

Thomas Sterns ('T.S.') Eliot

Audio Guide transcript of National Sound Archive recording

In this sound extract, Eliot reads from part of the Four Quartets, published in 1944; the recording was made in 1950.

'There is not time to read you a whole quartet, and the only section of any one which is at all self-contained, is the Fourth, or Lyrical Movement. So I choose the fourth section out of *Little Gidding*, as the one I think the best:

The dove descending breaks the air
with flame of incandescent terror,
Of which the tongues declare
the ones discharged 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.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar name
behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
which human power can not remove,
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.'