

Turning to the Mystics



T.S. Eliot

Bonus: Malcolm Guite on T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets (Part 2)

with James Finley and Kirsten Oates

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome everyone, to season 10 of Turning to the Mystics where we've been turning to T.S. Elliot and his poetry in four quartets. This episode is part two of our conversation with Malcolm Guite and in today's episode, Jim, Malcolm and myself reflect on the third and fourth poems in Four Quartets. The fourth poem, Little Gidding is the grand finale to all three poems where we find our way to a little chapel, to kneel where prayer has been valid and where we see the mystical nature of all the poems. So with that, I'm going to hand over to you Jim, and you are going to just take us through a small section of the third poem, Dry Salvages, before we move on to Little Gidding. And so we're going to part five of Dry Salvages about halfway through.

Jim Finley: So I'll read it. Men's curiosity searches past and future and clings to that dimension. But to apprehend the point of intersection of the timeless with time is the occupation of the saint. No occupation either, but something given and taken in a lifetime's death in love. For most of us, there is only the unattended moment, the moment in and out of time, the distraction fit loss in a shaft of sunlight. I'd like to reflect on this for a minute with you. It's really true, we ruminate over the past and we worry about the future. But when they're in these moments of the intersection of time and eternity under the great barber and the drafty church, the quiet hour at Days Inn, we're momentarily in this eternity and we're at the intersection, but is saying the saint is not content to simply know these fleeting moments where time and eternity are intermingled in an alchemy that they're one, but rather the saint seeks to live there.

See, how can I abide in the experience of the intersection that alone is ultimately real? And it's not just an intersection but also, it's a death. Let me find the text here. In a Lifetime's death and love, I love that phrase, it's a lifetime of endlessly dying to everything that's endlessly passing away, so that which never passes away, can shine out through everything passing away as holiness. So what do you see in that, Malcolm? I love that passage.

Malcolm Guite: I think he's been setting up for us from the very first poem, this problem or this question if you like, the intersection of time and the timeless, about the timeless moment, about how through time, time is conquered, about whether we can redeem the time. This is the constant theme. And he returns to it here and I think he places it right at the heart of Christian vocation. So to apprehend and I think he's very clear, I think he's Shakespearizing in his use of the word apprehend there, that imagination apprehends more than cool reason ever comprehends. We must apprehend some joy before we comprehend the bringer of that joy. But to apprehend the point of intersection of the timeless with time is an occupation for the saint, and that means all of us. And no occupation either, but something given and taken. That's brilliant. He's no sooner said it than he needs to think. I don't want to turn this into a work. It's a moment of receipt. It's a moment of openness to what's given.

And he goes on, something given and taken in a lifetime's death in love. Yes, that's one of the great phrases, arder in selflessness and self-surrender. And then he brings the rest of us in that

aren't John of the Cross or anybody else, and I feel really grateful for his welcoming charity and the fact that he includes himself in the others, in the rest of us. So he says, for most of us there is only the unattended moment, the moment in and out of time, the distract... And do you know we're right back with those three moments that he was telling us about in the earlier poem. He's gathering it all up. He's telling all of us, we have these moments and he's saying, pay attention. Pay attention when that happens.

Lost in a shaft of sunlight, the wild time unseen or the winter lightning, or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all, but you are the music while the music lasts. I think he's saying in these poems, I may not any more than you be able to express a lifetime self-surrender in the way that perhaps John of the Cross does. But I share with you the unattended moments, and what I'm trying to do to offer you in my poem is the gift of attention that it is by the poetry that we attend to the unattended moments. And I think of the Four Quartets not as a kind of lofty thing, I wish I could have mystical experiences like that. I see it much more as a series of worked examples with a kind of go and do thou likewise. You apprehend these moments with him, in order to be able to better apprehend them when you suddenly see something lost in a shaft of sunlight, when you are in whatever your equivalent is of the arbor where the rain beat.

And then the humility of it, the he follows, you are the music while the music lasts. One of the greatest lines or phrases of English poetry. And then he goes, "Oh, these are only hints followed by guesses. And the rest is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." And then I think one of the great moments of affirmation in the poem, the hint half guessed, the gift half understood is incarnation. Lewis said that every poem is a little incarnation. And I think that's what he's doing, he's kind of bodying forth for us these things. But he can only do it and we can only receive it because ultimately the word Himself, bodied forth. It was incarnate that in Christ there genuinely is a meeting of the eternal and time.

Jim Finley: I have one more thing I want to add on here before we move into Little Gidding, on the same passage. I get a sense of something being implied here and tell me how this strikes you, is that it's really true we're aware, we're momentarily at the intersection and we spend most of our life in the unattended moments. But there's an insight to this. Although the attentiveness from our end breaks just occasionally lights up again, it never breaks from God's end. So even the unattended moments are eternally attended by God in the holiness of the incidental holiness of simple things and he's trying to breathe that atmospheric divinity of the rhythms of ordinariness this way. How does that strike you? Does that strike you?

Malcolm Guite: I agree with that. I think the sort of theologians can take nice Latin eight words like omniscience and bandy them around, but a poet helps us to attend, well if God knows everything, let's consider some of the everything He knows, including the unattended moment when you're washing the dishes and the moment a leaf falls somewhere in a forest, He knows its pattern and its beauty, and I think more, I think He looks at it and sees that it is good. I think the American poet, Wendell Berry is good at this in his sequence of poems called Sabbath. But one of the things that a certain kind of inspired poetry can do is to allow you for a moment, to watch things with God, with God's concentration and time rather than just with your own fleeting distractions.

Kirsten Oates: When the poem resonates with that experience, it can open your mind to it. I love what

you both said and that line “hear the impossible union.” So what I’m hearing is, it’s impossible from our side to create, but it’s always there from God’s side.

Malcolm Guite: I mean, “hear the impossible Union when he says “hear the impossible union, is a direct reply to the despairing moment of all time is unredeemable. Oh yes, it is redeemable, but this is where it’s redeemable, in this union which is incarnation.

Kirsten Oates: Well, onto the finale, Little Gidding.

Jim Finley: The grand finale. Yeah, Little Gidding.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, do you want to get us started?

Jim Finley: Yes. I’ll start with my sense of this. He kind of begins again with these strange kind of fleetingness of time, spring and summer and winter, he goes on like before. And then he says, “if you came this way.” And the way means this way to Little Gidding and then he says, “taking the route you’d likely take on your way home from work,” whatever it is.

Malcolm Guite: Well he say, taking the route you’d like to take from the place you’d be likely to come from, is a very oblique way of talking about Cambridge because Little Gidding is not that far. And he visited little Gidding from Cambridge and was taken there in I think, 1936 by a guy called Maycock. And the truth is that most people do come to Little Gidding by one particular route from Cambridge, because it tends to be people in Cambridge who’ve heard of Little Gidding, because it’s a tiny, tiny little place in the middle of nowhere. It’s on the smallest of back roads. You would go buy it and not even know it was there unless you were really looking for it.

Jim Finley: I want to say something here in kind of theological language in parentheses, that he’s going to poetically give witness to, is that in his faith in Christ through Jesus, which is when we kneel where prayer’s been valid, we don’t have to find our way out of time. We don’t have to wait for these little timeless moments in the midst of time, for in Jesus the infinite love of God, the word became flesh and dwelt among us. And God enters in to the very time of the times of our life. So for me to live is Christ. So Jesus lives our life. Jesus suffers our suffering. Jesus dies our death. And the resurrection of Jesus bears witness to our resurrection. Not just when we die into glory, it gives witness to the resurrection that’s born out of these awakening moments, that God’s already unexplainably present in the ordinariness of everything. And when we come to this realization, no matter how you come, you didn’t expect to come there. No matter how you come, you might fall off the cliff, you’re just dropped into this serendipitous place. What do you make of this way I’m setting this up? How does that strike you? What would you say?

Malcolm Guite: I like that. I think this is very much a poem about having the humility to receive what God has to give you in Christ. And there’s a bit where he says, He has this list of reasons that you might have given yourself on your English itinerary like he did in 1936 of why you might want to make a visit to this place. And he ticks them all off and says, forget it. Just jettison all of those things. So he says, you are not here. If you came this day, take any route starting anywhere, it would always be the same.

You would have to put off sense and notion. Any notion you had of what this was about, let it go, leave it outside. It's like God saying to Moses, take off those shoes from off thy feet. Just unbuckle it, leave it behind, because you're not here to verify, instruct yourself or inform curiosity, or carry report. That's about five or six reasons why most people go to places. He says forget it. And then he says really simple language, "You are here to kneel where prayer has been valid."

And then comes that beautiful thing, that prayer is more than an order of words and so on. You are here to be in this moment. And I take great pleasure from this and I particularly used to take pleasure bringing groups of students from Cambridge and reading this to them in the chapel, because it's an uber competitive place, everybody's trying to do better than everybody else. Everybody cares about their marks. And then later on when we're in social media, everybody wants more. It's a very burdened, work driven, you've got to do stuff and prove yourself. And Elliot says, just take all that off, put it off, take it away. You're not going to do any of that. Just kneel and receive. And that when people get that, it's so beautiful and refreshing when it happens.

Jim Finley: Well in our talks together, Kirsten pointed this out, we could take this stanza as guidelines for contemplative prayer. Totally. So we could walk through each one and see how in contemplative prayer, contemplative prayer embodies this very thing. So you'd have to put off sense and notion. So when you kneel in contemplative prayer, you'd have to put off any previous sense. For one, what the senses are able to touch and see and feel. But also your sense, all your assumptions about what it was about being fined out are completely inadequate here. And you're not here for a report to go back, what are you going to say? What are you going to explain? You're not here to prove anything because it's God. And so because we don't need to do anything because it's already achieved in dying words of Jesus on the cross, "it is consummated." But we need to do something. We need to kneel and be receptively open because love's never imposed, it's always offered. And so this is the devotional sincerity of prayer in which comes all out into the open here. How does that strike you too, Malcolm?

Malcolm Guite: That I absolutely agree with all of that. I mean there's a paradox here, isn't there? On the one hand, we're so used to sense and nation and we're so used to all our busy verifying and instructing ourselves and informing, do you know what I mean? It's kind of been part of our routine of self-justification. So in one way it's quite hard to undo all that, it's quite scary to leave it behind. So it's a hard thing. But on the other hand it's kind of the easiest thing in the world to do, because that stuff has been screwing us up and weighing us down for years. So to have an invitation to just totally let it go is wonderful.

The whole first part of this poem is about how we approach this moment where we can kneel, but he prepares us for it in the earlier bit where he appears to be only describing the heat and the light,, and the roads and the ditches and the hedges, but he's already given you this idea of something that's frozen up finally being unfrozen, and he gives you the idea of this beautiful image of the soul sap quivering. There's something in you that's been waiting for this moment, waiting for this to be allowed. And the soul sap, I think is really important, because I think it obliquely refers to

Jesus saying, “I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me. Without me you can do nothing.” So finally at last, be rooted into this branch, let the soul sap come up from the root of Christ and not from some dumb thing you think you have to do.

I mean perhaps you’re going to look at this passage later, but in *Burnt Norton*, we had as it were, the ghost of a fire, the place has burned down, people have lost their lives. And we have the roses. We have the image of the fire and the image of the rose, but they’re sort of separate. We’ve turned from the burnt place to look at the roses. A rose of course, is sometimes a symbol of the fleetingness of time. “Gather ye rose buds while you may all time, here’s a flying and sure the flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying.” But there’s something eternal about the rose. And as he comes towards Dante in this, we suddenly get the rose. And I don’t know if you know, you probably know that although it’s set in *Little Gidding*, he was writing it in London during the Blitz, and the bombs were falling everywhere. And he was a fire watcher, so he actually went out onto the streets in the early morning after the dawn raids and reported back where fires were, so that the ambulances could get there. He was an American who stayed with us in the war rather than leaving.

I think the extraordinary thing where in a terrible destructive way fire and rose come together when he sees this house, it’s like one whole story, is just dust in the air suspended, marks the place where a story ended. ash on an old man’s sleeve as all the ash burnt roses leave. For a moment, rose and fire come together destructively. And he shows you the bleakness of our kind of the wars of our... All that happens because we don’t reside in Christ. And then he takes those two images at the end, the very same image of the rose and the fire and he brings them together at the end of the poem in the eternal fire of God’s love. It’s just almost too wonderful to give words to, what he does in this poem.

Jim Finley: What do you make of this? Staying on the same theme for a moment. You know what this also, I think there’s so many moments in scripture that embodied this. When they’re in exile and Moses is out walking alone in the wilderness and he sees the bush burning, but it’s not burning up, that is he’s beyond cause-effect relationship.

Malcolm Guite: That’s obviously one of the kind of great turning points, great moments of scripture. And lots of biblical commentators from the early fathers onwards saw this bush, which is still a bush, it’s still rooted, it’s never lost any of its bushiness, and yet it’s a flame with the divine presence. They saw that as a foreshadowing of the coming of Christ, the impossible union, that he has fully human nature and fully divine nature. And his divine nature doesn’t burn up or destroy or override his human nature any more than the bush is consumed. So it seems to me that the bush is not only symbolic of those moments of illumination that we’ve been talking about throughout, but it is also a biblical foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus, I think.

Jim Finley: What do you think of this idea too? We think of the birth of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the suffering of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus. But what if actually they’re all collapsed as the true nature of the present moment, that is the burning bush of the divinity of what immediately is? It’s like non-sequential holiness concretely manifested in very concrete images, a burning bush and he’s trying to sensitize us to this. How’s that strike you? What do you make of-

Malcolm Guite: Well I think of course, we experience things in time, because we are in time. But if God is eternal then every moment of time is equally and eternally present to Him. So He sees the crucifixion and the resurrection. And He's in the crucifixion and the resurrection in some sense at the same moment, although they're sequenced out for us. So I think there's a lot in that. Towards the end of this poem, he's kind of channeling a lot of Dante. And Dante you may remember, gets finally up into the imperial. He thinks he's been traveling out from the center of the earth, up through all these different spheres of heaven and the sphere of fire and everything, and the primum mobili. So he thinks he's going to find God on this final height, outer edge.

But when he gets there, he experiences a complete paradigm and perspective shift and he realizes he's been traveling into a center, and it's the center of the rose, and that all the things of time and the beings are folding out like petals and the angels are going back and forth like bees, and he was always traveling in towards this center. And what he sees in the center is love. I mean the last line of the poem is, "the love that moves the sun and the other stars." And I think there's something like this going on at the end of this poem, particularly when he says, "and the fire and the rose are one."

When he quotes Julian and says, "he takes all those moments that we had and got left, and it goes quick,, now here, now, always. A condition of complete simplicity, costing not less than everything." And dense Julian all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well. But this, "when the tongues of flame are enfolded into the crowned not of fire, and the fire and the rose are one." That seems to me to be again, one of the supreme lines of mystical poetry.

Jim Finley: Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: So what I'm hearing is the fire of suffering and the fire of transformation are one, and that's the pattern that this poem has been pointing to. And Jim, you brought up Pentecost too as one of these pointers for fire.

Jim Finley: Yes. Do we burn by pyre or pyre? So this poem is going to end this way too. There is the fire of the burning, of the falling away of all things in time and the burning when we're caught in that as if it's claustrophobic, it's one dimensional. We're nothing but the self that things happen to. But then there's a fire of Pentecost as fire by fire. And the fire of Pentecost, I love this phrase in John of the Cross, "to have no light to guide you except the one that burns in your heart." There is this timeless divine fire that's actually burning in the midst of our suffering, in the midst of our daily life, and that's another seminal thing that starts emerging out of Little Gidding. Malcolm, what do you make of that? How do you-

Malcolm Guite: Well, I agree with you. And this is the Pentecost. You know that the four quartets were also... I talked about how patterned they are, the music. So one of the patterns is he took the ancient four elements out of which everything is made and each quartet reflects one. Burnt Norton is air. There's a lot about the air in the end echoes the music. East coca is earth, and dry salvages is water, but the fourth element of course, is fire. So this is the fire quartet. He gets you straight there. He's looking at this light reflected. It's midwinter spring, there's a kind of spring in the middle of winter. And then he says, "a glow more intense than blaze of branch." I think there's the burning bush, "a glow more intent than blaze of branch or burning brazier stirs the dumb spirit. No wind, but Pentecostal fire in the dark time of the

year.” He’s getting us ready.

And in the bit about the blitz, he talks about the terrible thing of the kind of anti-Pentecost, if you like, of fire from heaven in the sense of these bombs being dropped. And he calls the Luftwaffe planes as they’re going back, he says “after the dark dove with the flickering tongue had passed below the horizon of his homing.” And then he says, “which fire do we want to have here?” Then he gives you the great lyric, the dove, the is the real dove. There’s “the dove descending, breaks the air...” But it’s not sentimental.

“The dove descending breaks the air with flame of incandescent terror, of which the tongues declare the one release from sin or error. The only hope or else despair lies in the choice of pyre or pyre to be redeemed from fire by fire.” And it’s the fire of if you like, time burning everything up, the cauldron of our lusts, all that stuff. It’s another fire. That fire has to be answered by fire and it’s the other fire, the fire of the dove descending, which is the one that redeems us. We are redeemed from fire by fire. I mean, it’s astonishing writing. And then he’s, “Oh Julian, who then divides the torment?” Love. “Love is the unfamiliar name behind the hands that wove the intolerable shed of flame, which human power cannot remove. We only live only suspire consumed by either fire or fire.” That’s absolutely astonishing.

Kirsten Oates: It’s amazing how without saying the name of Jesus, without saying the name of God, without saying the name of Christ, that there’s so much of that underlying the poem. Yeah. So it’s beautiful to hear that drawn out.

Malcolm Guite: Yeah,. And he’s doing a great thing with this because there’s huge numbers of people who aren’t Christian, and who might not like whatever brand of Christianity they happen to have seen in their neighborhood, who will read this poem and love it. But the more they love it and read it, the more they’re going to be drawn to Christ. Elliot’s faith is a very real thing and has borne real fruit in the world, I think.

Kirsten Oates: What I love about it too, it’s got a deep respect for all mystical traditions, the way he brings in the Bhagavad Gita, the lotus flower, Buddhism, that’s the kind of Christianity I’m interested in, that stands in respect of all mystical traditions, the impossible union.

Malcolm Guite: Yeah. And in fact, he starts with... In the little preface before the poem starts at all, he has these quotations from Heraclitus. He’s a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher. He says, and it’s Heraclitus on... If you read it, you’ll notice that the second word in the Greek is [foreign language 00:26:18]. The Heraclitus means, although the word logos and he’s not letting that word fall, “although the word is common to all, most men live as if they had a private wisdom of their own.” I’m reading from the little epigraphs at the beginning of the poem to [foreign language 00:26:38]. I’m translating the Greek, but it means “although the word is common to all, most men live as if they had a private wisdom of their own.” That’s a really interesting thing to have said because it is personal poem, he is got lots of his own stuff in it. But actually I think what he’s trying to restore to us is the logos, which is common to all.

Jim Finley: I want to move on to where he meets the master, the dead man. I’d like to draw out... It will kind of be ending on this too, because it leads into Dante and the rose, and so I’d like to share a few thoughts that you could pick up on it and share it. And of course it’s the patrols that he would make going out to check with a fire and he’s out walking the street. And he

meets a dead master, and he refers to the master as a compound ghost. And I think the compound ghosts are the masters he's been quoting throughout the whole poem. So it's St John of the Cross, it's the Bhagavad Gita, it's Krishna talking to Arjuna that no one ever dies, is references to the Buddha, the lotus rose slowly from the stream, the middle way of the Buddha. And then primarily though it's really this Christian imagery of it. And especially, he's going to be ending with Julianne of Norwich. "All shall be well, all manner of things shall be well."

And it's like a refrain at the end that it isn't, that all manner of things shall be well when we die and we're in glory, but all manner of things are already unexplainably well, and we shall realize it more and more, and more as we go along. And he says, "and then I took a double form," I take from this. And who I see is this, the double form is that which recognizes this. It speaks to our heart. That is us that sees it, but that is us that doesn't see it yet. So it's almost a double form or these two dimensions of ourself and we're to be endlessly compassionate toward the aspects of ourself that don't see it yet.

And then he says at the end, I'm strangely familiar. I feel so comfortable being with the mystery of this. And it's comfortable because as a child created by God in the image and likeness of God, it's his own true nature as the deathless presence of the beloved in the presence of God. It's like homecoming, where we rest in the naturalness of the miraculous. How would you pick up on some of these nuancing? It's such a beautiful part of that.

Malcolm Guite: I love this great passage, it's the second section of Little Gidding. And it starts where he's, you know, in the uncertain hour before the morning, nearing the ending of interminable night, the recurrent end of the unending after the dark dove with a flickering tongue had passed. It's like an intersection time. It's as though suddenly all times are present to him and this familiar compound ghost, which I think is all you've mentioned, but also supremely Dante, is speaking to him. It's not all good news. What they have to teach him the past. I mean it's a fellow poet coming up to him and he says, "I am not eager to rehearse my thought and theory, which you've forgotten. Last year's words belong to last year's language and next year's words await another voice." But this is great. 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.

And then he goes on and say, "we were poets. Our concern was speech, and speech impelled us" and he says, "let me disclose the gifts reserved for age to set a crown upon your lifetime's effort." And you think, oh, this is very nice. I'm going to be honored by the queen you know, he's all, you know, just at the point where somebody could rest on their laurels. This is a supreme thing, at the moment of his highest poetic achievement, Eliot has Dante come and tell him off and say, "look, you have to let it all go." First there's the cold friction of expiring sense without... He tells him he's going to get old. He tells him he's going to die. He tells him that the very things he thought once were virtuous, probably weren't virtuous at all. Things he'll done and done to others harm, which once you took for exercise of virtue. Think how much evil has been done by people who thought they were doing good.

And then "fool's approval stings and honor stains. From wrong to wrong, the exasperated spirit proceeds." If it had finished there, I would've closed the book and thought, well, I give up. But it doesn't. "from wrong to wrong, the exasperated spirit proceeds." This is great.

“unless restored by that refining fire where you must move in measure like a dancer.” That is fantastic. I think he’s thinking of the moment when after they’ve been purged, they’ve gone all the way up Mount Purgatory, and the last of the sins to be purged. The last and least, but it needs to be purged, nevertheless is last, and it’s symbolized by fire. But now the fire that burned or carried away becomes the purifying fire of God’s love and it turns out to be the fire that guards the garden of Eden and they go through the fire.

And Dante at that point meets a whole bunch of other poets. Maybe poets have lust problems, I don’t know. But anyway, suddenly there’s a load of poets there and he dances through the fire and gets to the garden. So from wrong to wrong, the exasperated spirit proceeds unless restored by that refining fire where you must move in measure like a dancer. God’s love purges us. It’s a fearful thing for events of God, but even gold passes through the assay as fire, so this wonderful refining fire. And I think all of that, which is section two, sets us up for the beautiful Pentecostal poem about the dove descending and then the final fire and the rose one. I love that phrase, “the spirit unappeased and peregrine.” Peregrine like a pilgrim. I was thinking, however old I get, I want to have a spirit unappeased and Peregrine.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, beautiful. That next line between two worlds becoming much like each other, I remember Jim pointing to in that state, in that unappeased state, how everything our life starts to take on this sense of the eternal within the time in our dreams, in our waking life. Yeah.

Malcolm Guite: I hadn’t seen the double figure the way Jim said. I find that really helpful what you said there, Jim, that I assumed a double voice, that that’s the bit of us that gets it and is redeemed in the bit of it that doesn’t get it, and that the one should have compassion on the other. I found that extremely helpful.

Jim Finley: Yeah. And also what I saw in that also, when we’re compassionate or tenderhearted toward the part that still doesn’t get it because it’s reactive and so on, we actually embody that when love touches suffering, the suffering turns love into mercy.

Malcolm Guite: Oh, that’s very good.

Jim Finley: And Jesus is the infinite mercy of God, that kind of flows through and transcends our brokenness itself. It’s a very touching thing. Yeah. I want to paraphrase the end. Malcolm already touched on this, but I want to look at this lovely ending. “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.” That’s beautiful. It’s lovely. “To 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,” referring back to Burt Norton or echoing all this again. “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.” I love that. “Costing nothing less than everything.”

Meister Eckhart says, “It steals the soul from itself. That is it steals from the soul the ability to live by its own resources, anything less than the infinite love of God.” Or just unraveled, is the view from the cross, too I think for Jesus, and all shall be well, and all matter things shall we be well, Julian, when the tongues of flame are unfolded in the crown not of fire

and the fire in the rose are one. My sense is this, it gets echoing Dante the rose. But another thing I think in this, what do you see this? The fire and the rose are one, is that the fire of our suffering and the fire of Pentecost, the deliverance from suffering are one. There's a mysterious alchemy of the suffering, and the deliverance from suffering. It's kind of a mystical quickening or a realization of the oneness of birth and death, and gain and loss and suffering and joy, and he's inviting us to hope... How does that strike you, what I'm saying here?

Malcolm Guite: Well, I think if we're to speak of redeeming time or if speak of redemption at all, then everything has to be redeemed, including suffering. So it's not enough to say, "oh, thank God my suffering's over, now I'm in heaven." I think it'd be reasonable to say, "well, why did I suffer in the first place?" But if I can discover that in my suffering is this extraordinary fire of God's love, is this deepening of the soul, then it's given the one thing it really needs, which is meaning.

I mean, it's very interesting, if you look at Medieval doom paintings, paintings of the judgment, you see God up in the heavens and you see the divine worship in the angels, the seraphs and the cherubim. And the seraphs of course traditionally, they're fiery, they're ablaze with the fire of God's love and the very fire of God's love in person. And it flows down the sides of the pictures, and then there's Christ in the middle there. And insofar as there's a scene of a hell at the bottom, it's the same fire experienced differently. There's no place that isn't the divine love, but we can either let that... We can kneel where prayer is, we can let that be the utterly transformative thing and become the rose.

Jim Finley: One final note, tell me how this strikes you, picking up on what you're saying, it's interesting that Christ rose with his wounds.

Malcolm Guite: Absolutely. Yeah, that's essential.

Jim Finley: But the wounds transformed by glory. And that's another big theme in the-

Malcolm Guite: Well, that's a very big theme in... And obviously when Eliot quotes somebody, he usually wants you to remember all of it as it were, the quote is just the little thread, you pull the rest of it out. So in Julian's Revelation of Divine Love, of course you get this parable or story of the servant who falls into the pit and is wounded with many thorns. But in the vision, the servant comes out and every one of the wounds has become a jewel. So I think it's really vital that we see the wounds of Christ as the hymn says, "in beauty glorified." And I think that's all in the redeemed from fire by fire.

Jim Finley: I want to end with this. This has been such a grace Malcolm, that you joined us. Really, it's blessed me and I know it'll bless the listeners. I think they'll so resonate with this. I feel such an affinity with you and-

Malcolm Guite: I feel a strong affinity with you. We obviously love the same poem for the same reasons here, and that's very good. It's been a joy to meet you and a joy to be part of this podcast. And to be honest, I'll enthuse about this poem anytime with anyone. I just love it.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah. Well, thank you for being with us Malcolm today, and thank you Jim,. And what a beautiful way to close this season of Turning to the Mystic, so thank you.