

T. S. Eliot:

And to conclude, I shall read the whole of one quartet, "Little Gidding." Because it's the last one, and I think it's the best, and that's why I want to give it to you.

Midwinter spring is its own season sempiternal though sodden towards sundown, suspended in time between pole and tropic. When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire, the brief sun flames the ice on pond and ditches, in windless cold that is the heart's heat, reflecting in a watery mirror a glare that is blindness in the early afternoon. And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier, stirs the dumb spirit-- no wind, but pentecostal fire in the dark time of the year.

Between melting and freezing the soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell or smell of living thing. This is the spring time but not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom of snow, a blue more sudden than that of summer, neither budding nor fading, not in the scheme of generation. Where is the summer, the unimaginable Zero summer?

If you came this way, taking the route you would be likely to take from the place you would be likely to come from, if you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges white again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness. It would be the same at the end of the journey, if you came at night like a broken king, if you came by day not knowing what you came for, it would be the same, when you leave the rough road and turn behind the pig-sty to the dull facade and the tombstone.

And what you thought you came for is only a shell, a husk of meaning from which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled if at all. Either you had no purpose or the purpose is beyond the end you figure and is altered in fulfillment. There are other places which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws, or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city-- but this is the nearest, in place and time, now and in England.

If you came this way, taking any route, starting from anywhere at any time or at any season, it would always be the same-- you would have to put off sense and notion. You are not here to verify, instruct yourself, or inform curiosity or carry report. You are here to kneel where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more than an order of words, the conscious occupation of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying. And what the dead had no speech for, when living, they can tell you, being dead-- the communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. Here, the intersection of the timeless moment is England and nowhere. Never and always.

Ash on an old man's sleeve is all the ash the burnt roses leave. Dust in the air suspended marks the place where a story ended. Dust inbreathed was a house-- the wall, the wainscot and the mouse, the death of hope and despair, this is the death of air.

There are flood and drouth over the eyes and in the mouth, dead water and dead sand contending for the upper hand. The parched eviscerate soil gapes at the vanity of toil, laughs without mirth. Is the death of earth.

Water and fire succeed the town, the pasture, and the weed. Water and fire deride the sacrifice that we denied. Water and fire shall rot the marred foundations we forgot, of sanctuary and choir. This is the death of water and fire.

In the uncertain hour before the morning near the ending of interminable night at the restaurant end of the unending after the dark dove with the flickering tongue had passed below the horizon of his homing while the dead leaves still rattled on like tin over the asphalt where no other sound was. Between three districts whence the smoke arose, I met one walking, loitering and hurried as if blown toward me like the metal leaves before the urban dawn wind unresisting.

And as I fixed upon the down-turned face that pointed scrutiny with which we challenge the first-met stranger in the waning dusk, I caught the sudden look of some dead master whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled both one and many; in the brown baked features the eyes of a familiar compound ghost both intimate and unidentifiable. So I assumed a double part, and cried, and heard another's voice cry-- "What! are you here?" Although we were not. I was still the same, knowing myself yet being someone other-- and he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed to compel the recognition they preceded.

And so, compliant to the common wind, too strange to each other for misunderstanding, in concord at this intersection time of meeting nowhere, no before and after, we trod the pavement in a dead patrol. I said-- "The wonder that I feel is easy, yet ease is cause of wonder. Therefore speak-- I may not comprehend, may not remember." And he-- "I am not eager to rehearse my thoughts and theory which you have forgotten. These things have served their-- purpose let them be.

So with your own, and pray they be forgiven by others, as I pray you to forgive both bad and good. Last season's fruit is eaten and the fullfed beef shall kick the empty pail. For last year's words belong to last year's language and next year's words await another voice. But, as the passage now presents no hindrance to the spirit unappeased and peregrine between two worlds become much like each other, so I find words I never thought to speak in streets I never thought I should revisit when I left my body on a distant shore.

Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us to purify the dialect of the tribe and urge the mind to aftersight and foresight, let me disclose the gifts reserved for age to set the crown upon your lifetime's effort. First, the cold friction of expiring sense without enchantment, offering no promise but bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit as body and soul begin to fall asunder. Second, the conscious impotence of rage at human folly, and the laceration of laughter at what ceases to amuse.

And last, the rending pain of re-enactment of all that you have done, and been; the shame of motives late revealed and the awareness of things ill done and done to others' harm which once you took for exercise

of virtue. Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains. From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire where you must move in measure, like a dancer." The day was breaking. In the disfigured street he left me, with a kind of valediction, and faded on the blowing of the horn.

There are three conditions which often look alike yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow-- attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment from self and from things and from persons; and, growing between them, indifference which resembles the others as death resembles life, being between two lives-- unflowering, between the live and the dead nettle. This is the use of memory-- for liberation-- not less of love but expanding of love beyond desire, and so liberation from the future as well as the past.

Thus, love of country begins as attachment to our own field of action and comes to find that action of little importance though never indifferent. History may be servitude, history may be freedom. See, now they vanish, the faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them, to become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern. Sin is Behovely, but all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.

If I think, again, of this place, and of people, not wholly commendable, of no immediate kin or kindness, but some of peculiar genius, all touched by a common genius, united in the strife which divided them; if I think of a king at nightfall, of three men and more on the scaffold and a few who died forgotten in other places, here and abroad, and of one who died blind and quiet, why should we celebrate these dead men more than the dying? It is not to ring the bell backward nor is it an incantation to summon the spectre of a Rose.

We cannot revive old factions. We cannot restore old policies or follow an antique drum. These men, and those who opposed them and those whom they opposed accept the constitution of silence and are folded in a single party. Whatever we inherit from the fortunate we have taken from the defeated what they had to leave us-- a symbol-- a symbol protected in death. And all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well by the purification of the motive in the ground of our beseeching.

The dove descending breaks the air with flame of incandescent terror of which the tongues declare the one discharged from sin and error. The only hope, or else despair, lies in the choice of pyre or fire-- to be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love. Love is the unfamiliar Name behind the hands that wove the intolerable shirt of flame which human power cannot remove. We only live, only suspire, consumed by the fire or fire.

What we call the beginning is of the end and to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from. And every phrase and sentence that is right-- where every word is at home, taking its place to support the others, the word neither diffident or ostentatious, an easy commerce of the old and the,

common word exact without vulgarity, the formal word precise but not pedantic, the complete consort dancing together-- every phrase and every sentence is an end and the beginning, every poem an epitaph.

And any action is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat or to an ineligible stone-- and that is where we saw. We die with the dying-- see, they depart, and we go with them. We are born with the dead-- see, they return, and bring us with them. The moment of the rose and the moment of yew-tree are of equal duration. A people without history is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern of timeless moments. So, while the light fails on a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel history is now and England.

With the drawing of this love and voice of this Calling we shall not see from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. Through the unknown, remembered gate, when the last of earth left to discover is that which was the beginning; at the source of the longest river the voice of the hidden waterfall and the children in the apple-tree.

Not known, because not looked for but heard, half-heard in the stillness between two waves of the sea. Quick now, here, now, always-- a condition of complete simplicity-- costing not less than everything-- and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well when the tongues of flame are in-folded into the crowned knot of fire and the fire and the rose are one.