

Some thoughts and exercises as we approach our last *Four Quartets* class.

First, I want to thank you all for your energy and engagement with a series of poems that are very challenging, but to my mind, very rewarding. I don't want to teach a class just in order to share expertise; I want to keep learning, and you've helped me know Eliot and the Quartets better.

I hope that, whatever you take from this class, it will set you off on a journey of exploration of these poems that will last a long time. I hope that the beauty of Eliot's language and the challenge of his ideas will start a dialog between you and the poems, you and T. S. Eliot.

As you read through the poems again this week, would you make some notes about these questions?

What is your favorite, most inspiring, most touching, image or line of poetry from the Quartets?

What is the thing that most annoys, upsets, confuses you about the Quartets?

What do you wish we'd had more time to talk about in class?

What could we have done a better job of explaining or clarifying from the Quartets?

What did you enjoy most about the class?

In what follows I've chosen a series of quotes from the Quartets that are for me a set of stepping stones to guide me through the river, or the quagmire, of the poems. It helps me remember what the themes and repeated motifs are, and gives me some sense of how Eliot uses these to build the final edifice of the Quartets. (Can a quagmire, or a river, be built into an edifice? The joys of metaphors.)

Four Quartets
A Chain of Quotes
Linking
The Movement of Ideas, Feelings, and Images
Through the Four Poems.

Note: This is my personal response to the material in the poems. I encourage you to find the path of images that ties the work together for you.

1. Humankind cannot bear very much reality.
2. At the still point of the turning world... there is only the dance.
3. Not here the darkness in this twittering world.
4. The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility.
5. I said to my soul be still and let the dark come upon you which shall be the darkness of God.
6. The faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
7. Old men ought to be explorers.
8. People change and smile, but the agony abides.
9. Not fare well, but fare forward, passengers.
10. The rest is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
11. 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.
12. All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.
13. Love is the unfamiliar name behind the hands that wove the intolerable shirt of flame which human power cannot remove.
14. With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this calling --- we shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.



This is a portrait of T. S. Eliot and his second wife, Valerie. We haven't had much chance to talk about Eliot's life after *Four Quartets*, but it may help us to give a thought to this second marriage. Eliot married his first wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood in 1915, during the height of World War I, after they had known each other for less than three months. It was a disastrous and unhappy marriage, made more complicated by Eliot's conversion to the Church of England in 1927; along with other high church, catholic principles, Eliot rejected the idea of divorce. They were, however, formally separated in 1933, so that Eliot's visit to Burnt Norton with his old flame, Emily Hale came at a time when he was not living with his wife. There was evidently an 'understanding' between Eliot and Hale that when Vivienne died they might marry. Vivienne died in 1947, in an asylum for those with mental health issues, having been committed there by her brother in 1938. But Eliot never married Emily Hale. In 1957 he married his secretary, Esmé Valerie Fletcher, known as

Valerie, and in the process dumped both Emily Hale and his longtime friend and poetry advisor, John Hayward. Eliot's first marriage and his treatment of Hale and Hayward speak volumes of his personal insecurities, and there is no excuse for his behavior. But a part of me can't help but feel glad for him that in his later years (and remember all the tough things he had to say about the difficulties of age) he was able to find love and an easy companionship.

And so, as we come to the end of this course, we hear Eliot in East Coker:

In my end is my beginning.

May the end of our time together be the beginning of exciting and interesting new things for you.

Alden