"Burnt Norton" by T.S.Elliot

**I**

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.  
What might have been is an abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation.  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.  
Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind.  
                                   But to what purpose  
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves  
I do not know.  
                                   Other echoes  
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?  
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,  
Round the corner. Through the first gate,  
Into our first world, shall we follow  
The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.  
There they were, dignified, invisible,  
Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,  
In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,  
And the bird called, in response to  
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,  
And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses  
Had the look of flowers that are looked at.  
There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.  
So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,  
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,  
To look down into the drained pool.  
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,  
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,  
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,  
The surface glittered out of heart of light,  
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.  
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.  
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,  
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.  
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind  
Cannot bear very much reality.  
Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.

El tiempo presente y el tiempo pasado

Están ambos quizás presentes en el tiempo futuro

Y el tiempo futuro contenido en el tiempo pasado.

Si todo tiempo es eternamente presente

Todo el tiempo es irredimible.

Lo que podría haber sido es una abstracción

Que sigue siendo una posibilidad perpetua

Sólo en un mundo de especulación.

Lo que podría haber sido y lo que ha sido

Apuntan a un fin, que siempre es presente.

Las pisadas resuenan en la memoria

Por el pasaje que no tomamos

Hacia la puerta que nunca abrimos

hacia la rosaleda. Mis palabras resuenan

Así, en tu mente.

Pero con qué propósito

Alterar el polvo en un tazón de hojas de rosa

no lo sé.

Otros ecos

Habitan el jardín. ¿Los seguimos?

Rápido, dijo el pájaro, encuéntralos, encuéntralos,

Dobla la esquina. A través de la primera puerta,

En nuestro primer mundo, ¿seguiremos

El engaño del tordo? En nuestro primer mundo.

Allí estaban (los ecos), dignos, invisibles,

Moviéndose sin presión, sobre las hojas muertas,

En el calor del otoño, a través del aire vibrante,

Y el pájaro llamó, en respuesta a

La música no escuchada oculta en los arbustos,

Y el rayo de ojo invisible se cruzó, porque las rosas

Tenían el aspecto de las flores que se miran.

Allí estaban como nuestros invitados, aceptando y aceptando.

Así que nos movimos, y ellos, en un patrón formal,

A lo largo del callejón vacío, en el círculo de la caja,

Para mirar hacia abajo en la piscina drenada.

Seca la piscina, de hormigón seco, de bordes marrones,

Y la piscina se llenó de agua de la luz del sol,

Y los lotos se levantaron, en silencio, en silencio,

La superficie brillaba fuera del corazón de la luz,

Y estaban detrás de nosotros, reflejados en el estanque.

Luego pasó una nube, y el estanque quedó vacío.

Ve, dijo el pájaro, pues las hojas estaban llenas de niños,

Escondidos con entusiasmo, conteniendo risas.

Vete, vete, vete, dijo el pájaro: el género humano

No puede soportar mucha realidad.

El tiempo pasado y el tiempo futuro

Lo que podría haber sido y lo que ha sido

Apuntan a un fin, que siempre es presente.

**II**

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.  
The dance along the artery  
The circulation of the lymph  
Are figured in the drift of stars  
Ascend to summer in the tree  
We move above the moving tree  
In light upon the figured leaf  
And hear upon the sodden floor  
Below, the boarhound and the boar  
Pursue their pattern as before  
But reconciled among the stars.

**II**

**Ajos y zafiros en el barro**

**Coagulan el árbol del eje encamado.**

**El hilo trino en la sangre**

**Canta bajo las cicatrices inveteradas**

**Apaciguando guerras largamente olvidadas.**

**La danza a lo largo de la arteria**

**La circulación de la linfa**

**Se figuran en la deriva de las estrellas**

**Ascendemos al verano en el árbol**

**Nos movemos por encima del árbol en movimiento**

**En la luz sobre la hoja figurada**

**Y oímos sobre el suelo empapado**

**Abajo, el sabueso y el jabalí**

**Siguen su patrón como antes**

**Pero reconciliados entre las estrellas**

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.  
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.  
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.  
The inner freedom from the practical desire,  
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner  
And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded  
By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving,

**En el punto quieto del mundo que gira. Ni carne ni sin carne;**

**Ni desde ni hacia; en el punto quieto, allí está la danza,**

**Pero ni detención ni movimiento. Y no lo llames fijeza,**

**Donde se reúnen el pasado y el futuro. Ni movimiento desde ni hacia,**

**Ni ascenso ni descenso. Salvo el punto, el punto inmóvil,**

**No habría danza, y sólo existe la danza.**

**Sólo puedo decir que hemos estado allí, pero no puedo decir dónde.**

**Y no puedo decir, cuánto tiempo, pues eso es situarlo en el tiempo.**

**La libertad interior del deseo práctico,**

**La liberación de la acción y el sufrimiento, la liberación de lo interno**

**Y la compulsión exterior, sin embargo, rodeado**

**Por una gracia del sentido, una luz blanca quieta y en movimiento,**

Erhebung without motion, concentration  
Without elimination, both a new world  
And the old made explicit, understood  
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,  
The resolution of its partial horror.  
Yet the enchainment of past and future  
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,  
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation  
Which flesh cannot endure.  
                                                    Time past and time future  
Allow but a little consciousness.  
To be conscious is not to be in time  
But 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; involved with past and future.  
Only through time time is conquered.

**Erhebung sin movimiento, concentración**

**Sin eliminación, tanto un mundo nuevo**

**Erhebung sin movimiento, concentración**

**Sin eliminación, ambos un mundo nuevo**

**Y lo viejo explicitado, entendido**

**Al completar su éxtasis parcial,**

**La resolución de su horror parcial.**

**Sin embargo, el encadenamiento del pasado y el futuro**

**Entretejido en la debilidad del cuerpo cambiante,**

**Protege a la humanidad del cielo y la condenación**

**Qué carne no puede soportar.**

**El tiempo pasado y el tiempo futuro**

**No permiten más que un poco de conciencia.**

**Ser consciente no es estar en el tiempo**

**Pero sólo en el tiempo puede el momento en el jardín de rosas,**

**El momento en el cenador donde la lluvia golpea,**

**El momento en la iglesia con corrientes de aire al caer el humo**

**Ser recordado; involucrado con el pasado y el futuro.**

**Sólo a través del tiempo se conquista el tiempo.**

**III**

Here is a place of disaffection  
Time before and time after  
In a dim light: neither daylight  
Investing form with lucid stillness  
Turning shadow into transient beauty  
Wtih slow rotation suggesting permanence  
Nor darkness to purify the soul  
Emptying the sensual with deprivation  
Cleansing affection from the temporal.  
Neither plentitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker  
Over the strained time-ridden faces  
Distracted from distraction by distraction  
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning  
Tumid apathy with no concentration  
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind  
That blows before and after time,  
Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs  
Time before and time after.  
Eructation of unhealthy souls  
Into the faded air, the torpid  
Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London,  
Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,  
Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here  
Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

 Descend lower, descend only  
Into the world of perpetual solitude,  
World not world, but that which is not world,  
Internal darkness, deprivation  
And destitution of all property,  
Dessication of the world of sense,  
Evacuation of the world of fancy,  
Inoperancy of the world of spirit;  
This is the one way, and the other  
Is the same, not in movement  
But abstention from movememnt; while the world moves  
In appetency, on its metalled ways  
Of time past and time future.

Aquí hay un lugar de desamor

Tiempo antes y tiempo después

En una luz tenue: ni la luz del día

Invirtiendo la forma con lúcida quietud

Convirtiendo la sombra en belleza transitoria

Con una rotación lenta que sugiere permanencia

Ni la oscuridad para purificar el alma

Vaciando lo sensual con la privación

Limpiando el afecto de lo temporal.

Ni la abundancia ni la vacuidad Sólo un parpadeo

Sobre los rostros crispados por el tiempo

Distraído de la distracción por la distracción

Lleno de fantasías y vacío de sentido

Apatía tumultuosa sin concentración

Hombres y trozos de papel, arremolinados por el viento frío

Que sopla antes y después del tiempo

Viento que entra y sale de los pulmones insanos

Tiempo antes y tiempo después.

Eructación de almas malsanas

En el aire desvanecido, lo tórpido

Impulsados por el viento que barre las sombrías colinas de Londres,

Hampstead y Clerkenwell, Campden y Putney,

Highgate, Primrose y Ludgate. No aquí

No aquí la oscuridad, en este mundo de trinos.

Desciende más abajo, desciende sólo

Al mundo de la soledad perpetua,

Mundo no mundo, sino lo que no es mundo,

La oscuridad interna, la privación

Y destitución de toda propiedad,

Desecación del mundo de los sentidos,

Evacuación del mundo de la fantasía,

Inoperancia del mundo del espíritu;

Este es el camino, y el otro

Es el mismo, no en el movimiento

Sino en la abstención del movimiento; mientras el mundo se mueve

En la apetencia, en sus caminos metálicos

De tiempo pasado y tiempo futuro.

**IV**

Time and the bell have buried the day,  
the black cloud carries the sun away.  
Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis  
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray  
Clutch and cling?  
Chill  
Fingers of yew be curled  
Down on us? After the kingfisher’s wing  
Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still  
At the still point of the turning world.

**IV**

**El tiempo y la campana han enterrado el día**

**la nube negra se lleva el sol.**

**¿Se volverá el girasol hacia nosotros, se inclinará la clemátide**

**se inclinará hacia nosotros; zarcillo y rocío**

**¿Se aferran y se aferran?**

**Frío**

**Los dedos del tejo se enroscan**

**¿se enroscan sobre nosotros? Después de que el ala del martín pescador**

**haya respondido luz a luz, y esté en silencio, la luz está quieta**

**En el punto quieto del mundo que gira.**

**V**

Words move, music moves  
Only in time; but that which is only living  
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness.  
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
Not that only, but the co-existence,  
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
And the end and the beginning were always there  
Before the beginning and after the end.  
And all is always now. Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices  
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,  
Always assail them. The Word in the desert  
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,  
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,  
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

 The detail of the pattern is movement,  
As in the figure of the ten stairs.  
Desire itself is movement  
Not in itself desirable;  
Love is itself unmoving,  
Only the cause and end of movement,  
Timeless, and undesiring  
Except in the aspect of time  
Caught in the form of limitation  
Between un-being and being.  
Sudden in a shaft of sunlight  
Even while the dust moves  
There rises the hidden laughter  
Of children in the foliage  
Quick now, here, now, always-  
Ridiculous the waste sad time  
Stretching before and after.

V

Las palabras se mueven, la música se mueve

Sólo en el tiempo; pero lo que sólo está vivo

sólo puede morir. Las palabras, después del discurso, llegan

Al silencio. Sólo por la forma, el patrón,

pueden las palabras o la música alcanzar

La quietud, como una jarra china

Se mueve perpetuamente en su quietud.

No la quietud del violín, mientras dura la nota,

No sólo eso, sino la coexistencia,

O decir que el fin precede al principio,

Y que el fin y el principio siempre estuvieron ahí

Antes del principio y después del fin.

Y todo es siempre ahora. Las palabras se tensan,

se agrietan y a veces se rompen, bajo la carga,

Bajo la tensión, resbalan, se deslizan, perecen,

No se quedan quietas. Voces chillonas

Regañando, burlándose, o simplemente parloteando,

Siempre los asaltan. La Palabra en el desierto

Es más atacada por las voces de la tentación,

La sombra que llora en la danza fúnebre,

El fuerte lamento de la quimera desconsolada.

El detalle del patrón es el movimiento,

Como en la figura de las diez escaleras.

El deseo mismo es movimiento

No es en sí mismo deseable;

El amor es en sí mismo inmóvil,

Sólo la causa y el fin del movimiento,

Intemporal y no deseable

Excepto en el aspecto del tiempo

Atrapado en la forma de la limitación

Entre el no-ser y el ser.

De repente en un rayo de sol

Incluso mientras el polvo se mueve

Se eleva la risa oculta

De los niños en el follaje

Rápido ahora, aquí, ahora, siempre-

Ridículo el tiempo triste perdido

Que se extiende antes y después.

[\*Burnt Norton (jesusplacencia.com)](http://www.jesusplacencia.com/files/t-s-eliot-cuatro-cuartetos.pdf)

BIOGRAPHY

[Thomas Stearns Eliot](https://poemanalysis.com/t-s-eliot/biography/) was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1888. He was a British poet, essayist, and playwright. Although born in the United States of America, he became a British citizen in 1927. T. S. Eliot moved to England in 1914, at the age of 25, and stayed there until his death. He died in his home in Kensington, London in 1965. T. S. Eliot is known as one of the most [important poets of the twentieth century](https://poemanalysis.com/explore-poets/20th-century-american/), as he was one of the key figures in the [modernist movement](https://poemanalysis.com/movement/literary-modernism/) of the early 1900s. His most famous poems are ‘[*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*](https://poemanalysis.com/t-s-eliot/the-love-song-of-j-alfred-prufrock/)‘, ‘[*The Waste Land*](https://poemanalysis.com/t-s-eliot/the-waste-land/)‘, ‘[*Journey of the Magi*](https://poemanalysis.com/t-s-eliot/journey-of-the-magi/)‘, ‘[*Ash Wednesday*](https://poemanalysis.com/t-s-eliot/ash-wednesday/)‘, and Four Quartets, among many others. T. S. Eliot won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.

THEMES

The main theme of ‘Burnt Norton is the nature of time, its relation to salvation, and the contrast between the experience of the modern man and spirituality. The lyrical [voice](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/voice/) meditates on life and the need to subscribe to the universal order. The poem’s structure and form are similar to T. S. Eliot’s The Wasteland, as several fragments of poetry are put together and set as one. The [rhyme](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/rhyme/) and [meter](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-meter/meter/) rely on the [repetition](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/repetition/) and circularity of language, which corresponds to the conception of time introduced in the poem. Light and dark, movement and stillness, and roses are some of the [motifs](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/motif/) that appear in ‘Burnt Norton’.

* Time:

Time is a major concern of Eliot's in this poem. He is constantly meditating about how humans can - or should - interact with time. 'Burnt Norton' illustrates Eliot's complicated concept of time, which allows one, in some moments, to escape or transcend 'time' as we understand it to achieve a sense of eternity or timelessness, or what Eliot calls *the still point of the turning world* (line 62). He believes that the past and future are contained within all moments. The opening lines illustrate this with:

*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.*

Many such mind-bending statements about time occur throughout the poem, aiming to illustrate Eliot's multidimensional understanding of how time operates.

**Background Information**

Reading 'Burnt Norton,' and the 'Four Quartets' as a whole, can be a daunting experience. Understanding some details about T.S. Eliot's personal and professional life, highlighting some passages from the poem that illustrate central themes, and discussing 'Burnt Norton's' role within the 'Four Quartets' can clear up a lot of confusion.

Though Eliot is known as an important figure in the Modernist movement, the content of his poetry took a turn during the latter part of his career. From 1915 to 1925, Eliot's major poems, such as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' 'The Hollow Men,' and 'The Wasteland,' described the loneliness and frustration brought on by modern life. By the late 1930s and 40s when the poems of the 'Four Quartets' were published, he had become a British citizen (He was born in the United States), joined the Anglican church, and separated from his mentally and emotionally unstable wife. His later poetry reflected these aspects of his life by including intensely religious imagery and more meditative and abstract themes.

'Burnt Norton' and the other quartets (a set of four poems published together) are excellent examples of this change of tone and content. The titles of each of the quartets are locations that were spiritually significant to Eliot. They were published as a whole in 1943, and Eliot considered the 'Four Quartets' (as they were titled when published together) a masterpiece. These poems certainly contributed to his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.