

Gardner, Helen

also by Helen Gardner

A READING OF *PARADISE LOST*
RELIGION AND LITERATURE
THE BUSINESS OF CRITICISM

(*Edited by*)

A BOOK OF RELIGIOUS VERSE
THE METAPHYSICAL POETS
THE NEW OXFORD BOOK OF ENGLISH VERSE

The Composition of
Four Quartets

HELEN GARDNER

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Preface

My first sight of the drafts of *Four Quartets* and of the correspondence with John Hayward about them was in 1947, when, as the result of a query from me over a Donne manuscript, he asked me to come to tea and showed me the volumes he had bound up. This was the beginning of a close and affectionate friendship to which my labours on this book have been a kind of tribute. For I knew, as I worked, that what I was doing would have given him pleasure.

That it would have given pleasure to Eliot is more doubtful. In February 1941, he wrote to the Librarian of Magdalene College, Cambridge, of which he was an Honorary Fellow, to enquire whether the college library took 'any interest in "contemporary manuscripts"', adding 'I don't see why it should', and offered it the 'mss.' of *The Dry Salvages* with the option of refusal: 'if you *do* like to have such mss. I shall be glad to hand over this and future ones; but if you don't there is no need to take them just to be kind.' When the Master (A. B. Ramsay), to whom the Librarian had handed the letter, wrote to express the College's pleasure in accepting the gift, Eliot expanded his uneasiness:

From the point of view of an author, I am not sure such papers should be preserved at all; from the point of view of a librarian, they seem to me a nuisance: but if they are to be preserved, I should be sorry to think that they should be divided only between the Bodleian and Eliot House and that none should be at Magdalene.

Some eighteen months later he wrote again to the Master to say it 'would be a pleasure' to add 'the manuscripts and papers' of *Little Gidding* to those connected with *The Dry Salvages*, with a qualification:

When I say that this would be a pleasure, I do not wish this quite truthful assertion to be construed as expressing general approval of the preservation of my own or indeed of most manuscripts. As a general rule, to which I cannot perceive my own work to provide any exception, it seems to me that posterity should be left with the product, and not be encumbered with a record of the process, of such compositions as these. Their presentation, however, affords an author one of the few means at his disposal for showing his gratitude and appreciation, such as I owe towards Magdalene: and it is in this spirit that I have proposed subtracting these papers from the national supply of pulp.

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Although I share some of Eliot's apprehension that the current interest in poets at work may distract attention from what finally emerged from all their toil, and believe, with him, that the study of the creative process, however interesting, has far less to give us than a study of the object created, I am reassured by the fact that four years spent with abandoned fragments, discarded readings, and what Eliot called the 'Litter' of composition has not diminished my love for these poems or my conviction of their greatness. It has, indeed, contributed to an increase of that 'understanding and enjoyment' which Eliot in later life thought it was the prime function of criticism to promote.

The length of the poems and the amount of material, particularly for *Little Gidding*, has posed problems of presentation. Although Eliot was not unique among poets in inviting and accepting criticism of 'work in progress' from his friends, it is rare—in my experience unique—to find such discussion committed to paper. It seemed to me imperative for readers' comfort that they should have the final text before them, with the process of revision attached and the comments and queries with Eliot's replies immediately presented. This has involved cutting up the text and the letters, which I regret; but the alternative would face the reader with continually flipping to and fro to remind himself of the wording of the passage being discussed. I have, however, printed in full the first draft of *Little Gidding* with Hayward's letter upon it in an Appendix, to allow a reader the shock of reading a familiar poem in an unfamiliar form and, if he wishes, to play the game of what comment he would have made if faced by it as Hayward was.

I was tempted at the beginning to be selective and to print only those passages and readings from the drafts which seemed to me to be significant, fearing that they might be buried under a mass of trivialities. But I decided that it was my duty to make the material available and not to impose my own criterion of significance upon it. The correspondence shows Eliot so scrupulous over the minutest details in his 'wrestle with words and meanings' that I came to the conclusion that all changes in the drafts should be noted. I have made an exception in dealing with the working typescripts, as distinct from the drafts, of *Little Gidding* and not noted punctuation variants in them. Eliot's manuscript drafts are very lightly punctuated, or not at all, and his working typescripts are erratically punctuated. It is in those drafts which are in the nature of 'fair copies' that he gave his mind to problems of punctuation. For the benefit of those who are not interested in changes in a preposition or alterations of punctuation I have signalized by an asterisk readings which are the subject of discussion in the commentary.

As this book is not 'an edition of *Four Quartets*' many passages that an editor would annotate are left without annotation. What annotation I have provided arises usually out of hitherto unpublished material. I have attempted in Part I to provide a background to the study of the drafts by giving informa-

tion about the progress of the poem, the circumstances in which it was written, and the major sources. Both here and in the commentary I have quoted, sometimes extensively, from articles that are not easily available, including uncollected articles by Eliot. Far more people than scholars with access to university libraries cherish these poems and I have tried to bear their interests in mind.

My greatest debt is to Mrs. Valerie Eliot for giving me access to all the unpublished material with a bearing on *Four Quartets* and for giving me freedom to use it as I thought best. She has also given me information I might otherwise not have found and been most generous in answering my questions. After her, I owe most to the late Dr. A. N. L. Munby. As the Librarian in charge of the Hayward Collection in King's College Library, and as an old friend of Hayward's, he was enthusiastic over the whole enterprise and nobody could have been more helpful. His death, before I had brought the work to a conclusion, was both a personal and professional loss. I am very grateful to his assistant, Mrs. Penelope Bulloch, for helpfulness throughout and especially after Dr. Munby's death. I have also to thank the Librarians at Magdalene College, Professor J. A. W. Bennett and Mr. Pepys Whitely, for kindness in allowing me to work in the Library and for supplying me with photocopies, and Professor Bennett and his son, Piers, for reconstructing the torn-up manuscript pad there. Like all who work on Eliot I am indebted to Dr. Donald Gallup. He sent me photocopies of the manuscript of *East Coker* IV and showed me Eliot's letters to Mrs. Perkins, his hostess at Chipping Campden, as well as being always ready to answer queries. I have also to thank the Librarian of the Houghton Library, Harvard, for supplying me with copies of the drafts for 'Lines for an Old Man' and for permission to publish them, and Mr. David Farmer, Assistant Director of the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, for telling me of the typescript of *The Dry Salvages* there, for supplying me with a photocopy, and for permission to quote its readings and to quote from a letter from Eliot to Philip Mairet. I owe my knowledge of this to Mr. Paul Anderson. I am grateful to the late Rear-Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison and the Editors of *The American Neptune* for permission to quote *in extenso* from his article on 'The Dry Salvages and the Thacher Shipwreck' and to Professor Harry Levin for calling my attention to this article.

Mr. George Every, formerly of the Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham, gave me information about Eliot's visits to Kelham and his sight of a kingfisher in flight there in the summer of the year in which he wrote *Burnt Norton* and also, most kindly, lent me the first draft of a verse play of his on King Charles's visit to Little Gidding after Naseby which Eliot read and discussed with him in 1936, the year he went there. Mrs. Oakeley, John Hayward's sister, gave me personal information about him. Among

many with whom I have discussed the work I should like particularly to thank Mr. Vivian Ridler for his kindness in giving me expert advice on methods of presentation, Mrs. Anne Ridler, at one time Eliot's secretary and a friend of Hayward's, who read some of the material in early stages, and Mr. Jon Stallworthy, who gave me the benefit of his advice drawing on his experience in working on the rather different problems of the papers of Yeats and Wilfred Owen. I am greatly indebted to Mr. R. E. Alton for help in deciphering some difficulties in manuscript. I was more than fortunate in having the assistance of Mrs. Bridget Bertram as a research assistant, whose skill in typing and setting out the material saved me hours of labour. Miss M. E. Griffiths of St. Anne's College enabled me to have my typescript xeroxed in the deadiest depth of the long vacation. Finally, I must acknowledge the skill and care of the staff at the Oxford University Press in dealing with very difficult copy, and their patience and helpfulness over the proof-reading.

I would like to add that I owe much to the classes I have given in the last few years on *Four Quartets* in Oxford. Members both gave me information and made suggestions, and also, by asking questions I could not answer at the time, stimulated enquiry. Most of all, by their obvious love for the poems they confirmed my belief that these poems that spoke so powerfully to our condition in the dark years when they first appeared still speak with power to a later generation.

HELEN GARDNER

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published in the *New English Weekly* on 15 October and appeared in pamphlet form on 1 December.

Four Quartets appeared first in America. It was published 11 May 1943. There were two impressions of this book. The first was so badly printed that all but 788 of its 4,165 copies were destroyed. The entire impression would have been destroyed but for the need to meet the publication date in order to keep copyright.²⁸ The English edition did not appear until 31 October 1944. Its dust-jacket bore a rather misleading statement:

The four poems which make up this volume have all appeared separately. . . . The author, however, has always intended them to be published as one volume, and to be judged as a single work.²⁹

As this story of the writing of the poem has shown, no such scheme was in Eliot's mind when he wrote *Burnt Norton*, nor, the war having made the writing of another play seem futile, when he 'picked up his tablets again' and wrote *East Coker*. In *Four Quartets*, the Greek epigraphs were printed on the reverse of the table of Contents, as if applying to the whole sequence. In the *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, they reverted to being epigraphs to *Burnt Norton* alone. Mrs. Valerie Eliot tells me that Eliot had thought of prefixing as epigraph to the volume as a whole an observation by a modern philosopher, Mr. Roker of the Fleet prison: 'What a rum thing time is, ain't it, Neddy?'³⁰

²⁸ Gallup, 72.

²⁹ The statement on the dust-cover is quoted by Gallup, 73. A confused memory of it led to an error in my *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (1949), 46, corrected in the preface to the sixth impression (1968).

³⁰ *The Pickwick Papers*, chapter 42.

CHAPTER 3

The Sources of *Four Quartets*

'Autumn weather': I do not get the significance of *autumn*? It struck me as having a greater significance than you may have intended it to have. HAYWARD to ELIOT, on a line in the first draft of *Little Gidding*, 1 August 1941.

'Autumn weather' only because it *was* autumn weather—it is supposed to be an *early* air raid—and to throw back to Figlia che piange (but not having my Poems by me I may be misquoting) but with less point than the children in the appletree meaning to tie up New Hampshire and Burnt Norton (with a touch, as I discovered in the train, of 'They' which I don't think I had read for 30 years, but the quotation from E. B. Browning has always stuck in my head, and that may be due to 'They' rather than to the Bardess herself). ELIOT to HAYWARD, 5 August 1941.

. . . between the usual subjects of poetry and 'devotional' verse there is a very important field still very unexplored by modern poets—the experience of man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in terms of the divine goal . . . ELIOT to WILLIAM FORCE STEAD, 9 August 1930.

The major sources of *Four Quartets* are experiences:—'it *was* autumn.' The experiences are both actual experiences and experiences revived in memory. These last come back with a new power as their meaning is apprehended:

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness.

The experiences, whether actual or remembered, arise from, or are connected with, certain places recreated as they were at certain seasons. The places and seasons give rise to memories of what has been and what might have been: the actualities and the potentialities of the past. Although the egoism of a continual use of the first person singular is avoided, sometimes by a rather uneasy use of 'we' or 'one', there is no attempt to disguise the personal and confessional nature of the poems. They are meditations on the experiences of a lifetime, and any study of their sources must begin with biography. But a poet's biography is much more than the narrative of

events in his life. In exploring his past to discover its meaning, Eliot also explored his past as a poet. He deliberately echoed himself, 'throwing back' to '*La Figlia che Piange*', 'meaning to tie up' 'New Hampshire' and *Burnt Norton*, and insisting on retaining a phrase that Hayward queried in *Little Gidding* 'because I was using a line from the Family Reunion'.¹ Since a poet's life is not merely the record of events, or the history of his development as a poet, but also the record of what fed his imagination and stimulated his intelligence in his reading, the poems are soaked in literary reminiscences. Some of these, like the memory of Kipling's story 'They', not read for thirty years, or of Mrs. Browning's poem, read some twenty-five years before and I suspect not re-read, lie buried very deep and were recalled unconsciously.²

The poems are poems of experience and are not built upon literary sources. There is a certain amount of direct quotation: the passage from Sir Thomas Elyot, given in archaic spelling, and the passage from St. John of the Cross in *East Coker*; the quotation from the *Bhagavad-Gita* in *The Dry Salvages*, ascribed within the poem—'So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna'; the quotations from Julian of Norwich and from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the first identified as a quotation by the capitalized archaic form 'Behovely' and the second by being set as a separate line. These are quotations and they are not made ironically, as are so many of the quotations in Eliot's earlier poetry. It is, therefore, of little importance to our understanding to look up the original passage. Its sense has not been twisted and there is no clash between the original and the context in which Eliot has set it. But, as with minor reminiscences and echoes, although recognition may not assist understanding, it enriches our reading of the poems. They come to us as the fruit of a lifetime's reading and thinking, carrying memories of events and of persons, and of phrases that echoed and sang in Eliot's mind.³ Thus, when Eliot substituted 'the spectre of a Rose' for 'the ghost of a Rose' in the third section of *Little Gidding*, he built into his poem a memory of one of the great aesthetic experiences of his early years in London, preferring the recollection of Nijinsky's famous leap in the ballet of that name to an echo of Sir Thomas Browne, which he did not in fact recognize until Hayward drew his attention to it.⁴ To know this adds nothing to our appreciation of the force of the repudiation of reactionary sentiment in politics in the poem, and the reference may be regarded as a delightful irrelevance. The echo of *Hamlet*, when the 'familiar compound ghost' in *Little Gidding* 'faded on the blowing of the horn', does not equate this mysterious figure with the

¹ See p. 223.

² In this chapter only the major sources will be dealt with. Occasional allusions and reminiscences are given in the commentary to the poems.

³ Whoever indulges in spotting allusions and echoes in Eliot's poems must remember Eliot's own comments on Livingston Lowes's *The Road to Xanadu* and on 'the criticism of explanation by origins'. See 'The Frontiers of Criticism' (University of Minnesota Press, 1956), reprinted in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), 107-8.

⁴ See p. 202.

ghost of Hamlet's father, who 'faded on the crowing of the cock'. This was an allusion that Eliot made deliberately and was unwilling to lose in order to meet an objection by Hayward.⁵ It might be said to have propriety, enforcing the purgatorial meaning of an encounter that at the beginning appears infernal. But the first scene of *Hamlet* was a scene that Eliot picked out for special praise and analysis in his lecture on 'Poetry and Drama',⁶ and I suspect that it was more the beauty of Shakespeare's phrase than its appropriateness that made him want to echo it in *Little Gidding*. Sometimes the original sense of a passage that Eliot echoes is amusingly at odds with the sense in which he uses it. Thus, in this same Dantean passage he substituted for a line that Hayward queried the line as it stands in the final version: 'Where you must move in measure, like a dancer', writing that he rather liked 'the suggestion of the new line which carries some reminder of a line, I think it is about Mark Antony'. Actually the phrase is used by, and not about, Antony, who says contemptuously of Octavius that he 'at Philippi kept / His sword e'en like a dancer'. Sometimes, though rather rarely, the recognition of a source that Eliot had in mind can guide us to an interpretation. A striking example is the obvious reminiscence of Gide's *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné* in the manuscript notes for Part IV of *East Coker*.⁷ But literary echoes and allusions are less fundamental as sources than places, times, and seasons, and, above all, the circumstances in which the Quartets were written.

i. BURNT NORTON

In October 1932 Eliot left England for six months in order to deliver the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at his old university, Harvard, and the Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia. He had not visited the United States since 1915, when he had gone over for a brief visit to tell his parents of his marriage and of his decision to settle in England. He said good-bye to his wife at Southampton, and while he was in America instructed his solicitor to begin proceedings for a legal separation. He returned thus to his native country and to his old university, where, but for the accident of the outbreak of war in 1914, he might have made a career as a Professor of Philosophy, knowing that a whole, long, distressful chapter of his life had come to an end. It was a time of painful reflection on what had been and on what might have been, of memories intertwined with the scenes of his childhood and young manhood. It was a time for taking up old contacts and old friendships. It was also a time when the future was uncertain and had somehow to be built on the failure of the past.

⁵ See p. 196.

⁶ *Poetry and Drama* (Harvard University Press, 1951), reprinted in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), 72-88. Eliot explained in the preface to *On Poetry and Poets* that the passage analysing the first scene in *Hamlet* was taken from a lecture given at Edinburgh University before the war.

⁷ See pp. 43-6.

When Eliot returned to England at the end of June 1933, he was met by Frank Morley, the Morleys having offered him a home in their seventeenth-century farmhouse, Pikes Farm, in the 'angle where Surrey, Kent, Sussex come together'. Having settled him in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', the Morleys went off for a holiday, leaving him alone. 'There are times', writes Morley,

when a man may feel as if he had come to pieces, and at the same time is standing in the road inspecting the parts, and wondering what sort of a machine it will make if he can put it together again. It was fourteen years later, and speaking of his own feelings, that Tom used that figure of speech, and I fancy there was a stress upon the pronoun; he had to draw upon *his* sources, for reconstruction, perhaps involving redirection, of the machine he knew about better than any outside mechanic.⁸

By the time that the Morleys returned, on 7 August, Eliot was in touch with other friends and had begun discussing collaboration in the pageant-play *The Rock*. On 22 September Martin Browne offered him the commission. He left Pikes Farm at the end of 1933 and moved to a guest-house in Courtfield Gardens, South Kensington, wanting to be in touch with the theatre in London. As soon as he settled there he began to attend St. Stephen's, Gloucester Road, and very soon became Vicar's Warden. After only a few months at Courtfield Gardens he moved into the clergy-house at St. Stephen's, and in 1937 he and the Vicar, the Rev. Eric Cheetham, moved to a flat at 11 Emperor's Gate. He was here when the war broke out and enrolled as a Warden at the local Air-Raid Wardens' Post. Both at the clergy-house and at Emperor's Gate, Eliot led an independent life, living and eating alone and making much use of his club, the Oxford and Cambridge University Club. He was also frequently away, lecturing, or at conferences, or visiting friends in the country. During the Kensington period his main interest was in the theatre, first with the two commissioned plays, *The Rock*, produced in May 1934, and *Murder in the Cathedral*, produced in 1935. Between these and his most ambitious effort in the theatre, *The Family Reunion*, produced in March 1939, he brought out the *Collected Poems 1909-1935*. The volume included the slender stock of poems written since the publication of *Ash Wednesday* in 1930: the two 'Coriolan' poems, the 'Five-finger Exercises', the 'Landscapes', and the 'Lines for an Old Man', adding to these, as the final poem in the volume, *Burnt Norton*. Eliot remained at Emperor's Gate for the first year of the war and was there when he wrote *East Coker*. Hayward, writing to Morley in February 1940, refers to Eliot's 'somewhat unsettled domestic life' at Emperor's Gate 'where the pipes froze and then burst, so that for a week he had to shave and shit at the Club, and consequently caught a cold.'⁹ In November 1940 Eliot transferred to the

⁸ Frank Morley, 'A Few Recollections of Eliot'; see Tate, 106.

⁹ HMC, Letter XI, February 1940. The winter of 1939-40 was extremely severe and there was

country. He joined the household of Mrs. Mirrlees, mother of his friend Hope Mirrlees, at Shamley Green, near Guildford. He would come up to London for two days a week, usually from Tuesday to Thursday, sleeping either at the Fabers' house in Hampstead, or in their flat above the office in Russell Square, or at his club; and he took his share of fire-watching at the firm. It was at Shamley Green that he wrote *The Dry Salvages* and *Little Gidding*. But one can understand why, in spite of this, he thought of calling the four poems 'Kensington Quartets'. Their roots lay in the Kensington period in which having 'come to pieces' he had to 'reconstruct the machine'; and, in solitude, had to live with his memories 'and make them into something new'.¹⁰

After the publication of *Ash Wednesday*, dedicated 'To my Wife', in 1930, Eliot endured one of his recurrent periods of sterility. It has been reported that, in some prefatory remarks before a recital of some passages from *The Rock*, he said that 'he had doubted during the two or three years before *The Rock* was composed, whether he had any more poetry to write'.¹¹ Having published 'Triumphal March' as an Ariel Poem in 1931 and 'Difficulties of a Statesman' in *Commerce* (Winter 1931-2), he abandoned the plan of writing a political sequence 'Coriolan'. He fell back on 'Five-finger Exercises', which were published in the *Criterion* in January 1933. These, as has been pointed out, are 'exercises in pure allusiveness and imitation; they give a clue to certain "music" in the *Quartets*'.¹² They are woven out of a tissue of allusions loosely associated in the poet's mind and point forward to one mode of allusion in *Four Quartets*. After his return from America Eliot published two short poems under the title 'Words for Music': 'New Hampshire' and 'Virginia'. They were printed in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in April 1934 and, privately, for distribution by the author in February 1935. In October 1935 'Rannoch, by Glencoe' appeared in the *New English Weekly*, and two further short landscape poems, 'Usk' and 'Cape Ann', were privately printed in the same month for distribution by the author at Christmas. All five poems appeared in *Collected Poems 1909-1935* under the heading 'Landscapes'.¹³

As the title 'Words for Music', used for the first two, shows, the five 'Landscapes' carry further the musical patterning and musical allusiveness

a fuel crisis. I well remember a pupil of mine at Birmingham University ploughing through February fog and snow with a bucket of coal affectionately inscribed 'Flowers for Teacher'.

¹⁰ cf. Reilly in *The Cocktail Party* (p. 165):

You will have to live with these memories and make them
Into something new. Only by acceptance
Of the past will you alter its meaning.

¹¹ Herbert Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures behind T. S. Eliot* (1965), 294.

¹² Grover Smith, 250.

¹³ An exception to the general critical neglect of the 'Landscapes' is an excellent article by Erik Arne Hansen, 'T. S. Eliot's "Landscapes"', *English Studies*, August 1969.

of the 'Five-finger Exercises'. But here, themes and images, rather than literary echoes, are treated musically, and the musical reverie arises out of the memory of a place and a time. Eliot gave his last Harvard lecture on 31 March 1933, and at the end of April went to lecture at the University of Virginia. By 15 May he was back in Cambridge, 'having just returned from Virginia'. On 12 June, just before he sailed back to England, he was staying at Mountain View House, Randolph, New Hampshire.¹⁴ In November 1933 Frank Morley and Donald Brace took him to Scotland. They were 'met by George Blake at Glasgow to drive over Rannoch Moor and to and from Inverness'.¹⁵ Over eighteen months later, at the end of July 1935, the Morleys picked him up at Chipping Campden, where he was staying, to take him on a trip to Wales. The final poem, 'Cape Ann', however, was not inspired by a recent visit but by much earlier memories. In the Eliot-Hayward Correspondence there is a postcard of a crudely coloured representation of the statue of *Notre Dame de Bon Secours*, with a sailing-boat in place of the infant Saviour carried on her left arm, from Gloucester, Massachusetts. The card is addressed to Ezra Pound in St. Elizabeth Hospital, and is postmarked 14 June 1947. It reads: 'E. P. et famille: Here is my Lady that Possum stole. Best dead Madonna this side Atlantic. . . . Yrs. Olson.' A typewritten note by Eliot is attached to the card:

Mr. Olson or Olsen is in error. I have never returned to Cape Ann or to Gloucester Mass. since 1915. Presumably this statue tops the façade of the R.C. Church in Gloucester. I do not think it was there in my time: anyway I had no knowledge of its existence when I wrote 'The Dry Salvages'. But I thought that there *ought* to be a shrine of the B.V.M. at the harbour mouth of a fishing port. The church on which *this* statue stands is probably in the town itself.¹⁶

T.S.E. 14.8.47.

The 'Landscapes' strikingly anticipate the themes of *Four Quartets*, beginning with the children's voices in 'New Hampshire' and passing through the stillness and heat of 'Virginia', and the legendary and historical themes of 'Usk' and 'Rannoch, by Glencoe' to the memories of a New England boyhood in 'Cape Ann'. But, as has been said, when Eliot wrote *Burnt Norton* in the autumn of 1935 he had no idea that he was inaugurating a sequence of poems which would, unlike the 'Landscapes', combine to make a single unified work. *Burnt Norton* arose out of what would seem to have been the happiest experiences of the Kensington period: his visits

¹⁴ The dates are from letters addressed to Mrs. Perkins, who was to be Eliot's hostess in the following summers at Chipping Campden. Eliot's letters to her are in the possession of Dr. Donald Gallup, who kindly allowed me to see them and to take relevant notes.

¹⁵ Frank Morley, 'A Few Recollections of Eliot', see Tate, 107.

¹⁶ Eliot's suggestion is correct.

to Dr. and Mrs. Carroll Perkins in the house they rented for three summers at Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire. Dr. Carroll Perkins, Minister of the Unitarian King's Chapel in Boston, was a Doctor of Divinity. His wife was the aunt of one of Eliot's old friends from his Harvard days, Emily Hale.¹⁷ He had first met her through his cousin, Eleanor Hinkley, who was still living in the Hinkley family home in Cambridge when Eliot returned to Harvard. Whether he had known the Perkins as a young man or not, he was made welcome to their home and often dined there.

A year after Eliot's return to England the Perkins came over to spend the summer. On 18 June 1934 Eliot wrote that he rejoiced that Mrs. Perkins had 'found a satisfactory habitation', adding 'Chipping Campden is only a name to me, but I know its reputation; the Cotswolds I only know from the motor route between Oxford and Hereford'. He was soon invited for a week-end and on 30 July wrote to express his gratitude. He was at Campden again early in September and on 4 September wrote 'My weekend, apart from being twice the length, gave me still more happiness than the previous one'. The Perkins did not go home until late in the year, for the Visitors Book at the Deanery of Chichester records the signatures of Dr. and Mrs. Perkins, Miss Emily Hale, who gives her address as Scripps College, California, and T. S. Eliot on 30 November 1934.¹⁸ This suggests that Miss Hale had been staying with her uncle and aunt throughout the summer of 1934. In the following spring the Perkins returned to Campden. Eliot wrote on Easter Sunday 1935 to thank Mrs. Perkins for a happy week-end and his letter makes clear that Miss Hale was there again. He was at Campden once more in May, in July, when the Morleys called to pick him up for the trip to Wales, at the beginning of September, and again at the end of the month. On this last visit he wrote a poem 'A Valedictory/Forbidding Mourning: to the Lady of the House', dated 28 September 1935,¹⁹ and on 30 September he wrote to Mrs. Perkins to express his gratitude: 'I want now to thank you for all your kindness and sweetness to me during the past two summers. . . . I had come to feel "at home" in Campden in a way in which I had not felt at home for some twenty-one years, anywhere.' The Perkins did not come over in 1936, for in a letter, dated 10 July 1936, Eliot wrote to Mrs. Perkins to give her news and commented on the bad weather in England that spring, adding 'The only really lovely day that I remember was a day at the end of May when I motored over from Cambridge to Little Gidding'. By April 1937 they had arrived again at Campden and this seems to have been their last visit. In addition to her other gifts, Mrs. Perkins was a skilled gardener. Eliot's poem to her is largely concerned with her talents

¹⁷ Emily Hale was a Lecturer in Drama at various American colleges. She died in 1969.

¹⁸ Information from Mrs. E. E. Duncan-Jones, daughter-in-law of the then Dean of Chichester.

¹⁹ There is a fair copy of the poem in the Bodleian Library and a typed draft is preserved with the letters to Mrs. Perkins.

as a gardener, mentioning, among other flowers she 'trimmed and trained and sprayed' *Clematis jackmanii*. Anyone who has wrestled with this most rampant and lovely of climbing plants can appreciate the precision of Eliot's verbs in the lines

Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
Clutch and cling?

In a letter written much later, 11 July 1948, Eliot wrote to tell her the good news that the famous gardens at Hidcote Manor, a few miles north of Campden, were being taken over by the National Trust and preserved. 'I was particularly pleased', he adds, 'because I remember so well your taking me there; and of all the gardens I have visited (mostly with you) that is the one I loved the best.' It was probably by Mrs. Perkins's suggestion that Eliot one afternoon visited the garden at Burnt Norton, although his companion on this occasion was not Mrs. Perkins but her niece, Emily Hale.²⁰

The house and garden of Burnt Norton stand on the edge of the Cotswold escarpment overlooking the Vale of Evesham and a distant view of the Malvern and Welsh hills. The name is derived from a sensational and horrible event in the 1740s. Sir William Keyte, a Warwickshire landowner of some standing and fortune, having taken as mistress his wife's maid, abandoned his wife and younger children and, with his mistress and two elder sons, set up house in the large seventeenth-century farmhouse which is the core of the present house. He proceeded to ruin himself by building a grandiose mansion and laying out gardens, and by indulging in reckless hospitality and riotous living. After some years of dissipation his fancy turned to a young dairy-maid. His former mistress left him, as did his sons. After he had for a week drunk himself into a state of frenzy, his new mistress, terrified, deserted him also. Left alone, ruined, and desperate with drink, he set fire to the mansion he had built and was burnt alive. Only some bones, two or three keys, and a gold watch remained of him.²¹ No trace remains today of the mansion Keyte built; the name that commemorates the catastrophe is attached to the estate and to the original farmhouse which through the centuries has been expanded into an attractive family house. It came into the possession of the Ryder family, the Earls of Harrowby, some ten years after the disaster. The present Lord Harrowby lived there for many years before moving to the main seat of the family at Sandon Hall

²⁰ I suspect, although I have no evidence, that Emily Hale was with Eliot on his short holiday in New Hampshire just before his return to England in 1933. 'New Hampshire' and *Burnt Norton* are obviously very closely linked in feeling as well as in imagery.

²¹ The story caused an immense sensation locally and there are many contemporary accounts. The tale is told by Richard Graves in *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773), Book x, chapters xxvi-xxviii, with many improving comments by Wildgoose.

in Staffordshire; but he tells me that the house was let for a short period in the middle 1930s at the time when Eliot visited the garden.²²

The sinister history that lies behind the name Burnt Norton has no bearing on Eliot's poem and the story seems to have faded from local memory. I give it only because many people are puzzled by the name. In August 1942 I published an article on 'The Recent Poetry of T. S. Eliot' in *New Writing and Daylight* edited by John Lehmann.²³ The article had been written soon after the appearance of *The Dry Salvages*, when there was no indication that a further poem would follow. As both East Coker and the *Dry Salvages* were associated with Eliot's personal history, I rashly suggested that he had perhaps some family connexion with Burnt Norton also. Mr. Lehmann sent a copy of the issue of *New Writing and Daylight* to Eliot, who replied to him with some kind words which Mr. Lehmann passed on to me. After the publication of *Little Gidding* I wrote to Eliot, wishing to let him know how much these poems had meant to me, and told him that Mr. Lehmann had passed on his remarks. He replied saying my article had given him 'great pleasure' and went on

Only two very small points occur to me. The first is that I have no such connection as you suggest with the house at Burnt Norton. It would not be worth while mentioning this except that it seemed to me to make a difference to the feeling that it should be merely a deserted house and garden wandered into without knowing anything whatsoever about the history of the house or who had lived in it. . . . The other point is that I have never read or even heard of the book by Herman Melville.²⁴ American critics and professors have been so excited about Melville in the last ten years or so that they naturally take for granted that everybody has read all of his books, but I imagine that bell buoys sound very much the same the world over.

Like Milton's Paradise, the garden of Burnt Norton is a place set apart from the rest of the world on a high hill. It is far from easy to find, and is approached by a long private road and over a cattle-grid. Passing behind the house, which like the garden overlooks the valley, one comes into a place where nothing can be heard but bird-song. Leaning over the balustrade,

²² Of recent years the house has been let to a school. It is now being put into order for residence by the present Lord Sandon and the garden will thus revert to the beauty it had when Eliot and his companion visited it and which it had retained on my first visits there. My account is based on photographs taken on my first visit which was in 1952 and ignores the alterations made by the school.

²³ The article was revised to include *Little Gidding* and appeared as 'Four Quartets: A Commentary' in *Penguin New Writing* (1946) and in *T. S. Eliot: A Study of his Writings by Several Hands*, edited by B. Rajan (1947). With some further revision it became the last chapter of my book *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (1949).

²⁴ I had suggested, with acknowledgement to Henry Reed, that a passage from *Redburn* lay behind the close of Part I of *The Dry Salvages*. Eliot mistakenly assumed Henry Reed was an American Professor of that name.

one looks down over a steep wooded slope. Near the house, overlooking the garden, is a huge tree with 'figured leaves' on which, as Eliot did, one can watch the light at play. Passing through the rose-garden, down some steps, one comes upon a clipped hedge surrounding a large expanse of grass. Coming out of this, through a gap in the hedge, one finds oneself standing above a grassy bank and looking down on a big rectangular drained pool, 'dry concrete, brown-edged'. Behind it is a smaller semi-circular drained pool, with a pediment in the middle where perhaps there once stood a statue and from which a fountain may have played.²⁵ Beyond the grass in which the pools are set there is a path sloping up through trees to a yew alley running the upper length of the garden, chill and cold, where no birds sing. The garden, in its stillness and beauty and strange remoteness from the world, stirred in Eliot profound memories and brought together disparate experiences and literary echoes.

Another actual experience besides the visit to the garden at Burnt Norton came into the poem. In September 1933 Eliot paid the first of many visits to Kelham, the headquarters of the Society of the Sacred Mission, an Anglican religious community dedicated to theological education. He visited Kelham frequently up to the outbreak of war. Mr. George Every, who was at that time a member of the community, became a close personal friend and remained in touch with Eliot through the war and after. Mr. Every tells me that on a hot day in the summer of 1935 when Eliot was staying at Kelham he saw a kingfisher on a stream running into the Trent by Averham Church over the fields from Kelham and that there is a yew in the churchyard there and masses of clematis in the rectory garden next to the churchyard by the same stream. He was not himself with Eliot but two students who were told him how excited Eliot was at seeing the bird. Mr. Every remembers a conversation about *Burnt Norton* in the year after when Eliot spoke of this summer scene. I had always a little wondered at the sudden irruption of a kingfisher into *Burnt Norton*, for the garden is so remote from any water—unlike the garden of Appleton House surrounded by meadows that flood from the river on which

The modest *Halcyon* comes in sight
Flying betwixt the Day and Night.

Mr. Every's reminiscence provides another instance of the presence of actual and recent experience in *Four Quartets*. Just as, when asked for the

²⁵ There is a third drained pool in the garden of Burnt Norton, a circular pool among the trees. There was some correspondence in *The Listener* (14 and 28 January 1971), following a BBC *Omnibus* programme on Eliot, as to which pool it was that was 'filled with water out of sunlight'. The producer of the programme thought the circular pool in the trees best fitted the description of the garden in the poem. But the words 'to look down into the drained pool' exactly fit the surprise of coming through the gap in the hedge and seeing these empty pools at one's feet. My photographs taken in 1952 show that the trees around the pools have grown considerably by now. No doubt when Eliot was there in 1935 the pools were less shaded from sunlight even than they were then.

significance of 'autumn', Eliot replied simply 'it *was* autumn', so here he might answer those who look for mystical meanings in the sunflower, clematis, and kingfisher: 'There *was* a clematis; there *was* a kingfisher.'²⁶

In his interview with John Lehmann, Eliot mentioned three sources for *Burnt Norton*: 'Bits left over from *Murder in the Cathedral*', the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland*, and the garden.²⁷ The opening paragraph of *Burnt Norton*, except for minor alterations in wording, was originally written as a comment by the Second Priest after the exit of the Second Tempter. The second of Thomas's temptations is the temptation to attempt to retrace one's steps, to try to go back to the moment when a choice was made and make a different choice:

The Chancellorship that you resigned
When you were made Archbishop—that was a mistake
On your part—still may be regained.

The temptation is presented to Thomas in political terms. The Priest's comment generalizes on 'what might have been and what has been' but then gives the comment a profoundly personal application, applying it to the most poignant 'might have been' of our lives: the rose-garden at the end of 'the passage which we did not take'. As for *Alice in Wonderland*, it was already there in the bit cut from *Murder in the Cathedral*, where Alice hears the footsteps of the White Rabbit in the passage and cannot get through the door into the rose-garden. In a letter to John Hayward, 5 August 1941, quoted in the heading to this chapter, Eliot mentioned three other sources: his own poem 'New Hampshire'; Kipling's story 'They', which he only recognized as having contributed to his poem when, five years later, he was re-reading Kipling for his anthology *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*; and a 'quotation from E. B. Browning'. Many years ago I suggested that 'the image of laughing hidden children may have been caught from Rudyard Kipling's story "They", since the children in that story are both "what might have been and what has been", appearing to those who have lost their children in the house of a blind woman who has never borne a child'.²⁸

²⁶ We should perhaps be a little chary of giving too defined a symbolic meaning to the 'chill fingers of yew' in *Burnt Norton* and the yew tree at the close of *The Dry Salvages*. There are yew trees in the garden as there is a yew tree in the churchyard where Eliot hoped to be buried at East Coker. A letter from Eliot to Hayward (27 April 1930, EHC), replying to Hayward's appreciation of *Ash Wednesday*, suggests that even the yews there have more a personal than a deliberately symbolic meaning: 'Perhaps the yew does not mean so much as you suppose. It happened to occur in two or three dreams—one was a dream of "the boarhound between the yew trees"; and that's all I know about it.' This dream gave Eliot the beautiful enigmatic line in *Animula*:

Pray for Floret, by the boarhound slain between the yew trees.

Of course, the question of what symbolic meaning yew trees had for Eliot at this time to make him dream of them remains a legitimate question.

²⁷ *New York Times Book Review*, 29 November 1953.

²⁸ *The Art of T. S. Eliot* (1949), 160. The suggestion was made to me by Henry Reed.

I did not, however, identify the song that the blind woman in the story sings as being a quotation from a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. As Eliot did so, though Kipling does not mention its author, the poem must have been known to him²⁹ and I think unconsciously it contributed more than Kipling's story to *Burnt Norton*. The poem is a long one, called 'The Lost Bower', and the blind woman sings the first four lines of the opening stanza, the narrator commenting 'She dropped the marring fifth line':

In the pleasant orchard-closes,
'God bless all our gains,' say we,
But 'May God bless all our losses,'
Better suits with our degree.

The poem goes on to tell how as a child the poet found in a wood a 'bower', a kind of garden, and

On a sudden, through the glistening
Leaves around, a little stirred,
Came a sound, a sense of music which was rather felt than heard.

The music is more beautiful than any bird's song; but, as she 'rose up in exaltation' the music ceased and a silence followed:

Heart and head beat through the quiet
Full and heavily, though slower:
In the song, I think, and by it,
Mystic Presences of power
Had up-snatched me to the Timeless, then returned me to the Hour.

She vowed she would return to the bower but she never found it again. The poem then runs through at some length the many losses she has suffered in growing up and growing older but declares that, though her 'first was of the bower', she knows it remains just as it was:

Springs the linden-tree as greenly,
Stroked with light adown its rind;
And the ivy-leaves serenely
Each in either intertwined;
And the rose-trees at the doorway, they have neither grown nor pined.

²⁹ From 1916 to 1919 Eliot gave a three-year tutorial class at Southall on Modern English Literature. Lecture III of the first year was devoted to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and one of the six poems recommended for study, in addition to the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', was 'The Lost Bower'. See Ronald Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916-1919', *Review of English Studies*, May 1974.

From those overblown faint roses
Not a leaf appeareth shed,
And that little bud discloses
Not a thorn's-breadth more of red,
For the winters and the summers which have passed me overhead.

And that music overfloweth,
Sudden sweet, the sylvan eaves:
Thrush or nightingale—who knoweth?
Fay or Faunus—who believes?
But my heart still trembles in me to the trembling of the leaves.

Is the bower lost, then? who sayeth
That the bower indeed is lost?
Hark! my spirit in it prayeth
Through the sunshine and the frost,—
And the prayer preserves it greenly, to the last and uttermost.

Till another open for me
In God's Eden-land unknown,
With an angel at the doorway,
White with gazing at His Throne;
And a saint's voice in the palm-trees, singing—'All is lost . . . and won!'

Apart from its first four lines which Eliot said had 'always stuck in my head'³⁰ there are no verbal echoes from this mediocre poem; but the music, the bird's song, the silence, the conjunction of the 'Timeless' and the 'Hour', and the whole conception that what is lost is not lost but exists to be known in prayer and to be finally restored make Mrs. Browning's poem a kind of crude and sentimental version of the underlying themes of *Burnt Norton*. It is an interesting example of the ways of the poetic imagination that Kipling's over-emotional story and Mrs. Browning's lax effusion should have been combined unconsciously to contribute to Eliot's austere and rigorously philosophic poem on time and time's losses and gains.

ii. EAST COKER

East Coker was written on the model of *Burnt Norton* and it bears the marks of its origin. It arises less than the other Quartets out of experiences and memories that came together, and at times seems to follow its model too closely, as in the lyrical opening of the second section. East Coker is a singularly beautiful village in Somerset, not far from Yeovil. Eliot visited

³⁰ The echo from these is in *The Dry Salvages*: 'It tosses up our losses.'