



Déjà vu As an Incarnation of the Human Consciousness of Time: A Reading in T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill"



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Abstract. The aim of this study is to examine the Déjà vu, that is the sensation of having previously encountered something. It is a prevalent occurrence that has captivated several authors and artists throughout history. Literature has examined this issue via many approaches and provided a diversity of assimilations for the concept of time. Both T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill" poems use this concept to illustrate the impact of Time on the human experience, as they emphasize the human consciousness in the recurring pattern of Time and how people's recollections of the past may influence their current and future circumstances. In "Burnt Norton," Eliot used the garden metaphor to express the sensation of Déjà vu. The speaker recounts his previous visit to the garden but cannot recall when and where it occurred. He has a sensation of reexperiencing a former event, which causes him to feel uneasy. The speaker is keenly aware of the perpetual progression of Time and the irrevocable nature of the past. This revelation exacerbates his uneasiness since he perceives himself incapable of evading the perpetual cycle of Time. Similarly, in "Fern Hill," Thomas depicted a childhood recollection to communicate Time's recurring and repetitive essence. The speaker recounts his recollections of summer vacation on a farm and elucidates how those reminiscences have become entwined with his current reality. He has a sensation of repeating his childhood events, and this feeling of Déjà vu evokes





nostalgia and a yearning for a more uncomplicated era. Thomas proposes that our recollections of the past may elicit both solace and anguish, serving as poignant reminders of the things people have lost as well as what people will never reclaim. Both Eliot and Thomas use Déjà vu to underscore the influence of Time on the human condition. They propose that a straight progression does not characterize Time but instead follows a recurring pattern. They argue that recollecting previous events may significantly influence our current and future experiences that unfold the stream of consciousness. The topic of Déjà vu also emphasizes the constraints of human comprehension since we cannot completely grasp the intricacies of Time and the world.

Keywords: Déjà vu, Time, T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton," Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," Human Comprehension, Consciousness, Experiences.

المخلص. الهدف من الدراسة هو فحص ظاهرة (ديجا فو) الاحساس بمواجهة تجربة الحاضر مسبقاً. فتكرار هذه الظاهرة السائد قد اسر عديد من الكتاب والفنانين عبر التاريخ. كما هو الحال فان الادب قد فحص هذه القضية من خلال طرق ومنهجيات مختلفة حيث وردت في أدبياته مجموعة من التباينات والتقاربات الزمنية لمفهوم الوقت. ان كلا من ا تي توماس ستيرن اليوت وديلون توماس قد استخدمتا مفهوم الوقت في قصيدتهما "بيرنت نورتن" و "فيرن هيل" بالترتيب وذلك لتصوير تأثير الوقت على التجربة الانسانية حيث اكدا على الوعي الانساني لانماط الزمن المتكررة وكيف ان استذكارات الناس للماضي قد تؤثر في ظروفهم الحالية والمستقبلية. ان وجود ظاهرة الديجا فو في قصيدة "بيرنت نورتن" لاليوت وقصيدة "فيرن هيل" لدلين توماس قد وضح تآثر الوقت على الوضع الانساني. حيث استخدمت القصيدتان الجانب الدوري للوقت للتعبير عن شعور الحسرة والتوق للماضي وفي نفس الوقت يبرز محدودية الادراك البشري . ولذلك يتوجب على الانسان ان يعزز من امكانية الوجود في الحاضر من خلال التمييز والتعرف على تأثيرات تجاربه السابقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ديجا فو الوقت , "بيرنت نورتن" لاليوت , "فيرن هيل" لدلين توماس , الادراك و الوعي والتجربة الانسانية.

1. Introduction

The sensation of having lived through the current circumstance previously is known as déjà vu. This kind of memory illusion occurs when the time, location, and context of the "previous" event are ambiguous or unfeasible, even if there is a strong sensation of remembering (Blom, 2010: 132). Roughly two-



thirds of those polled said they have had déjà vu at least once in their life. Periodically, the phenomenon appears as a seizure aura symptom, and some studies have linked frequent or chronic "pathological" déjà vu to neurological or mental disorders. Rétrospection has been linked to lower ages, better educational achievement, and higher socioeconomic standing. Individuals who travel regularly, view films frequently or recall their dreams frequently are also more prone than others to get déjà vu (Ross, 2010).

For centuries, individuals have been captivated and perplexed by the phenomena of déjà vu. It is the sensation of having gone through a circumstance or event previously, even if it is brand-new. Although researchers in psychology and science have tried to identify the reason for this occurrence, its precise source is still unclear (Brown, 2003: 395). Nonetheless, some literary works have investigated the idea that déjà vu is a manifestation of time consciousness in humans. This article will look at Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill" and T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" to see how both poets employ the idea of déjà vu to express how they see time and human awareness. By examining these poems, people can gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of human experience and the role that Déjà vu plays in shaping their understanding of time.

The notion of déjà vu has always captivated individuals due to its prevalence and enigmatic nature. Within the realm of literature, the issue has been examined in several manners (Farina, 1996: 100). However, two noteworthy poems that particularly excel in their portrayal of this theme depict déjà vu as a manifestation of human awareness of the passage of time but in two distinct ways. The effects of time on the human mind are explored in "Burnt Norton" by T.S. Eliot and "Fern Hill" by Dylan Thomas. Although the poems take distinct approaches, they both examine the concept of déjà vu as a representation of the repetitive pattern of time and its impact on our comprehension of reality.

"Burnt Norton," the first part of Eliot's "Four Quartets," explores the essence of time and its impact on human perception. The poem implies that time is not a straight line, but rather a cyclical power that influences how we see the world. Eliot examines the phenomenon of déjà vu when instances from the past seem to resurface in the present, causing a blending of the distinctions between memory and lived encounters. This reoccurrence of historical events in the present alludes to the interrelatedness of all periods in time (Fairchild, 1999).





Dylan Thomas contemplates the passage of time and its influence on human awareness by examining his childhood recollections in "Fern Hill." The poem chronicles the poet's blissful encounters at Fern Hill throughout childhood, highlighting the exuberance and purity of that period. Nevertheless, as the poem advances, the speaker becomes aware that those moments have already occurred and cannot be recovered. Thomas examines the impact of time on awareness. The poem emphasizes the juxtaposition between the pleasant naivety of infancy and the awareness of the impermanence of time. The speaker's sentimentality for bygone days and the erosion of naivety elicit a yearning and contemplation of the progression of time (Gregory, 1947).

2. Déjà vu: Human Consciousness about The Cyclic Nature of Time in Eliot's "Burnt Norton"

Déjà vu, a psychological phenomenon that elicits a feeling of familiarity and the impression of having once experienced a current situation, has captivated people for millennia. Within the realm of literature, this works as a literary technique that introduces an element of enigma, confusion, and a link to something transcendent. This narrative blurs the distinction between the past and present, memory and experience, causing both the characters and readers to doubt their views and struggle with a combination of familiarity and uncertainty. Authors have used the phenomenon of déjà vu in several ways, including the incorporation of repeating themes, solitary episodes, or subtle interconnections within narratives. Déjà vu, by using time-travel tales, memory research, and experiences with the eerie, challenges readers to reflect on the essence of perception, the malleability of time, and the interrelation of past, present, and future. The experience might elicit feelings of nostalgia, yearning, or apprehension as characters struggle with the uncanny notion of having already gone through a particular situation. Déjà vu in literature enables readers to contemplate deep questions about reality and the human condition (Farina, 1996: 103).

The Human consciousness is working valiantly with the unconscious to communicate with the external impressionistic event. Dr. Jung described four functions of consciousness: thought, feeling, intuition, and sensation that "equip man to deal with the impressions of the world he receives from within and without. It is by means of these functions that he comprehends and assimilates his experience; it is by means of them that he can respond" (Jung, 2012, 240). Moreover, he associated their convergence with time, Jung is not





just aware of the existence of "synchronistic events that do not involve obvious simultaneity but went to great lengths to try to preserve the notion of simultaneity even where in the obvious sense it clearly was not present, as in experiences of precognition" (Jung, 2004 , 110). So, the conceptual notion of time in one way or another is mostly oscillating between the conscious and the unconscious and dramatically forming the human experiences.

Fascinating about Bergsonian la durée "duration," Eliot shows how time is essential in human life. David Hoy (2012) claims:

Bergson was particularly interested in la durée because he thought that it was something [that] science could not capture in its explanatory web (p.119).

The effect of time is vital in Eliot's poetry, particularly the latter one. In "Four Quartets," according to Eliot, life in time is a life of bondage and misery, whereas life in eternity is a life of liberation and joy. The opening lines of this passage are a reminder of the Bergsonian coil "gnawing at the future" (Bergson, 2004: 52). These lines of Eliot's "Burnt Norton" introduce his central topic, time and the timeless, which is in keeping with the temporal elements of music:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,

And time future contained in time past . . .

all time is eternally present. ("Four Quartets," 1971:Lines 1-4)

The idea that human awareness, where time and eternity collide, is central to "Four Quartets," as is the idea that human beings dwell in the tension between immanence and transcendence. Indeed, people are temporal beings, always traveling down the timestream we define as a straight line connecting the past, the present, and the future. However, Voegelin (2004) argues:

we are not moving only on this [temporal] line, but in openness toward divine reality, so that every point of presence is as T. S. Eliot formulated it, a point of intersection of time with the timeless (p.181).

Eliot portrays time in "Burnt Norton" as a cyclical power that perpetually repeats itself. He characterizes the sensation of déjà vu as a juncture where past and present intersect, leading to our realization of our bond to the everlasting. Eliot argues that "all time is unredeemable" since the past and the present are both engulfed by the future. As such, we must see time as the foundation of our lived experience. Eliot's principal concern in "Four Quartets" is with lived time as individuals represent it. This part reveals Eliot's understanding of time, its spiritual importance, and its intellectually frustrating character, which he mulls over 'time is eternally present,' a statement that attributes time's both



relative and absolute aspects of time, while combining its multiple, changing forms—the past forever departing, the future forever being born, and the present forever being reborn into a single instant (Fairchild, 1999). Eliot draws attention to the connection between time and eternity by contrasting them. By fusing the past, present, and future, he creates the everlasting present, both absolute and relative, constant and transient, and preserved for posterity like the lovers on Keats' urn.

Eliot uses the phenomenon of *déjà vu*, characterized as a sensation of familiarity with an event despite it being novel, to imply that our perception of time is not always precise. Eliot introduces the notion of "the still point" as a third element of "time," sandwiched between the image of the deserted Garden of Eden and the chaos of the London Underground. Eliot's idea of this, notably described in "Burnt Norton," is the subject of a chapter in Ethel Cornwell's *The Still Point*. Cornwell interprets Eliot's still point as "the point at which all opposites are reconciled, but this reconciliation is a matter of balance or tension" (1962: 29). By itself, with no context or history, the still point represents the realization of one's completeness as a person. Therefore, the moment at which one realizes non-temporal, limitless knowledge or truth is the point of non-time:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.

And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time. ("Four Quartets", 1971: Lines 64-71)

After this chain of negations, Eliot appears to contradict himself by placing the still point in the dance's space-time reference. The dance, a term that may be an act or an event, is a metaphor for the motionless point's contradictory dynamism that defies its name—a dynamism without which the highly charged world could not exist. Thus, like the static point it clarifies by analogy, the dance requires elaboration. The sturdy and serene dance is further complicated by context, where Eliot changes its meaning to meet the ever-changing kinds of life, making it absolute, relative, and both. Eliot is challenging because of contextual variety, but in this instance, he is loyal to the intricacy of relative



existence and its connection to the absolute. Dance's meaning changes dramatically from line to line, illustrating such intricacy (Cooper, 2008).

Eliot calls "dancing" creation. Eliot earlier compares the dance to the motionless point, the eternal wellspring of creation. He concludes that the first dance symbolizes creation, and the second, its source. Dance is an acceptable term for all three of Eliot's uses—the source, the act, and the product of creation—because they are one from the source's viewpoint. Therefore, the still point is called a moment of revelation, when "both a new world and the old [are] made explicit" ("Four Quartets," 1971: Lines 77-78). It is almost as intense as the peak of euphoria when all people's sensations and senses are at their peak. Once again, "the rose garden" appears, symbolizing the inseparability of all things. Eliot emphasizes moments since it is only via them that we may reach the "still point."

"Burn Norton" serves as a gentle reminder that poetry and philosophical inquiry have had a close relationship since the time of the ancient Greeks. Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, and many others concluded that many of the mysteries of human life are best entertained via indirect confrontation since early forms of philosophical study were sensitive to myth and the power of imagination in everyday experience. This issue is a test of individuals' calm composure and intellectual modesty. Eliot has severe doubts about the ability of words to describe the human experience. The poet bolsters the idea that everyone with an active imagination may have access to man's store of enduring wisdom: "Words strain, crack, and sometimes break, under the burden, Under the tension, slip, slide, perish..." ("Four Quartets," 1971: Lines 152-154). However, the narrator cautions us against attacking phrases that serve the goal of the idle discussion. Such phrases are a timewaster. Instead, the words that face the voids head-on, the essences people must name, lead them to the truth. The "cause and end of the movement" ("Four Quartets," 1971: Line 167) is where individuals should be taken by words that spring from their whole selves, not motion as a sensuous phenomenon.

3. Déjà vu: Human Consciousness about The Shadowing of The Past and its Effect on Human Experience in Thomas's "Fern Hill"

"Fern Hill", is one of the poems that is considered the best example to describe the characteristics of the neo-romantic movement. "Fern Hill" is inspired by the poet's reflections on the passage of time, the loss of childhood,





and the sad elements of existence. "Fern Hill" is about youth, when life was "young" and "easy," and it symbolizes the progression of a person's life from childhood to adulthood to the acceptance of his mortality, as portrayed by symbols in nature (Bhatta, 2006). The first three stanzas are about the poet's childhood and the time he spent during the summers at his uncle's farm, while the final three stanzas are about an awakening in the kid that represents the loss of innocence. The tales surrounding the demise of early humans are essential to this loss of innocence (Adam and Eve) (Gregory, 1947). As depicted in the first three stanzas, the world of innocence (child) is analogous to the Garden of Eden. A child's natural state is in total harmony with the outdoors in this setting.

"Fern Hill" is a poetic exploration of the interplay between memory, time, and the human condition. The poem prominently features the concept of déjà vu, which Thomas used to imply that our sense of time is often influenced by previous events, so significantly impacting our view of the current moment. In "Fern Hill," time is shown as a sequential advancement characterized by the experience of loss and a longing for the past. The poem depicts the speaker's wistful remembrance of his boyhood spent on a farm named Fern Hill, where he once felt liberated and blissful, but is now unable to relive such emotions. In this poetry, the occurrence of déjà vu does not signify a link to the timeless, but rather a strong yearning for the past (Mishra, 2020).

The concept of time in "Fern Hill" helps to sustain the mentioned path from innocence to experience. Time is generous and understanding. For the boy, it makes no difference. A child's lack of knowledge of their death and the passage of time is reflected in the phrase "once below a time" (Thomas, 2003: p, 170 line 7). Thus, time demonstrates "his" strength by allowing him to "play and be golden" (Thomas, 2003: p, 170 lines 13-14), but the boy is still oblivious to the passage of time and his death. When the opportunity arises to sing before the children "follow him out of grace" (Thomas, 2003: p, 171 line 44), a hint of self-awareness appears. When the time leads the youngster up to the loft, evil is hinted at. By the time he is an adult, he has lived enough to realize his mortality and wake up to the reality that he will die someday. Because of the passage of time, he is now a grownup, and death is imminent (Gregory, 1947).

A wise old narrator in Fern Hill reflects on the carefree joy of youth and the special bond he or she had with nature. Though he had boundless joy, unfettered spirit, and naïve innocence as a youngster, he came to terms with the transience of youth, its blessings, and maturity as he got older. The "relationship of youth, time, and death" is shown most well in "Fern Hill"





(Jenkins, 1966: 1180). A child's view of the world is idyllic and full of wonder in Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill," while an adult's view is dull and unfulfilling. The poem's message can be made without too much difficulty because it represents "first and foremost the personal unconsciousness"(Gras, 476). The poem seeks a satisfying moment of harmony by using contrasting words and images to portray a balance of clashing components. Ignorance and maturity, youth and old age are all themes that the poem delves into. The many allusions to time throughout the poem highlight the difference in perspective between the adult and kid perspectives. The topic of the past is the period of innocence and delight, as an adult now recognizes their mortality and await their eventual death. The adverb "now" creates a contradiction with the past tense verb "was," and this tension is important to the subject (Thorne, 2006: 318).

There is already a nostalgic air to "Fern Hill" that makes people rest and relax in times gone by. "Fern Hill" expands much beyond a child's wistful recall of a farm vacation. This recollection consumes the poet, and his words become a means of conveying not only melancholy but also a universal yearning for lost youth, a universal and human need for life. Dylan Thomas wishes back to the carefree days of his youth that he spent on his uncle's farm: "Now as I was young and easy beneath the apple boughs" (Thomas, 2003: p, 170 line 1). The poem's adult narrator reflects on his youth and the carefree days of his youth in the first line. As he lost track of time and reveled in the breathtaking surroundings, Time, via "his eyes," maintained a firm grasp on the boy and kept him under his continual vigilant eye. The carefree little boy saw himself as the "prince of the apple towns" (Thomas, 2003: p, 170 line 6), and he felt a strong connection to nature. As a youngster, the speaker was completely absorbed in his world of make-believe, unfettered joy, and blissful ignorance of the passage of time. Actually, the youngster was "let" to freely do what he wanted by Time (Shabanirad, & Omrani, 2016: 108).

Thomas used the sensation of *déjà vu* to imply that memories are not always precise and that a better awareness of time is often influenced by prior experiences. The poet expresses his youthful and carefree state, being well-known in the barns and enjoying the joyful atmosphere of the farm.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be

Golden in the mercy of his means, (Thomas, 2003: p,170 lines 10-14)





These lines imply that the speaker's recollections of his former encounters are romanticized, and he is endeavoring to reclaim a feeling of purity and untroubled delight that he links with his youth. He reflects on the fleeting nature of youth and the limited opportunity to experience the golden moments of life. The speaker's memories of his previous encounters are imbued with a feeling of regret and yearning, which is shaping his interpretation of the current situation. The sensation of *déjà vu* might be seen as a symptom of the overlapping of previous events, where our recollections and encounters merge and our perspective of time is disturbed.

Fern Hill is a contemplation on the purity and happiness of an innocent child who has the belief that everything in the world exists solely for his benefit. Nevertheless, time itself emerges as the true dominator, eventually resulting in the erosion of his pleasure and the demise of the farm. The farm represents the boy's youthful exuberance and happiness. However, as it disappears, he matures and loses his lighthearted delight. In the poem, Time perceives the kid's contentment and grants him the freedom to pursue his desires, but the innocent infant remains unaware of Time's influential authority. The poem used the hue "green" as a symbol to represent the child's unity with the splendid natural realm and the child's joy. Nevertheless, time retains its power and gives the kid the opportunity to experience enjoyment, even while the youngster is unaware of the transient nature of their delightful, pure, and euphoric youth. The poem accentuates the child's innocence and purity by depicting the child's reverent and sanctified perception of the natural landscape. The reference to "Adam and maiden" strengthens the notion of the child's untainted purity and naivety about his idyllic surroundings resembling the Garden of Eden. Thomas employs religious symbolism to strengthen the primary issue of the poem, which is the fleeting nature of youth and happiness and the erosion of purity (Laurentia C.S.J., 1975, 3).

A gradual shift from elation and joy to sorrow and mourning characterizes the speaker's demeanor and voice. Time whisked the boy away from his idyllic, made-up Eden as he got older, robbing him of the gift of youth. "By the final stanzas, however, the exaltation of the child's vision is beginning to be invaded by the adult's sense of mortality" (Thorne, 2006: 319). As an adult, the speaker realizes that his innocent belief in endless pleasure and bliss was shattered by the passage of time, which forces him to leave his paradisaical environment. The world has lost its radiance and beauty for this adult speaker, who now just perceives "shadow" in everything. Sighing, he reflected on his younger self and felt remorse: "Oh, I was young and carefree..." (Thomas, 2003: p, 172 line





52). He now conveys his sadness and longing for a simpler period, knowing that his carefree youth has slipped away. His loss of these times is also lamented: "Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would lead me Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand" (Thomas, 2003: p, 172 lines 53-54).

Thomas' poem delves into the process of moving from a joyful and carefree youth to an unavoidable maturity, emphasizing the relinquishment of innocence and liberty that accompanies it. The speaker, originally oblivious to the change, realizes the passage of his youth and experiences a sense of "mortality" as he grows older. Thomas posits that when individuals transition into adulthood, they gradually relinquish their creative imagination and their innate bond with nature, both of which are crucial for fostering a deep connection with the natural world. Consequently, he gains consciousness of his loss and experiences profound regret. Thomas seeks to comprehend the paradoxical function of time, originally seen as kind and abundant, but thereafter as malevolent and cunning. The inexperienced lad first had the belief that Time was kind and generous, but as he grew older, he saw that Time was a deceitful oppressor who robbed him of his youthful joys. The poem concludes with a bleak perspective on the joyless and empty nature of maturity, mirroring the intricacies of life's passage (Shabanirad, & Omrani, 2016: 110).

4. Conclusion

The presence of *Déjà vu* in Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and Thomas's "Fern Hill" illustrates the impact of Time on the human condition. Both poems use the cyclical aspect of Time to express a feeling of wistfulness and yearning for the past while simultaneously emphasizing the constraints of human comprehension. These works remind people that their recollections of the past can influence their current and future circumstances. Consequently, they must cultivate the ability to exist in the present while recognizing the influence of their previous encounters. The concept of *déjà vu* is used in T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill" to examine the interconnection between memory, time, and the human condition. Both poets use vibrant imagery and serious contemplations to portray the intricate and sometimes mysterious nature of human cognition about time. Eliot's poem depicts time as a cyclical power that both restricts and emancipates human awareness, but Thomas's poem implies that memories are tinged with sentimentality and yearning, shaping our understanding of the current instant. The speaker's nostalgic recollections of childhood serve as evidence of the influential role of





memory in defining our perception of time and our position in the world. Both poems provide significant perspectives on the essence of being and the enigmas of awareness.

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