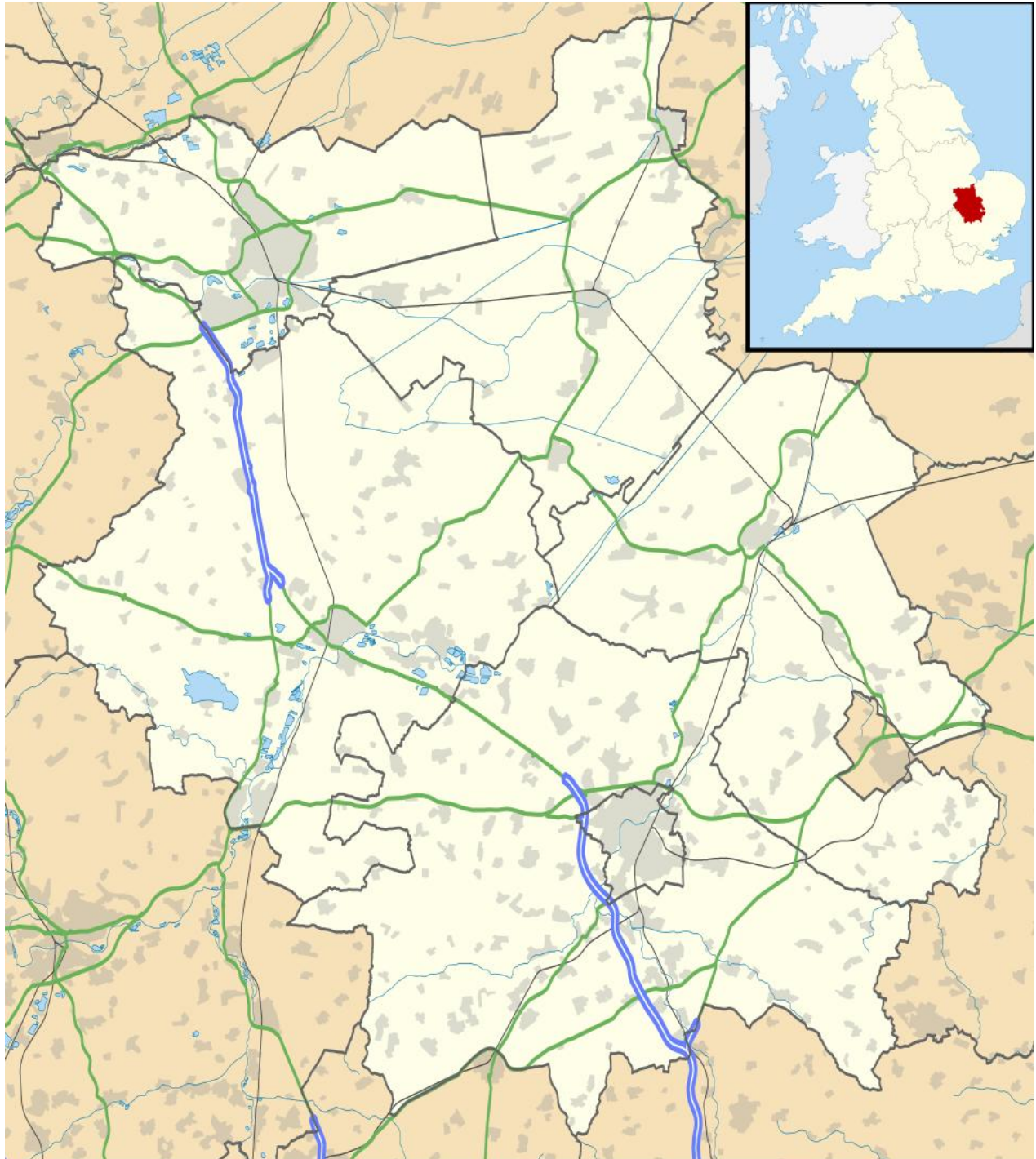


Midcoast Senior College

T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets

Website posts: Little Gidding

The English town of Little Gidding:



St. John's Church, which was the chapel of the informal 17th Century religious community established by the Ferrar family, and was visited three times by King Charles the First.



King Charles the First:

The beheading of King Charles the First, in a contemporary print:



The London Blitz: September 1940 to May 1941:





The Second part of the second section of *Little Gidding* is written by Eliot in a form that Eliot has created to be an English form of Dante's *Terza Rima* in *The Divine Comedy*. In this section of *Little Gidding* Eliot meets, in his imagination, a figure he knows from Purgatory, as Dante met people he knew in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.

Terza Rima: The English mystery novelist, Dorothy L. Sayers, late in her career, taught herself Italian and published a translation of *The Divine Comedy*. In her introduction she gives an explanation of Terza Rima and her reasons for writing her translation in this form.

I have stuck to the *terza rima*, despite the alleged impossibility of finding sufficient rhymes in English....The rhyme-scheme 9aba, bcb, cdc, dcd ... xyx, yzy, z) runs continuously from the beginning to the end of every canto, each three-line stanza (terzain) being rhyme-linked to the one before and the one after. (Penguin Classics edition, p. 56)

Here is a selection from Canto XVI of Sayers's translation of the Purgatorio. Note the terza rima form, and ways Eliot has used Dante's meeting of shades of people he knew as the model for his meeting with friends and mentors in this section of Little Gidding. (Note: Dante's guide through Hell and Purgatory in the classical Roman poet Vergil.)

Darkness of hell, or midnight disendowed
Of every planet, under a poor shred
Of starveling sky hung thick as thick with cloud,

Never had wrapped a veil about my head
So gross in grain and gritty to the touch
As was that smoke that held us blanketed;

One's eyes could not keep open, insomuch
That my good escort came up close beside,
Offering a trusty shoulder to my clutch.

(.....)

Say, who and what art thou that cleavest through
Our smoke, and speak'st like one who reckons still
The time by kalends as the living do?"

Thus from their midst a voice was audible:

“Answer,” my master said, “Then ask and see
If this is the right way to mount the hill.”

“Creature of God,” said I, “now cleansing thee
To come home beauteous to thy Maker’s house,
Wouldst thou hear wonders, walk along with me.”

“As far,” he answered, “as our rule allows
I’ll follow; though the smoke has made us blind,
Hearing instead of sight shall neighbour us.”

(Sayers, *Purgatory*, pp. 188-189)

Just two notes before moving on. First, Sayers speaks of the Purgatorio as the “tenderest, subtlest, and most human section of the *Comedy*.” This is because there is no hope in Hell (“Abandon all hope ye who enter here”), and Heaven is a realm of “intellectual severity”, but in Purgatory human souls come to an understanding of themselves and their shortcomings and the pain they have caused and the pain they have suffered.

Second, Sayers dedicates this second volume of her translation to Charles Williams, whom we will remember from the quote about the Dance from his novel *The Greater Trumps* that we referenced in the notes to *East Coker*.

Pentecost:

Below the Painting is the poem “Whitsunday”, by George Herbert, written in 1633. Herbert was a friend of the Ferrar family and visited Little Gidding often. Below that is a poem by William Butler Yeats, *The Spur*. Of all the many people who constitute the “Compound Ghost” of the second section of part II, Yeats is the one affirmed by Eliot. It is Yeats who “left my body on a distant shore”.



Whitsunday

Listen sweet Dove unto my song,
And spread thy golden wings in me;
Hatching my tender heart so long,
Till it get wing, and flie away with thee.

Where is that fire which once descended
On thy Apostles? thou didst then
Keep open house, richly attended,
Feasting all comers by twelve chosen men.

Such glorious gifts thou didst bestow,
That th' earth did like a heav'n appeare;
The starres were coming down to know
If they might mend their wages, and serve here.

The sunne, which once did shine alone,
Hung down his head, and wisht for night,
When he beheld twelve sunnes for one
Going about the world, and giving light.

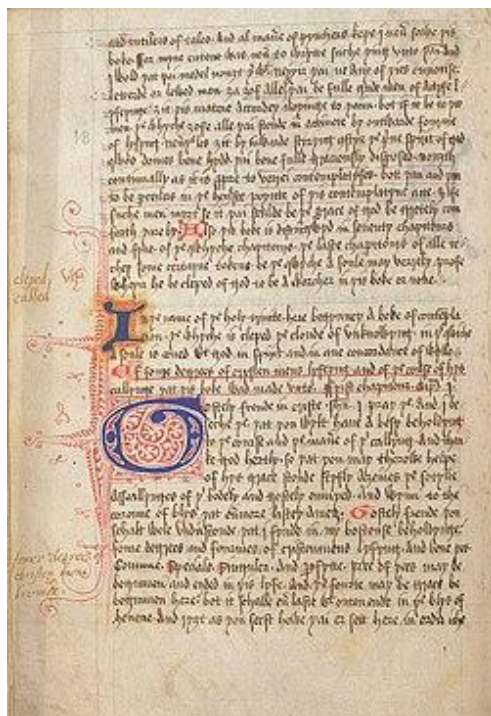
But since those pipes of gold, which brought
That cordiall water to our ground,
Were cut and martyr'd by the fault
Of those, who did themselves through their side wound,

Thou shutt'st the doore, and keep'st within;
Scarce a good joy creeps through the chink:
And if the braves of conqu'ring sinne
Did not excite thee, we should wholly sink.

Lord, though we change, thou art the same;
The same sweet God of love and light:
Restore this day, for thy great name,
Unto his ancient and miraculous right.

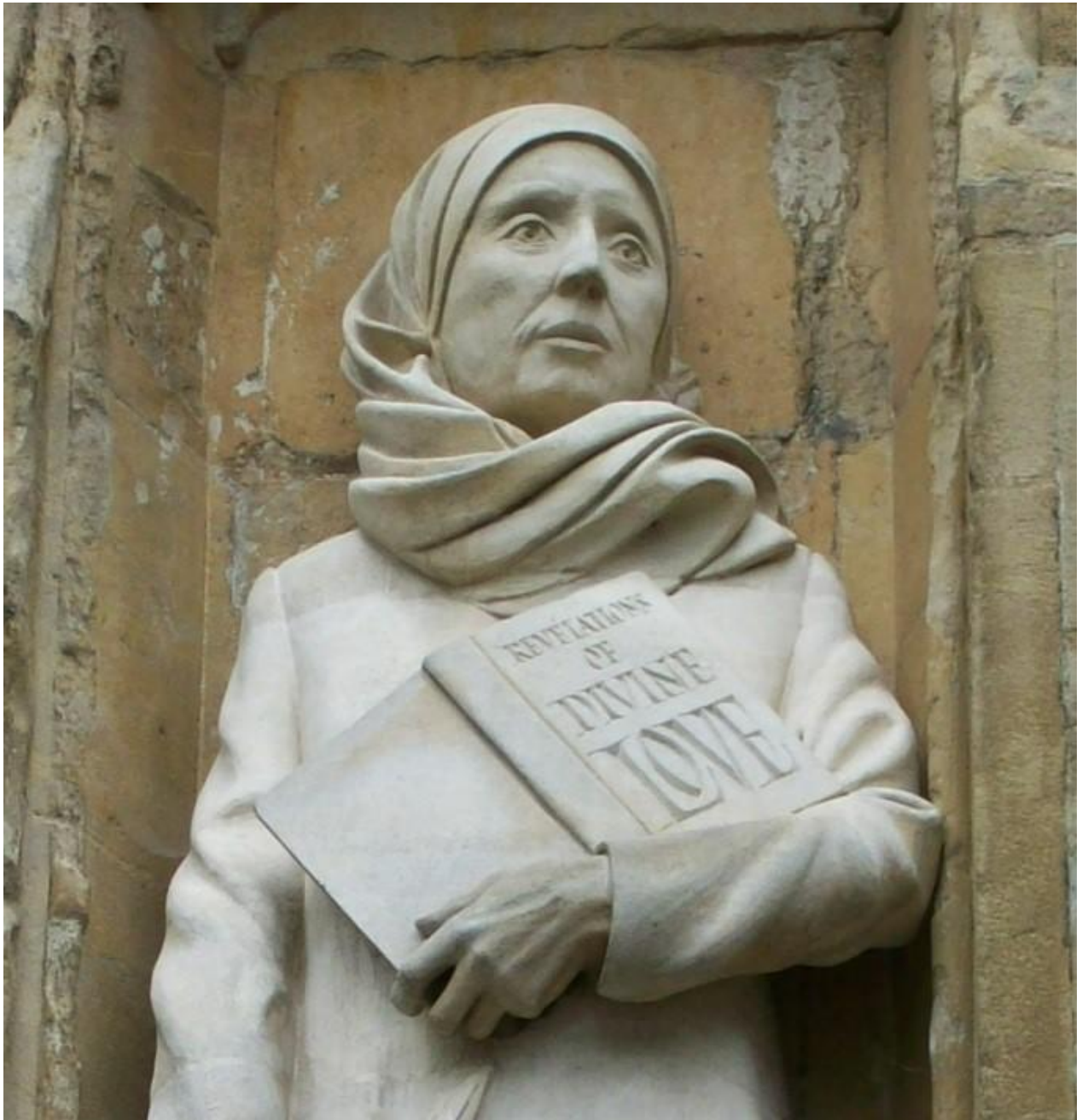
The Spur

YOU think it horrible that lust and rage
Should dance attention upon my old age;
They were not such a plague when I was young;
What else have I to spur me into song?



The first page of a 15th Century manuscript of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous work of Christian mysticism that Eliot quotes at the head of the last part of the last section of *Little Gidding*:

“With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this calling...”



A recent statue of Dame Julian of Norwich, outside Norwich Cathedral, England. Julian was an anchoress (a woman dedicated to living a religious life in solitude) who lived in Norwich and provided counsel to many lay people in this market town.

Eliot quotes her famous line, "All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well..." three times in the last section of *Little Gidding*.

Her only work, *Revelations of Divine Love*, completed toward the end of the 1300's, ends in this way:

And from that time that it was shewed I desired oftentimes to learn what was our Lord's meaning. And fifteen years after, and more, I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus: *Wouldst thou learn¹ thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Learn it well: Love was His meaning. Who shewed it thee? Love. What shewed He thee? Love. Wherefore shewed it He? For Love. Hold thee therein and thou shalt learn and know more in the same. But thou shalt never know nor learn therein other thing without end.* Thus was I learned that Love was our Lord's meaning.