

The Mystical Journey from Past and Modern Literature with an Examination of W.B. Yeats's *the Second Coming* and T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*

Harith Ismael Turki¹, Mohammed Ismael Turki²

^{1,2}Karabuk University, Turkey

ABSTRACT: This study analyzes the concept of the spiritual trip as it transitions from traditional to contemporary literature, concentrating on W.B. Yeats's *The Second Coming* and T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Both poets address historical crises and spiritual disappointment by employing mysticism to comprehend personal and cultural evolution. Yeats, shaped by esoteric traditions and cyclical history, articulates a prophetic picture of society's disintegration and renewal. Eliot examines time, quiet, and spiritual salvation through Christian mysticism and intellectual contemplation. This analysis of two major works demonstrates how mystical language and structure facilitate transcendence, providing insight into humanity's quest for meaning amongst ambiguity.

KEYWORDS: Mysticism, Yeats, Eliot, *The Second Coming*, *Four Quartets*, spiritual journey, modernism, transcendence, time.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mysticism is a phrase used in religion to describe being at one with God or the Absolute. It indicates an inward unity with God and a condition of consciousness. It also represents the mental practices of thinking, reflecting, and praying that result in insight into the highest being, upon whom the duty of being silent regarding his divine knowledge was placed. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon defines mysticism as: "an attitude of mind founded upon an intuitive or experienced conviction of unity, of oneness, of a likeness in all things" (2017, p. 5). Furthermore, Rumi refers to one of his writings, *Masnavi*, as the unity shop because of how deeply ingrained the idea of unity is as follows: "Our *Masnavi* is the shop for Unity: anything that you see (there) except The One is (only) an idol" (Verse 1528).

The word mysticism is Greek in origin and derived from the Greek mysteries. It has been given to the one who gains knowledge of divinity when he must keep his mouth shut. Mysticism is an environment rather than a philosophical system; it is a question of temperament more than dogma (Spurgeon, 1913).

Moreover, a holy spark that yearns to be with the Eternal Source again is always inside. Mysticism makes the supposition that all people are reflections of God. As the soul begins its mystical journey to engage the Source Divine, it must first undergo self-purification to comprehend God. An intense love for Him serves as the guidance for this trip. "By Love and by Love alone can the soul of man win back to its Divine source and find its ultimate goal in reunion with the Truth," according to Elias J. W. Gibb (*A History of Ottoman Poetry* 20). Plato describes the purification process as having two dimensions. The moral aspect comes first, followed by the intellectual aspect. Pursuing moral purity entails exhibiting the traits that stand for humility and humanity. Among these virtues are prudence, courage, justice, and temperance. If an individual falls short of these ideals, the body continues to impact them. The goal of having these qualities is to teach the body to be calm rather than to divert the soul. A seeker can easily perceive the light of Truth once they reach this level. Thus, Plato shares Socrates' belief that virtue is the source of actual knowledge (Louth, 2007).

However, with the advent of Judaism 2000 BCE, the idea that only one creator exists spread to monotheistic religions. Every Abrahamic religion has a different title for this idea: "Tawhid" in Islam, "Shituf" in Judaism, and "Trinity" in Christianity. These faiths all acknowledge the uniqueness of the heavenly creator or deity. Christians hold that the concept of the Trinity refers to various ways in which the one real God has manifested Himself. To honor a single deity, Jews have evolved a unique style of prayer, and Muslims are required to begin their prayers with the phrase "There is no God except He." Most theories and faiths contain a mystical element dating back to ancient Greece and Rome. Moreover, they can be found in the Buddhist and Jewish teachings and the religious beliefs of China and India. Finally, the final two religions—Islam and Christianity—mark the end of this mystical sensibility. According to Smith (1995), mysticism is defined as a spiritual encounter in which one feels the presence of God most intensely.

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As for Mystics, the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines Mystics as "one who believes in the spiritual apprehension of truths beyond the understanding." Mystics generally aim to unite with the primary source of existence. However, each mystic follows a distinct path toward union. Moreover, all mystics hold that the only path to a thorough understanding of God is by the spirit or soul. They hold that the spirit is given the ability to know spiritual concerns as long as the intellect is given the ability to realize materialistic things. Whether a mystic is a painter, poet, philosopher, or something else, he aims to know God by acknowledging His reality with his heart and his spirituality. (James, 2002).

However, the mystical life of a mystic differs from that of a theologian, logician, rationalist, and man who studies science and scripture because it is based more on feeling and inner perception than on reason or proof, as Spurgeon asserts:

The essence of Mysticism is to believe that everything we see and know is symbolic of something greater. Mysticism is on one side of the poetry of life. Poetry also consists of finding resemblances and universalizing the particulars with which it deals. Hence, the utterances of poets on mystical philosophy are peculiarly valuable ... the indirect teaching of a poet touches us more profoundly than the direct lesson of a moral treatise, because the latter appeals principally to our reason. In contrast, the poet touches our "transcendental feeling". So, it is that mysticism underlies the thought of most of our great poets. (Spurgeon 1913: 12-13)

Moreover, Plotinus, considered the founder of European mysticism, developed the Neoplatonist school. According to Plotinus, the soul is lost because it is unaware of God's indwelling, even though it is supposed to be in heaven. To Plotinus, three stages are involved if the soul wishes to return home. According to Plotinus, the first step is for the soul to be cleansed of its animal cravings. It needs to be connected to spiritual things and separated from sensuous ones. The next phase, known as the illuminating life, is awareness of the realm of pure thoughts, primarily connected to all things divine. The final step is the unitive life, in which the material world has no place and the soul is solely connected to the Divine. Once the soul reaches this point, it is in the location it has always wanted to be and is no longer aware of the body's desires (Plotinus, 1994).

2. WILLIAM B. YEATS AND HIS POEM *THE SECOND COMING*

The greatest poet to come out of Ireland, William Butler Yeats, is regarded as the acknowledged originator of the Irish Renaissance and one of the most beloved and studied writers of the 20th century. The thematic studies have assumed a prominent role in Yeats's research, adopting a comprehensive approach that views Yeats's works as cohesive. Some of the themes from his early work are returned to, expanded upon, or addressed from an older and more experienced perspective in his later work. The following themes have drawn attention: love, history and prophecy, death, old age, mythology, costumes, enchanted objects symbolism, Ireland, and bringing people together. (Mohammed & Hassan, 2017).

Throughout his writing career, he tried to bring his worldview together and develop a basic, enlightening vision for his poetry, evoking the styles of Dante and Shelley. He looked for that vision in Blake's mysticism and occult doctrines, illustrating these disparate concepts simultaneously in his 1925 book *A Vision*. The British poet Edwin Muir described his poetry's genesis as "a magnificent temperament associated with a magnificent style" (Safier, 1996).

Mysticism and occultism greatly influence Yeats, who prefers to view the world through a mystical lens and takes Irish myths and stories seriously. The spiritual life is the center of all he does, thinks, and writes, he once stated in a letter from 1892 (Yeats, 1954: p. 303). He hopes to "regenerate the modern world by reopening ancient spiritual wellsprings and reviving primal religious sensibilities" (Kim, 2009: p. 105) with his intensely supernatural works. The poet also admits that many of his methods are metaphorical and necessitate an explanation of the symbols. Yeats' mysticism and occultism have been the subject of numerous critical works, which have viewed him as a member of either the Golden Dawn's Inner Order or the Esoteric branch of the Theosophical Society. They usually interpreted his poems in terms of hermetic beliefs or ceremonial magic. In his famous book *A Vision*, Yeats explores his visual sense of time through a series of symbolic pictures that are his occultism and mysticism.

Yeats seeks to establish the temporal symbolic framework to construct his meticulous and cryptic mysticism. He wrote his cosmology tale after finishing a draft of *A Vision*. He frequently makes references to this complex mystical framework in his poetry. Yeats's view of time operates inside a complex structure, which we must critically acknowledge. *A Vision* provides a structure for the occurrence and repetition of human types or historical events and demonstrates the fold relationship concerning Yeats's spiritual symbolism and the temporal issue. In Yeats's mystical iconography, the Gyres and the Great Wheel are two emblematic symbolic figures closely linked to the concept of time. (Mohammed & Hassan, 2017).

However, W.B. Yeats's 1919 poem "*The Second Coming*," published the following year, is frequently seen through a mystic lens, demonstrating the poet's intense interest in occult and spiritual subjects. Yeats explores fundamental metaphysical issues in this poem, an excellent example of his sophisticated use of symbolism and apocalyptic imagery. In addition to illuminating Yeats's mystical convictions, "*The Second Coming*" tackles universal issues of chaos and order, fear and hope, and regeneration and destruction. As such, it offers a profound mystic analysis of the universe and human cycles.

William Butler Yeats uses one of his main elements, the gyres, in his work *A Vision*, to create his unique brand of systematic mysticism and to illustrate his theory of fate and history. The gyre, Yeats contends, is a basic life principle and image of the cyclic,

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extant, and recurring movement of the ultimate reality that fluctuates in growth and decay, similar to phenomena related to the Upanishads (Izzo, 2009, p. 98). The gyres depict an individual's course in life from cradle to grave and civilization to civilization. These gyres are symbolically represented in *A Vision* as two intersecting conical shapes, one inside the other, similarly matriculated through all individuals, societies, and historical periods.

Moreover, according to Abdul-Razzaq, Yeats, the narrator of "*The Second Coming*," seems to be by himself when it comes to his evaluation of Christian salvation since he challenges the nature of the Messiah's coming to earth to atone for humanity's spiritual depravity. The poet feels a revelation is about to occur, but he also understands that this revelation is not of Christ. However, rather than the grand scheme from a "*Spiritus Mundi*" (94), Yeats attempts to critique the prevailing moralities in society in "*The Second Coming*". Although Christians anticipate *the Second Coming*, the poet in this passage uses metaphor and symbolism to allude to the event. Yeats uses the enormous and merciless picture to appear in place of Jesus Christ, the world's Savior. Thus, the sinful society is being punished by the Second Coming. (Razzaq, Abdul, 94–95)

In the first stanza, Yeats mentions the falcon and falconer to refer to the relationship between God and people. He wants to criticize people who have lost their faith.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre, The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Usually, a falcon circles and returns to its handler when called. However, the falcon does not hear the falconer's call in the poem and continues circling outwards to be lost. Perhaps this was inspired by a scene in Dante, in which Dante and Virgil arrive at the proper circle of Hell on the back of Geryon. (Yang, 2015).

Furthermore, Yeats believed that "*The Second Coming*" would depict the moment when these gyres can be verified. A gyre or vortex symbolizes the two cycles, which also weave together, with one cycle scrolling up and the other down. Their vitality and power can conflict, but occasionally they are in balance. Yeats employs this method in "*The Second Coming*" to explain how society broke down at the start of the 20th century. While Yeats declined to disclose the exact name of the rough beast here, he did argue at the end of his life that the poem predicted the emergence of fascism in Europe, a reign of chaos and terror consistent with the historical cycle (Safier 935). Yeats believed that, when history reached the end of the outward gyre and began to move along the inward gyre, the globe was on the verge of a revelation that would destroy the entire planet (Mohammed & Hassan, 2017).

The darkness drops again but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

And what rough beast, its hour comes round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Remembering the fundamental notion of the verse concerning the end times, it cites Bethlehem, the place where Jesus Christ was born, and a collapsing structure can allude to the coming of the Anti-Christ. It shows the "beast" approaching massive devastation on Earth. Yeats might have known that the First World War did not stop hostilities and that worse things were still to come. It must have been devastating to see such human devastation. One passage in the Bible says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." This statement is reminiscent of a ritualistic statement filled with strong, vivid imagery. "*The Second Coming*" is one of Yeats' most well-known poems and is often featured in anthologies because of its striking and menacing language. Still, comprehending it is one of the most mysterious and complex (Mohammed & Hassan, 2017).

3. T. S. ELIOT AND HIS POEM *FOUR QUARTETS*

T.S. Eliot, who was familiar with the writings of the greatest Christian mystics and analytical studies on mysticism, not only included quotes from these sources but also made several references to this phenomenon. Prophets and mystics share a common belief in a God present in the world and whom humanity can turn to for guidance. This theory upholds Eliot's religiosity in his literary criticism, social writings, poetry, theater, and the theory that connects mysticism and prophecy. The prophets experience God's emotions; they share his delight and sorrow. Their comprehension of the divine desires is so profound that it overwhelms them and drives them to desperation: "Both mystics and prophets symbolize the human being who declares oneself "capable of God," as it is this capacity that defines and gauges empathy as it serves as the essential intermediary for all religious encounters." (Corbin, 1993, p. 134).

T.S. Eliot's poetry demonstrates a growing affinity with the Christian mysticism tradition, as evidenced by his main lyrical works. St. Augustine's Confessions, the Upanishad, and Buddha's Fire Sermon are all quoted in *The Waste Land*, which is nevertheless a somewhat bewildering mixture of Christian doctrine and Eastern mysticism. Eliot's poem *Ash Wednesday*, a form of poetic route purgatives that links the concept of spiritual rebirth and the renunciation of selfishness, portrays a mystical ascension through the metaphor of a ladder to God. However, in this instance, the ascension is cut off before it reaches a direct revelation of the divine. Lastly, the *Four Quartets* seem to touch the essence of the almighty mystery in some parts as they persistently explore the boundaries of the indescribable. Within the intellectual views that adhere to the tradition of negative theology are placed the mysterious, fleeting

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glimpses seen in these poems. Furthermore, canonical Christian mystics like Julian of Norwich and Saint John of the Cross are mentioned and occasionally quoted directly by Eliot in this work (Schmelzer, 2017).

The relationship between religion and literature throughout Western literary history, particularly in the writing of his day, is a topic Eliot addresses in his 1935 essay "Religion and Literature." Poets like Henry Vaughan, Robert Southwell, Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, and Gerard Manley Hopkins are examples of religious poets whose poetry deals with subjects and emotions exclusive to religion. According to Eliot, there should be an unconscious rather than an intentional and forcefully Christian connection between religion and writing (Eliot's italics). Eliot suggests that poetry should stray from religious propaganda and instead reference Christian imagery and ideas while avoiding the psychoanalytical declarations of the "unconscious" (Asciuto, 2020).

However, *FOUR QUARTETS* is Eliot's mature poem, written between 1935 and 1942, attaining a deeper level of meaning and precision than anything that came before it. The poet's style has become less obscure than in works like *The Waste Land*, as experience has had more time to solidify. The four quarters reward the listener with passages of pure lyricism and an inner truth revealed as a personal discovery, an enjoyable experience of receiving the urge almost without realizing the promptings of the poet's symbolism. However, they still make demands upon the listener's attentive and intuitive powers through the genius of epigrammatic phrasing and numerous embedded connections to literature and history. Moreover, "*Four Quartets*" is a collection of four individual poems, each divided into five sections and complete on their own, yet together they form a unified whole. Each poem is titled after a place significant to the poet's own life experiences: "Burnt Norton," an old manor in the Cotswolds; "East Coker," a village in Somerset from where his ancestors originated; "The Dry Salvages," likely named after the French "Les Trois Sauvages," referring to a cluster of rocks off the northeast coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts; and "Little Gidding," a village in Huntingdonshire known for its religious and historical significance (Eliot & Speaight, 1944).

N. A. Dhar claims that reviewers have critically examined the *Four Quartets*' mysticism and mystical components. First, the poem's mysticism is strikingly linked to the Neoplatonic and Christian orthodoxy. The poet also heavily draws from Eastern mystical heritage and employs a global mysticism language. However, it is noteworthy that the *Four Quartets* contain two central motifs: the paths to the holy through negativa and affirmativa (2002, p. 181). Furthermore, Eliot uses a variety of mystical symbols and images to suggest meditation practices that lead to a direct encounter with the divine. For instance, Eliot alludes to "The Night of the Soul," the title of a mysterious poem by St. John of the Cross, using the imagery of darkness. The negative meaning of the "divine dark" in Christianity could be the source of the imagery. To achieve the "union with the divine," the core of mysticism, the human spirit should be stripped of all material cravings (Dhar, 2002, pp. 181–183). The following passages demonstrate how Eliot used this ethereal motif:

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,
Desiccation 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 movement;
while the world moves in appetency,
on its metaled ways of time past and time future. (Burnt Norton, Section 3).

The experience that theology explains and on which religion erects a discipline is the subject of ["Burnt Norton"], according to Helen L. Gardner (1947: 63). It involves the sudden realization of "the one end, which is always present," as well as the immediate perception of a timeless reality that is felt in time as well as recalled through time.

Eliot also used "the language of paradox" as a mystic device. This indicates that he speaks uniquely and that, despite common sense, his words have unusual meanings. The best instances of the negative form used with contradictory language are seen in the lines from "East Coker" (Bhatnagar, 1996, pp. 65–66).

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
To possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through how you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know

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And what you own is what you do not own

Moreover, where you are is where you are not. ('East Coker', section 3)

These words discuss the idea that tremendous joy or ecstasy, which are sometimes thought of as emotional highs that might divert attention from more profound truths, is not indicative of a spiritual arrival at a fundamental understanding of oneself and the cosmos. This indicates a mystical perspective in which quiet, steady awareness, rather than intense emotional experiences, leads to genuine revelation. Furthermore, Eliot offers a deep analysis of the mystical journey in these lines from "East Coker" by utilizing these paradoxes and the road of negation. It implies that genuine spiritual advancement frequently necessitates unconventional methods—embracing ignorance, experiencing ecstasy in the absence of possessing something, being unbecoming to become something—themes that force the reader to reflect carefully on the nature of spiritual truth and the paths that lead to it.

Alkhayer & Ghazarian (2008) stated that by echoing Krishna's well-known words, "Fare forward," Eliot combines the Western mystical philosophy found in the *Four Quartets* with the Eastern mystical doctrine symbolized by Krishna in "The Dry Salvages" to suggest the generality of the notion of the negative way:

Fare forward, travellers! Not escaping from the past

Into different lives, or into any future;

You are not the same people who left the station

Or who will arrive at any terminus, While the narrowing rails slide together behind you (1969: 188)

The mystical undertones in T.S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages" offer readers layers of meaning deeply intertwined with themes of time and transformation. The poem reflects a profound understanding of the cyclical nature of existence, where every moment is imbued with the essence of change. This exploration is not merely abstract; it resonates with life's daily trials and tribulations, capturing the essence of our perpetual journey with time. By invoking natural imagery and spiritual reflections, Eliot invites us to consider how the moments of our lives come together to create a narrative that transcends mere experience, urging a more profound comprehension of our place within the larger ebb and flow of existence.

The metaphor of a train ride stands out as a powerful symbol in this exploration of internal and external journeys. Trains parallel the human quest for understanding and fulfillment with their steady momentum and definitive destination. The phrase "Fare forward, travellers!" serves as a call to action and a reminder that while the destination may be clear, the path is fraught with uncertainties. This encourages readers to embrace the changes that come with growth, suggesting that personal and spiritual development is an ongoing voyage, where each station offers new insights and opportunities for transformation. In this way, Eliot intertwines the physical and spiritual journeys, emphasizing that our travels through life are enriched by our ability to adapt and evolve amidst the inevitable changes we encounter.

4. CONCLUSION

The poem "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats is frequently read from various angles, such as political, historical, and cultural viewpoints. However, its mystical aspects are also fundamental, illustrating Yeats's lifelong fascination with spiritual and mystical issues. Yeats was a mystic poet whose work often examined the boundary between the material and spiritual realms, greatly influenced by his beliefs in visions, prophecies, and the paranormal. Understanding Yeats's mystical viewpoint is essential to appreciating the poem's profundity and enduring appeal. Along with presenting a view of his era, he also offers a more universal and eternal reflection on the cyclical nature of historical and spiritual epochs. By doing this, Yeats invites the reader to contemplate the wider spiritual ramifications of social upheavals and the enduring human search for purpose during turmoil.

T.S. Eliot's writings embody a contemporary mysticism that crosses the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, the old and the new. His poetry takes the reader through the intricacies of the 20th-century spiritual environment rather than providing straightforward answers. Using his mystical perspective, Eliot offers readers a meditative place where they can delve deeper into the spiritual aspects of life and gain a rich, insightful understanding of the human condition. His capacity to express the inexpressible and shed light on the spiritual labyrinths woven into contemporary existence will define him as a mystic. Deeply mystical themes are explored throughout "Four Quartets," as Eliot weaves a complex web of intellectual and religious allusions. His reflection on the human condition, spiritual suffering, and the search for meaning is universal, incorporating components from Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian traditions. With its deep insights into the nature of transcendence, existence, and time, T.S. Eliot's work continues to be a key examination of mysticism in contemporary poetry.

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