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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Modern Philology*, Vol. 108, No. 3 (February 2011), pp. 427-461

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](http://www.press.uchicago.edu)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/658355>

Accessed: 21/03/2012 12:38

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Eliot's Affirmative Way: Julian of Norwich, Charles  
Williams, and *Little Gidding*

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Sin is Behovely, but  
All shall be well, and  
All manner of thing shall be well.  
.....  
By the purification of the motive  
In the ground of our beseeking.

(T. S. ELIOT)<sup>1</sup>

For thousands of poetry lovers, Julian of Norwich is a name first and often last encountered in glosses to *Little Gidding* (1942), the last poem in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943). Her talismanic "All shall be well," quoted twice in the third movement of that poem and once more at its close, functions as a refrain, much as it does in Julian's own *Revelation of Love*.<sup>2</sup> Ever since Eliot's friend and editor John Hayward first queried the source of those lines in a draft, critics have dutifully noted their provenance.<sup>3</sup> It was in part through Eliot's enormous cachet in the forties and fifties that Julian became a household name among the literati, apart from the small circles of

I thank Christine Froula, Sebastian Knowles, Abram Van Engen, Nicholas Watson, and an anonymous reader for their many helpful suggestions.

1. T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* III, in *Four Quartets*, in *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1963). All citations from *Four Quartets* and other Eliot poems are from this edition and hereafter given parenthetically by movement number. I have used the abbreviations *BN* for *Burnt Norton*, *EC* for *East Coker*, *DS* for *The Dry Salvages*, and *LG* for *Little Gidding*.

2. Julian's book has been published under a wide variety of titles. *A Revelation of Love* is the one used in the best modern edition, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006). I cite the versions of Serenus Cressy and Grace Warrack below insofar as these were used by T. S. Eliot and Charles Williams, respectively.

3. Helen Gardner, *The Composition of "Four Quartets"* (London: Faber, 1978), 203–4.

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mystically minded Catholics and Anglicans who already knew of her. Along with more conspicuous borrowings from St. John of the Cross and the Bhagavad Gita, the lines from Julian have taken their place among the myriad voices that haunt this most allusive of poems, making it an echo chamber of poetic and spiritual traditions. Few have noted, however, that Julian constitutes a very late addition to *Little Gidding*, inserted after Eliot had been working on the poem for more than a year. Nor has anyone observed that the fourth line cited above—"the purification of the motive"—is not only an interpolation but a corrective to Julian's theology. In its unadulterated form, her thought would have been anathema to Eliot's temperament and doctrine.

The last movement of *Little Gidding* is a remarkable Christian affirmation, striking a note of transcendence and hope that was desperately needed in the dark days of 1942 when the poem first appeared. For the most part, however, the *Quartets* oscillate between the *Inferno* of modernity, as Eliot saw it, and the *Purgatorio* of his ascetic call. All time is unredeemable, all language unreliable, all love riddled with disappointment and deception, the elements hostile, the wisdom of age a delusion, the war a ubiquitous if poetically understated reality. Cyclical time is an image of futility; linear time threatens apocalypse. Anglo-Catholic though he was, Eliot remarked with good reason that he had "a Catholic cast of mind, a Calvinistic heritage, and a Puritanical temperament."<sup>4</sup> Deeply committed to the Negative Way—the ascetic path of renunciation—in both his writing and his Christian life, Eliot found it difficult to affirm the gracious potential of ordinary human experience.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the divine is sensed only in rare "moments in and out of time" (*DS V*)—transient epiphanies typified by the rose garden in *Burnt Norton*. Frustratingly, such epiphanies appear to lead nowhere: "to what purpose / Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves / I do not know" (*BN I*). If not simply relegated to nostalgic memory ("we had the experience but missed the meaning" [*DS II*]), they are at best "Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony / Of death and birth" (*EC III*). The way forward from such graced experience into "a further union, a deeper communion" (*EC V*) is the way of darkness and dispossession, on which the poet sternly commands his soul to "wait without hope" or even love, lest he should love or hope for the wrong thing (*EC III*).

By the time he wrote *Little Gidding*, however, Eliot faced tremendous pressure to end his cycle with an affirmation, at least gesturing toward a possible *Paradiso*. Not only would this poem be the last quartet and thus

4. T. S. Eliot, "Goethe as the Sage" (1955), in his *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957), 243.

5. Eloise Knapp Hay, *T. S. Eliot's Negative Way* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

the consummation of all four but, in all likelihood, Eliot knew it was the last major poem he would ever write. (Although still in his forties, he had already published a volume of his collected—not selected—poems in 1936.) Moreover, the devastation and terror of the Blitz virtually demanded of any poet with a claim to spiritual wisdom that he provide more than yet another cause for gloom. To balance the bleakness of his first three quartets, therefore, and end the last on a “paradisal” note, Eliot required as a counterweight the strongest affirmation that the English Christian tradition could afford him—and this proved to be his adaptation of Julian. Yet, unlike his other spiritual masters, such as Dante, St. John of the Cross, George Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, Krishna, the Buddha, and the many poets who share in his “familiar compound ghost” (*LG II*), Julian held no previous place in Eliot’s well-furnished pantheon, nor is there evidence that he paid her any regard after *Little Gidding*.<sup>6</sup> How then did she come to his attention in 1942, providing just the note of sublime and universal affirmation that he sought?

The few critics who have addressed Julian’s role in *Little Gidding* assume that Eliot learned of her from Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism* (1911), a work he had studied as a graduate student at Harvard when it first appeared.<sup>7</sup> Underhill cites diverse passages from Julian, though not “all shall be well,” and praises her *Revelation of Love* as “the most beautiful of all English mystical works.”<sup>8</sup> Yet thirty years separated Eliot’s reading of *Mysticism* from *Little Gidding*. Even though he had long been aware of Julian, I believe his sudden interest in her in the summer of 1942 derived from a more proximate source—his friend Charles Williams (1886–1945). Unlike Eliot, Williams had been preoccupied with Julian throughout his career, wrestled seriously with her thought, and mentioned her in numerous books. In particular, his brief but theologically startling work, *The Forgiveness of Sins* (1942), published a few months before *Little Gidding*, treats Julian in a context bound to attract Eliot’s notice, discussing the very passage *Little Gidding* was soon to make famous. The friendship between Eliot and Williams was a close one that can be documented through letters, book reviews,

6. On this point I cannot agree with Jewel Spears Brooker’s otherwise fine reading, “The Fire and the Rose: Theodicy in Eliot and Julian of Norwich,” in *Julian of Norwich’s Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Medieval Reception*, ed. Sarah Salih and Denise N. Baker (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 69–86. Brooker states that “Eliot’s engagement with Julian was continuous from the early 1930s” (70) but provides no evidence beyond his mentioning her in a 1937 review of Paul Elmer More’s *Anglicanism*.

7. Lyndall Gordon, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*, rev. ed. (London: Vintage, 1998), 89, 538; Brooker, “Fire and the Rose,” 71.

8. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed. (New York: Dutton, 1930), 467.

and memoirs. But Williams himself, a consistently underrated writer, has seldom earned more than a footnote from Eliot scholars.<sup>9</sup>

This article therefore traces three sides of a triangle. First, it explores the literary friendship and exchange of the two Anglo-Catholic modernists. Second, it examines Williams's reception of Julian of Norwich. Finally, it reads *Little Gidding* in light of Eliot's influential but cautious adaptation of *A Revelation of Love*. I will argue that the poet's eleventh-hour insertion of "All shall be well" radically transformed the meaning and tonality of *Little Gidding* and thus, retrospectively, of the *Quartets*. But Julian's theology was in turn radically transformed by Eliot's interpolations. If the poet borrowed the mystic's all-embracing voice to affirm the spiritual value of experience—of time, love, language, even sin—in ways he found impossible to do in his own voice, he nonetheless struggled to offset what he may have perceived as an almost facile optimism about salvation. As Julian's earlier twentieth-century reception suggests, the problem revolved around the potential equivalence of "all shall be well" and "all shall be saved." Universalism (the doctrine of universal salvation) would have been heretical if asserted outright, so Julian scrupulously avoids any such assertion while nonetheless pointing in that direction. This problem is trenchantly addressed by Williams, who almost certainly mediated his friend's reception of Julian. By exploring their three-way literary relationship, therefore, I hope not only to illumine the *Quartets* but also to reopen a forgotten chapter in modernist history and, for medievalists, to disclose the splendid irony by which Julian's famous mantra attained the prominence it now enjoys.

#### T. S. ELIOT AND CHARLES WILLIAMS: A SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

T. S. Eliot and Charles Williams were almost exact contemporaries, Williams being just two years older. At the time they met, probably in 1931,<sup>10</sup> Williams was a senior editor at Oxford University Press with responsibility for poetry, while Eliot was editor of *The Criterion* and a director of Faber and Faber. He had already made his reputation as a poet with "The Love

9. The only detailed account of their relationship is Sebastian D. G. Knowles, *A Purgatorial Flame: Seven British Writers in the Second World War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 153–72; but see also John Heath-Stubbs, *Charles Williams* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955), 10–13; and Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 74–76, 118–22. I disagree with Humphrey Carpenter's claim that, despite "certain small influences on each side," the two men "largely failed to communicate with each other" (*The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979], 98).

10. Knowles, *Purgatorial Flame*, 153. Various sources propose dates ranging from 1927 to 1934 for the first meeting, but Knowles persuasively argues that 1931 is the most likely.

Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) and *The Waste Land* (1922). In June 1927 he had been secretly baptized in the Anglican Church, a move he would soon announce poetically in "Journey of the Magi" (August 1927) and *Ash-Wednesday* (April 1930) and politically in his essay collection *For Lancelot Andrewes* (November 1928), where he issued his scandalous manifesto as a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion."<sup>11</sup> Williams, a lifelong Christian, was more prolific but less famous. By 1931 he had already produced several verse plays, three novels, and five books of poems, but he was just embarking on the most productive decade of his career. He and Eliot met through a mutual friend, Lady Ottoline Morrell, the famous literary hostess. Both poets were regulars on her guest list, and she had recommended to Eliot that he read Williams's early novels, *War in Heaven* (1930) and *The Place of the Lion* (1931), in preparation for meeting him.<sup>12</sup> Another friend in common was the poet Anne Ridler (1912–2001), a lifelong disciple and correspondent of Williams; she served as Eliot's secretary from 1936 until 1940.<sup>13</sup> Others included John Hayward, the translator Montgomery Belgion, and the novelist and playwright Dorothy Sayers.

The writers' paths also crossed in ecclesiastical circles. Eliot belonged to the parish of St. Stephen's in Kensington, where he served as churchwarden from 1934 to 1959, but he received spiritual direction at another Anglo-Catholic church, St. Silas the Martyr in Kentish Town.<sup>14</sup> This was the parish to which Charles Williams and his wife Michal belonged.<sup>15</sup> St. Silas had the distinction of being the first English church since the Reformation to perform its own mystery plays, which were staged intermittently from about 1918 to 1930. Both poets participated in the revival of religious verse drama that was such an unexpected feature of early twentieth-century British culture.<sup>16</sup> Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, written for the Canterbury Festival in 1935, was followed a year later by Williams's *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury*, the drama of another martyred archbishop. Through their involvement in religious theater, both writers formed friendships with George Bell, bishop of Chichester and president of the Religious Drama

11. T. S. Eliot, preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber, 1928), vii. For these and other dates I follow Caroline Behr, *T. S. Eliot: A Chronology of his Life and Works* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

12. T. S. Eliot, introduction to *All Hallows' Eve*, by Charles Williams (London: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948), ix.

13. Anne Ridler, *Memoirs* (Oxford: Perpetua, 2004), 108, 129.

14. Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot: A Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 211. Ackroyd writes "St Simon's in Kentish Town," which is an error for St. Silas.

15. For Williams's involvement in the church, including many of the poems he published in the parish newsletter, see the St. Silas Web site at <http://www.saintsilas.org.uk/section/126>.

16. Esty, *Shrinking Island*, 54–61.

Society, and the actor-director E. Martin Browne, who produced all their plays.<sup>17</sup> During the war years, both were in frequent demand to give lectures and retreat talks, and in 1944–45 they served together with Sayers on a committee to draft new liturgical services.<sup>18</sup> Both also volunteered as fire wardens during the Blitz, an experience of horror immortalized in the “death of air” stanza of *LG II*.<sup>19</sup>

On the professional front, the two engaged in what Jed Esty has called “a relationship of reciprocal sponsorship,” although Eliot was in a stronger position to support the impecunious Williams.<sup>20</sup> Four of Williams’s best-known books—the novels *Descent into Hell* (1937) and *All Hallows’ Eve* (1945), the historical study *Witchcraft* (1941), and a book on Dante, *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943)—were published by Faber, the last three commissioned by Eliot himself.<sup>21</sup> This mutual sponsorship also extended to reviews: Eliot favorably reviewed Williams’s theological work, *The Descent of the Dove*, in 1939 and *Beatrice* in 1943; Williams in turn reviewed Eliot’s *Poems, 1909–25*; *The Family Reunion*; *East Coker*; and *Little Gidding*. In his wartime letters to his wife, he mentions Eliot about as often as C. S. Lewis and more often than anyone else except his son and the director of the Oxford Press. After Williams’s untimely death in May 1945, a week after the armistice, Eliot broadcast a generous memorial program on the BBC, later published as an introduction to *All Hallows’ Eve*.

As early as 1930, Williams included Eliot among sixteen living poets treated in his first book of criticism, *Poetry at Present*. In a perceptive if bemused appreciation of *The Waste Land* and other early poems, Williams remarks, “Whatever his more difficult poems mean, his simpler nearly always mean Hell pure and simple. But not in any prejudiced or invented mode. Mr. Eliot’s poetic experience of life would seem to be Hell varied by intense poetry. It is also, largely, our experience. It is also, generally, our experience of Mr. Eliot’s poetry. But Hell, like heaven, has many mansions. If Mr. Eliot has gone to prepare a place for us, it is only courteous to attend, so far as we can, to the particular kind of place he has prepared.”<sup>22</sup> The wit here is not supercilious, for Eliot himself would have agreed. Denis Donoghue points out that as a new convert, Eliot found the doctrines of original sin, hell, and damnation strangely comforting. In 1929 he wrote to a friend

17. Alice Mary Hadfield, *Charles Williams: An Exploration of His Life and Work* (Oxford University Press, 1983), 128, 135; Roma A. King Jr., ed., *To Michal from Serge: Letters from Charles Williams to His Wife, Florence, 1939–1945* (Kent State University Press, 2002), 264; Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 385.

18. Charles Williams to Michal Williams, April 29, 1944, in King, *To Michal*, 198.

19. Knowles, *Purgatorial Flame*, 110.

20. Esty, *Shrinking Island*, 118.

21. Carpenter, *Inklings*, 172, 179, 193.

22. Charles Williams, *Poetry at Present* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), 166.

and fellow convert, Paul Elmer More, “To me, the phrase ‘to be damned for the glory of God’ is sense and not paradox; I had far rather walk, as I do, in daily terror of eternity, than feel that [life] was only a children’s game.”<sup>23</sup> When More called Eliot a Calvinist for believing that eternal damnation could be willed by God, Eliot parried that, if More thought otherwise, he must be worshipping Santa Claus.<sup>24</sup> As he maintained in an essay on Baudelaire, “the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation—of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living.”<sup>25</sup> If the Christian faith appealed to Eliot it was, in large part, because it allowed him to pray that his hellish sufferings would prove in the end to have been purgatorial.<sup>26</sup> In this light, Williams’s early critical essay is prescient. Although he had not yet seen Eliot’s postconversion poems, he had noticed his epigraphs, so in a parting shot he asks, “Dante and St. John of the Cross—what interpreters of poetry are these? Can this hell be rather the place of purgation? and has the eternal Footman himself some likeness to the Ancient of Days?”<sup>27</sup>

By the time the writers met, Eliot had committed himself to an austere though sacramental version of Christianity. His letters from this period reveal a fascination with the alluring, dangerous reality of the supernatural, a theme very much to the fore in Williams’s fiction. In a letter to Williams dated October 7, 1934, Eliot expressed his admiration for *The Place of the Lion*. This is a fantasy novel in which the leader of an esoteric circle, much like A. E. Waite’s Fellowship of the Rosy Cross,<sup>28</sup> meditates on the Platonic archetypes so intensely that he sets them loose in the material world, where they become manifest as beasts and proceed to work havoc. Approving of the novel’s metaphysical realism, Eliot writes, “It is surprising how few people seem to have any awareness of other than material realities, or of Good and Evil as having anything to do with the nature of things—as anything more than codes of conduct. I suppose it is because there is something so terrifying, like a blast from the North Pole, in spiri-

23. Denis Donoghue, *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 273.

24. Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 244.

25. T. S. Eliot, “Baudelaire” (1930), in his *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 342–43.

26. Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 275.

27. Williams, *Poetry at Present*, 173.

28. Williams entered this esoteric society, an offshoot of the more famous Order of the Golden Dawn, in September 1917 and remained active for a decade, attaining a high degree of initiation. On his esotericism see Gavin Ashenden, *Charles Williams: Alchemy and Integration* (Kent State University Press, 2008); Barbara Newman, “Charles Williams and the Companions of the Co-inherence,” *Spiritus* 9 (2009): 1–26.

tual reality that just natural cowardice and laziness makes us all try to evade it as much of the time as we can.”<sup>29</sup>

This appreciation of “spiritual reality” pervades Eliot’s writing about Williams, whom he saw as a man well versed in “states of consciousness of a mystical kind, and the sort of elusive experience which many people have once or twice in a life-time.”<sup>30</sup> Eliot ascribed some of his friend’s obscurity to the problems anyone might face in “trying to convey the beauty of colour to the colour-blind.”<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere he expands on that theme: “What Williams has to give is no mere moral teaching, no mere theory of doctrine. It is the work of imagination, based upon real *experience* of the supernatural world, of a supernatural world which is just as natural to the author as our everyday world. . . . He really believes in what he is talking about. And seeing all persons and events in the light of the divine, he shows us a significance, in human beings, human emotions, human events, to which we had been blind.”<sup>32</sup>

As one who prided himself on his orthodoxy, Eliot was not always sure about his friend’s. His review of *Descent of the Dove* concedes “that a heresy from Mr. Williams would be . . . a real contribution to the explication of orthodoxy,” though he does not identify anything specifically “heretical” in that volume.<sup>33</sup> In one of his most amusing and affectionate letters from late 1940, Eliot adopts a style unique in the history of publisher-to-author correspondence: “My dear Charles, (Unless you are to be addressed as the Blessèd Charles, but our Secretarial Etiquette Book contains no guidance for formal approach to the presently beatified) I have your letter of the 9th.” After advice on a book proposal, he adds, “One of your most important functions in life (which I have endeavoured to emulate in *The Family Reunion*) is to instil sound doctrine into people (tinged sometimes with heresy, of course, but the very *best* heresy) without their knowing it.”<sup>34</sup> A few months later, Eliot tells Williams to “have no fear: the O’Possum is still your Guardian Marsupial; you can hide under the feathers of his wings.” He then explains how he persuaded a reluctant editorial board to accept

29. T. S. Eliot to Charles Williams, October 7, 1934, in the library of the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College, Illinois. Unless otherwise noted, all letters of T. S. Eliot subsequently cited are contained in the Wade collection. I thank the Wade Center and the estate of T. S. Eliot, c/o Faber and Faber Ltd, for permission to cite these letters.

30. Eliot, introduction to Williams, *All Hallows’ Eve*, xvii.

31. T. S. Eliot, “A Lay Theologian,” review of *The Descent of the Dove*, by Charles Williams, *New Statesman and Nation*, December 9, 1939, 864.

32. T. S. Eliot, “The Writings of Charles Williams,” *Literary Digest* (London and Dublin) 3 (1948): 6.

33. Eliot, “Lay Theologian,” 864. Eliot may have been referring simply to Williams’s sympathetic accounts of heretics and skeptics. Williams always considered himself to be orthodox, fully accepting the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

34. T. S. Eliot to Charles Williams, December 14, 1940.

Williams's essay: although the periodical in question should not often "publish supplements intelligible only to a few, because that would give the paper a highbrow reputation," yet on rare occasions it ought to publish one "intelligible to none of the readers, because that would teach them mental humility, especially the higher ecclesiastics; and . . . we should never get a contribution that would do the trick better than this."<sup>35</sup> To be tweaked for obscurity by the author of *The Waste Land* may seem a backhanded compliment, but Eliot's steadfast patronage underscores a deep affinity. As Sebastian Knowles puts it, "one cannot discuss Eliot and Williams in terms of influence: the two poets are writing in the same key."<sup>36</sup>

The notion that Williams disliked Eliot's poetry, or even despised modernism in general, stems from an uncritical tendency to conflate his views with those of his friend C. S. Lewis, who indeed had little use for Eliot.<sup>37</sup> More revealing, however, is an anecdote Williams reports in a letter of July 4, 1940. He and Eliot had clashed swords over Milton, whose reputation faced a concerted assault from Eliot, Pound, and others in the late thirties, and whom Williams and Lewis had both defended.<sup>38</sup> On this occasion, Williams wrote to Michal "in a towering rage" because he had been asked to review a pro-Milton manuscript that attacked Eliot's views. "O he won't like it!" sniped another colleague: "Eliot is his great idol."<sup>39</sup> What enraged Williams was the idea that friendship would interfere with his integrity as a critic: "Eliot my great idol! I admire him very much; I like him immensely; but my idol!" The real extent of their closeness is suggested by a letter Williams wrote three months before he died. Probably sensing that the end was near, he told Michal that he had observed "a certain new detachment" in himself, a sense of being "more of a Voice and less of a man everywhere except at home . . . and perhaps at Magdalen [with Lewis] or with Eliot."<sup>40</sup> The depth of this personal understanding is apparent in his reviews of the late poems, which were among the first to express sympathy with these difficult works.

Because *Four Quartets* quickly gained canonical status, it is important to remember that not all responses were friendly. When *East Coker* appeared

35. T. S. Eliot to Charles Williams, May 20, 1941.

36. Knowles, *Purgatorial Flame*, 156.

37. See Carpenter, *Inklings*, 48–49; Hadfield, *Charles Williams*, 190. Williams once told Hadfield "that he did not like Eliot's verse more because he liked the man" (128), but she does not give the date of that remark. His appreciation seems to have grown considerably with *Four Quartets*.

38. Carpenter, *Inklings*, 118. In a letter to Eliot about this controversy, Lewis wrote, "Charles Williams is always promising (or threatening!) to confront us with each other [to] hammer all these matters out" (C. S. Lewis to T. S. Eliot, February 23, 1943, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 2, *Books, Broadcasts, and the War, 1931–1949*, ed. Walter Hooper [San Francisco: Harper, 2004], 557).

39. Charles Williams to Michal Williams, July 4, 1940, in King, *To Michal*, 75.

40. Charles Williams to Michal Williams, February 17, 1945, *ibid.*, 249.

in the *New English Weekly* in March 1940, many of the early reviewers were unimpressed. The *Times Literary Supplement* (TLS) published a negative notice on September 14, decrying Eliot's "poetry of disdain—disdain of the tragic view of life, of the courageous view, of futile sensualists, of poetry, and now even of himself." Mr. Eliot, wrote the anonymous reviewer, "is becoming more and more like an embalmer of the nearly dead; he colours their masks with expert fingers to resemble life, but only to resemble. . . . This is the confession of a lost heart and a lost art."<sup>41</sup> Only three weeks later, however, *Time and Tide* published Williams's review of the same poem under the headline "The Poetry of Health," as if to rebut the TLS critic. Williams notes that *East Coker* "comes, as so much of [Eliot's] verse has come, from that chill and terrifying region of neither here nor there, neither now nor then." But most unexpected is his conclusion, apropos of the "wounded surgeon" lyric in EC IV: "Mr Eliot has been admired, times without number, for describing the disease. What his poetry has been . . . always calling is the note of strange and beautiful health. But O that we should have to listen to it!"<sup>42</sup> With these cryptic lines he implies that the poem's Negative Way—a way guided only by "the wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters / Of the petrel and the porpoise"—leads indeed to "a further union, a deeper communion" (EC V). That "strange and beautiful health" may come when the daunting "way wherein there is no ecstasy" converges at last with an Affirmative Way, barely hinted at in EC III by "the wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry." The coinherence of these two ways to the divine was one of Williams's great themes. But it was only after *Little Gidding* that a reader of the *Quartets* might be expected to realize that "the fire and the rose" were finally "one" (LG V).

In the spring of 1943 Williams published a sparkling humanist dialogue that Knowles has called "possibly the wisest thing ever written on Eliot's last quartet."<sup>43</sup> Four speakers—the older couple Eugenio and Sophonisba, with their young friends Celia and Nicobar—discourse on *Four Quartets*, whose musicality Williams acknowledges with the fiction that each speaker has read one poem aloud. Celia, a figure of youthful beauty, prefers *Burnt Norton*, the springtime quartet with its "birds and children, the flowers and sunflower, the footfalls echoing," while the matronly Sophonisba favors the summer poem, *East Coker*, and Nicobar reads *The Dry Salvages*.<sup>44</sup> Fittingly it is Eugenio, the *senex*, who offers a performance of *Little Gidding*,

41. Anonymous TLS review in *T. S. Eliot: Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, "Ash-Wednesday," "Four Quartets" and the Drama, ed. Graham Clarke (London: Helm, 1990), 33.

42. Charles Williams, "The Poetry of Health," review of *East Coker*, by T. S. Eliot, *Time and Tide*, October 5, 1940, 990.

43. Knowles, *Purgatorial Flame*, 157.

44. Charles Williams, "A Dialogue on Mr. Eliot's Poem," review of *Four Quartets*, by T. S. Eliot, *Dublin Review*, April 1943, 117.

the poem of winter. "Soliloquies from the heart's cloister are ever the most difficult poems to read aloud," Celia remarks, "perhaps because they have in them something which contains a greater urgency even than poetry, but which is not poetry." To overhear such a poem is almost like "eavesdropping, outside the door, to the murmurs of the prayers of some saint within." Indeed, this last quartet, permeated with the language of the dead, sounds "like the cry of a strange bird flying over that sea [of *The Dry Salvages*] from a coast beyond it."<sup>45</sup>

Before resuming the dialogue, however, Celia wants to draw the curtains because "there may be birds from beyond another sea tonight whose rhetoric would be less quiet than Nicobar approves."<sup>46</sup> In other words, the backdrop to poetry and prayer in 1943 is blackout and the noise of bombers. With exquisite subtlety, Williams thus acknowledges the doubleness of *LG IV*, in which "The dove descending breaks the air / With flame of incandescent terror"—the "dove" being at once the Pentecostal spirit and a Luftwaffe plane. Eugenio then distills the achievement of Eliot's maturity:

Those who supposed him disillusioned spoke perhaps wiser than they knew, for he stood from the beginning on a bare solidity. Few poets change much—and he less than some, except indeed in language. . . . The co-existence of the end and the beginning in the work of poets is perhaps an image of something more, and more general. Few poets have been able to go all their distance; in any who have won to an end, and not to a mere breaking-off, we may be aware that there is but one thing said. . . . [In Eliot's case it is,] if you will have it in a poor phrase—that you can only be a thing by becoming it. . . . Old men are like poets; few go the whole distance. . . . Most poets begin with man in a situation; presently man is himself the situation; that is, in them, not an increase of knowledge but a mounting power of style. That is true of poetry, and more than poetry. The grace of time is to turn time to grace.<sup>47</sup>

Taking up the theme of ends and beginnings in the *Quartets*, Williams sees that Eliot, with a quarter century still to live, had in one sense already "won to an end" or "gone all his distance." After *Little Gidding* he would continue to write plays and essays, but with this statement, he had definitively said what he had to say as a poet. The residue—that which is "more than poetry" and "contains a greater urgency even than poetry"—is prayer, "turning time to grace." But Eugenio warns against any reduction of poetry to pious meditations: "We wrong the poetry else, and we do not much help religion." The dialogue shows Williams to have been a perceptive, sophisticated reader of the *Quartets*. He was in fact something like Eliot's ideal reader, as implied by the inscription on his gift copy: "To C—W—(who, if

45. *Ibid.*, 115.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 116–22.

any, will understand what the author attempted & how far he fell short of it) from T-S-E.”<sup>48</sup>

Brought together by an identity as self-consciously Christian poets, a shared love of Dante, and a zeal for Catholic tradition, the friends were also linked by a more private bond. Williams, whose union with Michal was in Anne Ridler’s eyes “a tempestuous and a true one,” liked to think of himself as a poet of marriage par excellence.<sup>49</sup> Michal had remained in London during the war when the press, and Williams with it, moved to Oxford for security. In a moment of nostalgia, he wrote to her that the lost pleasures of domesticity “have been nine-tenths of my life,” adding a boast that may astonish critics: “I attribute the fact that I may be a better poet than TSE entirely to the fact that he has never had, I suppose—at least, not for years—that kind of life. I attribute my undoubted success as a praiser of marriage entirely—no, largely—to that. The rest has to do with your face, arms, and figure: to say nothing of your walk.”<sup>50</sup> But despite these endearments, Williams’s domestic life had been far from serene, for around 1927 he fell passionately in love with a colleague at the press, Phyllis Jones. Although the two were never physically intimate, their emotional affair reached a searing intensity that, on Williams’s side, endured from the late twenties until 1942, when he finally broke it off.<sup>51</sup> Apparently he never considered divorce, much less adultery, knowing both to be against Christ’s teaching.<sup>52</sup> Yet, in a torrent of impassioned poems and letters numbering in the hundreds, Williams maintained his devotion to Jones through all the vicissitudes of her life: an affair with another colleague, her first marriage and relocation to Java, divorce, and a second marriage in England. Significantly, he called her not “Phyllis” but “Celia,” Lady of heaven—the name he would give the ingenue in his “Dialogue on Mr. Eliot’s Poem.” By the time Michal learned of this passion, it was public knowledge, and Williams seems to have spoken of it freely with his friends both male and female. Though tormented by hopeless desire, by his wife’s pain and anger, and not least by Jones’s rejection, Williams like many before him found artistic inspiration in “the Impossibility.” He even introduced “the Celian

48. King, *To Michal*, 230. In a letter to his wife of October 23, 1944, Williams says that “TSE has sent me his book” and gratefully cites the inscription. This could only have been *Four Quartets*, which was officially released by Faber on October 31, 1944 (Behr, *Chronology*, 60). As author and publisher, Eliot would have had advance copies. He published no other book in 1944.

49. Anne Ridler, introduction to *The Image of the City and Other Essays*, by Charles Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), xviii.

50. Charles Williams to Michal Williams, June 21, 1940, in King, *To Michal*, 73.

51. Ashenden, *Alchemy*, 224. Carpenter and Hadfield both discuss this relationship, but the fullest account is Ashenden, *Alchemy*, chap. 10.

52. Carpenter, *Inklings*, 89; Ashenden, *Alchemy*, 68.

moment” into literary criticism as a trope for ideal love, or the revelation of divine beauty through the vision of the beloved.<sup>53</sup>

In a 1935 letter to Celia, or Phyllis Somerville as she then was, Williams wrote, “Did I tell you I was talking with Eliot and John Hayward, and we touched on the Troilus-Niphatas crises? I referred to the moment when the thing by which we lived becomes poisoned—as Othello said—and Eliot said he didn’t quite get it. So I said—‘O—Keats and Fanny Brawne,’ and he said so charmingly and seriously, ‘Ah I don’t know that state.’ But Hayward and I agreed that we did, only too well.”<sup>54</sup> Though the cases in question differ, Williams was clearly speaking of frustrated love. If Eliot “didn’t quite get it,” he was either being disingenuous or, more likely, as reserved about his private life as Williams was voluble. For, as Lyndall Gordon recounts in her moving biography, Eliot was obsessed for decades with his first love, Emily Hale, whom he had spurned in his youth to marry the unstable Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Like Williams, he refused to consider divorce, although his marriage deteriorated steadily. Having taken a vow of celibacy in 1928, soon after his conversion, he deliberately abandoned his wife, starting with his American sojourn of 1932–33.<sup>55</sup> Eliot offered no protest when her family committed her to an asylum in 1938, and (notoriously) he never saw her again. But Hale visited England every summer from 1934 until the outbreak of war, except for the year he crossed the ocean to visit her. It was she who accompanied the poet on his visit to Burnt Norton, inspiring his reflections on “the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened / Into the rose-garden” (*BN I*).

Like Williams, Eliot wrote a thousand letters to his beloved and constant muse, whose spirit animates the hyacinth girl of *The Waste Land* and the lady of silences in *Ash-Wednesday*.<sup>56</sup> But, as Gordon remarks, the stiffly ascetic poet and his patrician New England love could have been invented by Henry James.<sup>57</sup> High-minded to a fault, they steadfastly chose virtue over happiness until 1947, when Vivienne suddenly and unexpectedly died. Free at last to marry Hale, Eliot spurned her yet again, for no sooner did the object of his desire become attainable than desire itself failed. At the time of the *Quartets*, however, he found himself caught “between the live and the dead nettle” (*LG III*), estranged from his wife and ascetically in love with another—a position that Williams, *mutatis mutandis*, would

53. Charles Williams, ed., *The New Book of English Verse* (London: Gollancz, 1935), 12–15, and *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* (London: Faber, 1943), 49–51.

54. Charles Williams to Phyllis Somerville, 1935, quoted in Hadfield, *Charles Williams*, 133–34.

55. Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 292.

56. Much to Hale’s dismay, Eliot apparently destroyed her letters. His own remain sealed at Princeton University, by his request, until 2019. See Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 392–93, 423–24.

57. Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 393, 401.

have understood perfectly. It is no wonder Eliot especially admired *The Figure of Beatrice*, for both poets saw in Dante's celestial muse and earthly disappointments a myth they could adapt to their own experience.

These erotic struggles are refracted in Eliot's plays, Williams's novels, and the tangled threads that bind them. As we have seen, Eliot claimed to imitate Williams in *The Family Reunion* by using that play "to instil sound doctrine into people." But, as usual in such cases, the public did not find the doctrine at all sound. Harry, the play's protagonist, atones for the death of his unloved wife (whom he imagines he has murdered) by turning hermit, leaving the rest of his family shocked and stranded. Expressing its author's ineffectual guilt over his treatment of Vivienne, *The Family Reunion* was a critical and commercial failure.<sup>58</sup> By 1950 Eliot himself could admit that "my hero now strikes me as an insufferable prig."<sup>59</sup> But in his next play, the highly successful *Cocktail Party* (1949), he moves beyond the stark theater of penance, dramatizing not one way of salvation but two. The comic plot centers on an unhappily married couple, Edward and Lavinia, who first separate but then reconcile, committing themselves to mutual kindness and forgiveness under the guidance of their psychiatrist-cum-spiritual director, Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly. Running athwart this plot is another, tragic or triumphant depending on one's point of view. Edward's spurned mistress, Celia, also consults Reilly about her feelings of emptiness and world-weariness, which she resolves with his help by detaching herself from her lovers and entering a special "sanatorium." We learn of her true fate only in the last act, when Celia's death is reported. It turns out that she joined a nursing order of nuns, went to "Kinkanja" to care for disease-ridden natives, and was gruesomely martyred in a colonial rebellion. Although her offstage crucifixion appalled many critics,<sup>60</sup> Celia's destiny as a saint on the *via negativa* balances the affirmative way of Edward and Lavinia, giving the play a more satisfying resolution than *The Family Reunion*. Departing from Eliot's earlier, relentlessly ascetic path, *The Cocktail Party* continues the trajectory of *Little Gidding* by dramatizing in human terms how it might look for, as Julian wrote, "all manner of thing [to] be well."

Not by coincidence, *The Cocktail Party* is also the dramatist's fullest homage to Williams, who had died in May 1945. At the same time he was working on the play, Eliot was writing articles to introduce his late friend to new readers. The pivotal character of Reilly may even be indebted to Williams, who had offered spiritual direction to W. H. Auden and many

58. Peter Lowe, "'Doing a Girl In': Re-reading the Asceticism of T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*," *Religion & Literature* 38 (2006): 63–85.

59. T. S. Eliot, *Poetry and Drama* (London: Faber, 1951), 31.

60. Clarke, *Critical Assessments*, 369, 380; Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 418.

others.<sup>61</sup> One tipoff is Reilly's long quotation from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, beginning: "Ere Babylon was dust / The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child, / Met his own image walking in the garden."<sup>62</sup> Reilly recites this passage to account for his premonition of Celia's violent death, heralded by his uncanny vision of her shadowed by a double. The same lines are invoked at the beginning of Williams's 1937 novel *Descent into Hell*, the first that Eliot published. Its heroine, Pauline, is also haunted by a doppelgänger but helped by a celebrated verse playwright, Peter Stanhope, whom several critics have seen as a portrait of Eliot.<sup>63</sup> But the plot thickens, for the two writers' sacrificial heroines prove to be a set of nesting dolls. In Gordon's view, Celia Coplestone in *The Cocktail Party* is Eliot's richest tribute to Emily Hale, and her initial experience is similar to Hale's as well.<sup>64</sup> When Edward's wife in the play leaves him, he unexpectedly rejects his longtime mistress, just as Eliot had recently rejected Hale, with the words, "I have met myself as a middle-aged man / Beginning to know what it is to feel old. / That is the worst moment, when you feel that you have lost / The desire for all that was most desirable, / . . . And you go on wishing that you could desire / What desire has left behind."<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, we cannot help noticing that "Celia" was the name Williams had given his own unattainable muse, as Eliot knew. The protagonist of an earlier Williams novel, *Many Dimensions* (1931)—consciously modeled on Phyllis Jones<sup>66</sup>—experiences a destiny much like Celia's in *The Cocktail Party*. Celia forsakes her lovers for a life of contemplation, service, and, ultimately, martyrdom. Williams's heroine Chloe also suffers from a sense of hollowness, despite her two devoted lovers, because she can find no place for herself in the world. Although she has no explicit religious faith, her desire increasingly seeks an otherworldly object. Guided by a magisterial older man, in this case a judge, with the same authoritative character as Reilly, Chloe gives herself to an unlikely spiritual path that soon leads to her death. To echo Sebastian Knowles, the two authors were indeed "writing in the same key," but in this case the influence runs from

61. On Williams as spiritual director see Newman, "Companions"; on Auden as his convert see Hadfield, *Charles Williams*, 141, 186. In a letter at the Wade collection (July 14, 1940), Auden wrote to Williams, "I am trying to learn a little about the Practice of the Presence, but O dear, the spirit and the flesh are as unwilling as they are weak. I wish you were here to help." Copyright by the Estate of W. H. Auden.

62. T. S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*, ed. Nevill Coghill (London: Faber, 1974), 3.423–31; Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts*, ed. Richard Ackermann (Heidelberg: Winter, 1908), 1.191–93.

63. Knowles, *Purgatorial Flame*, 160; Esty, *Shrinking Island*, 74; Glen Cavaliero, *Charles Williams: Poet of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 80.

64. Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 399–400, 414–17.

65. Eliot, *Cocktail Party* 1.2.229–36.

66. Hadfield, *Charles Williams*, 96, 102.

Williams's novels of the thirties to Eliot's play of 1949. If his martyred Celia derives from a fantasy of Emily Hale, she also derives at one remove from Williams's fantasy of his own "Celia," Phyllis Jones. Significantly, both poets chose similar—eminently spiritual and idealized—ways to kill off the women they loved, who in real life proved to be resilient survivors. In this world, neither Hale nor Jones ever joined a convent, and both lived to a ripe old age.

The chief importance of Williams to *The Cocktail Party*, though, lies in the very conception of the Two Ways.<sup>67</sup> One searches Eliot's earlier work in vain for any hint that marriage might be a path to joy, let alone redemption. How could it be otherwise, given his own disastrous marriage and austere personality? As late as 1936 he had written to a friend, "I don't think that ordinary human affections are capable of leading us to the love of God."<sup>68</sup> Nor was *The Cocktail Party* a fruit of Eliot's belated happiness with Valerie, whom he married only in 1957. Rather, the play's programmatic contrast between Celia's negative way to sainthood and Edward and Lavinia's affirmative way to salvation is precisely the contrast between the Two Ways outlined by Williams in *The Descent of the Dove*: "The one Way was to affirm all things orderly until the universe throbbled with vitality; the other to reject all things until there was nothing anywhere but He. The Way of Affirmation was to develop great art and romantic love and marriage and philosophy and social justice; the Way of Rejection was to break out continually in the profound mystical documents of the soul."<sup>69</sup> In *The Figure of Beatrice* Williams confirms that "marriage is the great example . . . of the Way of Affirmation."<sup>70</sup> As a novelist, he often contrasted the two ways by juxtaposing the quest of a solitary ascetic with that of a couple. Eliot does so only in *The Cocktail Party*, and in that regard the play is unique. As Nevill Coghill writes, "no other English comedy has linked these two kinds of spiritual quest—the quest for love in marriage and the quest for the love of God."<sup>71</sup>

I hope to have shown that Williams, though now "relegated to the margins of literary history," was both an interesting figure in his own right and

67. Compare Julia Maniates Reibetanz, *A Reading of Eliot's "Four Quartets"* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research, 1983), 206 n. 13. While acknowledging Williams as a source for Eliot's understanding of the Two Ways, Reibetanz believes his chief source was St. John of the Cross. But in John's works, both "ways" are aspects of the ascetic and monastic life. He describes no "Way of Affirmation" that involves marriage or secular vocations.

68. Bonamy Dobrée, "T. S. Eliot: A Personal Reminiscence," in *T. S. Eliot: The Man and His Work*, ed. Allen Tate (New York: Delacorte, 1966), 81.

69. Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (London: Longmans, Green, 1939), 58.

70. Williams, *Figure of Beatrice*, 51.

71. Nevill Coghill, "An Essay on the Structure and Meaning of the Play," in Eliot, *Cocktail Party*, 237.

a significant influence on his friend.<sup>72</sup> Eliot paid him the ultimate tribute, declaring in his memorial broadcast that Williams “seemed to me to approximate, more nearly than any man I have ever known familiarly, to the saint.”<sup>73</sup> So it was in the realm of sanctity and mystical experience that he especially valued Williams’s guidance. According to Knowles, “The more one studies *Descent into Hell* the more the book becomes an echo-chamber for Eliot, screaming *Little Gidding* from every page.”<sup>74</sup> A little hyperbole may perhaps be forgiven if it offsets sixty years of neglect. I turn now to the second side of my triangle: Williams’s response to Julian of Norwich, which played a key role, as I will show, in Eliot’s revisions to the fourth quartet.

#### CHARLES WILLIAMS AND JULIAN OF NORWICH: THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALISM

Anchoress, mystic, and speculative theologian, Julian of Norwich (1342–after 1416) is today the most oft-read Middle English writer after Chaucer. Yet before the 1970s, with the upsurge of interest in mystics and women writers, and especially before *Four Quartets*, she remained almost as obscure as she had been in late medieval England. Only three manuscripts of her *Revelation of Love* survive, the earliest written not much before 1600, all probably copied by English recusant nuns in Paris or Cambrai.<sup>75</sup> Serenus Cressy, a priest, printed the first edition in 1670, naming its author as “Mother Juliana, an Anchorete of Norwich.” In fact, we know neither the visionary’s baptismal name nor her family. The name “Julian” derives from the church of St. Julian, Conesford, to which her cell was attached, as was the custom with anchorites. Her book was no sooner published than denounced by Edward Stillingfleet, the bishop of Worcester, as “the blasphemous and senseless tittle tattle of [a] Hysterical Gossip,” and an ensuing pamphlet war between Catholics and Protestants did little to commend it.<sup>76</sup> After this no one bothered (or dared) to reprint Cressy’s edition until 1843. Further modernized versions appeared in 1864 and 1877 but were not widely noticed. It was only in 1901 that Julian became more accessible, after Grace Warrack published a text midway between a translation and a

72. Esty, *Shrinking Island*, 118.

73. Ridler, introduction to Williams, *Image of the City*, xxviii.

74. Knowles, *Purgatorial Flame*, 164.

75. My discussion of Julian’s early reception relies on Nicholas Watson, introduction to Watson and Jenkins, *Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 17–19, and bibliography, 458–59. For a fuller account, see Alexandra Barratt, “How Many Children Had Julian of Norwich? Editions, Translations and Versions of Her Revelations,” in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), 27–39.

76. Edward Stillingfleet, quoted in Watson and Jenkins, *Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 453.

modernized-spelling version of the original. Warrack titled the book *Revelations of Divine Love*, assigned it a date (1373), correctly identified the author's church, and added a historical and thematic introduction. By 1949 her version was in its thirteenth printing.

It was Warrack's edition that Charles Williams owned. In a memoir written after his death, Michal remembered reading Julian together in the halcyon days of their courtship, "when lass meets lad and each is but twenty-one." Walking in the meadows, she recalled, "we would take Charles' book and boon companions along with us: Shakespeare and Wordsworth and Milton, Donne and Crashaw, St. Athanasius, or rather, his Creed, St. Augustine and the Lady Julian of Norwich."<sup>77</sup> Williams was twenty-one in 1907–8, so he must have been studying Julian even before the appearance of Underhill's *Mysticism* (1911), making him one of her first serious twentieth-century readers. Others included W. B. Yeats and the hermetic scholar A. E. Waite, whom Williams knew through London esoteric circles; the novelist May Sinclair, a member of Eliot's circle; and, somewhat later, Aldous Huxley.<sup>78</sup> In the thirties and early forties Williams introduced her to several other friends, including Lewis and Auden.<sup>79</sup>

Julian's importance for Williams lay in two areas. First, she was one of his favorite exemplars of the Affirmative Way. Second, she treated the problem of salvation in a way he found more compelling than Augustine's approach, which remained normative in her own day and long afterward. As early as his first published novel, *War in Heaven*, Williams used Julian and St. John of the Cross as mystic bookends to denote the Affirmative and Negative Ways, much as Eliot would do in the *Quartets*. Near the beginning of that novel, its contemplative hero mentions owning a rare edition of the Spanish mystic's *Ascent of Mount Carmel*; near the end, as he awaits destruction by his enemies, he sits at a window "reading the *Revelations of Lady Julian*."<sup>80</sup> The first title points toward ascetic struggles to come, while the second hints that, in the end, all shall be well. But aside from salvation "in the end," Williams prized Julian for affirming God's goodness even in the fallen world. In *The Descent of the Dove*, he links her with Dante as a witness to the idea that repented sins contribute to the soul's beatitude.<sup>81</sup> He was especially attracted by her high valuation of the body, a stance not typical of mystics in any age, let alone the fourteenth century.

77. Michal Williams, "As I Remember Charles Williams," in King, *To Michal*, 260–61.

78. T. A. Birrell, "English Catholic Mystics in Non-Catholic Circles—III," *Downside Review* 94 (1976): 213–31.

79. Auden's 1949 poem "Memorial for the City" (in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson [London: Faber, 1976], 450–53), dedicated to the memory of Charles Williams, imitates his style and takes as its epigraph a passage from Julian that Williams particularly admired.

80. Charles Williams, *War in Heaven* (London: Gollancz, 1930), 60, 239.

81. Williams, *Descent of the Dove*, 137.

In a letter to Celia from around 1941, Williams characterized Julian as a “sensual” recluse whose doctrine supported his own peculiar blend of spirituality and eroticism.<sup>82</sup> An essay of May 1939, “Sensuality and Substance,” takes a difficult passage from Julian as its unexpected starting point for an assessment of D. H. Lawrence. Williams’s chief purpose in the essay is to reproach Christians for betraying the aspect of human nature that Julian called “the sensuality”—sex, passion, the body, marriage, romantic love—by adopting a bland and timid spiritualism. When it comes to sex, Williams writes tartly, churchmen “may have said the right things, but they have said very few of them and they have generally said them in the wrong style.”<sup>83</sup> The antiromantic Eliot, much as he admired his friend, would have been puzzled at best by this version of the Affirmative Way.

Williams also helped to popularize Julian by including generous extracts from her *Revelations* in *The New Christian Year* (1941), an anthology of devotional readings. “Juliana” supplies fourteen passages, encompassing the hazelnut vision, the Trinity, the Passion, prayer, penance, and trust in God.<sup>84</sup> These texts, chosen with no need to illustrate themes or bolster an argument, show how different Williams’s Julian was from the Julian of modern fame. Despite Williams’s fascination with the idealized feminine, he ignores her teaching on Christ as Mother, nor does he cite “all shall be well.” The first omission is not surprising; after the Reformation, “Jesus as Mother” could hardly be named in polite company before Caroline Bynum’s 1977 article.<sup>85</sup> But the second may indicate some discomfort. Recent readers of Julian have been intrigued by the possibility that “all manner of thing shall be well” means “all manner of folk shall be saved”<sup>86</sup>—though the mystic took pains to avoid that inference.<sup>87</sup> But even if she was

82. “I am the most material poet that lived / since Lucretius: almost as sensual indeed / as the Lady Julian of Norwich, that recluse of sanctity, / who said where the soul and flesh met God / built his City” (Charles Williams, quoted in Ashenden, *Alchemy*, 220).

83. Charles Williams, “Sensuality and Substance,” in *Image of the City*, 69.

84. Charles Williams, ed., *The New Christian Year* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941). Only two living writers appear in the anthology, T. S. Eliot and Karl Barth.

85. Caroline Walker Bynum, “Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing,” *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 257–84.

86. For sensitive treatments of universalism, see Robert Llewelyn, *With Pity Not with Blame* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982), 129–36; Richard Harries, “On the Brink of Universalism,” in *Julian, Woman of Our Day*, ed. Robert Llewelyn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 41–60; Joan M. Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 162–69.

87. In chap. 33 Julian says she desired a vision of hell and purgatory, but this request was not granted. Despite the fact that she saw no damned souls in her vision, she affirms her orthodoxy: “For though the Revelation was shewed of Goodness, in which was made little mention of Evil: Yet I was not drawn thereby from any point of the Faith that Holy Church teacheth me to believe” (Julian of Norwich, *Sixteen Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. Serenus Cressy [London?, 1670], 74).

not formally a universalist, Julian sees no damned souls and imagines no vicious, impenitent sinners. In her view sin is “no thing,” a mere privation of good, following the Neoplatonic tradition. Hence it is recognized primarily by the pain it causes. Julian envisions a readership of loving, contemplative souls who promptly repent their sins, suffering more from scrupulosity and fear of God’s wrath than from any pernicious commitment to evil. To such readers, she offers the comforting assurance that God will punish sins on earth but reward them in heaven, insofar as the soul has already atoned through contrition. But for Christians like Williams and Eliot, with a more robust sense of human perversity, this doctrine posed an ethical challenge. Acknowledging its danger for those who might take it as encouragement to sin, Williams felt obliged to say, “All this is for those who are adult in love, and few, even in Christendom, are those.”<sup>88</sup> So he might well have thought Julian’s most famous locution was too easily misunderstood to set before the multitudes.

The priest George Tyrrell (1861–1909), a leading Catholic Modernist, had reprinted Cressy’s edition of the *Revelations* in 1902, partly to buttress his own denial of eternal damnation. But his efforts earned him expulsion from the Jesuits in 1906, followed soon afterward by excommunication.<sup>89</sup> This aspect of Julian’s thought was handled thereafter with extreme caution. C. S. Lewis, whose reading of her was also sparked by Williams, told his brother in a letter of March 1940 that he was not sure what to make of “all shall be well.” “Sometimes it seems mere drivel,” he wrote, “but then at other times it has the unanswerable, illogical convincingness of things heard in a dream.” Unlike Tyrrell, however, Lewis did not see Julian as a universalist but understood Christ’s “Grand Deed” to be performed on the Last Day as one that would “make everything quite different while leaving it exactly the same.”<sup>90</sup> Like Eliot and Lewis, Williams believed wholeheartedly in damnation and often depicted it in his novels (Sir Giles Tumulty in *Many Dimensions*, Dora Wilmot in *The Place of the Lion*, Wentworth in *Descent into Hell*, and Evelyn and Simon in *All Hallows’ Eve*). Universalism, he wrote apropos of Origen, is a dream bound to “linger in any courteous mind, but to teach it as a doctrine almost always ends in the denial of free-will.”<sup>91</sup> So, when he finally came to discuss Julian’s “all shall be well,” he avoided any hint of universal salvation.

Eliot had known since at least 1939 of Williams’s interest in Julian. But it was *The Forgiveness of Sins* (1942) that deeply influenced his late revisions

88. Williams, *Descent of the Dove*, 137.

89. Barratt, “How Many Children,” 32–33. Tyrrell was a friend of Baron Von Hügel, the spiritual director of Evelyn Underhill.

90. C. S. Lewis to Warren Lewis, March 21, 1940, in Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2:369.

91. Williams, *Descent of the Dove*, 40.

of *Little Gidding*: Williams's little book had been commissioned by the publisher Geoffrey Bles for a popular series on Christian doctrine. He finished it in August 1941, having begun work at the height of the Blitz (September 1940–May 1941), during which London was bombed for seventy-six nights in a row, with more than 43,000 civilians killed and more than a million homes destroyed or damaged.<sup>92</sup> It is no wonder the book has a somber tone. When the editor found it too short and demanded an additional chapter, Williams wrote one on forgiving the Germans—who, at the time, seemed as likely as not to be victors.<sup>93</sup> By April 1942 the book was out, and by late 1943, both *Descent of the Dove* and *Forgiveness* were being read by Christian study groups.<sup>94</sup> In the meantime, Eliot had laid aside his unsatisfactory first draft of *Little Gidding*, which he had sent to Hayward in July 1941. He did not resume work on it until August 1942, when he made the key changes introducing Julian into its third, fourth, and fifth movements.<sup>95</sup> This interval is precisely when he could have read *The Forgiveness of Sins*, which gave him the lines he needed for his finishing touches.

Julian holds a more central place in Williams's argument here than anywhere else. He begins with the proposition that “the beginning of all . . . creation was the Will of God to incarnate.”<sup>96</sup> In other words, the Incarnation was not a contingent response to the Fall, but the purpose for which the world was made, a purpose so firm that sin could not change it. Theologians call this doctrine “the absolute predestination of Christ.” It was broached by St. Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century, widely taught in the twelfth, and later championed by Duns Scotus. Although the position was a minority view from the thirteenth century onward, it was never declared unorthodox. Williams's premise, like Julian's, is therefore the absolute solidarity of all humans in the body of Christ. Creation from the beginning “was to be a web of simultaneous interchange of good. ‘In the sight of God,’ said the Lady Julian, ‘all man is one man and one man is all man.’”<sup>97</sup> The Fall transformed this solidarity into a web of evil rather

92. For the date of completion, see Charles Williams to Michal Williams, August 6, 1941, in King, *To Michal*, 122. My information on the Blitz comes from an excellent Wikipedia entry ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Blitz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blitz)) that cites as sources Joshua Levine, *Forgotten Voices of the Blitz and the Battle for Britain* (London: Ebury, 2006); Alfred Price, *Blitz on Britain, 1939–1945* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000); and Winston Ramsey and Kenneth Wakefield, *The Blitz—Then and Now*, 3 vols. (London: Battle of Britain Prints, 1987–90).

93. Charles Williams to Michal Williams, August 13, 1941, in King, *To Michal*, 127–28.

94. In a letter to his wife of April 8, 1942, Williams mentions sending a copy of *Forgiveness* to the archbishop of Canterbury. For the study groups, see his letter of January 3, 1944. King, *To Michal*, 137–38, 185.

95. Gardner, *Composition*, 153–54.

96. Charles Williams, *The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Bles, 1942), 15.

97. *Ibid.*, 16.

than good, but could not destroy it, nor could it sever humankind from the predestined humanity of God. Instead, it introduced the suffering of fallen humanity into Christ's human flesh and spirit.

Writing "with a kind of laboured, anguished sincerity" born of the horrors of war, Williams even asks if it might not have been kinder of God to abort the human project and start over.<sup>98</sup> We in our dread of pain might have preferred it so—but not the Creator. "It is the choice of a God, not of a man; we should have been less harsh."<sup>99</sup> The question of forgiveness first arises, then, in our need to forgive God for creation, a need no less real for being sinful in its very basis. If he could not prevent the misery that would come of sin, why did God not abstain from creation in the first place, or else destroy it at the first sign of trouble? Here Williams comes close to Julian's agonized question, "why by the great foreseeing wisdom of God the beginning of sin was not letted: for then, methought, all should have been well."<sup>100</sup> It is this question that Jesus answers in *Revelations* with his assurance, "It behoved that there should be sin" (or in the earliest manuscript, "Sin is behovely"); "but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."<sup>101</sup>

Williams answers by reflecting on the biblical metaphor of the soul as God's bride. "Like any mortal lover," the Creator "would not consent that his wife should cease to love him. He would not consent that . . . she should cease to exist . . . she had turned from him; she had attempted to deracinate her life; but he was still her root, and she should still have at her disposal all that he had given her; she should still have life. Intolerable charity!"<sup>102</sup> In the next few pages he twice repeats that phrase: "intolerable" because of its cost in pain, yet "charity" because God would not sever his union with creatures for any cause. Having submitted to humankind's free choice of evil, "he was not merely to put up with it as a Creator, he was to endure it as a Victim." The forgiveness of sins is therefore grounded in the Cross: "God in flesh was to maintain both incarnation and creation; he must then be the Victim of the choice of man. But why maintain it? there is but one answer—for love. Intolerable charity indeed—but now also intolerable for himself. Indeed, it killed him."<sup>103</sup> We cannot fail to hear a premonition of *LG IV*: "Who then devised the torment? Love. / Love is the unfamiliar Name / Behind the hands that wove / The intolerable shirt of

98. Cavaliero, *Poet of Theology*, 146.

99. Williams, *Forgiveness*, 100.

100. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. Grace Warrack (London: Methuen, 1901), chap. 27 (55).

101. *Ibid.*, chap. 27 (56).

102. Williams, *Forgiveness*, 27.

103. *Ibid.*, 31.

flame / Which human power cannot remove." The affinity is, in Glen Cavaliero's words, "immediately apparent," and I shall say more of it below.<sup>104</sup>

But what of the punishment for sin? Williams here considers the difference between church and state. In the church, as in Dante's *Purgatorio*, penitent souls rejoice in their punishment because they yearn to be cleansed. In the state, punishment is a means of self-protection for the community. Offenders are not seriously expected to reform, much less to suffer willingly. But in a profoundly Christian state, in Williams's own "idea of a Christian society"—could it be possible to create "a Guild of those who would vicariously bear the legal penalties on the part of the confessed criminals, even perhaps to the death penalty itself?"<sup>105</sup> Such a bold imitation of Christ has been attempted here and there by saints; it has also been corrupted to a system of cash payments in the sale of indulgences. It is typical of Williams, the apostle of "substituted love" as doctrine and practice, to imagine such an extraordinary embrace of substitution on the corporate level.<sup>106</sup> Only in that context does he recall, "It was in relation to sin and pain that the Lady Julian said: 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' Certainly in small things this can be seen; it is in the greater that it is difficult. It is true that the same Lady said that all our life was penance, and perhaps the burden of life might be eased if it were taken that way."<sup>107</sup>

Williams, as usual, is cryptic. What is clear enough from these anguished reflections, though, is that even as he welcomed Julian's reassurance, he would by no means make it a passport to cheap grace. "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church," Dietrich Bonhoeffer had written in 1937. "We are fighting to-day for costly grace."<sup>108</sup> Even as Williams mused on the need to forgive the Germans, Bonhoeffer was plotting against Hitler and would soon face a terrible martyrdom. At such a time, to have interpreted "all shall be well" as universalism or any other form of cheap grace would have seemed a travesty, not only of Christ's Passion and Julian's vision but of every martyr's and every soldier's death. So, before Eliot incorporated her words into the triumphant close of *Little Gidding*, he specified the sole condition under which they could be valid: "A condition of complete simplicity / (Costing not less than everything)" (*LG V*).

The tough-mindedness of Williams's approach in *Forgiveness* went a long way toward making Julian acceptable to Eliot. Despite the fact that he

104. Cavaliero, *Poet of Theology*, 148.

105. Williams, *Forgiveness*, 87.

106. Newman, "Companions," 6–13.

107. Williams, *Forgiveness*, 90.

108. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 37. The British edition was published with a preface by Bishop George Bell, a friend of Williams and Eliot.

had known of her since his student days, as T. A. Birrell remarks, "It was very late in Eliot's career before he came to an unembarrassed public acceptance of the mystics." In the decade after his conversion, the poet kept his distance from any religious idiom that savored of "sentimentality, romanticism, the inner light, and 'tender-mindedness.'"<sup>109</sup> To most of her early twentieth-century readers, including Underhill, Julian's visions—read more as an expression of feminine piety than as speculative theology—had precisely those connotations. By taking her seriously as a theologian, however, Williams made it considerably easier for Eliot to admit her voice into *Little Gidding*.

#### JULIAN OF NORWICH AND T. S. ELIOT: PURIFICATION OF THE MOTIVE

I will frame Eliot's adaptation of Julian with two events. The first intensely private episode reveals his surprising susceptibility to mystical experience. The second public incident evokes the bleak wartime mood that shaped the composition, as well as the reception, of his last quartet.

In September 1932 Eliot sailed for America, leaving Vivienne behind, to accept a one-year position as visiting lecturer at Harvard.<sup>110</sup> In Cambridge he attended daily morning Mass at the monastery of the Cowley Fathers, or Society of St. John the Evangelist, on the Charles River. It was in their basement chapel one morning in 1932–33 that the following event took place, as recalled by Wallace Fowlie, then a Harvard undergraduate, later a distinguished professor of French at Duke. I recount the anecdote in full because it has hitherto escaped the notice of Eliot scholars.

The Harvard students who had associated themselves with the Cowley Fathers were asked to choose one morning a week when they would help "serve" the seven o'clock mass. My day was Tuesday. During his year at Cambridge, Eliot was a daily communicant at that mass and on Tuesdays he and I were often the only ones with the priest in the chapel. (This was the very small chapel used before the large Ralph Adams Cram chapel was built.)

One of those Tuesdays has remained memorable for me. Only the three of us were present. At the time of communion Eliot had risen and come up to the altar to receive. The priest and I had turned back to the altar, and I could hear Eliot rise and return to his place. At that moment there was such a heavy thud, as if Eliot had fallen, that the priest and I turned around. Eliot was flat on his face in the aisle, with his arms stretched out. It was obvious at a glance he had not fallen.

109. Birrell, "English Catholic Mystics," 230.

110. Ackroyd, *Life*, 193.

Under his breath, and as if speaking to himself, the priest said, "What shall we do?"

I suggested, "Let's finish here first." So, we turned back to the altar.

The one aisle in the chapel where Eliot lay was so narrow that the priest and I could not have walked there in order to reach the sacristy. The priest finally said to me, "I think you should help him up. Something may be wrong."

I went on ahead and put my arm under his shoulder. He came with me easily. Almost no physical effort was required on my part to help him back into his seat. As I preceded the priest into the small room at the end of the aisle, I realized that Eliot had just undergone a mystical experience.<sup>111</sup>

It is theoretically possible, of course, that the poet had simply fainted. If he ever related this experience to anyone, his biographers have yet to discover it. But his silence need not mean that Fowlie's inference was wrong, for Eliot, a reticent man by nature, would all the more have adhered to the doctrine of "Anglican reserve"—the High Church notion that private religious experience ought to remain private, in reaction against evangelical witnessing. In keeping with such reserve, the possible epiphany in Cambridge may have lived on as the elusive "moment in the draughty church at smokefall," a station on the Affirmative Way in *BN II*. "Smokefall" is one of four "fall" words in the *Quartets* evoking the four elements in a fallen world (the others are footfall, nightfall, and waterfall). It probably denotes the priest's censuring of the altar before consecration.<sup>112</sup>

A second, less benign "smokefall" occurred ten years later. In the spring of 1942 Hitler launched the "Baedeker Blitz," a series of bombing raids on historic cities of no strategic importance, in order to weaken British morale and avenge the RAF bombing of Lübeck. While sparing cathedrals, the Luftwaffe targeted important parish churches. On Tuesday night, April 28, one such raid flattened the Saxon church of St. Julian's in Norwich, where *A Revelation of Love* was written.<sup>113</sup> The church was hit within weeks of the publication of Williams's *Forgiveness*, with its meditations on Julian, the cost of grace, and the need to forgive enemies. Newspaper coverage of this attack would have put the mystic's name and memory briefly before the public, calling her to Eliot's attention once more and adding another layer to his evocation of Little Gidding, the seventeenth-century Anglican com-

111. Wallace Fowlie, *Journal of Rehearsals: A Memoir* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1977), 138. I thank the brothers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist for calling my attention to this passage, which they reprinted in their newsletter *Cowley* 33, no. 2 (2007): 15–17.

112. Harry Blamires, *Word Unheard: A Guide through Eliot's "Four Quartets"* (London: Methuen, 1969), 25, 181.

113. By 1953 the church had been fully rebuilt, complete with a replica of Julian's cell (the original was destroyed at the Reformation). The fame of *Little Gidding*, as well as the mystic herself, doubtless contributed to the success of the fund drive for restoration.

munity destroyed by Cromwell's men in 1646: "Water and fire shall rot / The marred foundations we forgot, / Of sanctuary and choir. / This is the death of water and fire" (*LG II*).

As these two anecdotes suggest, the *Four Quartets* are positioned uneasily between "the infirm glory of the positive hour" (*Ash-Wednesday I*) and the ever-present reality of destruction. Of course Eliot valued the mystical tradition in theory and "read its records without irony."<sup>114</sup> But critics have not yet noted that, at least once, he may have personally experienced a divine manifestation shocking enough to leave him flat on his face. Ordinarily, his demeanor in church was staid and free of histrionics. Yet, whatever "glory" he may have known, he was even more deeply shaped by the Augustinian tradition, via Pascal and the Jansenists, with its sharp stress on original sin. As we have seen, he found the thought of damnation itself reassuring because it gave life a purpose. Donoghue, one of the finest readers of the *Quartets*, argues that such a profoundly ascetic poetry could have found a public only in wartime. "Eliot's hope is to clear a space, or if necessary to take over a bombed-out area, and there to build a new life of the spirit."<sup>115</sup> But new life required some form of affirmation. What fragments could be shored against the ruins? What path could lead back from the marred foundations, the disfigured street, and the illegible stone to a living England, or what voice call out from that refining fire?

*Little Gidding*, like *East Coker*, is haunted by the seventeenth century. Among the ghosts remembered in *LG III* are George Herbert, John Donne, and Richard Crashaw ("some of peculiar genius"); Nicholas Ferrar (the "common genius" who founded the community); the doomed Charles I, who sought refuge in it ("a king at nightfall"); Archbishop Laud and his fellow martyrs ("three men, and more, on the scaffold"); and John Milton ("one who died blind and quiet").<sup>116</sup> The period feel is so strong that Eliot worried about a loss of universality. As he told Hayward, one reason he introduced Julian was that "there is so much 17th century in the poem that I was afraid of a certain romantic Bonnie Dundee period effect and I wanted to check this and at the same time give greater historical depth to the poem by allusions to the other great period, i.e. the 14th century. Juliana and *The Cloud of Unknowing* represent pretty well the two mystical extremes or, one might say, the male and female of this literature."<sup>117</sup>

Eliot's "mystical extremes" are the same as Williams's Two Ways, that is, the Affirmation and Rejection of Images. But his gendering of these types stems from an academic distinction between "intellectual" and "affective"

114. Donoghue, *Words Alone*, 260.

115. *Ibid.*, 288.

116. Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 192.

117. Gardner, *Composition*, 70.

mysticism, the first type being abstract, speculative, inclined toward negative theology and imageless contemplation, while the second (lower) type is bodily, emotional, imagistic, and feminine. This distinction, a commonplace from William James (one of Eliot's teachers at Harvard) all the way to Luce Irigaray, was not seriously critiqued until the 1980s.<sup>118</sup> If St. John of the Cross and *The Cloud* represent the first type, Julian is meant to embody the second. Interestingly, the poet shunned Warrack's version and went out of his way to purchase a reprint of Cressy's edition, noting that the Early English Text Society had not yet produced a critical edition.<sup>119</sup> Eliot could have preferred Cressy's text because it dated from the seventeenth century, loosely connecting Julian with Little Gidding. Following Underhill, he believed that Herbert, Ferrar, and other Anglican divines of the seventeenth century were steeped in the mystics of the fourteenth.<sup>120</sup>

Having traced the path by which Julian came to *Little Gidding*, let me now suggest the difference she made to it. In her invaluable study *The Composition of "Four Quartets,"* Helen Gardner painstakingly traces each poem's progress from Eliot's letters and drafts, many of them annotated with Hayward's suggestions and queries. Unlike the first three quartets, *Little Gidding* gave the poet extraordinary trouble. He sent Hayward five successive drafts, and the Magdalene Library at Cambridge holds no fewer than thirteen typescripts heavily marked with revisions.<sup>121</sup> The meeting with the compound ghost in *LG II*—Eliot's brilliant imitation of Dante in modified terza rima—is among his greatest technical achievements and cost him immense labor.<sup>122</sup> But on a level beyond the technical, it was the note of mystical affirmation, of the sublime, that the poet long sought in vain and achieved only with his borrowings from Julian. As Gordon puts it, "The poetry of 'Love' came late in the evolution of *Little Gidding*, only in September 1942, in the last stage of revision, when a penitent approaches the 'unfamiliar Name' through the fires of purgatory. It is as though Eliot had to put himself through excruciating torture to name this emotion."<sup>123</sup>

*LG IV* was the core of the problem. The fourth movement of each quartet is the shortest, a lyrical evocation (or invocation) of one person of the Divine Quaternity. In *Burnt Norton* it is God *simpliciter*, approached in a delicate, questioning lyric of just ten lines ("Time and the bell have buried the day"). In *East Coker* it is Christ, described in a heavily allegorical poem about Good Friday ("The wounded surgeon plies the steel"). In *The Dry*

118. Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

119. Gardner, *Composition*, 71.

120. Schuchard, *Dark Angel*, 183. Critics today are less certain of this influence.

121. Gardner, *Composition*, 10.

122. Dominic Manganiello, *T. S. Eliot and Dante* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 154.

123. Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 385.

*Salvages* it is Mary, whom the speaker prays to intercede for widows and the departed (“Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory”). Having addressed the Father, the Son, and the Mother, Eliot obviously had to invoke the Holy Spirit in *LG IV*, but could not find the right language. His first draft, sent to Hayward on July 7, 1941, offered three stanzas, of which only the third survived into the final version (“The dove descending breaks the air”). Preceding this, however, are two dry, archaizing stanzas built around a financial conceit. Here is the first:

Till death shall bring the audit in  
To value all our hoarded treasures:  
The Profitable Sin,  
Consenting Thoughts, and Sundry Pleasures;  
The prizes that we think to win  
By Prudence, and by Worldly Cares,  
Figure as gilt-edge stocks and shares.<sup>124</sup>

This obviously would not do, as Hayward hinted and Eliot had to agree. By the time he returned to the trouble spot, he had rediscovered Julian and opened her book to its final page. Fifteen years after the visions of 1373, Christ spoke to Julian again, resolving her puzzlement: “What? wouldest thou wit thy Lords meaning in this thing? Wit it well: Love was his meaning. Who sheweth it thee? Love. Wherefore sheweth he it thee? For Love. Hold thee therein, thou shalt wit more in the same. But thou shalt never wit therein other without end.”<sup>125</sup> This is the last triad of Julian’s Trinitarian work, proclaiming Love the author, Love the text, and Love the purpose: Love inexhaustible and unopposed. And here is Eliot’s first pained adaptation:

Who heaped the brittle roseleaves? Love.  
Love put the match; and blew the coals.  
Who fed the fire? Love.  
To torture and to temper souls.<sup>126</sup>

The final version of *Little Gidding IV* reads as follows:

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 or pyre—  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

124. Gardner, *Composition*, 231.

125. Julian, *Sixteen Revelations*, chap. 85 (215).

126. Gardner, *Composition*, 216.

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.

Eliot's constraints are clear. He wanted an image of fire, the element of this quartet; he had to invoke the Holy Spirit, which is the source of "pentecostal fire" in *LG I*; and he needed to affirm divine love. "God is love," says St. John, and Augustine had defined the Holy Spirit in particular as the love that unites Father and Son. But "love," given Eliot's bitter sexual history, lifelong antiromanticism, and ascetic temperament, could never be the source of joy and comfort that it was for Julian. Rather, love is torment—even or perhaps especially divine love, much like Williams's "intolerable charity." As early as *Ash-Wednesday II*, Eliot had prayed: "Terminate torment / Of love unsatisfied / The greater torment / Of love satisfied." In *LG IV* he first wrote brutally, "Who then designed the torture? Love." He let Hayward soften the line slightly, reducing its suggestion of intentional cruelty<sup>127</sup>—but only slightly, for the dive-bombing dove "with flame of incandescent terror" still echoes "the dark dove with the flickering tongue" of *LG II*, and that is a German bomber.

Moreover, it is by no means clear how we should identify the opposing fires of the last line: Are they the fires of worldly and heavenly desire? The firebombing of London and the fires of hell? Purgatorial and Pentecostal fire? What may be plainest is the underlying classical myth. When the centaur Nessus tried to rape Deianira, the wife of Heracles, the hero saved her by shooting him with a poisoned arrow. In revenge the dying centaur gave Deianira some of his blood, saying it was a powerful aphrodisiac. Years later, after Heracles had been unfaithful, Deianira sought to regain his love with a shirt soaked in the blood of Nessus. But the centaur had lied, for it was a deadly poison, so as soon as Heracles donned the shirt it began to torture him with intolerable pain. Unable to remove it, he built a funeral pyre and immolated himself.<sup>128</sup> On Eliot's terms, it is divine Love that has woven this "intolerable shirt of flame" to regain human love. Hence we are all Heracles, our only option "the choice of pyre or pyre."<sup>129</sup>

127. *Ibid.*, 218.

128. Anne Ridler thinks Eliot may have adopted the shirt of Nessus metaphor from a manuscript he was reading at the time for Faber, combining it with thoughts of the hair shirt worn by ascetics (*A Measure of English Poetry* [Oxford: Perpetua, 1991], 38). See also Brooker, "Fire and the Rose," 81–82.

129. Blamires, *Word Unheard*, 168.

This use of Julian, subtler than the direct quotations in *LG* III and V, works in two directions. On the one hand, her catechism enabled Eliot at last to name God as Love, a move he still seems to have found difficult and counterintuitive. On the other hand, *LG* IV is more clearly subversion than adaptation—a “strong reading,” in Harold Bloom’s terms. Julian would have been nonplussed, for her *Revelation* qualifies God’s love as “courteous” and “homely,” never as intolerable torment or incandescent terror. In fact, she meant precisely to comfort those who dread such a God. The same doubleness characterizes Eliot’s more explicit citations. He uses Julian in *Little Gidding* to achieve the note of high affirmation he could not otherwise attain, but at the same time hedges her with cautions to subvert her theological optimism, lest it affront his “Calvinist” (or Jansenist) soul.

The ascetic heart of each quartet beats in the third movement. Here Eliot’s impersonal, didactic voice brushes against the severe counsels of a spiritual master. In the first two quartets this is St. John of the Cross. *Burnt Norton* calls the penitent to enter the dark night of the senses, which is the stage of active purgation (“descend lower, descend only / Into the world of perpetual solitude” [III]), while *East Coker* urges the more advanced phase of passive purgation, the dark night of the spirit (“I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you” [III]). In *The Dry Salvages*, the Spanish saint gives way to Krishna, who discourses to Arjuna on detachment from the fruit of action (“Not fare well, / But fare forward” [III]). Early readers attentive to Eliot’s patterning would have expected some such authoritative voice in *LG* III, and this time it declares, “Sin is Behovely, but / All shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well.”<sup>130</sup> These lines come as a shock on many levels. In the first place, “Sin is Behovely,” with its archaic capital (suggested by Hayward), obviously derives from some ancient source. But, unlike *The Waste Land*, *Little Gidding* did not come with footnotes, so few would have recognized that source. In the second place, readers must have wondered what on earth “behovely” meant. The adjective was rare even in Julian’s day; the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites no usage after 1400 except *Little Gidding*.<sup>131</sup> Derived from the verb “behave,” it is defined as “useful, profitable; needful, necessary.” Nicholas Watson links it with the “paradoxical joy” of the *Exsultet* sung at the Easter vigil, commenting that “‘behovely’ might be considered a translation of both *felix* and *necessarium*.”<sup>132</sup>

130. Compare Julian, *Sixteen Revelations*, chap. 27 (63).

131. All the early editions of Julian of Norwich except Cressy use the slightly more common variant *behovabil* from a manuscript at the British Library (London, BL MS. Sloane 2499). Only the Paris manuscript (BNF ms. Fonds Anglais 40), followed by Cressy, has the form *behovely*.

132. Watson and Jenkins, *Writings of Julian of Norwich*, 208.

O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est!  
O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!<sup>133</sup>

[O truly needful sin of Adam, blotted out by the death of Christ!  
O happy fault, that deserved to have so great a Redeemer!]

In Julian's text, "sin is behovely" acknowledges, rather than explains, the insoluble mystery of evil, but Christ's refusal to explain is outweighed by the absoluteness of his promise. In *Little Gidding*, this theological mystery is overlaid by the semantic one. Whatever "Sin is Behovely" means, it is clearly a voice from elsewhere, a voice that speaks with authority. But the third and most profound shock is what the voice says, for "all shall be well" is unlike anything a reader of the *Quartets* has heard before. Where we might have expected yet another solemn call to renunciation, we hear instead the promise of a no less solemn joy.

In Eliot's initial draft, *LG III* was closer than *IV* to its final form but lacked the bracketing lines from Julian. It opened with the impersonal voice distinguishing between deadly indifference and life-giving detachment. If we follow Krishna's counsel, detachment offers "not less of love but expansion / Of love in the end of desire, and so liberation / From the future as well as the past."<sup>134</sup> Eliot then modulated into first person to muse on the turbulent seventeenth century: the English Civil War, the Protectorate, the rise and fall of Little Gidding. This troubled national past was also his personal past, the age of his beloved metaphysical poets as well as his Calvinist ancestor Andrew Eliot, who emigrated from East Coker to Salem, where he sat on the witchcraft juries.<sup>135</sup> Little Gidding could also be seen as a first, abortive attempt to establish an Anglican monasticism, much prized by Eliot.<sup>136</sup> But why, the poem asks, should we commemorate these dead men "more than the dying"—that is, the living—given that "We cannot revive old factions / We cannot restore old policies / Or follow an antique drum" (*LG III*)? Eliot did not yet know how to answer his question, for the draft of *LG III* ends as follows:

We have taken from the defeated  
What they had to leave us—a symbol:  
The symbol created by death

133. "Exsultet, de vigilia Paschali," in *Liber usualis missae et officii*, ed. monks of Solesmes (Tournai: Desclée, 1960), 776N, translation mine.

134. T. S. Eliot, draft of *LG III*, quoted in Gardner, *Composition*, 229.

135. Ackroyd, *Life*, 15. Eliot would reverse his ancestor's journey by choosing to be buried at the Anglican church in East Coker.

136. He maintained a lifelong friendship with the monks of the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge as well as with an Anglican religious community at Kelham in Nottinghamshire. His friend Brother George Every, a member of that community, had written a verse play in 1936 about King Charles I's visit to Little Gidding. See Schuchard, *Dark Angel*, 181.

(Created by such a death)  
 The life only death transmits,  
 The perfection of the motive  
 Which the moment of death brings to life.  
     Soul of Christ, sanctify them,  
     Body of Christ, let their bodies be good earth,  
     Water from the side of Christ, wash them,  
     Fire from the heart of Christ, incinerate them.<sup>137</sup>

In the finished poem these lines read:

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.

(LG III)

Strikingly, Eliot had decided to end this movement with a medieval text even before he settled on Julian. The original *Anima Christi* prayer, said after communion, opens with: “Soul of Christ, sanctify me; / Body of Christ, save me; / Blood of Christ, inebriate me; / Water from the side of Christ, wash me.”<sup>138</sup> Eliot experimented with this prayer to invoke a blessing on the dead and bolster his motif of the four elements. But if he had let his adaptation stand, with its shocking close, *Little Gidding* would have savored much more of “incandescent terror” than of affirmation. Replacing “Fire from the heart of Christ, incinerate them” with “All manner of thing shall be well” was a dramatic shift indeed. Yet one thing remained constant. Eliot agonized over motives, and in *LG II* the last and most devastating of the “gifts reserved for age” is “the rending pain of re-enactment / Of all that you have done, and been; the shame / Of motives late revealed, and the awareness / Of things ill done and done to others’ harm / Which once you took for exercise of virtue.” We can read guilt over Vivienne into these lines, but we need not, for any adult with sufficient moral self-awareness has experienced such pain. It is no wonder, then, that Eliot imagines redemption as “the purification of the motive / In the ground of our beseeching.” The second of these lines, but not the first, is Julian’s. In *A Revelation of Love*, Christ encourages confidence in prayer with the words, “I am ground of thy beseeching. First, it is my will that thou have it: And sithen [next] I make thee to will it: And sithen I make thee to beseech it,

137. Eliot, draft of *LG III*, quoted in Gardner, *Composition*, 230.

138. The *Anima Christi* prayer, sometimes wrongly ascribed to St. Ignatius Loyola, dates back at least to the fourteenth century.

and thou seekest it: How should it then be, that thou shouldest not have thy seeking?"<sup>139</sup> In other words, since it is God who inspires prayers in the first place, how could he not grant them?

Most spiritual teachers, including John of the Cross and the *Cloud of Unknowing* author, warn against self-centered, self-deceiving, halfhearted, or shortsighted prayers. Julian, however, consoles the scrupulous by declaring that God thanks and rewards the soul especially for prayers that lack all fervor: "full glad and merry is our Lord of our Prayer. . . . for in Dryness, and Barrenness, in Sickness, and in Feebleness, then is thy Prayer full pleasant to mee; though thou think it savor thee not but little."<sup>140</sup> As for sinful motives, we touch here on the most radical aspect of Julian's theology. In a famous parable, the Fall is represented in her vision of an eager servant sent on an errand, who races off so zealously to do his lord's will that he stumbles and falls into a ditch. Badly wounded and unable to free himself, he can no longer see his lord's face and reproaches himself terribly for his failure. What he does not know is that all along the lord watches him with pity, not with blame, and plans not only to rescue him but to reward him more fully for the pain he has suffered than if he had fulfilled his mission without harm.<sup>141</sup> Julian says she was initially so puzzled by this vision that she omitted it from the original version of her book. But twenty years later, she received further insight and understood that the servant signified both Adam and Christ—Adam in his falling, Christ in his unchangeable good will. In God's sight, our motives are always already pure.

Julian goes even further. In every soul that shall be saved, she maintains, "is a godly Will that never assented to sin," for only our sensuality—our temporal and contingent being, not our substance or eternal being—is ensnared by sin.<sup>142</sup> As Abram Van Engen has pointed out, in Julian's world we experience sins or even suffer them but seldom if ever willfully commit them.<sup>143</sup> Julian argues that, *sub specie aeternitatis*, "between God and our Soul is neither Wrath nor Forgiveness in his sight."<sup>144</sup> In fact, it is impossible that God should be angry even for an instant, for anger would be a defect of power, wisdom, and love, hence entirely contrary to his divine nature.<sup>145</sup> Thus he has nothing to forgive, even if our limited and, in the

139. Julian, *Sixteen Revelations*, chap. 41 (91).

140. *Ibid.*, chap. 41 (92–93).

141. *Ibid.*, chap. 51 (115–31).

142. *Ibid.*, chap. 53 (136). Medievalists today understand Julian's "sensuality" as the contingent, earthly self, including but not limited to the body, rather than "sensuality" in the modern sense, as Williams had assumed.

143. Abram Van Engen, "Shifting Perspectives: Sin and Salvation in Julian's *A Revelation of Love*," *Literature and Theology* 23 (2009): 11.

144. Julian, *Sixteen Revelations*, chap. 46 (105).

145. *Ibid.*, chaps. 46, 49 (105, 111–13).

end, false perceptions of his wrath are morally good for us. Given all that we know of Eliot—his moods of self-disgust and self-loathing, his distaste for a thoroughly fallen world, his convictions about original sin and hell—it is impossible that he should have embraced Julian’s theological vision. Yet she alone offered the assurance of a Christian hope not merely willed but profoundly felt, at the high level of abstraction he preferred. By slipping a single line about “the purification of the motive” between two of hers, he supplied a corrective that made her theology more ethically convincing and his own more graciously affirming.

The last iteration of “All shall be well” comes just before the end:

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 flame are in-folded  
 Into the crowned knot of fire  
 And the fire and the rose are one.

(LG V)

Eliot adopts a line from *The Cloud of Unknowing* to introduce this coda,<sup>146</sup> a lyric of such uncharacteristic joy that it casts a bright shadow back over all four quartets, leaving an impression of balance between the Two Ways when, in fact, the *via negativa* has by far predominated. In these magical trimeter lines, the poet evokes a restoration of childhood innocence, a return to Eden, an entrance into Paradise, and not least, a redemption of the “unredeemable” time of *Burnt Norton*.<sup>147</sup> The circle closes on itself as all the echoes are masterfully gathered in. Julian’s place may seem obvious, but here too she is a late addition. The third “all shall be well” invests the coda with the incantatory charm of repetition but also with a universality beyond Little Gidding, or even “History is now and England.” In *A Revelation*, Julian’s phrase refers to a specific, though not specifiable, event: on the Last Day, God will do a “great deed” by which all shall be made well, although no creature may know that deed until it is done.<sup>148</sup> This is what theologians call *apokatastasis*, the restoration of all things to their primal perfection. Eliot’s last three lines, among the most overdetermined in

146. Eliot used McCann’s edition, in which the full sentence reads, “What weary wretched heart and sleeping in sloth is that, the which is not wakened with the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling?” (*The Cloud of Unknowing, Together with The Epistle of Privy Counsel*, ed. Justin McCann [London, 1924; repr., Turnhout: Burns & Oates, 1964], 6).

147. Of all the metrical and nonmetrical forms Eliot employs in the *Quartets*, he uses trimeter only in the last sections of *BN V*, *DS V*, *LG III*, and *LG V*. If we take this increasingly insistent rhythm seriously, we should read the line “all *shall* be well.”

148. Julian, *Sixteen Revelations*, chap. 32 (72–73).

modern poetry, supply a potent metaphor for this “great deed.” The union of fire and rose signifies the convergence of the Two Ways—or, we might say, of Dante and St. John of the Cross—at the end of the journey. Beyond that, critics have proposed innumerable referents for the symbols, ranging from the celestial rose of the *Paradiso* to the flaming topknot of Shiva, Lord of the Dance.<sup>149</sup> To these we may add one more passage from Julian, proclaiming the unity of all the redeemed in Christ: “All the Souls that shall be saved in Heaven without end, be knit in this knot, and oned in this oning, and made Holy in this Holiness.”<sup>150</sup>

Controversial from the start, *Four Quartets* had an immediate, powerful impact on the literary scene. Robert Lowell conveniently expresses the case both for and against Eliot as a religious poet. As a brash Harvard freshman in the mid-1930s, he denounced the convert of *Ash-Wednesday* as “a tireless Calvinist” who “harried his pagan English public” with holiness. Yet in 1943 he praised *Four Quartets* as “probably the most powerful religious poem of the twentieth century, and certainly the most remarkable and ambitious expression of Catholic mysticism in English.”<sup>151</sup> What is astonishing is that this erstwhile “Calvinist” took his last spark of inspiration from a mystic whose theological vision was almost the precise opposite of his own. Hence it came to pass, with Eliot’s eleventh-hour revisions of *Little Gidding*, that “all shall be well” entered the canon through one who scarcely believed it, who could even write that “the glory of man . . . is his capacity for damnation.”<sup>152</sup>

Yet, reversing our perspective, Eliot may have been one of the last surviving members of Julian’s intended public. A recent Calvinist critic notes that, in an age when divine wrath is thoroughly out of fashion, readers often turn *A Revelation of Love* into a spiritual self-help book. “For many, Julian presents almost a theology of self-esteem.”<sup>153</sup> Yet in the 1390s, fear of God’s wrath and judgment so far overshadowed his love that the devout stood in urgent need of a corrective. It was to readers in that apocalyptic age, tormented by scrupulosity, that Julian directed her message of a God incapable of anger, of Christ’s absolute solidarity with Adam, of the ultimate “oning” of all creation. “For these fearful and sorrowing Christians—and for any that remain,” Van Engen concludes, “Julian’s text may not be entirely orthodox, but it may very well be ‘behovely.’”<sup>154</sup> Such Christians were Charles Williams and T. S. Eliot in 1942, the year that the fiery dove, descending on Julian’s home, lifted her toward a belated fame.

149. See esp. Brooker, “Fire and the Rose.”

150. Julian, *Sixteen Revelations*, chap. 53 (138).

151. Robert Lowell, quoted in Gordon, *Imperfect Life*, 227, 601; and Clarke, *Critical Assessments*, 128.

152. Eliot, “Baudelaire,” 344.

153. Van Engen, “Shifting Perspectives,” 10.

154. *Ibid.*, 13.