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Maggie Wells April 7, 2021

Seeking Transcendence in a Time of War: Theology and "Saving Civilization" in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

English

2021

Abstract

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T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* is celebrated by scholars for its acute depiction of cultural disillusionment following World War I. Eliot's last poem, *Four Quartets*, on the other hand, receives criticism for disengaging with society and politics in part due to the poem's focus on theology. Surprisingly, Eliot explicitly mentions war, and even World War II throughout the *Four Quartets*. Looking specifically at places where Eliot explores war in the text, this study aims to closely examine how Eliot engages with politics and society within the frame of his recent conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. These sections of the poem reveal that Eliot's faith frames his cyclical interpretation of war and his civic-minded impulse towards "saving civilization," or the affirmation of a communal identity that upholds a moral order. At the same time, Eliot cynically describes poetry's inability to change human action and focuses instead on transcendent experiences accessed by those who refine their souls. Comparing Eliot to W.H. Auden's "Spain" and H.D.'s *The Walls Do Not Fall* highlights the poetic tools Eliot employs to make an argument for "saving civilization" as opposed to explicit political action. Moreover, this comparison emphasizes Eliot's ultimate focus on human experience in the *Four Quartets* to offer transcendence as a mechanism to find meaning in human life.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to my dad, for fostering my love of poetry and for inspiring me to pursue a degree in English. To my mom, for encouraging me to push myself to complete this project and for supporting me throughout college.

Thank you also to my advisor, Dr. Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, for giving me the opportunity to study T.S. Eliot and for his continued assistance throughout this process. In addition, to my other committee members, Dr. Elizabeth Goodstein and Dr. Jeffrey Staton, for their support.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In T.S. Eliot's obituary in the *New York Times*, the editors expressed their belief that "it is very likely that when the literary history of our time comes to be written, it will be characterized as the Age of Eliot" ("T.S. Eliot, the Poet"). Eliot's impact on this age, now perhaps synonymous with literary modernism, is undeniable. Even in his own time, the modernist movement's figureheads, such as Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and Virginia Woolf, acknowledged Eliot's leading role in shaping the literary movement (Lewis, *Cambridge Introduction* 129). Today, Eliot's most famous poem that helped to define modernism, *The Waste Land*, continues to inspire readers due to its ability to describe the feeling of cultural disillusionment in the aftermath of World War I. *The Waste Land*'s enduring popularity equally reflects Eliot's ability, even after his death, to "speak for us" and "know us" (Fowlie 20). In fact, my own interest in *The Waste Land* grew out of the sense that this poem constituted one of the most important critiques of the twentieth century

Yet, Eliot's same capacity to "speak for us" and describe the feeling of an age is often not recognized in the context of his last poem, the *Four Quartets*. Published between 1936 and 1941, after Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, the *Four Quartets* approaches and analyzes theology and time with philosophical rigor. Though written by the same author who popularized modernism in the 1920s, the *Four Quartets* is often even categorically divided by scholars from *The Waste Land* and classified as "late modernism," instead of "high modernism," in part because of late modernism's perceived epistemological retrenchment in the later modernist years away from "political commitment … or the attempt to escape the confinements of the ivory tower" (Whitworth 281). Despite these distinctions between high and late

modernism, Eliot's impulse towards "sav[ing] civilization through some form of communal identity" (McDiarmid xi), mediated by his disbelief in poetry's ability to offer a meaningful mechanism to do so, is noticeable in both of Eliot's masterpieces.

Due to Eliot's focus on Anglo-Catholic theology in the poem, the *Four Quartets* has been characterized as a poem that retreats from political commentary. Knowing this, I was surprised to discover upon reading Eliot's *Four Quartets* that he does explicitly mention war, and even World War II. In an effort to reconcile scholarly debate surrounding Eliot's theological focus with this explicit war commentary, I began this research project to analyze the moments where these two themes intersect in the *Four Quartets*. These intersections reveal that "saving civilization," to Eliot, entails affirming a communal identity that upholds a religiously-framed moral order. Yet the intersection between war and theology in the *Four Quartets* also shows Eliot's attempt to come to terms with the possibility that he may not be able to realize this goal, either from a religious or literary perspective. While Eliot argues in the poem that poetry cannot effectively change politics, opening up our definition of political engagement highlights Eliot's nuanced response to World War II. David Easton's widely used definition of politics as the "authoritative articulation and allocation of values for society" (Bang) highlights the ineffectiveness of a strict focus on explicit political advocacy when interpreting poetry. Eliot's emphasis on faith and devotion necessarily advocates for a value system, meeting the first part of Easton's definition even if he does not take the next step to argue for the imposition of that system. I hope that my close reading will add to existing scholarship that attempts to deconstruct rigid definitions of literary modernism, which among other things, restrict poetry to a political or apolitical binary based purely on whether or not literature takes a principled stance on war or

governance. With this logic, the *Four Quartets* appears squarely apolitical. However, analyzing the poem reveals Eliot struggling with questions about his own ability to save civilization, despite hoping for a saved world.

In order to understand how Eliot's *Four Quartets* complicates the scholarly assumption that it retrenches from political commentary, it is critical to examine this scholarship itself. The context this research gives for Eliot's political disinterest is, of course, his religious belief following his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. However, truly understanding Eliot's theological journey begins by examining his childhood in St. Louis, Missouri. Eliot grew up in an extremely religious environment because his grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, was a strict Unitarian preacher. Greenleaf Eliot imposed austere religious control on Eliot's family and required members to adhere to a religious "code-of-conduct" (Gordon 18). Despite Greenleaf Eliot's behavioral conservatism, his Unitarian Christian denomination explicitly reacted against earlier, more orthodox, Christianity. In fact, Unitarianism rejects "the Puritan conviction of man's innate sinfulness" (Gordon 19) and God's perfection. Rather, Unitarians believed in a loving and benevolent God and stressed each individual's ability to create a personal relationship with Him.

Even at a young age, Eliot felt a disconnect from Unitarianism due to his attachment to religious morality. As a boy, he was not attracted to his Grandfather's conception of a benevolent God and an image of humanity that is capable of communing with divinity and, in fact, craved an understanding of morality that came to terms with the doctrine of Original Sin (Gordon 20). Eliot's concern with good and evil, rooted in sin, continued amidst his education at Harvard and Oxford. In 1921, a year after he published *The Waste Land*, Eliot wrote that all "first rate poetry" is concerned with "good and evil" ("The Lesson of Baudelaire" 1). In this essay, Eliot rejects the

moral compass presented in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which Eliot believes creates a moral grey-area instead of arriving at "a point of view toward good and evil" ("The Lesson of Baudelaire" 1). Critically, Eliot argues that evil and sin structure the world and that it is a poet's job to explore this morality.

Despite Eliot's dissatisfaction with Unitarian beliefs, he did not find a Christian denomination he identified with until 1927 when he converted to Anglo-Catholicism. In the context of his personal history, Eliot's conversion appears as a direct rebuke to his Unitarian roots. The two denominations are fundamentally different in how they conceptualize God and His relationship to humanity. While Unitarian theology suggests humans can redeem themselves from sin in spite of Adam's fall, Eliot's Anglican belief, which falls closer to Catholic orthodoxy than Protestant faith, takes the Augustinian view that humans carry innate sinfulness through their lives (Gordon 213). In this way, one Anglican interpretation of atonement proposes that Adam's Original Sin divided humanity and God and this division can only be repaired through Christ's death.

From the time of Eliot's conversion onward, the majority of his prose, poetry, and drama took up religious subjects. Between 1927 and 1930, Eliot published short lyrics that responded to the Gospels, such as "Journey of the Magi" and "A Song for Simeon." In 1930, he released a longer religiously-oriented poem entitled "Ash Wednesday." Eliot tried his hand at drama with mixed poetic elements between 1930 and 1933, with plays that ruminate on Christianity and Sin. At the same time as Eliot published religious drama and poetry, he actively engaged in critical writing on Christianity. Eliot conversed with other scholars interested in theology and, notably, wrote a series of lectures which advocated for the creation of a Christian Society ("The Idea of a

Christian Society"). Finally, in 1936, Eliot published the first of the *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton" as a stand-alone piece in his *Collected Poems*. Over the next five years, Eliot wrote and published the remaining three quartets: "East Coker" (1940), "Dry Salvages" (1941), and "Little Gidding" (1942). In its complete form, Eliot's *Four Quartets* is the last complete poem that he ever published.

Of course, the *Four Quartets*' publication dates also carry greater significance because they coincide with the duration of World War II, which ravaged Europe between 1939 and 1945. Given the magnitude of this international conflict, as I mentioned above, Eliot's shift towards faith is controversial. Illuminating this criticism, in the *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* Pericles Lewis suggests modernists reacted in one of three ways to the politics of their time. The writers

> turn[ed] inward in pursuit of an analysis of Englishness, turn[ed] outward in search of documentary realism or political action, or simply laugh[ed] mirthlessly at the folly of this world. (231)

The earliest scholarship unsurprisingly classifies Eliot firmly in the first category. Eliot's own prose seems to be partly to blame for this interpretation, as he argues in an essay published in 1945 on poetic criticism that great poetry should reject politics ("The Social Function of Poetry"). Yet, contemporary scholarship aims to complicate the assumption that these three options are the only ways in which poets can respond to crises, by, for example, broadening our understanding of Eliot's supposed "disengagement" from the political and examining how Eliot's implicit war commentary could itself be political (Mirella; Asher). Running parallel to – but importantly, not intersecting – this discussion on ideology, scholars have examined the connection between time and theology in Eliot's *Four Quartets* (Joudry). For instance, Andrew

Shenton analyzes timelessness in the *Four Quartets* and Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*, arguing that timeless moments in both works illustrate revelatory theological experiences (157). Anthony Domestico builds on this analysis and emphasizes the significance of these revelatory moments to the *Four Quartets*' theological project by comparing Eliot's poem to Karl Barth's theological philosophy.

In the following pages, I seek to contribute to contemporary Eliot scholarship by examining Eliot's discussion of war and theology in the *Four Quartets* to isolate his unique reaction to worldly crises. Scholars have long analyzed the *Four Quartets* from a theological perspective. However, existing close readings focus exclusively on theology and do not connect Eliot's complex relationship with politics and religion to his construction of time in the poem. Understanding the poem's theological argument and its war commentary in tandem results in a more holistic image of Eliot's political aspiration. Moreover, the *Four Quartets*, read in this light, reveals that modernist engagement with politics and theology more generally cannot be uniformly described or categorized. Rather, these writers display a unique relationship to both issues in their work that is worth studying. In fact, assuming that modernist writers displayed uninterest, and perhaps even antipathy, towards religion eliminates the possibility for investigating interesting connections between twentieth century politics and changes in theological and philosophical thought. Analyzing Eliot's poetry serves as one example of how specifying a poet's connection to both issues beyond these assumptions clarifies our understanding of this poet's relationship to the twentieth century. Given Eliot's importance to the period, proven by the New York Times obituary cited above, studying Eliot's *Four Quartets* serves as an essential mechanism to understand literary modernism.

In Chapter One, I examine scholarship on the modernist literary movement's engagement with theology and politics. Scholars often regard Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* as the highest point of modernist poetics. However, tracing modernism's origins and its change over time, with an emphasis on modernist writers' interactions with theology, shows that monolithic definitions of the movement do not accurately capture its formal and thematic diversity. After focusing on modernism broadly, I look specifically at modernist writers' obsession with the end of time and eschatology. Augustinian eschatology offers an illuminating lens with which to view Eliot's *Four Quartets* due to its focus on history and time, so I also introduce this specific philosophy. Finally, I turn to political engagement and the prospect of "saving civilization" through an exploration of common scholarly argument that good modernist writing necessarily comments on society and culture. In this context, I then introduce two points of comparison to Eliot's *Four Quartets* – W.H. Auden's "Spain" and H.D.'s *The Walls Do Not Fall*, which I incorporate into my second and third chapters.

Building on this foundation, in Chapter Two I examine Eliot's theology and war commentary in the first three poems of his *Four Quartets*. First, I analyze how Eliot temporally constructs an eschatological argument in "Burnt Norton" that he further develops in his later poems. With this theological context, I turn to the places where Eliot mentions war in the first three poems and look specifically at how these sections interact with eschatology. Given that Eliot's construction of time influences both his eschatological argument and his interaction with war, I compare the *Four Quartets* to Auden's "Spain" at the end of this chapter. Auden takes a distinct present-focused temporal approach in his poem, which strengthens the poem's call to

action to fight in or support the Spanish Civil War. Together, both poems demonstrate literary modernism's heterogeneity firsthand in relation to time and politics.

In Chapter Three, I move from Eliot's general commentary on war to his specific observations on his experience living in London during the Blitzkrieg in "Little Gidding." In this section of the poem, the Blitz directly impacts the speaker's life and frames his eye-opening experience of transcendence. While on the one hand, Eliot highlights the Blitz to discuss the inevitability of human aging and death, he also describes German bomber planes, and their fiery bombs, as a metaphor for purgatorial grace. In this way, the Blitz serves a dual-purpose in the poem and helps give Eliot the language necessary to develop the climax of his theological argument. Framing this turn towards faith, Eliot also discusses poetry's inability to "save civilization." Thus, despite Eliot's acute description of the Blitz's violence, he always returns to faith and devotion, complicated by a fundamental division between God and humanity, which can only be resolved in the refining purgatorial fire. I conclude the third chapter with a comparison between "Little Gidding" and H.D.'s opening to *The Walls Do Not Fall*. H.D. also reflects on living amidst the Blitz in her poem, but evokes the most poignant images of the Blitz's destruction by comparing the bombings to the excavation of Egyptian ruins. Just as the Blitz forces the speaker to think more deeply about his own life and his faith in the *Four Quartets*, the Blitz leaves H.D.'s speaker with existential uncertainty about her place and purpose in the world. Analyzing Eliot's and H.D.'s poetry together shows that despite their closeness in subject matter and themes, they still diverge in their final reflections on human life. Taken together, Eliot, Auden, and H.D. offer a glimpse of the benefits of expanding our understanding of modernist poetics to recognize the complexity in each of these author's poems outside of the confines of this political or apolitical binary.

Finally, in a brief Coda, I address some of the larger questions facing modernist studies. Returning to Eliot's poetry from a scholarly perspective offers an opportunity to critically analyze some of the most important forces of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I hope that by analyzing Eliot's *Four Quartets* I demonstrate the importance of studying literary modernism, and literature in general, in our contemporary world.

Chapter 1: Surveying Theology and Politics in Literary Modernism

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.
>
> T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 1919

T.S. Eliot's poetry and criticism illustrate his hyperawareness of the literary canon. As Eliot explains in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," true appreciation for a poet's work comes, in part, from understanding the poet's relationship to literature's past. Contemporary Eliot scholars often follow the literary theory outlined in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and explore Eliot's relationship to "the dead writers." However, analyzing Eliot's poetry also demands a critical look at the writers of Eliot's own time and the modernist literary movement. Today, "for many readers, T.S. Eliot is synonymous with modernism" (Domestico and Lewis), yet, interrogating the relationship of Eliot's poetics to other modernist writing highlights the diversity in literary techniques and characteristics evident in the modernist movement. This is particularly true in the context of modernist writers' relation to theology and religion.

In order to compare Eliot to other modernist writers, and to the movement as a whole, it is critical to understand the forces that shaped this literary movement. Today, "modernism" broadly categorizes art and literature from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, with a "core period of about 1890 to 1945" (Mao and Walkowitz 738). New modernist scholarship has worked to expand the breadth of this definition to acknowledge the euro-centric bias inherent to modernist studies and to explore the transnational communication essential to producing the movement, as well as its anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist writing (Mao and Walkowitz 739). That being said, for many scholars, Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land*, serves as a blueprint for "high" modernist poetic experimentation due to its breakage from lyrical conventions (Lewis,

Cambridge Introduction 129). For example, the speaker changes fluidly and frequently in the poem, making it difficult to decipher any single narrator when reading. As evidence for *The Waste Land*'s importance to the modernist movement as a whole, Ezra Pound, one of Eliot's mentors, declared after its publication that "Eliot's *Waste Land* is … the justification of … our modern experiment since 1900" (Lewis, *Cambridge Introduction* 129).

Contemporary understandings of literary modernism, exemplified by Eliot's *The Waste Land*, do capture several prominent characteristics in modernist writing, namely the writers' explicit desire to break from literary conventions. According to Pericles Lewis, modernism originated as a response to three early twentieth-century crises: an artistic "crisis of representation," a socio-political "crisis of liberalism," and a philosophical "crisis of reason" (*Cambridge Introduction* 3). The first representational crisis expresses the writers' dissatisfaction with conventional literary mimesis, or the typical way of portraying the world in text. With new representational forms, writers hoped to alter more than simply their subject matter; they also sought to alter the standard language and syntax of popular literature. Eliot's writing in *The Waste Land* shows how writers explored new styles to accurately portray their subject matter. In a changing and industrializing society, modernist writers felt they could not rely on conventional writing styles to express the uniquely modern experience they hoped to convey in their work.

Along with their questioning of typical representational strategies, modernist writers also displayed an increased scrutiny towards reason, which ultimately caused some writers to question the superiority of human rationality. New scientific discoveries, such as Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, initially unsettled nineteenth-century beliefs in the Bible and Christianity (Lewis, *Cambridge Introduction* 18). However, scientific progress eventually upended conventional belief in human excellence. In the late nineteenth century, scholars

realized that Darwin's theory, taken to its logical conclusion, suggested that humans were essentially animalistic and the product of evolutionary chance. In this view, humans' "superior" characteristics, like reason, were simply an evolutionary accident.

Surprisingly, given that Darwinian theory initially destabilized Christian faith, the crisis of reason did not occur simultaneously with broader religious disbelief. Rather than coinciding, this "crisis of reason … resulted in part from an antecedent crisis of faith" (Lewis, *Cambridge Introduction* 18). Thus, in the early days of the modernist period, writers did not presuppose that Darwin's theory of evolutionary chance diminished the power of faith or God. For some believers, in fact, Darwin's animalistic theory of human excellence inspired faith in an all-powerful God. Accordingly, early modernist writers took varied approaches to religion and theology in their work, which caused a broader sense of "ambivalence" (Mutter 3) to religion in the movement as a whole. Despite this ambivalence, religion and theology remained prominent themes in poetry and fiction, perhaps because non-religious writers found it difficult to shake Christianity's influence on the literary canon. Domestico characterizes these writers as "haunted by Christianity's cultural traces despite their own lack of belief" (4). The result was a body of poetry and fiction that adapted Christian stories and metaphors for non-religious projects.

In order to contrast the modernists interested in theology to their counterparts, I will refer to the latter group as exclusively humanist writers. This terminology is derived from Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, who defines religious writers as those who believe in a higher, supernatural force which serves a meaningful role in their poetry. Non-religious, exclusively humanist writers, on the other hand, accept "no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing" (Taylor 18). Belief in a higher being, as opposed to belief in human ability, serves as the defining characteristic to both groups. It's worth

noting that Taylor describes a potential third group – "non-religious anti-humanisms" (19) – who do not believe in a higher force nor human excellence. However, as I am interested in a poem's political and theological projects, I believe the first two goal-oriented definitions serve my purpose in this research.

While early modernism can be characterized by ambivalence towards religious engagement, World War I generated a renewed interest in religion for many of the previously exclusively humanist writers. The war's gruesome violence, compounded with new disbelief in liberalism and the international order, encouraged "a return to religion" for writers, but also "for society more generally" (Domestico 9). For the purpose of this study, I will focus on Christianity, which deeply affected T.S. Eliot's poetry. However, post-World War I poets and novelists also displayed an interest in non-Western religions. Egyptian, Tibetan, and Hindu religious texts captivated James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, and H.D., for example (Lewis, *Religious Experience* 171). Attraction to religious belief beyond Christianity, especially from the British exclusively humanist modernists, suggests, at the very least, that the period saw renewed spiritualism from poets and novelists in the wake of World War I.

Splitting from previous literary movements that focused on religion, the interwar religiously inclined writers did not replicate Romantic depictions of religious experience. Instead, these modernist writers took an interest in conversing and debating with theologians. Domestico illustrates that "the period's most important poets regularly read, reviewed, and responded to Christian theology" (4). It was not enough for the modernists to respond emotively and aesthetically to their personal spiritual experiences; they also saw the necessity of entering into serious, philosophical debates about theology. The writers hoped that their work, a product of theological thinking, would offer meaningful "self-reflexivity and theological speculation"

(Domestico 5) for their readers. In other words, the writers sought to actively engage in critical theological analysis in atypical forms, like poetry or fiction.

Interestingly, the writers interested in exclusive humanism similarly split from emotive and aesthetic religious metaphors in their poetry and prose. These writers believed that by adapting religious references for non-religious texts, they "[raised] questions of legitimacy and coherence that force one to ask whether originally religious ideas remain intelligible in an alien framework" (Mutter 11). For example, the exclusively humanist writers questioned whether biblical metaphors could be repurposed for writing with no religious message. While Eliot concerned himself with religion, *The Waste Land* illustrates this objection as Eliot repurposes biblical metaphors to illustrate his disillusionment with culture and society, including that which is propelled by religious institutions and texts. Yet, it is hard to divorce this poem from the theology inscribed in the texts from which Eliot quotes, like Dante's *Inferno*, or the bible itself. Thus, for non-religious modernists, it was not enough to merely adapt religious concepts or imagery for non-religious purposes. Instead, they hoped to find an entirely new language to describe the world that did not rely on religious tropes.

Religious writers, on the other hand, found a solution for purely emotive religiosity in a specific branch of theology that highlights the doctrine of Original Sin and its effects on humanity. In Christian theology, the doctrine of Original Sin proclaims that the moment Adam ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, humanity was cursed with eternal division from God. As a result, the writers dismissed theological conversations that "emphasized unity between God and humanity" and "marginaliz[ed] sinfulness" (Domestico 10). Instead, they sought to study "absolute transcendence" (Domestico 11), which they saw as an alternative to humanist idealism because it relied on Original Sin as its foundation. Transcendence refers to God's

intrusion into the earthly world, which humanity requires due to the fundamental division Adam created between heaven and earth. For the purposes of this study, revelation is synonymous with transcendence because revelatory moments signify God revealing himself to humanity. The theological concept of transcendence rejects the notion of humanity's inherent goodness for a universal tendency toward sin or moral failure that can only be redeemed by divine transcendence. The final moment of which, is of course, the Apocalypse, where God reunites heaven and earth. Thus, diminishing human agency, transcendence emphasizes God's supreme power. Interwar theologians, like Rudolf Otto, described experiencing transcendence as awesome but incomprehensible (Domestico 11). By focusing on transcendence, scholars hoped to reinvigorate theology with an understanding of insurmountable division between God and humanity.

It's clear that modernist authors embraced various relationships to religion in their writing. However, religious and exclusively humanist writers alike rejected emotive and aesthetic religious descriptions in their work. For religious poets like T.S. Eliot, this resulted in serious, theology-focused poetry. Eliot's own life actually replicates the modernist writers' turn from emotive Christianity to revelation-focused Christian theology. Growing up in an American elite culture permeated by a liberal Unitarian Christianity that emphasized a human capacity to unite with divinity and experience that unity emotionally, Eliot developed an early antipathy for this theology. It is fitting in this context that he later found himself among the theologians emphasizing the doctrine of Original Sin and the importance of transcendence. As Christina Iglesias notes, Eliot shows a sustained preference for "thought over feeling, or intellect over emotion" (197) throughout his life as a critic and poet. Given his strong inclination against

emotionality, it is unsurprising that he took up the study of theology during a period of Christian revivalism in England.

The interwar period's turn towards religiosity resulted in theologians and writers taking up specific theological questions about God and his relationship to humanity. One concept that concerned these writers was eschatology, or the "theological doctrine of the 'last things,' or the end of the world" ("Eschatology" 633). Importantly, Christian eschatology informs how theologians viewed time and history. Instead of framing time as linear and progressive, Christian eschatology understands human history through important divine interventions on earth. Yet, every intervention stems from Adam's original sin because it created the precondition that necessitates God's interference on earth. The historical period between the fall and the apocalypse is only marked by one instance of direct intervention from heaven to earth: the incarnation of Christ. However, the most important intervention for Christian eschatology is the apocalypse, or the "cataclysmic intervention of God in history" ("Apocalypse" 65), where God reunifies heaven and earth and saves the faithful humans. Until the apocalypse, theology suggests that humanity's innate sinfulness results in their inability to be close to God, except in death. Nevertheless, smaller interventions, or revelatory moments of transcendence, can create a connection between God and humanity in the period between the Incarnation and the apocalypse.

Christian or not, many modernist writers became interested in the doctrine of last things as they began to think differently about history following the catastrophe of World War I. Lewis writes that modernist writers were "attracted to mystical systems of world history" (*Cambridge Introduction* 146). For example, W. B. Yeats believed history turned like a series of gyres and often repeated itself cyclically. Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming," describes history,

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre." Yet the gyres fail under the weight of crisis: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (187). The title, aptly alluding to Christ's second coming, connects the poem to the apocalypse and eschatology. However, Yeats's vision of history is deeply indebted to his understanding of the present world, characterized by chaos and disorder. Yeats published "The Second Coming" in 1919, suggesting an even stronger linkage between the war and his mystical history. While Yeats' poem differs from traditional Christian interpretations of the apocalypse, it highlights the modernist's obsession with an "eschatological view of the world" and "their fascination with the problem of destiny and the Last Judgement" (Lewis, *Cambridge Introduction* 147).

In contrast, Eliot's eschatological theory, represented in his literary criticism, reflects his personal Christian religious beliefs. In his essay, "Literature and the Modern World," Eliot criticizes the "modern eschatology" described in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*. Eliot believes Wells interprets the present world as merely a progressive step towards the future. To illustrate this point, Eliot crudely compares Wells's present humans to the apes of the past that gave way to humanity. The criticism that Eliot highlights in this essay reflects his and Wells's contrasting temporal values. For Eliot, there is value in the past and the present, not just the future ("Literature and the Modern World" 196). Further, to Eliot the future is characterized by the end of times, or the apocalypse, not infinite absolute progress. Although Eliot does not explicitly mention Christian eschatology in this essay in 1935, he replicates his criticism of linearity in "Burnt Norton" a year later. Further, in this same essay, Eliot reiterates his personal belief that a poet must "assume [the] role of a moralist" (202) in his poetry. Earlier in the text, Eliot clarifies that he believes that Wells's "secular revolution … [diminishes] the value" (200) of a work by making it impossible to express immorality in the present. Given that Christianity strongly

influenced Eliot's moral values, his explicit connection between morality and time in this text suggest there is precedent for Eliot's concern with Christian eschatology.

Only Eliot's essay on H.G. Wells, in his entire body of critical work, specifically mentions eschatology. With this in mind, contemporary Eliot scholars interested in eschatology in *Four Quartets* focus primarily on the relationship between time and Christianity in the poem to formulate an understanding of Eliot's eschatological argument (Joudry). I intend to add another layer to this analysis by examining Eliot's *Four Quartets* in relation to Saint Augustine of Hippo's interpretation of eschatology because of his focus on divine intervention in human history and his explicit connection between eschatology and war theory. In this chapter, I introduce the Augustinian philosophy relevant to my project and I will examine its applicability to Eliot's poetry in chapters two and three.

Saint Augustine of Hippo was a Christian theologian born in 354 A.D. in the Roman Empire. In his time, Augustine revolutionized Christian thought and famously debated other theologians leading to their excommunication from the church. In one of these debates, against his most famous foe, Pelagius, Augustine instated the doctrine of Original Sin into modern Christian thought (Bonaiuti and La Piana 159). Importantly, this doctrine also serves as the foundation for Augustinian eschatology because Adam's fall created a fundamental division between Heaven and Earth, which can only be closed in the second coming of Christ.

In his book, *The City of God*, Augustine forms his theological understanding of history and time rooted in Adam's fall. *The City of God*'s final twelve, out of twenty-two, books,

> retell the biblical story of humankind from Genesis to the Last Judgement, offering … the true history of the City of God against which, and only against which, the history of the city of Man … can be properly understood. (O'Donnell)

In the text, history is essential to understanding eschatology. Augustine describes two historical timelines, the heavenly timeline, and the earthly timeline, that operate simultaneously. However, divine history creates and predetermines the course of human history, which eventually ends in the Last Judgement. Therefore, human history cannot be divorced from its relationship to God. Despite this, God, and his heavenly timeline, is fundamentally divided from humanity. Until the Last Judgement, "humanity live[s] in … an opaque world of time and space [in which] they cannot know anything about the End" (Landes).

Interestingly, Augustine also outlines a relationship between war and eschatology in *The City of God*. At the time Augustine wrote this text, many Roman-Christians held the belief that Rome was a divine city on Earth (Landes). However, during Augustine's life, the Roman empire suffered serious blows to its territorial and governmental integrity. Augustine hoped to decouple Christianity from Rome to sustain the Christian religion after Rome's inevitable fall. Further, although Augustine accepted earthly history, he believed "the battle that really mattered had already been fought on the Spiritual plane, where God had triumphed" (Landes). By intentionally focusing on battle, Augustine further divorced Christianity from Earthly politics. No war on the earthly timeline could be divine. In this way, no loss in battle could spell the end of Christianity. The two wars that mattered, for Augustinian eschatology, were God's first battle with Satan and the Last Judgement, where God will defeat Satan and sin for the second time.

Of course, resemblance between Augustinian eschatology and Eliot's theology in the *Four Quartets* is not sufficient evidence for drawing a direct connection between the two. However, Eliot himself establishes a relationship between his poetry and "the dead" by quoting from St. Augustine's *Confessions* in *The Waste Land*. In the conclusion of the poem's third section, Eliot writes, "To Carthage then I came / Burning burning burning burning / O lord thou

pluckest me out / O lord thou pluckest / burning" (*Collected Poems* 64). Eliot's official annotations to *The Waste Land* confirm that the allusion to Carthage, and the speaker's call to the "lord," comes directly from Augustine's *Confessions*. Eliot could not have quoted *Confessions* without direct textual knowledge, which suggests that Eliot read Saint Augustine's teachings himself. Eliot's prose work from this time confirms his knowledge of Augustine. Throughout the 1920s, Eliot quotes from and describes Augustine in his lectures. For example, in a lecture on John Donne's poetry, Eliot describes Augustine's boyhood, again quoting directly from *Confessions* ("Lecture II: Donne and the Middle Ages" 641).

Further, in 1941, around the same time Eliot wrote and published his *Four Quartets*, he also published a prose essay on Christian theology. In this essay, titled "The Christian Concept of Education," Eliot muses on essential reading for Christian scholars. He specifies that, "Every educated Christian should have an acquaintance with St. Augustine and Pascal … and you cannot understand St. Augustine or Pascal without some study of the worlds in which they lived" (251). Not only does this essay confirm the importance of Eliot's earlier prose on Augustine, but it further reaffirms Eliot's interest in Augustinian theology. Moreover, Augustine's appearance in Eliot's prose in 1941 suggests that Eliot was concerned with Augustinian philosophy at the same time that he wrote and published the *Four Quartets*.

Finally, later in his career as a critic, Eliot addressed Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin and his debates with Pelagius in his prose. In an essay on Blaise Pascal, published in 1951, Eliot describes similarities between Pascal's ideology and Jansenism – a movement in Catholicism prominent in France during Pascal's life. One of the general problems Eliot identifies in theology, while on the subject of Jansenism, is balancing human free will and divine grace. Eliot writes, "The Pelagians, who were refuted by St. Augustine, emphasized the efficacy of human

effort and belittled the importance of supernatural grace" ("The *Pensées* of Pascal" 346). Importantly, Eliot explicitly critiques the Pelagian "deviation" toward human free will and suggests this constitutes "heresy" (346). By critiquing the Pelagian interpretation of human will and grace, Eliot implicitly agrees with St. Augustine's more complex view of human nature. Further, Eliot posits Augustine as a scholar who identified free will and grace as opposing forces in his theological work and attempted to reconcile them. Though Eliot published this essay ten years after the *Four Quartets*, his writing on Pascal and Augustine together help isolate what Eliot believed was significant about the two authors when he described their importance in "The Christian Concept of Education."

One of the main problems Augustine sought to solve through his distinction between earthly and divine time was the relationship between God's omnipotent control of the universe and the actual, transformative events of human history. At that time Eliot composed the *Four Quartets*, the most cataclysmic event taking place was, of course, the outbreak of World War II. Eliot's interest in eschatology and Augustine in particular, then, must be read in his reactions to the war. In fact, *The City of God* provided Eliot with a foundation for exploring the relationship between war and eschatology. Despite this, connections between war and eschatology have not been examined in the context of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. In fact, Eliot often receives criticism for disengaging with World War II in his final poem. For this criticism, Eliot's prose writing is partially to blame, as he describes poetics as solely an aesthetic project in his essay "The Social Function of Poetry." More explicitly, Eliot argues that despite a poet's moral or political advocacy in their work, great poetry must survive "the complete extinction of interest in the issues with which the poet was passionately concerned" (438). However, in his essay "The Function of Criticism," Eliot complicates his pronunciation against the social function of poetry.

Kearns summarizes Eliot's second layer of argument, which suggests that "all writers must recognize something outside themselves which they [owe] 'allegiance' and 'devotion'" (78). Only for this greater allegiance can "sacrifices of … ideology" (Kearns 78) be justified. It is clear that Eliot's criticism displays an aversion to politically oriented poetics. However, from Eliot's critical standpoint, poetry can engage with politics and society with a higher purpose.

With Eliot's own criticism of socially engaged poetry in mind, I do not believe the language of political engagement correctly serves my purpose in analyzing the *Four Quartets*. Instead of explicitly taking a stance on contemporary politics or refusing to engage with them altogether, Eliot continuously displays a hope for a moral order throughout his life. While it might seem similar to political engagement, McDiarmid employs "saving civilization" as a subset of political action in the context of modernist poetry to describe a poet's urge to "save the collective soul" of the Western world (2). Only this definition captures Eliot's public-facing work's religious motivations. Yet, the impulse precedes Eliot's conversion and is evident in his strong moral convictions in his youth, where he goes so far to argue that poetry must make an argument for moral good and evil ("The Lesson of Baudelaire"). Later, it is most noticeable in Eliot's series of lectures published in 1931, entitled "The Idea of a Christian Society," where he argues for changing social attitudes and actions in order to make a Christian state possible.

Contemporary scholars have opened up their discussion of ideology to consider the ways Eliot's poetics and prose complexify his supposed "disengagement" from the political. For example, Loris Mirella examines Eliot's politics in conversation with the modernist movement's values surrounding the Spanish Civil War. He argues that the modernist movement assigned value to poetry that balanced stylistic innovation and social engagement. Thus, Eliot received criticism from his contemporaries for poetics that were perceived as overly focused on style.

Mirella responds to these critics by suggesting Eliot's "disengagement" is in fact his own form of political action that "mediates between a social and artistic agenda" (98). Mirella's theory better grapples with Eliot's poems like *The Waste Land* which clearly take up conversations about society and politics.

Crucially, Mirella outlines that critics, both modern and from Eliot's own time, often compare Eliot's social engagement to that of other modernists. Just as modernist writers displayed varied relationships to theology, they also took diverse approaches to the political. In order to better explore the intersection between theology and politics in modernist literature, I will compare Eliot to two modernist poets who took up both issues in their work: W. H. Auden and H.D. According to Mirella, Auden approached poetry from the social engagement side of the aesthetics-to-politics spectrum and was, in fact, criticized by his contemporaries for being too political (98). In his poem "Spain," published in 1937, Auden focuses on time in order to create a political message in support of the Spanish Civil War. Auden's thematic emphasis on time and war in "Spain" offers an interesting comparison to Eliot's eschatology and war imagery in the first sections of his *Four Quartets* as Auden constructs time linearly, with an emphasis on the present, to further a political goal. H.D., on the other hand, plays with time in her long poem *The Walls Do Not Fall*, published in 1944. At the same time, H.D. compares the German Blitz to archaeologists excavating Egyptian ruins. Given that Eliot takes up the Blitz in the *Four Quartets*' fourth section, "Little Gidding," H.D.'s *The walls do not fall* offers the opportunity for comparison between the two poems. By juxtaposing Eliot, Auden, and H.D.'s poetry, I will highlight Eliot's desire to save civilization in the *Four Quartets*. Moreover, I will demonstrate the variety in modernist responses to theology and politics in the mid-twentieth century.

Eliot argues in his criticism that poetry must be examined in relation to the "dead poets and artists" that influence the work ("Tradition and the Individual Talent"). Looking at Augustinian theology specifically highlights the theological threads which Eliot weaves together to create the *Four Quartets*. However, it is equally important to examine Eliot's poetry in relation to the literary movement with which he was a contemporary. Research on the relationship between theology and modernism reveals that Eliot falls into a broader movement that took varied approaches to religion and politics. At the same time, Christianity deeply influenced even modernism's exclusively humanist writers. The violent specter of World War I and World War II drove many writers to theology, including T.S. Eliot. Through their poetry especially, writers engaged in complicated theological questions. Eliot demonstrates this engagement in his late poems, "The Hollow Men," "Ash Wednesday," and finally his *Four Quartets*. Analyzing Eliot's last long poem, which is deeply influenced by Christianity, will show that theology and politics interact with each other in the text to reveal Eliot's understanding of "saving civilization." However, only by moving beyond binarism in modernist studies, which assign poetry to either political action or inaction and religious or exclusively humanist goals, does this effort in the *Four Quartets* come to light.

Chapter II: "Saving Civilization" in Eliot and Auden

As World War II ravaged Europe, Eliot found Britons wondering "Where are the British war poets?" In response to this outcry, Eliot published an essay in 1942 outlining the problems he saw in writing poetry in the midst of conflict. He argued,

> You cannot understand war – with the kind of understanding needed for writing poetry – or any other great experience while you are in the midst of it; you can only record small immediate observations. And when, after the war, the experience has become a part of a man's whole past, it is likely to bear fruit in something very different from what, during time of war, people call "war poetry." ("T.S. Eliot on Poetry in Wartime" 327)

Judging by this essay, Eliot would not categorize the *Four Quartets* as a war poem, even if this poem deals with war-related subjects and was published during World War II. Part of the problem with wartime poetry, Eliot indicates, is that it necessarily harnesses patriotism, which is difficult to authentically capture while also producing genuine emotion. Eliot does acknowledge great poets, like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, who wrote about World War I, however, he argues that this poetry's "spirit was more that of sadness and pity than militant glory" (327). Instead, Eliot charges poets with creating the best poetry possible "to preserve and develop" (327) their native language, which requires the substance and feeling that celebratory war poetry cannot fully harness.

Despite the shortcomings of wartime poetry, themes in the *Four Quartets* meet the qualifications for "immediate observations" which Eliot indicates can form the basis of great poetry. In fact, in the most authoritative collection of letters and manuscripts related to the *Four Quartets*, Helen Gardner argues that Eliot takes "immediate observations" from his life as the poem's primary subject matter. She writes "there is no attempt to disguise the personal and confessional nature of the poems. They are mediations on the experiences of a lifetime, and any study of their sources must begin with biography" (29). In keeping with the poem's focus on

experience and observation, this chapter will explore two of the most influential forces shaping Eliot's life as he wrote the poem: his 1927 conversion to Anglo-Catholicism and the outbreak of World War II. An analysis of the *Four Quartets*' first three sections reveals that Augustinian eschatology mediates Eliot's civic-minded drive towards "saving civilization" by emphasizing the importance of faith in a world where it is impossible to change patterns of human violence.

Given that Eliot published each of the four shorter poems that make up the *Four Quartets* separately before he released the final completed version, each short poem gradually builds on the themes present in those earlier. Moreover, each poem considers a slightly different time in Eliot's life. For example, Eliot published the first short poem, "Burnt Norton," in 1936, three years before World War II broke out in Europe. Despite its early publication, "Burnt Norton" lays the foundation for the theological argument Eliot would develop during the war as it was originally conceived from fragments of Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral*, commissioned by the Bishop of Chichester George Bell. In fact, the poem's opening comes almost directly from lines cut from the play, which focuses on conflict between the Pope and King Henry II of England (Gardner 15). Thus, it is important to read the opening lines with the context that they were originally written to explore the relationship between spiritual power and worldly power. Although it contains eschatological elements, missing from this section, of course, is Eliot's experience living in England during World War II. Similarly, though Eliot published "East Coker" in 1940, Gardner notes that he relies less on "experiences and memories" (41) in this section and instead mimics the structure and themes of "Burnt Norton." Therefore, "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker" offer a mechanism to compare Eliot's war engagement with the other two quartets, "The Dry Salvages" and "Little Gidding," which were each published deeper into the war. To facilitate this comparison, I will analyze the theology in "Burnt Norton," and explore

how this moderates Eliot's impulse towards "saving civilization," illustrated by his war commentary, in the next two poems in the sequence "East Coker" and "The Dry Salvages."

In the opening of the *Four Quartets*, Eliot sets the foundation for an eschatological theory which divides heavenly and earthly temporality. Specifically, Eliot describes a nonlinear timeline which reflects an Augustinian interpretation of divine time. Eliot writes,

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable. (*Collected Poems* 177)

The timeline Eliot describes here does not operate chronologically. Instead, each moment in time "contains" the past, present and future. In other words, as Eliot describes in the fourth line, time is "eternally present." Eliot's language creates the feeling of this ever-present time through repetition and enjambment, which blur all the temporal indicators in the passage together. Each line repeats a temporal indicator from the previous line, but describes it in a slightly different way, causing the reader to lose their own sense of time in the poem. For example, Eliot highlights "time present" in the first line and then uses "present" in the second line to describe time contained in the future. Eliot also ends the first four lines midsentence on different temporal indicators. This aids in cementing time as a theme in the poem by emphasizing the words "past", "present," and "future." However, Eliot does not offer a mechanism to center the reader in a single temporality, so the enjambement augments the sense of time's ever-presence in each moment.

While the opening of the *Four Quartets* establishes a strange, ever-present time, Eliot connects this uncertain temporality to theology in the final lines of this section. First, "eternally," from the fourth line, connects the opening lines' sense of time to a religious philosophy that

examines divine time. Among the most famous philosophers to analyze divine time was Augustine, who asserted that the realm of God or divinity operates atemporally. Driven by the presumption that "time is … an aspect of the created world and is itself a creation of God" (Barr), Augustine argued that God cannot be subject to time and is, in fact, "beyond space and time" (Barr). Eliot's paradoxical opening maps onto Augustine's conception of divine time. In the divine timeline, where there is no past or future, every moment is ever-present because time does not move progressively. Therefore, time is eternal. Eliot's tone shifts in the fifth line with the negative proclamation that "eternally present" time is "unredeemable." Though at first, "unredeemable" may seem to have a negative connotation, Eliot plays on the word's ability to describe something complete – something that cannot or does not need to be "redeemed" any further. For example, in a monetary sense, "unredeemable" can describe funds that have been completely paid and require no additional compensation. This further provides evidence for Eliot's connection with Augustinian theology as the divine, outside of time, cannot be made better or more complete because it is already perfect.

Later in the opening passage, Eliot builds on his initial description of divine time by contrasting this temporality with earthly time, characterized by linear historical movement and physical imagery. Eliot writes, "Footfalls echo in the memory, / Down the passage which we did not take, / Towards the door we never opened" (*CP* 177). Eliot's diction marks his transition to earthly time because "memory," only exists in a timeline which recognizes a distinct past, present, and future. At the same time, the movement in these lines emphasizes time's linear chronology, as "footfalls," "down the passage," and "towards the door" evoke an image of a person walking away from one point and towards another. Continuing in the lines, "Into the rose-garden. My words echo / Thus, in your mind" (*CP* 177), Eliot ties his false-memory to a distinct

person and place, "the rose-garden" and "your mind." Given that this person and place are contained in memory, they are automatically subject to the earthly timeline. Even if this memory is false or fabricated, it still requires a relationship with the past, which can only occur in earthly time. Further, by moving from abstract philosophical musings in the opening lines to concrete illustration of place, Eliot contrasts the divine time he can only speculate about to the concrete earthly time that Eliot recognizes and describes.

Through his description of divine and earthly time, Eliot sets up an eschatological interpretation of human history that can be intersected by the divine. Glen Hughes notes that Eliot criticizes history conceived as a "purely material process," dependent on "the inevitability of progress" (112). With this critique in mind, Eliot's divine timeline offers a competing vision of history where the divine gives meaning to the people living on earth through religious devotion. Adding to this meaning, Eliot suggests that humanity can witness the intersection between both temporalities, or divine transcendence. In these moments humans experience "access to experiences of the divine" which reaffirm the necessity of "join[ing] one's personal will with the divine will through … observance, prayer, mediation, or spiritual practice (Hughes 113).

With this theory in mind, in the second section of "Burnt Norton," Eliot turns to illustrating this intersection between the earthly and divine timelines. Eliot describes the experience of transcendence as "the still point of the turning world, / Neither flesh nor fleshless" (*CP* 179). Here, "still point" illustrates a transitory space between "flesh" and "fleshless." The Christian tradition associates "flesh" with humanity, whereas "fleshless" refers to God himself. In fact, in the biblical book of John describes Jesus as "the word [becoming] flesh" (*King James Version*, John 1.14). Thus, "flesh" and "fleshless" denote the human and the divine, and suggest

that the "still point" intersects both spheres. To emphasize that the "still point" offers a connection with the divine, Eliot describes the feeling of the "still point" itself. Eliot depicts sensing, "The inner freedom from the practical desire, / The release from action and suffering … By a grace of sense" (*CP* 179). As a moment of connection with God, the "still point" offers the speaker a momentary release from their human sin or "the practice desire," "action," and "suffering." As further evidence of this, Eliot suggests that "a grace of sense" rescues the speaker, where "grace" contains powerful Christian connotations as God offers grace to human sinners. While Eliot's word choice does offer a connection to theology, it is worth noting that Eliot's phrasing suggests that the speaker's grace is not directed towards God, but to their "sense." This suggests that while experience transcendence, humans peacefully exist without feeling.

In spite of the release from sin that Eliot associates with the "still point," the experience of transcendence forces the speaker to come to terms with the separation between earthly and divine time. By extension, transcendence reminds the speaker of the fundamental division between God and humanity. Eliot ends his section on transcendence writing, "Time past and time future / Allow but little consciousness. / To be conscious is not to be in time" (*CP* 179-180). While alluding to the opening of "Burnt Norton," here Eliot shifts his language to focus on "time past" and "time future" which evoke the span of human history. Being in this time allows no "consciousness" because humans, who are fundamentally stuck in time, cannot ever become fully aware of the divine. God's incomprehensibility, and the inability for humanity to reach full awareness of the world, "reminds humanity … that humanity [is] not God" (Domestico 45). Yet Eliot concedes that, "only in time can the moment in the rose-garden, / The moment in the arbour where the rain beat, / The moment in the draughty church at smokefall / Be remembered" (*CP*

180). Eliot creates momentum for each transcendent memory by repeating "the moment" and connecting the revelatory experiences with commas. Yet, the moments capture the "still point" by creating a one dimensional depiction of a single moment in time. Eliot only describes his surroundings, the "rose-garden," "the arbour," and the "church," but does not include any sense of time. Though humanity may not be able to uncover the mysteries of transcendence, being in time is a precondition for this experience. In the end, Eliot suggests that time, without intervention from God, is meaningless, writing," "Ridiculous the sad waste time / that stretches before and after" (*CP* 183).

In exploring the division between divine and earthly time, Eliot comes to the conclusion that transcendence is the only meaningful part of human existence because it offers humanity a glimpse of the divine. This theological argument necessarily prioritize faith and salvation over earthly existence and, by extension, the Christian apocalypse over earthly conflicts. Thus, Eliot rejects civic engagement that attempts to change the patterns of human war. Eliot's references to war in "Burnt Norton" lay the foundation for how he engages World War II in his later poems. Eliot opens section II of "Burnt Norton" by illustrating, and eventually rejecting, the circularity of human history and violence, in favor of the divine. He writes,

> Garlic and sapphires in the mud
> Clot the bedded axle-tree.
> The trilling wire in the blood
> Sings below inveterate scars
> Appeasing long forgotten wars. (*CP* 178)

Eliot opens this passage with a provoking image of "garlic" and "sapphires," stuck in "the mud," preventing an "axle-tree" from moving. "Mud" serves as the first indication that Eliot perhaps means to allude to war, as he lived through World War I, which was fought in muddy trenches. While "mud" represents a modern war for Eliot, the "axle-tree" could refer to carriage wheels, or

antiquated war-vehicles. In the next line, Eliot moves back to modern-day warfare with "the trilling wire in the blood," illustrating both the "trilling," or vibrating, communication wires that provided information during the first World War and barbed wire which could get stuck "in the blood." Finally, Eliot circles back in time once more, and invokes "long forgotten wars." Alone, these war references seem disconnected and devoid of a specific moment in time. However, Eliot compares the passage of time to blood circulating in the body. The mud "clots" the "axle-tree," where "clots" brings to mind blood clotting on a wounded body. Eliot makes this image clearer in the next few lines, where the wire in blood "sings below inveterate scars." With the blood circulation metaphor, Eliot connects past and present wars by suggesting they are all connected and reproduce each other like blood in the body. The scars of human violence are "inveterate," or long, established and unlikely to change, proven by the "forgotten wars," which cannot help prevent modern conflict because their violence is forgotten. Magnifying the connection between war and the blood metaphor, "inveterate" shares an etymological root with "veteran," which also illustrates the people who bleed and retain scars from this violence. The circulation metaphor further highlights Eliot's concern with wars that reproduce themselves, as he relates this conflict to violence and death.

Although Eliot clearly offers a violent vision of war, he proposes spirituality is the only available solution to conflict because human violence is inevitable and self-reproducing. Eliot ends the stanza on war with the lines, "Below, the boarhound and the boar / Pursue their pattern as before / But reconciled amongst the stars" (*CP* 180). Given his previous references in this stanza to "forgotten wars" and war technology, Eliot sets up a comparison between humans fighting each other and the "boarhound and the boar." This relation brings out the animalistic violence that Eliot notices in humanity's political wars. Importantly, the animals "pursue their

pattern as before," suggesting they have an innate tendency to hunt and be hunted. Just as blood circulates in the body and reproduces itself, the boar and boarhound continue their behaviors for all of time, with "as before" suggesting that from the beginning of time, they have been fighting each other. The passage's meter and rhyme also evoke the circularity in Eliot's message. Each conclusive iamb, and line ending rhyme, predictably reproduces another. However, Eliot shifts in the last line to propose that this violence, including the war and the boarhound and boar, is "reconciled amongst the stars." Eliot mimics this shift in his form by breaking the anticipated rhyme scheme with "stars." By explicitly stating that only "the stars" solve violence, Eliot indicates that there are no earthly or political solutions to these patterns. Rather, only in the heavens can the cruelty end. While Eliot's vague allusion to the stars could be indicative of a pagan religion that interprets the heavens for clairvoyance, Eliot's depiction in these lines is in harmony with Augustinian theology. Humanity is plagued with sin and violence because Adam fell from Eden therefore, only when the division between God and humanity is closed, in death or in the apocalypse, can violence come to an end.

In "East Coker," Eliot builds on his eschatological argument by explicitly connecting war to the apocalypse. Gardner notes in *Composition of the Four Quartets*, that "*East Coker* was written on the model of *Burnt Norton* and bears the marks of its origin (41). With this in mind, it is no surprise that "East Coker," section II, takes up war, and the connection between heaven and earth, in its opening lyric. Although Eliot wrote and published "East Coker" after World War II's commencement, Eliot's commitment to the structure of "Burnt Norton" inhibited him from drawing on personal experiences from the beginning of the war (Gardner 46). However, Eliot does supplement the argument on war that he fleshed out in "Burnt Norton" by explicitly connecting war to the end of time and by suggesting the apocalypse curbs individual civic

responsibility to respond to politics. To do this, Eliot describes time passing with dark and violent language to create a connection between war and time. Eliot begins by questioning a surprising earthly scene, he writes:

> What is the late November doing
> With the disturbance of the spring
> And the creatures of the summer heat,
> And snowdrops writhing under feet
> And hollyhocks that aim too high
> Red into grey and tumble down
> Late roses filled with early snow? (*CP* 185-186).

At first, Eliot appears to illustrate the transitory movement between seasons. The lyric rhythm and rhyme scheme give this stanza a light, happy feeling, complemented by natural subject matter. Yet, Eliot's diction reveals a darker scene; the late November is "disturbed" by spring, where snowdrops "writhe" under feet, and hollyhock flowers "tumble down," or die. Although Eliot does not illustrate the same destructive war scene as he highlights in "Burnt Norton," he subtly suggests that violence on earth is deeper than just person-to-person warfare. Everything on earth endlessly moves forward, perhaps driven by the seasons changing, and dies.

Eliot connects the natural violence to the apocalypse in the second half of the stanza, where he returns to the subject of war. Eliot continues to describe the changing seasons, but expands his focus to the cosmos. He writes,

> Thunder rolled by the rolling stars
> Simulates triumphal cars
> Deployed in constellated wars
> Scorpion fights against the Sun
> Until the Sun and Moon go down
> Comets weep and leonids fly. (*CP* 186)

Again, Eliot takes up the earthly war against time itself as his subject. Instead of flowers growing and dying, he describes "constellated wars" where "comets" and "leonids" cause "thunder" amongst the stars. Moreover, "Scorpion fights against the sun," which Gardner notes perhaps

alludes to the sun's position in Scorpio from the end of October through late November (101). Thus, Scorpio fighting the Sun in November causes the "late November" disruptions in the first two lines of "East Coker," section II. Nonetheless, the endless time-war goes on until "a vortex that shall bring / The world to that destructive fire / Which burns before the ice cap reigns" (*CP* 186). Here, for the first time, Eliot explicitly mentions the apocalypse or the "destructive fire" and he posits that the end of the world is the only solution to the continuous progression of time. Just as how in "Burnt Norton" only the "heavens" can stop human violence, this apocryphal fire also represents the only end to violent earth time and death. The relation between both sections suggests that Eliot sees war and violence as interconnected, yet also as only resolved in the final war. Taken to its logical end, although this thinking acknowledges violence on earth in many forms, it also advocates for inaction as Eliot describes brutality as inevitable.

Eliot generally ties war to eschatology in "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker." However, in "The Dry Salvages," Eliot explicitly mediates his response to international conflict, including World War II, with faith and devotion. Interestingly, though Eliot published "The Dry Salvages" deeper into the war than his previous poems, his overarching argument does not change: humanity should not focus or rely on earthly politics, but instead they should turn to God. Eliot loosens the structure he developed in the "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker" and takes up international politics in section V of "The Dry Salvages." Eliot opens the section by satirically listing mechanisms by which people attempt to uncover future events. He writes,

> To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
> To report the behavior of the sea monster,
> Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
> Observe disease in signatures, evoke
> Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
> And tragedy from fingers: (*CP* 198)

Eliot's language and style in this passage highlights the ridiculousness he sees in turning to magic or myth to see the future. Eliot humorously exaggerates the fashions by which people can investigate their fortunes by listing them in one long sentence. Further emphasizing this point, Eliot juxtaposes authoritative and technical sounding verbs, like "communicate," "report," "describe," and "observe" with unfounded mysticism. He continues,

> Riddle the inevitable
> With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
> Or barbituric acids, or dissect
> The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors –
> Explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams. (*CP* 198-199)

Here, the examples seem to multiply faster and faster, propelled by the verbs "riddle," "fiddle," and "dissect," and even further by the internal rhyme in "womb" and "tomb," until it abruptly stops with "dreams" breaking the rhyming pattern. At the same time, Eliot turns to the focus of this mystical study: seeing the future, or "riddl[ing] the inevitable" and "explor[ing] the womb and tomb." By creating this movement, Eliot simulates human desperation, where each verb signals the future-seeker turning to a new method to learn their destiny with even more intensity than before. The satirical methods Eliot employs throughout the passage illustrates that he believes these efforts to be futile.

Despite Eliot describing an almost innate human impulse to uncover the future, in the end, he does not sympathize with these strategies for clairvoyance. In fact, in the second half of the passage, Eliot connects the desire to know the future with politics and resolves the issue by explicitly turning towards the divine. After listing the future-seeking devices, Eliot declares,

> … All these are
> Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
> And always will be, some of them especially
> When there is distress of Nations and perplexity
> Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware road. (*CP* 199)

First, Eliot suggests that fortune-telling is dangerous and addictive and perhaps driven by sensationalized drama for the news. However, Eliot concedes that these "pastimes and drugs, / […] / always will be," especially when nations are in conflict. Eliot turns explicitly to World War II, and names "Asia" and "Edgware Road" as spheres for violence. In 1941, when Eliot published the poem, the Empire of Japan was beginning to invade territories in Asia ("Pacific War"). Closer to home, German airplanes frequently bombed Edgware, a major road in London ("Explore the London Blitz"). Thus, Eliot connects wartime to false mechanisms for seeing the future. Though he seems to understand the human urge for clairvoyance, and even goes so far as to assert that these techniques "always will be," Eliot believes they are ineffectual, and perhaps even addicting and harmful, like drugs.

Instead, the answer, for Eliot, lies in accepting the unknown, and leaving matters of past and future to the divine. Eliot concludes, "to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time, is an occupation for the saint" (*CP* 199). Even in the context of war and violence, Eliot explicitly rejects understanding the future and time itself. However, Eliot changes the focus in these lines from seeing the future, to understanding "the point of intersection" between the earthly and the divine. Thus, Eliot suggests that perhaps what humanity really searches for is a meaning through a connection with the divine. Invoking "the saint" is telling as saints are supposed to be the humans who are closest to God and who frequently experience transcendence. While the saints, with this unique knowledge, can occupy themselves with revelation, for most people, Eliot argues, "there is only the unattended / Moment, the moment in and out of time" and "the rest / Is prayer, observance, discipline" (*CP* 199). As his solution to the "distress of Nations," Eliot reaffirms the importance of the "unattended moment" of transcendence, but even more importantly, he turns to dutiful religious behavior. The answer lies in "prayer, observance,

discipline," which, when compared to the long, extravagant fortune-telling list, seem simple. By paring down his language, Eliot suggests that the plain solution – hard-work and belief – is the only place to truly find fullness in the face of incomprehensible violence. However, prayer and belief in God still cannot offer clairvoyance. Yet, these strategies offer the only effective means for Eliot to "save civilization" as they result in saving souls. Therefore, this passage demonstrates Eliot's religious impulse determining his response to wartime.

It is clear that Eliot's eschatological analysis frames his commentary on World War II in the *Four Quartets*. At the same time, it is also true that Eliot depicts the violence of war in a critical way. While harsh descriptions of the circularity of war perhaps point in the direction of civic engagement for some, Eliot's effort to save civilization ultimately ends in religious devotion. Eliot seeks to give up prioritizing earthly geopolitics, and instead, devote his life fully to God. Eliot's unwillingness to make the future himself, or engage in fortune-telling, reflects Augustine's criticism of earthly politics. As mentioned in Chapter One, Augustine derived his theory of war from a belief that humanity is fundamentally sinful. In this way, though Augustine believed "war [resulted] from sin" (Tournau), he also offered no mechanism to change politics because innate sinfulness necessitates the inevitability of future conflict. Eliot, in the passages above, similarly rejects civic engagement and advocates in favor of pursuing a relationship with God marked by transcendence.

While Eliot's *Four Quartets* reflect his focus on personal "immediate observations" during the war, as outlined in his essay "T.S. Eliot on Poetry and Wartime," other poets did attempt to write political and patriotic war poetry in the 1930s and 1940s. W.H. Auden, for example, published "Spain" in 1937 in order to raise money for Spanish Medical Aid (Grass 84). Comparing Eliot's poetry to "Spain" emphasizes that Eliot's political message and nonlinear

interpretation of time in the poem serve as a reflection of his devotional theological focus. Contrastingly, Auden's "Spain," interprets time progressively and linearly for the purpose of promoting a political conflict. In this way, "Spain" shows that a poet's construction of time can emphasize, or deemphasize, a political project. For context, the Spanish Civil War began in 1936 and ended in 1939. Many young liberal poets, including Auden, traveled to Spain to fight with the liberal rebels (Grass 84). In this war, the conservative Nationalists received support from Fascist governments in Europe, while the opposing rebels held progressive liberal beliefs that aligned more closely with communist nations than moderate Western Europe ("Spanish Civil War"). Eventually, the conservatives won the civil war, leaving Auden feeling disillusioned with his romantic, progressive politics (Grass 99). Years later, Auden rejected the "Spain" for its inauthenticity, which further suggests Eliot's wartime poetry does offer the only genuine way to interact with conflict through immediate observations.

While Eliot describes two temporalities, one which runs linearly, but which is subsumed by a more important, nonlinear timeline, Auden constructs a single, linear timeline that emphasizes the present in "Spain." Progressive, present-driven time, which perhaps serves as a reflection of Auden's Marxist idealism (Grass 87), highlights Auden's political message by demonstrating that human actions "to-day" affect the future. Auden opens the poem by proclaiming, "Yesterday all the past" (54). With this line, Auden creates a division between "yesterday" and the present. However, Auden declares that this "yesterday" contains "all the past," sweeping the totality of human history onto one side of the division between past and present. To emphasize yesterday's characteristics, Auden continues by mentioning important events in human history. Before every couple of examples, Auden repeats "Yesterday," cementing the temporal relationship between these events and suggesting that Auden intends for

his readers to think about how time operates in the poem. In the fifth stanza, however, Auden shifts time's focus. Though Auden begins the second and fourth lines in the stanza "Yesterday," and an example of the past, he ends the stanza, "but to-day the struggle" (55). Here, Auden begins a second form of temporal repetition. While he continues to muse about "yesterday" and history, Auden's repetition of "to-day the struggle," at the end of the following stanzas, refocuses the reader from the past, to the present. Further, by hyphenating "to-day," Auden emphasizes the end of the word, "day," highlighting a smaller, and even more concrete, increment of time within the present. Adding to this effect, "the struggle," which appears mysterious and powerful at first without further information, draws the reader in and causes them to question what "struggle" characterizes the present.

After he introduces the present, Auden ties "to-day the struggle" to the Spanish Civil War and uses the temporal imperative that he built in the early part of the poem to call on people everywhere to fight for liberty. Moving from history to the war, Auden describes that the faces of rebels in war torn Spain "Are projecting their greed as the firing squad and the bomb. / Madrid is the heart. Our moments of tenderness blossom / As the ambulance and the sandbag; / Our hours of friendship into a people's army" (56). In this stanza's opening line, Auden highlights the Nationalist's violence. On one hand, "projecting" suggests that the bombs and "firing squads" are symbols of the Nationalist's greed for power. However because "our faces" project this violence, Auden also suggests that dead people and ruins illustrate the Nationalist's greed. Simultaneously, in this stanza Auden returns to focus on time in this stanza by connecting the violence to the present. Auden highlights even smaller present-time increments and describes that "moments of tenderness" and "hours of friendship" create the "people's army." By shortening the markers of time, Auden emphasizes the temporal imperative that he sees in

fighting the war. The soldiers cannot wait for human history to resolve the conflict, so they must cling to "moments" and "hours" to create a fighting force.

By placing urgency on war in the present, Auden opens the hopeful possibility of the future. Yet, Auden does not display the same certainty about the future as he does about the past and present. He writes, "to-morrow, perhaps the future" (57). This phrase, and by extension the future, hinges on "perhaps," suggesting some action must force the future into being. Like in the poem's opening, Auden identifies the future with happy examples of human progress, but once again returns inevitably to "to-day" reflecting that actions in the present create the possibility for this future. In his powerful last stanza, Auden writes, "We are left alone with our day, and time is short, and / History to the defeated / May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon. (57). Here, most clearly, Auden combines urgency in time with his political message. Auden specifically says "time is short," reflecting the pressing need to fight in the present, and adds that "History" cannot help the defeated, which places history's burden on the soldiers going to fight. By using time to reflect urgency and emphasize the contingency of the future, Auden calls on people to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Auden's invocation of time makes his call powerful because it reveals the absolute necessity for war in the present.

Side-by-side, Auden's "Spain" appears to be a much more effective form of "saving civilization" than Eliot's *Four Quartets* because it draws on a temporal imperative to convince others to support the Spanish Civil War. However, Auden's response to his own poetry later in his life actually provides support for Eliot's suggestion that it is impossible to write authentic war poetry during conflict. Almost immediately after its publication, Auden "subjected [the poem] to extensive revisions" which ended with Auden throwing the poem out altogether and calling it "trash" (Nowell Smith 88). In 1964, Auden offered more clarity for this rejection and

criticized “Spain” for its “unathenticity … false emotions, inflated rhetoric, empty sonorities” (Smith 2). Although “Spain” certainly offers a concrete example of overtly political poetry compared to Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, Auden ultimately rejected the poem for its inability to meet what Eliot suggests is the poet’s most important job: to improve the English language by writing great poetry with genuine emotion. Thus, by focusing on his immediate observations in the *Four Quartets*, Eliot artfully balances the demands of great poetry with his religiously motivated desire to save civilization.

Eliot’s *Four Quartets* fields criticism for its unwillingness to engage with society and politics. Yet, examining the poem reveals that Eliot does explicitly mention war, and World War II, in the text. While Eliot does highlight wartime violence, which suggests he is averse to war in a way that may necessitate public facing work, Eliot’s ultimate effort to save civilization comes in the form of religious devotion. Eliot frames the war as less important than the divine, shown by his primary interest in transcendence and divine time. Comparing Eliot’s poetry to Auden’s “Spain” reveals that a poem’s temporal argument has a strong effect on how its relation to politics comes across. Eliot does not abandon the goal of “saving civilization” in the *Four Quartets*, he merely frames his ultimate end goal by his religious interpretation of time. Only by broadening the scholarly interpretation of modernist political engagement to include forms of “saving civilization” that do not result in overt calls for civic action, can the relationship between war and eschatology in Eliot’s *Four Quartets* come to light.

Chapter Three: Making Meaning Amidst the Blitz in Eliot and H.D.

Given Eliot's emphasis on religious faith and devotion in the first three poems of the *Four Quartets*, it may seem somewhat surprising that Eliot himself engaged in civic social work throughout World War II. Gardner notes that during the war Eliot "joined … in editing *The Christian News-Letter*" and "was also involved in Archbishop Temple's Malvern Conference in January 1941" (20). Further, in 1942, Eliot traveled to Sweden with another Anglican religious leader, Bishop Bell, as a lecturer (Gardner 20) and even saw his religious wartime activity as his "duty to undertake" (Gardner 19). Though Eliot associated his work with international politics, he believed religiously-based advocacy to be the most critical action he could participate in during the lowest points of the war.

Similarly, Eliot developed a series of sociological lectures which he published in an essay entitled "The Idea of a Christian Society," in 1939. In the lectures, Eliot attempts to interrogate and describe a "Christian society," which he suggests serves as "the real issu[e] of contemporary civilization" ("The Idea" 683). Instead of outlining the ideal governing structure for a Christian society, Eliot concerns himself with a Christian "social attitude" ("The Idea" 686) which he indicates would spill up into the state's institutions. Just as Eliot's social work reflects his attention towards international events, Eliot's essay outlines a publicly-oriented vision for "saving civilization." In fact, at the end of "The Idea of a Christian Society," Eliot divulges that the "events of September 1938," or the European appeasement to German expansion, caused him to doubt the "validity of … civilization" (717). In response to fears surrounding European geopolitics leading up to the war, Eliot turns to a public-facing life and Christian philosophy as a mechanism for remedying the critiques that he presents of modern society.

The final poem of the *Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding," aids in resolving the tension between Eliot's social work and his war commentary in the three previous poems. First, Eliot explicitly criticizes poetry's efficacy in creating social change, suggesting that he saw his social work and lecture series as a more strategic method for "saving civilization." At the same time, even in "The Idea of a Christian Society," Eliot reminds his audience that creating a Christian state "involves, at least, discipline and discomfort" (695), just as he advocates for hard work through faith and devotion in the *Four Quartets*. Thus, the action for which Eliot argues in both his poetry and prose is the same. While it appears to reject politics at first, placing the *Four Quartets* in conversation with Eliot's wartime work and prose shows that the theological focus of the poems is actually responsive to his broader concern with "saving civilization."

Eliot was one of many poets living in, and coming to terms with, the German Blitz of London in the early 1940s. The Blitzkrieg, or the "intense bombing campaign undertaking by Nazi Germany against the United Kingdom," lasted from 1940 to 1941 and resulted in 43,000 civilian deaths ("The Blitz"). It is impossible to understate the extent to which the Blitz shaped Eliot's life during the war. As he lived in London at the time, Eliot certainly experienced the nightly raids and the resulting destruction of his beloved city. In fact, letters and manuscript drafts reveal that Eliot also had a much more difficult time writing his final quartet, "Little Gidding," in part because of the war. After submitting several drafts of the poem to his friend John Hayward – all of which Hayward felt were unmoving – Eliot suggested that perhaps the struggle stemmed from the poem's "lack of … acute personal reminiscence" (Gardner 184). In other words, Eliot believed the poem's emotional accessibility depended on its meaning springing from a more specific articulation of his own experience. As a result, "Little Gidding"

presents a closer look into Eliot's religious belief and experience living in England during the Blitz.

While the first two poems of the *Four Quartets* abstractly address war, and the third, "The Dry Salvages," takes a somewhat closer look at current events, the last poem, "Little Gidding," explicitly relates the speaker to the Blitz. When making the poem more personal through including a discussion of the war, Eliot focused on section II of "Little Gidding," which recounts a revelatory experience. Analyzing this section of the poem reveals that, just as earlier in the *Four Quartets*, Augustinian theology shapes Eliot's commentary on the Blitz. In the end, Eliot responds to World War II in this poem by advocating for faith and devotion just as I outlined in Chapter Two. However, Eliot adds to his reflections on war and theology that poetry serves as an ineffective way to "save civilization."

Eliot opens his discussion of the Blitz in section II of "Little Gidding" by creating a moment outside of time to suggest that the speaker is experiencing transcendence. Eliot begins, "In the uncertain hour before the morning / Near the ending of interminable night / At the recurrent end of the unending" (*CP* 203). Similarly to the opening lines of "Burnt Norton," Eliot creates temporal instability to contextualize the speaker's experience in this passage, which he even specifically calls the "uncertain hour." Time neither completely precedes the morning nor proceeds the night. Despite Eliot characterizing the night as "interminable," or endless, he "near[s]" its end. Eliot complicates this further in the next line, where he adds that the "end" of the "unending" night is recurrent, confusingly suggesting that the night cyclically replicates its ending. By repeating "end," and synonyms for endless, Eliot's language adds to this temporal uncertainty by confusing the meaning of a word that could typically place the reader in time.

Despite invoking explicitly temporal language, like "morning" and "night," through this repetition, Eliot creates a space outside of both moments.

While the passage's opening clarifies that this moment is outside of time, Eliot begins a connection between the speaker and the divine by establishing that the speaker is physically closer to death and the afterlife following a Blitz campaign. Eliot writes, "After the dark dove with the flickering tongue / Had passed below the horizon of his homing / While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin / Over the asphalt where no other sound was (*CP* 204). Here, the "dark dove with the flickering tongue" describes the German bomber planes which set fire to London. Eliot describes the bomber plane as a "dove," which typically serves as a symbol of peace. Yet, the language surrounding "dove" clarifies its true character – it is "dark" and creates "dead leaves" rattling like "tin." Just as the leaves die, the bomber plane leaves "no … sound" in its wake of destruction. By alliterating "dark" and "dove," Eliot further creates a connection between the two words and reveals the plane's violent purpose. Given that this passage is contextualized by Eliot's description of an uncertain temporal moment, his "dark dove" clarifies that the speaker's experience outside of time occurs on the heels of the Blitz. In doing so, Eliot creates a connection between the speaker and death. Just as transcendence operates in the intersection between heaven and earth, post-Blitzed London also represents a physical location closer to death, and by extension God.

Eliot relates the Blitz to transcendence further by connecting the Blitz's effects on the streets of London to a mysterious stranger. Eliot writes, "Between three districts whence the smoke arose / I met one walking, loitering and hurried / As if blown towards me like the metal leaves" (*CP* 204). To emphasize the speaker's place, neither completely in either timeline, Eliot writes that he is somewhere among "three districts." In this limbo, the speaker meets a stranger,

who is "loitering and hurried," which brings to mind Eliot's description of the transcendent "still point" in "Burnt Norton," characterized by neither "arrest nor movement" (*CP* 179). Adding to the perception that the stranger arises from a supernatural source, Eliot meets the "one walking" amidst rising smoke, generating the suspicion that perhaps the stranger is a figment of the speaker's imagination brought on by the moving fumes. Magnifying this skepticism, the stranger seems "blown towards" the speaker, as if he materializes out of thin air. Even when the speaker recognizes the man as "some dead master" (*CP* 204), he still describes the stranger as a "compound ghost," emphasizing that this man is perhaps long dead. Although the stranger and the speaker are not anchored in time, they are explicitly connected to war-torn London. The smoke is left over from the bombs and the stranger drifts towards the speaker "like the metal leaves," or bomb fragments. Through this contextualization, Eliot suggests that the war creates the conditions for this revelatory experience, perhaps given the speaker's proximity to death. At the same time, likening the stranger to a bomb suggests this meeting will have a similar, cratering impact in the speaker's life.

Upon looking at the stranger, the speaker realizes he is experiencing transcendence and recognizes the relationship between revelation and time. Eliot writes, "So I assumed a double part, and cried / And heard another's voice cry: 'What! Are *you* here?' / Although we were not" (*CP* 204). In order to communicate with the stranger, the speaker becomes something beyond his earthly self. Yet, the speaker makes the conscious decision to enter into this "double part," as "assumed" suggests that he intentionally transforms himself to speak to the old master. Like the time described above, the speaker enters into limbo and senses his own being but also recognizes the "double part" and as he speaks he "hear[s] another's voice cry." Although he yells to the stranger "Are *you* here?", the speaker realizes, matter-of-factly, that the old master is not of this

time. The speaker's confidence in this fact suggests he perceives some mystical intervention in this strange moment outside of time. Emphasizing this, the speaker describes, "In concord at this intersection time / Of meeting nowhere, no before and after, / We trod the pavement in a dead patrol" (*CP* 204). Here, the speaker turns from illustrating a vague supernatural experience to explicitly describing transcendence in noting that he and the "old master" are together in the "intersection" of "time," where there is no "before and after." However, the speaker and the stranger walk in "a dead patrol." Given the context of the Blitz, "dead patrol" suggests that the speaker and the stranger walk and take inventory of the night's casualties and perhaps alludes to Eliot's volunteer position as an air-raid warden during the war (Gordon 375). Yet, "dead" modifies "patrol," which could also characterize the stranger's and the speaker's place outside of time in this moment, as almost "ghosts."

Following their initial meeting, the old master advises the speaker to let go of the past and focus on his faith. As he walks alongside the stranger, the speaker demands that the old master "speak" even though he "may not comprehend" (*CP* 204). Most literally, the speaker suggests he may not understand the old master's wisdom. At the same time, given that the speaker describes this moment as the intersection between divine and earthly time, the speaker perhaps also indicates that his humanity may inhibit him from comprehending divine lessons. The old master responds, "I am not eager to rehearse / My thought and theory which you have forgotten. / These things have served their purpose: let them be. / So with your own" (CP 204). The old master commands the speaker not to dwell on the past, especially the stranger's "thoughts and theories" that the speaker has forgotten. In his letters, Eliot indicates that both W.B. Yeats and Dante serve as the inspiration for the old master (Gardner 64). Thus, the master asks the speaker to release the lessons he has drawn from their poetry, and "let them be." By

adding "so with your own," the old master further commands the speaker to leave his old work in the past. Instead, the master advises the speaker to, "pray [your thoughts and theories] be forgiven / By others, as I pray you forgive / Both bad and good" (*CP* 204). Here, the old master re-centers the speaker's life on his faith and, instead of dwelling on his old writing, the speaker should "pray [it] be forgiven." Commanding that the speaker pray for forgiveness suggests that the speaker included something sinful in his earlier poetry. However, the old master complicates this advice in the next line by asking the speaker to forgive the "bad and good." Asking the speaker to pray for the "good" places the old master in line with Augustinian theology, which comments on the inherent sinful bent of all art, rather than the individual morality in good or bad actions. At the same time, by telling the stranger to put his faith in God through prayer, the old master also acknowledges God's supreme power over earthly life. The old master concludes his lesson by telling a parable, "Last season's fruit is eaten / And the fulfilled beast shall kick the empty pail" (*CP* 204). The fruit in this passage describes the speaker's past and future art. While the old master advises the speaker to leave this his old writing in the past, as "last season's fruit is eaten," he simultaneously acknowledges the purpose for this art in those previous moments. The "beast" that consumed this fruit is "fulfilled" and "shall kick the empty pail" as if to kick this old language to the side to make room for new creations. Typically, a parable offers a religious or moral lesson, which speaks to the connections Eliot sees between poetry, spirituality, and morality. With this advice, the old master contends that instead of dwelling on the past, the speaker should move forward and stop focusing on the moral ineptitude that he sees in his old writing.

After arguing that the speaker should leave his art of the past behind and focus on his faith in his life, the old master turns to the speaker's craft and directs the speaker to avoid

attempting to change the world through his poetry. In this way, Eliot advocates for religious devotion as opposed to outward, literary mechanisms for "saving civilization." To set up this argument, the old master outlines the goals that he and the speaker hoped to achieve through their poetry. The old master explains, "our concern was speech, and speech impelled us / To purify the dialect of the tribe / And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight" (*CP* 205). Eliot indicates that for both the stranger and the speaker, this "speech" forcefully drove them forward, determined to reach their goals, which he communicates with "impelled." In the next two lines, Eliot lays out the speaker's and the old master's goals – "to purify" language and the mind. "Purify" indicates that both the stranger and the speaker believe that the "dialect of the tribe" needs cleansing from contamination. The stranger's strong connection with Yeats suggests that English is the "dialect" that the old master and stranger hope to improve. Referring to English as the "dialect of the tribe" emphasizes the vulgarity that Eliot sees in a language that must be transformed and, at the same time, highlights the difficulty in achieving this goal. Aside from the English language itself, the master also suggests he and the speaker hoped to inspire members of the "tribe" to "urge the mind to aftersight and foresight." This goal appears similar to the fortune-telling techniques that Eliot satirizes in the "Dry Salvages." Just like fortune telling, poetry also fails in "urg[ing] the mind." In order to equally highlight this goal's impossibility, Eliot creates the meaningless word "aftersight," as a poet cannot compel the mind to do something that does not exist.

The stranger concludes his argument by emphasizing poetry's uselessness in the face of inevitable aging and death. However, the stranger divulges that the real answer to the problems that the speaker sees in modern culture lies only in refining language itself. The old master ironically begins, "Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age / To set a crown upon your

lifetime's effort. First, the cold friction of expiring sense" when "the body and soul begin to fall asunder" (*CP* 205). Appealing to his own old age, the stranger sets out to describe the mature "gifts" the speaker can expect as he gets older which will "set a crown" upon the poetic goals the stranger described above. In the next line, however, it becomes apparent that these "gifts" and this "crown" ironically refer to the body's and the soul's gradual decay. According to the old master, the speaker will experience "the cold friction of expiring sense," or in other words, the loss of his senses. With the language "cold friction" Eliot captures the emptiness the stranger will feel without his sense. Next, the stranger indicates the speaker will experience the "conscious impotence of rage / At human folly," and finally, the "rending pain of re-enactment/ Of all that you have done (*CP* 205). By describing each stage in the passive voice, Eliot highlights the negative emotion associated with aging, which he characterizes as "cold," helpless, and "pain[ful]."

In spite of these agonies, the old master offers the speaker the possibility to leave his old language in the past and continue to draw life from his craft in a new, meaningful way. The old master continues, "From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit / Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire / Where you must move in measure, like a dancer" (*CP* 205). The old master acknowledges the pain that the speaker's spirit will encounter as it travels from "wrong to wrong," yet the "fire" offers a mechanism for relief. While on one hand, the "refining" fire could imply purgatorial flames that cleanse the soul, on the other hand, Eliot chooses to describe the "spirit," not the soul, which is not necessarily religious. Instead, Eliot perhaps alludes to the spirit's discontent with the poetry of its youth described earlier in "Little Gidding." In this way, the fire offers the speaker the opportunity to refine his craft in response to the speaker's new moral concerns and a new world. The final line in this passage provides further evidence for this

because it may allude to Yeats' poem "Among School Children," where he reflects on the labor he put into a lifetime of poetry, but Yeats uses the language of "the dancer" to evoke the life that he draws from writing. Similarly, though Eliot's speaker might tire of the pains of age, and reflect badly on his earlier poems, he must move "like a dancer" and change his language and outlook on poetry to draw essential life from his craft.

At the end of the passage, Eliot returns to earthly time and war as the speaker leaves this brief moment of transcendence behind. In this way, Eliot solidifies the speaker's conversation with the old master as a moment of divine transcendence. Eliot writes, "The day was breaking. In the disfigured street / He left me, with a kind of valediction, / And faded on the blowing of the horn" (*CP* 205). While Eliot opened the passage by illustrating a transitory and uncertain moment between day and night, here he conclusively describes "the day … breaking" around the speaker and the old master. With daylight's emergence, the speaker returns to earthly time, where the Blitz leaves a "disfigured street." Of course, the old master, who does not exist on earth, must go, and with a "valediction," he "fade[s] on the blowing of the horn." By describing the stranger's speech as a "kind of valediction," Eliot suggests the old master formally, and memorably, severs his relationship with the speaker in a final farewell. Moreover, Eliot further cements the old master's position outside of time by indicating that on "the blowing of the horn," or at a silence-breaking indication of time passing, the old master dissipates. Through these time-markers, Eliot describes a revelatory experience that occurs at the intersection of earthly and divine time. As the stranger represents divine transcendence, his existence is incompatible with strict earthly time.

While in section II of "Little Gidding" the Blitz provides context for the speaker's revelatory experience, in section IV, the Blitz takes on a new role in the poem: that of supplying

Eliot with the language to cement his emphasis on the refining, purgatorial fire. Section IV opens with such familiar language that it almost seems like the speaker's memory of his transcendent experience earlier in the poem. In the first of two short stanzas, Eliot writes,

> The dove descending breaks the air
> With flame of incandescent terror
> Of which the tongues declare
> The one discharge from sin and error.
> The only hope, or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre –
> To be redeemed from fire by fire. (*CP* 207)

Eliot returns to the image of the dove in this passage, which in section II represents the German bomber planes, but here seems to indicate something else. On one hand, the dove could describe a divine spirit which offers the choice between purgatorial fire and the fires of Hell. At the same time, the dove's importance lies with its "flame of incandescent terror," where the fire could also illustrate spiritual lust and desire. While the lustful fire is destructive, this divine spirit's fire is refining and offers grace to the sinner. As a result, Eliot offers the choice between "pyre or pyre" – desire or the painful internal transformation process that comes with faith and devotion. The bomber plane metaphor creates the connection between desire and purgatory by evoking the image of death and fire. In this way, World War II, and the brutality of the Blitz provides Eliot with accessible language to make a theological argument in the poem. Eliot's short, rhythmic, and rhyming lines add to this perception. By writing in rhyming iambs, the stanza sounds almost like a nursery rhyme which adds to the accessibility of Eliot's Christian message.

Eliot solidifies his argument in the following stanza by connecting the painful refinement of the soul to the ability to access love in the world. Eliot continues the lyric,

> Who then devised the torment? Love.
> Love is the unfamiliar Name
> Behind the hands that wove
> The intolerable shirt of flame

> Which human power cannot remove.
> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire. (*CP* 207-208)

Here, Eliot poses a rhetorical question about this "torment" or "the choice of pyre or pyre" that "Love" offers humanity. Though Eliot perhaps explores religious paradoxes, such as death being the only mechanism to gain eternal life or God's creation of a world that suffers under Him, Eliot does not use familiar language. Instead, "Love" created the "shirt of flame." Eliot highlights the "intolerable" process necessary to reform the soul to enable the opportunity for experiencing love. Eliot again chooses to write about potentially religious themes in accessible language and in doing so highlights that morally refining the soul opens the possibility for pure love, perhaps even devoid from a religious context. Yet, the flame is "intolerable," unremovable by "human power," which suggests that humans will always succumb to lust or sin despite their attempts to change themselves in the metaphorical fire. In the end, humans all "suspire" and must choose between the sin or a life of hard work. It is important to consider the context of the German bomber plane that Eliot connects to this argument on the choice between "fire or fire." In the first stanza, although the plane represents Love's shirt of flame, it also evokes a fiery death from the bombs which serve as the most poignant reminder of death in Eliot's own life at the time.

These passages from "Little Gidding" suggest that for Eliot, the Blitz illustrates death's inevitability and, by extension, the forced choice between sin and an impossible moral transformation. Another modernist poet, H.D., also investigates her own relationship to the Blitz in her long poem *The Walls Do Not Fall*, published in 1942. Like Eliot, H.D. was born in the late 1880s in the United States, but moved to England permanently in 1911, where she experienced the Blitz firsthand (*Trilogy* 202). Placing these poems side-by-side shows that Eliot's relation to the Blitz was not unique. In fact, in the opening poem in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. draws on

mysticism and the Blitz's relationship to Egyptian ruins to contemplate her survival in a time of overwhelming violence. H.D. highlights her personal relationship to the Blitz in the poem's opening by comparing the German bombing to ruins. H.D begins *The Walls Do Not Fall* with an epigraph that gives the poem a distinct sense of place and time, writing "*for Karnak* 1923 / *from London* 1942" (*Trilogy* 2). The epigraph ties Karnak to London and the dates clarify that this represents a connection between the Egyptian tombs, which H.D. visited in 1923, and World War II, which she experienced in London (Attewell 305). H.D. continues this juxtaposition in the first lines, writing "An incident here and there, / and rails gone (for guns) / from your (and my) old town square" (*Trilogy* 3). In the opening tercet, H.D. repeats vague indicators of place which sustain the connection between Karnak and London. "An incident here and there" describes the bombings and the excavations as "incidents" and links both places with "here and there." The second line more narrowly focuses on H.D.'s own relationship to the war as English railroads were pulled up for steel to fabricate guns (Attewell 309). The third line at first seems to connect Karnak and London again, as H.D. compares "your (and my) old town square." Yet, this relationship to place clarifies where rails were destroyed for guns in the "old town square." Though H.D. begins by connecting Karnak and London, her initial juxtaposition in the epigraph and first line evoke a personal memory in the "rails gone (for guns)."

In the following two tercets, H.D. continues to develop the connection between the Egyptian ruins and the London Blitz. However, H.D. adds a mystic and prophetic element to this relationship. H.D. continues,

> mist and mist-grey, no colour,
> still the Luxor bee, chick and hare
> pursue unalterable purpose
>
> in green, rose red, lapis;
> they continue to prophesy

from the stone papyrus (*Trilogy* 3)

Here, H.D. describes ancient papyrus writing found in the Egyptian ruins. Though the hieroglyphics lost all their color with age, the "Luxor bee, chick and hare" carry on with their "unalterable purpose" – to foretell the future. H.D. creates a temporal relationship between the ruins and the future by describing that the hieroglyphics prophecy in their original colors, placing them firmly in the past. Yet, the writing extends itself into the present day through its continuous clairvoyance. H.D. develops this connection further in the next two tercets, adding, "there, as here, ruin opens / the tomb, the temple; enter, / there as here, there are no doors: // the shrine lies open to the sky" (*Trilogy* 3). H.D. repeats "here" and "there," to once more vaguely allude to Karnak and London. Comparing the blitz to the Egyptian excavations, H.D. describes that "ruin opens … the shrine … to the sky." Just as excavations hurt the tombs and temples, sacred Egyptian places, the Blitz ruthlessly destroys London's buildings and opens them to the sky. Given that H.D. transitions between the prophetic hieroglyphics and explanation of the ruins with a semicolon, she suggests that the ruins almost foretell London's future. The destruction is the same, just by different hands.

At the end of the first poem in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. shifts to focus more heavily on the Blitz. Through her diction and style, H.D. illustrates the Blitz's extreme violence by comparing the Blitz to another disaster. She writes,

> Pompeii has nothing to teach us
> we know crack of volcanic fissure,
> slow flow of terrible lava
>
> pressure on the heart, lungs, the brain
> about to burst its brittle case (*Trilogy* 4)

H.D. indicates her shift in focus by moving from the indicators "here and there," to focusing on a present-day group with "us" and "we." She compares the Blitz to Pompeii and, through her

strong diction, emphasizes the Blitz's violence. The word "crack" sounds like a bomb, and thus emphasizes its damaging explosion, and the alliteration of "slow" and "flow" call attention to the moving fire. In the next line, H.D. describes the Blitz's, or a volcano's, effect on the human body. H.D's stripped-down language, "pressure on the heart, lungs, the brain / about to burst," dehumanizes the individuals facing the Blitz to their failing body parts. At the same time, focusing on the body specifically accentuates the injury and death the bombings cause by forcing attention on failing organs. In the penultimate tercet, H.D. employs the same strategy, adding "the flesh? It was melted away, / the heart burnt out, dead ember, / tendons, muscles shattered, outer husk dismembered" (*Trilogy* 4). Again, the body becomes only a sum of its parts, which are "melted away," "burnt out," "shattered," and "dismembered." In fact, H.D. even calls the body the "outer husk," highlighting its dehumanization once more. While on the one hand, these stanzas describe the death and injury caused to the human body by the Blitz, the early connection between Egyptian buildings and ruins suggests that the "outer husk" can also describe the building-frames left behind. In either reading, H.D. acutely critiques the Blitz's violence through its destruction towards human-made buildings or human bodies themselves.

While the Blitz's destructiveness causes Eliot's speaker to think more seriously about his death, and subsequently, his soul, H.D.'s speaker turns inward and existentially wonders about her own place in the world. In the final stanza, H.D. writes, "yet the frame held: / we passed the flame: we wonder / what saved us? what for?" (*Trilogy* 4). "The frame" alludes to the buildings, mostly destroyed by the Blitz. At the same time, the phrase "the frame held" vaguely suggests the tethers of London, or H.D.'s society more broadly, hold together despite the tragedy of the Blitz. The dual colons in the passage offer more and more explanation, and at the same time, indicate a connection between each action that H.D. lists in sequence: when the frame holds, the

speaker moves on and "pass[es] the flame" into the future. Despite artificially passing the flame, the speaker does not understand why she has been saved from the destruction. H.D. offers no answer to either question in the poem, highlighting the questions' un-answerability in the real world.

Eliot and H.D. both explore the Blitz through a single speaker's eyes, who sees the same destruction and death, but who comes to terms with their own existence in different ways. Eliot's speaker recognizes death's imminence and strives to delve deeper into prayer and observance. H.D. offers no such closure and ends the first poem with her speaker questioning her own existence in the face of destruction. The precondition for both arguments, however, is the same: the Blitz, which causes unavoidable devastation, violence, and death. Though neither Eliot, nor H.D. make an overtly political plea in their work, highlighting the Blitz's violence during World War II does engage with the political. In fact, this poetry serves as an example of authentic poetic engagement with the war through "immediate observations," that Eliot outlines in "T.S. Eliot on Poetry and Wartime," described in Chapter Two.

More importantly, perhaps, H.D.'s speaker's existential questioning highlights important questions about the human experience that result from living through terrible violence. H.D.'s speaker wonders what force saved her, and for what purpose, suggesting that the speaker will seek this purpose after surviving the Blitz. Looking at Eliot's *Four Quartets* through the same lens shows that Eliot also focuses on finding individual meaning in the face of conflict in the poem. Yet for Eliot, transcendent experiences provide meaning in a world shaped by "sad waste time." While these moments may represent the intersection between the human and the divine to the speaker, Eliot explicitly highlights the feeling of transcendence which provides accessibility for his language beyond purely religious meaning. Eliot's faith is not the only mechanism from

which he draws meaning, as the conversation between the stranger and the old master solidifies the importance of poetry in the speaker's life. Comparing H.D. and Eliot brings to the fore both speakers attempts to find purpose in their lives.

Aside from this immediate observation, "Little Gidding" helps clarify the paradox between Eliot's civic, religious action in his personal life during the war and the argument, found throughout his poetry, that "saving civilization" is impossible. "Little Gidding" suggests Eliot saw attempting to change the world through poetry as futile. In fact, in "The Idea of a Christian Society," Eliot emphasizes this argument and writes, "the practice of poetry need not in itself confer wisdom or accumulate knowledge" (684). Despite this, Eliot ultimately argues for the same strategy in his poetry and prose to save civilization: faith and devotion. In "Little Gidding" Eliot adds that devotion includes a painful refining process that attempts to move the soul away from sin. In his response to the essay, with which Eliot mentions he agrees, the theologian George Every clarifies the argument, writing "Christianity is primarily a Gospel-message, a dogma, a belief about God and the world and man, which demands of man a response of faith and repentance" (731). While this poem may not appear overtly political in light of World War II, Eliot's poetry and prose clarify that he saw theology as one way to affirm a communal identity that could save the souls of civilization. Only a broader definition of politics, such as that offered by David Easton which could include "saving civilization," captures Eliot's argument in his poetry because it does not carry an explicit sociopolitical goal but does articulate a value system that Eliot indicates in his prose should structure the world.

Analyzing *The Four Quartets* reveals how Eliot responds to the evolving war landscape, framed by his Anglo-Catholic faith. The Blitz's destruction causes the speaker to think about his own death in the form of a transcendent experience. While the Blitz brings about this discussion,

the speaker's Augustinian theological beliefs shape his response to the war. Instead of advocating for sociopolitical change through poetry, the speaker responds religiously and concludes that the only solution to death's inevitability is strong belief in God. H.D.'s poem, *The Walls Do Not Fall*, also explores a speaker's experience living through the Blitz. Both poems together show that Eliot's reaction to the war was not unique; in fact, both Eliot and H.D. recount their immediate observations and experiences during that time. While Eliot's description of the Blitz's violence meets his own understanding of effective wartime poetry, Eliot's prose suggests that his final argument for religious devotion in the poem reflects his civic-minded strategy for "saving civilization."

Coda

In the *Four Quartets*, Eliot's concern for "saving civilization" is subsumed by his religious belief and his dissatisfaction with poetry as a mechanism to create change in the world. As I have argued, this Augustinian theological belief is revealed most fully in Eliot's construction of time, which implicates his discussion of war in the first three sections, "Burnt Norton," "East Coker," and "The Dry Salvages." In "Little Gidding," Eliot continues to articulate an Augustinian interpretation of time and eschatology, but raises a new concern: poetry's ultimate inability to save civilization. In the end, Eliot encourages faith and devotion because "saving civilization," to the Anglo-Catholic poet, centers not so much on enacting social or political change as on saving souls "from fire by fire" (*CP* 208). Despite this advocacy, he recognizes that the *Four Quartets* do nothing to achieve this aim.

In my analysis of the *Four Quartets*, Auden's "Spain," and H.D.'s *The Walls Do Not Fall*, I hope to have highlighted two important implications for modernist studies. First, these poems demonstrate that explicitly political poetry does not always represent an authentic reaction to war. Although Eliot and H.D. offer less forceful reactions to war than Auden, the latter poet rejected his political advocacy almost immediately after publishing "Spain." Eliot and H.D., on the other hand, offer their experiences and observations living in London during World War II. Though they do not outline a distinct political project, Eliot and H.D. do capture the feeling of wartime uncertainty and raise universal questions concerning human life in the context of war. Secondly, these poems demonstrate how important themes relate to and frame each other in a text. For example, Eliot's and Auden's respective approaches to the construction of time define how we interpret their poem's political aims. Recognizing this system allows us to ask further questions about these connections, such as: is Eliot's poetry *only* apolitical? Or, do we simply

perceive the *Four Quartets* as rejecting any public-facing action given the poem's emphasis on theology and time? Recognizing the webbed interaction between themes in the *Four Quartets* allows us to uncover the extent to which Eliot does concern himself with "saving civilization." However, recognizing this network requires us to first abandon binaries and assumptions surrounding theological and political engagement in literary studies to open the discussion for further findings beyond these pre-formed conclusions.

Thus, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the twentieth century by revealing how the theological and sociopolitical forces of Eliot's time interact with each other in his poetry. Recently, modernist scholarship has sought to highlight the theological heterogeneity of the period beyond the assumption that modernist literature "reflects an increasingly secularized … world and existence" (Hughes 5). Analyzing Eliot's *Four Quartets* shows that specifying a poet's relationship to theology implicates other subjects and themes in the text, through the thematic system that the poet creates. As mentioned in the introduction, Eliot's impact on the modernist literary period is undeniable. This impact is owed in part to the complex relationship between theology and politics in his work. In this sense, I hope this study might also spur scholars to look into other modernist writers' relationships to these concerns and thus update our understanding of modernism more generally.

Finally, in this study, I hope to contribute to scholarship that advocates for the importance of studying literature by demonstrating how the *Four Quartets* reveals the necessity of examining the theological and political forces relevant to the modernist period. Literature synthesizes and reacts to major developments of its period, and, perhaps more importantly, captures the feeling of someone living in a particular age. Analyzing literature therefore helps elucidate critical forces shaping history and uncover their importance to a particular writer and

their work. However, examining literary modernism offers more than a mere historical perspective because the "dominant concerns" of literary modernism "remain … our contemporary concerns" (Hughes 4). Thus, continuously returning to modernist literature offers to inform us anew "as humans who we are" (Hughes 5). In fact, studying Eliot's *Four Quartets* raises important questions about finding meaning in human existence that remain relevant to our world today. Studying theology and politics specifically illuminates these questions and forces us to ask ourselves how, through transcendence or otherwise, we find meaning in our own lives.

I understand Eliot's cynicism regarding poetry's inability to serve as a vehicle for political change. Nevertheless, I wonder if Eliot could have highlighted or repudiated fascism's abhorrent violence in his work without explicitly advocating for war or other political action. Given that Auden rejected "Spain" later in his life for its strong political message, which did not match the disillusionment he personally felt after fighting in the Spanish Civil War, I do not think poetry that explicitly argues for or against particular policies is the solution. Instead, perhaps H.D. offers a better alternative to Eliot or Auden because in *The Walls Do Not Fall*, H.D. does viscerally capture the Blitz's extreme destruction, but focuses on how this shapes her life. In this way, H.D. captures the qualities that make poetry powerful, as she describes the human experience in an accessible and critical way, without sliding too far into overt political advocacy.

While H.D. may offer the best blueprint for poetic political engagement, aspects of Eliot's *Four Quartets* do offer meaningful ways to explore contemporary society. In fact, twenty-first century poetry engages with religion to raise larger questions about the human experience. For example, in his poem "Another Elegy," published in 2013, Jericho Brown explores loss in part through analogizing lost love to religious belief. In the first part of the

poem, Brown sets up his connection between religion and loss, but primarily emphasizes the experience of losing a lover. The poem's title immediately highlights loss as a major theme in the text, given that elegies often mourn things and people. Brown introduces loss of love in the opening lines, writing "To believe in God is to love / What none can see. Let a lover go." For all the ambiguity involved in religious devotion, the opening line takes a surprisingly strong stance on what it means to hold religious beliefs. However, the enjambment between the first and second lines emphasizes the second half of this comparison, the real object of the poem, loving "what none can see." At the same time the enjambment at first emphasizes a familiar narrative that connects God to love and then reveals, in the second line, that loving God is connected to the absence and loneliness that lies behind loving something that is not physically present. Brown directly follows this comparison with "Let a lover go," which relates loving God to loving absent people, further illustrated by physical space after the stanza break. While Brown sets up a connection between loving God and lost people in the first stanza, he describes the process of the lover leaving in the second, writing "Let him walk out with the good / Spoons or die." The speaker loses more than just their lover in these lines, as they take the "good / Spoons," which perhaps represents physical wealth. However, Brown explicitly suggests that the speaker should "let" the lover leave, or even perhaps "die." Just as the poem's first stanza break creates physical absence which emphasizes the poem's subject, the second stanza break illustrates the permanence of disappearing by emphasizing death. In this way, Brown illustrates and mourns the experience of losing a lover.

In the second part of the poem, Brown returns to the connection between God and a lost lover to describe how devotion cannot simply disappear, even after a loved one goes. Brown continues, "so much / Remains for scrubbing, for a polish // Cleaner than devotion." Here,

Brown compares enduring love to a stain that must be washed out. The first line break emphasizes the word "remains," which characterizes love's enduring nature. At the same time, "scrubbing" describes an intense way to clean a stain that will not come out, which speaks to the difficulty in moving on after a lover leaves. In fact, Brown suggests in the next stanza, that the speaker searches for, but ultimately cannot find, a wash "cleaner than devotion." Returning to his initial comparison between love and religion, Brown concludes the poem, "Tonight / God is one spot, and you, // You must be one blind nun. You / Wipe, you rub, but love won't move." Brown, who directly addresses the person enduring loss as "you" in these lines, compares the relationship between two lovers to a "blind nun" and God. Through this relationship, Brown suggests that the mourner worships their lover, perhaps in a naïve or ignorant way. At the same time, "blind" provides context for the last line, illustrating blindness as one possible reason for the mourner's inability to scrub away their love. Nevertheless, Brown suggests that even if the mourner explicitly tries to move on, love is too strong a force to simply wipe way. While Brown ultimately describes losing a lover, he connects this experience to religion in order to highlight enduring, devotional love almost akin to worship. In this way, Brown's poetry shows that themes Eliot examines in his poetry, like religion and theology, can meaningfully explore contemporary issues. Similarly to Eliot in the *Four Quartets*, Brown's decision to focus on personal experience and explore an individual instance of loss makes the poem's message accessible and emotionally meaningful. "Another Elegy" offers an example of how poetry focused on the personal can uniquely comment on the experience of living in contemporary society.

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