

Deciphering the Water Symbol in T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets" and Ian McMillan's "Canal Life"

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Abstract: *In this study, the 'water' symbol has been deciphered in the poems of T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets" and Ian McMillan's "Canal Life" and also shed light on their symbolist nature of poetry. The symbol 'Water' has always been considered a prominent literary metaphor because it can represent multiple meanings, such as life, purification, existential reflection, and metamorphosis. It is always open to multiple interpretations. The Four Quartets and Canal Life have explained, interpreted, and illustrated the symbol of 'water' through textual and comparative analyses. A comparative analysis has been conducted to find out the similarities and contrast in the attainment of the 'water' symbol in their poems: 'Canal Life' by McMillan and 'The Four Quartets' by Eliot. It highlights the different ways in which 'water' can serve as a symbol in poetry, ranging from a literal representation of community and continuity to a complex metaphor that involves eternal, spiritual, and existential characteristics. The poets demonstrate the many complex and varied characteristics of water as a metaphor, emphasising its ability to provoke a broad spectrum of emotions, thoughts, and introspection within the framework of poetic expression.*

Key Words: *Eliot, Four Quartets, McMillan, Canal Life, Spiritual, and Community.*

Introduction

Literature is an art of using words. This is due to the fact that understanding a literary work requires the ability to decipher every word in the work to its fullest meaning. Literary works convey many meanings through their words (Mayer 1997: 33). Literature exists to provide readers with amusement and enjoyment. It is clear that enjoying literature is the primary motivation for studying it. The main purpose of literature, according to Stein (1982: 13), is to amuse and provide pleasure to those who voluntarily read it. Many widely recognized writing genres exist. Poetry is the genre's most popular literary work because it is more comprehensive than other literary works (Ali et al., 2016; Iqbal et al., 2021).

The literary work represents the author's essence and is the outward manifestation of their creative life. A literary work's text is where the reader can engage in a humanistic or spiritual communion with the ideas and emotions of the author. Literature, stated differently, represents humankind's invaluable resources. Of course, the public's enjoyment of the writer's opinions and sentiments determines the

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success or failure of a literary work (Iqbal et al., 2021).

In *Discovering Literature*, N. Scott Momaday personified the idea that "we are what we imagine." The only thing that keeps us alive is the fantasy we have about ourselves. Our best course of action is to imagine who we are and who we are. "To go unimagined is the greatest tragedy that can befall us," wrote well-known author Tony Morrison, who also used this quote to explain why she wrote so much to draw attention to herself: "I only have twenty-six letters in the alphabet; I don't have colour or music." To make the reader see the colours and hear the noises, I have to use my craft (Ullah et al., 2020).

Human life is one of the most universal subjects covered in literature. This suggests that literature can address any human endeavour or experience. While some of these activities are more commonplace, others are more specialized. Accordingly, we should anticipate that literature, which is the documentation of human experience, would appeal to people from different cultures in order to provide verification. There are undoubtedly a lot of clues in the literary work that the reader must decipher. We must master semiotics in order to decipher the meaning that the signs suggest (Sabir et al., 2021a; Sabir et al., 2021b).

The Greek word "semion" (meaning "mark" or "sign") is the source of the word "semiotic." It entails analyzing any medium or genre as a semiotic "sign system" (Nugiantoro, 1995: 40). Semiotics, therefore, provides information on the sign, as well as the system, media, and relationship with the sign. Studying semiotics also included studying the backgrounds, sign construction, and all variations.

According to Pierce, semiotics is the formal doctrine of sign and another branch of logic; however, Saussure (1967: 26) defines semiotics as a comprehensive study regarding sign in society. On the other hand, semiotics is a discipline of philosophy, according to Saussure. In semiotics, the sign is the subject of discussion. Every walk of life makes use of these indicators. We also use signs to convey a message, interact with others, and express a desire. In semiotics, discussion of icons, indices, and symbols is just as important as discussion of the sign.

A symbol or sign, according to Bachry (1993: 95), is anything like a picture, phrase, emblem, etc. that conveys or explains a meaning. For example, rice is a symbol of riches, and white represents sanctity. Literary symbols are different from random symbols, such as alphabetic letters, numbers, and algebraic signs. Therefore, when discussing the relevance of a literary work, we refer to them as symbols, as they offer expanded perspectives beyond mere symbols. The author can draw the conclusion that symbols vary in significance depending on society. For instance, in Makassar culture, people wave white flags to indicate the death of family members, and in Bali culture, individuals wave yellow flags in the same manner.

People widely recognise T.S. Eliot as a poet known for his deep exploration of symbolism in his collection "Four Quartets." This series of interconnected poems showcases Eliot's skill in intertwining symbols with verse, inviting readers to delve into a thought-provoking journey of metaphysical reflection. Through "Four Quartets," Eliot skillfully employs symbols that go beyond imagery, revealing insights about time, spirituality, and the intricate nature of human existence. This analysis explores the many levels of symbolism that are present in the poems and clarifies Eliot's position as a symbolist whose writing goes above the norm to provide a rich tapestry of thought and meaning (Sabir et al., 2021c).

Ian McMillan employs symbolism, akin to Eliot, in his poem 'Canal Life', which transcends its literary interpretations. Ian McMillan symbolises the canal life, which carries a tapestry of meanings. In

this poem, McMillan transformed himself into a symbolist, presenting 'water' as a multifaceted symbol that transcends its tangible presence. In "Canal Life," water is more than a backdrop; it becomes a vessel, representing themes such as continuity, adaptation, and the interconnectedness between humanity and nature. By portraying water in this work, McMillan invites readers on an exploration of the human experience—an exploration that navigates themes of heritage, transformation, and the ever-changing rhythms of life. This analysis seeks to unravel McMillan's skillfulness as a symbolist in "Canal Life," deciphering the layers of symbolism intertwined within the fluidity of water to shed light on its significance in capturing the essence of existence and societal progress.

The current research is investigating the symbolism in T.S. Eliot and McMillan poetry, as well as deciphering the water symbol in T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quarters" and Ian McMillan's "Canal Life."

Literature Review

Some Relevant Previous Findings

Although this study has links to some earlier research, we will review it separately due to its own goals.

Rosida (2007) conducted a study of symbols in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter" for her thesis. She identified four different symbol types used throughout the book: the rosebush next to the prison, the meteor, the scarlet letter, and the pearl. The aim of this research is to examine the symbol found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter." Because the analysis of the novel's symbols involved semiotics, this study employed that methodology. We examined the data using Richard's concept.

In her thesis, Melani (2010) examined the symbol in Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*. She found that the discussion focused on five deeper symbols: the Holly Grail, the painting "The Last Supper," Mary Magdalena, the Suineres, the Message Code, and Blood. In this book, each symbol has a distinct meaning that corresponds to the object it depicts. The children of symbols present in this narrative are explained using descriptive-qualitative analysis. The Holy Grail narrative mentions Mary Magdalena, while the Last Supper picture illustrates the actual events and individuals involved. *Monalisa* provides a deeper understanding of the subject matter of the painting. *The Da Vinci Code* classifies the *Monalisa* painting "Suinere" as an action sign, while "Blood" is a study of truth and illumination (Ullah et al., 2021).

Hikmah's (2008) thesis, "The Power of Symbols in Jalaluddin Rumi's Prose "Fihi Ma Fihi" (It is what it is)" She discovered that Jalaluddin Rumi came to the conclusion that there are numerous types of symbols in his prose piece, "Fihi Ma Fihi" (It is what it is). Scholar, prince, trial word, duties, prayer, helpless, forgotten, ascetic, seal, religion, heart, believer, unbeliever, woe, masters, prisoners, crucible, gold, house, fest, beloved, and thrown are a few examples of these symbols. We analyse this thesis using semiotic approaches and hermeneutics. These emblems represented both the unity of existence, or "wahda al wujud," and the self-unity of Allah for the majority of the creators.

The goal of this research and the earlier studies mentioned above is to identify the different types of symbols that literary works have within the semiotic branch. However, the research's objective makes

the differences between them obvious. In her thesis, Rosidah applies Richard's theory to analyse the symbols found in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter." In her thesis, Melani employs Revsina's theory to examine and elucidate the diverse symbol types present in Dan Brown's novel "The Da Vinci Code." The last, Hikmah, employs semiotic and hermeneutic techniques in Jalaluddin Rumi's prose "Fihi Ma Fihi" (It is what it is). The research focuses on applying Pierce's theory to the analysis of symbol meaning in Dan Brown's book "The Lost Symbol."

Symbolism

"To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create." John, symbols are more complicated and exact than words. A symbol is a physical object that serves as a symbol for an abstract concept. The Greek words "symballein," which means "to put together," and "symbolon," which means "mark," "taken," or "sign," are the sources of the English word "symbol." Literature refers to a figure of speech as a "symbol" when a person, thing, or circumstance symbolises something beyond its literal meaning. Symbols function in a similar way and can express thoughts that are more universal than the physical aspect because they have a predetermined meaning. A symbol can take on multiple forms and suggest multiple interpretations in a literary work. Authors like symbolism because it gives their writing more depth, helps readers understand difficult subjects and follow main themes in traditional literature, and enables writers to integrate large ideas in an effective, creative fashion (Wiedhardt 2019).

The symbol has always been the heart and soul of poetry. This technique has been used by poets of all times, nations, and languages to improve their writing and leave an impression. Poets had been employing symbols since the sixteenth century and even earlier, despite the fact that symbolism as a movement started in the early twentieth century. This illustrates the intimate connection between symbolism and poetry. Per Tiwari (2006).

The art and poetry movement known as symbolism began late in Europe, but it originated in France. The 1880s saw the emergence of symbolism as a literary movement in France, which gained momentum following the publication of Jean Moréas' manifesto in *Le Figaro* in 1886. In opposition to the materialism and rationalism that had come to characterise Western European culture, Moréas declared the value of pure subjectivity and the expression of an idea over an accurate portrayal of the natural world.

This idea became a cornerstone of the movement, encompassing the poet Stéphane Mallarmé's view that poetry followed rather than copied nature, making it the finest medium for expressing truth. According to Mallarmé, naming an item suppresses three-quarters of the pleasure found in the poem—suggestion, that is the dream— Symbolism in writing draws readers in by revealing the writer's perspective on the world and his feelings towards ordinary items and actions that carry deeper significance.

Through a variety of metaphors, symbolism indirectly conveys concepts. The poet prompts the audience to react in a way that surpasses everyday awareness. The symbolist poets assert that the transitory objective universe is not a real reality, but only a representation of the intangible absolute. On this basis, they rejected naturalism and realism, which seek to capture the transient (Khan et al., 2020).

Symbolism made its way to England in the 1890s. The symbolists Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Verlaine,

Rimbaud, and Laforgue were well known. Arthur Symon's 1899 book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, had a significant impact on contemporary authors. T.S. Eliot joined the English symbolist movement when Ezra Pound introduced him to some of the greatest and most well-known writers of the day. Through Pound, authors such as E.M. Forster, D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox Ford, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and others shaped and shaped Eliot's conception of poetry. After reading Arthur Symon's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which served as an introduction to French literature, the symbolist movement greatly influenced Eliot. He later acknowledged that Arthur Symon's work had a positive impact on his writing career trajectory. Additionally, because of this book, he met notable symbolists like Jules Laforgue, Tristan Corbière, Rimbaud, and Verlaine. As a poet, Laforgue impacted him in terms of style, subject, and technique, but Baudelaire had a greater spiritual influence. Remy de Gourmont's analytical skills had such an impact on him that he even stated, "Maybe Remy de Gourmont had most of Aristotle's general intelligence." The symbolists clearly had a significant impact on Eliot, influencing most of his later ideas and thoughts, particularly from Laforgue's study. Because of his intense inspiration from the symbolists, most of Eliot's ideas, characters, settings, moods, phrases, and even work titles come from his intense inspiration from the symbolists. But Eliot's life and career as a poet-critic would undoubtedly have been less successful had he not learned about the English and French symbolist movements (Ullah et al., 2021).

Using the literary symbolism lens, one can thoroughly examine Ian McMillan, a modern poet known for his complex and evocative poetry. This late-19th-century literary movement placed a strong emphasis on using metaphor, imagery, and oblique language in poetry to express deeper meanings and feelings. McMillan's poetry echoes the core of symbolism through a variety of techniques.

The power of symbolism to convey ideas beyond the explicit is what makes it so fundamental. McMillan, like other symbolists, expertly uses figurative and provocative language, where he provides access to different interpretations for the readers. McMillan's highly symbolic poems often prompt the reader to delve deeper into the symbolically represented worlds of feelings and experiences.

In McMillan's poetry, the investigation of the invisible and intangible is another defining feature of symbolism. McMillan's verses transcend the commonplace, exploring the domains of the unexplainable and the ineffable through symbolic language, much like Symbolist writers, who aimed to dive into the depths of human experience, emotions, and the mysteries of existence.

Research Methodology

An analysis and interpretation of the 'water' symbol is conducted using two chosen poems: "Canal Life" by Ian McMillan and "The Four Quartets" by T.S. Eliot. The researcher gathers data from books, articles, and poems to interpret and decipher the symbol of 'water' in the chosen poems. We have applied comparative and textual analysis to demonstrate and analyse the 'water' symbol in 'Canal Life' and 'The Four Quartets'.

Textual Analysis: The textual analysis scrutinizes the two poems, 'The Four Quartets' and 'Canal Life', identifying the usage of the 'water' symbol and scrutinizing its contextual portrayal within the poems.

Comparative Analysis: By examining the narrative structures, styles, and themes of these various poems, comparative analysis not only reveals the similarities and differences in the use of the 'water' symbol, but

also illuminates the various techniques employed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Symbolism in Eliot's *The Four Quartets*

Eliot is considered a prominent figure in the symbolism movement. His poetry is full of symbols, both conventional and personal. Among his poems, 'The Four Quartets' is also abundant in symbolism, like others here; it delves into the themes of time, human existence (history), and spirituality. To achieve this deeper insight, he employs multifaceted symbols in this collection of four interconnected poems, known as the Four Quartets. For instance, the emblem of 'rose' symbolises awakening and spiritual transformation throughout the poem. While the symbol of 'water' represents multiple meanings, the most common ones being life and rebirth, the motif of 'fire' simultaneously represents both destruction and purification. This poem is full of complicated notions about life, death, and transcendence, combining images from religious beliefs, seasons changing, and elements of nature.

'The Four Quartets' strengthens its worth through the nuanced and profound quality of its symbols. The poem, which masterfully combines deep symbols of profound themes: human history, time, and spirituality, is considered a masterpiece of modern poetry. These four interconnected poems—*Burnt Norton*, *East Coker*, *The Dry Salvages*, and *Little Gidding* Eliot—use a rich tapestry of symbolism.

The symbol of 'rose', which appears repeatedly in all four quartets, symbolises beauty: heavenly and earthly at the same time, and is often associated with awakening and transfiguration. It signifies the potential for personal growth and conveys the concept of hope and reclamation in the midst of adversity.

The other symbol in this poem is 'fire', which conveys the meaning of both purification and destruction. It is advised to overcome adversity and burn away all the worthless because that is the very path to purity and reclamation. It represents a force of transformation that helps people face hardships and challenges in life.

The binary of fire is 'water', a symbol of purification and a symbol of rebirth and renewal. The fluidity of water represents the ups and downs of life and offers a sense of regeneration and continuity. In this poem, Eliot masterfully uses the symbol 'water' to represent the potential spirit of rebirth and the cyclical nature of existence.

Eliot, as commonly used, refers to symbols from different religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. He expands the meaning of 'The Four Quartets' by giving references to biblical scripts, historical events, and concepts of intellectuality.

Seasons and other natural elements, such as earth, light, and wind, symbolize human history and time (past, present, and future), emphasizing the interplay between temporal and eternal life.

Using these multifaceted symbols, Eliot creates a dynamic world for the reader in this poem (*The Four Quartets*). He left a legacy of thought-provoking poetry for readers to find spiritual enlightenment, time passage, and human curiosity about meaning in life through complex symbols.

Symbolism in McMillan's *Canal Life*

Ian McMillan, like Eliot, embodied 'Canal Life' with multifaceted symbols and captured the life

that lived besides the canal. The symbol 'canal' itself represents a crossing, a link, and a voyage, which stands for the complexity of life and the passage of time. The water in the canals is both necessary for life and a potential source of harm; in simple terms, it represents both death and life.

The boats going through the canals may represent people going through their own lives, meeting difficulties head-on, making decisions, and pressing on in spite of setbacks. The locks that line the canal may represent the get-up against the obstacles that people must face in their past lives.

The canals' passage represents the natural imagery that shows vegetation, wildlife, and shifting topography, which may represent change and the cyclical nature of life. McMillan generally conveys the deeper and more thought-provoking issues of the human experience through the depiction of 'canal life', which is rich in symbolism.

McMillan weaves a deep tapestry of symbolism into his depiction of the canalscape in 'Canal Life'. These canals are more than just water transit routes; they have rich and deeper meanings. The symbolic representation of these canals may reflect human history, interconnectedness, and the transitory rhythms of existence.

The canals, moving and dynamic, are themselves representations of the fluid journey of life. They show the persistent flow of time and depict life's ups and downs. Water in the canals is like the lifeblood of these canals, which represents both harm and energy; it may be a sign of impending harm or the source of nourishment, while at the same time encapsulating dualities of existence.

The boats that cross these canals may serve as metaphorical vessels for humans making their way through their lives. Each of the boats metaphorically serves as a person's journey across the many ups and downs of life. The human flexibility, resiliency, and spirit to endure hardship have shown through those containers.

Furthermore, the locks strewn around the canals evoke deep metaphors. They depict the changes, obstacles, or entrances in life that represent the flexibility, forbearance, and endurance of humans' nature. Each lock mirrors life's difficulties, encouraging humans to face the trails, navigate changes, and emerge changed.

The canal banks' natural surroundings depict another level of meaning. Seasonal changes, ever-changing landscapes, and the fauna and flora depict the growth, decay, and regeneration of the life cycle. They portray the fugitive beauty and unchangeable nature of change that come with being human.

"Canal Life" becomes more than just a physical location when it is in the skilled hands of Ian McMillan. Larger existential ideas transform it into a canvas. McMillan illuminates the complex tapestry of the human experience—its setbacks, victories, and the unceasing flow of life's currents—through the symbolism of the canals, boats, locks, and natural elements.

Water symbol in Eliot's The Four Quartets

In T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets," the water symbol represents themes of time, spiritual development, purification, and renewal. It is meaningful on multiple levels. Water serves as a potent metaphor for both material and spiritual elements throughout the entire poem.

In the first quartet, "Burnt Norton," Eliot uses water to symbolise renewal and continuance. He summarises the core of water's never-ending motion by comparing time to a river that never stops

flowing:

*"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable."*

Here the river represents the passage of time, suggesting a circular existence where the past, present, and future coexist. The fluidity nature of water depicts the interconnectedness of many worldly aspects, that emphasizing the idea of continuous repetition and the need of spiritual conciliation with time.

Further in the third poem (The Dry Salvages) of 'The Four Quartets' depicts water in a more ruminative meaning that shows both life and spiritual purification:

*"I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges."*

Eliot describes river is a divine force here in this stanza, that implying respect for the strength and mystery of water. It establishes the force that is challenging and benevolent beyond human understanding. Eliot skillfully making link between water and humans and appreciating the benefits of it but the time he is realizing that human won't be able to control its unpredictable nature.

Furthermore, the water metaphorical significance in "The Four Quartets" is the purification and transformation. Eliot consider water is a means of inner healing and purification:

*"The river is within us, the sea is all about us;
The sea is the land's edge also, the granite
Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses
Its hints of earlier and other creation:
The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone;
The pools where it offers to our curiosity
The more delicate algae and the sea anemone."*

This stanza connects the life on earth (land) and life in the sea. Water, which symbolizes the introspection and spiritual growth that may have different forms. The sea, which a hub for the variety of living forms represent here the human's consciousness that molds in individual on land.

In conclusion, Eliot's water symbol in 'The Four quartets' represents the wide range of ideas: including time, rebirth, spiritual metamorphosis and the complicate essence of existence. Eliot provides a though provoking for the readers to understand the deep connection between unending currents of

existence and the human experience through the fluidity and depth of this water symbol.

Water symbol in McMillan's Canal Life

The symbol 'water' in McMillan's "Canal Life" represents the continuity, connection, and flow of time in life. In the poem, 'water' in the canal reflects the unceasing flow, connecting people (human history) and places. The symbol 'water' represents perseverance, adaptability, and the passage of time that flows through a human's life experiences.

At the beginning of the poem, the symbol 'Water' referred to "the pulse of the canal." McMillan wanted to establish a vital link between the human's beating heart and the flow of water in the canal. Rather than using the static element 'pulse', McMillan implies that 'Water' is an active force to maintain the canal's life. This also represents vitality, vigour, and rhythm. The symbol 'water' here not only depicts the physical existence of a canal, but also the emotional and spiritual health of a human being.

In 'Canal Life', McMillan skillfully incorporates many aspects of life, with 'Water' as a consolidative element. The poem's portrayal of situations where 'water buses' pass by, carrying children from far-off places, shows how water acts as a conduit, uniting dissimilar individuals and distant locations. The depiction of canal banks highlights that these canals are like hubs of activity, where people gather and chat, and the water reflects them.

The poem also illustrates the community's adaptability and resilience through the symbol of 'water'. The poem describes 'Water' as 'Silver afternoon', symbolizing hectic activities, while the canal maintains a calm and contemplative atmosphere. This depiction describes that instead of facing challenges from the canal's occupants, there is a calm and enduring element, the unchanging power of water.

Moreover, the symbol of 'water' in 'Canal Life' refers to the passage of time in a metaphoric sense. In this poem, the unceasing flow of 'Water under Bridge' refers to the ephemeral nature of life's events. The perpetual motion of life is like the 'water' in a canal, carrying the past, present, and future. The unceasing flow of the canals symbolizes memory and time passing (human existence history).

McMillan's symbol of 'water' in 'Canal Life' skillfully describes the complexity of humans' existence (history). The symbol of 'Water' in this poem portrays the pulsing energy, a consolidative force, a symbol of resilience, and most importantly, the depiction of time's passage, which makes 'Water' a versatile metaphor that encapsulates life's spirit.

Comparison of the 'water' symbol in both poems

The symbol of 'Water' in these two poems, 'Canal Life' by McMillan and "The Four Quartets" by Eliot, has multifaceted metaphoric meanings, but the setting and approaches are quite different from each other.

McMillan in 'Canal Life' describes the symbol of 'Water' is a feeling of calm, history community more specifically, the Canal:

*"They hang in that space
Between memory and water"*

This stanza of the 'Canal Life' that describes water is the history of human being and this water that makes connection with past and present narratives. This is how the symbol of 'Water' here acts a lifeline, encouraging the continuity and shared experience.

While the symbol of 'Water' of Eliot in 'The Four Quartets' is more complex that elaborates more deep spiritual and philosophical themes. In this four interconnected poem the "Burnt Norton" symbolizes the water as metaphor for the cyclical nature of time:

*"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past."*

In the 'Burnt Norton' Eliot's representation the flow of water in a river symbolizes connecting of the past, present, and future and suggesting an understanding the cyclical nature of life.

Further, McMillan's symbolizes 'canal' as a more touchable and specific sense of belonging, as these lines that follow show:

*"The canal tells you stories
The canal sings you songs"*

In these line of the Canal Life makes a link a between the past and present and fosters a sense of shared identity by depicting canal as storyteller and singer which sing the same song and the same story to all.

On the other hand Eliot in "The Dry Salvages" compares water with spiritual restoration and cleansing, he portrayed river as a celestial power:

*"I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable."*

Eliot depiction of 'Water' in "The Four Quartets" transcends from worldly material to spiritual material, presenting it as a strong power of healing and a power that is incomprehensible to humans.

Moreover, McMillan presents canal like veins in body that show the metaphorical connection how these veins unites the body same like these canals connect different people and place of the country:

*"Like they stroll through this country
Like blood through our veins.."*

In these lines, the poet uses a very metaphorical representation of water as blood in veins and considers canals as veins.

On the other hand, Eliot presents 'water' beyond the material world, portraying it as an existential

and metaphysical sphere.

"The river is within us; the sea is all about us."

Eliot's representation of 'water' here is a deep level of understanding and a connection between immortal elements and humans in life.

To conclude, Eliot in "The Four Quartets" and McMillan in "Canal Life" use water as a vivid symbol, but their presentation and approaches were different. Eliot considers 'Water' as a spiritual, metaphysical, and eternal element, and depicts 'Water' as a force that is beyond human existence and perception, while McMillan presents 'Water' and Canal as social mediums that share the same experiences that tell the past and present and connect people from different ages and places.

Conclusion

The skillful use of the 'water' symbol by Eliot in "The Four Quartets" and Ian McMillan in "Canal Life" exemplifies how tricky this symbol is and how it represents the multiple range of subjects and situations in poetry.

McMillan's 'Canal Life' portrays the canal in a way that explores it as a meeting spot, a symbol of shared memories, and the connection of the passage of time (past and present) with a certain community or people. In the poem, the canal symbolizes a tangible link between individuals, bringing up solidarity and belonging while portraying the universal and ordinary character of living.

But in Eliot's poem 'The Four Quartets', the symbol 'Water' goes beyond the tangible. He attributes many symbolic and metaphorical meanings to 'water', such as temporality, spiritual rebirth, and the confusing and cyclical nature of life. By describing the extended nature of the sea and the unstoppable flow of water in the sea, Eliot portrays the depth of the human consciousness, the complex and cyclical nature of time, and the infinite flow that link mankind to the divine and one another.

Both of the authors employ the symbol of water in their poems, but their approaches and settings are significantly different, and both have width and depth. In McMillan's poem "Canal Life," the canal serves as the central theme, symbolizing the history and connections of shared experiences within a community. In Eliot's poem 'The Four Quartets', the symbol of 'water' goes beyond its physical characteristics to a force that mirrors the intricacy of existence itself and transcends human understanding in order to explain the spiritual and philosophical issues.

In conclusion, we compare 'Canal Life' by McMillan and 'The Four Quartets' by Eliot to explore the various ways 'water' can function as a symbol in poetry, from its literary portrayal to its intricate metaphor that encompasses eternal, spiritual, and existential aspects. These two poems decipher the symbol of 'water', showcasing its complex and varied characteristics, as a metaphor emphasizing its capacity to evoke a wide range of emotions, thoughts, and introspection within the poetic expression framework.

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