



## **Four Quartets**

*T.S. Eliot*

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## Four Quartets T.S. Eliot

The Four Quartets is a series of four poems by T.S. Eliot, published individually from 1936 to 1942, and in book form in 1943; it was considered by Eliot himself to be his finest work. Each of the quartets has five "movements" and each is titled by a place name -- BURNT NORTON (1936), EAST COKER (1940), THE DRY SALVAGES (1941), and LITTLE GIDDING (1942). Eliot's insights into the cyclical nature of life are revealed through themes and images woven throughout the four poems. Spiritual, philosophical, and personal themes emerge through symbolic allusions and literary and religious references from both Eastern and Western thought. The work addresses the connections of the personal and historical present and past, spiritual renewal, and the very nature of experience; it is considered the poet's clearest exposition of his Christian beliefs. (The Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature)

## Four Quartets Details

Date : Published 1959 by Faber Faber (first published 1943)

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Author : T.S. Eliot

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## From Reader Review Four Quartets for online ebook

### Tim says

T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* is a masterpiece. I don't know how I missed it before this year. How can you not love a poem that says things like:

There is, it seems to us,  
At best, only a limited value  
In the knowledge derived from experience.  
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,  
For the pattern is new in every moment  
And every moment is a new and shocking  
Valuation of all we have been....  
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.

or

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—  
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres  
Trying to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always deteriorating  
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,  
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer  
By strength and submission, has already been discovered  
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope  
To emulate—but there is no competition—  
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

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### Anthony Vacca says

T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* are as apocalyptically-sound as his more well-known *The Waste Land* (at least in terms of bored freshman who, in the fullness of time, will most likely only dimly remember sludging their

way through the poem in some requisite English Lit courses), but whereas the latter keeps its cosmic lens rolling on the ecological, religious and human desolation brought to the early 20th century by the wonders of Imperialism and Industrialization, the *FQ*, on the other hand, carpet bombs the idea of consciousness and its relation with Time and Being. Who would have guessed that having self-awareness could be such a terrifying notion?

Using an effective array of techniques to get his point across—repetition of words, letters and syllables (usually in sets of three); spurts of faux-Middle English; Thesaurus-bending diction; a heady blending of up-to-the-minute psychology, philosophy and multi-religious allusions—Eliot's poems reject the notion of Time as a flowing line and instead present the concept as a brick wall in which Being moves through or puddles about in a dizzying array of cross-currents. Movement is key to understanding the *FQ* with its many metaphors involving travel by sea, air and dirt. Published over a period of six years, the heft of these poems is not found in their narrative continuity, but in the revisiting of meditations that are clawed at again and again with Eliot's lush and articulate narrative voice, all in the hopes of dispensing with notions of endings and beginnings as ways of thinking about anything.

A poet/musician who is a good buddy of mine has been at me for months to read these poems, and all I have to say is that the dude knows what he's talking about. *Four Quartets* is a class-act display of poetic virtuosity that I hope to be repeatedly revisiting over however long a time I'll be kicking around this mortal coil.

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## **Habemus\_apicellam says**

### **In my beginning is my end**

La parola che mi viene in mente per questa opera è prodigio: non immaginavo che temi così astratti, così ineffabili e metafisici potessero divenire materiale poetico e con quali splendidi risultati estetici, visionari e musicali! Non ho le competenze per una disanima critica di questo libro meraviglioso, vera pietra miliare della letteratura moderna: e impossibile mi è anche scegliere tra *The Waste Land* e questi *Four Quartets*. Posso solo dire che ho adorato la capacità di Eliot di cambiare tono, di arrivare a versi perfetti esteticamente per poi passare ad una scrittura totalmente intelligibile, ma sempre evocativa e visionaria. Anche se lo stesso poeta dubita delle possibilità di rendere a parole idee tanto immense:

*Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle*

*With words and meanings.*

E poi percepire come tutto sia parte di una struttura perfetta che allaccia il proprio inizio e la propria fine, dimostrazione meta-letteraria di ciò che Eliot asserisce in quelle stesse righe. Non ho potuto che pensare a Borges e alla sua capacità di rendere letteraria la metafisica.

Dopo questa lettura credo che la poesia non abbia limiti, nè confini - anzi, forse può raggiungere territori superiori a qualunque prosa.

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## **Camille Stein says**

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.  
What might have been is an abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation.  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.  
Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind.  
But to what purpose  
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves  
I do not know.*

*Tiempo presente y tiempo pasado  
Están ambos quizá presentes en el tiempo futuro  
Y el tiempo futuro contenido en el tiempo pasado.  
Si todo tiempo es eternamente presente  
Todo tiempo es irredimible.  
Lo que podía haber sido es una abstracción  
Y permanece como posibilidad perpetua  
Sólo en un mundo de especulación.  
Lo que podía haber sido y lo que ha sido  
Apuntan a un fin, que es siempre presente.  
Las pisadas resuenan en la memoria  
Bajando el pasillo que no tomamos  
Hacia la puerta que nunca abrimos  
A la rosaeda. Mis palabras resuenan  
Así, en tu mente.  
Pero con qué propósito  
Removiendo el polvo en un cuenco de pétalos de rosa  
No lo sé.*

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## **Hadrian says**

Apparently I haven't put this into Goodreads and thought I did. Ah well.

This is really good poetry. Don't trust me. Go read it. It's not very long, and you can probably find it in 30 seconds on Google. Please go read it.

That being said, it is rather astonishing. Eliot has this rhythm, which survives even in Prufrock, and shines here. Themes from religion and nature and history. Heraclius and Marcus Aurelius and St. John and aphorism and myth, Pentacostal fire and the chanting advance of the Bhagavad Ghita. This stuff speaks to you. It has overly religious themes, which somehow seem very universal. History and the present moment. Written in the despair and fragile hope of the Blitz.

Bluh. I'm far too inarticulate to give these praise. Go read them. Then come back in a few months and closely follow a few lines, and commit them to memory. Then read them again.

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### **Richard says**

I think that "Four Quartets" is Eliot's masterpiece and one of the great poetic works of the twentieth century. Of the four, my favourites are the first and the last, but all four have moments of Epiphany such as this section in "East Coker":

"Love is most nearly itself  
When here and now cease to matter.  
Old men ought to be explorers  
Here or there does not matter  
We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion  
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,  
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters  
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning."

The intellectuality in Eliot's use of an intricate allusive approach combined with a depth of spirituality creates a powerful meditation that one can read again and again.

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### **rahul says**

*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.  
Through the unknown, unremembered 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 flames are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.*

Fuck Me!!!!

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## **Manny says**

### **Question 1** (5 points)

Contrast the treatment of denotation and reference in the following works:

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*
- T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*
- Marcel Proust, *A L'Ombre Des Jeunes Filles En Fleurs*

Well, that's what I think's wrong with formal examinations.

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(Gratuitous cross-promotion)

### **Question 2** (3 points)

Order the following by the extent to which they glorify substance abuse:

- Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting*
  - Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*
  - Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*
  - Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
  - notgettingenough, *Review of "The Marijuana Papers"*
-

## Kelly says

This is the first record of my reading that I have not posted on this website in 6 and a half years.

You can find my full review of the amazing experience of this book at soapboxing:  
<http://soapboxing.net/2013/10/four-qu...>

\* \* \*

ORIGINAL: Well. I just... I... what I mean to say is... I think I...

Holy fuck.

Yeah, gimme a minute on this one, guys.

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## Felicity says

*Four Quartets* is one of the most astounding pieces of writing I've ever encountered. It may start off strange and esoteric, but it becomes more and more familiar through the reading, until you feel almost as if you are experiencing Eliot's journeys and musings instead of reading a poetic result of them. It builds upon itself in the most transparent yet masterful ways. An incredible experience for me as a writer and a thinker.

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## Ken Moten says

*" The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one discharge from sin and error.  
The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre of pyre-  
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 either fire or fire." - Section 4 of "Little Gidding"*

Now over the whole period of listening/reading this poem I have been wondering how I would review such a personal and colossal statement as this. So I will do my best to simply say what I felt or my interpretation of this poem overall instead of going into elaborate detail about each section which is what I planned.

The 'Quartets' are based on the elements air, water, wind, and fire; the main themes are time, God, history, and death (and England). And these themes are expressed in each poem differently. This poem, especially



when we get to "East Coker", is for Eliot his defining work of him "coming-out" as a Christian (which was, in the circles he hung out in, not very popular) and it seems as though he is trying to tie in the elements of his ante- and post-Anglican self together in this one work (he had already "announced" his new found religion in Ash Wednesday which I sadly haven't read yet) and I think he pulls it off well, much to some people's, then and now, disdain.

*" Our only health is the disease  
If we obey the dying nurse  
Whose constant care is not to please  
But to remind us of our, and Adam's curse,  
And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.*

*The whole earth is our hospital  
Endowed by the ruined millionaire,  
Wherein, if we do well, we shall  
Die of the absolute paternal care  
That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.*

*The chill ascends from feet to knees,  
The fever sings in mental wires.  
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." - From section 4 of "East Coker"*

Eliot being a long time Dante fan can't resist finally feeling able to truly stand close to his idol; and like Dante, T.S. Eliot has his own non-Christian but very much respected hero of literature make a guess spot in this poem, though instead of the Roman Poet Virgil we have the Hindu god Krishna show up in "The Dry Salvages" to warn against simply wasting time about baseless personal gains of the future instead of following divine will.

*"Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;  
You are not those who saw the harbour  
Receding, or those who will disembark.  
Here between the hither and the farther shore  
While time is withdrawn, consider the future  
And the past with an equal mind.  
At the moment which is not of action or inaction  
You can receive this: 'on whatever sphere of being  
The mind of a man may be intent  
At the time of death' - that is the one action  
(And the time of death is every moment)  
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:  
And do not think of the fruit of action.*

*Fare forward.  
O voyagers, O seamen,  
You who came to port, and you whose bodies  
Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,  
Or whatever event, this is your real destination."  
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna  
On the field of battle.  
Not fare well,  
But fare forward, voyagers." - From section 3 of "The Dry Salvages"*

The aspect of time and how it relates in life and death also show up in this poem. 3 out of the 4 "Quartets" were written during the Battle of Britain and its aftermath, so this poem served as a rallying cry and a sort of philosophical piece for England. "*Here, the intersection of the timeless moment  
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.*"

So I will confess while this won't out-shine *The Waste Land* for me, but it is fast becoming a favorite of mine and is an instant masterpiece for me. No reason why you shouldn't read it no matter your feelings about Eliot.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBD\\_OW...](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBD_OW...)

*" 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 walls, 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.  
This 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."*

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*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.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.  
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.  
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,  
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy  
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony  
Of death and birth.*

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## **Abailart says**

This is something that I've been reading and returning to for more than 40 years. Few works are so intimately connected with my own life changes. Truly, all poems are read afresh with each reading: as oneself changes, the poems change. In the case of *Four Quartets*, I used to go to it for melancholy comfort, a vague spiritual longing too balmed with its reverberations of paradox and eastern thoughts while rooted in the soil of an East Anglian mysticism. I also found its original influence (along with Auden et al) on me towards Leavisite cultural pessimism now reflected back, refracted rather, through prisms of my own beginnings and ends. I have swerved away from both such indulgences, especially the second which I now feel as naive and elitist.

One thing that hasn't changed is that these are excellent poems by any standard. I heard not long ago a world-famous novelist decry Eliot's poetry on the ground that he was anti-semitic. He said that if Eliot's stuff was good poetry it doesn't say much for poetry. Leaving aside the intense debates about Eliot's views (debates without any agreed conclusion), less controversial would be his adherence to a strict and disciplined anglicanism, royalism and belief in tradition - none of which I personally have any time for. As it happens, I don't think Eliot was any more 'anti-semitic' than, say Winston Churchill, or any of the thousands of other establishment figure's in England's torrid history of discrimination against Jewry. The poems themselves gain their power not from statements, affirmations and exclusions, but from their formal qualities. Insofar as I have just re-read them it was to appreciate again Eliot's persistent difficulty in expressing the ineffable, in using words no matter how brilliantly, to go beyond themselves. For me, the best poets and writers have as their chief energy a longing which can at best be partially expressed only by dismantling the very means of expression:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—  
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres  
Trying to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure  
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words  
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which  
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always deteriorating  
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,  
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer  
By strength and submission, has already been discovered

Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope  
To emulate—but there is no competition—  
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

(East Coker V)

Words move, music moves  
Only in time; but that which is only living  
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness.  
Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
Not that only, but the co-existence,  
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
And the end and the beginning were always there  
Before the beginning and after the end.  
And all is always now. Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices  
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,  
Always assail them. The Word in the desert  
Is most attacked by voices of temptation,  
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,  
The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

(Burnt Norton V)

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### **Arlette says**

If you read this to yourself out loud and slowly, it will echo in your head the rest of your life. I think it will last forever.

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### **João Fernandes says**

*"We can only live, only suspire  
Consumed by either fire or fire."*

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## **Psycho Kanev says**

The Four Quartets by TS Eliot is a classic. The Four Quartets are regarded by many to be the greatest philosophical poem of this century. The titles of the four sections which make up the Quartets are place names, each corresponding to a phase of spiritual development. What particularly satisfies about the Four Quartets is that they complete Eliot's broad spiritual landscape begun with "Prufrock," "Gerontion," and The Wasteland, poems about failure in a bankrupt universe, but with the words from the Upanishads, "Datta . . . Dayadhvam . . . Damyata1" spoken by the thunder at The Wasteland's conclusion, Eliot anticipates a revitalized world that he fully conceives in the Four Quartets. In this later poem, Eliot once again includes the world of desire, fear, and death that haunted The Wasteland and other earlier efforts; but in the Quartets the importance of this darker world has been diminished, relegated to the sphere of time to form a mere backdrop to Eliot's expanded vision of life as unblemished eternity. The greatest achieve of Eliot in Four Quartets, is the way he manages to reach out to the greatest poet in history, who lived a number of centuries ago, and have the language speak with his tongue, simultaneously admitting that Dante's world view cannot be copied in today's world - but that does not mean that his form of structure and vivid allusions should not be employed: in this poem, the Trecento and the century of the atomic bomb have found common ground to behold each other as not quite congenial, yet deeply related brothers. The past is not dead - it's not even past yet.

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