

LITTLE GIDDING

1942. FIRE is the symbol of the fourth quartet. For Heraclitus it was the basic stuff of the universe and has divine qualities: the *kosmos*,

... selfsame in all things,
neither by gods made nor men,
but ever was, is, shall be:
everliving fire...³⁵⁵

The fire of war destroys our cities, but fire is the Holy Spirit, and the fire of purgatory refines us to “fold” us into the “knot of fire” that is the rose, eternal oneness in God.³⁵⁶

Little Gidding is a village north of London. There in 1626 Nicolás Ferrar (1591–1637), businessman, Member of Parliament, and friend of poet George Herbert, founded an Anglican religious community of thirty-five or forty members for the purpose of “waiting upon God”. The “Household”, as it was called, was a combination of family, monastery, and commune. The Puritans destroyed it in 1647, and although its small chapel was rebuilt in the 19th century, the experiment was never followed up.

King Charles I paid the Community a secret visit after his defeat by the Puritans at the battle of Naseby in 1645. He was executed by the Puritans four years later. Eliot visited the chapel in 1936 and reviewed two books on Ferrar’s Household for *The Criterion*. It was his conviction that certain persons and groups —such as Ferrar’s Community— had a special mission to relate the eternal to the transient; he will speak about them —and also about the conflict between Royalists and Puritans— in this quartet.

Monasticism forms part of the background of *Four Quartets*.³⁵⁷ Hermits, monks and nuns, friars and sisters, have played a key role in the history of Christianity and in Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot’s spiritual home, although largely ignored or opposed in Protestantism. On the other hand, a renewed interest in and revival of religious orders accompanied the 19th-century Ox-

ford Movement, which lay at the heart of the Catholic renewal within Anglicanism. St. John of the Cross, whose pervasive influence on Eliot has been noticed, was St. Teresa's right-hand man in founding the order of Discalced Carmelites.

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Fire, like water, not only destroys; it purifies. The second movement of *Little Gidding* is partially set in Dante's "purgatory", where souls are "refined" by fire before they can be united with God. Fire is a symbol of God Himself, of His love, of the coming of His Spirit. As *The Dry Salvages* is about the Annunciation and Incarnation, *Little Gidding* is about Pentecost and the love of God.

LG-I: THE HOUSEHOLD

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LG-Ia: (1-20) Holy fire

The Season

Spring in winter, as, in *East Coker*, the “disturbance of spring” coming in “late November”, is “sempiternal”, ever pointing outside time.³⁵⁹ The winter solstice is an especially powerful reminder of timelessness, when the “brief” sun, now “suspended” at its lowest point in the sky, refuses, as *Sol Invictus*, to be overcome, and begins to ascend again, promising a new spring.

Many peoples celebrate hope in new life on this “short day” of the year, as did the Romans in their cult of the “Unconquered” Sun-God. There is an unclear relation between this feast and the Christian celebration of Christmas. In his “A Christmas Carol”, a contemporary of Ferrar, the poet-priest Robert Herrick, saw spring in winter as Christ gives life to the world:

Dark and dull night, fly hence away,
 And give the honor to this day,
 That sees December turned to May.
 If we may ask the reason, say,
 The why, and wherefore all things here
 Seem like the springtime of the year?
 Why does the chilling winter’s morn
 Smile, like a field beset with corn?
 Or smell, like to a mead new-shorn,
 Thus, on the sudden? Come and see
 The cause why things thus fragrant be:
 ’Tis He is born, whose quickning birth
 Gives life and luster, public mirth,
 To heaven and the under-earth....
 And fit it is we find a room
 To welcome Him. The nobler part
 Of all the house here, is the heart.³⁶⁰

But there is no security in the temporal cycle. The tempters in *Murder in the Cathedral* try to persuade St. Thomas to take a commonplace way out. The First Tempter speaks to him—using images similar to this part of *Little Gidding*—of a return to “all the good time past”.

Fire devouring the winter season,
Eating up the darkness....

And the new season.

Spring has come in the winter. Snow in the branches
Shall float as sweet as blossoms. Ice along the ditches
Mirror the sunlight. Love in the orchard
Send the sap shooting.

But the Saint warns him that we do not know very much about the future nor do we learn from the experience of others —indeed only the fool thinks that

He can turn the wheel on which he turns.³⁶¹

Saul

“Midwinter spring” is lasting, hung amid the sun’s wanderings “between pole and tropic”, in our age, our life. But the warmth will turn the earth to mud “before sundown”. The sun flashes on the “watery mirror”, but the heat of our heart is “windless cold”. The sun’s glare is “blindness”. This is a “moment”, as when St. Paul was converted. Saul, as he had been called, was on his way to Damascus, “breathing threats and murder” against the followers of Jesus and armed with the written permission of the high priest to bring them back bound to Jerusalem. Then

suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven,
and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him:

“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”...

And Saul arose from the earth;
and when his eyes were opened, he saw no one.³⁶²

The “glare that is blindness”, this unseeing seeing, is reminiscent of negative theology.³⁶³ In the fifth movement Eliot will quote from *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whose title corresponds to the phrase “dark of silence” from Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology*,³⁶⁴ which the author of *The Cloud* translated into Middle English. The metaphor, as Eliot’s “darkness of God” in *East Coker*, is ultimately Biblical. God speaks to Moses on Mount Sinai:

Behold, I come unto thee in a thick cloud,
that the people may hear when I speak with thee and believe
there forever,

and then, leaving the people behind,

Moses drew near junto the thick darkness where God was.³⁶⁵

However, God in this tradition is a secret not to be kept but told, a mystery to be pondered. In the final blessing of his letter to the Romans, St. Paul links the Gospel to

the disclosure of the mystery kept secret since the world began,
but now told.³⁶⁶

But God may not be so easily found. John of the Cross echoes the words of Isaiah,

truly Thou art a hidden God, oh God of Israel, Savior,³⁶⁷

and begins his *Canticle* with this words:

Where hidest Thou,
Love, leaving me breathless?

Of “seeking God in faith”, he says,

Oh soul, seek Him ever as hidden,
for thou draw very close to Him
when thou dost think Him higher and deeper
than anything thou canst reach;
...be ever content not with what thou dost understand of God
but in what thou dost not understand....
for the less sharp [thy] understanding of Him,
the closer [dost thou] come to Him, since... as the
prophet Davis says,
“Darkness He made His hide-away”.³⁶⁸

Eliot speaks of “a glare that is blindness”. Dionysius advises anyone wishing to “behold”:

bent upon blind beholdings,
 forsake all things, ...things both felt and understood,
 strain up unknowingly to oneness with Him,
 ...raised to that supernatural
 ray of divine darkness.³⁶⁹

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* describes the “work” of contemplation:

at the first time when thou dost it,
 thou findest but a darkness
 and as it were a cloud of unknowing,
 ...a naked intent unto God;
 this darkness and this cloud is, howsoever thou dost,
 betwixt thee and thy God.³⁷⁰

Perhaps this “intent” lies behind the other ways Eliot uses the word.³⁷¹

Blaze in darkness

Now our “spirit” is touched by the “glow” of a fire brighter than the “blaze of branch”, the golden bough from the *Aeneid* of the Latin poet Virgil, who led Dante through hell and purgatory. The hero of the epic, Aeneas, wished to speak with his beloved father Anchises in the abode of the dead, but he was told by the prophetess Sibyl that he must first offer a gold branch to Proserpine, queen of the underworld. This “golden bough” would allow him to visit Anchises and then return to the land of the living.³⁷² In the account (the first line is famous) the sybil speaks to Aeneas:

Easy is the descent into hell:
 night and day dark Pluto’s gate stands open;
 but retracing thy steps, coming back to light above:
 that is the task, that is the deed.
 A few, born of the gods, have done it,
 favored kindly by Jupiter or lifted to heaven by their
 burning valor.
 Woods shroud the center,
 the black river Cocytus rings it around.
 But if such love is in thy mind, such passion,

twice to cross the waters of the Styx,
 twice to see the gloom of hell,
 if thou art bent on this mad deed,
 hear what thou must first do.
 Hidden in a shadowy tree is a golden bough,
 its leaves and supple stem of gold,
 held holy to Proserpine,
 screened by the grove, closed off by dark ravines.
 Only after plucking its golden leaved fruit
 May one go down to the hidden places of the earth....
 So let thine eyes search above,
 and when thou findest it, let thy hand pluck it off.
 For if the fates are calling thee,
 it will break off freely and easily;
 otherwise no force can overcome it,
 no hard steel cut it away.³⁷³

The passage previews the descent into Dante's purgatory in the second movement of this quartet.

Pentecost

The "glow more intense" is "pentecostal fire". Jesus's apostles were together after the resurrection when their "moment" came:

all at once from the sky came a noise, like a rush of strong wind,
 filling the whole house where they sat.
 And there appeared to them tongues like fire,
 parting, then alighting on each,
 and all were filled with the Holy Ghost,
 and began speaking in other tongues, speaking out
 as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.³⁷⁴

The story weaves three metaphors together: wind, tongue, and fire. In the Old Testament God's "wind" is His breath, symbolizing that He, in contrast to false gods, is alive and gives life. His "Holy Breath" ("Spirit". "Ghost") speaks a word which, unlike our words, always comes true: when He said "Let there be light", light came about. He breathed into the prophets that they might with His Breath speak His word to the people. The "strong wind" rushing at Pentecost is the Breath of Christ breathing life into the

small community. Traditionally the Holy Ghost is seen as sanctifying the members of the church by having them share in the life and love of Christ.

In Genesis, sharing the same word, having a single tongue, symbolized covenant, the oneness of God and man. At one time

the whole earth had one speech, the same words.

But human beings, wishing to boast of their unity and dominion apart from God, built a city, Babel, with a towering ziggurat that reached the sky. And God

confused the speech of the whole earth,
and from there scattered them abroad over the face of the whole
earth.³⁷⁵

At Pentecost, the whole earth ideally had a single word, Word, again. The “Holy Breath” brings about understanding and fellowship from confusion and division.

Eliot downplays the image of wind (“no wind”) and tongue (“dumb spirit”) in favor of the “glow” of fire. In fact, the three elements air, earth (“no earth smell”), and water (“freezing”) give way to the fourth, the fire lying above them, beyond all of nature and beyond the senses we use to apprehend nature (“blindness”, “dumb”, “no... smell”). The light is not “absorbed” by the earth as in *East Coker*³⁷⁶ but “reflecting” as on a “mirror”, pointing away, upwards.

Lightening in the storm is a basic image of the theophany. In *The Waste Land* the thunder spoke three words in the “black cloud” over Mount Hivavant.³⁷⁷ On Mount Sinai God, hidden in a cloud, wrapped in smoke and darkness, came in fire to make His “covenant”. After the people were purified, there came

peals of thunder, bolts of lightening,
a heavy cloud on the mountain,
a very loud trumpet noise...
all Mount Sinai was in smoke,
for God came down upon it in fire.³⁷⁸

Moses climbed to the top of the mountain to meet God.

Spring of the Soul

The Holy Ghost, then, is the spring sun melting the lifeless wintry landscape of our soul, breathing Word into our “dumb spirit” at this meeting of fire and frost, and our “sap quivers” with life. This spring is not the usual yearly “time-for” of Ecclesiastes, the cycle of seasons promised by God when He made His first covenant with Noah:

while the earth lasts,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day
and night,
shall not cease.³⁷⁹

Snow covers the hedges with white (“blanched”) in an instant, quicker than summer flowers. This is a new covenant, a springtime out of time, “neither budding nor fading”, without beginning, “generation”, or end. This is an inner season, Whitsuntide, the time of White Sunday, Pentecost. It is a “moment” as in the rose-garden.

Does suddenly feeling fire in mid-winter point to an “unimaginable” summer solstice?

LG-Ib: Monasticism (20-39)

In the three previous quartets Eliot spoke of approaching the rose garden, the village of the past, and river and seascapes; now he describes a pilgrimage to the Household.

Surprise

King Charles I visited Ferrar’s Community at Little Gidding twice by day, but Eliot refers to his secret pilgrimage “at night”, when he was “broken” after his defeat by the Puritans. We too, in “may time” —in “sempiternal” spring, where every moment is *kairos*, whatever season it “may” be— “may” travel there. Our pilgrimage may be at night, as the king’s, or in the day-time. Where we come from and how we get there make no difference; “at the end” we would find the same “hedges/ white” and sweet. The “end” to which the rough road now leads is the Household’s erstwhile manor, now a hog farm, with the chapel “dully” restored in the 19th century, and Ferrar’s tombstone in the path at the entry.

Our visit may have different sorts of “purpose”: pastime, curiosity, looking for answers, devotion, tourism —and Eliot will mention four false mo-

tives (below). But these ends are but a “husk of meaning”, and really amount to no purpose or “end” at all, since in any case the real “purpose” is other, unforeseeable, “beyond the end” that we “figured”, altered in its fulfillment. And even a lack of purpose is less important than that *the* “purpose” be “fulfilled”. And the fulfillment will always be a surprise. The “unknowing” tradition cautions against taking spiritual experience at first glance.³⁸⁰

But the “end” toward which we are “faring forward”, as in *East Coker*, is always “the same”.³⁸¹ The symbolism here is pilgrimage: consciously moving out of timeful routine toward a timeless destination.

Finisterrae

The particular goal of pilgrimage does not matter, since it ultimately leads to “the world’s end”, and all pilgrims have taken basically the same path to get there. Ferrar’s Household, is “the nearest” shrine, but it is not the only one; Eliot lists four others from the history of Christian monasticism. Several Irish monasteries were built “at sea jaws”. St. Colm Cille, the first great “exile for Christ”, founded a community of monks on Iona, an island off Scotland; it is still a popular place of pilgrimage.³⁸² Another monastery, Lindisfarne, famous for its illuminated manuscript of the Gospels, was founded by St. Cuthbert on the north-east coast of England. The hermitage of St. Kevin was built “over a dark lake” in Glendalough, Ireland.

On the other pole of Christendom, St. Anthony of Egypt, greatest of the Desert Fathers, lived “in a desert”, the Egyptian Thebaid.³⁸³ “A city” refers to Padua, that is to St. Anthony of Padua, a 13th-century Franciscan mystic, who lived in the hermitage of St. Anthony in Portugal and later in a cave in Italy. The desert, the seaside, the forest, Little Gidding, the city—the South Atlantic, “here or there”, as Eliot said in *East Coker*—,³⁸⁴ all are the world’s end, the “good” waste land, where God has been sought.³⁸⁵

Little Gidding was the destination “nearest, in place and time” to Eliot, but, as he had written,

perfection is as nearly attainable for any man here and now
as it will ever will be in any future place.³⁸⁶

Actually, we need not travel to any place or wait for any time. All we have to do is redeem the *kairos* which is offered always and everywhere, say, “now and in England”. Eliot said that we

...neglect and belittle the desert.
 The desert is not remote in southern tropics,
 The desert is not only around the corner,
 The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
 The desert is in the heart of your brother.³⁸⁷

LG-Ic: Change (39-53)

Outgrowing

No matter whence or when we set off for the world's end, the way is "always the same", for we all must "put off/ Sense and notion". It has been the custom for the newly baptized to put on a new robe to symbolize their new life. The "putting on and off" metaphor is from the letter to the Ephesians, where the author assumes that the way to "learn Christ... as is the truth in Jesus" is

to put off the old man...
 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
 and to put on the new man created after the likeness of God
 in the justice and holiness of truth.³⁸⁸

A. similar saying of St. Paul, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ", moved St. Augustine to his *aversio-conversio*, to Eliot's *turning*, the conversion, *metanoia*, that Jesus preached:

The *kairos* has been fulfilled and God's kingdom has drawn near;
 be converted and believe in the gospel!³⁸⁹

Eliot gave a spiritual turn to this *metanoia*. The distinction between "sense and notion" or, in *Burnt Norton*, between the "worlds" of sense and fancy, lies behind the traditional teaching on spiritual maturing, which Eliot has been assuming.³⁹⁰ It is based upon this anthropological "duality", found not only in Christianity (for example, in the New Testament) but also in Hindu religion, perhaps in most cultures.³⁹¹

The following version of St. Thomas Aquinas was familiar to St. John of the Cross and to the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.³⁹² A person in this view is a living unit (or "soul"), and living is carried out on several levels. There are two types of functions open to significant conscious control, each with a cognitive and affective side:

- 1) neurological functions:
 - * cognitive: “sense”, “fancy”
 - * affective: instinct and emotion
- 2) “transcendent” functions (not completely accounted for by the physiological): “spirit”:
 - * cognitive: “notion”, understanding (mind, *logos*)
 - * affective; freedom, commitment, love (will).

St. John of the Cross, following St. Augustine, added memory to the functions of spirit.

The human being is a rational animal; it is his reason, *logos* —mind + will—, that distinguishes him from other animals. It is his spirit, then, that makes man unique, and this is why the human spirit has been so highly valued and considered a key aspect of the maturing process. People “grow”, become more “human”, when their behavior is not driven by raw passion and instinct, but is reasonable and honorable in regard to others, “virtuous”.

This yielding of sense to spirit calls for self-discipline. In a religious context, growing includes *outgrowing*. Not only must sense yield to spirit; spirit itself must yield to God Himself; sense gives way to spirit and spirit gives way to God. Dionysius told his disciple to forsake things “felt and understood” in order to be united with God, and St. Anthony of Padua taught the traditional three-step pattern:

- 1) purgative way (cleansing)
- 2) illuminative way (contemplation, virtue)
- 3) unitive way (oneness with God).

The famous metaphor of St. John of the Cross is “going into the night”: the two nights, which can be active or passive, mark two yieldings:

- 1) *senses* (purgative way)
 - the *night of the senses* (cleansing the senses), *gives way to*:
- 2) *spirit* (illuminative way)
 - the *night of the spirit* (cleansing the spirit), or the night of faith (and hope and love), *gives way to*:
- 3) *God* (unitive way).³⁹³

Eliot’s point is that what is “put off” in sense and notion is emotionalism and ideology that keep us away from God, and that this pattern is “always the same” whoever we are, wherever and whenever we live.

Waiting upon God

Eliot specifies four false motives of travelers bound for Little Gidding: to “verify”, “instruct yourself”, “inform curiosity”, and “carry report”. In *The Waste Land* Eliot also alluded to the misuse of sacred lore³⁹⁴ and saints have warned of the false motivation affecting how we move toward our common “end”.

The proper attitude toward the community of Little Gidding is humble respect for their prayer; Ferrar wrote that

they ceased not from contemplation...
every hour seemed short for waiting upon God.

Eliot stresses the *contemplative* aspect of their recollection. Prayer, like the cleansing he mentions in the third part of the previous *Quartets*, is both

* active: saying “an order of words” or practicing the meditation “of the praying mind”

* passive: undergoing the Holy Ghost’s “fire”, the especially “valid” prayer of contemplation arising from timelessness.

Ferrar and his companions can communicate with us even now that they are dead. After St. Thomas à Becket’s martyrdom at the end of *Murder in the Cathedral*, the Chorus thanks God

for Thy redemption
by blood. For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints
Shall enrich the earth, shall create the holy places.
For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given
his blood for the blood of Christ,
There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it
Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come with
guidebooks, looking over it;
From where the western seas gnaw at the coast of Iona,
To the death in the desert, the prayer in forgotten places by
the broken imperial column,
From such ground springs that which forever renews the earth
Though it is forever denied.

Prayer was valid in hermitage, monastery, and Household, as well as in places of martyrdom, such as the cathedral in Canterbury where St. Thomas was murdered in 1170 and whither, as Chaucer said,

...from every shire's end
 Of England... they wend,
 The holy blissful martyr for to seek
 That them hath helped when that they were sick.³⁹⁵

The change

The dead can “tell you” what, when alive, they could not. Eliot may be thinking of Christ, when He said at the Last Supper:

It is better for you that I go away;
 for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come unto
 you....
 I still have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them
 now.
 But when [the Paraclete] come, the Spirit of Truth,
 He will lead you to all Truth.³⁹⁶

His telling, “tongued with fire”, will inspire the disciples at Pentecost.

But the context here is rather eschatological; in heaven there will be, not unknowing, but a knowing “beyond the language of the living”. St. Paul showed us “a mystery”:

we shall all be changed,
 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump,
 for the trumpet shall sound,
 and the dead shall be raised incorruptible
 and we shall be changed.³⁹⁷

This is the definitive *turning*, what the dead, when living, “had no speech for”:

a wisdom in the mature, a wisdom not of this world...
 but God's wisdom hidden in mystery,...
 of which it is written:
 Eye has not seen nor heard nor has it entered
 human heart
 what God has prepared for those who love Him.³⁹⁸

dawn, an “uncertain hour” after the enemy aircraft have returned to base but before the all-clear sounds (the “blowing of the horn”).⁴⁰⁷ Eliot presents himself as a fire-watcher on patrol, when he happens to meet the ghost of poets whom he admired, just as in hell Dante met the ghost of a teacher who to him was as a father: *Ser Brunetto*.

The air-raids, “recurrent” and “unending”, are seen as a caricature of Pentecost. The “dove” is symbol of the Holy Ghost coming down from heaven on the apostles, but here it is a “dark” warplane, its “tongue” not the Spirit’s tongues of fire, but “flickering” machine guns “homing” in on targets and then “homing” back to airfields “below the horizon”. The smoke is not the storm cloud and lightening of theophany; it billows out from burning buildings. The wind that blows “the metal leaves” like shrapnel is not God’s Holy Breath. Still, the scene maintains ambiguity, expectation, a “moment” of intersection of time and eternity.

The “dead leaves” blown toward the warden, Eliot, bring to mind the *Ode to the West Wind*, which Shelley composed in Florence, Dante’s birthplace, and whose verse form is also a variation of Dante’s *terza rima*:

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing.

Fall winds usher in the weather of winter, and the human soul comes to death. But the spirit of nature revolves and so the wind is

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

But for Eliot, cycles are no solution; the wheel of time must be broken to attain the eternal.

Ser Brunetto

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot alluded to Dante’s surprise meeting with his teacher, *Ser Brunetto* (“*You here?*”), in the person of Stetson the businessman.⁴⁰⁸ Actually, Dante met with Brunetto in hell, not in purgatory, but Eliot said the location is irrelevant. Purgatory, in fact, fit in better with the dynamic conception of the quartet. This company of souls, says Dante, were

coming along the embankment, and each
 eyed us, as people are wont at dusk
 under a new moon to stare at one another,
 as an old tailor squints
 to thread.
 One of them recognized me and he grasped me
 by the hem and cried: "What wonder!"
 As he stretched out his arm to me,
 on his baked features I fixed my eye,
 and his scorched face did not hinder
 my mind's recognition;
 turning my face down toward his
 I replied: "You here, *Ser Brunetto*?"⁴⁰⁹

Brunetto Latini was a writer and chancellor of Florence (hence the title "Sere"). Dante later says to him:

...thy dear good fatherly likeness
 is fixed in my mind and now aggrieves me,
 when in the world, from time to time
 thou did teach me how man becomes timeless.⁴¹⁰

Becoming immortal refers here to literary fame, but "*eternarsi*" could be taken as the whole theme of *Four Quartets*.

The compound ghost

Before Eliot gusts of wind blow the "stranger", "unresisting", "loitering" but "hurried", with a sort of inevitability. Eliot, like Dante, "fixed" upon the ghost, and was likewise surprised at recognizing "some dead master" in his "brown baked features". The conversation with the ghost begins with the same "What wonder!" that affected Dante.

Eliot's ghost is "both one and many", his eyes "both intimate and unidentifiable"; he is a "compound ghost", the ghost of his many teachers. The Irish poet Yeats holds a special place in this company; in his poem *Sailing to Byzantium* he prayed to the "sages standing in God's holy fire":

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.

From allusions in the dialogue between Eliot and the ghost we can glimpse other poets: Mallarmé, Milton, Swift, John Ford, Johnson, and Shakespeare. In a draft of *Little Gidding* Eliot added “*Ser Brunetto*” to the words “*You here?*”; cutting it opens up the reference. The “compound ghost”, then, is the humanistic tradition which Eliot absorbed and then portrayed eschatologically in *The Waste Land* more as a purgatory than a hell, suggesting that history will end not in a Heraclitean conflagration but in a Christian denouement.

Eliot takes on a “double part” in the conversation, his other self, the ghost, speaking as Dante. As he relived Dante’s experience, he knew himself as “still the same” yet was “someone other”. Again, there are obscure hints of Pentecost. The ghost is parallel to the Holy Ghost, the “common wind” to which the speakers are “compliant”, allowing unity. Although they are “too strange to each other”, so distinct that they cannot mistake the experience, they are “in concord” at this time of “intersection”, communicate, as sharing in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. The “meeting” is spaceless, “nowhere”, and timeless, without any “before and after”. The encounter of those who “were not”, and walked together “in a dead patrol” recalls the “communication/ Of the dead” at the end of the first movement.

The dialectic

Eliot feels Dante’s wonder, but it is “easy”, not upsetting, and this itself is surprising. He is eager, perhaps as a disciple, to hear the ghost, but afraid he may not understand or remember the lesson.

The ghost, the teacher, does not want to go back over the “thought and theory” which he proposed when alive and which Eliot has forgotten or never learned. Nor should Eliot, he adds, wish to “rehearse” his own ideas, both “bad and good”. Eliot’s disciples should “forgive” his ideas as the Ghost “prays” Eliot to forgive his own. The word recalls the reciprocity “forgive us – we forgive”) in the Lord’s prayer and injects an element of reconciliation to be brought out in the next movement.

The communication is now not about “these things”, and Eliot should “let them be” in the timeflow where “they have served their purpose”. From the moment’s timeless perspective it does not matter whether they hit the

mark or not. Literary and philosophic fashions come and go; a new vogue feeds on the last one and kicks it over like an “empty pail”. We have already rejected “last year’s words” and “next year’s words” will replace our own and be replaced in turn by others. This is a literary dialectic: one idea supersedes another and is then superseded itself, over and over again —this Hegelian turnover is the process of history, of all of reality.

The ghost (“spirit”) has yet to find peace, and still strays as a wandering pilgrim (“peregrine”) between two worlds, purgatory and London, which now, during the Second World War, resemble each other. He is surprised to find himself speaking again in London, Florence, Paris or wherever he (or they) lived when in the flesh. Using new speech is the “concern” of innovating poets such as *Ser Brunetto* himself in Italian, Yeats, who with Pound and Eliot changed the course of English poetry, and Mallarmé, who launched the French Symbolist movement. When the ghost says speech “impelled us/ To purify the dialect of the tribe”, he is repeating a line from a sonnet by Mallarmé, where the angel

gave a purer meaning to the words of the tribe.⁴¹¹

“Gifts” to the old

Speech also impels the poet —all of us, actually— to “urge the mind to after-sight and foresight”, to reflect on our timebound experience. Seeing what went before from the viewpoint of what comes after tells us something about our life’s work. In our old age we receive a “crown” for our best “effort”, three “gifts” —the words are ironic.

The first gift is the failure of our “expiring sense”. As “body and soul begin to fall asunder” the senses wear out (“friction”). Two passages of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* place these lines in the context of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Michael the Archangel tells Adam that eating the forbidden fruit has led to

... old age; but then thou must outlive
Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty, which will change
To withered, weak, and grey; thy senses then,
Obtuse, all taste of pleasure must forgo
To what thou hast; and, for the air of youth,
Hopeful and cheerful, in thy blood will reign
A melancholy damp of cold and dry,
To weigh thy spirits down, and last consume
The balm of life.⁴¹²

In Genesis, God said to the serpent

on your belly shalt thou crawl,
and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.

Milton pictured Satan and his devils turned into snakes, hungry and thirsty, amid a “multitude” of trees of knowledge. They climbed the trees to eat the fruit, but found only “bitter tastelessness”, since the fruit,

...more delusive, not the touch, but taste
Deceived; they, fondly thinking to allay
Their appetite with gust, instead of fruit
Chewed bitter ashes, which th’ offended taste
With spattering noise rejected. Oft they assayed,
Hunger and thirst constraining; drugged as oft,
With hatefullest disrelish writhed their jaws
With soot and cinders filled; so oft they fell
Into the same illusion, not as Man
Whom they triumphed once lapsed.⁴¹³

Sense, understanding, offers “no promise” any more, no “enchantment”, only disappointment in “shadow fruit”. The other two “gifts” bring tearing pain (“rending”, “laceration”). The second is anger at our helplessness to mitigate, or even be amused by, human madness. The third is the reliving our hypocrisy with regret and shame for everything we “have done, and been”, the evil and harm to others that we took as virtue,

...a lamentable tale of things
Done long ago and ill done,

words of John Ford, a dramatist at the time of King Charles I.⁴¹⁴ It now “stings” us to remember how fools—or we ourselves— approved of our actions and our so-called “honor” now “stains” us.

A caricature of holiness

These gifts seem to be a caricature of spiritual maturing: our “exasperated spirit/ Proceeds” “from wrong to wrong” instead of proceeding from deception to truth, from selfishness to virtue. The end is “ash on [the] sleeve”, not “endless humility”.⁴¹⁵ In traditional spirituality, our “lifetime’s effort” does

indeed promise to be crowned with “gifts” —of passive contemplation, but here the reference is to the “gifts of the Holy Ghost”. This teaching goes back to a text of Isaiah, where the prophet promises that from the stump of Jesse, David’s father, a shoot will come forth: the Anointed One (“Messiah”, the “Christ”):

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and piety
and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord.⁴¹⁶

St. Thomas Aquinas related the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost to our passiveness before God. The Holy Ghost sensitizes us, he said, in our faith through the gifts of understanding (to grasp the content disclosed) and knowledge (to judge of its truth), in our hope through fear of the Lord, and in our love through wisdom.⁴¹⁷ For St. John of the Cross, it is just these three theological virtues which refill the “empty” person in the night of the spirit.⁴¹⁸

The suffering of the old that Eliot describes here, as in *Dry Salvages*,⁴¹⁹ seems pointless, sterile, rather than cleansing, preparing, promising. The senses just become deadened, but are not raised to any higher union with God. The mind recognizes stupidity, but it is not led to understanding. Serving self and hurting others, not virtue, dominates behavior.

“Unless”

The “unless” (“the exasperated spirit” is “restored by that refining fire”) is a stunning word; it separates this depressing meaninglessness from a flood of words inspiring hope, the expectation of redemption. For we may be “restored” in our sufferings, which are no longer barren but “refining” in the “fire” of the Holy Spirit in which we “move” toward God. We advance “in measure, like a dancer”, as in the garden we moved “dignified”, “in formal pattern”, “without pressure” before seeing the pool filling with light.⁴²⁰ Our moving ahead fits into a wider purposefulness embracing the dance of our metabolism, of society, of the stars, but with hope for breaking out of the cycle of time: “at the still point”.⁴²¹

“The refining fire” is the purgation of the Holy Ghost. The phrase is from Dante’s *Purgatorio* and refers to the troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel, whom Dante called “the better craftsman”, the words Eliot quoted in his

dedication of *The Waste Land* to Ezra Pound. Daniel speaks in Provençal, language of southeast France used by the medieval poets”

“I am Arnaut, who weeps yet singing goes.
 My past folly I see with pain,
 but joyous I behold before me the joy I hope for.
 Now I pray thee, by the Power
 guiding thee to the top of the stairway,
 remember in due time my pain!”
 Then he hid in the fire which refines them.⁴²²

In *The Waste Land* Eliot quotes this last line in Italian: holy fire gives hope, since God, as St. Augustine said, plucks us out of the “burning” of lust.⁴²³ Daniel sees not only his folly but his promised joy.

Farewell

The ghost, like that of Hamlet’s father, fades at daybreak, and for Eliot when the all-clear sounded (“the blowing of the horn”). He parted with “a kind of valediction”. “*Valedicere*” means “to say *vale*” in Latin and “*vale*” means “be strong”, and especially “farewell”, and Eliot’s phrase “a kind of” suggests ambiguity: the “Not fare well/ But fare forward” of *The Dry Salvages*,⁴²⁴ not “good-bye” but “Godspeed”. “The day was breaking” amid the “disfigured street” of the broken and burning city. Could the “horn” also be the trumpet blown by the seventh angel of the Apocalypse, when loud voices cried out:

the kingdom of the world
 has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ,
 and he shall reign forever and ever?⁴²⁵

LG-III: RELEASE

Eliot returns again to detachment as the condition of freedom. The theme is a basic human experience. Jesus told us:

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LG-III: RELEASE

Eliot returns again to detachment as the condition of freedom. The theme is a basic human experience. Jesus told us:

Take no thought for your soul, what you are to eat,
 nor for your body, what you are to put on.
 Is not the soul more than food and the body more than clothes?
 Behold the birds of the sky:
 they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns,
 yet your heavenly father feeds them.
 Are you not of more worth than they?...

Learn from the lilies of the field, how they grow;
 they toil not, neither do they spin,
 but I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory
 was arrayed like one of these....
 Seek first the kingdom and His righteousness,
 and all these things will be given you besides;
 Therefore have no worry for tomorrow.⁴²⁶

St. Paul recommended an “as-if” detachment:

Let those who have wives be as if they had none,
 those weeping, as if not weeping,
 rejoicing, as if not rejoicing,
 those buying, as if owning nothing,
 using the world, as if not using it,
 for the shape of the world is passing away;
 I want you to be free of worry.⁴²⁷

St. Teresa of Ávila spoke about “releasing” things, St. John of the Cross about becoming “unfastened” from everything, Meister Eckhart about being “calm” and “secluded”, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* about “heedlessness”, Dionysius the Areopagite about being “withdrawn” from everything, Jewish mystics about “cleaving” to God rather than to things, Buddhists about “renunciation” (second of the eight ways), Stoics about remaining “unshaken”, “Twelve-Steppers” about “serenity” —Eliot about “detachment” and “liberation”.⁴²⁸

The detaching movement is turning away from something and toward something; freedom is freedom from and freedom for, both forsaking and stretching ahead for (Paul) or straining upwards for (Dionysius).⁴²⁹ St. Augustine spoke of *aversio*, turning away from the City of Man for *conversio*, turning back to the City of God. For St. John of the Cross, there is *nada* and *todo*, nothing for the sake of everything.

LG-IIIa: The hedgerow (150-165)

The conditions

Three “conditions” or kinds of life flourish in the same “hedgerow”, recalling, in the first movement, the “hedgerow... blanched” of springtime outside “time’s covenant” and the “hedges white and sweet” of Ferrar’s Community.⁴³⁰ They are three attitudes, each one of persons toward themselves, toward other persons and toward things. They look alike but are completely different.

Two conditions are *alive* and flowering:

- 1) The attitude of “*attachment*” to self, others and things. It is like a “live”, or stinging, nettle, which pricks and causes irritation. This is the wrong kind of commitment where fear of its outcome stings.
- 2) The attitude of “*detachment*” to them. It is like a “dead nettle”, the kind that does not sting. It is the right kind of commitment when freed from the “desire” regarding its outcome, as with Arjuna or Eckhart.
- 3) The third condition, lying “between the two”, is *dead*, “unflowering”. It is the “death” that is “*indifference*” to self, others and things. It contrasts with the first two conditions as “death resembles life”. It is an avoidance of commitment, not caring about the outcome.

The book of Revelation records Christ’s judgment on the Laodicean Christians:

I know thy works, that thou art neither hot nor cold;
I would thou wert cold or hot,
but since thou art lukewarm, neither cold nor hot,
I will spew thee out of my mouth!⁴³¹

Eliot had said of “hollow men”:

Shape without form, shade without color,
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion.⁴³²

Memory

“Liberation” here means becoming free for love and from “desire”. It “expands” love, “beyond desire” in another, timeless, dimension, toward God, and comes back to envelop everything. In the context of the Bhagavad-Gita Eliot spoke of disinterested action in warfare.⁴³³ Now he says that memory liberates us because we can think of past conflict without its result being at stake for us today and because we see the same sort of conflict repeating itself down to our day. Since history, presumably, will go on being the same as it has been, we should maintain the same detached attitude toward the future. Standing away from the tenses —past, present, and future— gives us the freedom to show our love, respect and compassion for all. This in no way implies a relativistic indifference as if every side, every person, were equally guilty or guiltless. Detachment is a tough, all-embracing realism, a balanced maturity.

St. John of the Cross explained how passive purification brings about a deep spiritual detachment: in the night of the spirit the three theological virtues empty and darken the three functions of the spirit.⁴³⁴ Charity empties the will by “stripping away” desire and faith empties the understanding of spiritual ideology. Hope darkens the memory by detaching us from the past and from all ownership. It does not turn us toward a future in time but toward the *eschaton* of oneness with God.

Love, then, is what remains after emotion and understanding give way in the ascent of Mt. Carmel. The reason that Aquinas gave for this triumph of love is that the mind brings God down to us and love brings us up to God outside the self. It is not the experience, emotional or intellectual, of God that is sought, but God Himself. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, whom Eliot will quote in the fifth movement of this quartet, said of knowing and loving, the two “principle might” or functions of rational creatures, parallel to mind and will:

to the first, which is the *knowing* power... God is evermore
incomprehensible,
and to the second, which is the *loving* power...
in each one diversely He is all comprehensible at the full,
insomuch that one loving soul, alone in itself,
by virtue of love may comprehend in it
 Him that is sufficient to the full, and much more...
And this is the endless marvelous miracle of love which shall
 never take end;
for ever shall he do it and never shall he cease to do it.⁴³⁵

The author goes on to say that we should be cautious about our thinking about God in prayer,

be it never so holy,
for love may reach to God in this life, but not knowing.
And all the while that the soul dwells in this deadly body,
 evermore is the sharpness of our understanding
 in beholding of all ghostly things, but most specially of God,
mixed with some manner of fancy
for the which our work should be unclean...⁴³⁶

Eliot was “attached” to his own “field of action” when, after he left Germany at the outbreak of war in 1915, he began to send down roots in England through his marriage, social life, and employment. He came to consider these accidental circumstances “of little importance” —but obviously significant for his life—, when twelve years later and from different motives, he became a British citizen and received confirmation in the Church of England.

History

Our memory of and attitude to the past is ambivalent. Memories enslave us when we continue to fight battles long gone, attached to one side or the other. The context suggest the religious and political conflict between the Royalists supporting King Charles and the Parliamentarians opposing him, but it includes all conflict in centuries of history and of its violence.

Detachment from history is not ignorance of history; philosopher George Santayana said if we do not know history, we shall unknowingly relive it. Nor is it “neutrality” meaning indifference; it is rather like the nettle that does not sting. Detachment does not stand still; it keeps seeing historical situations “in another pattern”. The word recalls not only Eliot’s “revisionism” of “new” patterns in *East Coker* but the movement “in formal pattern” of the garden-people toward the pool.⁴³⁷ My “self” vanishes with the “faces and places” I have loved, but we shall all be “renewed, transfigured” somehow in a timeless pattern. History as a “pattern/ Of timeless moments”, Eliot will intimate in the fifth movement, is what redeems from time.⁴³⁸

LG-IIIb: Sin and love (166-199)

Julian of Norwich

Eliot now states this hope explicitly in the words of Dame Julian of Norwich. He quotes from her *Showings of Divine Love* twice in this movement and once again in the fifth (where he will also quote from *The Cloud of Unknowing*), and he will allude to her in the fourth movement. He said that the reason why he incorporated these English medieval mystics is because he wished to offset “so much 17th century in the poem” (Ferrara’s Household and the English Civil War), and to “give greater historical depth to [it] by allusions to the other great period, which included Chaucer”.⁴³⁹ The five ascetics, Richard Rolle, the author of *The Cloud*, Walter Hilton, Margery Kempe, and Julian, are indeed some of the most profound and original representatives of the contemplative ideal in the history of the church. They all wrote in Middle English, and Rolle and Hilton also wrote in Latin.

Mother Julian lived as an anchoress (the word means “withdrawn” from the world), in a cell adjoining the parish church of St. Julian and St. Edward in Norwich in east central England. This church was destroyed by bombs in 1942, the same year that Eliot served as an air-raid warden in London. From her hermitage she acted as counsellor and spiritual director of the townspeople. She she was probably educated in a convent; she could read Latin, knew the Bible and the Fathers of the church (Dionysius, for example), and was at home in the contemplative monastic tradition.

In 1373 Julian was healed from a serious illness after experiencing sixteen revelations or “showings”. She wrote them down soon afterwards as *Showings of Divine Love* and spent the next two decades thinking about what they meant. She then composed a longer account of the showings. Reflecting on previous “moments” is important for Eliot, and represents a traditional form of detachment from spiritual experience.⁴⁴⁰ In her writings Julian spoke of God as “Mother” and “courteous Lord”. She insisted, in this tradition of detachment, that “seeking is as good as contemplating”. The primary theme of this joyous mystic is the love of God. And like Eliot, she thought of these things in the context of time and eternity.

The solution

A good argument against the existence of God, many philosophers have claimed including St. Thomas Aquinas, is based on the fact of evil.⁴⁴¹ If God is almighty and good, why the waste land of suffering, hatred, sin, which God could prevent? Julian saw the problem as one of reconciling sin with grace, God’s love. She thought it would have been “well” for God not to allow sin,

and methought if sin had not been,
 we should all have been clean and like our Lord as He made us.
 And thus in my folly before this time often I wondered why,
 by the great foreseeing wisdom of God,
 the beginning of sin was not prevented,
 for then, thought me, that all should have been well.⁴⁴²

But she said that Jesus conveyed to her “all that was needful for her”, and Eliot quoted the *answer* she received

Sin is *behovely*,⁴⁴³ but
 all shall be well, and
 all shall be well, and
 all manner of thing shall be well.⁴⁴⁴

She understood “sin”, however, in a very wide sense, as what keeps us from God:

In this naked word “sin” our Lord brought to my mind generally
 all that is not good,
 and the shameful scorn and the uttermost tribulation
 that He bore for us in this life,
 and His dying and all His pains,
 and the passions of all His creatures, ghostly and bodily.
 For we be all in part troubled, and we shall be troubled,
 following our Master Jesus...

Sin for her is somewhat like St. Paul’s *hamartia*: “original sin”, death and pain, blameworthiness, helplessness. It is the destruction of Ferrar’s chapel and of Julian’s church in Norwich. For Julian, the key fact is that *God Himself, in Christ, is involved in sin*. We should follow Jesus, she goes on to say,

until we be fully purged
 of our mortal flesh
 and of all our inward affections which be not very good.
 And with the beholding of this,
 with all the pains that ever were or ever shall be,
 I understood the passion of Christ
 for the most and surpassing pain.

But her dreadful “beholding” was “quickly turned into consolation” for her. She shared St. Augustine’s conception of sin as a lack of something that should be there:

But I saw not sin,
for I believe it had no manner of substance, no part of being,
nor might it be known
but by the pain that is caused by it.

Evil is part of the process of reality that God chose to be:

And in my view
this pain is something for a time,
for it purgeth
and maketh us to know ourself and ask mercy;
for the passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this,
and that is His blessed will.

She then puts God’s love into the picture, and Eliot will quote her again on this point at the end of the movement.

And for the tender love
that our good Lord hath for all that shall be saved,
He comforteth readily and sweetly.

To explain what this means, she now repeats Jesus’s “answer”:

it is true that sin is cause of all this pain, but
all shall be well,
and all manner of thing shall be well.

St. Augustine called sin the *felix culpa*, the “fortunate fall”, as Milton translated the phrase, since it is somehow presupposed to the telling of God’s secret: Christ. The thought is echoed in the epistle to the Ephesians:

We have redemption in His blood,
 forgiveness of sins, in the wealth of His grace,
 wherein He abounded towards us, in all wisdom and insight,
 making known to us the mystery of His will
 according to His good pleasure which He decreed in Christ,
 His plan in the fullness of time:
 to gather together all things in heaven and on earth in Him.⁴⁴⁵

The English Civil War

“This place” to which Eliot refers after quoting Julian is Little Gidding, and more generally England in 17th century, at the time of the Civil War between Royalists and Parliamentarians. The strife was to a large extent religious: the supporters of King Charles I were Anglicans and general Cromwell’s followers were Puritans who would oppose the beliefs and monastic lifestyle of Ferrar’s Community. Eliot does not seem to take sides between these “people, not wholly commendable”, although his preference is obvious. The two sides held widely different attitudes toward Christianity and were hostile to one another (without “immediate kin or kindness”), yet in a larger sense they shared a “common genius” and a history which both divided and united them. Some were “of peculiar genius” like John Milton, the poet “who died blind and quiet”, not violently, and was sympathetic to the Puritan cause, or Ferrar himself, who was an Anglican.

The “king at nightfall” is Charles I, who visited Little Gidding at night after his defeat by the Puritans in the battle of Naseby. He, together with “three men”, his advisors William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, were executed by the Parliamentary forces. The “forgotten” were those silenced or exiled to the Continent by the Puritans. A Catholic exile, Richard Crashaw, “metaphysical” poet and a friend of the Ferrar Community, addressed this plea for detachment to St. Teresa of Avila:

Take away from me myself and sin...
 Leave nothing of myself in me;
 Let me so read thy life that I
 Unto all life of mine may die!⁴⁴⁶

Incidentally, we owe the long text of Julian’s *Showings* to English Benedictine monks and nuns who had been exiled to the Low Countries and France in the previous century.

Release from the past

Eliot's ambivalence regarding the English Civil War is an example of the detachment from history, mentioned in the first part of this third movement. If he does "celebrate/ These dead men", he does not relive the wars of the past—when church bells were rung backwards to call people to battle—nor advocate groups like the "Society of King Charles the Martyr", who belonged to the Stuart family—the "rose" in the War of the Roses over a hundred years before. We cannot turn the clock back, follow the "antique drum"—nor (in *East Coker*) the "weak pipe and the little drum"—of circumstances long-gone.⁴⁴⁷

History is freedom, not servitude, for a person detached from the ambiguity of its dialectic. But the present is like the past, and we celebrate "the dying" as well as "these dead men". Eliot also said:

However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil

in the name of the church, which

Must be forever building, and always decaying,
And always being restored.⁴⁴⁸

Learning detachment from the past makes it easier to disengage from present conflicts. How to be detached without losing commitment, without becoming "indifferent" or cynical; this is "what Krishna meant".⁴⁴⁹

The ground of beseeching

At any rate those divided by "policies" into "factions" are now, or will shortly be, in silence, "folded into a single party", shepherded into one fold, "in death". Eliot will mention the in-folding at the end of *Four Quartets*: the ending, denouement; Jesus said:

I have other sheep not belonging to this flock;
them too I must herd, and they shall hear My voice;
then there shall be one fold, one Shepherd.⁴⁵⁰

We "inherit" the result of the victories and defeats of the past. What the winners and losers leave us is the "symbol perfected in death", "in another pattern",⁴⁵¹ their death incorporated into Christ's death, divine love.

Dame Julian's answer to the problem of evil is the finality of Christ's love —actually, that it has penetrated all of time from the beginning. Eliot refers to her words again:

All manner of thing shall be well
 By the purification of the motive
 In the ground of thy beseeching.⁴⁵²

This stunning idea emerges in a passage where Julian expresses her puzzlement that God seems not to hear our prayer. She was shown that for our prayer to be answered it must be “rightful”, in accordance with God's will and for His glory, and trusting as well. But

often our trust is not full,
 for we be not sure that God heareth us, as we think,
 because of our unworthiness
 and because we feel nothing at all,
 for we were as barren and as dry oft times after our prayers as we
 were before.
 And thus, when feeling so, our folly is the cause of our weakness,
 for thus have I felt myself.⁴⁵³

Then she gives her answer: God *stands behind* our praying:

And all this Our Lord brought suddenly to my mind,
 and showed these words and said:
 I am Ground of thy beseeching:
 first it is My will that thou have it,
 and then I make thee to will it,
 and then I make thee to beseech it.⁴⁵⁴

God gives us the mercy and grace that we seek, if He has willed it from all eternity:

Here may we then see that our *beseeking*
 is not the cause of the goodness and grace that He giveth to us,
 but His *own goodness*.
 And that showed He verily in all these sweet words where He said:
 I am *Ground*.
 And our good Lord will that this be known by His lovers on earth,
 and the more that we know, the more shall we beseech, if it be
 wisely taken,
 and so is our Lord's meaning.
 Beseeking is a true and gracious lasting will of the soul,
 united and fastened into the will of our Lord
 by the sweet secret working of the Holy Ghost.

Her thought echoes St. Paul:

The Spirit also helps our weakness,
 for we know not what we should pray for as we ought;
 but the Spirit Himself beseeches for us over and above
 with groanings unutterable....
 And we know that for those who love God
 all things work together for good.⁴⁵⁵

Prayer has a two dimensions: *impetratio*, God acquiesces to the pray-er, and *contemplatio*, the pray-er beholds Him. Still, the "purification of the motive", detachment, is central. Mother Julian's love is tough.

LG-IV: FIRE AND FIRE (200-213)

The dove

In the fourth movement we find double meaning again. The "dove descending", like the "dark dove with flickering tongue" of the second movement, is a bomber which "breaks the air/ With flame of incandescent terror" and with "discharge" of its weapons. But the Dove is also the Holy Ghost, and the fire is His purgation through the "terror" of release from "sin and error". There is one death to oneself for spiritual motives and a death through enemy action. Actually, the fire which consumes and the fire that purges is one and the same, and death, ascetic and physical, is one death, all unified in Christ and brought to fulfillment by His Spirit when His Kingdom has come.

Jesus at His baptism saw "the dove descending, break[ing] the air",

Here may we then see that our *beseeking*
 is not the cause of the goodness and grace that He giveth to us,
 but His *own goodness*.
 And that showed He verily in all these sweet words where He said:
 I am *Ground*.
 And our good Lord will that this be known by His lovers on earth,
 and the more that we know, the more shall we beseech, if it be
 wisely taken,
 and so is our Lord's meaning.
 Beseeking is a true and gracious lasting will of the soul,
 united and fastened into the will of our Lord
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Jesus at His baptism saw "the dove descending, break[ing] the air",

the sky splitting,
and the Spirit coming down upon Him like a dove.⁴⁵⁶

The sky opening symbolizes the communion between heaven and earth as God's Breath breaks through and hovers, as once over the waters of creation, over Jesus, creating anew. God's voice said:

Thou art My beloved Son in Whom I am pleased.

Jesus Himself will suffer as the “wounded Surgeon” of *East Coker* and “God's Servant” in Isaiah:⁴⁵⁷

See my Servant Whom I shall uphold,
My Choice in Whom My soul is pleased.

Jesus will baptize “in the Holy Ghost and fire”— for the coming of the Kingdom.⁴⁵⁸

The choice

Hence the “terror” is *behovely*; unavoidable. But we do have a choice of the pyres on which we are burnt:

- * attachment to things— the fires of “despair”
- * release, redemption “from fire by fire”, giving “hope” —the fires of Pentecost.

Jesus spoke the paradox:

who loves his life shall lose it,
and who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.⁴⁵⁹

Eliot uses a classical myth, combining metaphors of blood and fire, to show how “love” can trick us and how one fire can redeem us from another. The Greek hero Hercules wounded the Centaur, who before dying sought revenge by giving of his own poisonous blood to Hercules's wife Deianira as a “love potion” to insure her husband's undying love. Later, when Hercules was straying, Deianira soaked a shirt she had woven for him with the Centaur's blood. The wish for eternal love, then, lay in “the hands that wove”. But once donned, the garment turned into an “intolerable shirt of flame/

Which human power [could not] remove”, and Hercules found relief only by throwing himself upon a funeral pyre.

Love, says Eliot, “devised the torment”. The blood of Passover lambs sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts saved the Hebrews from the plague of the death of the firstborn before God led them out of Egypt, as Christians gained victory through sharing in the death of Jesus,

through the Blood of the Lamb and through the word of their
witness,
and they did not love their life unto death.⁴⁶⁰

The 18th-cent. English mystic William Law spoke thus of the Blood of the Lamb:

dark, disordered fire of our soul... can as well be made
the foundation of heaven as it is of hell.
For when the fire and strength of the soul
is sprinkled with the Blood of the Lamb,
then its fire becomes a fire of light
and its strength is changed into a strength of triumphing love.⁴⁶¹

“Love” is “the unfamiliar Name” (capitalized) because it is rarely understood in this paradoxical sense. For Love is what God is and our love for Him is the same as our love for our neighbor:

Beloved, let us love one another,
for love is of God;
and whoever loveth is born of God and knoweth God;
whoever loveth not, knoweth not God,
for God is love.⁴⁶²

Eliot’s question here, “Who... devised the torment?”, and the answer, “Love”, go back again, paradoxically, to Dame Julian of Norwich. In the last chapter of her *Showings* she says that God had spoken to her many years ago

the sweet words where He said full merrily:
I am the Ground of thy beseeching,⁴⁶³

but she never quite understood what He meant by them.

And from the time that it was shown,
 I desired oft times to know
 in what was our Lord's meaning.
 And fifteen years after and more
 I was answered in ghostly understanding saying thus:
 What? Wouldst thou know thy Lord's meaning in this
 thing?
 Know it well: *Love was His meaning.*
 Who showed it thee? Love.
 What showed He thee? Love.
 Wherefore showed He it thee? For love.
 Hold thee therein and thou shalt know more in the same.
 But thou shalt never know therein other, without end.
 Thus was I taught that love is our Lord's meaning.
 And I saw full surely in this and in all,
 that before God made us He loved us,
 which love was never slacked and never shall.
 And in this love He hath done all His works,
 and in this love He hath made all things profitable to us,
 and in this love our life is everlasting.
 In our making we had beginning,
 but the love wherein He made us
 was in Him from without beginning.
 In which love we have our beginning,
 and all this shall we see in God without end.
Deo gratias.

Julian speaks here of love in a context dear to Eliot's heart: beginnings and endings but also the timeless.

LG-V: SUMMARY

Start

The last movement recapitulates the quartet and indeed all *Four Quartets*, drawing together their many motifs.

LG-Va: The calling (214-238)

Conversion

The “end”, death, is the “beginning”, rising again; Eliot alludes to the motto of Mary Queen of Scots that he quoted at the end of *East Coker*. He also is thinking of a *turning*, an *aversio*, turning away from an old life with a *conversio*, turning toward a new life.⁴⁶⁴ It is a “moment”, a *kairos*, a time-for being uprooted, going on pilgrimage, starting all over again. Saints Paul, Augustine and Francis had “moments” of turning, and for centuries donning the habit of a monk and taking a “religious” name signified the *conversio vitae*, a permanent state of humility, a holy self-discontent, an ongoing rebeginning.

Poetry and endings

Eliot has spoken in *Four Quartets* about the problems facing an author, especially the religious poet, and here, in a parenthesis apart, he describes the ideal structure of a sentence of poetry.⁴⁶⁵ A poem is an “epitaph” where every component begins and ends within a “consort” or harmony of the whole, where each word fits in, is sealed off, finalized. He sees the poet going through a kind of artistic *conversio*,

a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to
something... more valuable;
[his] progress is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction
of personality.⁴⁶⁶

Our lives are poems with a beginning and an end. Our society, our modern age, are also poems, which Eliot saw coming to an end. Our “actions”, like the works Krishna spoke of, lead to our endings: King Charles’s to the beheading “block”, Hercules’s to the pyre, the sailors’ “down the sea’s throat”, our ancestors’ to graves beneath worn tombstones.⁴⁶⁷ But he adds that ends are beginnings “where we start” from. There is hope for history, for living again. Although we are all dying together “with the dying”, still, we are “born with the dead”; Heraclitus stated the paradox:

immortal mortals, mortal immortals,
 living others' death, dying their life.⁴⁶⁸

We are communities sharing traditions who “fructify in the lives of others” as the “communion of the saints”.⁴⁶⁹

History

The “rose” —life and love, glimpses of timelessness— blends in time with the “yew-tree”— death and hope for rising again.⁴⁷⁰ “History” is more than a temporal sequence of events, their causation and aftermath, but “timeless moments”, themselves a “pattern”, “another pattern”, which give meaning to events themselves. Eliot’s paradigm is the Incarnation:

A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history...
 A moment in time but time was made through that moment;
 for without the meaning there is no time,
 and that moment of time gave the meaning.⁴⁷¹

And history understood from this communal timeless perspective is what redeems “a people” from time. The history of a people has meaning beyond the turnover of events.

As pilgrims we return to Little Gidding at dusk, to the “secluded chapel” where Ferrar and his friends sought the eternal, just as now we revisit the timeless history of the monastics Columba, Cuthbert, Kevin and Anthony, “now and in England”.

The Cloud

When Eliot recorded *The Four Quartets*, he paused before speaking the last verse of this section (line 238). These words are a direct quotation from the 14th-century spiritual classic written in Middle English, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. In his work the anonymous author was instructing his disciple who was to follow the vocation of a recluse. He described “four degrees and forms” of Christian living in the first chapter:

- 1) *common*: the practice of good Christians
- 2) *special*: of those having a conscious spiritual life, especially monks and nuns but motivated laypeople as well, when God

kindled [their] desire full graciously
and fastened to it a leash of loving longing

- 3) *singular*: of solitary contemplatives, presumably Carthusian hermits
- 4) *perfect*: of the spiritually mature —the definitive form, the only one that will survive death.

The disciple was probably entering the Carthusians from a Benedictine or Cistercian monastery, and so passing from the second to the third life-form:

Seest thou not how readily and how graciously
He hath pulled thee to the third degree and manner of living,
the which is called “singular”...
in the which thou mayst learn
to lift up the foot of thy love
and step toward that state and degree of living
that is perfect and the last of all?⁴⁷²

Eliot’s quotation is found in the following passage:

Look up now, weak wretch, and see what thou art!
What art thou and what hast thou deserved thus to be called by
Our Lord?
What weary wretched heart and asleep in sloth is that the
which is not wakened
*with the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling?*⁴⁷³

Eliot placed no punctuation after this quotation and he capitalized “Love” and “Calling”. Did he mean to leave the calling open for the reader, drawn by God’s love?

The author of *The Cloud* followed the tradition that the soul becomes passive, “drawn”, as it is detached from its own feelings and thinkings about the world and God. His last three “degrees and forms” to some extent parallel St. John of the Cross’s stages:

* *purgative*: when the soul places all created *things* below the cloud of *forgetting*, pictured below the soul

* *illuminative*: with the onset of contemplation, the soul places even *God's nature* below the cloud of forgetting

* *unitive*: the soul places his or her *own existence* below the cloud of forgetting; then *God's existence* is all that is left above the cloud of forgetting.

However, a cloud of *unknowing* always lies above us, between our mind and God, for only love, in the will, pierces the cloud:

by love He may be gotten and held; by thought never ⁴⁷⁴

This “secret little love”, this “gentle stirring of Love”, is a “naked intent of the will”, a “blind outstretching”, since thought is left behind. St. Paul said:

For we see now dimly, as in a mirror, but then face to face.
We now know in part, but then we will know as we have been
known.
There remain now faith, hope, and love, these three,
but the greatest is love.⁴⁷⁵

LG-Vb: ENVOI (239-259)

Moments

What “was the beginning” is the creation where “the longest river” arose, the river of time that Heraclitus said we cannot enter twice. But the final discovery which “was the beginning” suggests another, an “etiological”, sense: when the world-to-come, the Kingdom, is come.

At the end of *Four Quartets* we are still “faring forward”, as Ulysses sailed out beyond the “last of the earth” —but now we go ahead by going back, “remembering” those “unattended moments” when “for the first time” “we started” our “exploring”.⁴⁷⁶ We return “through the first gate/ Into our first world”, into the rose-garden, where we were startled by the “shaft of sunlight” that filled the pool and were intrigued by the children, now perhaps seen “in the apple-tree”, whose voice we “half-heard, in the stillness”, “music heard so deeply/ That it is not heard at all”.⁴⁷⁷ Then we remembered the sound of the “hidden waterfall”, recalling “The Water-fall” by metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan, who asked: if water returns to its source,

why should frail flesh doubt any more
that what God takes, he'll not restore?⁴⁷⁸

Eliot mentioned the water-fall in *The Dry Salvages* along with other “moments in and out of time”: “the winter lightening” and “the wild thyme unseen”.⁴⁷⁹

Always

In *Burnt Norton* the bird told us twice to “find them”, the garden children, and four times to “go”, since we “cannot bear much reality”, and here at the end of *Four Quartets* Eliot again says,

Quick now, here, now, always,

perhaps urging us to ask the Bridegroom

Where hidest Thou?⁴⁸⁰

The answer will depend upon “complete simplicity”, detachment, having nothing for “everything”.

The phrase “the crowned knot of fire” is from *The Cloud of Unknowing*. To combat gross misunderstandings of spiritual progress, the author recommended that we should play a game with God, coyly pretending that we really do not want to experience Him. His reason why we should play the game sums up the soul’s ascent to God:

I would by such a hidden showing
bring thee out of the rude state of bodily feeling
into the purity and depth of ghostly feeling;
and so also, lastly, help thee
to knit the ghostly knot of burning love
betwixt thee and thy God
in ghostly oneness and accord of will.⁴⁸¹

Mother Julian has assured us —as Eliot again reminds us— that

...all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well,

but when creation ends at its beginning, when we are all “folded into a single party”, when “tongues of fire”, spiritual and historical, are folded into the “knot of fire”, “of burning love”, when the fire of the Holy Ghost and the rose,

the holy host that Christ
in His Blood has made His bride,

are one.⁴⁸²