

## WATER SYMBOLISM IN T.S. ELIOT'S "THE FOUR QUARTETS" AND IAN MCMILLAN'S "CANAL LIFE"

T.S. Eliot'un "The Four Quartets" ve Ian McMillan'ın "Canal Life" Eserlerinde Su Sembolizmi

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### Abstract

From ancient religious texts and myths to contemporary literary works, water has always been a highly symbolic element linked to life and human experience. While many studies have explored water symbolism within literary works, comparative analyses of this symbol across different writings are less common. So, the aim of this study is to compare the symbolic representation of "water" in T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets" and Ian McMillan's "Canal Life". In "The Four Quartets" Eliot employs water imagery as a powerful force that embodies the flow of time and memories. Through this symbolism, Eliot delves into the deep subconscious of human nature and explores the necessity of a spiritual journey as a source of meaning, enlightenment, and redemption. McMillan, on other hand, uses the symbol of water in "Canal Life" as a source of reflection, tranquility, and nostalgia. It signifies pleasures and the passage of time, tightly connected to communities. This essay provides a comprehensive overview of the enduring power of water as a symbol that can hold truths, experiences, and times of human life and its ability to reflect beyond the limits of perception. Through this thorough comparative analysis that is based on symbolism theory, the study reveals the unique perspective of each poet in reflecting water symbolism and how it offers richness in these literary works.

**Keywords:** T.S.Eliot, Ian McMillan, Symbolism, Water Symbolism, "The Four Quartets", "Canal Life"

### Öz

Antik dini metinlerden ve mitlerden çağdaş edebi eserlere kadar su, yaşam ve insan deneyimiyle yakından ilişkili, son derece sembolik bir unsur olmuştur. Edebi eserlerde su sembolizmi üzerine birçok çalışma yapılmış olsa da, bu sembolün farklı yazınsal metinler arasındaki karşılaştırmalı analizleri daha nadirdir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı T.S. Eliot'un "The Four Quartets" ve Ian McMillan'ın "Canal Life" adlı eserlerinde suyun sembolik temsillerini karşılaştırmaktır. "The Four Quartets"te Eliot, su imgesini zamanın ve anıların akışını somutlaştıran güçlü bir unsur olarak kullanır. Bu sembolizm aracılığıyla Eliot, insan doğasının derin bilinçaltına iner ve anlam, aydınlanma ve arınma kaynağı olarak ruhsal yolculuğun gerekliliğini araştırır. Öte yandan McMillan, "Canal Life"ta su sembolünü tefekkür, huzur ve nostalji kaynağı olarak ele alır. Su, zevkleri ve zamanın akışını temsil ederken, topluluklarla da sıkı bir bağ içindedir. Bu makale, suyun insan yaşamının hakikatlerini, deneyimlerini ve zamanlarını barındırabilen ve algının sınırlarını aşan bir yansıtıcı güç olarak kalıcı sembolik etkisini kapsamlı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Sembolizm teorisine dayalı bu kapsamlı karşılaştırmalı analiz aracılığıyla çalışma, her bir şairin su sembolizmini yansıtmadaki özgün bakış açısını ve bunun söz konusu edebi eserlerde nasıl bir derinlik sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** T.S. Eliot, Ian McMillan, Sembolizm, Su Sembolizmi, "The Four Quartets", "Canal Life"

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORETICAL HISTORY OF WATER SYMBOLISM

Symbolism is a powerful literary technique that is employed to signify meanings beyond literary uses of words. These abstract and the intangible meanings provide layers of interpretations and depth to stories, inviting readers to interpret complex themes and ideas and reach their deeper implications. As a literary technique, symbolism emerged with the ancient religions and mythologies to convey profound spiritual and philosophical contemplations. For example, in the Egyptian culture the Ankh symbolizes life and the eye of Horus represents protection. In the early literature forms as in ancient Greek and Roman literature, symbolism registers moral lessons and universal truths. During the medieval and Renaissance eras, Christian literature is abundant with various symbols, including the dove, the lamb and the cross. Symbolism in the medieval love poetry celebrates the beauty, purity and divinity of the beloved.

The Romantic movement, which extended in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a resurgence of symbolism with authors such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Blake, employing symbolic imagery to explore the complexities of human emotions and mysteries of the universe. Symbolism became a distinct literary movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in France with poets as Charles Baudelaire, Stephane Mallarme, and Paul Verlaine each of which had his unique style of writing but shared a common target of expressing emotions and concepts by using evocative language and symbolic imagery, opting to imply meanings rather than directly depict reality. René Wellek defines the distinction between symbolism and romanticism saying that “[t]he distrust of inspiration, the enmity to nature is the crucial point which sets symbolism from romanticism” (Wellek, 1970, p. 268). According to this definition and many scholarly works on symbolism, Romanticism held a strong belief in the influence of inspiration and nature in gaining insight about themselves and their surroundings. Symbolism, on the other hand, portrays inspiration as skeptical, personal and distorted, perceiving nature as flawed and a source of alienation.

Symbolism in distinction from other literary movements, emphasizes the importance of language and analogy. Post-symbolist movements such as surrealism are described as being more abstract and less reliant on analogy. Wellek called the period of European literature between 1885 and 1914 as the international movement of symbolism (Wellek, 1970, p. 269). This movement produced great writers and poetry from different countries as T.S Eliot and Yeats from Britain, Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens from the United States of America, Hofmannsthal, George and Rilke from Germany, Bely and Ivanov from Russia and many other great authors. Symbolism extended to reach different literary genres as drama in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, with the symbolism of the skull of Yorick referring to the fleeting nature of life. In novels, symbolism enriches narratives and adds suspension as in Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*, where George Samsa’s transformation into an insect symbolizes the feeling of isolation and represents the effect of modern societies in dehumanizing individuals. In fantasy and science fiction, symbolism explores the deep and complex themes in imaginative settings as in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, where a ring symbolizes the struggle between good and evil. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, even though the Symbolism movement waned in popularity and gradually evolved into other artistic movements, it maintained its influence and contributed in their growth. This movement’s emphasis on suggestion, and emotions through imagery, and its investigation of the subconscious can be clearly seen in later movements such as Surrealism, Expressionism, and certain elements of modernism. This research deciphers the symbolism of water in T.S. Eliot’s “*The Four Quartets*” and Ian McMillan’s “*The Canal Life*”, and investigates how each of these prominent poets approach this symbolism to present profound themes in life.

The symbol of Water, the life-giving element, has been used throughout the ages in religions, ancient mythologies, civilizations, and literature genres as a powerful symbol that nurtures, destroys, and reflects the fluctuating nature of reality. To further understand the symbolic significance of water, the study can look at various interpretations of water imagery across different cultures and religions. In creation myths water was the original substance of existence, that the whole universe emerged from the primordial waters or the cosmic ocean. According to this myth the world was drowned in dark and chaotic state, and that with the help of the creative forces that emerged from the vast ocean, order was imposed (Witzel, 2015). Signs mentions that “metaphorically and metaphysically the ancient mythologies refer to water as the container of life, strength and eternity” (Signs, 1994 p. 210). Water symbolism has played a prominent influence in religions throughout history. In Christianity, water not only refers to rituals of purification and baptism, but it is also a new birth and a source of spiritual renewal in Chamberlain’s comment:

Thus, Christianity transforms water from its inherent powers of cleansing and purifying to become a powerful means of preparing an initiate for emersion into new life in a new community of believers. Past misdeeds are dissolved in the water, and the initiate emerges from the waters as a new person (Chamberlain, 2012, p. 115).

In Hindu belief, the Ganges River holds a significant place in world history as a sacred river that is believed to flow from the heavens and links various realms of existence. It has played a vital role on special occasions and life rituals (Singh,

1994). Witzel (2015) argues that water -salty and sweet- has been a powerful symbol for creation in Mesopotamian mythology, saying that:

When on high heaven had not been named (...) Naught but primordial Apsu [the watery abyss], their begetter, and Mummu Tiamat, she who bore them all, their waters, commingling as a single body (...) then it was that the gods were formed within them (p. 18-19).

According to this mythology, Apsu mingled with Tiamat, the goddess of seawater (salty water), and from their union, gods were born. In ancient Iranian and Indian cultures, rivers are often places of healing. This idea relates to the ancient beliefs in the goddess of rivers and water Sarasvati, the divine source of the Helmand River in Afghanistan (Witzel, 2015). Prayer, the second pillar of Islam, cannot be performed unless Muslims wash specific organs of their body in the "Wudu" signifying a physical and spiritual purification before the direct contact with God.

Many psychoanalytic schools discuss water symbolism as the Jungian views of psychological archetypes which consider water as a representation of the unconscious and the collective consciousness (Jung, 1959). McNiff (1989) suggests that our psychological inward selves are as deep as the sea explaining that "[i]n nature, the word 'depth' is closely associated with water. The organic origins of psychological depth are in the fathomless sea . . . [that] suggests inward as well as downward motion, immersion" (McNiff, 1989, p. 13). Scholars have explored the symbolism of water in their works. In his book *The Water Images*, Bachelard explains that water symbolism triggers memories, dreams, and emotions (Bachelard, 1983). The symbolic expression of water has always existed in artworks such as in the works of Louise Bourgeois. Her sculptures and artistic collections reflect themes of fluidity of the subconscious, memory and time.

Based on the principles of symbolism, a late 19th century movement, this research will decipher the water symbolism in T.S. Eliot's "*The four Quartets*" and Ian McMillan's "*The Canal Life*", and through a comparative lens investigates how each of these prominent poets approach this symbolism to present profound themes in life.

### Water symbolism in "*The Four Quartets*"

Eliot is a prominent poet in both American and English literatures and a central figure in Modernist poetry. He is renowned for his complex, allusive works that dealt with spirituality, desolation, and fragmentation in modern society. Critics have extensively analyzed Eliot's use of imagery, such as Cleanth Brooks, who discusses Eliot's intricate use of symbolism and imagery (Heilman, 1983). Bradbury (1951) made a critical observation regarding the effect of personal experiences in inspiring Eliot's poetic imagery and how it truly impacts the reader, commenting that:

The only further source on which Eliot draws to a considerable extent is his own experience. And here only, in the most legitimate of all sources of imagery, does Eliot's practice come into question. His theory, that simple evocation of a private experience, provided only that it is done accurately and sensitively, will evoke a similar experience from the reader's past, is a very dubious doctrine (Bradbury, 1951, p. 255).

Eliot, influenced by the symbolist movement, employs symbolism in his poetry. His poem "*The Four Quartets*" is a rich tapestry of symbolism, a collection of interconnected poems that discuss human conditions with the universe. The poems reflect on the passage of time, the nature of reality, and the spiritual search for meaning and transcendence. Balakrishnan (1991) comments on the importance of the "*The Four Quartets*" as rooted in the Christian faith and resonates with Indian readers by saying that:

It has been called the greatest philosophical poem of this century. It is rooted in Christian faith and doctrine. It is alive with Christian imagery and symbols such as the Annunciation, Communion, Good Friday, the Temptation of Christ, the Fire, the Dove, the Rose, the Lotus (Balakrishnan, 1991, p. 73).

Throughout "*The Four Quartets*", the water symbol recurs in different forms of rivers, streams, the sea, and the rain, carrying multifaceted meanings. Bradbury (1951) mentions that water in Eliot's works underlies the will to exist. It is a metaphor for the flowing nature of life, explaining that "[f]or Eliot, water has always symbolized the life principle, or better perhaps, the will to life. Through "*The Four Quartets*," it continues to appear in the aspects of river, sea, and waterfall, as stagnant pools, and as ice in the "midwinter" of age." (Bradbury, 1951, p. 259).

The "*Burnt Norton*" is the first of the four Quartets. Moses (2005) describes this poem as "states of feeling that are predicated on an openness to faith" (Moses, 2005. P. 136). In this poem, Eliot reflects upon the interconnectedness of times and their cyclic nature. Eliot talks about the experience of time stillness in the symbolic rose garden as an escape

from reality and a path toward enlightenment and divine understanding. He emphasizes the effect of memories in shaping the present moments. In this poem, Eliot suggests that the physical world hides real and deeper truths and that true knowledge is beyond human perception. He questions language's ability to convey metaphysical meanings and intangible experiences. Eliot examines how memories linger in our lives, saying that echoes of the past are everywhere, urging readers to follow them until they reach the pool:

So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern....  
 To look down into the drained pool.  
 Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,  
 And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,  
 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,  
 The surface glittered out of heart of light,  
 And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.  
 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty ("Burnt Norton", 33- 41).

In these lines, the drained pool represents human emptiness, spiritual disconnection, and loss. At present, the pool lacks water, the life-giving source. This pool is a neglected place because of the decay of time. Water brings life to the pool when it comes back *out of sunlight* and *glitters out of the heart of light*, referring to the strong connection between water and light, as they are divine sources of transformation and represent physical and spiritual awakening. Light signifies clarity, truth, and insight of a fleeting nature. Light, depends on the sky and activates water's reflective power, might be hidden by clouds. The pool becomes alive when exposed to light and filled with water, creating a glittering surface that represents happiness and growth in "*the lotos rose quietly, quietly*" (line. 38). In this spiritual experience, materialism is united with metaphysical creating a new reality.

The pool filled and then emptied reflects the cyclical nature of human experiences. According to Eliot, water is temporal but is the source of life that when meeting with the eternal light, human beings will reach fulfillment and spiritual clarity. Accordingly, following the echoes led to the pool (water), the same as going back to the former past leads to a scene of lost childhood, beautiful moments, and satisfaction. Through this poem, Eliot attempts to build a bridge between the past and the present. He recalls the passing or temporal moments in the garden where rain drops saying that:

To be conscious is not to be on time  
 But only in time can the moment in the rose- garden,  
 The moment in the arbour where the rain beats,  
 The moment in the draughty church at smokefall  
 Be remembered; involved with past and future.  
 Only through time time is conquered." ("Burnt Norton", 87-89)

This stanza is a natural imagery evoking a vivid sensory experience. The rain's rhythmic beats disturb this stillness of the scene, bring life, and suggest movement, perhaps referring to spiritual awakening. Water symbolizes the flow of time and brings back remembered moments that linger in the speaker's mind, connecting past to present. "*East Coker*" is the second poem in "*The Four Quartets*", described as a poem of late summer, earth, and faith (Kirk, 2008 p. 248). In this poem, Eliot contemplates the cyclic nature of time, history, life, and death. He attaches individual life experiences with broader historical cycles. Eliot's endings are tied to his beginnings, emphasizing the idea that even if life is impermanent, and death is an inevitable experience, ultimately, we will gain a greater understanding of existence. Although Eliot depicts the earth as a place of suffering and struggle, he still has an optimistic view that there is an opportunity for healing and growth. He urges readers to go through the spiritual journey as a means to achieve fulfillment. Eliot reflects upon the different moments in people's lives, engaging in dancing, celebrations, shared joys, and human activities within seasons, in an image that shows movement and rhythm. Eliot connects these moments of cyclical nature to the symbol of water as in the following example:

Dawn points, another day  
 Prepares for heat and silence.  
 Out at the sea the dawn wind  
 wrinkles and slides. I am here  
 or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning ("*East Coker*", pp. 48-51)

In this stanza, the dawn winds cause the constant movement of the sea. Eliot emphasizes this interaction between the sea and the wind. Water with its motion and changing nature parallel the dancing in the previous lines, symbolizing the

impermanence of life and the fleeting nature of time. The sea symbolism may also refer to the unconscious mind when he says, "I am here or there, or elsewhere" (50-51). The poet may express the hidden currents of thoughts and emotions in the unconscious that takes him to different places. This line may also refer to his acknowledgment of his existence as a part of this world. In the context of paradoxes, T.S. Eliot requests spiritual peace of waiting for what is greater than reality and showing his surrender, acceptance, and trust of the mysterious or the unknown that will bring genuine understanding into existence demanding readers to:

Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.  
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.  
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,  
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy  
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony  
Of death and birth ("*Easter Coker*", pp. 128-134).

In the line, the "whisper of running stream" (line, 130), he reminds us the quiet, gentle natural flow of life and time, a mysterious experience that is interrupted by the sudden, unexpected, powerful "winter lightning", an image that may suggest life and death and explains how the continuous flow of life is interrupted by sudden events.

*"The Dry Salvages"* is the third poem in *"The Four Quartets"*. In this poem, Eliot holds a pessimistic view of reality and human actions interwoven with spiritual yearning. This section showcases the most extensive incorporation of water imagery. Eliot elevates water symbolism to the supernatural level. Water is a "strong brown god" (*"The Dry Salvages"*, 2), with a duality of power and utility. This god is the source of life and a means of commerce. When forgotten by people, the powerful river rages and destroys to remind people of its existence. In "[t]he river is within us, the sea is all about us" (15), the poet shows the impact of Water rhythm as externally reaching everywhere, and internal symbolizing the unconscious mysteries and depths within human beings. The unconscious as the brown god, holds the power to nurture and destroy. This picture is similar to People who often choose to suppress feelings and thoughts in their unconscious, but when provoked, they can have a destructive impact. The river's rhythm permeates everything as the unconscious influences every aspect of human life. Eliot shifts his focus from the river to the sea. The image expands and becomes more mysterious by showing the sea as vast and powerful "[t]he sea has many voices, [m]any gods and many voices" (24, 25), an image that may symbolize human nature with its different moods, sounds or beliefs and forces.

*"The Little Gidding"* poem is the fourth and the last poem in T.S. Eliot's *"The Four Quartets"*. Eliot introduces the Little Gidding, a religious place in England in the 17th century. People sought this place for personal renewal, redemption, and confrontation with the inner self. Eliot depicts the decay of this place as parallel to the experience of loss and destruction in the World War II, suggesting the effect of the lack of spiritual nourishment. He emphasizes the idea of understanding the past as a means for spiritual growth. Eliot suggest that the theme of suffering leads to purification, and emphasizes the theme of salvation as the ultimate purpose of the life journey. In this poem, water symbolism contrasts its natural role as a source of renewal to become a force of destruction and change. Eliot unexpectedly combines water with the element of fire when he says:

Water and fire succeed  
The town, the pasture and the weed.  
Water and fire deride  
The sacrifice that we denied.  
Water and fire shall rot  
The marred foundations we forgot,  
Of sanctuary and choir.  
This is the death of water and fire. ("*Little Gidding*," 72-78)

In these lines, Eliot draws a picture of a house that once was filled with life then turned into dust. In this image, Eliot refers to death, the end of time, and despair. After a bleak picture of decay, ash, and burnt roses that symbolize the loss and death of beauty, water accompanies fire as a divine punishment to destroy Western civilizations because of human being's actions and detachment from foundations. Water and fire are two opposing powers that come for a duty to destroy and then purify the scene.

In conclusion, Eliot's *"The Four Quartets"* employs the multi-layered and evocative symbolism of water to explore the various conditions of human life. Water appears as a river that represents the flow of time, the impermanence of

moments, and the cyclic nature and transient quality of reality. Water is the sea, with its vastness and depth, reflecting the mysteries of human experiences, the unconscious mind, the unknown, and what resides beyond human understanding. It is the rain that purifies and brings renewal, growth, and happy moments. And it is the mirror that reflects human experiences and a path that connects past, present and future.

### Water symbolism in “*The Canal Life*”

Ian McMillan is a contemporary British poet, a representative of postmodernism well known for his witty works connected to everyday life (Poetry Archive, n.d.). His use of symbolism weaves profound meaning into the ordinary, mingling simple experiences with rich metaphors that depict universal themes. David Kennedy describes McMillan’s unique approach to poetry by saying that:

Viewing McMillan’s work as reports on the lived experience of postmodernity sheds useful light on his departure from one of the most fundamental poetic narratives of all: the poem as page work. More than anyone else of his generation, McMillan consistently produces work which blurs the distinctions between page poem and performance poem just as his readings typically combine elements of traditional poetry readings and stand-up comedy routines (...). This may offer us linguistic fireworks at the expense of the kind of emotional truth we are taught to expect from poetry but, again, this is typical of McMillan’s determination not to produce poems that look and [sound like poems] (Kennedy, 1996, p. 94).

Kennedy points out the experimental and wit use of language in McMillan’s poetry, noting that his unique style mingles theoretical elements and wit to create a work that must be both read and experienced. Kennedy remarks that McMillan deliberately crafts unconventional poems to captivate readers with fresh and thrilling poetry, challenging the unconventional linguistic approach to poetic performance and ultimately enhancing the emotional resonance and depth of his themes.

Ian McMillan’s “*The Canal Life*” was published in 2019. It is a contemplative piece that describes the rhythms of nature, the beauty of simple pleasures, and the interconnectedness of time in different ages. In this poem, “Water,” specifically “The Canal” is an unconventional symbol for Britain’s canals. Through vivid imagery and rich sensory descriptions, the poet captures the essence of the canal, promoting contemplation on time, seasons, and memories associated with the canal. The canal is a source of reflection and inspiration. Water is personified with the powerful ability to narrate tales, serving as a source of music and songs that can represent the flow of life, the rhythm of nature, or the melancholic beauty of history.

The canal tells you stories  
The canal sings you songs  
They hang in that space  
Between memory and water (“*The Canal Life*”, 1-4)

In this stanza, Ian McMillan expresses his nostalgia for the emotions that this canal evokes in the surroundings, and the stories and the songs it tells to communities. The pronoun “They” refers ambiguously to something that dwells in this space between memory and water, which may refer to the different generations connected to the canal or the stories and songs. This line also highlights the relationship between the water and memory. The canal as a living presence, loaded with songs, stories, and memories, represents the interplay between human experience, history, and the natural world. In this stanza, McMillan emphasizes the ongoing role of the canal in fostering human connections and bridging new generation with old generation. The canal continues to link people to history, past events and traditions.

Once saw a narrow boat raised up,  
Like it was cutting through the air,  
Between two grass walls and the road below  
Like it was sliding through history, (5-10).

The poet highlights the canal’s significance by screening different scenes from the past and the present. The canal is a window to history through which the folklore boats come through history to represent the historical roots, emphasizing the preservation of heritage passed down through generations. Boats have spiritual value, connecting people to their ancestors and the traditions they carried on the waterways. The poet urges readers to have a sensory experience with

the canal in order to go back to nature, appreciate its beauty and significance, and gain a deeper understanding of culture and history :

You need to go back and see it again,  
And sail it again, and smell it again, and  
Touch it again; canals run through our veins  
Like they stroll through this country  
Like blood through our veins.

In these lines, the canal connects destinations, penetrates cities like veins, and circulates history and memories like blood. McMillan represents the importance of the canal as a part of human body. Its enduring presence, continuous flowing and mysterious nature carry humanity through generations. Different generations find themselves suspended between memories and the water's embrace. McMillan depicts the canal as a "lesson, a water-based school". A gathering place where people from all walks of life meet, increasing human connections.

## CONCLUSION

T.S. Eliot's "*The Four Quartets*" and Ian McMillan's "*Canal Life*" employ water as a central symbol, inviting readers to contemplate the passage of time, human experiences, and the impact of nature on our lives, albeit with distinct focuses. In "*The Four Quartets*," water symbol appears in each of the four poems in different forms and settings. In this poem water appears as rivers, oceans, or rain symbolizing the flow of life and time, the remembered moments, the impermanence of life, and the cyclical nature of human experiences. Water connects past and present and represents the depths of the human subconscious, where thought and emotions influence every detail in our daily choices and life-altering decisions. Water has the dual force for redemption and bringing life through spiritual and physical awakening. Other times, water terminates and takes revenge on humans.

Moreover, Eliot's language is known for its complexity and allusiveness, with a dense language and intricate imagery. He uses water as multifaceted and complex symbol that imposes profound questions about life and is linked to philosophical, religious and spiritual journeys. What distinguishes the use of water symbolism is that Eliot skillfully combines water with other elemental forces like fire, earth, and air providing multilayered meanings and powerful images that express these intricate philosophical and abstract themes. On the contrary, Ian McMillan's language is more accessible, clear and direct, employing everyday speech to capture the details of daily routines. His language is so sincere and emotional to prevail the sorrows, the joys and the difficulties in human life. In "*The Canal Life*," the canal is the central setting of the poem. The canal permeates communities and brings life into them as the veins of blood bring life to human body. The canal itself is a small community that reflects the larger community, able to mirror fleeting reflections of events and people through history and carry humanity and generations. This symbolism carries more deeper meanings and emphasizes the interconnectedness between the canal, memories, and history. McMillan in a simple direct language, uses the imagery of water to create a tone of nostalgia, while Eliot's exploration of water symbolism questions universal existence in a philosophical, abstract way connected to spirituality. McMillan's perspective is localized, and the image of water is more realistic and concrete, derived from the life of communities near the water canals and celebrating the history of the canals.

Despite the historical and artistic variations between "*The Four Quartets*" and "*The Canal*," this analysis reveals that water symbolism provides significant insights into the human existence. By comparing these two pieces, we can better comprehend how water, as a universal element, symbolizes our concerns about time, mortality, and our role in the natural world. This study not only enriches our interpretation of these specific poems but also offers a useful framework for exploring water symbolism in various literary and cultural contexts. Future studies could further investigate how water symbolism is presented in post-modern literature and how it reflects environmental issues and the deep subconscious. They may also explore how this symbolism is linked with contemporary issues.

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