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T.S. Eliot's Poetic Journey from Fragmentation to Harmony

T.S. Eliot'ın Parçalanmadan Uyuma Doğru Şiirsel Yolculuğu

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Abstract

This study explores how fragmentation and harmony are portrayed in T.S. Eliot's poetry, focusing on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *The Waste Land*, and "Burnt Norton" from *Four Quartets*. Eliot's earlier poems, "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, display a disjointed and hopeless modern world loaded with anxiety and loneliness, thereby demonstrating the failure of organizing principles. Eliot employs literary, mythological, and biblical allusions to create harmony and address these anxieties, yet his strategies often fail to overcome the poems' depiction of a disorganized world. However, his later poetry, exemplified by "Burnt Norton," exhibits a shift towards serenity. Following his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, Eliot transformed his poetic universe, convincingly suggesting a transcendent realm. In "Burnt Norton," Eliot acknowledges life's inherent chaos but offers a pathway to harmony by embracing temporal flux and revealing an underlying order in the universe. This paper thus demonstrates Eliot's departure from the hopelessness and fragmentation of his earlier works towards a more harmonious and, ultimately, more optimistic view of reality in his later poetry, reflecting his developing philosophical and spiritual orientation.

Keywords: T.S. Eliot, Modernism, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *The Waste Land*, "Burnt Norton"

Öz

Bu çalışma, T.S. Eliot'ın şiirinde parçalanma ve uyumun nasıl işlendiğini "J. Alfred Prufrock'ın Aşk Şarkısı," *Çorak Ülke* ve *Dört Kuartet*'ten "Burnt Norton" şiirlerine odaklanarak incelemektedir. Eliot'ın erken dönem şiirleri "Prufrock" ve *Çorak Ülke*, kaygı ve yalnızlıkla yüklü, kopuk ve umutsuz modern dünyayı sergileyerek, mit veya din gibi düzenleyici ilkelerin bütünsel bir deneyim sunmadaki başarısızlığını kanıtlar niteliktedir. Eliot, uyum yaratmak ve bu kaygıları ele almak için edebi, mitolojik ve dini alıntılar kullanır; ancak stratejileri genellikle şiirlerin betimlediği parçalanmış dünya tasvirini aşmada yetersiz kalır. Bununla birlikte "Burnt Norton" ile örneklendirilen sonraki dönem şiiri,

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dinginliğe doğru bir geçiş sergiler. 1927'de Anglikanizm'e geçişinin ardından, Eliot şiirsel evrenini dönüştürür ve aşkın bir alemin varlığını içten bir şekilde vurgular. Eliot "Burnt Norton"da yaşamın içsel kaosunu kabul eder ancak zamansal akışı benimseyerek ve evrendeki karmaşanın altında yatan temel düzeni ortaya koyarak uyuma giden bir yol sunar. Bu makale, Eliot'ın erken dönem eserlerindeki umutsuzluk ve parçalanmanın sonraki dönem şiirlerinde, yerini şairin gelişen felsefi ve ruhsal yönelimini yansıtan ve en nihayetinde daha uyumlu ve iyimser bir gerçekliğe bırakan değişimini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: T.S. Eliot, Modernizm, "J. Alfred Prufrock'ın Aşk Şarkısı," Çorak Ülke, "Burnt Norton"

INTRODUCTION

As a central figure in modernist poetry, T.S. Eliot addressed the dissolution and uncertainty of the early twentieth century, which was mainly shaped by the trauma of World War I. The catastrophe of the war triggered widespread disillusionment and a loss of meaning as human beings witnessed unprecedented suffering. In other words, the war's impact shattered the optimism and Victorian certainties such as the belief in moral progress, rationalism, and imperial stability that had defined the preceding era. This disillusionment deepened because of mass mechanized slaughter of trench warfare and the introduction of chemical weapons, leading people to question the reliability of traditional sources of meaning such as religion, science, and political ideologies. Religion was unable to account for or prevent such horrors, so it lost its moral authority. Science, once celebrated for advancing human progress, now facilitated the machinery of mass destruction. Governments and political ideologies, having led their nations into catastrophe, were widely discredited and thus created a distrust in the established order. Therefore, in the face of this existential crisis, many began to question the very foundations upon which Western civilization had been built, seeking new frameworks for understanding a world irrevocably altered by violence and despair.

In this atmosphere, like many modernist artists¹, Eliot turned to art to reconstruct coherence in this disjointed world through religious, literary, and mythological allusions. Eliot's poetic project manifests a sustained and evolving attempt to articulate a coherent vision amidst the perceived chaos. However, a comparison of Eliot's earlier and later poetry demonstrates a distinct contrast in his struggle to settle this extensive unrest. Building upon this introduction, this paper argues that Eliot's earlier poems, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, depict a fragmented reality and reveal the limitations of using allusions as a unifying strategy, whereas his later poem "Burnt Norton" from *Four Quartets* presents a more spiritually integrated vision. In this later work, which was written after Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, he transcends the distress of fractured identities and dissolving psychic landscapes by embracing the temporal flux and finding a still moment in an underlying spiritual structure. In essence, these three works trace Eliot's transformed response to modernity, from existential despair to a more contemplative and transcendent understanding of unity.

This paper will first focus on the shattered worlds of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* to highlight Eliot's initial poetic strategies and their limitations in achieving coherence. It will then analyze "Burnt Norton" for its acceptance of life's complexities, supported by a hopeful belief in an immanent order. Ultimately, this paper aims to demonstrate Eliot's evolving treatment of chaos and harmony in his poetry by comparing his earlier and later works through a transformative journey from portraying fragmentation to embracing a perspective where the acceptance of flux becomes a key to the discovery of underlying harmony.

¹ For further discussion on Modernism, see: Bradbury and McFarlane (Eds., 1976), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*; Levenson (1984), *A Genealogy of Modernism*; Lewis (2007), *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism*; and Nicholls (2009, 2nd ed.), *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*.

1. Chaos and fragmentation in Eliot's early poetry: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*

Eliot's early poetry powerfully conveys the modernist anxiety, particularly in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"² and *The Waste Land*, both of which show an atmosphere saturated with chaos and fragmentation. These works collectively articulate the disillusionment and unease of the modernist period by reflecting a world where traditional, cultural, religious, and philosophical structures collapsed due to several key factors. The trauma of World War I shattered the belief in progress and a stable moral order. Furthermore, the rapid growth of industrialization and urbanization led to a sense of social and spiritual alienation. The new scientific theories like Einstein's relativity and Freud's psychoanalysis challenged long-held certainties about a predictable universe and a unified, rational self. In "Prufrock," for instance, Eliot presents the dilemma of a middle-aged intellectual who feels inadequate in society. Even engaging in small talk at a party incapacitates Prufrock because of self-doubt. Feeling deeply alienated from society, he tries to reconcile his idealized self with the anxieties and insecurities that dominate his inner world and social behavior. His crisis, therefore, directly challenges the Cartesian notion of rational identity, "I think; therefore, I am," as he is hesitant and insecure rather than confident in society. Moreover, the structure of the poem, woven by stream-of-consciousness and fragmented imagery, exhibits Prufrock's split psyche. Ultimately, Eliot's depiction of Prufrock embodies the modern individual's struggle to find meaning in a secularized society by further emphasizing the central theme of alienation. This sense of fragmentation deepens in *The Waste Land*, which shows the downfall of cultural and spiritual coherence on a broader, civilizational scale. The poem integrates multiple voices and shifts in time and place, disrupting the sense of unity. This structural lack of coherence directly signals Eliot's perception of the cultural and spiritual disintegration of the post-World War I era. Thus, the pervasive sense of chaos in *The Waste Land* is not only a stylistic preference but also a reflection of Eliot's diagnosis of the early twentieth century's fractured reality; the poem's very form embodies the multiplicity and breakdown of meaning characteristic of the time. It is composed of five parts titled I. The Burial of the Dead, II. A Game of Chess, III. The Fire Sermon, IV. Death by Water, and V. What the Thunder Said, each of which contributes to the poem's overall turmoil and sense of despair. Even titles with religious connotations, such as "The Burial of the Dead" and "Fire Sermon," fail to offer a sense of peace and unity.

In order to stabilize the fragmentation in these early poems, Eliot attempts to impose order through the strategic use of allusions. His deployment of religious allusions in "Prufrock," however, paradoxically stresses Prufrock's inadequacy. The allusion to John the Baptist, for example, highlights Prufrock's longing for decisiveness and heroism. Prufrock admires figures like John the Baptist, who boldly confront injustice and assert their beliefs. John the Baptist was beheaded on Herod's orders because he had announced that Herod's marriage to Herodias, Salomé's mother, was unlawful since she was Herod's brother's wife (Jain, 1991, p. 49). Prufrock stands as a mock-heroic figure when compared to John the Baptist, as he does not "have the strength to force the moment to its crisis" (Jain, 1991, p.38). In contrast, John the Baptist was courageous enough to declare his own beliefs by daring death. While John the Baptist was decapitated literally, Prufrock is decapitated from the zone of social interaction. Claiming that "[he] [is] no prophet" (Eliot, 1944, p.14), he regresses and delays social interaction once again. While he idealizes being courageous, assertive, and socially engaged like John the Baptist, his actual self is timid, indecisive, and isolated.

"Prufrock" invokes another religious figure, Lazarus from the Bible, in an attempt to overcome his linguistic incompetence and self-doubt. Since Lazarus has returned from death, he has the true knowledge of it. Prufrock feels if he can formulate the overwhelming question, his experience might parallel Lazarus's insight. However, displaying his characteristic retreat, Prufrock regresses, imagining that even if he communicated his ideas, these women would fail to grasp them, and he

² Hereafter "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" will be abbreviated as "Prufrock."

would lament, "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it at all" (Eliot, 1944, p. 14). Consequently, he is linguistically ineffective, and in G. Douglas Atkins's words (2007), "Nothing in his world approaches communion" (p. 141). Words are unable to convey any meaning in his meaningless world.

Eliot's employment of allusions continues to expose spiritual and cultural decay in *The Waste Land*, where they reveal a similar, yet expanded, sense of inadequacy and a "death-in-life" existence. Although the title of the first part, "The Burial of the Dead," drawn from the Book of Common Prayer, describes how the burial service should be conducted (Rainey, 2005, p. 76), it does not portray a sacred burial service; instead, the spiritual connotations are immediately subverted by the epigraph. It references the Sybil of Cumae— a Greek prophetess granted immortality but not youth; thus, she wishes to die as she is decaying— and introduces a death-in-life existence. This terrifying portrayal at the poem's outset immediately challenges optimistic literary traditions. For instance, it stands in contrast with Chaucer's prologue in *The Canterbury Tales*, which traditionally associates April with the sense of rejuvenation. In Eliot's vision, "April is the cruelest month" (Eliot, 1944, p. 61) since dull roots cannot generate something lively. Accordingly, he subverts the conventional wisdom about the connotations of the spring. He draws attention to the terrifying conditions of urban life and ends the poem with death-in-life figures, drawing a parallel between the epigraph, the title, and the conclusion of the first part. Referring to London, the poetic persona remarks:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many. (Eliot, 1944, p. 63)

These lines portray individuals who are drained of all vitality, resembling walking corpses. Their inability to connect is further emphasized: "Sighs short and infrequent, were exhaled, / And each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (Eliot, 1944, p. 63). People avoid looking at each other's eyes; everybody is self-centred, and there is no attempt at communication.

Yet, much like Prufrock, the poetic persona yearns for human connection. He gets excited when he sees someone he knows among the crowd: "There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying 'Stetson!'" (Eliot, 1944, p. 63). Stetson does not answer, but the poetic persona, seeking intersubjectivity, starts asking his questions:

"'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?" (Eliot, 1944, p. 63)

These lines remind the reader of the ancient rituals when the most precious person is sacrificed and buried with the expectation of regeneration. Conversely, the dead body, which was once considered spiritual, is now referred to as a "corpse." The utterance is devoid of all religious implications. The traditional expectations from the dead body, such as to enrich the soil and add to the fertility and vitality, totally collapse here. Thus "The Burial of the Dead" concludes with the barrenness of "Unreal City," which does not promise any hope for renewal.

In addition to the religious references, Eliot's literary allusions consistently undermine any chance of a unified self or universe. In "Prufrock," these allusions particularly emphasize his split identity and inferiority complex. The opening epigraph from Dante's "Inferno" introduces the damned Count Guido da Montefeltro, thus establishing a nightmarish reality of inescapable individual hells. As Sanford Schwartz (1985) notes, Guido is a deceitful counsellor locked in Hell, and he mistakenly reveals his identity to Dante, believing Dante to be another damned soul. The incident highlights the irony of a deceiver becoming the victim of self-deception. Guido's intended private confession becomes public, which foreshadows the themes of social and individual identities

explored in “Prufrock” (p. 196). Preparing a mask to meet the faces fails in Guido’s experience, anticipating Prufrock’s ultimate failure to compose his social mask and deepening the poem’s portrayal of hopeless, fragmented identity.

Further intensifying the sense of fragmentation and failed identity, Eliot incorporates allusions to *Hamlet*. Prufrock reflects his internal disunity by comparing himself to Polonius, “an attendant lord,” rather than Prince Hamlet, a sign of his self-contempt. This low self-opinion is reflected in his obsession with his appearance: “I grow old ... I grow old ... / I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled” (Eliot, 1944, p. 15). His thoughts transition from struggling with existential concerns to dwelling on trivial anxieties about his physical condition, showcasing a mind incapable of sustained focus and vulnerable in both realms. At the end of the poem, he captures the image of mermaids, representing the erotic, but they are unattainable to him. As Williamson (1967) states, the imagery of the sea symbolizes his suppressed self (p. 65); the sea loses its traditional function to offer serenity. Instead, in Prufrock’s words, “Till human voices wake us, and we drown” (Eliot, 1944, p. 15), presenting a nightmarish setting that fully immerses him. This captures Prufrock’s initial central conflict: his idealized-self battles with his anxieties and insecurities that control his inner world and social behavior. As Oroskhan and Jahantigh (2022) argue, “[Prufrock] is entangled in an endless conflict between his inner self and the society, for he is unable to settle his inner conflict and is left by himself driven into a meaningless world” (p. 43). His procrastination and inability to “force the moment to its crisis” (Eliot, 1944, p. 14) demonstrate a lack of a unified will, with his shifting thoughts, from existential concerns to his physical appearance, further illustrating this fragmentation.

Building upon the exploration of fragmented identity and the unsettling presence of mythological undertones in “Prufrock,” Eliot extends his critique of a spiritually and emotionally barren modern landscape in *The Waste Land*, as exemplified in the second part, “A Game of Chess.” This part of the poem depicts relationships that are devoid of love and characterized by violence and cruelty. Here, Eliot draws on the myth of Philomela, who was first raped and then silenced by Tereus. In the classical narrative, Philomela turns into a nightingale, and this brutality transforms into a piece of art through her songs, but in *The Waste Land*, her pain remains unexpressed. With this allusion to Philomela, Eliot undoes the concept of romantic love, replacing it with a brutalized version. As Harold Bloom (2007) states, “[t]he illness of passion is shown in the violence of desire and its barrenness in the way it leads to the devouring of progeny” (p. 38). Consequently, Eliot’s tendency to create unity in the poem by employing mythic stories collapses in the case of the story of Philomela, as it highlights the failure of modern society to transform suffering into meaningful art. The “dirty ears” of contemporary humans are deaf to the music of Philomela’s voice, and the act of rape and silencing is not sublimated into artwork. Thus, myths amplify the fragmented nature of the poem, illustrating the unattainability of harmony in a spiritually barren world.

The conclusion of “A Game of Chess” shifts to another relationship, one equally brutal and devoid of affection as the mythological tales preceding it. Here, the women in a pub are gossiping about Lil, whose husband, Albert, has been in the army for four years. The central concern is Lil’s appearance, as a woman warns her,

Now Albert’s coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He’ll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. (Eliot, 1944, p.66)

This exchange implies that Lil’s duty is to make herself sexually presentable for Albert’s arrival. Lil is only thirty-one years old, but she has had five children and an abortion, which left deformities in her body. Despite her poor health, she is expected to be sexually available to her husband. The woman talking about Lil is the voice of society, and this voice is quite unsympathetic towards Lil. She warns Lil, “If you don’t give it him, there’s others will” (Eliot, 1944, p. 66), but Lil does not mind if her husband sleeps with someone else. As Scofield (1988) puts it:

This scene . . . completes the picture, in Part II as a whole, of loveless relationships and sterile sexuality, with one or two touches that link it with the other sections (the aristocratic lady had her 'strange synthetic perfumes'; Albert gave Lil some money to get herself some teeth) . . . [T]here is little sympathy or insight in the passage. (p. 115)

Thus, both the mythic tragedy of Philomela and the mundane reality of Lil's experience serve to undo any notion of romantic love, presenting instead relationships marked by violence, sterility, and disaffection. Sampson (2022) elaborates on this, arguing that the poem's depiction of relationships creates a sense that "psychic integration is absent from the world of the poem" (p. 158). This effect reinforces the argument that the breakdown of relationships, including the "marriage contract as much as . . . the social contract," is a central theme, contributing to the poem's fragmented reality (Sampson, 2022, p. 159).

The ending lines of the poem are again allusive, this time to Hamlet's Ophelia. While leaving the pub, the women say farewell to each other:

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.

Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night. (Eliot, 1944, p. 67)

These are Ophelia's last words in *Hamlet*, Act 4, Scene 5. Driven mad by her father's death and disappointment in love with Hamlet, Ophelia drowns herself. Scofield (1988) believes that there is a deeper note than drawing a strong "contrast between the tough pub ladies and the tragic innocence of Ophelia" (p. 116). He thinks Ophelia's mad songs also "reflect a sexual passion thwarted and turned tragically awry" (p. 116). Her suffering is intense because of her youth and innocence. The pub women seem to be accustomed to suffering and able to survive in toughness, but they are also unhappy because of lovelessness and callousness. These women, as Scofield (1988) highlights, have different "social circumstances, sensitivity, moral awareness," but their depression is the same, and "the women gain a momentary dignity from the association" (p. 116). The second part ends with a scene from the "unreal City" where people are in despair, not being able to share genuine love. Allusions, rather than offering a bridge to a peaceful past, present a continuum of suffering across time and space.

Having established the spiritual and emotional sterility within human relationships through the brutalized love stories of "A Game of Chess," Eliot develops his critique in the next part, "The Fire Sermon." Here, the ironic use of religious allusions continues to highlight modern society's spiritual ills. While the Buddhist fire sermon advises detachment from "the fires of passion, hatred and infatuation" (Jain, 1991, p. 169) to achieve liberation, this part of the poem presents an extension of urban depression. Despite the initial natural images that traditionally connote vitality, such as leaves, the wind, and the river, the "Sweet Thames" evokes a sense of barrenness. This passivity is strengthened in the poetic persona's identification with the Fisher King of Arthurian legend, who is wounded and whose kingdom has become a wasteland, mirroring the spiritual and emotional wasteland of the modern man. The speaker's identification with the Fisher King highlights his personal impotence as well as the general spiritual unease that dominates the modern landscape. Thus, the expected serenity of the fire sermon is subverted.

The poem's revisiting of the Philomela myth accentuates a prevalent spiritual barrenness. Eliot juxtaposes Philomela's rape and silencing with the depiction of a mechanical and affectionless encounter between a typist and her lover. After her lover leaves, the woman makes a dismissive remark, "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over" (Eliot, 1944, p. 67). The poem immediately alludes to Oliver Goldsmith's poem, "When Lovely Woman Stoops to Folly":

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,

And puts a record on the gramophone. (Goldsmith, 2003, p. 13)

While Sampson (2022) claims that “Goldsmith’s original gives us art—and, crucially, redemption,” (p. 160) I argue that Goldsmith’s poem does not offer redemption but has a lamenting tone. Thus, I believe this is one of the allusions reinforcing poem’s melancholy.

Another reference, aligning with the melancholic mood of *The Waste Land*, is to the song of Thames-daughters, an echo of the Rhine-daughters in Wagner’s opera where the river’s beauty is lost with the stolen gold:

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide. (Eliot, 1944, p. 71)

This song functions as an elegy for the modern condition, transforming the world into a nightmare through industrial development and displaying the ugliness of the city. Instead of mythical or literary works that carry hope, creativity, and productiveness in their nature, Eliot this time refers to a piece of artwork with a dull image. He compares the present situation of the river with its past situation and laments the loss of spirituality. Immediately following this song, Eliot introduces another potential violation: “Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me” (Eliot, 1944, p. 72), exposing the reader to a world of seduction and cruelty. The speaker was born in Highbury and has had devastating experiences in more affluent areas, Richmond, and Kew. As Scofield (1988) notes this section culminates in the “fires of suffering and a broken prayer of supplication” (p. 119):

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning (Eliot, 1944, p. 72).

The fragmented syntax and semantics emphasize the speaker’s unresolved anguish, leaving this part, like those before it, devoid of a unifying resolution.

Being a more expansive poem than *Prufrock*, *The Waste Land* presents a broader depiction of entrapment within a solipsistic world. In this sense, the final part, “What the Thunder Said,” is particularly significant as it juxtaposes different types of allusions that once again fail to offer order. In this part, the religious allusion to Christ’s crucifixion and his subsequent agony lacks Christ’s resurrection, removing hope of being saved. This part continues to lament the things that are lost in the modern world. There is no water but only a landscape of rocks and sand, where even thunder is “sterile . . . without rain” (Eliot, 1944, p. 74), displaying the indifference of mother nature to human suffering. The poem proceeds through the ugly images of the city whose symbolic disintegration is symbolized with “falling towers” (Eliot, 1944, p. 75).

Within this nightmarish and dissolving world, a brief rain brings a shift to the Ganges, a river significant for its early vegetation myths and Hindu religious thought. (Williamson, 1967, p. 150). Eliot’s turn to Hindu teachings, specifically the Upanishadic interpretation of the thunder’s “DA,” represents a desperate attempt to find meaning. However, these teachings find no receptive audience in the poem:

My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment’s surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed. (Eliot, 1944: 76)

In fact, the “surrender” is not clearly specified, but the context of the following injunctions and the whole poem implies that it refers to a personal relationship. Thus, the spirituality of the command collapses (Scofield, 1988, p. 124). The second command, “dayadhvam” (sympathize), also collapses in the face of modern isolation. Each person is imprisoned within their consciousness, which prevents them from understanding the others (Williamson, 1967, p. 151). Eliot underlines this with a reference to Coriolanus, a figure “who acted out of pride rather than duty, exemplif[ying] a man locked in the prison of himself” (Greenblatt et al., 2006, p. 2308), reminding us that only true sympathy can unlock this self-imposed confinement.

Finally, the third command, “Damyata” (“Control yourselves”), similarly fails to achieve its intended effect. Instead of self-mastery, the poem suggests an aspiration to experience the overwhelming beauty of passion as a misguided relief from anguish. As Williamson (1967) notes, while the “response of the heart counters the surrender to blood and is presented in imagery appropriate to the Sailor” (p. 151), the ultimate outcome is a pursuit of sensation rather than genuine control. Thus, each of the thunder’s commands is broken or twisted in the poem’s barren landscape. Sampson (2022) reinforces this point, noting that while the Hindu source of “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata” aims towards “a good society,” the poem risks reducing these terms to “mere aural effect,” without a full, integrated meaning within the Western context of the poem (p. 160).

Not being able to overcome the chaotic situation through Hindu teachings, the poetic persona identifies with the Fisher King and tries to find a solution to modern man’s tragic status. However, he realizes that he cannot change the workings of life. The poetic persona reduces the problem to a personal one. “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” (Eliot, 1944, p. 77). The last stanza shows that he will not be able to organize his chaotic world. This is implied with the fall of London Bridge, which shows that the center is collapsing. With allusions to different languages, Eliot proves the difficulty of achieving full meaning. The poem ends, “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih” (Eliot, 1944, p. 77). This ending does not imply hope but instead becomes the condensed form of the broken images in the poem. As Christina Hauck (2009) puts it, “the end of *The Waste Land* comprises a painful disintegration, a fragmented series of voices speaking from archaic European poems and plays, all divorced from their original narrative context, all performing some kind of suffering, even insanity” (pp. 46-47).

To conclude, both “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land* offer chaotic psyches and landscapes in which there is a struggle with disillusionment, alienation, and the collapse of meaning. These poems embody the spiritual and psychological turmoil of the early twentieth century through their fragmented speakers and religious, literary, and mythological allusions, which foster the sense of chaos. Rather than offering resolution or unity, Eliot exposes the failure of traditional cultural narratives and religious frameworks to provide coherence in a disoriented world. Prufrock’s introspective paralysis and *The Waste Land*’s nightmarish human experiences reveal the disconnection between individual identity and the external world. Eventually, Eliot’s use of allusion cannot heal the fragmentation of modern life; instead, it points out the impossibility of restoring lost order, leaving the reader suspended in a landscape of enduring uncertainty and existential despair. These earlier poems set the stage for the later shift observed in “Burnt Norton,” where Eliot overcomes the chaotic world by displaying a harmonious one.

2. Towards harmony in Eliot’s later poetry: “Burnt Norton”

“Burnt Norton,” the first of the *Four Quartets*, draws a contrasting picture when compared to “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*. Unlike their fragmented structures and depictions of existential despair, “Burnt Norton” has a harmonious structure that resolves into a unified universe, interwoven with organizing symbols. Although the flux of the material world in a Neoplatonic sense is reflected in the poem, it is incorporated into a central peace and order, reaching an eternal reality, the One, which is a transcendental realm in Neoplatonism.

In his earlier poetry, Eliot sought unity in literary and biblical sources, but these myths, heroes, and prophets proved insufficient to overcome the disjointed realities he portrayed. Eliot, both in his literary works and private life, was experiencing a crisis of representation. In his private life, he could not improve his relationship with his wife Vivienne, and their fights were psychologically damaging for both of them. In his literary works, the characters were having difficulty with communicating their thoughts as in “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*. Eliot was able to overcome this crisis after his conversion to Anglican faith, which, alongside his renunciation of American citizenship for British in 1927, accompanied a change in Eliot’s poetic universe. His friends were perplexed by this shift and believed that his conversion was guided by his mind instead of passionate belief. As Sanna (2003) notes, “Eliot had reached the end of his philosophical rope and so turned reluctantly but determinately to the last available source of authority and meaning” (p. 30). This new faith somehow provided him with the necessary tools to reach stability. From that point onward, Eliot’s conversion would shape everything he wrote: poetry, drama, and criticism. “Burnt Norton” was written in this phase of his life and unlike the earlier poems, it suggests the existence of a principle that elevates disintegrated human experience into a transcendent realm.

In contrast to the ruptured beginnings of “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*, “Burnt Norton” starts with a meditation on the cyclicity of time:

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. (Eliot, 1944, p. 185)

The final lines of this excerpt directly align with Morris Weitz’s interpretation that “all temporal experiences are in the present, at every moment, and we cannot redeem the temporal because it is never away from us to be redeemed” (as cited in Olsen, 1978, p. 122). He also thinks that redemption is impossible if one only focuses on the flux. Moreover, even the territory of pure possibilities of things that might have happened is not different from the temporal: “past, present, future and possibility point to one end, which is always with us; that is, which end, as the Eternal of Timeless, immanent in the flux, is the ultimate source of explanation of it” (as cited in Olsen, 1978, p. 122). Thus, for Weitz, the unredeemable nature of time stems not from its fleeting quality but from its inherent connection to an unchanging, ever-present reality that defines and encompasses all temporal experience. This philosophical framework reinforces the poem’s search for an enduring order within constant change.

The sense of unity in time is further strengthened by the poem’s setting. Unlike the desolate urban scenes of “Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*, “Burnt Norton” opens with the evocative image of a rose garden. This garden carries rich religious connotations, as Lawrence et al. (1985) suggest, by describing its “location” as “Through the first gate, / Into our first world,” Eliot evokes the biblical Eden, representing “paradise lost” and a primal state of innocence (p. 326). More than a historical or mythical place, this garden exists as a universal vision of possibility within human imagination, offering a powerful counterpoint to the spiritual barrenness of earlier works. (Lawrence et al., 1985, p. 326). However, as hinted earlier, “Burnt Norton” does not exclusively inhabit a transcendental world. The poem acknowledges the “ugly nature of the world of matter,” introducing primitive imagery that reflects earthly realities:

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. (Eliot, 1944, p. 186)

Remarkably, these lines present earthly reality by grounding "garlic and sapphires in the mud," which stands in contrast to the image of the Edenic garden. The mud signifies the unpleasant aspects of the material world. However, these lines do not disrupt the poem's emerging harmony; instead, they illustrate how seemingly disparate elements are integrated into a larger, coherent pattern. The juxtaposition of garlic (a mundane vegetable) with sapphire (a precious gem) suggests that it is possible to find beauty and harmony even within the mundane and corruptible. As Williamson (1967) explains,

from the buried axle-tree to the wheel of the stars many opposites are reconciled by the pattern, the dance of the turning world. These opposites, presented in correspondences of the microcosm and macrocosm, are reconciled in both realms by the center of the wheel. (p. 213)

Ultimately, this intricate weaving of the transient with the eternal reveals Eliot's sophisticated exploration of unity and meaning within the complexities of existence.

This unifying center is the "still point of the turning world," which refers to the One, the Eternal in a Neoplatonic sense. Williamson (1967) further elaborates that this "still point" is defined through negations of all that belongs to the "turning world." Yet paradoxically, "if it were not for this point, 'There would be no dance, and there is only the dance'" (p. 213). This elusive still point cannot be physically located or concretely described: "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" (Eliot, 1944, p. 187). Instead, it represents glimpses of an integrated universe that remains ultimately indefinable by temporal or spatial terms.

"Burnt Norton" continues to explore paradoxes, which simultaneously reveal life's ecstasy and horror. However, unlike earlier poems, paradoxes are here absorbed into the "enchainment of past and future / Woven in the weakness of the changing body" (Eliot, 1944, p. 187), thus highlighting the poem's consistent cyclical nature. Even the formerly bleak city images are now sublimated. For instance, the London subway, a symbol of urban alienation in earlier works, now evokes the Heraclitus epigraph: "The way up and down are the same" (Eliot, 1944, p. 183). The poetic persona echoes this insight: "This is the one way, and the other / Is the same, not in movement" (Eliot, 1944, p. 189). This suggests a path towards the eternal although it remains a challenge to fully grasp within temporal constraints.

The poem continually brings the reader to the threshold of the eternal yet simultaneously reminds them of time's illusory nature. As Cooper (2006) observes, "The enchanting moments of vision, of 'sunflower' and 'kingfisher's wing' cannot hide from us that 'Time and the bell' will bury the day" (p. 99). Despite this, the "kingfisher's wing" continues to point towards a greater Reality beyond the temporal world. Williamson (1967) notes that while "the paradox of the unmoving and the moving still governs 'the turning world,'" this does not negate the possibility of capturing Eternity (p. 215). Therefore, Eliot's "still point" emerges not as a static escape from time but as a dynamic principle that allows for an apprehension of the timeless within the temporal flux, offering a complex vision of spiritual coherence.

In the last part of "Burnt Norton," the tension between empirical reality and eternal reality is finally resolved. This reconciliation distinguishes Eliot's later poetry from his earlier works, where true harmony proved elusive. Towards the poem's conclusion, Eliot explicitly moves into a trans-linguistic area, going beyond words to forge an image of harmony, eternity, and unity. This resolution is achieved through art, echoing the transcendence found in works like Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Eliot articulates how art transcends temporal limitations:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the Silence.” (Eliot, 1944, p. 187).

While words are bound by temporal and spatial rules, when “placed in patterns, and then repeated in patterns, they may become secondary to the design they order,” leaving the reader with “only the purity of the design” (Antrim, 1971, p. 73). This is beautifully captured in the image of the Chinese jar:

Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness (Eliot, 1944, p. 187).

This “stillness” transcends both sound and movement, indicating that words, despite their burden of meaning, can achieve harmony through form.

This journey towards unity is also facilitated by the concept of love. Eliot introduces another symbolic relationship, “As in the figure of ten stairs,” referencing St. John of the Cross’s ladder of ascent to union with God (Williamson, 1967, p. 216). This spiritual ascent leads to a crucial distinction between desire and love, reflecting the poem’s central dichotomy of the moving and the unmoving. The poem explicitly defines this contrast:

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. (Eliot, 1944, p. 190)

While desire is inherently tied to the empirical world and its constant flux, love belongs to an unchanging, eternal reality. As Scofield (1988) elaborates, love, in its “timeless and undesiring” state, paradoxically triggers desire within the world of matter, moving from “un-being and being” towards realization (p. 212). This intricate relationship demonstrates how the “still point” of love becomes the ultimate resolution for the world’s flux.

Unlike Eliot’s earlier poetry, “Burnt Norton” embraces a cyclical nature, culminating in a powerful resolution. The poem’s final lines echo its beginning, returning to the image of “the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves” (Eliot, 1944, p. 185). Initially, the meaning of these rose-leaves remained obscure. Then a resolution emerges: “‘Sudden in a shaft of sunlight’ comes the illumination of the moment in the rose-garden, and he knows why he disturbed ‘the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves’” (Williamson, 1967, p. 217). This “dust in the shaft,” representing both beauty and the unmoving (Scofield, 1988, p. 213), symbolizes eternity— a timeless presence within the temporal. The poem stresses that an overemphasis on past and future can obscure the realization of these transcendent moments:

Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage.” (Eliot, 1944, p. 191)

Eliot’s command to be “quick” and his insistence that the moment is “here, now, always” (Williamson, 1967, p. 217) highlight the culmination of his exploration of time. Williamson (1967) concludes that the poem ultimately collapses time into the present, allowing for the impression of eternity (p. 217). This recognition of “the timeless in time,” moving “from the movement to stillness,”

and overcoming "the limitations of time, its perpetual movement and change," ultimately enables the perception of things in the realm of eternity, where love transcends the limitations of desire (Williamson, 1967, p. 217). Thus, "Burnt Norton" successfully achieves what "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* could not: the flux of empirical reality dissolves into eternity, providing a stable "still point" that both initiates and resolves the movements within the chaotic, empirical world.

CONCLUSION

This study has traced the evolution in T.S. Eliot's poetic universe, demonstrating a significant shift from the chaos and fragmentation of his early works, "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, to the redemptive harmony and integrated vision of "Burnt Norton." Eliot's initial poetic endeavors, born from the disillusionment of the early twentieth century and his own personal crisis of communication, powerfully depicted a fractured modernity. In "Prufrock," the poetic persona's psyche is fragmented. He is overwhelmed by self-doubt and unable to connect with other people. *The Waste Land* extends this personal experience to a larger scale, portraying a barren world where it is not possible to create a sense of unity. Eliot tries to overcome the despair and dislocated reality of the early 20th century in these poems; however, his attempt to create this harmonious universe through traditional literary, mythological, and biblical allusions fails. *The Waste Land* eventually displays loveless relationships and relentless suffering as well as the collapse of intersubjective communication in a world devoid of meaningful order.

However, a fundamental transformation occurred in Eliot's life and art with his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927. This spiritual anchor provided the necessary tool to navigate the philosophical and personal impasses that had characterized his earlier period. In contrast to his earlier poetry, "Burnt Norton" proves the possibility of a harmonious world. Instead of ruptures, the poem begins with a contemplative embrace of time's cyclicity, emphasizing that "all time is eternally present." As the poem reconciles the mundane reality with the transcendental realm, it exemplifies Neoplatonic concepts of time and eternity, reinforcing the poem's search for a constant order.

"Burnt Norton" achieves a resolution by deliberately re-engaging with symbols and philosophical constructs. In "Burnt Norton," unlike the sterile urban landscapes of earlier works, there is an evocative rose garden, denoting Edenic innocence. In this garden, realities of the material world are put together with more refined images, as in the illustration of "Garlic and sapphires in the mud." The mundane reality of the eternal world is integral to a coherent "eternal pattern," reconciled by the unifying "still point of the turning world." This "still point" is a point of reference to the transcendental realm in the Neoplatonic sense, and it functions as the abstract yet ever-present source of all movement and timelessness.

Additionally, "Burnt Norton" addresses the crisis of representation, which was evident in Eliot's earlier poetry, and demonstrates the way art transcends temporal limitations. Art becomes a means to represent a unified world. The image of the Chinese jar displays how form and pattern create meaning beyond words. The jar is perpetually moving in its stillness, juxtaposing the opposites in unity once again. Elevating the concept of love, which does not merely stem from temporal desire, is central to this journey. Eliot uses the symbolic "figure of ten stairs" and defines love as an unmoving "still point," which resolves the world's flux and paradoxes.

In its skillful integration of the empirical with the eternal, "Burnt Norton" achieves what "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* fail. It shifts from instability of the empirical reality to eternity, providing a redemptive still point. The poem can be considered both Eliot's personal and poetic victory over fragmentation and a showcase of how order and harmony can be perceived even within the apparent chaotic existence.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, T.S. Eliot'ın şiirinde parçalanmışlık ve uyumun evrilen tasvirini erken dönem eserlerinden "J. Alfred Prufrock'ın Aşk Şarkısı" ve *Çorak Ülke* ile geç dönem şiirlerinden *Dört Kuartet* eserinden "Burnt Norton" şiirini karşılaştırarak kapsamlı bir biçimde incelemektedir. Çalışma, Eliot'ın erken dönem eserlerindeki umutsuzluk ve parçalanmayı Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın yol açtığı felaketlerin, bir önceki dönem olan Viktoryen dönemin iyimserliğini yok etmiş olmasına bağlar. Son dönemlerdeki şiirlerinde ise zamanın akışkanlığı ve günlük hayatın sıradanlığına rağmen her şeyin altında yatan temel bir düzen olduğu bir evren sunar. Bu bütünlük hissinin Eliot'ın 1927'de Anglikanizm'e geçişinin ardından olması aradığı düzenleyici unsuru inançta bulduğunu da gösterir.

Eliot'ın erken dönem şiirleri yirminci yüzyıl başlarındaki hayal kırıklığı ve Eliot'ın kendi kişisel temsil kriziyle şekillenerek parçalanmış bir moderniteyi güçlü bir şekilde betimler. "J. Alfred Prufrock'ın Şarkısı," okuyucuyu orta yaşlı bir entelektüelin içsel yıkımına sürükler; bu özne, öz-şüpheyle ve insanlarla ilişki kuramama haliyle inşa edilmiştir. Şiirin bilinç akışı anlatımı ve parçalı imgeleri, Prufrock'ın bölünmüş ruhunu ve sekülerleşmiş bir dünyada anlam bulma mücadelesini canlı bir şekilde yansıtır. Vaftizci Yahya ve Lazarus gibi dini göndermeler, Prufrock'ın yetersizliğini paradoksal bir şekilde vurgulayarak, kararlı ve güçlü İncil figürlerinin aksine onun çekingen kararsızlığını öne çıkarır. Benzer şekilde, Dante'nin Guido da Montefeltro'suna ve Shakespeare'in *Hamlet*'ine yapılan edebi göndermeler, onun parçalanmış kimliğini ve öz-nefretini pekiştirirken; geleneksel olarak dinginliğin sembolü olarak kabul edilen deniz imgeleri, Prufrock'ın bastırılmış benliğinin ve kaçınılmaz boğuluşunun kabusvari bir sembolü haline gelir.

Bu yaygın parçalanmışlık hissi, Eliot'ın eleştirisini daha geniş bir ölçeğe yayan *Çorak Ülke*'de derinleşir. Şiirin çoklu sesler, zamansal kaymalar ve farklı mekânlarla şekillenmiş yapısal tutarsızlığı, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası dönemin ruhsal ve kültürel çözülmesini somutlaştırır. "Ölümlerin Gömülüğü" ve "Ateş Töreni" gibi dini çağrışımlı başlıklar okuyucuyu teskin eden bir atmosfer sağlamak yerine "ölüm-içinde-yaşam" varoluşuyla sergilenir. Yapılan göndermeler bütünlüklü bir deneyim sunmaktan ziyade sürekli olarak çürümeyi ifşa eder; örneğin, Philomela efsanesi, modern toplumun acıyı anlamlı bir sanat eserine dönüştürmedeki başarısızlığını vurgular. "Bir Satranç Partisi" bölümünde Philomela'nın miti ve Lil'in sıradan gerçekliğiyle görülen ilişkiler, kısır ve gerçek sevgiden yoksun olarak tasvir edilir. "Gök Gürültüsünün Dedikleri" bölümündeki Hint öğretileri "Datta" (ver), "Dayadhvam" (sempati duy), "Damyata" (kendini kontrol et) bile alıcı bir kitle bulamaz; çünkü modern insan kendi bilincine hapsolarak, öz-denetim veya diğer insanlarla ilişki kurma yeteneğini yitirmiştir. Eliot'ın gönderme kullanımı bu erken dönem eserlerinde modern yaşamın parçalanmışlığını onaramaz; aksine, kaybedilen düzeni yeniden tesis etmenin imkansızlığına işaret ederek, okuyucuyu sürekli bir belirsizlik ve varoluşsal umutsuzlukta bırakır.

Ancak, Eliot'ın hayatında ve sanatında 1927'de Anglikanizm'e geçişiyse temel bir dönüşüm yaşanmıştır. Bu ruhsal dayanak, önceki dönemine damgasını vuran felsefi ve kişisel çıkmazların üstesinden gelmek için gerekli çerçeveyi sağlamıştır. *Dört Kuartet*'in ilk şiiri olan "Burnt Norton," uyum arayışını başlatan çarpıcı bir karşıtlık sunar. Şiir, kopuşla değil, zamanın döngüsellığı üzerine derin bir meditasyonla başlar ve geçmiş ve gelecek zamanın da şimdide var olduğu önermesini getirir. Bu, zamanın kurtarılamaz doğasının, tüm zamansal deneyimi tanımlayan değişmez, daima mevcut bir gerçekliğe içsel bağlantısından kaynaklandığını gösterir. Bu felsefi çerçeve, şiirin sürekli değişim içinde kalıcı bir düzen arayışını pekiştirir.

Şiirin bütünlük duygusu, mekânıyla daha da pekişir. Erken dönem eserlerinin ıssız şehir manzaralarının aksine, olumlu çağrışımlar uyandıran bir gül bahçesi imgesi çizen "Burnt Norton," cennetvari bir masumiyetle evrensel olasılıklara işaret eder. En önemlisi, "Burnt Norton" yalnızca aşkın bir dünyada var olmaz; maddenin sıradan doğasını evrensel olanla bütünleştirerek, görünüşte farklı unsurların "dönen dünyanın sabit noktası" ile uyumlu ebedi bir düzende nasıl uzlaştığını

gösterir. Neoplatonik düşünceye dayanan bu “sabit nokta,” hareketin ve zamansızlığın soyut ama dinamik ilkesi olup, zamansal veya uzamsal terimlerle nihayetinde tanımlanamayan bütünleşmiş bir evrenin anlık görünümünü temsil eder.

“Burnt Norton” ayrıca, sanatın zamansal sınırlamaları aşma kapasitesini göstererek, Eliot’ın önceki şiirlerinde yaygın olan temsil krizini de çözer. Sürekli hareket eden ancak dinginliğini koruyan Çin vazosu imgesi, form ve düzenin kelimelerin ötesinde anlamı nasıl damıtabileceğini, ses ve hareketi aşan derin bir “dinginliğe” erişimi nasıl sağlayabileceğini örnekler. Bu uyum yolculuğunun merkezinde, salt zamansal arzulardan farklı, yüceltilmiş aşk kavramı yer alır. Eliot aşkı geçici arzuların ötesinde, güven veren, dünyanın akışını ve paradokslarını çözen nihai “sabit nokta” olarak konumlandırır.

Günlük gerçekliğin ebedi olanla ustaca bütünleştirilmesiyle “Burnt Norton,” Eliot’ın erken dönem şiirlerinden “Prufrock” ve *Çorak Ülke*’nin başaramadığını başarır. “Hareketten dinginliğe” doğru ilerleyerek, şimdiki gerçekliğin hareketinin aşkın olanla uzlaşısını sağlar ve istikrarlı, kurtarıcı bir “sabit nokta” sunar. Bu vizyon, yalnızca Eliot’ın kişisel ve şiirsel parçalanma üzerindeki zaferini değil, aynı zamanda görünürdeki kaosun içinde bile düzen ve uyumun nasıl algılanabileceğine dair zamandan bağımsız bir anlatım sunar.

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