



POETRY AND THE
RELIGIOUS
IMAGINATION

The Power of the Word

EDITED BY

FRANCESCA BUGLIANI KNOX
AND DAVID LONSDALE

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Chapter 9

The Poet as ‘Worldmaker’: T.S. Eliot and the Religious Imagination

Dominic Griffiths

All creatures want to utter God in all their works; they all come as close as they can in uttering him, and yet they cannot utter him. Whether they wish it or not, whether they like it or not, they all want to utter God, and yet he remains unuttered. (Meister Eckhart 204)

T.S. Eliot’s later poetry is, to quote Meister Eckhart, an attempt to ‘utter God’. His works are religious, not only in that they draw symbols extensively from the great religious traditions, but also in a broader sense; this, as I will argue, is the sense in which all art is religious, in as much as it unfolds worlds, opens possibilities and enacts the will to hope. To argue this position I will engage with the work of Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur. From Heidegger I will discuss the meaning of ‘worldmaking’ and from Ricoeur develop an understanding of the poetic and religious imagination. Both these thinkers offer us rich ontological and phenomenological insights into the nature of art and worldmaking.

Heidegger defines the world as ‘the ever non-objective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death ... keep us transported into Being’. He writes that the world is ‘not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are at hand ... The *world worlds*’ (*Basic Writings* 170). What Heidegger offers in these brief comments is a way of conceiving of the world which, to use his term, ‘deconstructs’ the history of modern philosophy and its rigid Cartesian dualism between the subject and object. Heidegger wants to draw our attention to a more ‘authentic’ experience of the world – one which is not characterized as a separation from Being, but rather a *being* with Being, which in English translation is captured in the hyphenated phrase, being-in-the-world. Thus the genuine ‘world’ that Heidegger conceives of is the ‘ever non-objective’ that encompasses us and our existence, and so transcends the ‘mere collection’ of things.

Properly understood, the world does not offer itself to us as a material collection of objects of contemplation and explanation; rather, it keeps us ‘transported’ and bound into the shaping of human existence itself. When we

alter the world we are not manipulating a separate object, but changing our experience of reality. The expression 'the *world worlds*' conveys this by drawing attention to the use of the word 'world' as both noun and verb. For Heidegger, this kind of neologism emphasizes a particular quality of a word which may be concealed in ordinary usage. We think of the 'world' as a collection of things, of geography, of peoples, and this gives the ordinary impression of the world as a material thing made up of objects. What Heidegger's tautology draws out is the more authentic experience of the world as something that is happening, that is unfolding and projecting itself, through human becoming, into a future. This future is the 'ever non-objective' because its existence is a potential that always remains undisclosed and yet is always constantly unfolding. As we project ourselves into it, it recedes always away – and thus we remain ever subject to the 'paths of birth and death' that the world offers.

A significant part of Heidegger's philosophy is concerned with re-engaging our existence with and attuning it to a more conscious recognition of this mysterious, yet fundamental, fact about reality, which he calls the 'mystery' of Being (*Discourse on Thinking* 56). Heidegger's later work proposes that a central way in which we can reinvigorate this attunement in ourselves is through the open encounter with the artwork. The artwork offers a genuine encounter with the true nature of a thing by revealing it within its broader horizon of meaning. This horizon reveals that this thing, this object, is, in fact, no mere thing, but a fragment of Being itself. Placed within the space that the artwork grants, the thing is illuminated, and this illumination reveals a *world*.

Central to this experience that we encounter in the artwork of revelation, of *worlding*, is the role of imagination, and to explore this role I will draw on the work of Ricoeur. In his 'Lectures on Imagination', he argues that it is through 'productive imagination' that individuals can gain access to a world transformed from their own.¹ The productive imagination can transform existing categories, drawing from current reality while at the same time producing something without an original; 'something from nowhere' (Taylor 98). This split between ordinary and imaginative reality Ricoeur calls an 'epoché'; essentially a suspension of ordinary experience to allow a space or openness for imaginative possibilities to become manifest ('The Metaphorical Process' 154; *The Rule of Metaphor* 248). Part of the aim of this chapter is to explore this moment of epoché by focusing on examples which demonstrate it. Ricoeur ascribes four categories to productive imagination. First is the domain of social and cultural imagination which he

¹ Ricoeur's 'Lectures on Imagination', presented in 1975, are unpublished. However,

Taylor provides an overview of the lectures which I refer to extensively.

relates specifically to the idea of utopia. The second domain is epistemological imagination, and pertains to theoretical models available to science. The last two are of particular interest to this argument as they concern poetic imagination and religious symbols (Taylor 94–7). The first part of the chapter will explore the nature of poetic imagination and the second part religious symbols.

Ricoeur writes that poetic imagination 'unfolds new dimensions of reality' (Taylor 97). This unfolding potential is made possible through language itself, particularly metaphor, which can alter reality in new and unexpected ways. Though his theories offer us a 'logic of discovery' which allows for the analysis of how metaphor works, he maintains that there remains a 'kernel of opacity', a measure of impenetrability which defies full explanation (Taylor 98). This elusive quality of language continually beckons us, yet, in the words of Eliot, leaves 'one still with the intolerable wrestle / With words and meaning' (*Complete Poems and Plays* 179, 'East Coker' II.20–1).² Because of this measure of impenetrability, metaphoric truth is thus not a question of conformity or 'adequation' in terms of how successfully one thing conforms to or confirms itself in comparison with another. Rather, for Ricoeur, truth is 'manifestation', as Heidegger also believes; it is a revealing or unconcealing of being which offers a new disclosure of reality, effacing itself 'for the sake of what is said about reality' (Taylor 98).

Poetic language is no less concerned with reality than other forms of language – scientific language, for example – that seem to be more directly referential. Rather, its 'complex strategy' involves a 'suspension and seemingly an abolition of ordinary reference attached to descriptive language' (Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process' 153). This is the effacement of poetic language, the sacrifice of its own meaning, in order to grant the epochal space for imaginative possibilities to emerge. Yet, through this suspension of direct reference to everyday things, poetry makes a 'primordial reference' to 'the deep structures of reality to which we are related as mortals who are born into this world and who dwell in it for a while' (Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process' 153). For Ricoeur, this 'split-reference' is essentially the distinction in which 'ordinary' language, in poetic form, opens a new dimension in imagination which offers the 'projection of new possibilities of re-describing the world' ('The Metaphorical Process' 154).

To explain how poetic imagination works more fully, I will offer some examples. The first comes from Heidegger himself in the 1935 essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in which he discusses the 1886 painting by Van Gogh of

² All quotations from *Four Quartets* come from the *Complete Poems and Plays*, and are referenced by page number, followed by quartet name, movement number in roman numerals and line number/s in arabic numerals. Attentive readers of this chapter should have a copy of the poem open.

a pair of shoes, which Heidegger is said to have seen at a 1930 exhibition in Amsterdam.³ We can stare at this painting as a depiction of things, objects, equipment. There is nothing to it. It is just a painting of some shoes, the shoes, for Heidegger, of a peasant woman, or perhaps, for other interpreters, Van Gogh's own shoes. If we just stare at them indifferently, as cast-off objects that we might see next to a dustbin, then they are not even equipment, merely discarded things of no value; junk. But the painting beckons; it calls us to go beyond the mere thingness of the object. This is the *work* of art, work in the verb sense. The painting, by its very existence, discloses this 'particular being in its Being' (*Basic Writings* 164). In the artwork, to use Heidegger's language, the truth of beings has set itself to work; art, he says, is truth 'setting itself to work' (*Basic Writings* 164).

As with all great artwork, it is difficult to fully articulate this truth because of the 'kernel of opacity', which compels us to both experience and interpret the work, and yet transcends our attempts to offer any final, definitive meaning. Nonetheless Heidegger ventures to describe what this painting reveals to him about the world it contains. He writes that from

the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-reaching and ever uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the sole stretches the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry fields. (*Basic Writings* 159)

In this famous description, Heidegger tries to evoke a truth that the painting expresses for him. To do this evidently requires an imaginative engagement with the artwork. In this phenomenological 'nearness' to the work, we find ourselves 'suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be' (*Basic Writings* 161). The experience is one of 'transport' and 'enchantment' (*Contributions to Philosophy* 48–9), where the world shows up 'as a holy place' and the things in it as 'radiant, charismatic, sacred beings' (Young 52). To explain this more technically, we can refer back to Ricoeur's notion of the 'epoché', the split between ordinary and imaginative reality which the encounter with the artwork can bring about.

³ There remains a question here as to whether he actually did see the painting. See

Thompson 107–9 for an overview of this issue.

Evidently Heidegger's own description of what the painting depicts is made possible through his imaginative engagement with it, allowing an original hermeneutic self-disclosure to emerge.

This enigmatic, original perceiving of the potential meaning of the painting transports us, via Heidegger's interpretation, into the imagined life of the peasant woman. This is a life structured according to the needs of those who dwell closely with the rhythms of the earth, attentive to its change in season and the needs of the soil in order to allow it to produce its 'quiet gift' (*Basic Writings* 159). A vital requirement of this life is sturdy, stout shoes. For the peasant woman, the shoes are an everyday object, taken for granted. Probably, as with most equipment that surrounds us, the shoes only become conspicuous to her as things when their nature as equipment, as use-objects, fails – when the sole of one is worn through or the lace snaps. The artwork transforms the shoes into objects brimming with a startling mystery, a hiddenness which offers its discovery to anyone willing to be in 'nearness' to the artwork. When this happens, the painting speaks (*Basic Writings* 161) and its speaking reveals a world. This world is not contained in the exhibition room; it is not, as both Heidegger and Eliot claim, even part of the artist's intention.⁴ Rather it is a dialogic moment that exists between the viewer and the artwork. Heidegger's verbal account of his encounter with the painting attempts to express this moment, to illustrate how the unfolding of truth happens in the artwork.

For this discussion, following these insights from Heidegger and Ricoeur, I will focus on some of Eliot's later poetry to show how he too is a 'worldmaker', and how an encounter with his poetry can reveal the truth of a particular world. In the opening lines of 'East Coker', the second of his *Four Quartets*, Eliot draws our attention to a thing, a house (*Complete Poems* 177): 'In my beginning is my end. In succession / Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended, / Are removed, destroyed, restored' (I.1–3). Houses, in a normal lifetime, seem to be mostly solid objects, lasting equipment. They do not wear out like a pair of shoes, but rather they are built to have the quality of endurance, to outlast their builders, possibly to shelter and provide dwelling for many generations of human beings. A house is an everyday object, like a shoe; it is just there, where we saw it the day before. But Eliot, like Van Gogh, uses the artwork to transform the thing, and to reveal a depth to it that is mostly hidden in everyday existence. 'Houses live and die', the passage continues, 'there is a time for building / And a time for living and for generation', but also a time for decay, when the wind will 'break the loosened pane' and 'shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto'

⁴ See Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* 44, and Eliot, *Selected Prose* 43–4.
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(I.9–13). The passage links the object ‘house’ metaphorically – more precisely, metonymically – to the generations of a family line. The double meaning creates a complex symbol which interweaves the life of a house with those who dwell there. To see this is to recognize, like Van Gogh’s shoes, that a house expresses a world.

The passage captures an intersection of two temporal cycles. One is the linear cycle of a single life, which is finite and marked by its natality and death: ‘In my beginning is my end’ (‘East Coker’ I.1, 14). This sentiment is echoed in Heidegger’s essay, where he writes that the ‘beginning already contains the end latent within itself’ (*Basic Writings* 201). This linear cycle falls within the broader temporal cycle of human dwelling, ‘a time for living and for generation’ (‘East Coker’ I.10). While the individual is born and dies, the cycle of regeneration extends from before the past and beyond the future of one person. We live in a constant ‘succession’ (‘East Coker’ I.1), a renewing genealogy. The things we create, even those things that will outlive an individual life, are also part of this cycle and it is this interweaving of beings, marked by time, which is both captivating and evocative in the passage.

These lines, like the painting, hold a mystery which they beckon us to discover. Through ‘a nearness’ with the words, we are invited and compelled to move beyond them. We experience, in Eliot’s language, ‘the sudden illumination’ (*Complete Poems* 186, ‘Dry Salvages’ II.44). We find ourselves, as Heidegger writes, ‘suddenly somewhere else’. Ricoeur’s epochal distinction between ordinary and imaginative reality explains how phenomenologically the poetic language and the productive imagination move us beyond the words themselves, connecting us to those ‘deep structures’ which shape human dwelling (‘The Metaphorical Process’ 153). Perhaps this brief suspension finds readers contemplating the unimagined, unknowable ancestors who begot them, trying, as Eliot says later in the poem, to search ‘past and future’ (*Complete Poems* 189, ‘Dry Salvages’ V.16) for a deeper clue as to who they are. Or readers imagine the endless cycle of building and destruction that marks human existence, a constant, ever-renewing and necessary violence that we perpetuate to make the earth habitable. Houses, like humans, live and die, and the passage communicates this to us while at the same time offering us the opportunity to contemplate it for ourselves.

Thus imagination gives us the ability to ‘produce new kinds of assimilation and to produce them not above the differences ... but in spite of and through the differences’ (Taylor 99). Eliot, interweaving the meanings of the ‘house’ in terms of both thing and genealogy, produces a new, original assimilation. The two senses stand side by side for us, the import of each enriched by the presence of the other. As Ricoeur says, this creates ‘imaginative interrelation

across difference' which produces 'new metaphoric resemblance' (Taylor 99). These resemblances are not contained in each thing separate from the other, but together are 'transformative of existing reality' (Taylor 98).

Arguably present in Eliot's mind when he wrote this passage in 1939 was the foreboding anxiety of imminent war and a despair that Western civilization was, for the second time in his life, inexorably drawing towards its destruction. These opening lines of 'East Coker' are somewhat eerily prescient of what was to follow in the year that the quartet was published; on 7 September 1940 began the sustained bombing of English cities by the Luftwaffe. Yet, in spite of this bleak time, critics regard 'East Coker' as the most optimistic of the *Quartets*, a poem that made an 'extraordinary impact' at the 'darkest moment of the war' (Gordon 353). The reason for this is arguably because the most important message in *Four Quartets*, and particularly 'East Coker', is the sense of hope that, even in the face of adversity, pervades the human condition; a realistic hope tempered by the wisdom gained from the disappointment and anguish of living a finite life.

In the second part of this essay, I will reflect on the significance of the 'religious imagination' in Eliot's poetry. The working of this imagination, though evident in his pre-conversion poetry, becomes explicit after his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927. In defining 'religious imagination', I again take guidance from Ricoeur, who discusses how the productive imagination contains a religious dimension. Once this definition is developed, I shall consider it in light of some passages from *Four Quartets*.

Ontologically central for Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology is human capability, which is essentially the open possibility that humans have to act in the world. This openness exists primarily because of language, which makes all other human capabilities meaningful (Ricoeur, 'Ethics' 280). As in Heidegger's thought, our ability to act in and upon the unfolding world makes temporality a central feature of Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology. Human existence, as the site of possibility, is futural in its orientation and 'constantly projecting itself in front of itself towards a possible way of being' (Vanhooser 7). Imagination is pivotal in how this projection can come to be, because it allows us phenomenological access to an idea of ourselves which has not yet been manifest in ordinary reality. This means that a human being is not 'limited to the here and now, that is, to present actuality' (Vanhooser 7). Rather, we exist as beings in the midst of our finitude, carrying the past with us as we shape the future. As Eliot puts it in the compelling opening of 'East Coker', 'In my beginning is my end' (*Complete Poems* 177, I.1).

For Ricoeur, human capability, the ability to act meaningfully in the world, aside from having a temporal character, is also shaped by our innate 'originary

goodness' ('Ethics' 284). Here Ricoeur is explicit about the structure of human ontology, which he understands in the biblical sense as 'creation, createdness' ('Ethics' 284). Our orientation to the good is rooted in our being, as an originary motivation. To act for the good is to strive to realize human capability in its fullest potential. Life, from natality, has already been given the potential for fullness; it is already possessed of a 'surplus of being' which is 'nothing other than *possibility*' and the reason humanity can hope (Vanhoozer 7). To quote Kevin Vanhoozer in this context: 'We are not as we shall be' (7). Thus hope is part of the human condition and shapes human capability, which is motivated by a will to transform existence.

Central to how this 'surplus of being' is expressed, for Ricoeur, is through poetic language, which provides the most complex and sophisticated way of responding to this plenitude by offering its own 'surplus of meaning', particularly through the techniques of narrative and metaphor (Vanhoozer 8). This is clearly evident in the above passage from 'East Coker' which, though relatively short, offers an abundance of rich complex interpretation and reflection. For Ricoeur these techniques allow us to express the possible, and it is in this realm of possibility where hope can be made manifest. This draws us back to the theme of the productive imagination, but especially to the last of the four types of productive imagination, namely, religious symbolism. It is particularly here, in this imaginary space, where Ricoeur locates the will to hope. He argues that it is primarily in this sphere where goodness is fully expressed, writing that 'all religions are different attempts in different language games to recover the ground of goodness, to liberate, so to say, the enslaved freedom, the enslaved capability' ('Ethics' 284).

Thus religious discourse offers us a language of hope and freedom; the metaphors and narratives of religious events are the symbolic and imaginative 'schematization of liberation' which allows us to recognize and to act on the ontological, originary goodness rooted in us. For Ricoeur, a powerful exemplar of this is the 'Christian symbol of the perfect man ready to give his life for the sake of his friends' ('Ethics' 285). This belief offers Christians 'freedom in the light of hope', essentially an understanding and acceptance of existence lived in sure knowledge of the Resurrection, an event of promise and hope (Ricoeur, *Essays* 105). Thus hope, the 'passion for the possible', is allied with imagination, for it is the power of imagination which offers the possibility of renewal, by granting new possibilities of meaning and action (Ricoeur, *Essays* 106).

For Ricoeur, imagination has a metaphysical role that goes beyond the 'simple projection of vital, unconscious, or repressed desires' (*History* 126–7). Instead it offers a 'prospective and explorative function' for envisioning what

is humanly possible. He goes so far as to argue for the 'redemption through imagination' where 'hope works to the fullest human capacity' (*History* 127). Though these images of reconciliation are 'myths', they offer a vision of a shared human destiny, and are the starting points for decisive change in the world. He writes that 'every *real* conversion is first a revolution at the level of our directive images. By changing his imagination, man alters his existence' (*History* 127).

As mentioned earlier, pivotal for Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology is the centrality of temporality and possibility in shaping human existence. Here he stands in the shadow of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, taking up Heidegger's project of describing temporality but also, as we have already seen, transforming it by offering an ontology grounded in goodness (Vanhoozer 25). This transformation becomes even more apparent when we consider the concept of hope, for which, Ricoeur complains, Heidegger's account leaves little room (Vanhoozer 25). It is worth reflecting on what Heidegger thinks of hope because it stands in marked contrast to Ricoeur's conception. Though both share some fundamental assumptions about human existence, their orientation of that existence differs profoundly. For the early Heidegger, the fact that we are temporal, futural beings does not imply that we should be hopeful. In fact, in *Being and Time*, hope is framed as an inauthentic mood which creates expectations about reality which, if not patently false, at least distract us from the call to authentically face our finitude. Heidegger writes that he who 'hopes takes himself *with* him into his hope ... and brings himself up against what he hopes for. But this presupposes that he has somehow *arrived at himself*' (*Being and Time* 396; my emphases). Hope may bring 'alleviation', but this means that it is still related to 'our burdens' (*Being and Time* 396). The mood of hopefulness, instead of creating a space which opens up genuine possibilities for existence, in fact closes them, because these hopeful possibilities are, in some deep way, already shaped by an individual's past burdens and expectations. For Heidegger, we are futural beings, ahead of ourselves, and our existence can never be given at any moment. Thus we should never expect to fully 'arrive' at ourselves. To imagine this arrival as possible implies assuming an inauthentic orientation to our existence. Essentially, hope produces an illusion of the self which occludes facing up to one's own finitude and, to use Heidegger's term, one's 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*).

Ricoeur's existential outlook for human existence is far more positive than Heidegger's because it is framed and guided by a radically different conception of freedom. For the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, authentic *Dasein* stands in its being-towards-death resolute before the nothing of Being, before the 'possibility of the absolute impossibility' of its being (294). This is all there is and to hope

for more is to be trapped in a beguiled fearfulness, a foolish unrealistic hope that attempts to shelter the individual *Dasein* from facing its authentic, finite self. Heideggerian freedom lies in grasping this authentic self, an experience which he suggests is similar in mood to Nietzsche's bleak vision of human destiny:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of 'world history' – yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die. (Nietzsche 42)

In contrast, for Ricoeur, freedom exists in the 'light of hope'. The idea of 'Christian freedom' specifically, a notion he takes from Luther, belongs 'existentially to the order of the Resurrection' (*Essays* 107). This conception of freedom is paradoxical because the hope that it inspires exists between 'what is heading toward death and what denies death'. The 'hope of resurrection' is a living contradiction of actual reality, because it 'proceeds from what is placed under the sign of the Cross and death' (*Essays* 107). Ricoeur writes that 'freedom in the light of hope is not only freedom for the possible but, more fundamentally still, freedom for the denial of death, freedom to decipher the signs of the Resurrection under the contrary appearance of death' (*Essays* 107). Thus the logic of hope is one of 'superabundance', an 'absurd' logic whose meaning is opposed to the abundance of 'senselessness, of failure, and of destruction' (Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred* 206). This law of superabundance provides a rich and complex existential meaning to our existence which is 'irreducible to a mere wisdom of the eternal present' (*Figuring the Sacred* 206). Ricoeur, following Kierkegaard, perceives in hope the freedom for a 'passion for the possible' which offers a different orientation to 'all Nietzschean love of destiny ... to all *amor fati*' (*Figuring the Sacred* 206).

How is the religious imagination, then, depicted in the poetry of T.S. Eliot? As mentioned earlier, Eliot converted to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927 and this had a marked effect on the content of his poetry. This is illustrated starkly by comparing his 1925 poem 'The Hollow Men' with his next poem 'Ash-Wednesday', published in 1930. While this is a clear and somewhat convenient division, one should not overlook the moments throughout Eliot's poetic corpus which are attentive to communications and illuminations of a divine sort. However, I shall limit my discussion to his last great poem and return again to 'East Coker', to the passage from the fourth movement of this quartet depicting the 'wounded surgeon' (*Complete Poems* 181–2, IV.1). In these almost garish

lines both the poetic and religious dimensions of the productive imagination are evident. In addition, we can clearly discern the impulse of hope which Ricoeur holds so central to the religious imagination in the symbols depicted in the passage.

In their evocation of a renunciation that is life-giving, the lines are clearly located within the tradition of Christian asceticism, but Eliot, through metaphor, presents Christ in a way which beckons the reader to engage and reflect on the meaning of this portrayal of him. Christ is our surgeon assisted by his nurse, the Church, yet paradoxically, in order for our health to be restored, 'our sickness must grow worse' (IV.10). This speaks directly to the superabundance of hope which is so central to the Christian message and to Ricoeur's conception of the religious imagination. The 'enigma' and mystery of our 'disease', 'Adam's curse' (IV.5, 6, 9), holds within it the means of our salvation. Though we are both sinful and mortal, we must obey the 'sharp compassion' (IV.4) of our healer and his Church, accepting faithfully that it is only through consuming the 'dripping blood' and 'bloody flesh' that we can be healed (IV.21–2). It is worth noting the regular and strongly traditional poetic form and metre of the lines, which reflect the 'intellectual and emotional structure' of 'East Coker' as a whole and link Christ's 'redemptive task' both in content and the deliberate precise form to that of a surgeon (Kramer 94).

Eliot is very deliberate in creating images which seem immediately counter-intuitive to our ordinary conception of disease and its treatment. There is no sense of our recovery being a gentle, restorative affair, convalescing quietly in a soothing hospital environment. Rather there is an urgency and directness to our treatment; we must surrender to our physician and ingest his medicine. Though the medicine itself is suggestive of cannibalism, this is again deliberately counter-intuitive, for this act of consumption, seemingly savage and repulsive, holds the mystery of transubstantiation, and thus our salvation, in its midst. Thus Eliot reminds us why 'we call this Friday good' ('East Coker' IV.25); it is because of the suffering Christ and his crucifixion that we live, in Ricoeur's words, in the 'hope of resurrection'. In Eliot's lines we perceive the 'living contradiction' of actual reality, for the fullness of our lives is held in the freedom our disease grants us, 'freedom for the denial of death' in spite of the certainty of our physical death.

The above passage from *Four Quartets* is explicitly Christian in image and content, and so I shall briefly consider another which is not. I do this to substantiate, but also to complicate, Ricoeur's claim that 'all religions are different attempts ... to recover the ground of goodness', and to support the claim made earlier that religious discourse offers us a language of hope and freedom ('Ethics' 284). In the passage below, Eliot again interweaves the poetic and religious

imagination, reminding us of the capacity of language, as Ricoeur says, to open up new worlds (Kearney 44). This passage comes from the second movement of the third quartet, 'The Dry Salvages', where the poet moves to consider a god from a different tradition, the Hindu tradition of the *Bhagavad Gita* (*Complete Poems* 187–8). The passage opens by alluding to Krishna's admonishment of Arjuna before a battle of the Kurukshetra War.⁵ The *Gita* is a conversation between them. Krishna appears as a charioteer and comes to aid Arjuna, who is engaged in the battle to recover land which is rightfully his. Arjuna tells Krishna that if victory requires killing relatives, then he would rather forego the battle, because it will lead to the death of family members, disrupt Hindu society and create caste confusion (Kramer 120). Krishna admonishes Arjuna for his worrying about the future and urges him to 'fare forward' ('Dry Salvages' III.14, 26, 39, 45); because Arjuna is of the Kshatriya caste, the warrior caste of Hindu society, it is his duty to fight, and thus he cannot shirk his own nature. The line the 'future is a faded song' (III.3) signifies that Arjuna must remain true to the action that his caste status requires of him, regardless of its future consequences, for once the future has unfolded, it too becomes the past. Also, Krishna, because he is divine, perceives time in a way that Arjuna cannot. Krishna understands the nature of the true Self, *Atman*, which is unborn and undying and therefore knows that, regardless of the outcome of the battle, Arjuna was born and will die and then reincarnate into another life. Thus, from Krishna's perspective, we must 'not think of the fruit of action' (III.38) and be paralysed by the fear of inaction, but remain mindful that 'the time of death is every moment' (III.36).

In this movement of 'The Dry Salvages', Eliot, via Krishna, calls for life lived which accords to duty and self-sacrifice, reminding us, via Arjuna, that the certainty of death diminishes our need to worry over the consequences of the future; rather, the action called for in the event itself, namely, for Arjuna upon the battlefield, must be most befitting of what Arjuna represents, in terms of his caste and position. Arjuna tells his doubts to Krishna and is guided according to the precepts of the complexity of Hindu belief. Much like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, who understands that his sacrifice will be for the freedom of humankind but is afraid of the torturous death that awaits him, Arjuna is conflicted by the demands of duty in the realization that it demands killing. Yet both Christ and Arjuna accept their respective destinies, in spite of their realization of the possible consequences.

⁵ See Balakrishnan and Sri for accessible overviews of Eliot's allusions to Upanishadic themes in his poetry and plays.

While it is apparent that Christ and Arjuna represent radically different religious traditions, Eliot traces a common wisdom in these traditions, which, as he writes in one of his essays, he believes 'is the same for all people everywhere' and which the language of poetry is 'most capable' of communicating (*On Poetry* 226). Keeping in mind the Heraclitean fragment 'the way up and the way down are the same' (*Complete Poems* 171), which underpins *Four Quartets*, we must search for those deeper patterns of meaning which draw human experience together. What the above passage gives us is a 'schematization of liberation', to use the words of Ricoeur. Krishna reminds us that the certainty of death gives us the unfolding present moment; that, if we are too focused on the future, then what is lost and denied is the sacramentality of the present. Genuine freedom is not found in the image from *Four Quartets* of 'time counted by anxious worried women / Lying awake, calculating the future' (*Complete Poems* 185, 'Dry Salvages' I.41–2), but rather in recognizing that, though we will all experience suffering and death, our 'real destination' (*Complete Poems* 188, 'Dry Salvages' III.42), we cannot hide from our own life because of this knowledge. We cannot bid 'fare well' to living, but must 'fare forward' (III.44–5) into the unknown and uncertain sea of life, mindful of the duty which both binds us to life and to living it fully, and which will ultimately separate us from it. Thus the 'right action is freedom / From past and future also' (*Complete Poems* 190, 'Dry Salvages' V.41–2).

As all the examples illustrate, our engagement with the artwork brings to the fore the imaginative epoché, the space which allows worldmaking to manifest. Through an open encounter with the artwork, particularly through the language of poetry, we can encounter the world in a way which transforms existing categories of meaning, producing wholly new ones. Yet these categories re-affirm the 'deep structures' of reality to which we all, as mortals, belong, while allowing us new possibilities of re-describing the world (Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process' 153–4). Central to this is Ricoeur's claim that it is here where we can locate the will to hope and recognize the capability we all have to 'recover the ground of goodness' in us ('Ethics' 284). Particularly in the last two examples, though from different religious traditions, we can discern a language of hope and freedom which allows us to find our own language to 'utter God'.

In conclusion I will leave the reader with the passage which ends *Four Quartets*, one that is richly compelling and hopeful (*Complete Poems* 197–8, 'Little Gidding' V.26–46). The lines speak of arriving at 'the end of all our exploring' and finding it to be 'where we started' (V.27–8). In the image of the 'unknown, remembered gate' (V.30), Eliot suggests that hope is always already inside us, and that the journey of life is compelled onward by that same hope.

Those who know the poem will recognize that this passage gathers together themes and symbols from the earlier quartets – ‘the children in the apple-tree’, the sea, the rose (V.35, 38, 46) – all imagery integral to the deeply personal work that Eliot does in his poem, examining the choices, places and histories that formed him, and searching for a sense of peace. Apart from the ‘tongues of flame ... in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire’ (V.44–5), which alludes to the heavenly fire that seemed to come down on the apostles on Pentecost, and the quotation from the English mystic Julian of Norwich (the lines ‘all shall be well’, V.42–3), the passage is not explicitly or exclusively Christian. What is deeply religious, in Ricoeur’s understanding, is the sense of fullness and maturity in the lines, ripeness that is at once a homecoming and a ceaseless, hopeful openness to the future. What the reader shares with Eliot is not so much an experience of his world, but of ourselves as worldmakers, able to cross the invisible boundary between the everyday world and that same world revealed as a mysterious potential that ‘worlds’.

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