Abstract

This article considers **chiasmus** in ***Four Quartets*** (1943) and argues that **T.S. Eliot** habitually uses the figure to effect poetic meaning. A close reading discusses numerous instances of **antimetabole, inverted parallelism**, and extended or modified chiasmus, positioning Eliot's chiasmic tendency as a formal means through which he approaches his thematic concerns with **time** and **language**. I argue that Eliot's employment of chiasmus represents a crucial device as part of his attempt to transcend the limits of language. The meditative reading of these poems is analogous to a pilgrimage, and their frequent chiasmi contribute to the reader's sensation of paradoxical return.

'Coming back to another place': Chiasmus in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*

In 1949 T.S. Eliot observed, in a letter to a fellow writer, 'One has to take account of the fact that to many people, every writer on mystical subjects appears not only to be saying the same things as other writers, but himself to be saying the same things again and again'.[1] Eliot's comment highlights the formal feature perhaps most apparent to casual readers of *Four Quartets* (1943), whose constituent poems initially appeared separately between 1936 and 1942. These readers – it is implied – perceive only 'vain repetition', without appreciating any meaning inherent in the recurrence of words, ideas, or formal elements. By contrast, scholars have frequently drawn attention to this aspect of the poems, finding significance in Eliot's very propensity for repeating and revisiting certain words, images and ideas. The sense that the work's structure as a whole consists in a return to its origin, rather than in a linear movement from start to finish, has often been emphasised. Steve Ellis, for example, states

[1] Qtd in T. S. Eliot and others, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot / Edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue* (London : Faber & Faber, 2015), p. 944.

that '*Four Quartets* is among many things a journey, or a process of exploration that ends where it began'.[2] Yet in a literal sense, the poems' journey is from one location to another: the first poem, *Burnt Norton*, invokes a specific visit Eliot made to the titular stately home in Gloucestershire, and the sequence ends with the poem inspired by the 17th-century religious community of Little Gidding in Cambridgeshire. This paradoxically linear-yet-circular journey is noted by Helen Gardner in *The Art of T S Eliot*, where she offers the following 'brief and abstract' summary of the content of *Four Quartets*:

> […] it presents a series of meditations upon existence in time, which, beginning from a place and at a point in time, and coming back to another place and another point, attempts to discover in these points and places what is the meaning and content of an experience, what leads to it, and what follows from it, what we bring to it and what it brings to us.[3]

Significantly, Gardner uses the apparently contradictory phrase 'coming back to another place' to describe the work's overall progress, and her summary evokes a proceeding-yet-returning motion and a sense of reciprocal exchange which, I suggest, is epitomised by the rhetorical figure of chiasmus. It is arguable whether the whole structure of *Four Quartets*, or that of its constituent poems, is more accurately characterised as chiasmic or cyclical. In *The Music of Poetry*, Eliot claimed that 'the use of recurrent themes is as

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[2] Steve Ellis, 'Four Quartets', in *The New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Jason Harding, Cambridge Companions to Literature, xx, 212 vols (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 103–15 (p. 104).

[3] Helen Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot* (London : Faber, 1968), p. 44.

natural to poetry as to music',[4] and the most convincingly argued musical analogue for *Burnt Norton*, Bartok's string quartet no. 4, notably has an essentially chiastic rather than recursive structure.[5] It is at the level of the line and the sentence, however, that Eliot makes frequent use of inverted parallelism, extended and modified chiasmus, and pseudo-chiastic structures. This habitual use of chiasmus both echoes and drives poetic meaning, contributing to what Michael O'Neill describes as 'Eliot's imaginative and rhythmic practice […] to move in a transitional way between passages, focusing maximum although unforced readerly concentration on their line-by-line workings. It is a poetry in which each line makes something happen'.[6]

Through a close reading of relevant passages, this article traces Eliot's use of chiasmus throughout *Four Quartets*, contending for the significance of this device in 'making things happen'. I discuss its use for aphoristic and musical effect; to convey equivalence, reciprocity and a sense of incremental spiritual progress; and as a kind of counterpoint that drives the logic of the poetry. Religious content, most evident in explicit allusions in *East Coker* and *Little Gidding*, is also evoked in Eliot's use of centre-focused chiasmi reminiscent of biblical poetry. Further, I argue that chiasmus is an important formal means that Eliot employs to address the work's fundamental thematic concerns: time, ends and beginnings,

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[4] T. S. Eliot, *The Music of Poetry : The Third W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture Delivered in the University of Glasgow, 14th February 1942 / by T.S. Eliot.* (Glasgow : Jackson, 1942), p. 27.

[5] Eliot and others, p. 895.

[6] Michael O'Neill, 'Eliot: Form and Allusion', in *The New Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Jason Harding, Cambridge Companions to Literature, xx, 212 vols (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 26–40 (p. 31).

'the point of intersection of the timeless / With time' (*DS* V, 18–19).[7] A major strand running through *Four Quartets* is the inadequacy or obsolescence of language, 'the intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings' (*EC* II, 20–21) in which any success is futile because 'one has only learnt to get the better of words / For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which / One is no longer disposed to say it' (*EC* V, 5–7). Ultimately, I argue that Eliot's use of chiasmus represents an attempt to square this circle, a crucial way in which he addresses the problem of using language to transcend the limits of language. Moreover, the meditative reading of *Four Quartets* becomes analogous to a pilgrimage or other spiritual practice, and its frequent use of chiasmus thus contributes to the reader's sensation of 'coming back to another place'.

Classical antimetabole and chiasmic dance in Burnt Norton

In its most easily recognisable form, also known as antimetabole (from Greek *anti* 'opposite' + *metabole* 'turning about'), chiasmus consists of the repetition of identical words in reverse order: 'The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath' (Mark 2. 27). The authors of a recent scientific study give several examples that illustrate the figure's ubiquity in diverse contexts, 'from literary classics (*all for one and one for all*) to presidential addresses (*ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country*)

[7] In referring to the poems that make up *Four Quartets*, I use the abbreviations *BN* (Burnt Norton), *EC* (East Coker), *DS* (The Dry Salvages) and *LG* (Little Gidding), followed by Roman numerals to denote the poem's part and Arabic numerals to indicate line numbers.

to quotidian proverbs (*a place for everything and everything in its place*)'.[8] These researchers found that statements made in antimetabolic form tend to be judged as both more beautiful and more true, as has been previously demonstrated for other stylistic devices such as rhyme. In fact, they propose that the so-called 'rhyme as reason effect' should be renamed 'the Keats heuristic', since such judgements appear to echo the association made in Keats's famous antimetabolic conclusion, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'.[9]

The ABBA pattern[10] formed by such a figure, suggesting an X-shaped cross (the Greek letter *chi* from which the word *chiasmus* is derived), is more clearly seen when the figure is organised with the first phrase placed on top of the second, as in two lines of poetry (AB/BA). Eliot's propensity for verbal repetition in *Four Quartets* prompts him to draw on this classical rhetorical figure in a fairly obvious and deliberate manner:

> We had the experience but missed the meaning,
> And approach to the meaning restores the experience […]
>
> (*DS* II, 45–46)

It is important to appreciate, however, that classical chiasmus goes beyond the simple swapping of identical words. As Brad McCoy describes it, 'chiasmus involves inverted

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[8] Mane Kara-Yakoubian and others, 'Beauty and Truth, Truth and Beauty: Chiastic Structure Increases the Subjective Accuracy of Statements', *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 76.2 (2022), p. 145.

[9] Kara-Yakoubian and others, p. 144.

[10] Throughout this article, I follow the example of Lund and McCoy in using capital letters to refer to the corresponding elements of a chiasmus. This should not be confused with the use of capital letters to denote terminal rhyme, a convention not used in this article.

parallelism between two or more (synonymously or antithetically) corresponding words, phrases, or units of thought'.[11] Nils Lund demonstrates the inversion of corresponding 'units of thought' with another New Testament example (Matthew 7. 6):

> Give not that which is holy unto the *dogs*,
>
> Neither cast your pearls before *swine*,
>
> Lest haply they (the swine) *trample* them under their feet,
>
> And they (the dogs) turn and *rend* you.[12]

As he points out, recognising the chiastic structure in these words is essential, 'for only so do they become intelligible […] This passage becomes clear at once, if we connect the two central and the two extreme lines, for swine trample and dogs rend'.[13]

Eliot's use of chiasmus is rarely so easy to 'solve', partly because it rarely occurs as a self-contained figure of simple inverted parallelism. The example given above, for instance, is only part of a longer meditation:

> We had the **experience** but missed the **meaning**,
>
> And approach to the **meaning** restores the **experience**
>
> In a different form, beyond any **meaning**

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[11] Brad McCoy, 'Chiasmus: An Important Structural Device Commonly Found in Biblical Literature', *CTS Journal*, 9 (2003), 18–34 (p. 19).

[12] Nils Wilhelm Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 1942), p. 32 (emphasis and insertions in original).

[13] Lund, p. 32.

We can assign to happiness. I have said before
That the past **experience** revived in the **meaning**
Is not the **experience** of one life only
But of many generations […]

(*DS* II, 45–51, my emphasis)

Having set up the AB/BA correspondence between the terms 'experience' and 'meaning' in the first two lines, Eliot then repeats the B term on the third line, before introducing another abstract noun, 'happiness'. After a pause, the new sentence returns to the repetition of terms, this time in the order AB/A. This asymmetric, contrapuntal repetition of the two key terms results in a subtle rhythm that blends the incantatory and the conversational. The loose pattern of repetition that proceeds from the third line cannot in any strict sense be described as chiastic – but it has clearly taken its impetus from the initial chiasmus.

Gardner points out that *Four Quartets*' predominant metre is akin to the medieval accentual line: 'The norm to which the verse constantly returns is the four-stress line, with strong medial pause, with which *Burnt Norton* opens'.[14] These opening lines also set up a grammatical parallelism, which is immediately complicated by the use of repetition:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future […]

(*BN* I, 1–2)

'Time present' and 'time past', introduced as two distinct parallel terms in the first line, are in the second line conflated. The challenge this presents to conventional logic is compounded by the re-purposing of 'present': first apparently used in its commonplace sense to distinguish

[14] Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 29.

'the present' from 'the past' – indeed, we more commonly use these words in this sense as nouns than as adjectives – it is then applied to describe the situation of both (implying the awkward phrase 'time present is present', which doubtless contributes to the uncertainty of 'perhaps'). If both are present in it, 'time future' cannot be introduced either logically or grammatically as a parallel term – though the fact that Eliot insists on the established formulation 'time future' rather than 'future time' or 'the future' points up the tension between words and experience that is a major theme of the poem.

Two four-stress lines are highly suitable for accommodating the ABBA terms of a chiasmus, though Eliot also incorporates the figure into longer, six-stress lines. But the medial pause in the four-stress line provides a natural division between the A and B elements that accentuates the figure's effectiveness. It also manages to suggest an essential chiastic structure underlying certain couplets, even when only some of the elements of a chiasmus are present. For instance, the entrance into the garden in *Burnt Norton* I is prompted by the song of a thrush:

> Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,
> Round the corner. Through the first gate,
> **Into our first world**, shall we follow
> The deception of the thrush? **Into our first world.**
>
> (*BN* I, 19–22, my emphasis)

The repetition of 'Into our first world' takes the form of question-and-answer, and this call-and-response (perhaps echoing the bird's call) is emphasised by the words' physical situation at opposite extremes of the 'X'. The question–answer relationship between the repeated phrase further strengthens the relationship on the other axis, between following and deception

– calling to mind the reason for the exile from Eden, and the impossibility of re-entering 'our first world'.

One further example from *Burnt Norton* I may serve to illustrate some subtle implications of the pervasive presence of chiasmus. Once in the garden,

> […] the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
> Had the look of flowers that are looked at.
> There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.
>
> (*BN* I, 28–30)

William Penny describes the imagery of the crossed eyebeam as a 'cruciate-like form',[15] and the crossing of two different viewpoints is echoed in the words that are repeated with morphological change: the flowers both 'had the look' and 'are looked at', the guests are 'accepted and accepting'. These pairs make a chiasmus of sorts, as an ABBA is formed by their respective grammatical change from active to passive, and from passive to active. This subtle pattern reinforces the garden's idyllic imagery of reciprocity, hinting at the simplicity and reconciliation at which *Little Gidding* will ultimately arrive.

In the second movement of *Burnt Norton* II, the verse modulates into six-stress lines whose virtuosic handling of rhythm and repetition, as in the example from *The Dry Salvages* discussed above, takes off from the chiasm of the first two lines:

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[15] William Kevin Penny, 'Dialect of the Tribe: Modes of Communication and the Epiphanic Role of Nonhuman Imagery in T S Eliot's Four Quartets', *Harvard Theological Review*, 108.1 (2015), 98–112 (p. 110).

At the still point of the turning world. **Neither flesh nor fleshless**;

Neither from nor towards; **at the still point**, there the dance is,

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,

Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,

There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where.

And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

(*BN* II, 16–23, my emphasis)

In this longer line, however, the organisation is looser and the chiasmus slightly staggered to accommodate 'of the turning world' and 'there the dance is' within its two lines. This allows the opening lines to set up three terms – 'the still point', 'neither…nor…' and 'there the dance is' – that are to recur with variations in the following lines. In the fourth line, Eliot eschews the more logical word order 'Movement neither from nor towards', to emphasise the parallelism of syntax with the lines above and below. Further down, as the line reduces to four stresses, the 'neither…nor…' repetend morphs into a dance between the words 'no' and 'only', making a tight chiasmus that is then extended into a coda, which arrives back at the problem of time:

There would be **no** dance, and there is **only** the dance.

I can **only** say, *there* we have been: but I **cannot** say where.

And I **cannot** say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

(*BN* II, 21–23, my emphasis)

This chiasmic dance drives the logic of the whole passage, from the 'still point' back to 'time'; but it is also a dance for its own sake, whose fluid movements and repetitive

vocabulary become somewhat hypnotic. As Eliot later wrote, 'the purpose of the dance is the dance itself. Similarly with poetry: the poem is for its own sake'.[16]

In *Burnt Norton* IV, the line 'St**ray** down, b**end** to us; t**end**ril and s**pray**' (4) provides a brief but beautiful example of phonological chiasmus, appropriate to the lyric mode of this section, which ends by reprising the vocabulary and repeating the opening line of the second movement of part II:

> 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.
>
> (*BN* IV, 8–10)

In each *Quartet*, part V addresses the role and the problems of poetry. Elisabeth Schneider sums up how, in *Burnt Norton*,

> […] poetry and music are conceived as an analogue of the spiritual still point. Their medium – language or musical tone – exists in time; but the essence of art is form and pattern, for through these it is that art and the timeless moment of mystical vision intersect. The work of art gives us the moving world yet the world detached from the claims of before and after.[17]

[16] Qtd in Eliot and others, p. 917.

[17] Elisabeth Schneider, *T.S. Eliot: The Pattern in the Carpet* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1975), p. 184.

This intersection of the timeless with time – more explicitly stated in the two later poems – here prompts a return to figures approximating classical chiasmus:

> Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The **stillness**, as a Chinese jar **still**
> **Moves** perpetually in its **stillness**.
> Not the stillness of the violin […]
>
> (*BN* V, 4–8, my emphasis)

The chiasmic pairing of the repeated 'A' term 'stillness' heightens the 'B' pairing of 'still' and 'moves'. If we remember that chiasmus is defined as inverted parallelism between *synonymously or antithetically corresponding* words, its use here also underlines the paradoxical relationship between the 'B' terms: the expression 'still / moves', joined grammatically but separated by enjambment, is ambiguous in meaning. Again, the chiasmus is modified so that it continues with repetition of the 'A' term on the line below, giving the impression of the continuing free movement of thought, from art to music.

***Religious language and biblical chiasmus in* East Coker**

The possibility of this intersection is subsequently figured in more abstract terms which point towards the theme and macro-chiasmic structure of *East Coker*:

> Or say that the **end** precedes the **beginning**,
> And the **end and the beginning** were **always** there.
> Before the **beginning** and after the **end**.
>
> (*BN* V, 10–12, my emphasis)

Although it is expressed tentatively ('Or say that…'), this figure represents an attempt at reconciling the divine and the temporal, and Eliot employs chiasmus in an attempt to 'square the circle'. Significantly, what could have been an ABBA couplet has made room for a central line that brings the end and the beginning into contact with eternity. This chiasm shows Eliot going beyond inverted parallelism (familiar from classical rhetoric) to explore chiasmus with a central component (characteristic of biblical literature). McCoy illustrates the difference by expanding the contemporary antimetabole, 'Winners never quit and quitters never win':

> 'Winners [A] never quit [B], and therefore perseverance is an important key to success [C], because quitters [B'] never win [A']' – illustrates chiasmus in this full technical sense. Worded in this way, the statement clearly revolves around the axis of the central component [C]. The chiasm, thus, explicitly states what the previous example of inverted parallelism only implied. This is accomplished by means of the corresponding components of the inverted parallelism of the chiasm (A/A' and B/B') building to and then moving away from the central affirmation, 'perseverance is an important key to success,' as the emphatically placed, pivotal [C] proposition of the chiasm.[18]

In *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, Lund gives illustrations from both Old and New Testaments, mostly of extended chiasmic structures too long to quote here. A shorter example (Isaiah 60. 1–3) has a central component consisting of two lines:

[18] McCoy, p. 20.

Arise,
Shine,
For thy light is come,
And the glory
Of Yahweh
Upon thee is risen.

{ For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth
And gross darkness the peoples.

But upon thee will arise
Yahweh,
And his glory upon thee be seen,
And nations shall come to thy light,
And kings to the brightness
Of thy rising.[19]

Compared to McCoy's simplified example, the relationship of the central component to the lines that bracket it is more ambiguous, though it is evident that the passage as a whole 'revolves around the axis of the central component' and that 'the corresponding components [are] building to and then moving away from the central affirmation'.[20] The lines from Isaiah further illustrate parallelism of ideas rather than just words ('shine' allied with 'brightness');

[19] McCoy, p. 44.

[20] McCoy, p. 20.

and the way that terms, although paralleled, change their grammatical identity as the lines effect a change in sense ('Yahweh' changes from possessive to nominative, and it becomes Yahweh himself rather than his glory that rises).

Although Eliot's chiasmi rarely include figures with such a clear central focus, his use of chiasmus demonstrates the features highlighted in the biblical example. While I am not suggesting that Eliot deliberately employed biblical verse forms in *Four Quartets* in any programmatic way (Lund's seminal work only appeared in 1942, the year in which *Little Gidding* was published, although there had been earlier studies of Old Testament chiasmus), he was of course familiar with biblical prosody and rhetoric. As the poems' religious content becomes more explicit from *East Coker* onwards, allusions to biblical language naturally evoke certain cadences and structures, and it is perhaps unsurprising that aspects of Eliot's form should be reminiscent of centre-focused biblical chiasmus. Coupled with *Burnt Norton's* epigraph from Heraclitus ('The way up and the way down are one and the same'), which may provide a key to the poem's interpretation, what McCoy calls 'active recognition'[21] of such underlying patterns can help the reader to unlock meaning.

East Coker famously announces its overall chiastic structure with its 'In my beginning is my end' opening line, and 'In my beginning' also serves as the 'envelope'[22] phrase that begins and ends part I. This part contains another description of dance, much more earthly and earthy than that evoked in *Burnt Norton*:

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[21] McCoy, p. 33.

[22] Stephen F. Fogle and T.V.F. Brogan, 'Envelope', in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edn (Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 436 (p. 436).

> […] Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter,
> Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
> Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
> Mirth of those long since under earth
> Nourishing the corn.
>
> (*EC* I, 35–39)

The antithetical relationship between 'earth' and 'mirth' (representing death and life respectively) is sharpened as they are brought into proximity by the dance imagery, by their perfect rhyme, and by their placement at the line ends to form a clear chiasm. The verbal reversal, together with the reference to 'those long since under earth', presages the ending of *The Dry Salvages*:

> […] We, content at the last
> If our temporal reversion nourish
> (Not too far from the yew-tree)
> The life of significant soil.
>
> (*DS* V, 47–50)

Penny also draws attention to the lines that end *East Coker*'s dance passage (*EC* I, 45–46), with their 'antithetical pairing of "Feet rising and falling. / Eating and drinking. Dung and death"'.[23]

The discursive second movement of part II critiques the 'pattern' that had been identified in *Burnt Norton*: the hope poetry had seemed to represent is now perceived as

[23] Penny, p. 110.

merely ‘A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion, / Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings’ (19–21). The ensuing discussion uses a form of extended chiasmus to enact its critique of manmade ‘pattern’ – as Penny puts it, it is the problem of ‘how a contrived system itself can represent notions intrinsically elusive and ephemeral’:[24]

There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited **value**
In the **knowledge** derived from experience.
The **knowledge** imposes a **pattern**, and falsifies,
For the **pattern** is new in every **moment**
And every **moment** is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

(*EC* II, 31–37, my emphasis)

The logic moves from the ‘value’ of ‘knowledge’ to the ‘pattern’ imposed by knowledge. But the falseness of imposing a pattern then propels the poem’s logic to look to the changing ‘pattern’ of the ‘moment’, and from this direct observation (as opposed to established knowledge derived from past experience) the ‘moment’ offers a new ‘valuation’ of the entirety of existence. The chiasmus’ central component (34–35) is the dynamic contradiction between the false, imposed pattern and the ever-new pattern. What McCoy notes of biblical chiasmus has relevance here: ‘an appreciation of chiastic structuring also encourages the interpreter to take special note of the corresponding thought units on the outer extremities of the overall discourse (A/A’), which also tend to be highlighted, albeit to a lesser degree than

[24] Penny, p. 98.

the pivotal component (X), in the employment of chiasm'.[25] The pivotal component (X) is the conflict between the false and the new pattern, and it is this conflict, arising from the initial recognition of limited value, that ultimately leads to a new 'valuation' – appropriately, an assessed estimate rather than an absolute 'value'. Along the way, the chiasmic structure encourages the reader to contrast the 'corresponding thought units' of 'the knowledge' and 'every moment'. The liberating progress from value to valuation is incrementally assisted by the key terms' general tendency, when repeated, to undergo grammatical change from object to subject.

The central part of *East Coker* is replete with religious allusions, including reference to I Corinthians 13, and a paraphrase of St John of the Cross. The repeated phrase 'I said to my soul, be still' (12, 23) calls to mind verses from the Old and New Testaments: Psalm 46. 10 ('Be still and know that I am God') and Mark 4. 39 ('And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still'). Lucy Alford, in her study of the relationship between attention and poetic form, states that 'stillness – not the stillness of the fixed form but the stillness of waiting – emerges as the "point" of the poem itself and the effect of its dance of paradox'.[26] The line 'I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope' (23) introduces a passage that engages with Corinthians' hope, love and faith, and also adds 'thought'. This meditation culminates in the phonologically chiasmic line 'So the **dar**kness shall be the **li**ght, and the st**ill**ness the **da**ncing' (28), whose use of parallel structure and ellipsis are reminiscent of Jesus' antimetabolic pronouncement 'the last shall be first, and the first last' (Matthew 20. 16).

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[25] McCoy, p. 31.

[26] Lucy Alford, *Forms of Poetic Attention*, *Forms of Poetic Attention* (Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 365 <https://doi.org/10.7312/alfo18754>.

The passage paraphrasing St John of the Cross is preceded by a rather defensive and tentative introduction:

> You say I am repeating
> Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
> Shall I say it again?
>
> (*EC* III, 33–35)

The transformation of statement into question, enjambed this time so as to occupy the 'B' positions of an imagined chiasmus, reverses the question-to-answer 'A' axis of the repeated 'Into our first world' from *Burnt Norton*, perhaps highlighting the inferiority of words compared to the thrush's natural ability to communicate through song. The question also suggests Whitman's *Song of Myself*: 'Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself',[27] an allusion that further contrasts with Eliot's hesitancy in posing rather than answering the question. However, Eliot's questioning tone, linked to the subsequent lines concerning the *via negativa*, can be seen in a more constructive light: Alford argues that as the *Four Quartets* proceed, the language starts to involve 'more and more paradox and self-contradiction, suggesting a movement from teaching to practice or from description to formal training.'[28] Certainly, *The Dry Salvages* sees Eliot using more variations on antimetabole and centre-focused chiasmi to further wrestle with the paradox and self-contradictions inherent to his search for 'The point of intersection of the timeless / With time' (*DS* V, 18–19).

The Dry Salvages*: incremental progress and Eliot's critique of time*

[27] Eliot and others, p. 944.

[28] Alford, p. 265.

With its evocative description of river and sea, Eliot's handling of the longer line in the opening of *The Dry Salvages* is, in Gardner's view, 'the most delightful variation of this six-stress line' in *Four Quartets*.[29] In this passage, Eliot is unafraid to use repetition and rhyme for obvious musical effect: The 'strong brown god' (2) of the river is 'ever, however, implacable […] waiting, watching and waiting' (7, 10), whereas the sea is more playful: 'the granite / Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses / Its hints of earlier and other creation […] / It tosses up our losses […] The sea has many voices, / Many gods and many voices' (16–24). As Penny notes, 'The power of mediation appears to reside with the inanimate objects and their communicative functionality rather than with the human agent in such instances',[30] and this power is conveyed through subtle but insistent repetition:

> The tolling bell
> Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried
> Ground swell, a time
> Older than the time of chronometers […]
>
> (*DS* I, 35–38)

This passage ends with a gesture towards a mirrored structure: the order of the 'ground swell' and 'bell' elements is reversed, even as 'time' beats its insistent rhythm:

> […] Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,
> The future futureless, before the morning watch
> When time stops and time is never ending;

[29] Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 34.

[30] Penny, p. 111.

And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,

Clangs

The bell.

(*DS* I, 43–48)

Part II of *The Dry Salvages* pursues parallelism and repetition, both for musical effect ('the soundless wailing, / The silent withering') and to advance the poem's argument:

Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing,

The silent withering of autumn flowers

Dropping their petals and remaining motionless;

Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,

The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayable

Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?

(*DS* II, 1–6)

This is the beginning of a simplified sestina, a form whose first stanza establishes the pattern of repeated terminal words that is followed through to the end of the poem. As Federico Italiano explains,

> The inscription of the end in the beginning is a famously formal, structural feature of the sestina. […] Most striking about the sestina is its teleological directionality.

> Having read the first stanza, the reader already knows the words with which the poem will end. […] the sestina engages its own ending from the very beginning.[31]

Eliot's choice of form here serves, like the opening of *East Coker*, to announce 'In my end is my beginning', though the questioning tone with which the first stanza opened is answered, in the final stanza, by negation:

> There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing,
> No end to the withering of withered flowers,
> To the movement of pain that is painless and motionless,
> To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage,
> The bone's prayer to Death its God. Only the hardly, barely prayable
> Prayer of the one Annunciation.
>
> (*DS* II, 32–36)

Further, Eliot's six-stanza sestina omits the form's final stanza, which traditionally compresses the repeated words into only three lines. Instead, his final verse mimics more exactly the form of the first, apparently refusing an opportunity for formal development that might offer some sort of epiphany: 'There is no end' here, but only a return to the same bleak prayer. Yet, some hard-won development has resulted from this endless wailing and withering, as the 'unprayable' prayer is now 'barely prayable', and the unspecified but 'calamitous annunciation' now assumes a more explicitly Christian interpretation, so that the sestina's real 'end' is the Magnificat, the 'Prayer of the one Annunciation'.

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[31] Federico Italiano, 'Sounding Ends and Endings: Non-Closure in Modern and Contemporary Poetry', *California Italian Studies*, 8.1 (2018), 1–16 (p. 6).

Part III opens with philosophical speculation on Krishna and Heraclitus, but swiftly lightens this serious mood with wordplay and the imagery of embarking on a journey:

> […] 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!
>
> (*DS* III, 6–14)

Eliot brings Heraclitus's cryptic fragment down to earth and into the present with the colloquial 'face it steadily', and goes on to negate the commonplace that 'time is a great healer' as well as to invert it through a technique approaching spoonerism or *verlan*:

> time is no **h**ea**l**e**r**: the patient is no **l**onge**r** **h**ere.

The consonantal juggling act is performed over the top of the grammatically parallel construction – a sonic game poking fun at the sententiousness of the aphorism to undermine its authority. A few lines further on, Eliot takes the opposite approach, assuming a flippant tone to convey a serious observation of the transition 'from grief into relief'. The word pairing practises a double-bluff on the reader: the obvious rhyme seems at first to be prioritising sound over sense, but on reflection expresses a common, recognisable experience whose rhyme chimes with its 'rightness'.

Eliot transitions from the prosaic world of train travel to the romantic imagery of seafaring in his critique of the notion of time. As Gardner summarizes it, 'In the present moment, "between the hither and the farther shore", the past is not finished, the future is not "before us". The present, the actual moment, is the moment in which past and future exist'.[32] The passage in which the mind's eye travels from railway carriage to ocean liner provides a particularly clear example of a biblical-style chiasmus with a central component (X), which can be analysed using the programmatic approach suggested by Lund or McCoy:

A PRESENT (DESCRIBES PAST) / FUTURE
{ You are not the same people who left that station
Or who will arrive at any terminus,

B PRESENT (DESCRIBES PAST)
While the narrowing rails slide together behind you;

X PRESENT
And on the deck of the drumming liner

B' PRESENT (DESCRIBES PAST)
Watching the furrow that widens behind you,

A' FUTURE (DESCRIBES PAST) / PRESENT (DESCRIBES FUTURE)
{ You shall not think 'the past is finished'
Or 'the future is before us'.

(*DS* III, 16–22, my indentations)

The parallels, convergences and divergences conjured by the imagery are brought into a complex interplay with those created by lineation and grammatical tense. The A/A' couplets, with their 'You…not… / Or…' construction, seem to mimic parallel railway lines. But this parallelism is an illusion, belied by the way that reversal of tense in these lines creates a mirroring effect, just as the 'narrowing rails' mirror the 'furrow that widens'. The shapes evoked by this imagery (Λ and V), not only chiasmically paired but even evoking a letter Chi

[32] Helen Gardner, *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'* (London : Faber, 1978), pp. 56–57.

when combined, in fact contradict each other: to figure the past using converging linear perspective is as arbitrary as to visualise it as the dissipating wake of a ship. The central image directs the attention instead to the present, 'on the deck of the drumming liner'. Yet within this symmetrical structure there is some leeway in the use of tense, if only to gesture towards a conception of the future even as it is being denied. This movement is somewhat like the incremental change allowed in the ending of Eliot's sestina, even as the repetition inherent in its form seems to deny any sense of an ending.

A similar progress-by-degrees is evident in the final part of *The Dry Salvages*, where words are repeated to be corrected or qualified:

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> **Moment**, the **moment** in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or **music heard** so deeply
> That it is not **heard** at all, but you are the **music**
> While the **music** lasts. These are only **hints and guesses**,
> **Hints followed by guesses**; and the rest
> Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
> **The hint half guessed**, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
>
> (*DS* V, 23–32, my emphasis)

The sestina's formal repetitions in part II arrived, through the difficult exercise of prayer, at the Annunciation. Here, through spiritual exercises of repetition ('prayer, observance, discipline'), we finally approach the mystery of the Incarnation, 'The point of intersection of the timeless / With time' (18–19).

Little Gidding*: prayer and pilgrimage*

Continuing to stress the practice of prayer, *Little Gidding* explores its definition by means of repetition, seeking this 'point of intersection' in a specifically English setting:

> You are here to kneel
> Where **prayer** has been valid. And **prayer** is more
> Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
> Of the **praying** mind, or the sound of the voice **praying**.
> And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
> They can tell you, being dead: the communication
> Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
> Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always.
>
> (*LG* I, 45–53, my emphasis)

Schneider sees this emphasis on attaining 'the point' through spiritual practice as being the major shift achieved by the final poem: 'The center of *Burnt Norton* had been the timeless moment, the moment of full consciousness that comes briefly, unsought and unforeseen, in a place entered by chance. In *Little Gidding* the experience occurs not by gift or chance but is to be won through a pilgrimage'.[33] The final line of part I underscores the significance of its geographical specificity, using phonological mirroring across its caesura:

> **E**ngland and **n**owhere. **N**ever and **a**lways.

[33] Schneider, pp. 198–99.

Sonically, place is paired with time: 'nowhere' with 'Never', 'England' with 'always', the local with eternity.

The second part of *Little Gidding* is 'a making new of Dante that is the most emphatically accented passage of iambic pentameter in *Four Quartets*'.[34] However, Eliot's use of feminine endings results in a pattern of alternating ten- and eleven-syllable lines that mitigates the finality of pentameter:

> Eliot replaces the rhyme scheme of terza rima with a pattern of alternating masculine and feminine endings. In conjunction with a fluid syntax, this pattern turns from a device into perfect medium. Setting the poem 'In the uncertain hour before the morning / Near the ending of interminable night / At the recurrent end of the unending', […] Eliot is able to convey the co-existence of the 'interminable,' 'the unending,' and a sense of 'the recurrent end.' Each line advances towards such a paradoxically circular 'end.'[35]

This paradox is enhanced by Eliot's use of effects approximating classical antimetabole. The 'interminable' night is equated with 'the recurrent end', and 'ending' is balanced against 'unending' on the arms of this X:

> […] Near the **ending** of **interminable** night
> At the **recurrent end** of the **unending** […]
>
> (*LG* II, 26–27, my emphasis)

[34] O'Neill, p. 38.

[35] O'Neill, p. 37.

The effect is even more marked since Eliot sought to avoid repetition as a general principle of the Dantesque form:

> The simplicity of language at which one must aim, in this kind of verse, requires the avoidance of repetition of words (even *of*s and *and*s and *but*s have to be carefully watched) and even the avoidance of words of similar formation too near together.[36]

A similar deliberate departure from this rule occurs in the chiasmus the narrator addresses to the 'familiar compound ghost' he encounters in the 'urban dawn':

> I said: 'The **wonder** that I feel is **easy**,
> Yet **ease** is cause of **wonder**. Therefore speak:
> I may not comprehend, may not remember.'
>
> (*LG* II, 55–57, my emphasis)

The almost-exact repetition of words recalls aphoristic chiasmus, familiar from Shakespeare and Donne, which Dunya I'Jam and Zahraa Fadhil describe as 'the use of a chiastic structure to bring a section of poetry to an end. In other words, it marks the closure of a stanza echoing the sequence of the elements that are presented in the previous line or lines in inverse order'.[37] An example is the final couplet of Donne's Holy Sonnet XV:

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[36] Qtd in Eliot and others, p. 1024.

[37] Dunya Muhammad Miqdad I'Jam and Zahraa Adnan Fadhil, 'Chiasmus as a Stylistic Device in Donne's and Vaughan's Poetry', *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7.26 (2016), 43–52 (p. 45).

> ’Twas much, that man was made like God before,
> But, that God should be made like man, much more.[38]

In Eliot’s Dantesque verse, however, the poem continues; the imperative ‘speak’, though corresponding chiastically with ‘I said’, leads the new sentence on to a third line that is equivocal and pessimistic. If the effect of aphoristic chiasmus comes from the fact that ‘the surface crossover of linguistic content implies a dovetailing of ideas at a deeper level’,[39] this sense is undercut by Eliot’s modification of the figure, though somewhat ameliorated by the addition of a feminine slant rhyme (‘wonder / remember’).

Eliot brings his own words more explicitly into conversation with mystics such as, in part III, Julian of Norwich (‘All shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well’) and, in part V, the anonymous author of the 14th-century *The Cloud of Unknowing* (‘With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling’). Part III opens with a discussion of ‘attachment’ reminiscent of St John of the Cross,[40] featuring verbal chiasmus as well as imagery that is concerned with the centre and the extremes:

> 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

[38] Donne, John and Patrides, C.A., *The Complete English Poems [of] John Donne* (Dent, 1985), p. 444.

[39] I’Jam and Fadhil, p. 46.

[40] Eliot and others, p. 1028.

> Which resembles the others as **death** resembles **life**,
> Being between two **lives** – unflowering, between
> The **live** and the **dead** nettle. 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.
>
> (*LG* III, 1–10, my emphasis)

Like that of his mystical models, Eliot's imagery requires meditation and interpretation, but it might be paraphrased thus: Indifference is a kind of death, between the old life of worldly attachment and the new spiritual life of detachment. The old life stings like a live nettle; the new life blooms like a dead-nettle, and indifference is an unflowering plant growing between them. Some confusion is created by Eliot's refusal to use a hyphen to make clearer the distinction between a dead nettle and the flowering dead-nettle plant – the latter being Eliot's intended meaning.[41] The temptation to read the line in the sense of 'the live nettle and the dead' is only encouraged by the way the chiastic arrangement emphasises the extremes of death and life. However, interrogating the imagery of the nettles reveals a more profound difficulty – of which Eliot was aware – inherent in its reliance on parallels and opposites. As he wrote in a letter to the critic Desmond MacCarthy,

> I do not mean that Attachment resembles Indifference; but that Attachment *can* resemble Detachment, and that Detachment *can* be mistaken for Indifference. You will not agree about the first; but surely, on a more familiar plane, a selfish love of a person and an unselfish love of a person can easily be mistaken for each other, or at

[41] Gardner, *The Composition of 'Four Quartets'*, p. 200.

> least the first can be mistaken for the second? But the image of the nettle is not happy, because it assumes the existence of a third kind of plant, which does not exist, which might be mistaken for both.[42]

In his struggle to express an esoteric philosophy in worldly terms, Eliot reaches for imagery derived from humble hedgerow plants. Yet his emphasis on botanical categorisation, on the difficulty of distinguishing differences amid resemblances, serves, like his resort to organising around the polar extremes and the centre of the chiasmus, to point up the ultimate impossibility of verbalising ineffable experience. By contrast, the meditative repetition of Julian's assurance represents a release and, as it ends this section, a simple grounding of faith once again in prayer:

> 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, 47–50)

The opening of part IV's short lyric, 'The dove descending breaks the air / With flame of incandescent terror', harks back to part II's evocation of the wartime all-clear ('After the dark dove with the flickering tongue / Had passed below the horizon of his homing'). But

[42] Qtd in Eliot and others, p. 1028.

what Eliot called 'my Pentecost poem'[43] stresses the redemptive power of love, which purifies like fire:

> The only hope, or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre –
> To be redeemed from fire by fire.
>
> Who then devised the torment? Love.
> Love is the unfamiliar Name […]
>
> (*LG* IV, 5–9)

The lyric relies on rhyme, symmetry and centre-focus for its power, with the pause effected by 'Love. Love […]' giving the impression of having worked inwards to the question and then logically outwards from its answer, Love.

The final part of *Little Gidding* opens with a couplet which now offers the ring of familiarity as well as the pleasing effect of inverted parallelism:

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
>
> (*LG* V, 1–2)

The simple chiasmus offers both a re-statement and a simplification of the major theme that was worked through in *East Coker* and explored throughout the *Quartets.* Gardner sums up how this 'restoration' results in a change in tone: 'The refusal to speak of "beginning" and the consequent denial of "end" in *The Dry Salvages* make the restoration of both words to us in

[43] Qtd in Eliot and others, p. 1037.

the last poem particularly moving. The tentative paradoxes of *Burnt Norton* return with confident certainty'.[44] Gardner also points to a key line from the end of *Burnt Norton* which reappears in the closing passage of *Little Gidding*:

> Quick now, here, now, always –
>
> (*BN* V, 37; *LG* V, 39)

Recurring word-for-word, though after a long interval, the phrase has not been subject to the incessant repetitions and variations practised on other lines throughout the poem, so it is easy to miss its unassuming re-statement. Though Gardner calls it relatively 'meaningless and unpoetic by itself', she argues that it provides an intense experience for 'a mind alert to recognize recurrences':[45] it consists entirely of ordinary adverbs and prepositions which – just like weightier terms such as 'time', 'end' and 'beginning' – have now become charged with special power, like an ordinary needle that becomes magnetised. The importance of the reader's active role in this interpretation cannot be over-emphasised.

Thus, Eliot's ending to *Four Quartets* is no simple return to the beginning, but rather the ending of a pilgrimage from which one returns changed – the experience being ultimately more important than the journey. As Steve Ellis has it,

> Readers are constantly being invited to return to earlier parts of the poem – the meaning of which now becomes modified, just as *Burnt Norton*, originally an end in itself, later became a beginning – through the recapitulation of these themes, so that the meaning of the whole lies not in a sequential narrative, but in 'the pattern,' the

[44] Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 53.

[45] Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 53.

> ever-present totality of all the parts in synchronic dialogue, the 'co-existence' in which 'all is always now.'[46]

There is a striking similarity between such descriptions of *Four Quartets* and descriptions of how chiasmus has been 'understood to be a device that involved the sense of reciprocation, or re-turning or re-versing'.[47] Eliot himself observed in an early essay,

> The token that a philosophy is true is, I think, the fact that it brings us to the exact point from which we started. We shall be enriched, I trust, by our experience of the Grand Tour, but we shall not have been allowed to convey any material treasures through the Custom House. And the wisdom which we shall have acquired will not be part of the argument which brings us to the conclusion; it is not part of the book, but it is written in pencil on the fly-leaf. For the point to which we return should be the same, but somehow is not, but is a higher stage of reality.[48]

Conclusion

The transformation undergone by the returning pilgrim, though less instantaneous than a religious epiphany, is akin to the experience of poetic epiphany. Paul Friedrich discusses the role of chiasmus in his essay on lyric epiphany, observing that 'a small or brief mini-

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[46] Ellis, p. 111.

[47] Kensei Nishikawa, 'God and the Poet Transposed: The Thou-I Chiasmus in George Herbert's Poetry', *George Herbert Journal*, 35.1–2 (2011), 55–71 (p. 55) <https://doi.org/10.1353/ghj.2011.0007>.

[48] Qtd in Eliot and others, p. 1042.

chiasmus may create a subtle epiphany'.[49] Friedrich goes on to explore the paradoxical workings of what he calls 'chiasmic epiphany':

> Chiasmus, like the sestina form, tightens and closes; there is an element of inevitability as exit replays introitus. Epiphany, on the contrary, breaks out of structure, whether verbal or temporal, into a more open, dynamic, vivid, and audible universe. Epiphany by means of chiasmus, when it does occur, is more cognitive than phenomenological: as the deeper levels of the mind recur through a structural series, there is a sense of realization with reinforcement that both locks the images in place and creates an experience of rebirth or reawakening that may be more profound than [other] sorts of epiphany […] The internal organization of a chiasmic epiphany […] is thus more of a breaking-into than a breaking-out-of.[50]

Friedrich writes in the context of analysing Homeric macro-chiasmic structures, but his description of how 'realization with reinforcement' offers a profound 'experience of rebirth or reawakening' is applicable to *Four Quartets* on both macro and micro levels. Further, Friedrich characterises traditional 'breaking-out-of' epiphanies as 'linear',[51] which suggests that the 'breaking-into' associated with chiasmic epiphany may be well-suited to Eliot's preoccupation with how linear time can intersect with non-linear timelessness.

Lyric epiphany is a small-scale, secular imitation of epiphany's more profound religious meaning, just as *Burnt Norton*'s 'not quite mystical moment in the garden' only

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[49] Paul Friedrich, 'Lyric Epiphany', *Language in Society*, 30.2 (2001), 217–47 (p. 240).

[50] Friedrich, p. 241.

[51] Friedrich, p. 241.

gestures towards 'the true mystical experience'.[52] And although the theme of poetry's inadequacy runs throughout the *Quartets*, once *Little Gidding* acknowledges that 'The end is where we start from', Eliot immediately applies this lesson not only to life but specifically to poetry:

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
> The end is where we start from. And every phrase
> And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new,
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together)
> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
> Every poem an epitaph.
>
> (*LG* V, 1–12)

Eliot finally accepts at least the hypothetical possibility of a poetry that can reconcile contradictions by embracing them, and it is fitting that this meditation on 'right' phrases and sentences is anchored in an initial chiasmus.

Like other devices involving repetition, the power of chiasmus depends on a fundamental truth – neatly summarised in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*

[52] Schneider, p. 182.

– that ‘exact repetition is impossible: the simple fact of temporal discontinuity between repeated elements leads to a difference in their functions, via the accumulation of significance and recontextualisation’.[53] Although, from a psychological point of view, the well-attested ‘associations between esthetics and credibility’ mean that such figures ‘make linguistic constructions more salient, more memorable, more appealing, as well as seem to incline us to perceive such expressions as more true’,[54] Eliot’s sceptical stance towards language will not allow him so easily to buy into the supposed power of words epitomised by the ‘Keats heuristic’.[55] He refuses to let language off the hook on which it elegantly twists and writhes. Thus, throughout *Four Quartets*, he usually resists the straightforwardly aphoristic and rhetorical effects of antimetabole; instead, his use of chiasmus is part of a subtle, varied, dynamic and searching inquiry into religious experience, which is at least as much a spiritual as an intellectual or rhetorical exercise. At the level of the line and the sentence, an analogy might be drawn with the labyrinth design incised in the floor of a medieval cathedral, which facilitates a miniature pilgrimage to the still point at the centre of the design and then a return journey outwards, arriving at almost exactly the point of entry. The paradoxical and participatory nature of this spiritual practice is key to Eliot’s chiasmic tendency, which similarly facilitates for the reader a ‘coming back to another place’ – a process of reciprocation, change and renewal.

Set against Eliot’s insistence throughout *Four Quartets* on the inadequacy of language and the futility of attempts to ‘get the better of words’ (*EC* V, 5), his final description of ‘every

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[53] Krystyna Mazur, ‘Repetition’, in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edn (Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 1168–71 (p. 1169).

[54] Kara-Yakoubian and others, p. 145.

[55] Kara-Yakoubian and others, p. 144.

phrase / And sentence that is right' (*LG* V, 3–4) contributes to the sensation of 'restoration'[56] the reader experiences in the work's closing passages. Earlier in *Little Gidding*, the ghostly figure from the Dantesque passage declares that 'last year's words belong to last year's language / And next year's words await another voice' (II, 65–66), and it is perhaps only through a difficult, years-long process of 'prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action' (*DS* V, 31) that Eliot has come to terms with his poetry's ability to be understood only through analogous practices of reading as meditation. Thus, Gardner recommends,

> It is better in reading poetry of this kind to trouble too little about the 'meaning' than to trouble too much. If there are passages where meaning seems elusive, where we feel we 'are missing the point', we should read on, preferably aloud; for the music and the meaning arise at 'a point of intersection', in the changes and movement of the whole. We must find meaning in the reading.[57]

Finding meaning in the reading depends to a significant degree on having a 'mind alert to recognize recurrences',[58] and in this context, McCoy's 'active recognition'[59] of the chiasmic structures in *Four Quartets* is highly relevant. *Burnt Norton* evocatively describes humans as 'time-ridden' (III, 11) – a more aggressive image than 'time-bound', conveying the extreme difficulty we necessarily have in escaping temporality or even in comprehending a state of timelessness. *Four Quartets*' paradoxical achievement of 'coming back to another place and

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[56] Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 53.

[57] Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 54.

[58] Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot*, p. 53.

[59] McCoy, p. 33.

another point' can allow the attentive reader to glimpse, or at least to conceive of, the 'point of intersection'. The figure of the chiasmus both effects this paradox at frequent moments throughout *Four Quartets* and stands for this paradoxical endeavour as a whole.

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