

= Burnt Norton =

Burnt Norton is the first poem of T. S. Eliot 's Four Quartets . He created it while working on his play Murder in the Cathedral and it was first published in his Collected Poems 1909 ? 1935 (1936) . The poem 's title refers to a Cotswolds manor house Eliot visited . The manor 's garden served as an important image within the poem . Structurally , the poem is based on Eliot 's The Waste Land with passages of the poem related to those excised from Murder in the Cathedral .

The central discussion within the poem is on the nature of time and salvation . Eliot emphasises the need of the individual to focus on the present moment and to know that there is a universal order . By understanding the nature of time and the order of the universe , mankind is able to recognise God and seek redemption . Many reviewers of Burnt Norton focused on the uniqueness and beauty of the poem . However , others complained that the poem does not reflect Eliot 's earlier greatness and that the use of Christian themes harmed the poem .

= = Background = =

The concept of Burnt Norton is connected to Eliot 's Murder in the Cathedral ; he worked on the poem while the play was being produced during 1935 . The connection between the poem and the play is deep ; many of the lines for the poem come from lines originally created for the play that were , on E. Martin Brown 's advice , removed from the script . Years later , Eliot recollected :

There were lines and fragments that were discarded in the course of the production of Murder in the Cathedral . ' Can 't get them over on the stage , ' said the producer , and I humbly bowed to his judgment . However , these fragments stayed in my mind , and gradually I saw a poem shaping itself round them : in the end it came out as ' Burnt Norton.'

Like many of Eliot 's works , the poem was compiled from various fragments that were reworked over many years . To structure the poem , Eliot turned to the organisation of The Waste Land .

In 1936 , the poem was included in Collected Poems 1909 ? 1935 , of which 11 @, @ 000 copies were published ; the collection symbolically represented the completion of his former poems and his moving onto later works . " Burnt Norton " was Eliot 's only major poem to be completed during a six @-@ year period as he turned to writing plays and continued with his work on essays . The poem was re @-@ published as an independent work in 1941 , the same year " East Coker " and " The Dry Salvages " , two later poems of the Four Quartets , were published .

The actual Burnt Norton is a manor located near the village of Aston Subedge in Gloucestershire that Eliot visited with Emily Hale during 1934 . The original Norton House was a mansion burned down in 1741 by its owner , Sir William Keyt , who died in the fire . Even though Eliot was married , he spent a lot of time with Hale and might possibly have become involved with her had he not been married . Even after their time at Burnt Norton , Eliot stayed in close correspondence with her and sent her many of his poems . The actual manor does not serve as an important location within the poem . Instead , it is the garden surrounding the manor that became the focus .

= = Epigraphs = =

The poem begins with two epigraphs taken from the fragments of Heraclitus :

??? ????? ?? ?????? ?????? ??????? ?? ??????

?? ?????? ??????? ????????

I. p . 77 . Fr . 2 .

???? ??? ???? ??? ??? ???? ?

I. p . 89 Fr . 60 .

The first may be translated , " Though wisdom is common , the many live as if they have wisdom of their own " ; the second , " the way upward and the way downward is one and the same . "

= = Poem = =

The poem was the first of Eliot 's that relied on speech , with a narrator who speaks to the audience directly . Described as a poem of early summer , air , and grace , it begins with a narrator recalling a moment in a garden . The scene provokes a discussion on time and how the present , not the future or past , really matters to individuals . Memories connect the individual to the past , but the past cannot change . The poem then transitions from memory to how life works and the point of existence . In particular , the universe is described as orderly and that consciousness is not found within time even though humanity is bound by time . The scene of the poem moves from a garden to the London underground where technology dominates . Those who cling to technology and reason are unable to understand the universe or the Logos (" the Word " , or Christ) . The underworld is replaced by a churchyard and a discussion of death . This , in turn , becomes a discussion of timelessness and eternity , which ends the poem .

= = Themes = =

Eliot believed that Burnt Norton could benefit society . The poem 's narration reflects on how humankind is affected by Original Sin , that they can follow the paths of either good or evil , and that they can atone for their sins . To help the individual , the poem explains that people must leave the time @-@ bound world and look into their selves , and that poets must seek out a perfection , not bound by time in their images , to escape from the problems of language .

Peter Ackroyd believes that it is impossible to paraphrase the content of the poem ; the poem is too abstract to describe the events and the action that make up the poem 's narrative structure . However , the philosophical basis for the poem can be explained since the discourse on time is connected to the ideas within St. Augustine 's Confessions . As such , there is an emphasis on the present moment as being the only time period that really matters , because the past cannot be changed and the future is unknown . The poem emphasizes that memory must be abandoned to understand the current world , and humans must realize that the universe is based on order . The poem also describes that although consciousness cannot be bound within time , humans cannot actually escape from time on their own . The scene beneath London is filled with the time @-@ bound people who are similar to the spiritually empty populace of The Hollow Men ; they are empty because they do not understand the Logos or the order of the universe . The conclusion of the poem emphasizes that God is the only one that is truly able to exist out of time and have knowledge of all times and places , but humankind is still capable of redemption through belief in Him and His ability to save them from the bounds of the material universe .

Imaginative space also serves an important function within the poem . Part one contains a rose garden that allegorically represents potential within human existence . Although the garden does not exist , it is described in realistic manner and is portrayed as an imagined reality . Also , the narrator 's statement that words exist in the mind allows this imagined reality to be shared between the narrator and the reader . This is then destroyed by the narrator claiming that such a place has no purpose . The garden image has other uses within the poem beyond creating a shared imaginative space ; it serves to invoke memories within the poem , and it functions in a similar manner in other works by Eliot , including The Family Reunion .

= = Critical response = =

An early critic , D. W. Harding , viewed the poem as being part of a new concept within poetry . Similarly , Edwin Muir saw that the poem had new aspects to it and felt that there was beauty in the poem similar to that in The Hollow Men . Peter Quennell agreed and described the poem as " a new and remarkably accomplished poem " and " uncommon rhythmic virtuosity " . Marianne Moore stated that it was " a new poem which is concerned with the thought of control [...] embodied in Deity and in human equipoise " . She argued that its " best quality " was " in its reminders of how severe , strenuous , and practical was the poet 's approach toward the present enlargement of his philosophical vision . " Rolfe Humphries declared , " How beautifully [...] Eliot winds the theme , from the simple statement that perhaps any dialectical materialist would accept [...] to the

conclusion that any revolutionist might find difficulty in understanding [...] How beautifully it is done ! "

However , George Orwell disapproved of Burnt Norton and stated that the religious nature of the poem coincided with Eliot 's poems no longer having what made his earlier works great . The later critic Russell Kirk agreed with Orwell in part , but felt that Orwell 's attacks on Eliot 's religiosity within the poems fell flat . In particular , he argued that " Over the past quarter of a century , most serious critics ? whether or not they find Christian faith impossible ? have found in the Quartets the greatest twentieth @-@ century achievements in the poetry of philosophy and religion . " Likewise , the 12 April 1941 Times Literary Supplement said that the poem was hard to understand . This was followed by another review on 4 September that attacked Eliot 's understanding of history .

Later critics varied in opinions . Bergonzi emphasised the " beautifully controlled and suasive opening " and claimed that " It contains some of Eliot 's finest poetry , a true musicalization of thought " . According to Peter Ackroyd , " ' Burnt Norton ' , in fact , gains its power and its effects from the modification , withdrawal or suspension of meaning and the only ' truth ' to be discovered is the formal unity of the poem itself . "