

## From Agony to Enlightenment: Parallels between Rafael Lechowski's *Quarcissus* and T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*

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### ABSTRACT

Eliot's *Four Quartets* stands as one of the most influential poetic works of the 20th Century. Therefore, academics have approached it from many different angles, among which one may mention its musicality, the references it contains, its composition, and the belief systems that converge in it, such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Rap music, on the other hand, is generally assumed to be a cultural product that lacks profound insights on the subjects it touches upon precisely because it is built for entertainment, not academic analysis. However, although rap music is generally regarded as non-academic, Rafael Lechowski's extensive rap work entitled *Quarcissus: El arte de desamar* has divided criticism because of the way in which it engages with the subject of

emotional pain. This article argues that Lechowski's work shares both structural and content features with Eliot's *Four Quartets*; particularly regarding Buddhist principles, which is established by comparing the four sections that make up both texts.

**Keywords:** poetry; cultural environment; literary analysis; contemporary music; Buddhism.

## **De la agonía a la iluminación: Paralelismos entre *Quarcissus*, de Rafael Lechowski, y *Cuatro Cuartetos*, de T.S. Eliot**

### **RESUMEN**

*Cuatro Cuartetos*, de Eliot, se ha caracterizado como una de las obras poéticas más influyentes del siglo 20. En consiguiente, la academia lo ha analizado desde diferentes aristas, entre las cuales se encuentran su musicalidad, las referencias que contiene, su composición y los sistemas de fe que convergen en el texto, tales como el cristianismo, el hinduismo y el budismo. Por otra parte, generalmente se asume que la música rap es un producto cultural que carece de profundidad en los temas que toca precisamente porque está concebida como material de entretenimiento, no de análisis académico. No obstante, aunque con frecuencia se ve al rap como distante del interés académico, la extensa obra en rap de Rafael Lechowski titulada *Quarcissus: El arte de desamar* ha dividido a la crítica por la forma en que maneja el tema del dolor emocional. El presente artículo sostiene que la obra de Lechowski comparte características tanto estructurales como de contenido con *Cuatro Cuartetos*, en particular principios budistas, lo cual se establece mediante una comparación entre las secciones que constituyen ambos textos.

**Palabras clave:** poesía; medio cultural; análisis literario; música contemporánea; budismo.

## INTRODUCCIÓN

Eliot's *Four Quartets* stands as one of the most influential poetic works of the 20th Century. Composed over a six-year period that included the bombing of British cities during World War II, the four poems entitled "Burnt Norton," "East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding" were printed as a collected work in 1943. Each one of them includes polyphony, many allusions to diverse mystic works, and a meditative tone that runs in the five movements or sections in which the four poems are divided. Those movements have a consistent function in *Four Quartets*. While Section I introduces the theme using two symbolic elements, Section II establishes the main concern. The three subsequent sections elaborate on the observations: Section III reveals a state of utmost spiritual desolation (the dark night of the soul for St. John of the Cross), Section IV presents the movement out of that critical state, and Section V finally presents a reflection on the limitations of language as a vessel to convey a mystical experience. Because of its academic complexity, Eliot's *Four Quartets* has been approached from many different angles: its musicality, the references that it contains, its composition, and the belief systems that converge in it, such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Undeniably, scholars have been studying the work since it was published and, despite clashing opinions on Eliot's poetic achievement, they agree that *Four Quartets* contains an interpretative richness that academics can profit from.

Rap music, and Hip Hop culture in general, seem to be located on the opposite side of the critical spectrum. Rap is one of the four core elements that Alridge and Stewart (2005) include as part of the Hip Hop culture: "Hip Hop culture consists of at least four fundamental elements: Disc jockeying (DJing), break dancing, graffiti art, and rapping (emceeing)" (Alridge & Stewart, 2005, p. 190). Hip Hop culture emerged in the South Bronx during the early seventies and has sparked relatively scarce academic research. While several factors can explain the lack of scholarly interest, a wide cultural bias certainly seems to have contributed to this phenomenon:

We also acknowledge that much Hip Hop, like earlier African American art and cultural forms and those of many other ethnic minority groups, has been commodified by what Frankfurt School theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno called "the culture industry," which has distributed Hip Hop to the masses in ways that reinforce historical stereotypes about African Americans by highlighting sexist, misogynistic, and nihilistic lyrics and images (Alridge & Stewart, 2005, p. 193).

Other researchers agree with the idea that there exists a strong social prejudice against rap music. As Tanner et al. (2009) observed, the impressive growth of rap music has not garnered positive attention, for this genre, just like other emerging musical genres at the time, has been labeled as dangerous:

However, its reputation and status in the musical field has, hitherto, been a controversial one. Like new music before it (jazz, rock 'n roll), rap has been critically reviewed as a corrosive influence on young and impressionable listeners (Best 1990; Tatum 1999; Tanner 2001; Sacco and Kennedy 2002; Alexander 2003). Whether rap has been reviled as much as jazz and rock 'n' roll once were is a moot point; rather more certain is its pre-eminent role as a problematic contemporary musical genre (Tanner et al., 2009, p. 693).

It is clear that, because of its street origins and vernacular content, rap music is generally regarded as non-academic. However, as McLaren (2007) remarked, scholars have found points of academic interest in rap:

Race and especially cultural identity are central to rap music and hip-hop culture, where language is expressed through the "spoken word" rather than the canonized literary text. Some cultural critics have challenged rap, considering it misogynistic and linguistically explicit. Nevertheless, rap artists are spokespersons for their generation of African Americans, and others, and are perceived as the voice of "street consciousness" (McLaren, 2007, p. 221).

Today, most academics who have studied rap music accept the notion that it is a manifestation of cultural resistance, which explains the violent language and imagery that is commonplace in this musical genre (Alridge & Stewart, 2005) and its adoption by non-African American young people. For Kitwana (2005), the popularity of rap is explained by its “capacity for resonating with the experiences of the downtrodden and marginalized in a variety of cultural contexts” (as cited in Tanner et al., p. 697).

Rap music, then, can be perceived as a vehicle to express messages that involve feelings of class conflict, racial prejudice, gender oppression, and social inadequacy, many times through lyrics and images overloaded with aggressiveness. Of course, it is only logical that oppressed minorities harbor resentful emotions toward the society that exerts oppression on them and erupt in violence, be it symbolic or otherwise. The question at stake is whether or not rap can become a suitable means to express a battle against one’s own suffering and a path of liberation from the passions of the self as Eliot’s *Four Quartets* succeeds at doing. We believe that Rafael Lechowski’s *Quarcissus: El arte de desamar*<sup>1</sup> stands as a great example of how a rap composition, using a common relationship problem, can share profound insight on applying Eastern mysticism to deal with the most destructive passions of the human being, which shows a reformulation of cultural resistance. The purpose of this article is to analyze the structural and content features that both Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and Lechowski’s extensive rap work share concerning Zen Buddhist principles for dealing with attachment and ignorance to help one control the toxic emotions that spring from suffering (*dukkha*).

## 1. BUDDHISM AND ZEN

To effectively compare how *Quarcissus: El arte de desamar* and *Four Quartets* deal with suffering, one must first take a look at the Buddhist principles that both texts manifest. Following the teachings attributed

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<sup>1</sup> “Quarcissus: The Art of Unloving”.

to Gautama Buddha, Buddhists believe that liberation from suffering is achieved by the application of several principles that, eventually, help the practitioner understand the real nature of suffering in a transcendental awakening. In fact, the meaning of the word Buddha is “the enlightened or awoken one.” Buddhism is an extensive belief system that originated in India and eventually reached many regions in Asia. Therefore, there exists many different Buddhist schools and practices, which are normally contained into three main traditions: Theravada, Vajrayana, and Mahayana. Theravada Buddhism, dominant in Thailand, for example, gives particular attention to the precepts of monastic life and morality (Keomahavong, 2022). On the other hand, Vajrayana, which concentrates in the Tibet and Mongolia, is commonly known as esoteric or Tantric Buddhism because of its use of mudras (hand positions in meditation), mantras, and mandalas. The Mahayana tradition, common in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, accepts as canonical some scriptures (*sutras*) that are rejected by the Theravada monastics, where teachings such as personal enlightenment are promoted, along with the idea that an enlightened individual or *bodhisattva*, instead of entering nirvana, can choose to remain in the world to help others break out from the cycle of suffering or *samsara* (Sosek, 2021a). Zen Buddhism originated from this latter tradition. For the purposes of this study, the authors will concentrate specifically on the teachings of Zen related to a personal insight that helps a lay individual deal with emotional suffering. This key revelation stands as one of the most popular concepts in Zen Buddhism: *satori* (悟り). *Satori* refers to the moment when someone has been able to see into the true nature or essence of reality, situations, and even oneself:

This acquiring of a new viewpoint in Zen is called *satori* (wu in C.) and its verb form is *satoru*. Without it there is no Zen, for the life of Zen begins with the "opening of *satori*". *Satori* may be defined as intuitive looking-into, in contradistinction to intellectual and logical understanding. Whatever the definition, *satori* means the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistic mind (Suzuki, 1964, p. 80).

While this glimpse of the ultimate reality only constitutes a possible indication of the process of enlightenment and expresses a certain ability to grasp the Zen experience, it does not mean someone is fully enlightened or even close to it. In other words, only constant practice after a *satori* moment can ratify one's enlightenment.

Jung (1964) pointed out that “We can of course never decide definitely whether a person is really ‘enlightened’ or ‘redeemed’, or whether he merely imagines it. [. . .] It is not, therefore, a question of ‘actual fact’ but of spiritual reality” (as cited in Suzuki, 1964, p.15). Thus, any attempt to logically prove or disprove whether or not someone has attained enlightenment will fail. Zen Buddhism solves this problem by resorting to a set of tools and contemplation cases (*koans*) that, rather than explaining what enlightenment is or guiding someone to it, throw the individual into a pit of confusing stories, inexplicable emotions, and irrational examples—sometimes physical pain—to experience Zen for themselves. One of the reasons why Zen Buddhism has difficulties with words such as “guiding” and “understanding” is because both actions require a base built upon rationality and methodology, when, on the contrary, enlightenment should be based on personal experience and perception. Basically, Zen Buddhism avoids defining what enlightenment is because explanations depend on language, structure, and reasons—all of which are bound to logic as well.

Because this realization involves the ability to see the true nature of oneself, Zen Buddhism emphasizes meditation as a technique to achieve freedom from inner agony. Zen teachings are eminently experiential, which makes intellectual access to their goal a rather difficult task:

This school is unique in various ways in the history of religion. Its doctrines, theoretically stated, may be said to be those of speculative mysticism, but they are presented and demonstrated in such a manner that only those initiates who, after long training, have actually gained an insight into the system can understand their ultimate signification. To those who have not acquired this penetrating knowledge, that is, to

those who have not experienced Zen in their everyday active life— its teachings, or rather its utterances, assume quite a peculiar, uncouth, and even enigmatical aspect. Such people, looking at Zen more or less conceptually, consider Zen utterly absurd and ludicrous, or deliberately making itself unintelligible in order to guard its apparent profundity against outside criticism (Suzuki, 1964, p. 32-33).

Zen is a reduction of the Japanese word *zazen* (座禪), which means sitting meditation. This practice may be a fundamental component of the name Zen, but it is not the objective of the practitioner. Actually, sitting meditation is considered as a tool toward mindfulness or insight, not the exclusive path leading to *satori*. In fact, Zen Buddhist schools incorporate different types of meditation, such as walking meditation, meditation through physical exercise (*Qigong*), or the use of koans in meditation (in Rinzai school), to name a few. As Suzuki argued, the goal of meditation discipline in its various forms is to abandon the dualism of logical thinking:

The object of Zen discipline consists in acquiring a new viewpoint for looking into the essence of things. If you have been in the habit of thinking logically according to the rules of dualism, rid yourself of it and you may come around somewhat to the viewpoint of Zen. You and I are supposedly living in the same world, but who can tell that the thing we popularly call a stone that is lying before my window is the same to both of us? You and I sip a cup of tea. That act is apparently alike to us both, but who can tell what a wide gap there is subjectively between your drinking and my drinking? In your drinking there may be no Zen, while mine is brim-full of it. The reason for it is: you move in a logical circle and I am out of it (Suzuki, 1964, p. 80).

Confino and Huu (2021) assert that the ultimate objective of this constant practice is to enable the person to comprehend the true roots of suffering: attachment and the illusion of the ego, which oppose the Buddhist principle of impermanence. For Sri (1985), “The fundamental perceptions of Vedanta as well of Buddhism are those of impermanence (*anithya*) of ephemerality of all phenomena and of the universality of suffering (*dukkha*). These insights are, of course,



universal” (p. 17). As everything in the world of phenomena is impermanent, attachment to any experience or to the very idea of the self will therefore produce suffering. Buddhism understands that life is ephemeral, that the body decays, that happiness can quickly transform into despair, and that painful circumstances may shatter all that supports the ego of the person:

Impermanence, when fully grasped, is applicable to the perceiver as well as to the objects perceived; the seer and the seen are both ephemeral, so that individuality or ego is best an illusion. Suffering, when fully understood, is found to be inseparable from existence in the world of phenomena (Sri, 1985, p. 17).

One may be tempted to assume that the Zen teaching of impermanence casts the individual into bleak nihilism, in particular, because of the absence of an idea of divinity:

Bodhidharma (Daruma, J., Tamo, C.), the First Patriarch of the Zen sect in China, was asked by Wu, the first Emperor (reigned a.d. 502-549) of the Liang dynasty, as to the ultimate and holiest principle of Buddhism. The sage is reported to have answered, "Vast emptiness and nothing holy in it" (Suzuki, 1964, p. 50).

Despite this principle of impermanence, Zen is not nihilistic because it does not advocate for negative quietism. In other words, although *satori* and enlightenment encompass dissolution of the self and grasping impermanence in everything, the positive outcome of Zen practice is freedom from suffering, not passive conformity to the idea that, since suffering and life are inseparable, one should simply do nothing and suffer in silence.

## 2. QUARCISSUS: EL ARTE DE DESAMAR, THE AGONY OF HUMAN SUFFERING

Rafael Lechowski, born February 13, 1985, is a Spanish rapper, writer, and poet who emigrated with his family from Poland to Spain at the age of 4 due to political problems. During his teens, Lechowski encountered writing as a cathartic method to express himself, which stirred the still-young artist to incorporate his writing experience into

a popular musical genre: Hip Hop. Lechowski became part of Flowklorikos along with Carlos Talavera and Fransanz. Flowklorikos' second album, *Zerdos y diamantes* (2002), propelled the musical career of the young artist. Consequently, Lechowski became a well-recognized singer in the Spanish hip-hop scene, which led him to be appointed *Joven promesa del arte nacional* by *El País* in 2004 (Lechowski, n. d.) and, in 2007, he released an album called *Donde duele inspira*. The album's clear inspiration from jazz music combined with Lechowski's lyricism allowed him to become the first Spanish rapper to be invited to a jazz festival and to a literary international festival (Lechowski, n. d.).

Rafael Lechowski's *Quarcissus, El arte de desamar* is a work that challenges the very structure and preconceptions of rap music, making it one of the few privileged artistic expressions of this genre, —if regarded as rap— that has generated debate due to its complexity and significance to the academic field. During a period of nine years (2009-2018), Lechowski composed *Quarcissus*, which, as if being a play, is divided into four acts. If caged into the genre and innocently regarded as just another one of the immense libraries of hip-hop songs, one of the most complete, innovative, and intellectual works will be overlooked solely because of its associations with the rest of the genre. Additionally, scholars and Zen Buddhism students will not only miss the opportunity to be immersed in such a sensitive experience but are also going to be deprived from the possibility of perceiving Zen through a contemporary multimedia production.

*Quarcissus*, Lechowski's most ambitious work, conveys diverse artistic experiences in such an attractive, yet unusual manner that it ultimately fulfills its purpose: allowing the reader to truly feel and evolve along with the character. This complex creation can be listened to as a song, read as a playscript, watched as a movie, and even felt like a sculpture (since, when first launched, the cover of each printed copy of the work either contained an individual painting or leaves from the Ordesa Valley in Aragon, Spain). Precisely, the combination of various artistic expressions is what leads to the problematic aspect of

characterizing this work, but it is also what makes it so unique and remarkable. As Corduras accurately points out:

Cualquier denominación existente se quedaría coja. En definitiva, se trata de una obra poliédrica en la que texto, música, imagen, espectáculo y declamación se incardinan de forma indisoluble. Quizá lo más acertado sería calificarla de obra de arte en su sentido más literal y figurado (as cited in Lechowski, n. d.).<sup>2</sup>

To amplify its content, *Quarcissus* relies on images, videos, and, of course, a track and lyrics. The length of the track, if considered as only one continuous song, is roughly one hour and nineteen minutes long. During this time, *Quarcissus* transitions from videos, texts, images, pauses, and non-lyrical sections, to even a narrator and characters—through a soliloquy—to allow the listener/reader to truly immerse in a burst of emotions and confrontations with the non-conventional themes and elements it contains. Although the work is long and the use of some of these tools is indeed sophisticated and remarkable—if still merely regarded as a rap song—, these aspects are only a means for *Quarcissus* to draw careful attention to its content, which is first heightened by the structural arrangement and then by the set of techniques used by Lechowski to get into the concepts of Zen Buddhism, still largely unfamiliar to the Western world.

One of the core elements in Lechowski's intriguing work is the ideas that it presents for dealing with attachment, principles rooted in Zen Buddhism. To be able to reach enlightenment, the main character has to undergo the process of unloving his significant other. Unlike a big part of rap music, this extensive rap song resorts to topics such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, but not as mere references or just as just literary figures; rather, these topics serve to indicate the manifestation of the main character's path to enlightenment, which

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<sup>2</sup> Any existing denomination would fall short. Certainly, it is a multi-faceted work in which text, music, imagery, performance, and declamation are inseparably integrated. Perhaps, it would be more accurate to describe it as a work of art in its most literal and figurative sense (as cited in Lechowski, n. d.).

establishes a clear parallel with T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, where the merging of these three seemingly incompatible belief systems becomes fundamental to understand the mystic experience in the poem.

### 3. QUARCISO AS A MODEL OF SUFFERING FOR THE LAY PERSON

One of the most attractive aspects of *Quarcissus* comes precisely from the description of the main character. The protagonist of Lechowski's work does not have a name but is identified as Quarciso in the four acts: "No es su nombre, mas lo llamo Quarciso / Mezcla del monstruo de Hugo y de Narciso" (Lechowski, 2019). The symbolism in the name evokes images of polar opposition both at the physical and spiritual levels. While Quasimodo's body was marked by deformity, his soul was beautiful. In sharp contrast, the notorious spiritual flaw of Narcissus was an out-of-control attachment to his own handsome physical appearance, a defect that ultimately caused his death. This clear duality stands as a key element, for it represents the very objective of Zen practice: achieving unity by rejecting binary thinking. In the first act, "Acto I: La traición," the narrator characterizes Quarciso as a lay person, not as an extraordinary individual:

Es la historia de un héroe profundo  
De esos héroes sin capa ni espada  
Que cargó la gárgola de la nada  
Y a hombros del alma las penas del mundo  
Reflejó lo oscuro del Ser inmundo  
En su propia figura despechada (Lechowski, 2019).

This ordinary man, however, had to endure immense suffering because of a love betrayal that stirred in him a turmoil of negative emotions: "Parecía un can gimiendo a la luna / Quedó su llanto por siempre grabado / Sus celos, su locura, su ira y su horror" (Lechowski, 2019). Since Quarciso is a common person, he is unable to cope with the emotional agony that overwhelms him. He loses his temper, yells, and becomes restless, marks of what, according to Nukariya (1913), Zen identifies as the opposite of enlightenment: "We are no more troubled by anger and hatred, no more bitten by envy and ambition, no more

stung by sorrow and chagrin, no more overwhelmed by melancholy and despair” (p. 87a).

The binary opposition that constituted the identity given to the protagonist in the beginning, however, disappears as the suffering individual transits the different stages of emotional and physical pain until achieving his *satori*. In other words, the Quasimodo-Narcissus compound dissolves when Quarciso is finally no longer tormented by dualities (such as the opposition between the self and the other). After enlightenment, it becomes clear that Quarciso is no longer a name that can fit him at the end of the work.

#### 4. “BURNT NORTON” AND “ACTO I: LA TRAICIÓN”<sup>3</sup>

Eliot published “Burnt Norton” in 1936, and this is the first poem in *Four Quartets*. The manor in the Cotswolds, which Eliot visited, exerted a powerful influence on the poet. The house, with its gardens and its overall sense of decay, inspired the poetic reflection on the nature of time and liberation. In *Four Quartets*, each poem revolves around one of the ancient Greek elements and “Burnt Norton” privileges air:

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 (Eliot, 1949, p. 17).

In addition, as the translation of the second epigraph in the poem shows, this work is strongly connected to the Heraclitean unity of opposites: “The way up and the way down are one and the same” (Eliot, 1943, p. 10). This impossible union generates a notion of impermanence of time, which associates itself to the volatility of air.

While the persona in “Burnt Norton” is in a rather quiet meditative state, Lechowski’s *Quarcissus* opens with a gust of

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<sup>3</sup> “Act I: Betrayal”.

tumultuous emotions that draws Quarciso into deep agony. The protagonist is calling his friend after being sleep-deprived for four days. The source of his emotional pain is a break-up with his partner, an event that Quarciso could not foresee and that had taken place a month before he called his unidentified friend. It was the woman who asked for the separation in a conversation that was marked by rationality and calmness, but Quarciso lost control of his emotions when he found himself alone, so he left everything and returned to his mother's house. In this context, air functions as an element of consolation for Quarciso when, after the break-up, he continues to see his still recent ex-girlfriend:

Aun así nos seguíamos viendo,  
Paseábamos, reíamos, sentí que me amaba de nuevo;  
De pronto respirar pesaba menos,  
Y regresaban mi hambre y mi ilusión por seguir viviendo  
(Lechowski, 2019).

However, air, in the form of mist, also works as a triggering mechanism for despair for Quarciso when he breaks down in sobbing and realizes the possibility of never being with her again:

Ella suspendida en un tiempo parado  
Mientras todo giraba en la rueda del molino,  
Una niebla se interponía a lo imaginado:  
Era la fatal mampara del destino (Lechowski, 2019).

Although the mental states of the persona in "Burnt Norton" and that of Quarciso contrast sharply, the notion of air is common for both works: Quarciso's phone call is not actually a conversation, but an intense rant that he is recording in the answering machine; his words are reminiscent of the howls of a wounded animal that the wind carries away while the man paces to and fro in desperation. In this sense, the element of air becomes a parallel between Eliot's poem and Lechowski's musical work.

It may be true that "Acto I" of *Quarcissus* provides little to no evidence of the main character's enlightenment and only resentment, suffering, and denial can be clearly detected. Still, "Acto I" is essential to lay the foundation upon which the rest of the work will be built. This

presentation is necessary because the Western mind may find itself unable to somehow trace the process of transformation if the character's excruciating reality is not disclosed before. Essentially, "Acto I" fills the gaps that otherwise would be problematic for the traditional Western mind in regard to the unfamiliar concept of enlightenment, especially when the sections that follow drift away progressively from Western ideas and concepts to portray the character's growth and ability to reach *satori*.

"Burnt Norton" describes a *satori* moment indeed, but its main concern is the paradoxical nature of time and how it constructs "our first world" (Eliot, 1949, p. 14) or what is commonly termed material reality. This poem also provides the glimpse of an answer for the suffering that this world creates. In this respect, Nhat-Hanh (2014) argued that understanding the nature of suffering constitutes a step toward happiness: "When we learn to acknowledge, embrace, and understand our suffering, we suffer much less. Not only that, but we're also able to go further and transform our suffering into understanding, compassion, and joy for ourselves and for others" (p. 10). When he later elaborated on how to transform suffering, Nhat-Hanh mentioned sitting meditation as one of the five Zen practices for nurturing happiness: "Sitting meditation is also an opportunity to heal and to create moments of joy... they say, 'time is money.' But we know that sitting can be very healing, very profitable on its own way" (Nhat-Hanh, 2014, pp. 63, 64). Lines 69-78 of "Burnt Norton" offer an image that is consistent with the healing function of sitting meditation:

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,  
*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 (Eliot, 1949, p. 16).

This knowledge, however, is foreign to Quarciso in “Acto I,” who is overwhelmed by his strong attachment to the past, a cradle of negative emotions that he confuses with love:

¡Respiro y me pesa el aire  
 Esa libertad que tanto ansié, sin ella, parece una cárcel!  
 ¡Ah, hermano mío, mi tristeza es tan honda  
 Que hasta en la negra oscuridad me persigue la sombra!;  
 Y ahí veo clara la distinción  
 Entre partir el corazón con alguien y que alguien te parta el  
 corazón  
 Si es grande el amor por ser la distracción del Yo  
 Es mayor el despecho por ser su destrucción  
 Ah, me siento desterrado, arrojado, vacío (Lechowski, 2019).

The only revelation that Quarciso obtains in “Acto I: La traición” is the cruel truth that his best friend betrayed him and seduced his significant other. This prompts him to conclude with a strong wailing: “¡Y por tu traición atroz / Clavo en ti mi llanto! / ¡No olvides mi lívida voz! ¡Sé que me estás escuchando!” (Lechowski, 2019). The impermanence of his relationship makes Quarciso emulate “the loud lament of the disconsolate chimera” at the end of section 5 of “Burnt Norton.” This resemblance becomes stronger when one keeps in mind the observation, previously made, that the name of the protagonist in Lechowki’s work embodies a rather impossible combination: Quasimodo and Narcissus.

##### 5. “ACTO II: LA DESCREENCIA”<sup>4</sup> AND “EAST COKER”

After the intense burst of emotions presented in “Acto I,” “Acto II: La descreenia” opens with a contemplative, yet critical soliloquy on human nature that directly questions belief systems, mainly Judaeo-Christianity, and the expansion of capitalism, which fostered and encouraged the concept of duality between the self and the other. Once more, one important Greek notion is prevalent throughout “Acto II”: the element of earth. This element, as Quarciso will contemplate, refers to changes (physical or spiritual), the relations of humans with one another, and the human interaction with the environment. Earth

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<sup>4</sup> “Act II: Disbelief”.



is signaled in this act with phrases such as “hegemonía terrenal,” “tierra confusa,” “tierra de nadie,” and figures of speech like “La vida es un túnel de luz con oscuridad al final, el cuerpo es ataúd del alma” and “Debo desenterrar mi esencia” (Lechowski, 2019). Foremost, this stage of disbelief is the first turning point in Quarciso’s subsequent transformation, considering that he finds no other solution than to look into himself and his abyss of emotions to seek answers. Therefore, Quarciso, at this point, turns to God and questions religious beliefs and teachings, which not only proved to be useless to relieve his soul-crushing emotional pain but were also unable to offer any hint of the correct path to follow to reach a sense of salvation:

Han degollado mi fe:  
 ¿Por qué me torturas, Señor?  
 ¡¿Acaso con lágrimas sacias tu sed?!  
 Te lo ruego, apiádate de mi ser;  
 ¡¿Por qué con ella?, ¿por qué con él?!,  
 ¿Por qué consientes que esto suceda?:  
 Su traición no es sino tu traición,  
 ¿Qué quieres que aprenda? (Lechowski, 2019).

Consequently, Quarciso realizes that a system based on prohibition and obedience (that is, on the duality of assertion and denial) is limiting not only from a social standpoint, but also from a spiritual one. While it is true that the duality of assertion and denial can be linked to religious, social, and moral values, the underlying problem presented to Quarciso is his latent logically bound reasoning to understand his excruciating pain, something that is patent when he expresses the futility of sanctimoniousness:

Tomaste a mi padre, te proclamaste mentor,  
 Y con mi dolor erigí mi fe inquebrantable.  
 Y jamás guardé rencor ni sucumbí ante el fracaso,  
 Di bien por mal y obré con corazón generoso,  
 Siguiendo tu lección con humildad y prurito,  
 Sordo a la conspiración de la carne contra el espíritu,  
 E hice mío tu mensaje,  
 Condené mi concupiscencia y mi libertinaje,  
 Y me rebelé contra el deseo, no ansié el bien ajeno,  
 Al desolado di consuelo, e imité al hombre pleno  
 Pero ella es todo lo que tengo, ¡Lo que más amo!,

¿Por qué la has arrancado de mi lado?! (Lechowski, 2019).

Though arguably somewhat comprehensible, Quarciso is still bound to a flawed logic which causes him to suffer since he believed that agonizing sorrow and embittered betrayal could have been prevented by behaving with religiously-imposed benevolence. Nonetheless, as Suzuki noted, one of the main causes of suffering according to Zen Buddhism is human dependence on logic, which, as a system, dictates and limits our understanding of experiences and, thus, life:

Zen thinks we are too much of slaves to words and logic. So long as we remain thus fettered we are miserable and go through suffering. But if we want to see something really worth knowing, that is conducive to our spiritual happiness, we must endeavour once for all to free ourselves from all conditions (Suzuki, 1964, p. 61).

Thus, in this regard, “Acto II” is quintessentially an epitome of the liberation of the self. Interestingly, this act can be somewhat perceived as still confined to hatred and resentment toward religion since Quarciso contradicts religious ideas and negates them rancorously. Nevertheless, as “Acto II” progresses, he then abandons all preconceptions, either religious or social, for his mind to be born again, free of contradicting ideas that bind his understanding. The latter is particularly evident when Quarciso expresses how humankind might find consolation when not bound to any system of ideas or beliefs:

Ha de desmasificarse toda unión, toda asociación,  
Fraccionarse hasta quedar completamente solo,  
Desnudo de cualquier tradición, ante la máxima de las síntesis:  
La esencia, la unión del Ser con Todo (Lechowski, 2019).

Quarciso, by realizing that all that exists cannot remain the same and must then transcend, has proved to embody one of the central pillars of Buddhism, which supports the idea that he has at least gained some insight into Zen. Basically, the Buddhist concept that serves as the pillar of “Acto II”—and that of Quarciso’s transformation—is impermanence.

“East Coker,” the second poem in *Four Quartets*, and arguably the most personal of all the four (Montezanti, 1994, p. 74), also

manifests both the Greek element of earth and the concept of impermanence. East Coker is the name of an English town in Somerset, from which the Eliot family migrated to America in 1667. This place is, therefore, the land of the poet's ancestors, and the employment of archaic spelling in Section I (Eliot, 1949, p. 24) establishes a connection with the element of earth because it gives a voice to the family members who were buried there. In addition, the poem uses land images like "grey stone" or "open field," several constructions involving feet ("heavy feet in clumsy shoes," "Earth feet," "loam feet") and funerary images ("The dancers are all gone under the hill") to strengthen the connection with the Greek element (Eliot, 1949, pp. 24, 27). Section I of "East Coker" begins by examining the ever-changing nature of reality, which sets the ground for an interpretation of the poem using the Buddhist concept of impermanence. This is mostly reflected on the opening lines of the poem:

In my beginning is my end. In succession  
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,  
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place  
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.  
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,  
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth  
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,  
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf (Eliot, 1949, p. 23).

The impermanence of the material world and even of human life is expressed in the previous lines as virtually every element is impermanent and must, accordingly, end, transition from its original purpose, or even transcend its previous state. By applying the concept of impermanence, the poem suddenly opens up to an interpretation that allows the connection between the physical events described and their following transformation. As contemplative as it is, the central idea that revolves around the previous lines is, again, that nothing can ever remain perpetual. Thus, attachment to a momentary material state, or even life is nonsensical as in: "Mirth of those long since under earth / Nourishing the corn" (Eliot, 1949, p. 24). Later, the persona understands that neither position is permanent and expresses:

Dawn points, and another day

Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind  
 Wrinkles and slides. I am here  
 Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning (Eliot, 1949, p. 25).

When incorporated into the idea of places constantly changing, the inability of the persona to indicate a clear physical location supports the idea of impermanence being applied not only to the outside physical world, but to oneself as well. Therefore, by not affirming or denying a statement, the persona is not bound to language, which is another limiting and structured system socially agreed upon a certain degree of logic and mutual understanding. On that account, Suzuki explains that:

Zen aims at preserving your vitality, your native freedom, and above all the completeness of your being. In other words, Zen wants to live from within. Not to be bound by rules, but to be creating one's own rules—this is the kind of life which Zen is trying to have us live. Hence its illogical, or rather superlogical statements (1964, p. 64).

This aspect of Zen Buddhism is present in both works at different levels and stages of *satori*. On the one hand, Quarciso deals with a more detailed process of attaining this state of mind; on the other hand, the persona in *Four Quartets* proves to have achieved it previously, which is perceivable in the acceptance of the impermanent nature of the world described in Section III:

As, in a theatre,  
 The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
 With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on  
 darkness,  
 And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama  
 And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away (Eliot,  
 1949, pp. 27, 28).

In the same way in which Quarciso initially questioned socio-political and religious paradigms and started a journey to dominate his emotions in "Acto II," Section IV of "East Coker" finishes with a reevaluation of the Christian idea of the Passion of Christ: "Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good" (Eliot, 1949, p. 30) and, in Section V, the speaker concludes with the need to continue practicing to reach

enlightenment. In so doing, the speaker commits to attempt to train the “undisciplined squads of emotion” although this might be the achievement of individuals “whom one cannot hope / to emulate (Eliot, 1949, p. 31).

#### 6. “THE DRY SALVAGES” AND “ACTO III: EL DIARIO”<sup>5</sup>

La “The Dry Salvages” is the poem where the speaker contemplates total detachment and immerses himself or herself into the most absolute denial of the self, a state not to be confused with the rigor of asceticism and that St. John of the Cross termed the dark night of the soul: “La noche de San Juan de la Cruz no es otra cosa que el ejercicio difícil de la ‘opción’, de escoger el bien mayor, renunciando a otros bienes (Ruiz, 1968, p. 46).<sup>6</sup> In Buddhism, since attachment imprisons one in the cycle of suffering, detachment is a step toward *satori*. “Immersion” becomes an appropriate word because the element that controls this quartet is precisely water, which stands as an archetype of cleansing, healing, and origin. Section I of “The Dry Salvages” opens with the image of the ever-waiting river-god that has been forgotten by “the worshipers of the machine” (Eliot, 1949, p. 35) and that runs into a sea where time is suspended and living creatures, along with the corpses of soldiers who died in the war, merge.

Section II expands on those visions of liquid chaos; the sound of the air raid alarms becomes analogous of the Zen bell of mindfulness, a reversal of enlightenment that the speaker refers to as “the calamitous annunciation” (Eliot, 1949, p. 37). It is in this context that the persona understands that, when the world has collapsed, the only salvation is within and detachment of notions of permanence starts:

While emotion takes to itself the emotionless  
Years of living among the breakage  
Of what was believed in as the most reliable—  
And therefore the fittest for renunciation (Eliot, 1949, p. 37).

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<sup>5</sup> “Act III: Diary”.

<sup>6</sup> “The night of St. John of the Cross is no other than the difficult exercise of the ‘option’, of choosing the greater good, forsaking other goods” (Ruiz, 1968, p. 46).

The speaker is able to distinguish between mere intentions and true actions. Therefore, Section III develops the consideration of right action, a concept taught by the Buddha as part of the Noble Eightfold path and which Nhat-Hanh defined as follows: “Right Action (*samyak karmanta*) means Right Action of the body. It is the practice of touching love and preventing harm, the practice of nonviolence toward ourselves and others. The basis of Right Action is to do everything in mindfulness” (1998, p. 61). However, overwhelming circumstances affect the resolve of the practitioner of right action and that is the reason why Buddhists use the figure of the Buddha as inspiration. Deriving from a Christian tradition, Section IV of “The Dry Salvages” appeals to the figure of Virgin Mary for help during those dire times (Eliot, 1949, pp. 42, 43). One must notice that Virgin Mary, as perceived in Christian lore, can be considered a Mahayana bodhisattva and, therefore, asking for her intervention is consistent with Buddhist principles. Finally, Section V concludes with all futile attempts of humanity to access the timeless dimension through practices like divination, graphology, and astrology. For the speaker, “to apprehend / the point of intersection of the timeless / with time, is an occupation of the saint” (Eliot, 1949, p. 44), but lay individuals should not be discouraged from meditating:

And right action is freedom  
From past and future also.  
For most of us, this is the aim  
Never here to be realised;  
Who are only undefeated  
Because we have gone on trying (Eliot, 1949, p. 45).

In direct congruence with the propositions in “The Dry Salvages,” “El diario,” the third act, narrates the turning point in Quarciso's journey. Its opening lines contain a reminder of how grueling his path has been thus far. After departing from his mother's house, Quarciso embarks on a journey of solitude in which he recognizes that he continues to be held prisoner of pain. Unable to loosen the restraints of his painful betrayal, he speaks of his heart as heavy luggage:

Qué equipaje tan pesado. ¿No podría dejarlo aquí apoyado?  
 ¡Por favor, sólo un instante!: Volveré aquí a buscarlo.  
 Si pudiera andar sin él, no viviría tan cansado.  
 ¡Qué equipaje tan pesado! Qué equipaje tan pesado..  
 Qué equipaje tan pesado: con el corazón a todos lados  
 (Lechowski, 2019).

Structurally, the diary is the act that contains the most sections, which precisely reflects the constant progression and evolution that Quarciso is undergoing. Similar to the *Four Quartets*, “El diario” uses contrasting elements such as day/night and light/darkness as metaphorical devices to further enhance the conflicting emotions still affecting him. In this regard, the second section, entitled “Luz”,<sup>7</sup> precisely manifests the elements of light and darkness as a means to attain a sense of salvation. The use of night as a metaphor for suffering and its counterpart, light, are strongly associated to the sense of enlightenment and the divine, which Quarciso is increasingly becoming sensitized to:

Cuando caiga la silente penumbra y salga confiada  
 Como una enorme luna en mitad de la madrugada,  
 Estaré allí, esperando su súbita epifanía en el espacio,  
 Como el estruendoso tambor de un trueno violáceo,  
 Para así ser iluminado por su suprema certidumbre,  
 Revelación última ante la que el Ser sucumbe.  
 Y al fin, madre, que diste lumbre a este hombre lúgubre  
 Lograré ser sombra que alumbre (Lechowski, 2019).

The following section (entitled “Salvarme en ti”<sup>8</sup>) introduces one of the controlling elements of the entire act: water. As stated before, water acts as an element for purification in the “The Dry Salvages” and this is also evident through the act, especially considering Quarciso’s need to purify himself and abandon not only his previous beliefs, but also his resentment and antipathy:

¡Qué carnaval de bálsamos y misceláneos salmos  
 Entonan los pájaros bajo el diáfano celeste de mayo!  
 ¡Qué bello llover de los rayos, orvallo de luz contra el cristal del arroyo,

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<sup>7</sup> “Light”.

<sup>8</sup> “Saving Myself in You”.

Agua que arrulla al silencio con suave murmullo! (Lechowski, 2019).

The connection between water as a religious symbol that allows rebirth and resurrection is also important to acknowledge, as Quarciso, similar to water, is now in a constant flow toward enlightenment. *El arte de desamar* manages to effectively employ many religious intertexts familiar to the Western world, such as the myth of the resurrection of Jesus, to connect Buddhist concepts with the latent and imminent enlightenment that Quarciso is attaining, which also supports the idea that this work has a higher density of analysis than the genre to which it would be generally affiliated:

Te burlas de Dios, glauco milagro,  
Saliendo de la tumba y resucitando en lo alto.  
Tú, que sorbes luz y exhalas silencio,  
Aunque tu interior sea un auditorio de múltiples cantos.  
Tú, que posees la quietud y humildad que yo no alcanzo,  
Cuando pisas tu propia alma y haces de ella un remanso.  
Ojalá pudieras seguirme en mi tramo,  
Pero tienes inútiles los pies por ser tan generosas tus manos  
(Lechowski, 2019).

Simultaneously, the last line evidences the ineffectiveness of religious beliefs for Quarciso to reach his final destination, inasmuch as a divine figure is unable to accompany him on his journey. In section VII, “Sed de tu carne”,<sup>9</sup> water reappears as an element representing Quarciso's feelings now that he is finally being able to let go of his duality-filled love: “Ya no tengo sed de tu carne, / Y no por ello te amo menos, ahora te amo más todavía, si cabe” (Lechowski, 2019). In the next section, Quarciso understands that what constitutes experience is not acquiring material objects or knowledge but being able to let go of them. Again, with his koan-like line “Y ahora llueve, y llueve, y veo el agua mojarse” (Lechowski, 2019), he is able to transcend logic to observe how water can also get wet. When faced with this new perspective, Quarciso acknowledges how the artificiality of language, instead of becoming a vehicle to transmit the Zen experience, actually

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<sup>9</sup> “Thirst for Your Flesh”.



disturbs it: “Quisiera traducir lo que siento, / Pero las palabras forman un río de ruido cuando lo intento” (Lechowski, 2019). In his discussion about *satori*, Suzuki (1964) agrees on the futility of words to describe Zen: “One has the feeling of touching upon a true secret, not something that has been imagined or pretended; this is not a case of mystifying secrecy, but rather of an experience that baffles all languages” (Suzuki, 1964, pp. 11-12). Lastly, Quarciso's inflection point is the battle of egos, in which he faces and acknowledges the multiple, contradictory, and grotesque selves who dwelt within him. When he eventually recognizes these selves as illusory, false, and product of a still dual perception, he is finally reborn and discovers that he is experiencing Zen:

Al recobrar el sentido,  
Mi ser liviano quería abrazarlo todo, con la inocencia del recién nacido.  
No sé explicar este sentimiento,  
Sólo sé que un ruiseñor que comenzó a cantar fuera  
Cantó también dentro (Lechowski, 2019).

#### 7. “LITTLE GIDDING” AND “ACTO IV: LA CARTA”<sup>10</sup>

“Little Gidding” stands as the quartet in which Christianity is presented more explicitly. It relies on the element of fire, an archetype of both destruction and purification that the poem relates to Pentecost as Section I starts: “but pentecostal fire / In the dark time of the year” (Eliot, 1949, p. 49). If the dark time of “The Dry Salvages” is equivalent to winter, “Little Gidding” is definitely the coming out of the cold darkness as spring arrives. “Little Gidding” juxtaposes seasons to establish a middle point of reconciliation: “Midwinter spring is its own season. / Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown. Suspended in time, between pole and tropic” (Eliot, 1949, p. 49). Montezanti (1994) notes that the adjective sempiternal also transmits the idea of a middle point: “El adjetivo, de registro exclusivamente religioso, está remitiendo al punto de intersección entre lo intemporal y el

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<sup>10</sup> “Act IV: The letter”.

tiempo”<sup>11</sup>(p. 116). Interestingly, as winter is associated to deprivation while spring is related to sensuality, this intersection reminds one of the Buddhist understanding of the middle way:

The notion of the middle way refers to the Buddha’s resistance to unconditionally accept any extreme ways of practice or theoretical viewpoints. The Buddha described himself as a *vibhajyavādin* (one who asserts propositions conditionally) rather than an *ekāntavādin* (on who maintains one absolute position). The middle path generally refers to the avoidance of two extremes of practical life, namely, indulgence in sensual pleasures on the one hand and severe asceticism on the other (Bajželj, 2017, par. 2).

As it opens, Section II continues with the juxtaposed images by mentioning hope and despair, flood and drought to rapidly enumerate the death of the four elements in three short stanzas (Eliot, 1949, pp. 51, 52). The long stanza that follows presents a soldier during night guard watching out for air raids and waiting for the morning “near the ending of interminable night” (Eliot, 1949, p. 52). The war images are intertwined with the initial allusion to Pentecost because the German plane releasing bombs becomes a descending dove after fire comes from above. The stanza concludes with the Pentecostal gifts but reformulated as the disillusion of the elderly: expiring sense without enchantment as death approaches, conscious impotence of anger at human stupidity, and the acute pain of understanding human repetition of acts of ill-will taken as a virtue (Eliot, 1949, p. 54). Section III offers spiritual renovation as an answer for this, and Section IV elaborates on the paradox of human condition: “to be redeemed from fire by fire” and to be “consumed by either fire or fire” (Eliot, 1949, p. 57). The second fire is the purifying mystic experience or, for Zen, *satori*, which is alluded to in Section V in what Knapp-Hay (1987) sees the image of the endless knot crowning the head of the Buddha, one of the Eight Auspicious symbols of Buddhism: “When the tongues of

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<sup>11</sup> “The adjective, exclusively religious in nature, refers to the point of intersection between timelessness and time”.

flame are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and the rose are one” (Eliot, 1949, p. 59).

The ideas of spiritual illumination and purification in Eliot’s poem are paralleled in Lechowski’s musical composition. After having had more profound *satori* experiences in the previous act, “Acto IV: La carta” starts with Quarciso writing a letter to his mother after several years of absence. During these years, Quarciso has finally obtained a deeper glimpse and acceptance of the nature of reality, but, more importantly, of his own suffering. “Acto IV” serves as the embodiment of Quarciso’s transformation since he is neither troubled by resentment, nor tormented by the previous events that originally led to his suffering. He describes this experience echoing the season in “Little Gidding”: “Y tras larga espera / La lenta y pesada locomotora hibernal volvió al fin a la florida / estación de la primavera / De color se llenó la tierra y pacía el rebaño de su enorme palma” (Lechowski, 2019). While the element of fire is not explicit in this act, it is suggested with the many associations to light and, more particularly, the light that comes from the sun: “Ya no entiendo más allá de esta Unión / Bien y mal, vida y muerte son uno en armonía / Como el alba y el ocaso son luces de un mismo día” (Lechowski, 2019). At the beginning of the act, Quarciso implements Buddhist principles to somehow plausibly transmit his current emotions:

No sé cómo este corazón inerme salió indemne,  
Se despeñan por mis ojos finos ríos de agua alegre.  
Quisiera expresarlo todo del modo más vívido  
Mas las palabras son amorfos retratos de lo vivido (Lechowski,  
2019).

Quarciso also uses a commonly associated grief-stricken emotion—crying—with its counterpart: happiness. Once more, he has proved to be no longer bound by the limiting structure of language, which regards crying and happiness as opposites, or by the ineffectual despotism of logic and dualism, which does not fully convey his transcendental experience. As a result of Zen not trying to affirm or negate facts, it might be possible to interpret that Zen uses obscure language to manifest itself to purposely hinder outsiders from its

meaning. Nevertheless, as Buddhist beliefs maintain, “the intellectual groove of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ is quite accommodating when things run their regular course; but as soon as the ultimate question of life comes up, the intellect fails to answer it satisfactorily” (Suzuki, 1964, p. 67). Similarly, since Quarciso was burdened by spiritual enlightenment as the only possible road to salvation, he acknowledges the futility and limitations of relying on the same insufficient, flawed devices that contributed to his pain.

In addition to Quarciso’s abandonment of previous beliefs in “Acto II” and his rebirth in “Acto III,” “La carta” enhances further elements to support the argument that he did undergo spiritual growth from a Buddhist standpoint, which clearly suggests that he indeed achieved a state of enlightenment:

Olvidar lo aprendido, desprenderse de sí,  
 Destilar el orgullo, dejar de sufrir.  
 En la contradicción se esconde el sentido:  
 La dicha anida en la plenitud, y la plenitud está en el vacío,  
 Y renunciar a todo me hizo libre:  
 Vencer a otro es ser vencedor;  
 Vencerse a sí mismo es ser invencible (Lechowski, 2019).

The previous lines greatly exemplify his now transcended vision, which finally allows him to abandon dual thinking between the self and the other. Quarciso has now accepted that the only source of salvation and redemption lies within himself. Interestingly, the element of fire, though more implicit and more metaphorically expressed unlike the previous acts, is the final component that allows Quarciso to fully integrate his past experiences with his calm, undisturbed, and reborn self:

Lo siento, madre, ¿cómo iba a quedarme?:  
 Fue tal el horror del desengaño..., sólo el dolor pudo curarme;  
 Tuve que perderme para poder ganarme,  
 Sé que tu generoso corazón indulgente podrá perdonarme  
 Por salir despavorido;  
 Sí, corrí, corrí, corrí  
 Hasta fundirme en el camino... (Lechowski, 2019).

Fire allows him to melt his diverse, conflicting emotions into unity, reunite himself with the world as one, and accept his pain as a transitional state. After these years of solitude, Quarciso finally had the opportunity to glimpse more profoundly into a Zen experience and implement Zen Buddhist notions to overcome his once tremendous pain. He no longer sees contradictions, divides himself with the other, and acknowledges his insight: "Y así aprendí a ver en lo hondo de todas las cosas, / Hoy las piedras del camino son piedras preciosas" (Lechowski, 2019). Fundamentally, "La carta" functions as a testimony of Quarciso's journey towards enlightenment, in which he has finally managed to accept the facts without opposing or even questioning them. His suffering and agony have completely dissipated, and he has finally obtained a notion of salvation to which many of the ideas inherent in Zen Buddhism have contributed.

## CONCLUSION

Undeniably, the content and form similarities between Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Lechowski's *Quarcissus: El arte de desamar* stand as a remarkable testimony that some Western poetic works have touched the Zen vision and attempt to convey *satori*, be it in an intellectual way, as in the case of the former, or in the more experiential manifestation of Lechowski's extensive rap song. In fact, *Quarcissus: El arte de desamar* is yet another of the few examples of a possible illustration of the path to enlightenment through the eyes of a Western mind, who, as a result of being mainly focused on the I-ness, is unable to cope with his romantic despair and unrequited, decomposing love.

If *Four Quartets* resorts to a profoundly structured approach that includes conscious meditation and reflection on topics that include war, the self, and religious imagery to convey a sense of enlightenment, Lechowski's simple use of love and betrayal—and consequently its decomposition and rebirth—as one of the work's foundational themes become more meaningful when considering that love, or rather a single-minded, egocentric, and even dangerous version of it, has been engaged with Western civilization since works

as classical as *The Iliad* or *Romeo and Juliet*. These works, though widely studied still today, are excellent examples of how conflicting the Western mind can be when detached from a duality, driving characters not only to war and anger but also to despair and suicide. By using romantic attachment and unrequited love, Lechowski's extensive rap is able to materialize difficult-to-grasp concepts as those of Zen Buddhism and deliver them to the Western mind. Lechowski's *Quarcissus*, through such an attractive and contemporary way, reminds Western literary academics of how little attention has been paid to Zen Buddhism in Western literature while, at the same time, shows the potential of rap, a marginalized genre often misconceptualized and looked upon with disdain for its apparent academic irrelevancy.

Zen Buddhism, as a point of convergence between Eliot's poem (an eminently academic text) and Lechowski's musical composition (which is associated to pop culture) also serves to illustrate a number of points about this philosophy. First, human beings experience intense suffering regardless of their social status or circumstances. Be it a world war or a broken heart, the reaction of individuals to suffering can be self-damaging or it can lead to an inner insight. In addition, both works illustrate the Buddhist principle of enlightenment for those who seek it inside; wisdom is not necessarily acquired in highly academic contexts or by following religions faithfully. Indeed, *Quarcissus* and *Four Quartets* exemplify that *satori* and the path to enlightenment is open for those who want to overcome themselves without any social or academic distinction.

Finally, it is important to remark that this study only browses over some of the parallels between *Quarcissus* and *Four Quartets*. A deep analysis of all the similarities that both works manifest would be impractical due to their extension and the need to provide detailed explanations of Buddhist concepts that defy simple definitions. For a future project, it would be interesting to pay full attention to the way in which both works manifest Buddhist ideas such as impermanence, the Noble Eightfold path, or *samsara*. Still, we hope that our

contribution by taking a look at how *Four Quartets* and *Quarcissus* intersect on the proposal of the classic elements and their connection to *satori* can spark an academic discussion on the legitimacy of certain contemporary works that are typically regarded as commercial or inferior because they do not belong to the literary canon.

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