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### Sacred Time & Sacred Places in the Poetry of Akhavan and Eliot -A Comparative Study

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#### Abstract

In this paper, the two poems “East Coker” by Eliot and Akhavan’s “Miras” [Heritage] will be compared and contrasted in order to check if the allusions to sacred places and sacred times in these poems would match with the primitive man’s understanding and application of the concepts, and if the poets have assumed for themselves the same poetic responsibility of the myth interpreter as Eliade assigned for the modern poets. Eliot wrote “East Coker” after visiting his ancestors’ village, East Coker, and in the poem, he is concerned about the notion of time. In “Miras”, the narrator is talking about a piece of heritage handed down to him from his distant ancestors through the time past. He symbolically refers to the heritage as “pustin-e kohneh” [an old fur cloak]. The findings of the research reveal that while there are similarities in the deep respect and nostalgic feeling the poets show for the sacred past time, there are differences in the poets’ choice of poetic diction and myths they allude to. The findings will, also, confirm that in their myth application, both poets have remained committed to their poetic responsibility as myth-interpreters of their time.

Key words: Akhavan. Eliot, Myth, Miras, East Cocker

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#### Introduction

Since the Persian poet Mahdi Akhavan Sales and the British Poet Thomas Stearns Eliot have had a very lasting impact on the modern poetry of their countries, it is essential to offer a brief synopsis of their poetic lives. Mahdi Akhavan Sales, Mim.Omid [M. Hope], was born on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928 in Mashhad, Iran. His father, Ali, originally from Yazd province, was an apothecary (‘aṭṭār), and his mother, Maryam who had a good talent for poetry, was a native of Khorasan. Akhavan moved to Tehran, Iran’s capital city, in 1949 and worked as a teacher. When Dr.Mosaddegh’s government was toppled by a coup, Akhavan was imprisoned along with Nima Yooshij and some other intellectuals for their political activities. Akhavan is known as one of the most prominent contemporary poets and one of the pioneers of Modern Poetry [sher-e no] in Persian language. He had a deep passion and respect for Iran’s ancient culture and literature and is most well-known for his classic poetic diction and his epic style. He also had a great deal of knowledge about Persian mythology and frequently alluded to them in his poems. He died on August 26, 1990 in Mehr hospital, Tehran, Iran.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, T. S. Eliot, was born on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri, to a well-educated family with a deep religious background. His father, Henry Ware Eliot, was a successful businessman and his mother, Charlotte Champe Stearns, wrote poetry and was a social worker. He grew up to become an American-British poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, literary critic and editor. He

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moved to England in 1914 to settle, work and marry there. He became a British subject in 1927 and converted to Anglicanism. He was deeply interested in mythology and suggested “Mythic Method” as a literary style to the modern writers. He is considered one of the 20th century's major poets and his poems are seen as the masterpieces of the Modernist movement. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948, "for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry". Eliot died on 4<sup>th</sup>, January 1965.

Thus, because of their contributions in modernizing the poetry of their languages, and also because of their great knowledge and deep interest in mythology and their frequent alluding to myths, their poems can be reviewed as the most appropriate samples of myth application in the poetry of 20<sup>th</sup> century. As such, in order to trace the allusions made to sacred places and rituals of re-actualization of eternal time as performed in mythologies, in Akhavan's “Miras” and Eliot's “East Cocker”, first, the poems will be reviewed in their own contexts and the myths alluded to in each poem will be identified and elaborated on. Then, to compare the extent to which each poet has engaged himself with the notion of sacred time and sacred places as discussed by Mircea Eliade, the poets' approach to time past in contrast to the time present will be discussed. Meanwhile, the poetic diction, i.e. linguistic style, the vocabulary, the metaphors as well as myth allusion will be reviewed in order to see if they are in alignment with the poet's philosophical approach to the concept of time and place. Finally, there will be a discussion concerning how successful each poet has been in performing his poetic commitment, i.e. fulfilling his duty as the myth interpreter of the time.

### **Akhavan's *Miras***

Akhavan wrote “Miras” in 1956; it was almost three years after Mosadegh's government was overthrown in the 1953 coup d'état. In those years, Akhavan was imprisoned for a few months because of his political activities. It was during those days of his imprisonment that his first child, a daughter called Laleh, was born. Years later, while Akhavan was talking about his children, he mentioned that Laleh's “intellectual growth at an early age had surprised” him (Akhavan)” (16-17). Akhavan addresses the poem to Laleh who was a toddler at that time.

Throughout the poem, the first-person narrator speaks boastfully about an old fur cloak, *pustin-e kohneh*, which he claims has been handed down to him from his distant forbearers. He explains that nothing can be found about his ancestors in recorded chronicles, apparently, because he does not belong to any noble birth family. Ironically, referring to history as “Kind Uncle”, he criticizes him for not recording anything about his forbearers' life in his well-designed notebook. He implies that such a neglecting might have been either because the Kind Uncle, i.e. history, has been too coward before the cruel, totalitarian rulers who used to believe themselves to be of such a higher rank and looked so down upon the common people that they could not tolerate even a name of the ordinary people to be mentioned along with theirs in the same chronicle; or perhaps because the “Kind Uncle” was too conservative and flattering toward those unjust rulers to take the risk of mentioning anything about achievements of the poor people in his precious chronicles which was, in fact, devoted to the trivial details of royal families. Yet, he is still happy because he has an old fur cloak which can tell him so many stories about the past.

Jabbari (2018), a Persian literature critic, has reviewed critical articles written on Akhavan's “Mirs” since the time it was first published in 1956. He asserts that almost all critics, concentrating on the first three stanzas and trying to decode what the symbolic expression “*pustin-e kohneh*” might be representing, neglect the rest of the poem which contains very important key words and implications to the thorough interpretation of the poem. Jabbari notes that most reviewers agree that the expression, “*pustin-e kohneh*” is symbolizing Iran's old culture and history, spiritualities and traditions. Yet, he refers to a few articles which go further than the title and discuss the character whom the narrator refers to as “my father”. They take him as the poet's real father, and the herbs and flowers that he mentions, to be relating to his (Akhavan's father's) profession, i.e. traditional medicine. Moreover, Jabbari asserts that each one of the stanzas has a special internal structure and its own part in completing the final structure

and meaning of the poem. He argues that the 11<sup>th</sup> stanza starting with the line, “Years ago, on the fruitful beach of Jeyhun,” [سالها زین پیشتر در ساحل پرحاصل جیحون] is, in fact, an allusion to Ferdowsi’s (major Persian epic poet) life story and the problems he had with Soltan Mahmood, the king of the time, after he had written Shahnameh. So, the title “my father”, for Akhavan, can be standing for “Ferdowsi” whom he always considered as his spiritual father and the herbal medicines he mentions in the next stanza, should be taken as Persian mythology and literature which both Akhavan and Ferdowsi loved and considered as medicine for healing the social wounds at all times.

While Jabbari’s interpretation of the poem seems to be more acceptable than the previous ones, there are still other aspects of the poem which need more illumination. In a mythological reading of the poem, it sounds quite acceptable if we take the word “father” in the line “Years ago....” to be an allusion both to Ferdowsi and the story of his attempts to revive Persian culture and mythology; and at the same time, to be referring to Akhavan’s natural father, who had migrated to the coast of Jeyhun years ago. And thus, the herbs and the flowers mentioned in the next stanza, (i.e. Assyrian plums and hyssops, ...) to be both a reference to his father’s profession, (i.e. apothecary) as well as, Persian culture and mythology; as Kadkaninotes.

His father, Ali Akhavan, as Mahdi said, was one of those Iran’s apothecaries, traditional physicians, whose shop in Mashhad is still one of the centres which people refer to for traditional medicine... and what he says (in “Miras”),

باز او ماند و سه پستان و گل زوفا  
بلز او ماند و سکنگور و سیه دانه

Again, he was left alone with Assyrian plums and hyssops  
Again, he was left alone with black nightshades and fennel flowers  
is about this paternal profession. His father had migrated in childhood or as a young man from Yazd to Mavara-o Nahr (i.e. " ساحل پرحاصل جیحون" [the fruitful beach of Jeyhun] and later they had come to Mashhad " بر لب خشک کشف رود" [on the dried edge of Kashaf Rood]. (21-22)

To support such a claim, we can also refer to other parts of the poem. In the third stanza, talking about his grandfathers, he, ironically, recalls that the life condition has been the same for his grand, grand grandfathers, going back into history up to those who lived in the caves and the jungles.

همچنین دینال کن تا آن پدر جدم،  
کاندر احم جنگلی، خمیازه کوهی  
روز و شب میگشت، یا میخفت

And like this go back to that grand grandfather,  
Who, in a thickness of a jungle or a yawning of a mountain,  
Used to wander or sleep days and nights. (482)

Thus, we can claim that the word, “father” as applied by Akhavan in this poem should be more appropriately taken as standing for all his forbearers through history. It is, more evidently, observed in the following stanzas where the narrator criticizes history for being ignorant of his ancestors’ life and their achievements,

این دبیر گیج و گول و کوردل: تاریخ  
تا مذهب دفترش را گاهگه می خواست  
با پریشان سرگذشتی از نیاکانم بیالاید  
رعشه می افتادش اندر دست  
در بُنان دُرَفشانس کلک شیرین سلک می لرزید  
حیرش اندر لیکه چون سنگ سیه می بست

This dazed and gullible scribe: history,  
Each time he was poised to stain his gilded chronicle

With the troubled fate of my forebearers,  
A tremor flashed through his hands,  
The mellifluous quill quavered at his eloquent fingertips  
The ink clothed like a black stone in the silk-padded ink-well.(482)

However, the Kind Uncle has eagerly recorded the most trivial details of everyday life of those who have been in position of power, whom the narrator, ironically, calls the "Just Rulers"!

زانکه فریاد امیر عادلی چون رعد بر می خاست  
هان، کجایی، ای عموی مهربان! بنویس"  
ماه نو را دوش ما با چاکران، در نیمه شب دیدیم  
مادیان سرخ یال ما سه کَرّت تا سحر ز ایید  
در کدامین عهد بوده ست این چنین، یا آن چنان بنویس"

For the call of a just ruler had risen like a thunder:

"O! Where are you, Kind Uncle! Write:

Yester eve, with the servants we beheld the new moon at midnight

Our sorrel mare gave birth three times before dawn.

In what epoch it happened thus or thus, write." (482-3)

Akhavan's critical tone while addressing history has been reviewed from different perspectives. Jabbari refers to Akhavan's tendency to Marxist ideology early in his youth, his political activities and his turning back from them after the leaders' promises turned out to be illusive. He claims that Akhavan's respectful tone while talking about his ancestors, about whom nothing has been mentioned in chronicles, is, in fact, a teasing response to those lefty leaders who believed themselves to be of noble birth but very soon they were proved to be disloyal to their promises and to people's welfare.

By referring to the life of his ancestors' noble birth, which can be preceded back till those foggy, pre-historic millenniums when men lived in caves, he proclaims his political stand toward the lefty leaders and, applying an ironic language, he criticizes them severely. By talking about his ancestors, he claims himself to be from a noble birth generation and expresses his pride for belonging to them. At the same time, he criticizes those political leaders who had earlier considered themselves to be genuine and noble birth. (Jabbari 31)

However, Akhavan's critical tone sounds not only to be mocking the concept of noble birth in the sense of having a connection to the royal families, but also to be negating having any kinship with those in religious authority.

من یقین دارم که در رگهای من خون رسولی یا امامی نیست  
نیز خون هیچ خان و پادشاهی نیست  
وین ندیم ژنده پیرم دوش با من گفت  
کاندر این بیفخر بودنها گناهی نیست

I am sure that in my veins there is no blood of any prophets or saints,  
Neither is the blood of any rulers or kings  
And my old worn out companion told me last night  
That there is no sin in such humbleness (483)

While Akhavan's critical stand against recorded history sounds quite in line with Marxist perspective, it can be clearly seen that his proud respectful tone while talking about his pustin-e kohneh is because of his tendency to view history, as narrated by the old cloak, to be a meaningful identity which has marvellous gifts for man. As Huber notes,

„„„ WE are forever cut off from the being- in – the world of those who were not counted among the four classes of the people, this is what Akhavan's language in MIRAS most essentially

signifies. The poem's diction itself evokes the marvels of long dead past whose words have slipped out of memory, are nothing but obscure sounds to us now. (69)

Thus, we can see that history as reflected in the stories told by the old fur cloak, quite in line with Eliade's definition of the eternal time, can be taken as equal to the whole body of culture and mythology of the nation. Huber adds, ... , in MIRAS, the materiality of a tangible, owned human history is embodied in the image of Pustin-e kohneh, handed down in time: a quiet history that is absent from chronicles of the powerful, pushed to the margins of even language itself. (176)

، ليک هيچت غم مباد از اين  
!اي عموی مهربان تاريخ  
پوستيني كهنه دارم من كه ميگويد  
!از نياكانم براي داستان تاريخ

Yet, don't be saddened by this,  
History, Kind Uncle!  
I have an old fur cloak that tells me  
Tales of my forbearers! (483)

Such a claim about the sameness of history and mythology from Akhavan's point of view, as expressed in this poem, can be supported by Akhavan's diction while describing the cloak, i.e. the word pustin, which usually refers to a very old outer cover made of animals' skin cave men used to wear to keep themselves warm, and also adjectives like, javdanmanand [immortal-like], and ruzegaralud [time-stained], all imply that heritage is a deathless property handed down through ages and has the story of all those days in it, the kind of stories not recorded in the well-known, apparently reliable, chronicles.

In the next parts, Akhavan tells other stories and provides more imagery to clarify the nature and the essence of the cloak as a significantly valuable heritage. First, he tells the story of his father's and his companions' attempt to renew the old fur cloak. Their hard-work, he says, finally ended in failure after a horrible storm and the condition became the same as before. He bitterly asserts that the condition after the storm became the same as it has been since the beginning of the world, "هم بدان سان كز ازل بوده است". The ironic language in this part, we can say, plays an effective role in reminding the readers of the mythic stories of scarifying the most beautiful young ones or the best products and crops before the gods to fertilize the lands.

Then, in the tenth stanza, referring to the day his father died, he explains that the old fur cloak was given to him and four more people as the heirs.

ما پس از او پنج تن بوديم  
من بسان كاروانسالارشان بودم  
- كاروانسالار ره نشناس-  
، او فتان خيزان  
تا بدین غایت كه بينی راه پيموديم  
روز رحلت پوستينش را به ما بخشيد

On the day of his death he offered his cloak to us.  
After him we were five persons.  
I was like the leader of their caravan.  
A caravan leader who did not know the way  
Falling and raising  
Up to here, as you can see, we travelled. (484-5)

Because of the information Akhavan presents about the heirs of the cloak and what happened to them, decoding the symbolic language and imageries in this part can be very important in surmising more appropriate guesses about the real essence of the cloak. Jabbari believes that based on the clues Akhavan gives in this part, pustin-e kohneh is nothing but the national epic poetry and literature. Akhavan, in an

interview, makes rather different speculations about who those five heirs including the narrator might have been.

although Akhavan does not give any clues who he means by the five persons, based on his words in an interview, we can make some guesses. In this interview, he (Akhavan) considers national epic poetry precious and valuable and contrasts them with historical or religious epic literature and names some national epic writers respectfully. (35)

There are other key words in this stanza which can help us make appropriate speculations and reach to a more reliable interpretation of the poem and its imageries. Here, the narrator calls himself “caravan salar” or the leader of the five people who were given the heritage. Remembering Akhavan’s love for Persian mythology and his frequent alluding to them in his poems and also, the point that his poetic style is usually referred to as “Khorasani-e no”, which means the new form of Ferdowsi’s poetic style, we can more readily agree with those reviewers who emphasize that Akhavan’s heritage or the old fur cloak is nothing but the priceless Persian culture and mythology which he loved so much.

Akhavan still has more interesting elaborations to make about the concept of heritage or the old fur cloak to help us understand it better. In the last stanza addressing his daughter, he writes,

!های فرزندانم  
بشنو و هشدار  
بعد من این سالخورد جاودان مانند  
با بر و دوش تو دارد کار

O, my child!  
Listen and be careful  
After me this aged immortal- like  
Will be dealing with your shoulders and your sides. (485)

While the poet directly refers to his daughter as the addressee, most critics insist on giving a more general meaning to the poem by taking the call, “O, my daughter!” to be, in fact, a call for all young people, i.e. the young generation of the country, for whom the poet’s daughter can stand as a representative, to listen to the poem, take its message and be the heir of that old fur cloak. That’s why, they say, the poet advises her to keep the cloak as clean as it has been so far and away from the clothes of those dirty people.

Indeed, mostly under the influence of the sad and disappointing condition of the country after the coup in 1953, critical reviewers have been able to present good interpretations of the poem, it is claimed in this research that a mythological reading can still reveal some more hidden aspects and of the main theme and the concept of *pustin-e kohne* as a heritage or “Mirs” for the young readers of the poem.

In *The Sacred and the Profane the Nature of Religion*, Eliade discusses how important the circular redemptive perspective of history, termed as eternal return, was for the primitive mind. He explains how the mythic man’s attempts to regain the sacred time through rituals brought him peace and joy in life and a hope to join the eternity after death. He, also, asserts that the modern poets’ nostalgic return to mythologies should be taken as their reaction to the modern philosophies of history and their harmful impact on man’s life.

Having all those discussions in mind and also, remembering Akhavan’s great passion and love for Persian mythology, the present researcher offers a different interpretation for the sixth stanza in which the narrator’s father tries to renew the old fur cloak, and the seventh stanza in which the narrator recalls the time when together with his friends, he, also, attempted to make the cloak new and had the same fate as his father’s, i.e. “the horrible storm happened and things became as they had been”.

Remembering Ferdowsi's story when he escaped to the shore of the Kashaf Rood to keep himself and his precious book, Shahnameh, safe from SoltanMahmood's wrath, and then comparing it with the story of Akhavan's father migrating to the same shore of the Kashaf Rood from Yazd in search for a better life, we can claim that the poet has keenly chosen the general title, "my father", to refer to two events happening at different times in the same place, seeking similar goals, to provide a real example of how the concept of eternal return of history should be understood in the modern minds.

As such, it can be implied that while Ferdowsi's great job of compiling Iran's old myths in Shahnameh was, no doubt, an outstanding endeavour to revive Iran's lost dignity in the hands of Arabs occupying the country, DrMosadegh's great endeavour for nationalizing Iran's Oil Industry, supported by Akhavan and the other intellectuals of the time, also followed the same objective of regaining the country's lost majesty. As we know these two well-known tragic events in Iran's history are regarded as having the same objective of reconstructing the country to be as prosperous as it once used to be. Thus, set beside each other in a poem, perhaps they can also make a good example of the circular turning of the history.

More importantly, in the last stanza, the narrator advises his daughter as the next heir of the cloak to keep it as holy as it has ever been, away from people with wicked intentions. Thus, we can deduce that while he emphasizes on the value and significance of the heritage that he is handing down, he is also trying to redefine the mythic concept of being sacred in the way it should be understood in our time, i.e. to believe in our culture, mythology and literature, as sacred heritages having been handed down to us from a sacred time in the beginning of the creation.

### **Eliot's "East Cocker"**

As we know, Eliot's background religious trainings along with his academic studies in philosophy, both Western and Indic, led him to a kind of unique worldview clearly reflected in his poetry especially in "Four Quartets". Moreover, there are two other unique features in this poem which make it an appropriate e for our myth studies from Eliade's perspective. 1) Eliot wrote the poem after visiting a significant historical place. 2) In this poem, Eliot is basically concerned with the concept of "time" as the main theme.

Eliot wrote "East Coker", the second poem of the "Four Quartets", in 1940, after he had visited his ancestral village "East Coker" in Somerset England. It was, in fact, the home of Eliot's first forebear before they left for America in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The poem was originally written for Good Friday. Thus, it can make a good case to search for Eliade's interpretation of the notion of sacred time and sacred place.

"East Coker" starts with an assertion about time, "In my beginning is my end." Considering the fact that the village, East Coker, he was visiting at the time, was the place where his ancestors lived and were buried and Eliot himself had asked for his remains to be buried there, critics are usually inclined to identify the first person narrator of the poem as the poet himself. In the first lines of the poem, he writes,

Houses live and die: there is a time for building  
And a time for living and for generation  
And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane  
And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots  
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto. (169)

On the other hand, the impersonal, philosophical view of life expressed in a serious poetic diction, also, is usually believed to be the consequence of the traumatic effect of the two destructive World Wars Eliot and his contemporaries had experienced.

However, it should not be neglected that when in the following line, as if compressing several centuries into a few lines, Eliot presents rapid images of constructions and destructions sketch of the

village of East Coker, he is, in fact, presenting his general philosophical approach to the cyclic nature of time. Such a reading of the poem makes it an appropriate case to search for the reflection of Eliade's definition for the concept of cyclic time and the eternal return as expressed in myths.

... 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.(196)

Then, in the next stanza, either to exemplify his assertion about the existence of the past time in present time or to clarify the concept of eternal return, Eliot provides an overview of the village as its present condition looks like in a late afternoon,

Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,  
And the deep lane insists on the direction  
Into the village.... (196)

In the following strophe, as if moving back into history, there is an image of a summer midnight in an open field in the same the village in 17<sup>th</sup> century. A community of men and women is described to be dancing in public, hand in hand,

And see them dancing around the bonfire  
The association of man and women (197)

The image of dancing as presented in this part of the poem has attracted the attention of different critics who mostly claim that the rhythm of the dance so subtly described is to recall the rhythm of life as described in the Bible.

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; And a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, a time to build up; ... A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (Ecclesiastes, 3: 1-8)

Meanwhile, in describing the dance, the line "In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie" (197) is said to be a quotation from the book *The Booke Named the Governour written* by Sir Thomas Elyot, Eliot's namesake and distant ancestor, who served at the court of King Henry VIII. In the first reading of the poem, this part might sound like a very simple way of expressing a nostalgic emotion occurred to the poet after visiting the village where his Tudor ancestor once lived. Eliot could have easily imagined the simple lives of the peasants who lived in the village at that time. However, remembering the fact that the book was published in 1531, just before the Protestant Reformation occurred in England, an event which caused the country to undergo a dramatic religious change, has led some critics to put more significance on Eliot's alluding to that particular book than just a nostalgia for his late ancestors.

Eliot has intensified the mood of the opening description of the village and provided "an insight into a harmony with nature which must be re-established if the truly Christian imagination is to be recovered by Christians." (Mc Nelly 60)

Other critics point to Eliot's Anglo-Catholic belief in marriage as the constitution of life, and assert that by alluding to a text written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, he is, in fact, revealing his disapproval of Protestantism because of the damage, he believed, it caused to family union.

This simple rustic picture of people dancing around a bonfire to celebrate a marriage precedes this turbulent period of English history by just a few years – a contextual fact whose significance would not have been lost on T. S. Eliot the Anglo-Catholic. (Tearlepar.3)



Then, a picture of the same area is presented when the summer midnight is over, and the dawn is on its way. The image can be both considered as an example for the notion of eternal cyclic time of mythologies and as another reminder of Eliot's first assertion on time, i.e. the presence of past in present time.

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. (197)

In section II, in a different image of time, seasons are mentioned in a converted cycle. The cycle moves into an apocalyptic fire, and the fire will finally put an end to the world. This image is usually said to be there both to direct the reader's attention to the prologue of the poem, i.e. Heraclitan philosophy about unity of opposites and the ending of the world in fire, and to confirm Eliot's first assertion on time, "In my beginning is my end".

What is the late November doing  
With the disturbance of the spring  
And creatures of the summer heat,  
...  
The world to that destructive fire  
Which burns before the ice-cap reigns (198)

After creating all these imageries of the cyclic nature of the time and the presence of eternal time, Eliot still has a lot more to add about the concept of time. So, he changes his perspective and questions the reliability of the experience or what men can gain or learn through time. He expresses his distrust of experience and criticizes those who rely too much on their knowledge because, he explains, things in nature are in constant changing, so no fixed pattern can be considered for them.

... There is, it seems to us,  
At best, only a limited value  
In the knowledge derived from experience,  
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,  
For the pattern is new in every moment  
And every moment is a new and shocking  
Valuation of all we have been. (199)

In contrast, in the concluding lines of the strophe, while repeating his dissatisfaction with putting too much reliance on experience, he praises humility as the key to a happy life. "The only kind of wisdom that means anything, Eliot decides, is 'the wisdom of humility' – knowledge derived from experience can only take us so far." (Tearle par. 4)

... Do not let me hear  
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,  
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,  
Or belonging to another, or to others, or to God.  
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless. (199)

Then, in the last two lines, Eliot, in a very poetic language, remembers the houses and the dancers, he mentioned in the first part, to be gone, a phenomenon which can present another example for the cyclic characteristic of the time. Mc Nelly notes, "All the striving and yearning of human existence is here summarized, and the eventual end of all things human is shown." (66)

The houses are all gone under the sea  
The dancers are all gone under the hill. (199)

Then, in the third section, as if trying to present more elaborations on the issue of death, Eliot directly names different groups of people, civil servants, merchants, ... and reminds that all human beings are doomed to die and go to darkness, "O dark, dark, dark. They all go into the dark,". (199). Yet, in the rest of the poem he makes it clear that this darkness which can be standing for both individual's death and the end of the world is neither frightening nor sad and disappointing. He compares the darkness of death with the darkness we are put in between two scenes of a play in a theatre when we are sure that a new scene is going to start soon.

Meanwhile, as we know, Eliot originally wrote "East Coker" for Good Friday. Putting this point into consideration, critics have been able to decode most of the imageries applied in the poem more clearly in the context of Christian mythology. The most important image in part IV, "The wounded surgeon", for example, is easily identified with Christ. Then, it can be seen that in part IV, which is the shortest of the all five parts of the poem, not only Eliot summarizes the whole poem, but he also tries to prescribe his treatment for all man's suffering on the earth. Very interestingly, Mc Nelly puts the starting lines of each of the stanzas of this part together,

The wounded surgeon plies the steel  
Our only health is the disease  
The whole earth is our hospital  
The chill ascends from feet to knees  
The dripping blood our only drink.

Mc Nelly tries to reveal how well they can tell the story of Christ's passions in this world, according to Christian Church's teachings. He notes, "the images progress, from the simple operation, to health, to the hospital, and finally, to the Eucharist" (72)

Thus, we can see that based on his religious worldview, Eliot considered all man's sufferings in life to be the natural consequence of Adam's curse and the Original Sin. He could see that the health of the soul is only possible through pain and suffering which will, finally, lead man to his reunion to God. As such, to cure man's sufferings, the whole earth should be taken as a hospital in which Christ acts as a surgeon who has been wounded himself.

The dripping blood our only drink,  
The bloody flesh our only food:  
In spite of which we like to think  
That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood-  
And, in spite of that, we call this Friday good. (202)

Once again, in part V, Eliot shifts his attention to the issue of words and their inability to express man's deep religious experience,

In the general mess of imprecision of feeling  
Undisciplined squads of emotion. (203)

And as if he is completing the discussion he started in part III about the act of repeating what he has already said in his poems, Eliot, while he insists that he does it intentionally, he emphasizes on semantic poverty of words in expressing meaning. He asserts that what he is trying to say has perhaps already been said by others, and explains that the reason is the role and the importance that such repetitions can have in man's life. In this regard, critics sometimes point to Eliot's frequent quotations from earlier men of letters and world masterpieces, but they mostly believe that these repetitions can never lower the value and the beauty of the literary works Eliot has created. Mc Nelly argues that Eliot

has most probably been indebted to St. John of the Cross and metaphysical poets like Herbert, in writing “East Coker”. Yet, he asserts that in alluding to different sources Eliot has not, surely, been restating them but he has rather been creating a new masterpiece out of the ancient concept.

... And what there is to conquer  
By strength and submission, has already been discovered  
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope  
To emulate—but there is no competition— (203)

Eliot’s insistence on the importance of obvious repetitions in his poetry can perhaps be best understood if seen from the perspective of Eliade’s findings in his comparative studies of mythologies where mythic men tried to sacralise their activities by imitating gods, prophets or heroes in their rituals.

As Bradford points out,

The poet realizes that what he is attempting to discover has already been discovered by Dante, Donne, and others--his masters. But he is not competing with them; he is only trying to recover this lost sense of man's spiritual possibilities. (qtd. Mc Nelly75)

Then, in the last stanza, he concludes the whole poem by returning to the issue of the eternal peace in eternal time somewhere out of this world and out of the time as we know. What he tries to communicate sounds very much like the process of sanctifying the chaotic profane time through love, when he writes,

Love is most nearly itself  
When here and now cease to matter. (203)

Thus, it can be concluded that in introducing the idea of exploring what has been lost, which he advises us to undertake, an action resembling to and in lined with the rituals the primitive man used to perform to make their life meaningful and happier, Eliot is also fulfilling his duty as the mythinterpreter of the time.

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.(203)

As such, perhaps we should agree with McNelly when he asserted that the whole message of the poem is expressed in the last line of the poem, in which Eliot reverses the first line, to show the full circle of life which the narrator himself, as an individual, traverses, “In my end is my beginning”. (204)

A man’s birth predicates his death, and his death predicates his re-birth. His life should be a constant attempt to prepare his soul for that re-birth and his attempts at preparation are dictated by history and by his realization of his purpose on earth. (76).

Here and there does not matter  
We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion. (203-4)

## Conclusion

Based on what was discussed in this research, it can be deduced that sometimes an object like “pustin-e kohneh” in “Miras” or a place, a city or a village, as in “East Coker”, representing the whole past, evokes a very deep nostalgic impression, i.e. a kind of sorrow accompanied with respect in poets and inspire them to write poetry. In writing these kinds of poems, the poets most often seek joy and release in remembering myths.

In “Miras”, as we could see, Akhavan’s “pustin-e kohneh”, symbolizing Iran’s whole culture and mythology handed down to him from his distant ancestors, living in jungles and caves, was considered as a precious heritage unexchangeable with the most expensive clothes in the world. So much so that he even advises his daughter, as the next heir of “pustin-e kohneh” after him, to keep it as pure as it has been so far.

It was also the village, East Coker, the place of birth of Eliot’s ancestors which inspired him to write so philosophically about the concept of time. The place which Eliot chose to be his own burial place reminded him of the whole sacred past and eventually led him to think of the eternal peaceful life in heaven.

In our review of the poems, we could also detect some noticeable differences in the type of the reactions the poets took in the face of the changes happened to those sacred places or objects through time. Eliot seems to have accepted the changes as a natural process of life so he blames nobody for what has happened, and tries to conclude some moral points from historical events. Akhavan, on the contrary, seems to be criticizing the recorded chronicles for being devoted only to those in the position of power.

It was also shown that under the influence of their personal life and their socio-cultural background, each poet preferred to allude to a different type of myth and they also chose different poetic languages and vocabulary. While in Akhavan’s poems the myths alluded to were usually epic heroes and the poetic diction was more epic like and with more archaic and classic vocabulary. Eliot generally alluded to universal and religious myths and he preferred a philosophical language and modern English diction in his poetry.

We attributed the difference between the way the poets expressed their nostalgic feeling for the past and their philosophical view towards the changes happened, to their different personal and socio-cultural backgrounds. We, also, considered the traumatic effect of the disasters happening in Iran through history, especially the socio-political crisis during Akhavan’s young age, which caused the country to lose the high international position she used to have, the main reason for Akhavan’s return to the classic style and epic mythology.

Meanwhile, in the case of Eliot, we attributed his philosophical approach to poetry to the experience of the two destructive World Wars happening at the time when people were proudly calling the century the modern age and were boasting their rapid scientific developments. It was discussed that Eliot’s religious and philosophical background caused him to consider the issue to be a universal problem happening to man as the result of his separation from heavens and spirituality. Thus, he suggested paying more attention to religious thinking as the solution.

Finally, we discussed that in spite of all the differences, the most important similarity in the poems reviewed was that in both of them, poets could manage to remain faithful to their responsibility as the myth interpreters of their time, a commitment which Eliade considers significant for poets.

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