***Little Gidding***

I

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 bloom 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 figured  
And is altered in fulfilment. 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.

II

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.

In the uncertain hour before the morning  
Near the ending of interminable night  
At the recurrent 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 towards 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 beast 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 a crown upon your lifetime's effort.  
First, the cold fricton of expiring sense  
Without enchantment, offering no promise  
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit  
As body and sould 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 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.

III

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 a country  
Begins as an 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 not immediate kin or kindness,  
But of some 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 perfected 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.

IV

The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one dischage 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.

V

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make and 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 nor ostentatious,  
An easy commerce of the old and the new,  
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 a 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 illegible stone: and that is where we start.  
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.

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.  
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.