

MIDWINTER SPRING, THE STILL POINT AND DANTE. THE ASPIRATION TO THE ETERNAL PRESENT IN T.S. ELIOT'S *FOUR QUARTETS*

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1. Four Quartets. Preliminary remarks

As T.S. Eliot explained in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1953, he did not set about writing *Four Quartets* following a premeditated design. The poem that opens the sequence, “Burnt Norton” (first published, on its own, in 1936), grew out of singularly reflective fragments that, being considered unsuitable for the stage, were excised from the manuscript of the commissioned pageant play *The Rock* (1934). At the time, Eliot “thought pure unapplied poetry was in the past” (Bergonzi 1969: 23) and was willing to further explore the possibilities of drama. The difficult circumstances of World War II, however, forced a retreat into meditative verse that resulted in “East Coker” (the second of the quartets, which appeared in 1940) and ultimately in the project to complete the sequence with “The Dry Salvages” (1941) and “Little Gidding” (1942).¹

When Eliot’s poetic work is examined chronologically, it seems inevitable to consider *Four Quartets* the resolution of his poetic quest, as well as the acme of his craft: “it would not be too much to say that all of his previous work has lead him to this point [...] Certainly the sequence is the most elaborately and intricately shaped of all his poetry” (Ackroyd 1984: 270). In a letter of 1931, Eliot told Stephen Spender that Beethoven’s later quartets struck him as “the fruit of reconciliation and relief after immense suffering”, and added: “I should like to get something

of that into verse before I die” (Spender 1975: 133). These words describe with premonitory precision how Eliot’s own quartets have come to be perceived. They reflect not only the author’s creative maturity, but also the peace of mind that put an end to years of religious disorientation and the rewards of his determined efforts to consolidate belief.² As David Perkins claims, “the protagonist of the *Four Quartets* finally achieves a deeper experience and a fuller understanding of his Christian faith” (1969: 254).

The significance of the four poems (first published together in 1944) has been explained in terms of Eliot’s career and spiritual life, but also in relation to literary history. With *Four Quartets*, according to George William Rutler, Anglo-American Modernism comes to an end (2006: 7). Thomas Howard insists on the historical definitiveness of the work, which he ranks among the greatest achievements of Christian art, including Dante’s *Divina Commedia*: “*Four Quartets* stands as Eliot’s valedictory to the modern world. I myself would place it, along with Chartres Cathedral, the *Divine Comedy*, van Eyck’s ‘Adoration of the Mystic Lamb’, and the Mozart Requiem, as a major edifice in the history of the Christian West” (2006: 16).

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Howard describes the thematic core of *Four Quartets* as “the old business of being mortal, that is, intelligent creatures existing *here* and *in time*, when all the while we are profoundly dissatisfied with this dismal sequence of past, present and future” (2006: 20; author’s emphasis). Human experience of time and its transcendence become pivotal motifs in these poetic compositions, whose imagery has the complexity and allusiveness typical of Eliot’s style.

The imagery of *Four Quartets* makes Eliot’s indebtedness to Dante’s poetic imagination evident. In his essay “Dante”, Eliot praises the medieval poet’s imaginative excellence: “One can feel only awe at the power of the master who could thus at every moment realize the inapprehensible in visual images” (1932: 227). Eliot also points out that Dantean imagery is admirably coherent and, far from being ornamental, plays a central role: “Such figures are not merely antiquated rhetorical devices, but serious and practical means of making the spiritual visible” (1932: 228).

Like Dante, the Eliot of *Four Quartets* concerns himself, more intensely than ever before, with “making the spiritual visible”. The concepts of temporal neutralisation and the resulting eternal present, central to Eliot’s poetic sequence, are effectively conveyed through the images of “midwinter spring” and the “still point” —both of Dantean inspiration or influence, as we will see.³ The purpose of this paper, however, cannot be simply to confirm this influence, which was straightforwardly acknowledged by Eliot and has been thoroughly researched.⁴ The detailed analysis of these two specific Dantean images will lead to a consideration of their

role in Eliot's practice of poetry: expressing or revealing poetic thought and, in characteristically Eliotic manner, causing the poems where they appear to contain literary tradition. In the following two sections, midwinter spring and the still point will be compared and examined in the context of *Four Quartets* and Eliot's poetic production as a whole, as well as in their links with *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso* and other canonical literary texts.

2. Midwinter spring. Eternal spring, Eternal present

The profound dissatisfaction with the “dismal sequence of past, present and future” —as Howard puts it— the anxiety produced by the weight of temporality and by inescapable mortality leads to a lofty aspiration, underlying some of the best lines of *Four Quartets*, specifically, to transcend the temporal in order to reach the timeless. The transcendence of the temporal has various imaginative translations in Eliot's work, the midwinter spring in “Little Gidding” being one of them:

Midwinter spring is its own season
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic. (Eliot 1974: 201)

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Liberation from the temporal is represented by a paradox —a season that is eternal and “suspended in time”, but also affected by the rotation of the earth and therefore becoming “sodden towards sundown”. The apparent contradiction is also implicit in the adjective chosen by the poet: as Moody points out, the adjective *sempiternal* “seems to comprehend time and eternity in the one word” (1994: 150).

A.V.C. Schmidt has linked the midwinter spring scene to William Langland's *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, completed towards the end of the fourteenth century. Schmidt laments the generalised lack of interest in this English medieval poem shown by nineteenth and twentieth century poets writing in English, but adds:

T.S. Eliot, however, who had alluded to Chaucer's *General Prologue* in the opening of *The Waste Land*, paid an appropriate tribute to Langland in the opening of his last great poem, *Little Gidding*, which recalls both the opening of Langland's *Prologue* and his ecstatic lines on the Holy Ghost in Passus XVII [...] In doing so he showed an unerring sense of the nature of poetic tradition. (Schmidt 1993: xix)

Langland's poem's stylised opening, typically medieval, rejoices in spring and summer: it was “in a somer seson whan soft was the sonne” that the Dreamer “went wyde in þis world wondres to here”; it was “on a May mornyng” that he had “a merueilouse sweuene” (Langland 1972: 1). The protagonist's adventure begins, like Dante's, in spring and in a “selva selvaggia” (Dante 1961a: 22), “in a

wilderness” (Langland 1972: 1).⁵ In Passus XVII, the power of the Holy Spirit is said to melt into mercy as the winter sun quickly melts icicles:

So þat þe holygoste gloweth but as a glede,
Tyl þat lele loue ligge on hym & blowe,
And þanne flaumbeth he as fyre on fader & on *filius*,
And meltheth her myzte in-to mercy as men may se in wyntre
Ysekeles in euses þorw hete of þe sonne,
Melteth in a mynut while to myst & to watre;
[...]. (Langland 1972: 314-315)⁶

The detailed examination of the opening of “Little Gidding” developed below will confirm that Eliot’s depiction of midwinter spring, characterised by the complementary opposition of cold and heat, is comparable to Langland’s metaphors, conveying the workings of the Holy Trinity. But the purpose here is to explore the Dantean component of the images mentioned above. Several connections between the beginning of “Little Gidding” and Dante’s great work can be established. After having climbed the stairways connecting the seven terraces of the mountain of Purgatory in the company of Virgil, Dante finds himself in the Earthly paradise, where the fair lady Matilda describes the place for him in the following terms:

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Qui fu innocente l’umana radice;
qui primavera sempre ed ogni frutto;
nettare è questo di che ciascun dice.
[Here the human root was innocent, here was lasting spring and every fruit, this is the nectar of which each tells]. (Dante 1961b: 370-371)⁷

Perpetual spring characterises the Garden of Eden or Earthly Paradise, at the top of the mountain of Purgatory. In *Paradiso*, Beatrice, in instructing Dante about the arrangement of the different spheres of Heaven, compares the angelic orders to the flowers of a “primavera sempiterna” (Dante 1961c: 408). In the fourth canto, she has explained to her pupil that the presentation of Heaven as a succession of hierarchically organised spheres is only a device—an objective correlative, it could be argued, to use the critical term coined by Eliot himself—used to suit human understanding, which relies on sensual impressions. Dante is to understand that all the blessed souls whom he meets in time and space on his journey through the heavenly spheres do not deserve identical exaltation, although all of them are part of the timeless, spaceless Empyrean.

The Empyrean is the last of the Ten Heavens and Dante’s final destination. The fact that it is made entirely of light reinforces the connection with midwinter spring: Perkins suggests that the lyrical speaker in this scene of “Little Gidding” finds himself in the “heart of light”, and not simply gazing at it (1969: 255). In

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Paradiso, St Benedict's description of the Emyrean as a state of blessedness rather than a physical space subject to the changes of the natural year, also bears some resemblance to Eliot's midwinter spring, which can be taken to represent the non-spatial and non-temporal condition of spiritual fulfilment —“very close to the final state of Christian beatitude”, Perkins argues (1969: 257). From the Sphere of Saturn, St Benedict says about the Emyrean:

Ivi è perfetta, matura ed intera
ciascuna disianza; in quella sola
è ogni parte là ove sempr'era,
perchè non è in loco, e non s'impola.

[There all we long for is perfect, ripe and whole. In it alone each part is where it always was, for it is not in space and does not turn on poles]. (Dante 1961c: 318-321)

As John D. Sinclair explains, the Emyrean is the space “where there is no past and future and all time is present, where desire is one with fulfilment” (1961: 328). Beatrice refers to the eternal present of the Emyrean as well, when she tells Dante of what she has seen “là 've s'apunta ogni ubi e ogni quando” [there where every *ubi* and every *quando* is centred] (Dante 1961c: 416-417). From an examination of the possible Dantean references in Eliot's midwinter spring lines, it can be concluded that the notion of an eternal spring leads to the notion of an eternal present, an oxymoron that represents the dissolution of the temporal sequence —indeed, of time itself. An alternative to sequential time is envisaged as *Four Quartets* works toward a conclusion (in “Little Gidding”), but the poet philosopher had already pondered over the subject at the beginning of the sequence (in “Burnt Norton” I), in challengingly abstract terms:

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*. (Eliot 1974: 177; emphasis added)

The line of time will inevitably lead the determined quester to the timeless the point where it “is always present”. Time must be fully redeemed, until it becomes “unredeemable”; no longer experienced as past, present and future, it will be transformed into a present that “is not time, but the essence of the perceiving consciousness which expands into eternity” (Kobakhidze 2011: 54). An allusion to Saint Augustine, who thought of “the passage of time as one in a durationless instant”, has been identified in the lines above. Augustine contemplates an eternal present that liberates from the constraints of memories, prospects and speculations:

“[it] redeems the time and loosens the fetters of past and future” (Manganiello 1989: 101).

The timeless is inherent to midwinter spring, which is also defined by the pairing of antithetic concepts —the same is true of the image of the still point, as we will see. In the eternal season, the cold of winter and the warmth of spring can coincide; the ice can burn and the reign of winter kindles the spirit. The lines from Movement I of “Little Gidding”, following those quoted above, read:

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. (Eliot 1974: 201)

These conceptual and imaginative oppositions are reminiscent of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, first described as a unifying metaphysical device by the medieval theologian Nicholas Cusanus (1401-1464): “He perceived the finite world with its variety and multiplicity (opposites) as finding resolution and knowability only in a transcendent unity of truth” (Richardson and Bowden 1983: 112). Rational thought relies on discrimination and opposition; Cusanus advocates neutralising coincidence and the *docta ignorantia* as alternative avenues to the Absolute (Richardson and Bowden 1983: 112).

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David Moody explains that, in Eliot’s pairs, the emphasis is laid on the positive elements, these being fire, flames and heat —as opposed to frost, ice and cold. As far as these oppositions are concerned, “their effect is to hold in tension opposing qualities, without resolving or reconciling them, and in such a way that the negative intensifies the positive. [...] This is neither negation nor transcendence, but an intensification of what is actual, or an expansion of the actual towards the ideal” (Moody 1996: 244).

The tone becomes increasingly aspirational in the first stanza of “Little Gidding”, which ends with a rhetorical question and an image that is the logical development of midwinter spring: “Where is the summer, the unimaginable/ Zero summer?” (Eliot 1974: 201). The aspiration is to reach the ideal timeless, but through the actuality of the temporal, which is never rejected on principle (Howard 2006: 40). In the lines quoted from “Little Gidding”, the fire that coexists with the frost emanates from the Holy Spirit, as the adjective “pentecostal”, used by Eliot a few lines below, makes clear. Midwinter spring, outside time and space, is symbolic of spiritual peace:

[...] This is the spring time
But not in time’s covenant. Now the hedgerow
Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom

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Of snow, a bloom more sudden
Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
Not in the scheme of generation. (Eliot 1974: 201)

With the lines analysed so far, Eliot comes back to the spring motif, some twenty years after *The Waste Land* (1922). Midwinter spring can be thought of as the reversal of the negative spring with which the latter poem famously opens:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers. (Eliot 1974: 53)

Certain images can be set against each other (breed/dead land, spring/winter, rain/dried, warm/snow), although they are not combined to produce paradoxes. These lines have been associated with the conventional spring opening of the “General Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales*; on the other hand, and as we saw, Schmidt connects Movement I of “Little Gidding” with *Piers Plowman*. The mystic vision of midwinter spring and the poet’s perceptive registering of its subtleties contrast with the cruelty of April and the gloomy negation of life with which “The Burial of the Dead”, the first section of *The Waste Land*, begins. Farahbakhsh and Habibi note that the time references in this poem are either to the literary past or to the poet’s present (2012: 35, 38) —the eternal present of midwinter spring is not an imaginative possibility yet. Stephen Spender called the “Unreal City”, where *The Waste Land* is set, “the *temporal* city of total conditioning” (1975: 90), and referred to Eliot’s decision to give his poetry a religious intent —from “Journey of the Magi” (1927) onwards— as a move “towards the city *outside time*” (1975: 123, emphasis added). “Little Gidding” is the culmination of this process; midwinter spring is beyond the temporal, not ruled by “time’s covenant” or “the scheme of generation”, and is therefore an image of the timeless.

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3. The still point. Where past and future are gathered

If midwinter spring is a case in point of the imagery of eternity or the timeless, the still point is an even clearer example. Various sources of inspiration have been put forward: Aristotle, Plato, early Christian theologians, Hinduist and Buddhist symbols, and of course Dante (Kobakhidze 2011: 55, 57). We first recognise the still point, presented in a way that anticipates the imaginative patterns of *Four Quartets*, in “Triumphal March”, one of the “unfinished poems” published

in 1931— five years before “Burnt Norton”— under the title *Coriolan*. In “Triumphal March”, the Major, a heroic figure, finds himself “at the still point of the turning world”, as the military march that he is taking part in advances. The Major seems to be enjoying a private moment of illumination, isolated from the surrounding vanity of the parade. Images of refuge and placid isolation, as well as the reiteration of the past participle “hidden”, are indicative of the spiritual peace of this introspective moment:

There is no interrogation in his eyes
Or in the hands, quiet over the horse’s neck,
And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent.
O hidden under the dove’s wing, hidden in the turtle’s breast,
Under the palm tree at noon, under the running water
At the still point of the turning world. O hidden. (Eliot 1974: 130)

The still point represents the coexistence of movement and stillness, of the physical and the metaphysical, of past and future. In these pairings, neither element prevails: it is neither one nor the other, and both at the same time. Opposites are reconciled, as heat and cold are in midwinter spring, as a variety of concepts are in the so-called “garden of paradoxes”, in Movement II of *Ash Wednesday* (1930). This poem, which appeared three years after Eliot’s conversion, “describes the process of spiritual progression from a condition of despair to a point where belief is possible” (Dickens 1989: 150). Through the first wavering stages of the journey of faith, the Lady of the Garden is a reassuring presence, as well as the embodiment of the *coincidentia oppositorum* referred to earlier:

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful (Eliot 1974: 88)

Contrary attributes, states of mind and concepts characterise this protecting female figure. Two opposites similarly coincide in the image of the still point —movement (or “the dance”) and stillness. As a representation of this coincidence, the still point has three images that could be called “satellite images”, appearing in Movement V of “Burnt Norton”. The first one is the Chinese jar, which does not move but has movement represented on its surface: “a Chinese jar still/ Moves perpetually in its stillness”. These lines, with the semantic ambivalence of *still* (both adverb and adjective) adding to the paradox, invite abstract reflection that ends with the conclusion that there is nothing but a seamless present:

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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*. [...] (Eliot 1974: 182; emphasis added)

The image of the Chinese jar has been linked to John Keats' "Grecian urn", which seems to have a comparable effect on the viewer: "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/ As doth eternity" (2006: 905-906). The ideational component of the images, however, cannot be equated if "the moments of intense experience in attitudes of grace" depicted on the urn cause Keats to think of it as "the perfect correlative for his concern with the longing for permanence in a world of change" (2006: 905, 1n), the simultaneous movement and stillness of the Chinese jar suggest "ceasing to live and move in time" (Moody 1996: 194).

A second related image is that of the stairs, introduced in the last movement of "Burnt Norton": "The detail of the pattern is movement,/ As in the figure of the ten stairs" (Eliot 1974: 182). The image was most probably taken from the poetry and prose commentaries of the Spanish mystic John of the Cross, where the "figure" stands for the soul's journey, divided into ten stages that correspond to "the ten stairs" (Ruano 1974: 678-682). As Howard notes, the stairs "have no purpose at all other than movement. But they themselves are motionless" (2006: 62).

The reference to "the figure of the ten stairs" is followed by a reflection on the dissociation of desire from love, which is "unmoving" while being "the cause and end of movement" (Eliot 1974: 182). To conclude, Eliot chooses another image of the simultaneity of movement and stillness: the shaft of light, which appears to be still, but where dust slowly moves.

Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
Even while the dust moves
There rises the hidden laughter
Of children in the foliage
Quick now, here, now, always—
Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after. (Eliot 1974: 182-183)

Before becoming an eternal present, time is "ridiculous", "waste" and "sad". The shaft of sunlight communicates a sense of circularity, as it coincides with "the hidden laughter/ Of children in the foliage" —the children who had been heard in the rose garden, in Movement I, where "the pool was filled with water out of sunlight". Interestingly, a similar image is used by Dante as one of the terms of a simile: the lights around the sparkling cross of souls —those of the "Warriors of the Faith"— in the Sphere of Mars, in canto XIV of *Paradiso*, are compared to "minuzie de' corpi" in a "raggio" (Dante 1961c: 206).

As we learn from the second Movement of “Burnt Norton”, movement and stillness, among other opposites, are to be found

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (Eliot 1974: 179)

“Past and future are gathered” at the still point, their conjunction resulting in a constant present. As a poetic image, the still point was inspired by *The Divine Comedy*. In *Paradiso*, God appears as a point of dazzling light:

un punto vidi che raggiava lume
acuto sì, che'l viso ch'elli affoca
chiuder conviensi per lo forte acume
[I saw a point which radiated a light so keen that the eye on which it burns must
close for its piercing power]. (Dante 1961c: 403)

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God is still, but causes the heavens to move and spin —what Eliot calls “the dance”, cosmic or universal harmony. Paradoxically, on the still point the movement of the whole universe depends.

In canto XVII of *Paradiso*, Dante had the privilege of conversing with his ancestor Cacciaguida —one among the heroic Christian warriors in the Sphere of Mars. Dante has Cacciaguida predict his exile from Florence and attributes his predictive power to the vision of the point of light:

così vedi le cose contingenti
anzi che sieno in sè, mirando il punto
a cui tutti li tempi son presenti
[gazing on the point to which all times are present, seest contingent things before
they are in themselves]. (Dante 1961c: 243)

Cacciaguida’s prediction of Dante’s destiny is an instance of the temporal relativity which the Italian poet skilfully takes advantage of in the *Commedia*. By making the year of his vision 1300, he is able to present past events as future happenings. These events are past with respect to the time of the poem’s composition and future with respect to the year of the vision. In other words, past and future are, if not gathered at an eternal present, relativised by the narrative technique. Dante’s future exile had already been communicated to him by the miniature artist Oderisi, a penitent in the first terrace of Purgatory (canto XI). In a previous canto of *Purgatorio* (VIII), we find a further example of these pseudo-predictions: Conrad Malaspina’s reference to Dante’s stay with his family in Tuscany.

4. Midwinter spring and the still point, their function and significance

The conclusions of the analysis of midwinter spring and the still point must again focus on their common referent —eternal present, or the timeless— as well as on their mutual reliance on paradox, which not only fuels the two images under consideration, but *Four Quartets* as a whole, as Moody argues: “The further we go into the poem the more we find that its music does not resolve its contradictions but rather becomes the music of a profound and irreducible contradiction” (1994: 142). Roger Bellin contends that contradiction and paradox, among other features of Eliot’s sequence, prevent it from reaching a definite resolution (2007: 422).⁸ The mind of the poem works largely through paradox —and the attendant device of *coincidentia oppositorum*— but this is not exceptional: according to Cleanth Brooks, paradox is of the very essence of poetry, especially when the subject matter is love or religion (1968: 1, 13).

Eliot’s use of paradox in *Four Quartets* has been identified as a clear influence from Dante (Kobakhidze 2011: 55). Connections between midwinter spring, the still point and other images in Eliot’s poetic production (the negative spring, the garden “where all loves end”, the Chinese jar, the stairs, the shaft of sunlight) have been established, and other less direct influences (Augustine, Langland, John of the Cross or Keats) considered. Eliot’s images are characteristically cohesive and allusive. Longenbach clarifies that allusion “in the later poetry” works differently in that “Eliot alludes more openly to poets whom he loved”, rather than abiding by his axiom that the best poets are those who have developed “the historical sense” (1994: 185-186).⁹ Among the poets whom Eliot loved, Dante is the one who first comes to mind: in his essay “What Dante Means to Me”, the Anglo-American poet refers to the Italian master’s poetry as “the most persistent and deepest influence upon my own verse” (1978: 125).

Considering the origins and significance of the images of midwinter spring and the still point not only confirms the influence of Dante, the poet who most vividly objectified a state of blessedness and the successive stages leading to it. As a critic, Eliot was especially sensitive to Dante’s prodigious imagination and as a poet, he followed his example of relying on imagery. Midwinter spring and the still point are examples of “the poem’s textual incarnation of its elusive meaning” (Bellin 2007: 428). They successfully reveal the theme of *Four Quartets*: namely, the spiritual urge to transcend time and reach the timeless, imagined as an eternal present. Finally, in their coalescence of various allusions, both images are highly representative of Eliot’s style.

Notes

¹ Since each of the “quartets” were originally published separately, their titles are sometimes italicised. They appear between inverted commas here (to emphasise that they are part of a sequence), except in quotes from secondary sources whose authors (e.g. Schmidt or Moody) choose to reproduce the titles in italics.

² Unitarianism, which rejects Trinitarianism and the divinity of Jesus, was Eliot’s religious background. As a young man, Eliot felt unable to relate to Unitarianism, “the religion he had come to consider as a substitute for religion”, one that “leads to skepticism rather than faith” (Spears Brooker 1994: 128). For a description of Eliot’s evolution from Unitarianism to Anglo-Catholicism, see the chapter “In Search of Faith” in Ackroyd 1984: 149-177.

³ The names of these two images will not appear between quotation marks subsequently.

⁴ Eliot overtly quoted Dante in his poems. He also wrote about his own poetry and its connections with Dante’s in two essays, “Dante” and “What Dante Means to Me”. Manganiello wrote the first monograph on the topic, *T.S. Eliot and Dante* (1989). More recently, *T.S. Eliot, Dante and the Idea of Europe* explores different facets of Dante’s influence on Eliot, but imagery is not a primary focus of attention. See “Works Cited” for details.

⁵ “On a summer time, when the sun was mild”; “wandered abroad in this world, listening out for its strange and wonderful events”; “one May morning”; “an extraordinary dream”; “an empty desert place” (Langland 1992: 1). Translations into Present Day English by A. V. C. Schmidt.

⁶ “The Holy Spirit, though, can be no more than a glowing ember, until true love bends over him and blows. When this thing happens, he flames up before the Father and the Son, making their power melt until it dissolves into mercy. You can see this happen in winter, when icicles on the house-eaves, under the sun’s heat, dissolve into liquid drops and vapour in the space of a mere minute” (Langland 1992: 204-205). Present Day English translation by A. V. C. Schmidt.

⁷ Translations into English are by John D. Sinclair.

⁸ Bellin focuses on the discursive passages of *Four Quartets* and on the paradox that they recurrently express: their voice, “the voice of argument”, complains that poetry is unsuitable as a medium to achieve the goal that the poem sets itself, i.e. reaching the timeless through the temporal. Hence, the negative theology that informs the poem is parallel with a form of “negative poetics” (2007: 427, 434).

⁹ Eliot wrote about the *historical sense* in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, published in 1919.

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