Eliot's Four Quartets: Poetry As Chamber Music

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T. S. Eliot Poems. The Four Quartets. Burnt Norton. I. Words move, music moves. Only in time; but that which is only living Can only die. Words, after speech, reach into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern, can words or music reach. The stillness, as a Chinese jar still moves perpetually in its stillness. Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts. Not that only, but the co-existence, or say that the end precedes the beginning. And the end and the beginning were always there. Before the beginning and after the end. The poetry does not matter. It was not (to start again) what one had expected. What was to be the value of the long looked forward to, long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity? And the wisdom of age? Four Quartets is a set of four poems written by T. S. Eliot that were published over a six-year period. The first poem, Burnt Norton, was published with a collection of his early works (1936’s Collected Poems 1909-1935.) After a few years, Eliot composed the other three poems, East Coker, The Dry Salvages, and Little Gidding, which were written during World War II and the air-raids on Great Britain. They were first published as a series by Faber and Faber in Great Britain between 1940 and 1942 towards Four Quartets. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian. Choreographer Pam Tanowitz has been quietly plying her trade in New York for more than two decades. She now arrives for the first time in London with Four Quartets, the first authorised dance version of TS Eliot’s 1943 work, with the poems read in full by the actor Kathleen Chalfant. “Interesting gets a bad rap as an adjective, but it’s no veiled slight to say Tanowitz’s choreography is truly that – brilliantly, intriguingly, compellingly so.” Saariaho’s music is sparse in orchestration but rich in texture, and that’s true of the production as a whole. Tanowitz never uses a pack of dancers where a single performer would be clearer yet the whole experience is dense with ideas and images, and the viewer can slip between layers.