



“Grace to the Mother - For the Garden - Where all love ends”: The Image of Woman in T. S. Eliot’s Later Poetry

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ABSTRACT

T. S. Eliot is known to have been a defender of culture and order which he feared were being destroyed by waves of sensual and material values. Hence, his constant yearning to create a higher mode of life governed by beauty and virtue, which could only be achieved through a rigorous discipline. Eliot’s search for a way out of the waste land becomes visible in his later poetry which addresses the essential features for a peaceful and blessed existence. Woman in Eliot’s later poetry acts as an agent of love and life, approaching if not identified with Virgin Mary and Dante’s Beatrice; the two being symbols of beauty and virtue-qualities of what Eliot terms as the rose garden. The study traces the image of woman in Eliot’s later poetry in relation to the concept of the rose garden which stands for a stable society and a serene life, governed by ethical values.

Keywords: Woman, Rose Garden, Virgin Mary, Beatrice, Culture.



T. S. Eliot deals with woman as a type or symbol, giving her universal significance. She is presented in concord with Eliot's poetry that journey's from the abyss of despair towards faith and tranquillity. Eliot's early poetry mirrors his contemporary world which is much like Dante's *Inferno*, a barren waste land, having woman as wanton and sterile. The later poetry ushers to the path of salvation or Dante's *Paradiso*, promising of the rose garden as an earthly paradise. The later poetry associates woman with images of rebirth and raises her to the status of the Virgin and Dante's Beatrice, symbolising the ideal and the divine.

Eliot was brought up to believe that "the family background of a man of genius was always of interest, especially if the man thought that his ancestry was important to his career" (Dale, 1988, p. 14). He considered it good for a child to be brought up with great respect for religion, community, and to be instructed "that the personal and selfish aims should be subordinate to the general good" (Moody, 1979, p. 2). Significantly, Eliot's grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, left the poet with a sense of obligation to serve committees and to be the spokesman for culture throughout his life.

Eliot grew up with an awareness of his grandfather's contribution to the cultural identity of St. Louis. Yet when he came in direct contact with the different aspects of the city, he found it "shabby to a degree approaching slumminess" (Scofield, 1988, p. 12). For Eliot, thereafter, "there was always to be a clash between ideal and actuality, between impeccable principles and motive and its realization in the sordid, polluting world of history" (S. Smith, 1982, p. 77). This opposition includes the image of woman throughout his poetry. His early poetry presents a debased woman that contributes to the collapse of civilization; while his later poetry presents the ideal woman that leads to a graceful life. Moreover, Eliot's parents were puritans; hence he "inherited a double dose of their self-examining, self-doubting, highly critical ways. In such families, praise comes seldom, blame is inevitable, and moralizing is the order of the day" (Dale, 1988, p. 23). This explains the rigid standards by which woman is portrayed in Eliot's poetry, i.e., either destructive or idealized.

Eliot notion of womanhood was basically influenced by his mother and sisters who were "forthright, determined, educated, busy about the world, and accustomed to taking care of their men instead of being taken care of" (Dale, 1988, p. 78). Eliot's mother, Charlotte Champe Stearns, was "a social worker, an ardent devotee of woman's rights, and a writer herself" (Mundra, 1999, p.1). She taught her children to be proud of their ancestors, for this reason she published a biography of her father-in-law, William Greenleaf Eliot, and dedicated it to her children "Lest They Forget" (Dale, 1988, p. 23). She wanted to be sure that her children would follow his example, "to make the best of every faculty and to control every tendency to evil" (Dale, 1988, p. 23). Though never expressing it, Eliot must have been closely attached to his mother. When he published her epic poem *Savonarola*, he wrote its



introduction which is an “impersonal document, devoted to ‘History and Truth’ and ‘Of Dramatic Form’” (Read, 1967, p. 31), yet telling nothing about the authoress. Nevertheless, publishing her work indicates that Eliot was proud of his mother’s literary career.

After a full exploration of man’s moral dilemma in his early poetry, Eliot perceives salvation through embracing spiritual faith; distinguish between good and evil, and choosing goodness. Hence, Eliot’s later poetry is occupied with the purification of the soul, endurance of suffering, a final resignation to the will of God, and hope for salvation. This came along with Eliot’s conversion to Anglicanism, upon which he “saw his task as a Christian writer to find a way to re-proclaim the Christian faith in terms the modern world could accept” (Dale, 1988, p. 5).

This development is closely linked to the image of woman in Eliot’s later poetry where she appears gentle, comforting, and pious; a symbol of love and beneficence. According to R. L. Lair (1968), in Eliot’s later poetry, “The church and its intercessory ministry (between man and God) is . . . symbolized in woman (in her is the perpetuation of life); she reminds us of Dante’s interceding Beatrice, emblem of life and truth, wisdom and the eternal radiance of God. But she suggests too quite naturally the image of the Virgin Mary” (p. 43). Flashes of the wanton woman of the early poetry would appear, alluring the protagonist who is wrestling to conquer “the baser compulsion of the personality” (Maxwell, 1952, p. 141). Yet this type of woman is immediately rejected.

The recovery process is addressed in “Ash Wednesday”, where woman ushers man to the path of redemption. F. O. Matthiessen (1958) writes that woman in “Ash Wednesday”, “as a result of the way in which she is described in distinct definite images and yet at the same time indefinite and suggestive . . . can stand at once as Beatrice or a saint or the Virgin herself, as well as being an idealized beautiful woman” (p. 116). The poem concerns the speaker’s process of purgatory before realizing God’s grace and love. This experience is conveyed in the poem through the metaphor of “a desert, a garden, and a stairway between them” (Frye, 1978, p. 230).

“Ash Wednesday” is written in the first person, which marks its point of development and distinguishes it from most of Eliot’s poems. Part I of the poem presents the speaker rejecting what he perceives as a transient life. Hence he is referred to as an ‘aged eagle’: “(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)” (CP 95). The image of the ‘aged eagle’ recalls the eagle mentioned in Psalm 103:5, where David urges man to praise God “so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s”.

The speaker’s renunciation of his past life leads to part II of “Ash Wednesday”. This part was originally published under the title “Salutation”, and given an epigraph from Dante’s *Purgatorio*: “I am one who, when love inspires me take note, and go setting it forth after the fashion which he dictates within me” (Williamson, 1955, p. 172). The epigraph hence points to the Lady of the poem as an agent of love and



redemption. Part II opens with a dreamy scene of a vague Lady beside three white leopards, that are still and content after a recent meal , indicated from a the scattered bones which are “white and shining, picked clean, while that which had been contained in the bones chirps like a bird” (Gardner, 1968, p. 116). The three white leopards represent the world, the flesh, and the devil as three beasts devouring those organs upon which man’s lustful desires dwell (Frye, 1978, p. 233). Hence, the three white leopards are considered as redemptive agents and the process as “dying into life” (Frye, 1978, p. 233):

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree

In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety

On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been

Contained

In the hollow round of my skull. (Eliot, 1974, p. 97)

The bones are joyfully praising the Lady: “because of the goodness of this Lady / And because of her loveliness, and because / She honours the Virgin in meditation” (Eliot, 1974, p. 97), the salvation of man is possible. The bones as “(the images of death and desolation in the earlier poems) are restored in the ritual [of] death and resurrection” (Lair, 1968, p. 44). The white colour of the bones is in coherence with the Lady who is “withdrawn / In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown” (Eliot, 1974, p. 97). The Lady’s withdrawal suggests that her role as a mediator between man and God is not wholly attainable to the speaker who is still attempting “to renounce human love and to turn his attention to divine beauty and divine love” (Lair, 1968, p. 181), which the Lady represents.

This vague Lady is described as “both Virgin and Mother, uniting perfect innocence and supreme experience” (Gardner, 1968, p. 117):

Lady of silence

Calm and distressed

Torn and most whole . . .

Rose of memory

Rose of forgetfulness

Exhausted and life-giving

Worried respectful . . . (Eliot, 1974, p. 97)



D. E. S. Maxwell (1952) believes that the ‘rose’ is related to the Virgin, just as “to Dante she [the Virgin] was the rose – as to Chaucer a ‘fresh flour,’ and to the church generally the Rosa Mystica” (p. 45). Mary being ‘Calm and distressed’ reflects both her faith in God’s mercy and concern for man’s welfare.

In an attempt to overcome his helpless situation, the speaker prays to the Lady whose love is symbolized as a rose garden:

The single Rose

Is now the Garden

Where all loves end

.....

Grace to the Mother

For the Garden

Where all love ends. (Eliot, 1974, p. 98)

E. E. Duncan-Jones (1973) writes that the contradiction between “the Garden / Where all loves end” and “the Garden / Where all love ends” “is not to be limited to one interpretation: but the obvious sense is that while the lower loves come to an end here, in the sense of being concluded, the higher love here reaches its destination, its consummation” (p. 56). The speaker’s prayer to the Lady is the first tread in a stairway which appears in part III of “Ash Wednesday”, originally titled “the summit of the stairway” (Williamson, 1955, p. 175). The image stands for the soul’s ascent to heaven. The speaker, who is “at the first turning of the second stair” (Eliot, 1974, p. 99), turns back to the first stair, where he endured a conflict between hope for the salvation of his soul and despair that redemption is ever attainable. Immediately afterwards, and “at the second turning of the second stair” (Eliot, 1974, p. 99), he suffers from an overwhelming sense of despair because the stair is “dark, damp, [and] jagged” (Eliot, 1974, p. 99). This is enhanced “at the first turning of the third stair” (Eliot, 1974, p. 99), where he encounters evil through a pleasant garden and a beautiful woman, both stand for vices that are hard to reject.

M. Scofield (1988) observes that the spectacle, with its ‘slotted window bellied like the fig’s fruit’, ‘pasture scene’, and ‘antique flute’, is of “a surprising parallel . . . with the painting in ‘A Game of Chess,’ ‘As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene’ (line 98), as if the image of violence and unhappiness which that picture involved were here recast and transformed into an image of sweetness and enchantment” (p. 156). The woman in this scene is actually related to Eliot’s early image of seductive women: “The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green / [. . .] / Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown, / Lilac and brown hair”



(Eliot, 1974, p. 99). This image of woman reminds of “earlier images of love in ‘La Figlia Che Piange’ (‘Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers’), the lilacs of ‘Portrait of a Lady’ and the opening of *The Waste Land* and the hyacinth garden later in ‘The Burial of the Dead’” (Scofield, 1988, p. 156). However, this type of woman is immediately rejected by the speaker who “do[es] not hope to turn again” (Eliot, 1974, p. 95) to a world of debased impulses.

The destructive early type of woman is replaced in section IV by the figure of a Lady, who walked from daybreak to dusk,

Who walked between

The various ranks of varied green

Going in white and blue, in Mary’s colour,

.....

In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary’s colour . . . (Eliot, 1974, p. 100)

The lines suggest that the Lady is an intercessor between the sinful man and God. She could also be an earthly woman “talking of trivial things / In ignorance and in knowledge of eternal dolour” (Eliot, 1974, p. 100). Further, this Lady has “made strong the fountains and made fresh the Springs / Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand” (Eliot, 1974, p. 100). The lady has mystical powers that can regenerate life in a barren land.

The years which have taken away “the fiddles and flutes” (Eliot, 1974, p. 100), as symbols of distraction, revive happy memories that carry with them the figure of a beloved robbed in a white gown:

Here are the years that walk between, bearing

Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring

One who moves in the time between sleep and walking, wearing

White light folded, sheathed about her, folded. (Eliot, 1974, p. 100)

Yet, “youth and love are borne away to burial in a gilded car drawn by jeweled unicorns” (Gardner, 1968, p. 120). The unicorn symbolizes the divine presence, chastity, and spiritual growth:

The new years walk, restoring,

Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring

With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem



The time. Redeem

The unread vision in the higher dream

While jeweled unicorns draw by gilded hearse. (Eliot, 1974, p. 100)

The speaker makes amends and prays to redeem lost time. Significantly, a ‘silent sister’ appears in the scene and she is identified with Beatrice in her quiet responses indicating acceptance, and with the Virgin for the colour of her dress. She stands ‘between the yews’, symbol of grief and the cross, and behind the silenced ‘garden god’, whose ‘flute . . . is breathless’, unable of distraction: “The silent sister veiled in white and blue / Between the yews, behind the garden god, / Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but spoke no word” (Eliot, 1974, p. 100). The sign she makes, which could be of the cross, is an apprehended yet unuttered word of blessing. Eventually, the speaker can glimpse eternity beyond the transient realms of mortal lives: “But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down / Redeem the time, redeem the dream / The token of the word unheard, unspoken” (Eliot, 1974, p. 101).

In part V, a ‘veiled sister’ is asked to pray for “those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and appose thee” (Eliot, 1974, p. 102), and “for those who offend her / And are terrified and cannot surrender / And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks” (Eliot, 1974, p. 103). Not until part VI of “Ash Wednesday” that a woman is explicitly identified with Virgin Mary. The speaker of the poem prays to her, “spirit of the river, spirit of the sea, / Suffer me not to be separated / And let my cry come unto thee” (Eliot, 1974, p. 105). The prayer recalls David’s prayer “let my cry come before thee O Lord” (Psalms 119:69), and makes it probable that the ‘aged eagle’ stretch out his wings and flies.

Eliot continues exploring the path of salvation in “Journey of the Magi”. The poem is a dramatic monologue, delivered by one of the Magi while travelling to Bethlehem to witness the birth of Jesus Christ. The description of the journey suggests that religion is “a hard and difficult path of patience and renunciation (Pinto, 1951, pp. 160-161):

A cold coming we had of it,

Just the worst time of the year

For a journey, and such a long journey:

The ways deep and the weather sharp,

The very dead of winter. (Eliot, 1974, p. 109)

During long and difficult journeys to attain salvation, it is natural that some men would recall the pleasures of the world; consequently seductive women are part of their reverie: “There were times we regretted / The summer palaces on slopes, the



terraces, / And the silken girls bringing sherbet” (Eliot, 1974, p. 109). Therefore, many would quit the new path of redemption and retreat to their former lives, where woman is part of temporal pleasures that hinder the salvation of the soul: “Then the camel men cursing and grumbling / And running away, and wanting their liquor and women” (Eliot, 1974, p. 109). This study explores the image of woman against one man’s journey to attain salvation, which Eliot’s later poetry could represent. Hence, it is not over yet, and the journey continues in the following poems.

Eliot’s “Marina” derives its title and context from Shakespeare’s *Pericles*, which addresses the reunion of an aged king with his daughter, Marina. The reunion is a kind of rebirth to the aged father who is never sure “whether he has crossed the boundaries of dream into reality” (Mundra, 1999, p. 51).

The epigraph of the poem is from Seneca’s *Hercules Furens* “(line 1138) (“what place is this, what land, what quarter of the globe?”)” (G. Smith, 1973, p. 64). The first two lines of the poem are inspired by the words spoken by Hercules after recovering from a fit of madness, during which he slaughtered his children. Hercules’s murder of his children followed his tremendous pride after killing the tyrant who dishonoured his family. Yet he has gained the divine wrath for his self-conceit which led to dispossession and devastation. The juxtaposition of the episode of Hercules and that of Pericles suggests “a recovery of hope despaired of” (G. Smith, 1973, p. 64).

The speaker of the poem is on a voyage, symbolizing a quest journey. As he approaches a new land, he is perplexed at the quality of the new experience evoked by the smell of pine and the wood thrush sound. The speaker becomes aware of his daughter’s existence because of the very smells and sounds associated with her:

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what iselands

What water lapping the bow

And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog

What images return

O my daughter. (Eliot, 1974, p. 115)

Marina, a symbol of hope and faith, heals the speaker of apathy. Consequently, the speaker feels that malice, arrogance, sluggishness, and lust “are become unsubstantial, reduced by a wind, / A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog / By this grace dissolved in place” (Eliot, 1974, p. 115). Marina’s presence remains mysterious, and the speaker perceives that she is “more distant than the stars and nearer than the eye” (Eliot, 1974, p. 115). By the grace of her presence, however, the speaker experience religious ecstasy and expanded consciousness:



This form, this face, this life

Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me

Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,

The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships. (Eliot, 1974, p. 116)

The speaker's resolution to join the new life is evident since the wood thrush is 'calling' at him to follow Marina who is standing across the fog, on the shores of paradise: "What seas what shores what granite towards my timbers / And woodthrush calling through the fog / My daughter" (Eliot, 1974, p. 116).

It is only at the very end of Eliot's *Four Quartets* that the foggy veil is lifted and the speaker enters the garden where all 'love ends'. The *Quartets* concerns "the unreality of human life so governed by time that the present dissolves into memories of the past and desires for the future" (Ford, 1961, p. 343). The *Quartets* meditates on history till the discovery of "the circular journey of man . . . that if man enters the garden of the past and follows his history, he arrives at the garden, from which he set out" (Williamson, 1955, p. 208).

The two epigraphs for the first of the *Quartets*, "Burnt Norton", perhaps for the rest three parts as well, are from the Greek philosopher Heracleitus. The first states that "while all men hold the Word, the Logos, in common, many live as if they had their own private knowledge" (Lair, 1968, p. 52). This suggests man's adherence to his private principles, neglecting the Logos; "the great rational principle of all life" (Lair, 1968, p. 52). The second epigraph states that "the way up and the way down are one and the same" (Lair, 1968, p. 52), which agrees with Eliot's theme of reconciling opposites.

"Burnt Norton" presents a rose garden from which the speaker of the poem is expelled due to his addictions to lustful desires and greed. The rose garden symbolizes "the might-have-been dream world we never quite got inside. It is also our 'first world' . . . the lost world of childhood innocence, and the lost paradisaical Eden of humanity's unfallen conditions" (Blamires, 1969, p. 8). This Eliot depicts in abstract terms:

Footfalls echo in the memory

Down the passage which we did not take

Towards the door we never opened

Into the rose-garden. (Eliot, 1974, p. 189)

The lines establish the starting point of a journey through the *Quartets*, or man's journey after he has been cast out of heaven.



The journey continues in “East Coker”, the second of the *Quartets*, which presents a country dance performed on a village green. The setting is dreamy and exotic:

In that open field

If you do not come too close; if you do not come too close,

On a summer midnight, you can hear the music

Of the weak pipe and the little drum

And see them dancing around the bonfire . . . (Eliot, 1974, pp. 196-197)

The lines are inspired by Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Book Named the Governor*. Sir Elyot believes that the dancing should reflect the nature of the dancers of both sexes. According to him, “a man in his natural perfection is fierce, hardy, strong in opinion, covetous of glory, desirous of knowledge, appetizing by generation to bring forth his semblance. The good nature of a woman is to be mild, timorous, tractable, benign, of sure remembrance, and shamefast” (Elyot, 1962, pp. 77-78). Dancing symbolizes harmony on the levels of marriage, community, and the universe. The “hierarchically ordered dance . . . [is] the true expression of that Love which must govern all things” with “magnanimity, constancy, wisdom, and continence” (Blamires, 1969, pp. 44-45). However, Eliot incorporates Sir Thomas Elyot’s obsolete language in his poetry to suggest the repetitive nature of life and death:

The association of man and woman

In daunsing, signifying matrimonie-

A dignified and commodious sacrament.

Two and two, necessary coniunction,

Holding eche other by the hand or arm

Which betokenth concorde. (Eliot, 1974, p. 197)

In concord with the rhythm of the music, the dancers are raising their feet from the ground and fixing them there again, strikingly mimicking man’s life cycle (Blamires, 1969, p. 46):

Round and round the fire

Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles,

Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter

Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,



Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth

Mirth of those long since under earth

Nourishing the corn. (Eliot, 1974, p. 197)

The dance reflects man cultivating sociability and seeking to become one with the universe. The dancers' moving echoes the rhythm of the flow of natural world that surrounds them:

Keeping time,

Keeping the rhythm in their dancing

As in their living in the living seasons

The time of the seasons and the constellations

The time of milking and the time of harvest

The time of the coupling of man and woman

And that of beasts. (Eliot, 1974, p. 197)

The dancers had time enough "for living, for joy and labor, for copulation and dancing. Nevertheless, death overtook them" (Ward, 1973, pp. 56-57). As time passes, the dancers end being "ashes to earth / Which is already flesh, fur and faeces, / Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and lead" (Eliot, 1974, p. 196).

Significantly, "East Coker" presents a symbolic description of the futility of man's wishes and the shortness of his life. Eliot conceives the earth as a hospital inhabited by a sick man, who has inherited the original sin. This hospital has Christ as its 'wounded surgeon', atoning for man's fall and inducing his final cure, while the hospital's 'dying nurse' represents "the church which mediates between the wounded Christ and the ailing human race" (Quinn, 1982, p. 30):

Our only health is the disease

If we obey the dying nurse

Whose constant care is not to please

But to remind of our, and Adam's curse,

And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse. (Eliot, 1974, pp. 201-202)

The 'dying nurse' teaches man that death and loss lead to transformation and a rebirth into a spiritual reality.



Man caught in the inconstancy of his circumstances and tormented by the ephemerality of life is the topic of the third of the *Quartets*, “The Dry Salvages”. This part presents humanity trapped in an “environment of familiarities and certainties [that] dissolves into a daunting indeterminateness of shifting perspectives and recessions” (Gardner, 1968, p. 121). Therefore,

Anxious worried women

Lying awake, calculating, the future,

Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel

And piece together the past and the future,

Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,

The future futureless . . . (Eliot, 1974, p. 206)

In contrast to these ‘worried women’, “The Dry Salvages” also presents Virgin Mary “whose birth gives meaning to time” (Gardner, 1968, p. 174). A prayer is delivered to the Virgin “in her role as ‘Stella Maris,’ patron of sailors” (Quinn, 1982, p. 38), and whose shrine stands ‘on the promontory’. The Virgin is pleaded to pray “for all those who are in ships” (Eliot, 1974, p. 211), which is considered as a “plea for all suffering and struggling people” (Blamires, 1969, p. 124). Her prayer on behalf of those “whose business has to do with fish” refers to, H. Blamires believes, the church. Her petition in favour of “those concerned with every lawful traffic / And those who conduct them” (Eliot, 1974, p. 211), includes both tradesmen and rulers (Blamires, 1969, p. 110). As Blamires (1969) concludes, “the three estates of Church, Industry, and Government seem to be referred to” (p. 110).

The Virgin is beseeched to intercede for distressed women who have lost their menfolk at wars or work incidents. This prayer is begged of her because she is “the sorrowing Mother, daughter of her own Son, who is yet ‘Queen of Heaven’” (Blamires, 1969, p. 110). The Virgin is also identified with another merciful lady, Dante’s Beatrice, ‘Figlia del tuo figlio’. In other words, Eliot’s later image of woman is “the archetypal representative of all that is the experience of love, beauty, and creativity” (Blamires, 1969, p. 111):

Repeat a prayer also on behalf of

Women who have seen their sons or husbands

Setting forth, and not returning:

Figlia del tuo figlio,

Queen of Heaven. (Eliot, 1974, p. 211)



The Virgin is entreated to pray for those who are lying dead at the bottom of the sea, which recalls Prufrock's drowning in the sea of silence, those who "denied the call to the ritual of Annunciation in the perennial rhythms of nature" (Feder, 1971, p. 240).

Also pray for those who were in ships, and

Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips

Or in the dark throat which will not reject them

Or wherever cannot reach them the sound of the sea bell's

Perpetual angelus. (Eliot, 1974, p. 212)

These requested prayers bring tranquility and harmony in human life. The Virgin's intercession on behalf of man teaches him to be humble, kind, and able to empathize with other suffering fellow beings.

Ultimately, this spiritual journey leads to "Little Gidding", the fourth of the *Quartets*, which is linked with the element of fire that is "associated with the Pentecostal tongues of flame which hung over the heads of the apostles at the coming of the Holy Ghost. . . . Fire is also associated with the purifying flames of purgatorial discipline, with the burning power of Divine Love, and the ardour of human passion" (Blamires, 1969, p.124). The image of the rose garden is central in "Little Gidding". It is the same garden that "Burnt Norton" starts with, and which appears much earlier in the lines concerning the hyacinth girl of *The Waste Land*, so the beginning and end are made one — but with a difference. The garden of the earlier poetry is a place where "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" (Eliot, 1974, p. 19); while that of the later poetry is a place where "the world of spirit descended into the world of sense" (Wagner, 1954, p. 23). Similarly, the fire, representing Divine love and the purgatory, is identified with the rose as a symbol of natural beauty and passion, creating a final image "of the union of the timeless with the temporal" (Quinn, 1982, p. 50). This suggests that "man can find his unity with God through the identification of his human love with the love of the Divine" (Jha, 1996, p. 138): "When the tongues of flames are in-folded / Into the crowned knot of fire / And the fire and rose are made one" (Eliot, 1974, p. 223). Eliot's later image of woman incarnates this union. She plays a crucial role in guiding man through a difficult trial of endurance and remorse. The journey ends in the rose garden, the dwelling place of eternal love.

Finally, if woman shares man's hell in Eliot's earlier poetry, it is she who guides him on the path of penitence till gaining his lost paradise in the later poetry. Eliot presents his ideal woman through the figure of a lady who is beautiful and virtuous. She acquires traits of saints and mystics, appearing in the image of the Virgin and Dante's Beatrice. She is further associated with notions of light, hope, fertility, and with images of life symbolized in the fountain, the river, and ultimately the sea as a symbol of eternity. The woman in this poetry is described in abstract terms as in



“Marin”, “Ash Wednesday”, and *Four Quartets*, where she incarnates enlightenment and spiritual rebirth. This is part of Eliot’s larger scheme to abandon the debased instincts which lead to the ruin of both culture and spiritual values. The pious lady of the later poetry eventually leads to an idealized existence, symbolized in the image of the rose garden as a final abode of spiritual tranquility, sagacity, happiness, and a perfect community.



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