

# **Four Quartets Study Guide**

## **Four Quartets by T. S. Eliot**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Four Quartets Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Burnt Norton.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">East Coker.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">The Dry Salvages.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Little Gidding.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>



# Burnt Norton

## Burnt Norton Summary

In the first section, past time and present time exist in future time, and all time is, to quote Eliot, "irredeemable." What might have been and what has been is all a world of speculation, an echo in one's memory, but to what purpose is a mystery. Sitting in a rose garden, the narrator hears children laughing, and a bird says to follow them. The narrator follows them and peers into a pool. He realizes that humankind cannot bear very much reality.

In the second section, there is movement at the still point of the turning world. It should not be called fixity where the past and future gather. If it were, there would be no dance, yet there is only dance which is the inner freedom from practical desires. Time past and time future allow little consciousness. Only in time can a moment in the rose garden be remembered; only through time is time conquered.

In the third part, the narrator is in a place of disaffection where shadow can be turned into transient beauty. He is distracted from distraction by distractions. He descends into the world of perpetual solitude in an abstention from movement while the world moves in abstinence.

In the fourth part, time and the bell bury the day, but the narrator wonders if the sunflower will turn to him. The light is still at the still point of the turning world.

In part five, only the living can die. The end and the beginning are always there. Words strain, crack and break under the burden. The Word in the desert is attacked by the voices of temptation. The disconsolate chimera lets out a loud lament. The detail of the pattern is movement; desire is movement, which is not in itself desirable. Love is unmoving and is the only cause and end of movement which is timeless. The narrator is caught in a form of limitation between being and unbeing in the shade as the sunlight rises and he hears the laughter of the children hidden in the foliage. It is ridiculous, the waste sad time, stretching before and after.

## Burnt Norton Analysis

The Word in the desert which is attacked by the voices of temptation refers to the temptation of Jesus in the New Testament of the Bible. The title of the poem refers to Burnt Norton, a country house in North Gloucestershire that belongs to the Viscount Sandon, son of the Earl of Harrowby. The beautiful rose garden at Burnt Norton is the setting of the poem. This poem represents the classical element of air with its references to time and space. Burnt Norton reflects the meaning of time, along with its relationship to humans. The Christian concept of redemption also plays a part in the meaning of this poem. Much of the poem contrasts the narrator's actual actions with the actions that he might have taken, demonstrating his perception of himself as a witness

in his life rather than an actor. The narrator also considers the meaning of eternity in terms of the movement of the world which is repeatedly mentioned. Burnt Norton also reflects the biblical ideologies of poverty and detachment.



# East Coker

## East Coker Summary

In the first part of East Coker, houses crumble or are destroyed. They are rebuilt; they live and die. Light falls across an open field. In the warm haze, dahlias sleep, waiting for the early owl. In that open field, if one does not come too close, they may hear the music and see a man and woman dancing, signifying marriage. The sounds of rustic laughter and merriment permeate the air. Dawn arrives, and another day prepares for heat and silence. The narrator is here or there or elsewhere, in his beginning which is his end.

In the second part of the poem, the narrator wonders what the late November is doing. The spring is disturbed by creatures of the summer heat, yet snowdrops and hollyhock are present. In the constellation wars, Scorpio fights the Sun and a vortex that will bring the world to a destructive fire. The narrator wrestles with his words, unsatisfied with the way he describes these events. Poetry does not matter. Nothing is as expected. He wonders if humankind has been deceived with a long hoped for calm in an age of serenity. Wisdom is only the knowledge of dead secrets, and it is useless, or has a limited value at best. Men are only undeceived of that which can no longer harm them. The narrator does not want to hear of the wisdom of old men; he wants to hear of their folly, fear of fear, and frenzied possession. The only wisdom men can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility which is endless. Houses are gone under the sea; dancers are gone under a hill.

In the third part, all men go into the dark individually, but all of humankind joins them in the silent funeral. Yet, it is nobody's funeral; there is no one to bury. The narrator tells his soul to be still and allow the dark to come upon it. He compares this to the change of scenes in a theatre. The mind is conscious, but it is conscious of nothing. The narrator tells his soul to be still and wait without hope for hope which would be hope for the wrong thing, to wait without love because love would be love for the wrong thing. There is yet faith, but faith, love and hope are all contained in the waiting. It is necessary to wait without thought because he is not ready for thought. The darkness will be light, and stillness will be dancing. There is laughter and ecstasy in the garden, pointing to the agony of birth and death. In order to get to where one is from where one is not, it is necessary to go by the way in which there is no ecstasy. What one does not know is the only thing one knows; what one owns is what one does not own; where one is is where one is not.

In the fourth section, the wounded surgeon plies steel, a resolving enigma. The only health is the disease. In order to be restored, the sickness must grow worse. The whole earth is a hospital, endowed by a ruined millionaire. If one does well, they will die of absolute paternal care. The chill ascends, and the fever sings. In order to be warmed, one must first freeze; one must quake in frigid purgatorial fires. The flame is roses, and the smoke is briars. The only drink is the dripping blood, the only food is the bloody



flesh, and yet this Friday is called good. The narrator is in the middle with twenty years wasted, and every attempt at a new start is a different kind of failure. Each venture is a new beginning, but his equipment is always deteriorating. What is able to be conquered by strength and submission has already been discovered by men whom the narrator cannot hope to emulate. He can only try to fight to recover what has been lost, but he may neither gain nor lose. One starts from home, yet the world becomes stranger as one grows older. It is not just one intense moment; lifetime burns in every moment. There is a time for evening under the starlight and the lamplight. Love is most nearly itself when here and now cease to matter. One must continue moving into another intensity, a further union, through the dark and desolation. For the narrator, in his end is his beginning.

## East Coker Analysis

Throughout East Coker, there is a repetition of the phrase "in my beginning is my end." This phrase begins the poem, but it is reversed to end the poem: "in my end is my beginning." This speaks to the circular nature of life. In the discussion about the constellated wars, the constellations are personified. There is also an allusion to the Bible in the reference to destroying the world with fire, as God promises Noah after the flood never to destroy the earth with water again; the next time God destroys the earth will be with fire, as described in Revelation. There is much juxtaposition in this poem as Eliot talks of what one does not know is the only thing one knows and what one owns is what one does not own. The idea that health is in the disease is a bizarre juxtaposition, as is the idea of "frigid purgatorial fires." The idea that the wounded surgeon who must harm in order to cure is Jesus Christ is reinforced by the idea of dying in the absolute paternal care of God. The reference to bloody drink and fleshy food, combined with calling this Friday good, alludes to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The chill that ascends and the fever that sings are personified.



# The Dry Salvages

## The Dry Salvages Summary

In the first part, the narrator expresses his belief that the river is a god. Though it was once seen as a frontier, it is forgotten after a bridge is built to conquer it. The river rages, reminding men what they choose to forget. It watches and waits. The river is within all men; the sea is around all men. The sea tosses earlier creation on the beach. The sea has many voices; it howls, yelps, and whines. The sea measures time by the unhurried ground swell, a method older than worried women calculating the future and piecing together the past with the future. Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception, time stops, never ending, and the bell clangs.

In the second part, the narrator wonders when the wreckage and calamitous annunciation will end. He realizes that there is no end, but there is an addition, more days, hours and years living among the breakage. The final addition is failing pride or resentment at one's failing powers. As there is no time without the ocean, there is no ocean not littered with waste. Like the past, there is no future not liable to have no destination; it is unchanging. There is no end of the painless, motionless pain. The bone prays to Death, its god. The past has another pattern as one ages, the means of disowning the past; one can have experience but miss the meaning. Past experiences revived in the meaning are not the experience of one life only but that of many generations; it is a backward look at recorded history. Moments of agony are permanent. Though people change and smile, agony abides. Time is both a destroyer and a preserver which the narrator compares to a ragged rock in the river which is a monument on clear days but means danger in bad weather.

In the third part, the narrator wonders what Krishna meant about the future being a faded song of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret. The way up is the way down, and the way forward is the way back. Time is no healer, and the patient is no longer here. The train starts, and the passengers are settled, their faces relaxing from grief into relief though they are not escaping from the past. They are not the same people who left the station or the same as who will arrive at the terminus. One can consider the future and the past with equal mind while time is withdrawn. Time is neither action nor inaction. A voyage can receive this message "on whatever sphere of being The mind of a man may be intent At the time of death." One action shall fructify in the lives of others, but one should fare forward and not think of the fruit of their actions. This is the destination of voyagers, not the port. In the fourth part, the narrator prays to the Queen of Heaven, asking her to pray for those in ships, the women who worry about them, and those whose voyage is ended because of the sea.

In the fifth part, the narrator discusses communication with the gods through horoscopes, tea leaves, and palm reading which are pastimes, drugs and features of the press. This is the way it will always be, especially when there is distress and perplexity of nations. Men's curiosity searches the past and future and clings to that



dimension. To apprehend the point of intersection of the timeless with time is an occupation for a saint as it requires selflessness. For most of humankind, there is only the unattended moment and the distractions within it. There are only hints and guesses. Rest is prayer, observance, disciplines, thought and action. The hint is half guessed; the gift half understood is incarnation. Here the impossible union of spheres of existence is actual. The past and the future are conquered and reconciled. The right action is freedom from the past and the future. For most of humankind, this is the aim that will never be realized; man only remains undefeated because he continues trying, content if his body nourishes the significant soil.

## The Dry Salvages Analysis

The Dry Salvages contain many juxtapositions and contrasts as the narrator discusses impossibility becoming actual and time being neither action nor inaction. The river is personified as a god which has been dealt with and subsequently forgotten. The river's rages are a reminder to men of the river's existence. The familiarity and beauty of the river are contrasted with the sea's unfamiliarity and ruthlessness. Using this imagery, the narrator reflects upon the powers above human beings and humans' inability to understand or control time, as well as destiny. The fishermen are compared and contrasted to all of humankind in their inability to understand and control the sea as humans cannot understand or control time. Jesus Christ's appearance on earth provides the only hope offered to humans. The narrator contemplates the meaning of happiness and pain and finds that both are beyond humans' capabilities to understand and control. The entity of time is a juxtaposition to itself: "time the destroyer is time the preserver." The narrator compares life to a voyage, meditating on humankind's attitude toward life. The prayer to the Queen of Heaven in the fourth part can be viewed as a prayer for humanity as well as for seamen in particular, in light of the comparisons made in the earlier parts of the poem. The narrator criticizes humankind's efforts to understand history and predict the future by arguing that eternity is what is important; although humankind cannot understand it, humankind must at least comprehend the importance of eternity and the liberation it holds.





# Little Gidding

## Little Gidding Summary

In the first part, the narrator explains that midwinter spring is its own season. The windless cold is the heart's heat. There is no wind except the Pentecostal fire. Between melting and freezing, the soul's sap quivers. The narrator wonders when summer will come. If one comes this way in May, it is the same; what one thinks they come for is only a husk. They either have no purpose or their purpose is beyond the end that they figured and is altered in fulfillment. There are other places at the world's end, but this place, in England, is the nearest. No matter when one comes here, the place is the same. One does not come to verify, instruct oneself, inform one's curiosity or carry a report to others. One comes here to kneel and pray. The dead, being dead, can now tell one what they had no speech for when living. This is the intersection of the timeless moment.

In the second part, the deaths of air, earth, water and fire are provided. In the uncertain hour before morning, the narrator meets one loitering. After pointed scrutiny, he recognizes the familiar compound ghost of many dead that he half recalls. The narrator is still the same yet someone other at the same time; he assumes a double part. He trudges along the pavement with the ghost in a dead patrol. The ghost answers the narrator's wonder though he is not eager to rehearse thoughts forgotten. He advises the narrator to forgive others good and bad. Last year's word belongs to last year's language. The ghost finds words he never thought to speak again after leaving his body on a distant shore. He discloses the gifts reserved for age: the body and soul fall asunder, there is a conscious impotence of rage at human folly, and a painful reenactment of all one has done and been. The day breaks, and the spirit fades.

In the third part, three conditions look alike yet differ completely; they are attachment, detachment and indifference to self and others. Indifference lies between attachment and detachment. Memory is used for liberation. Sin is behovely, but all shall be well. People unite in the strife that divides them. The narrator wonders why people celebrate dead men more than the dying. One cannot bring back a ghost; these men accept their constitution of silence. What is inherited from the fortune is taken to the defeated, a symbol perfected in death. All is well by the purification of one's motive.

In the fourth part, a dove descends through the air in flame. The tongue discharges sin and error. The only hope or else despair lies in the choice of pyre on pyre. Humankind is redeemed only by fire. Love devises a torment which human power cannot remove; we only live consumed by either fire or fire.

In the fifth part, the beginning is the end; making the end means making the beginning, and the end is where one starts. Every word, phrase or sentence is the end and a new beginning. Every poem is an epitaph. All actions lead to death which is where man starts. Man dies with the dying and is born with the dead. History is a pattern of timeless



moments; history is now and England. Humankind will not cease from exploration, but the end of exploring will be to arrive where they started. Through the last unknown gate is the beginning, and all will be well.

## Little Gidding Analysis

This poem contains a lot of religious imagery, which is symbolic since the village of Little Gidding was home to a religious community established in 1626. The narrator warns the visitor that the meaning of the place is beyond human understanding. One's purpose in the visit has been overcome with an incomprehensible purpose. The deaths of the elements serve to contrast human efforts with the inevitability of death. Also, this explicit introduction to the classical elements highlights the theme that runs throughout the four quartets. Much of this poem alludes to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, especially in terms of the style of the poem. The idea of eternity and the unimportance of human actions are mentioned throughout this poem, as in the three preceding poems. Eliot quotes Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* in the third part of *Little Gidding*. The fourth part of the poem refers to the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. His duality is shown through the ability to redeem as well as the ability to condemn one to hell. The idea of being born with the dead refers to God taking care of us throughout life. Also, the crowned knot of fire alludes to the Trinity in Christianity. The idea of arriving where one began at the end of exploration alludes to the story of the Prodigal Son in the New Testament of the Bible. The narrator explores the connection between the past, present and future, as well as the unimportance of time.

The fifth part of this poem alludes to the beginning of *Burnt Norton*, closing the quartets within a circular notion of ideologies. The poem ends with the joining of heaven and hell.



# Characters

## Narrator appears in Burnt Norton

The narrator sits in the beautiful rose garden at Burnt Norton. As he sits, he contemplates the idea of time being unredeemable. He thinks that what might have been what has been is an echo in one's memory. As he sits in the rose garden, the narrator hears children laughing; a bird encourages him to follow the sound and find the children. He follows the sound and comes to a pool of water which he peers into. The narrator realizes that humankind cannot bear very much reality. The narrator contemplates the movement at the still point of the turning world which he believes should not be called fixity where the past and future gather. If it were, there would be no dance, but there is only dance which is the inner freedom from practical desires. He realizes that time past and time future allow little consciousness since only in time can a moment in the rose garden be remembered; only through time is time conquered. The narrator is in a place of disaffection where shadow can be turned into transient beauty. He is distracted from distraction by distractions. He descends into the world of perpetual solitude in an abstention from movement while the world moves in abstinence.

When time and the bell bury the day, the narrator wonders if the sunflower will turn to him. The light is still at the still point of the turning world. The narrator considers the fact that only the living can die; the end and the beginning are always there. The narrator feels that words strain, crack and break under the burden. He recalls that the Word in the desert is attacked by the voices of temptation. The narrator considers the detail of the pattern is movement; desire is movement, which is not in itself desirable. He believes that love is unmoving and is the only cause and end of movement which is timeless. The narrator is caught in a form of limitation between being and unbeing in the shade as the sunlight rises and he hears the laughter of the children hidden in the foliage. The narrator says that it is ridiculous, the waste sad time, stretching before and after.

## Narrator appears in East Coker

The narrator watches as houses crumble or are destroyed. The houses are rebuilt; they live and die. The night sees light fall across an open field. In the warm haze, dahlias sleep, waiting for the early owl. In that open field, the narrator believes that if one does not come too close, they may hear the music and see a man and woman dancing, signifying marriage. The sounds of rustic laughter and merriment permeate the air. Dawn arrives, and another day prepares for heat and silence. The narrator is here or there or elsewhere, in his beginning which is his end. In the second part of the poem, the narrator wonders what the late November is doing. The narrator wrestles with his words, unsatisfied with the way he describes these events. He decides that poetry does not matter; nothing is as expected. He wonders if mankind has been deceived with a long hoped for calm in an age of serenity. The narrator acknowledges that wisdom is



only the knowledge of dead secrets, and it is useless, or has a limited value at best. Men are only undeceived of that which can no longer harm them. The narrator does not want to hear of the wisdom of old men; he wants to hear of their folly, fear of fear and frenzied possession. The only wisdom men can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility which is endless. The narrator watches the houses go under the sea and the dancers go under a hill.

The narrator notices that all men go into the dark individually, but all of mankind joins them in the silent funeral. Yet, it is nobody's funeral; there is no one to bury. The narrator tells his soul to be still and allow the dark to come upon it. He compares this to the change of scenes in a theatre. The mind is conscious, but it is conscious of nothing. The narrator tells his soul to be still and wait without hope for hope which would be hope for the wrong thing, to wait without love because love would be love for the wrong thing. There is yet faith, but faith, love and hope are all contained in the waiting. He must wait without thought because he is not ready for thought. The narrator believes that in order to get to where one is from where one is not, it is necessary to go by the way in which there is no ecstasy. What one does not know is the only thing one knows; what one owns is what one does not own; where one is is where one is not. The narrator alludes to the necessity of Jesus Christ needing to worsen the disease before being able to cure it. In order to be warmed, one must first freeze; one must quake in frigid purgatorial fires. The narrator is in the middle with twenty years wasted, and every attempt at a new start is a different kind of failure. Each venture is a new beginning, but his equipment is always deteriorating. What is able to be conquered by strength and submission has already been discovered by men whom the narrator cannot hope to emulate. He can only try to fight to recover what has been lost, but he may neither gain nor lose. Like others, the narrator starts from home, yet the world becomes stranger as he grows older. It is not just one intense moment; lifetime burns in every moment. There is a time for evening under the starlight and the lamplight. Love is most nearly itself when here and now cease to matter. One must continue moving into another intensity, a further union, through the dark and desolation. For the narrator, in his end is his beginning.

## **Narrator appears in The Dry Salvages**

The narrator expresses his belief that the river is a god. He compares it to the sea which tosses earlier creation on the beach. Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception, time stops, never ending, and the narrator hears the bell clang. The narrator wonders when the wreckage and calamitous annunciation will end. He realizes that there is no end, but there is an addition, more days, hours and years living among the breakage. The final addition is failing pride or resentment at one's failing powers. The narrator realizes that, like the past, there is no future not liable to have no destination; it is unchanging. He sees another pattern in the past as he ages, the means of disowning the past; he can have experience but miss the meaning. Past experiences revived in the meaning are not the experience of his life only but that of many generations; it is a backward look at recorded history. He realizes that moments of agony are permanent; though people change and smile, agony abides. He sees times as both a destroyer and



a preserver which the narrator compares to a ragged rock in the river which is a monument on clear days but means danger in bad weather.

The narrator wonders what Krishna meant about the future being a faded song of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret. He knows that the way up is the way down, and the way forward is the way back. He sees time as no healer, and the patient as no longer here. The narrator realizes that time is neither action nor inaction. The narrator prays to the Queen of Heaven, asking her to pray for those in ships, the women who worry about them, and those whose voyage is ended because of the sea. He discusses communication with the gods through horoscopes, tea leaves, and palm reading which are pastimes, drugs and features of the press. This is the way it will always be, especially when there is distress and perplexity of nations. He knows that men's curiosity searches the past and future and clings to that dimension. The narrator points out that to apprehend the point of intersection of the timeless with time is an occupation for a saint as it requires selflessness. For most of mankind, there is only the unattended moment and the distractions within it. There are only hints and guesses. He sees rest as prayer, observance, disciplines, thought and action. The past and the future are conquered and reconciled. The right action is freedom from the past and the future. For most of humankind, the narrator acknowledges, this is the aim that will never be realized; man only remains undefeated because he continues trying, content if his body nourishes the significant soil.

## **Narrator appears in Little Gidding**

The narrator explains that midwinter spring is its own season. The windless cold is the heart's heat, and there is no wind except the Pentecostal fire. Between melting and freezing, the sap of the narrator's soul quivers. The narrator wonders when summer will come. He warns visitors that if one comes this way in May, it is the same; what one thinks they come for is only a husk. He advises them not to come here to verify, instruct oneself, inform one's curiosity or carry a report to others; one should come here to kneel and pray. The narrator considers that the dead, being dead, can now tell one what they had no speech for when living. This is the intersection of the timeless moment. In the uncertain hour before morning, the narrator meets one loitering. After pointed scrutiny, he recognizes the familiar compound ghost of many dead that he half recalls. The narrator is still the same yet someone other at the same time; he assumes a double part. He trudges along the pavement with the ghost in a dead patrol. The ghost answers the narrator's wonder though he is not eager to rehearse thoughts forgotten. He advises the narrator to forgive others good and bad. Last year's word belongs to last year's language. The ghost discloses the gifts reserved for age to the narrator: the body and soul fall asunder, there is a conscious impotence of rage at human folly, and a painful reenactment of all one has done and been. The day breaks, and the spirit fades.

The narrator considers the differences and similarities between attachment, detachment and indifference to self and others; indifference lies between attachment and detachment. The narrator wonders why people celebrate dead men more than the dying since one cannot bring back a ghost; these men accept their constitution of silence. He



notes that what is inherited from the fortune is taken to the defeated, a symbol perfected in death. The narrator sees that the beginning is the end; making the end means making the beginning of something new, and the end is where one starts. Every word, phrase or sentence is the end and a new beginning. Every poem is an epitaph. The narrator meditates on the idea that all actions lead to death which is where man starts; man dies with the dying and is born with the dead. He sees history as a pattern of timeless moments; history is now and England. The narrator knows that humankind will not cease from exploration, but the end of exploring will be to arrive where they started. Through the last unknown gate is the beginning, and all will be well.

## **Bird appears in Burnt Norton**

The bird in Burnt Norton encourages the narrator to follow the voices of the children in the garden.

## **Children appear in Burnt Norton**

The children hide in the rose garden, laughing, causing the narrator to search for them.

## **Man and woman appear in East Coker**

The man and woman dance around a bonfire in an open field, signifying their marriage. They leap through the flames, keeping time to the music that plays. They eat and drink in celebration.

## **Surgeon appears in East Coker**

The surgeon plies steel and heals people. He must hurt them in order to cure them; the surgeon is a symbol for Jesus Christ.

## **River appears in The Dry Salvages**

The river is a strong, brown god. He is sullen, untamed and intractable. First recognized as a frontier, the river is nearly forgotten after a bridge is built across him. He remains implacable, keeping his seasons and rages. The river is a destroyer who watches and waits.

## **Lady appears in The Dry Salvages**

The Lady is also called the Queen of Heaven. Her shrine stands on a promontory. The narrator entreats her to pray for those in ships, women who have seen their sons or



husbands set forth without returning and those whose voyages ended in the sand, in the sea's lips or anywhere that the sound of the sea's bell does not reach them.

## **Dying appears in Little Gidding**

The dying depart, and we go with them; we die with the dying. We are born with the dead, but they return and bring us with them.

## **We appears in Little Gidding**

"We" in Little Gidding is humankind. The dying depart, and we go with them; we die with the dying. We are born with the dead, but they return and bring us with them. We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all exploring will be to arrive where we started.



## Objects/Places

### **Burnt Norton appears in Burnt Norton**

Burnt Norton is a country house near Chipping Campden in North Gloucestershire which belongs to the Viscount Sandon, son of the Earl of Harrowby. T.S. Eliot visits Burnt Norton in the summer of 1934.

### **Rose Garden appears in Burnt Norton**

The rose garden is located at Burnt Norton. The beautiful rose garden is the setting for the poem, Burnt Norton.

### **Time appears in Burnt Norton**

Time present and time past are located in time future, while time future is contained in time past. Time is eternally present and unredeemable. Only through time, time is conquered.

### **Gloomy Hills appears in Burnt Norton**

The gloomy hills are the hills of London, Hampstead, Clerkenwell, Campden, Putney, Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate.

### **Bell appears in Burnt Norton**

The bell tolls and, along with time, buries the day.

### **Light appears in Burnt Norton**

Light is located at the still turning point of the world.

### **Words appears in Burnt Norton**

Words reach into silence; only by form can they reach into stillness. Words strain under the burden. They decay and will not stand still.

### **Voices of Temptation appears in Burnt Norton**

Voices of temptation attack the Word in the desert, referring to Jesus Christ.





## **East Coker appears in East Coker**

East Coker is a village in Somerset, England, where T.S. Eliot's ashes are buried in the churchyard.

## **Open Field appears in East Coker**

In the open field, it is possible to hear the music of the weak pipe and the little drum as well as to see the matrimonial dance around the bonfire if one does not come too close.

## **Dark appears in East Coker**

The dark is in all vacant spaces where all eventually go.

## **Home appears in East Coker**

Home is where one starts from, though the world becomes stranger and more complicated as one grows older.

## **The Dry Salvages appears in The Dry Salvages**

The Dry Salvages is a small group of rock with a beacon off of the northeast coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts.

## **Tolling Bell appears in The Dry Salvages**

The tolling bell measures time by the unhurried ground swell.

## **Future appears in The Dry Salvages**

The future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender spray of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret, pressed between the yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened.

## **Little Gidding appears in Little Gidding**

Little Gidding is a village in Huntingdonshire that T.S. Eliot visits in 1936. It is also the home of a religious community that is established in 1626 by Nicholas Ferrar.



## **Midwinter Spring appears in Little Gidding**

Midwinter spring is its own season, suspended in time, where the shortest day is the brightest.

## **England appears in Little Gidding**

England is the "intersection of the timeless moment."

## **Dove appears in Little Gidding**

The dove descends, breaking the air with a flame of incandescent terror. It is the one discharge from sin and error, the only hope or else despair. With the dove, one can be redeemed from fire by fire. The dove represents the Holy Ghost in Christianity.



# Themes

## Time

Four Quartets explores the nature of time in relation to theology, history, physicality and its effect on the human condition. In *Burnt Norton*, the meaning of time and its relationship with human beings is explored. Time present and past are contained in time future. All time is eternally present and unredeemable. Humans are submerged in time and movement, but they are unable to perceive the source of the movement. Freeing oneself from worldly attachments is the only way to redeem time and give a value to one's actions in time. The poem ends as the narrator concludes that time is a sad waste. In *East Coker*, the beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning; the narrator takes a circular view of time. He considers the power of time to change things while humans are unable to prevent these changes. The narrator mentions the time of seasons, constellations, milking, harvesting, and coupling. There is a movement of time between the past and the present.

In *The Dry Salvages*, the river is tamed though it remains violent, much like time. Time, like the river, can be neither controlled nor understood completely by humankind. This inability of men to understand time is compared to seamen's inability to fully comprehend the sea. Time is seen as a destroyer and a preserver. The voyages of the seamen are compared to men's decisions to continue moving forward in life, in time. Men attempt to understand history and divine the future, but their place in time is limited to the present. It is important only for men to understand eternity in terms of its connection with men's history, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In *Little Gidding*, the narrator contemplates the small importance of human actions in consideration of the vastness of eternity. He sees this realization as a liberation from the past and the future. He also realizes the connection between the past, present and future and the meaninglessness of time. Each end is the beginning of something new.

## Classical Elements

Each of the four quartets represents one of the classical elements in the tone and subject matter; the classical elements are air, earth, water and fire. Besides the general tone that each poem exudes, there is also physical manifestations of these elements within the individual poems. *Burnt Norton* represents air. The atmosphere which the narrator describes as well as the light actions of the children's laughter gives the poem an airy feel. The abstract idea of the still turning point of the world reinforces this connection. Likewise, the narrator's intent to find detachment from worldly things, and his meditation on time in relation to human actions provides a less solid feel to the first quartet. *East Coker* represents earth. The idea that the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning provides a circular nature to this work, much like the circular appearance of Earth. The narrator's desire to have his ashes buried at *East Coker* provides a reminder of death, a very worldly experience. The hopelessness and the



discussion of the dark night of soul, death, is more solid than the other poems and contributes to this association of East Coker with earth.

The Dry Salvages represents water, which is apparent in the view of the river as a god. The poem concentrates heavily on the rhythm of the river and the sounds that the sea makes. The narrator compares the familiar river to the ruthless sea. The comparison between humankind in general and seamen in particular emphasize the author's desire to focus heavily on aquatic symbolism in this poem. Comparing seamen's understanding of the sea to humankind's understanding of time, the narrator is able to combine this element with all of nature. He also compares humankind's attitude toward life to a sea voyage. His prayer to the Queen of Heaven is for seamen. Little Gidding represents fire. While discussing the midwinter spring, the narrator alludes to the heat. He also comments on the "ash on an old man's sleeve." This poem can be compared to Dante's Divine Comedy. Love beyond, that of God, is compared to fire. The dove that descends brings redemption through fire. Hell is mentioned explicitly. There are also specific quotes that link this poem to the aspect of fire, such as "crowned knot of fire" and "tongues of flame."

## Religion

Religion, especially Christianity, constitutes a major recurring theme throughout Four Quartets. Christian imagery and symbolism are abundant in the four poems. In Burnt Norton, the narrator meditates on the meaning of redemption and the possibility of eternity as the still point of the turning world. In East Coker, there is a parallel to Ecclesiastes 3:1-9 which explains humility as the escape from the nothingness that it means to be human. The idea of hoping against hope alludes to Roman 4:18. Eliot nearly quotes St. John of the Cross' Subida del Monte Carmelo when he discusses going through the dark night of the soul. The surgeon who must produce pain in order to cure humankind symbolizes Jesus Christ. The mere mention of the soul is a religious concept. God is shown in this poem as the beginning and the end. In The Dry Salvages, the idea that destiny is not under human control suggests that Jesus Christ's coming is humankind's only hope. To man's attempts to divine the future, the narrator considers that all that is really important is eternity's connection with history in terms of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He also comments that to understand the point of intersection of the timeless with time is an occupation for a saint. In Little Gidding, the poem resembles Dante's representations of Paradiso and Inferno in his Divine Comedy, completed with the aspect of exploring the duality of heaven and hell.

Religious concepts that arise outside of the confines of Christianity appear sporadically throughout the book. In Burnt Norton, the narrator's concept of poverty and detachment parallels the Buddhist Nirvana. East Coker contains a reference to the Buddhist element of sublimation of self. The Dry Salvages contains the comparison of the river to a god which resembles the ancients' habits of deifying corporeal bodies. It also refers to Hindu mythology in the mention of Krishna's Bhagavad Gita. The prayer to the Queen of Heaven is a more pagan idea as Christianity is monotheistic.

# Style

## Point of View

The point of view for *Burnt Norton* is first person. The point of view is limited and subjective, as everything appears the way that the narrator sees it. The point of view is important since this work is a poem and must be viewed through the eyes of the narrator. *Burnt Norton* is mostly exposition, with the only exception being an excerpt where the bird in the garden tells the narrator to "go, go, go" find the laughing children, hidden in the foliage. Additionally, the point of view is very abstract and philosophical, rather than concrete and realistic.

The point of view for *East Coker* is first person. The point of view is limited and subjective, as everything appears the way that the narrator sees it. The point of view is important since this work is a poem and must be viewed through the eyes of the narrator. *East Coker* is all exposition in terms of being the thoughts of the narrator as he meditates on different aspects of the universe. Additionally, the point of view is very abstract and philosophical, rather than concrete and realistic.

The point of view for *The Dry Salvages* is first person. The point of view is limited and subjective, as everything appears the way that the narrator sees it. The point of view is important since this work is a poem and must be viewed through the eyes of the narrator. *The Dry Salvages* is mostly exposition; however, there are several quotes from Krishna in part three, and in the fourth part, the narrator appeals to the Queen of Heaven for the safety of seafarers. Additionally, the point of view is very abstract and philosophical, rather than concrete and realistic.

The point of view for *Little Gidding* is first person. The point of view is limited and subjective, as everything appears the way that the narrator sees it. The point of view is important since this work is a poem and must be viewed through the eyes of the narrator. Unlike the previous quartets, *Little Gidding* is definitively addressed to an unidentified "you" which seems to be a generalization of humankind as a whole. By addressing the poem to "you," the concept of the poem takes the shape of a conversation with this unknown entity which interrupts the flow of exposition of the poem. Additionally, the point of view is very abstract and philosophical, rather than concrete and realistic.

## Setting

The setting in *Burnt Norton* is a small, beautiful rose garden located at a country house named *Burnt Norton*. *Burnt Norton* is located near Chipping Campden in North Gloucestershire in England. It belongs to the Viscount Sandon, son of the Earl of Harrowby. T.S. Eliot visited *Burnt Norton* in the summer of 1934. In *East Coker*, the setting is the village of *East Coker*. *East Coker* is located in Somerset, England. *East*



Coker was the village in which T.S. Eliot's ancestors lived before immigrating to Boston in 1660. When T.S. Eliot visited East Coker in 1936-1937, he decided that he wanted to have his ashes buried in East Coker. Currently, T.S. Eliot's ashes lie in the churchyard in East Coker underneath a plaque memorializing him for all posterity.

The setting in *The Dry Salvages* is a small group of rocks, known as the dry salvages, with a nearby beacon. The dry salvages are located off of the northeast coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts. Additionally, there is a lot of imagery in this poem that refers to the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River. In *Little Gidding*, the setting is the village of Little Gidding. Little Gidding is located in Huntingdonshire in England. Little Gidding is also home to a religious community that was established in 1626 by Nicholas Ferrar. T.S. Eliot visits the village of Little Gidding in 1936.

## Language and Meaning

The language in *Burnt Norton* is very philosophical and vague. The poem is mostly exposition which does not allow the reader to distinguish between the characters that rarely appear. The only character that can endure extensive analysis is the narrator whose voice produces the poem. The poem is full of hyperbole, personification and double entendre. *Burnt Norton* is very difficult to understand. In *East Coker*, there is a circular repetition of the phrase "in my beginning is my end" which begins the poem and repeats periodically throughout until the end of the reverse, "in my end is my beginning."

The narrator in *East Coker* describes the action that can be seen if one ventures to this location. The language in this poem is very philosophical and vague. The poem is mostly exposition which does not allow the reader to distinguish between the characters that rarely appear. The only character that can endure extensive analysis is the narrator whose voice produces the poem. The poem is full of hyperbole, personification and double entendre. *East Coker* is very difficult to understand.

The language in *The Dry Salvages* is philosophical and vague. The poem is mostly exposition which does not allow the reader to distinguish between the characters that rarely appear. The only character that can endure extensive analysis is the narrator whose voice produces the poem. The poem is full of hyperbole, personification and double entendre. The fourth section is addressed as a prayer to the Queen of Heaven, but she does not respond in any way so this section still retains the narrator as the speaker. The narrator specifically personifies the Mississippi River as a god. *The Dry Salvages* is very difficult to understand.

The language in *Little Gidding* is very philosophical and vague. The poem is mostly exposition which does not allow the reader to distinguish between the characters that rarely appear. The only character that can endure extensive analysis is the narrator whose voice produces the poem. The poem is full of hyperbole, personification and double entendre. *Little Gidding* is very difficult to understand.



## Structure

Burnt Norton is split into five sections over eight pages. Each section refers to time with the first section beginning with positive views of time and degeneratively working towards negative views in the last section. The plot of Burnt Norton is the narrator's walk through the rose garden at Burnt Norton. The subplot is the narrator's meditations about the importance of time. Burnt Norton is not linear or bound by any rules of time, making it very difficult to read.

East Coker is split into five sections over ten pages. The plot of East Coker is time's ability to change things and humans' inability to prevent time from changing things. The subplot is human weakness and the nothingness that results from it. The story is not linear or bound by any rules of time, making it very difficult to read.

The Dry Salvages is divided into five sections, split over eleven pages. The plot of The Dry Salvages discusses the river's powers as a god in comparison to the cruelty of the ocean. The subplots are the powers above humanity and the fact that time is not controlled by humans. The Dry Salvages is not linear or bound by any rules of time, making it very difficult to read.

Little Gidding contains eleven pages, separated into five sections. The plot of Little Gidding is the voyager's visit to Little Gidding is midwinter spring though they do not know the purpose of the visit. The subplot is eternity in relation to human acts. Little Gidding is not linear or bound by any rules of time, making it very difficult to read.



## Quotes

"The inner freedom from the practical desire, The release from action and suffering, release from the inner And outer compulsion, yet surrounded By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving, Erhebung without motion, concentration Without elimination, both a new world And the old made explicit, understood In the completion of its partial ecstasy, The resolution of its partial horror." Burnt Norton, II, page 16

"Here is a place of disaffection Time before and time after In a dim light: neither daylight Investing form with lucid stillness Turning shadow into transient beauty With slow rotation suggesting permanence Nor darkness to purify the soul Emptying the sensual with deprivation Cleansing affection from the temporal. Neither plenitude or vacancy." Burnt Norton, III, page 17

"Words move, music moves Only in time; but that which is only living Can only die." Burnt Norton, V, page 19

"In that open field If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close, On a summer midnight, you can hear the music Of the weak pipe and the little drum And see them dancing around the bonfire The association of man and woman In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie— A dignified and commodious sacrament. Two and two, necessarye coniunction, Holding eche other by the hand or the arm Whiche betokeneth concorde." East Coker, I, page 24

"Dawn points, and another day Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind Wrinkles and slides. I am here Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning." East Coker, I, page 25

"Do not let me hear Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly, Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession, Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God. The only wisdom we can hope to acquire Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless." East Coker, II, pages 26-27

"I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love, For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting." East Coker, III, page 28

"If to be warmed, then I must freeze And quake in frigid purgatorial fires Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars. The dripping blood our only drink, The bloody flesh our only food: In spite of which we like to think That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood—Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good." East Coker, IV, page 30





"Not the intense moment Isolated, with no before and after, But a lifetime burning in every moment And not the lifetime of one man only But of old stones that cannot be deciphered." East Coker, V, page 31

"Past experience revived in the meaning Is not the experience of one life only But of many generations." The Dry Salvages, part II, page 39

"Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony (Whether, or not, due to misunderstanding, Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong things, Is not in question) are likewise permanent With such permanence as time has." The Dry Salvages, II, pages 39-40

"the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender spray Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret, Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened." The Dry Salvages, III, pages 40-41

"And right action is freedom From past and future also. For most of us, this is the aim Never here to be realised; Who are only undefeated Because we have gone on trying." The Dry Salvages, V, page 45

"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." Little Gidding, I, page 51

"Sin is Behovely, but All shall be well, and All manner of thing shall be well." Little Gidding, III, page 56

"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." Little Gidding, IV, page 57

"What we call the beginning is often the end And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." Little Gidding, V, page 58

"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 the 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." Little Gidding, V, page 58

## Topics for Discussion

List and describe at least three instances of Christian imagery in these poems.

Each poem is associated with the classical elements of air, earth, water and fire. Find references to each of these within the four poems.

Pick one poem and describe the importance of time within that individual quartet.

List two instances of contrasting ideas (such as "the door we never opened") in *Burnt Norton*, and explain the purpose of this repetitive method.

Explain the repetition of "in my beginning is my end" throughout *East Coker*.

Compare and contrast the river and the sea using the information provided in *The Dry Salvages*.

What is the significance of purpose in *Little Gidding*?