

# T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker": The Patriarchal Word, Space and Temporal Unbound\*

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## Abstract

This study aims at analyzing the maternal and the feminine in T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and "East Coker" in his *Four Quartets* benefiting from post-structural feminist theories. An elaborate understanding of his poetry and these two poems in terms of gender relations and the maternal involves an analysis that is a combination of Eliot's biography, his relations to women including his marriages, his fluctuating religious life and participation to the Anglican Church, which actually involves a desire to find the essence. His formal passage to the Church of England and pursuit of a milder version of Anglo-Catholicism is significant for a deeper understanding of the maternal in that this sect of the religion included doctrines of incarnation and sublimation of Mary. These two aspects are particularly important in the discussion of gender in T.S. Eliot's late works since they open up space for the blurring of boundaries, the unification of opposites and the significance of the feminine element in reaching the ultimate. Besides, instead of treating women as objects of desire and clinging to heterosexual norms, the female becomes the divine element in his late works and particularly *Four Quartets*, which is quintessential for a meaningful existence and the completion of the soul's journey towards unity.

**Keywords:** East Coker, Burnt Norton, Maternal, Gender, Phallogocentrism

## ERİL SÖZ, MEKÂN VE ZAMANIN ÇÖZÜNMESİ: T.S. ELIOT'UN "BURNT NORTON" VE "EAST COKER" ADLI ŞİİRLERİ

### Öz

Bu çalışma, T.S. Eliot'ın *Dört Kuartet*'indeki "Burnt Norton" ve "East Coker" adlı şiirlerindeki anaç ve dişil olanı, post-yapısalcı feminist teorilerden yararlanarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Eliot'un bütün şiirlerinin ve bu iki şiirin cinsiyet ilişkileri ve anaç açısından ayrıntılı bir şekilde anlaşılması, Eliot'ın biyografisi, evlilikleri de dahil olmak üzere kadınlarla ilişkileri, dalgalı dini yaşantısı ve Anglikan Kilisesi'ne geçişinin bir kombinasyonu olan bir analizi gerektirir; ki bu aslında özü bulma arzusuyla bağlantılıdır. Eliot'un İngiltere Kilisesi'ne resmen geçişi ve Anglo-Katolisizm kadar sert olmayan bir kilise versiyonu arayışı, dinin bu mezhebinin enkarnasyon ve Meryem'in sublimasyonu doktrinlerine daha yakın olması anaç kavramının daha derin bir şekilde anlaşılması için önemlidir. Bu iki husus, T.S. Eliot'ın son dönem çalışmalarındaki cinsiyet tartışmasında özellikle önemlidir, çünkü bu hususlar sınırların bulanıklaşmasına, zıtlıkların birleşmesine ve nihai olana ulaşmada dişil öğenin öneminin anlaşılmasına alan açarlar.

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Öte yandan, kadınları arzu nesnesi olarak ele alıp heteroseksüel normlara tutunmak yerine, son dönem eserlerinde ve özellikle *Dört Kuartet*'te kadın, anlamlı bir varoluş ve ruhun birliğe doğru yolculuğunun tamamlanması için olmazsa olmaz olan ilahi bir unsur haline gelir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** East Coker, Burnt Norton, Anaç, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Falogosentrizm

## INTRODUCTION

Even though there are some critics like Gilbert and Gubar defending that Eliotic texts have a tendency to kill the female based on Eliot's own lines going as "any Eliotic text has to, needs to, wants to in one way or another, do a girl in; and if it fails to achieve that goal, it is itself murderously threatened by the girl" (as cited in Pondrom, 2005, p. 323), there are also some other critics who contend that Eliot's texts require a more in depth analysis and if points that sublimate women are revealed, then Eliot's representations of gender can be understood at a different level rather than confining his poetics to that of a heteronormative legacy. Although Eliot's poetic style is generally regarded to be masculine, bringing together his personal life, his spiritual journey and his relations to women through a psychoanalytical frame helps us understand his stance towards women and the maternal.

Though it is not totally irrelevant to mention such objectification and misogyny in his early poetry and the anxiety of the 'New Woman', his latest poems unravel a transformed feminine who is an indispensable part and condition of the male poet's transcendence and significance. As Dekoven (1999) suggests, modernist writing's preoccupation with gender led to "a male modernist fear of women's new power" (p. 75). However, at the same time, this misogyny "was almost universally accompanied by its dialectical twin: a fascination and strong identification with the empowered feminine" (Dekoven, 1999, p. 75).

Despite the fact that the highly paternalistic upbringing of Eliot (Geary, 2016) might have led him to become cautious in representing women and to undergo anxiety of the female and preserve the Kristevan symbolic order, the semiotic can be said to be resurfacing despite Eliot's efforts to repress it. That is to say, his early misogynistic attitudes can be read as part of a reaction to the semiotic resurfacing of the feminine in him through the rhythms, phonic drives and unboundedness of meaning. To put it more rigidly, even if his early writings represent a poet hostile to women and the maternal (Geary, 2016), his later writings show us a writer who reconciled with women.

Even in his early works, which are known for their misogynistic and phallogocentric aspects, there is "the threat of feminine hysteria" (Li, 1997, p. 325). Therefore, in Eliot's writing - whether early, middle or late- we witness a distorted relationship between feeling and meaning and a hysterical self that is unable to express itself anymore in the language of the father but leaning towards Kristevan maternal non-linguistic elements to reconstruct the self and meaning. However much repressive Eliot might have been and however much improperly ordered the literary form is, it is indeed "a symptom of symbolic weakness in relation to the overflowing instinctual drive" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 196). Thus, even if Eliot has long been associated with "a masculinist, and reactionary conception of early modernist culture" (Laity, 2004, p. 2) the

poststructuralist theories allow us to go through his texts to find the pre-oedipal phallic mother in disguise and a semiotized symbolic through reading what is unsaid, absences and gaps. Avoiding the tenets of the high modernist logocentric episteme he was living in, Eliot tended towards a language that is unfinalizable. Eliot may then be said to be approaching towards a semiotic language that is defined by Kristeva (1980) in her book *Desire and Language* as characterized by a “rhythm of a drive that remains forever unsatisfied” (p. 142).

In *Four Quartets*, which is the final work of the poet, the persona is an isolated one detached from the linear time frames of Western history, is constantly within and out of time, going through a disembodied and ungendered experience in which he seeks for a reconstructed theology that would ontologically settle his disillusioned existence. The poet seeks ground for his existence in the cyclical patterns of time, which makes us read these two poems within the framework of post-structural feminism and as having aspects of *parler femme* or *écriture féminine*. Since the time frame Eliot explores in *Four Quartets* is not linear and monologic, he experiences moments of time in which he comes closer to understanding eternal reality. Despite being a totally transcendental poet in his later poetics, Eliot brings together the time and the timeless and gradually blurs the demarcating lines of all that runs opposite to one another. Sudden illuminations coming through the beats of rain, the philosophy of incarnation pervading all throughout the *Four Quartets* provide the reader with a context in which there is a poetic legacy of patriarchal denunciation and the binaries have lost significance, paving the way for a non-dualistic pattern of self-reconstruction. Particularly as regards the structure, Eliot works beyond the literal meanings of the words and he resorts to a musical analogy in the *Quartets*, hence moving away from the phallic discourse of signification.

Each part of the *Quartets* is spatially marked with a name that carries a link with the poet's past and childhood. Though now desolate and deserted, the places once had special meanings for the author and signified an unspoiled relationship between the poet and the nature. Nonetheless, though warfare has destroyed the appearance of those beautiful places, there are timeless moments for the poet through which he can reiterate the beauty of the eternal, the coming together of the transient and the eternal. “Burnt Norton” signifies a country house visited by Eliot in 1934. “East Coker” refers to a village where Eliot's family lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This place has yet another symbolic importance in that Eliot's ashes were to be brought to here following his death and Eliot's constant remark through the *Quartets* that the beginning and end are synonymous is the central theme of this part. “The Dry Salvages” refers to a place where Eliot used to spend his summers as a child and signify for the poet an eternity, a point of unification- of rocks and ocean. The final part of the *Quartets*, “Little Gidding” again refers to an old place where there were dedicated Christians. The names of the titles are all chosen from either childhood times or the past, when things were not rotten or had meaning in them.

Throughout the *Quartets*, the poet concerns himself with a temporality in which “all is always now” (Eliot, 1963, p. 176). He moves away from the linear, progressive frames of temporality and instead seeks for a point that implies hope and redemption. At this point, Eliot's use of mythic structures adds another momentum to his philosophy and to his efforts of avoiding

“the iron grip of the symbolic” as defined by Kristeva (as cited in Lorraine, 2001, p. 11). Therefore, while initiating himself into a realm outside the symbolic law/language of the father, Eliot may be said to be going back to the pre-oedipal jouissance through aesthetic experience, poesis of sounds, rhythms, words as images and myths. As myths represent the collective unconscious, their contribution to an understanding of the repressed feminine becomes invaluable.

### **“BURNT NORTON”: FADING BINARIES AND THE MELTING OF HISTORY FOR THE BIRTH OF THE MATERNAL**

“Burnt Norton” opens up with the poet’s meditation on time and being. The first lines of the poem “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future” (Eliot, 1963, p. 175) subvert the traditional understanding of time as something being linear and progressive. If time is something that is not linear but paralyzed and unable to move on, then this provides us with a concise background for understanding the rest of the *Quartets*. Eliot the poet seems to be trapped in the “presence of the past in a present that is perpetually merging flawlessly with the future” (Murphy, 2007, p. 196). Since “Burnt Norton” temporally and spatially refers to the “fantasies of the primal scene and castration” (Kristeva, 1981, p. 22), the poet freezes the progressive time and creates yet another temporal frame into which he can insert a new history, a history of the distorted subject.

As “Burnt Norton” refers to a place for Eliot where his ancestors lived beforehand when war was at stake on no accounts, it symbolizes a scene for primal fantasy through which Eliot can find a linkage to the maternal. That is, since he associates these places with his childhood and therefore pre-entry into the symbolic realm of the European heteronormative legacy, the language he produces is not bound by syntax and the meaning moves in multiple directions.

To Kristeva, “the permanence and quality of maternal love condition the appearance of the first spatial references” (Kristeva, 1981, p. 15). Most possibly that accounts for the reason why Eliot returned back to those primal sites to seek a mystical union with the maternal through the pre-oedipal rhythmical and musical moanings, since through this way the poet can experience “extrasubjective time, cosmic time, vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance” (Kristeva, 1981, p. 16).

In the logocentric world, time can be equated with subjectivity, the subjectivity of the male master. This male subject, together with the consciousness of history and sequence, becomes the one who systematically controls the episteme within a set, closed system of thought. However, the feminine unconscious is exempt from the sequences of time and the meaning multiplies in various directions, without being clung to bilateral relationship between the sign and the signifier. Therefore, the feminine epistemology grows out of enclosed and bounded terrains and unravels what is beneath and beyond the linear frames of space and time. The poet Eliot, writing the unconscious, also moves away from chronology and seeks for the interstices of time with eternity.

In Kristeva’s own terms, the cyclical and monumental temporalities generally deemed as feminine can also be observed as “conceptions of time in numerous civilizations and experiences, particularly mystical ones” (1981, p. 17). Therefore, this brings us to a platform where we can associate the feminine subjectivity with the mystical union and the distorted, subversive

experiences of time. Besides, since war brings a crisis on the civilization and language becomes impotent of meaning, the self who can no longer speak in the words of patriarchy becomes a hysteric and “would, rather, recognize his or her self in the anterior temporal modalities: cyclical or monumental” (Kristeva, 1981, p. 17). This tendency for a monumental time frame is best seen in the following lines:

If all time is eternally present  
 All time is unredeemable.  
 What might have been is an abstraction  
 Remaining a perpetual possibility  
 Only in a world of speculation. (Eliot, 1963, p. 175)

By moving from a progressive time frame to a cyclical and eternal one, Eliot can be alleged to unfold the submerged feminine element in secular humanist Western history. Since the war and the terror it creates and the killing of thousands of young men and civilians led to the collapse of pride in history as a male concept, Eliot dreams of a world that works on feminine principles of no-history and no-progress. To Middleton (2004), “the wartime Burnt Norton...stages phallic display...as a scene of melancholy-inducing loss in which manhood will be valued as an essential component of the war effort” (p. 90). Since Eliot sees man as the culprit of war and his psychic devastation, he refutes the idea of a linear (masculine) history that implies progress and the episteme in which meanings are organized in a binary pattern.

The idea of war as a source of disillusionment and despair permeate through the *Four Quartets*. The war is seen as a cause of cultural decay and spiritual desolation. The dualistic Western episteme grounds its existence on its history and language. Since it is language that keeps history intact, the collapse of history as a male concept runs parallel to the collapse of language. The language of the patriarchy (and perhaps of God) is “a world of speculation” (Eliot, 1963, p. 175), which in turn implies a vagueness and vanity of meaning. Language as the embodiment of the binary logic is ill and therefore an everlasting meaning cannot be produced in this man-made closed system, since “Words strain, /Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish” (Eliot, 1963, p. 180). As well as the emphasis on the restricted meaningfulness of the logocentric ways of thinking, the poet exposes the gaps, absences and silence in the poem, which in turn dismantle the unconscious and the hysteric aspect of the *Four Quartets*. The lines “Footfalls echo in the memory/ Down the passage which we did not take/ Towards the door we never opened” (Eliot, 1963, p. 175) highlight that the poet is experiencing the unknown and is beyond the expected frames of time and space. His selection of the word ‘echo’ is also significant in that echo is a reflection of a sound articulated by somebody and it comes through hitting against a natural surface or walls, namely a closure. To Blamires, “the echo of footfalls brings the first concrete realization of that possible Other”. (1969, p. 8). Therefore, these echoes and the absences might be a strong indicator of the poet’s ‘periplum’ towards the unknown, towards the lost contact with the feminine element.

Eliot might be mourning the loss of masculinity and facing the ‘coming-in of the other’ as well as implying the deficiency and discontinuity of being a male. The “drained pool”, “empty

alley" (Eliot, 1963, p. 176) as symbols refer to a total lack or total absence. These symbols lead us to think that the culture and history the poet is living in is exhausted and burnt-out and he is trying to find a way to recuperate his impotent self through the anima inherent in nature: "And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight, / And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly" (Eliot, 1963, p. 176). Regarding lotus as a sacred symbol, Nancy K. Gish (1981) contends that the lotos "signifies meditation, an awakened heart and spiritual enlightenment" (p. 99). Then, through the symbols of lotos and water, the poet discovers "a lost world of innocence" (Gish, 1981, p. 99) and these symbols help the poet to bring together all those opposites such as time and the eternal, and human and divine.

Corollary to what is all said, in "Burnt Norton" absence as the feminine speaks. Only by returning the feminine to language is it possible to end the oppositions which deny a place for language "for those who are Other to the white, middle-class, heterosexual and able bodied male" (Gatens, 1991 as cited in. Healy, 2000, p. 50). It is a well known fact that Christian theology permeates the *Four Quartets*; yet Christianity as a religion is paternalistic. Though Eliot alludes to so many phenomena of Christian theology, it is because he is after a different spirituality that will combine him to the God, perhaps the God having feminine attributes such as healing war-torn people. On one side Eliot establishes this new spirituality on the terms of lack and absence and on the other hand postulates the need for getting rid of sensual desire and highlights the spirit's need to be purged through darkness, to be reborn through the lines:

World not world, but that which is not world,  
 Internal darkness, deprivation  
 And destitution of all property,  
 Desiccation of the world of sense,  
 Evacuation of the world of fancy,  
 Inoperancy of the world of spirit,  
 This is the one way, and the other. (Eliot, 1963, p. 179)

Kevin Hart (2015) contends that Eliot in one sense gets away or escapes from mainstream Christian theology and offers "becoming an alter christus" (p. 244) to get rid of one's sinful situation. This case signifies Eliot's passage to Anglican Catholicism in 1927 and the real implication beneath this is that the prevalent modes of theology and the logocentric thinking drove the poet towards seeking alternative sites of meaning through which he can recuperate the original form. Therefore, the fact that both past and future point towards an eternal moment that is gendered feminine are inextricably connected with the search of a semiotic self or returning back to the semiotic self. "Rose garden", "birds", "echoes", "rose-leaves" are all phenomena that can be gendered feminine since these are indispensable parts of nature, while man represent culture, civilization and history (See Longenecker, 1997). All these words in turn combine to form "our first world" (Eliot, 1963, p. 175), which is the semiotic realm where the poet is seeking an "unnameable jouissance" (Kristeva, 1981, p. 16). This first world is being re-established through a musical analogy "with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist" (Eliot, 1957, p. 30). Despite the pronouns 'we' and 'they', it becomes impossible to clearly locate

their referents, since the garden is filled with “other echoes” (Eliot, 1963, p.175). In a poststructural feminist context, the following lines can be read as the depressed/castrated male subject’s retrospective journey towards the semiotic to unearth the maternal within.

Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?  
Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,  
Round the corner. Through the first gate,  
Into our first world, shall we follow. (Eliot,1963, pp. 175-6)

As the lines above imply, the poet removes his persona from the masculine havoc of war and seeks relief in “our first world”(Eliot,1963, pp. 175-6). Contrary to traditional modes of masculinity, gender loses ground in the “Burnt Norton” and through a skillful re-writing of or alluding to the *Genesis* 2:4-3-24<sup>1</sup>, Eliot associates Eve with a thrush which is known for its ability to articulate musical, rhythmical sounds. Therefore, subverting the whole history of “Eve as the seductress”, Eliot comes up with the idea that Eve speaks not in the language of God and Adam, but has her own way of communication through music. The single question mark Eliot uses in the “The deception of the thrush? Into our first world” (Eliot, 1963, p. 175) is sufficient on its own to claim a subversive poetic legacy for Eliot, since these lines evoke the presence of a feminine poet trying to save Eve from the position of being a seductress and transform her into a figure who is capable of reproduction and is gifted with the knowledge of good and bad. When read as a revisionist story of the Genesis, the first part of “Burnt Norton” depicts a persona torn between confusion and paralysis but at the same time knowing the peace and relief in the Kristevan semiotic which “in which multiple meanings and semantic non-closure prevail” (Butler, 1989, p. 105).

The second part of “Burnt Norton” can be said to be the poeticized form of Salvador Dali’s painting named *The Persistence of Memory*. The matter turns from hard to liquid and moves in multiple directions. This fluidity in turn eradicates boundaries between body/spirit, form/matter and time/timeless. In Murphy’s words, in “Burnt Norton” “the past and the present, for example, or the present and the future, memory and experience—are so near to each other as to be barely perceptible” (2007, p. 195). What the poet pays attention to is actually the still point, the intercession of time and timeless rather than present or future.

The poet’s insistence on this still point can be linked with the desire to move away from linear temporalities and a return to the pre-oedipal world where things can neither be named nor located, as language is non-existent there. Eliminating both temporality and spatiality from the poem, the poem seems to dismantle the different layers of existence and becoming. What is more, the male subject is defined through time and history in Western metaphysics; however, the newly constructed ‘I’ is on no accounts rooted or located in history. The poet as a persona who is seeking mystical union and spiritual illumination through primal fantasy needs to release his self from the temporal, in order to find the unchanging, the essence. In addition, he also has to get rid of the male self through mystic experience and language that is beyond time, not within it or temporally

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<sup>1</sup>The quotations from Genesis are taken from <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202%3A4-3%3A24&version=NIV> accessed 15.08.2021

bound. Seeing that the modern science and epistemology and understanding of progress cannot help him to achieve this illumination, Eliot writes,

At the still point of the turning world neither flesh nor fleshless,  
Neither from nor towards, at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point. (Eliot, 1963, p. 177)

The poet is in an in-between state, oscillating between the bodily and the divine. This is explicitly related to the hero's repressed yearning "to lapse out into maternal protectiveness" (Pinkney, 1984, p. 119). He is in a world where 'being' is not defined through progress of time or identification with a place. When looked at from an Irigarayan perspective, the poet seems to be in a fluid state of "self and not self" (Battersby, 1998, p. 99), despite his insistence on the "still point". The patriarchal self now seems to be a castrated one, undulating between the self and the object of that 'I', the (M)other or experiencing a relational connection to the God as (m)other. The poet tears himself away from the linear temporal frame of the father and says "To be conscious is not to be in time" (Eliot, 1963, p. 177), asserting his existence in a timeless maternal realm.

The outcome of this oscillation between "self and not self" is going beyond the Law-of-the-Father and getting spiritually rid of a desiring body. If the embodied subject has grown out of being a desiring 'I', then this means that a semiotic self is being reconstructed. "Inner freedom", "practical desire", "suffering" are concepts that are used widely in the poem and linked with the body. Thus, if the "still and moving" white light helps the poet to see his mirror image of the body, it also helps him to get rid of the excesses of freedom and desire. In the face of all this turmoil, the poet struggles on an unruly border, pushes the boundaries of his existence to a limit and discovers the maternal side of his existence.

The feminine, towards the end of "Burnt Norton" becomes the element that arises when the patriarchal self is dissolved when he says "This is the one way, and the other is the same" (Eliot, 1963, p. 179). Even if Eliot might be alluding to the ways of redemption and transience in Christian theology, the fact that he evades from linearity and desire bring forth a self in pure form, ungendered yet. Despite the fact that music and language moves in relation to time and are in flux, there is an unchanging pattern that deems them meaningful, just as in the case of the Chinese jar. The aesthetic quality that gives birth to the jar is the fact that pro-creation of patterns and stillness brings forth eternity.

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.  
And all is always now. (Eliot, 1963, p. 180).



Besides focusing on the idea of the transience of time and a search for eternity through a newly reconstructed mysticism, Eliot reminisces the fragility and futility of words to convey meaning and the depths of experience. In Murphy's words, the poem is obsessed with "philosophical abstractions and metaphysical speculations regarding time and experience" (2007, p. 203). The decenteredness and deterioration of the language of the father and its artificiality seems to bother the poet who is after the unchanging truth. Nevertheless, it is poetry, rather than speech or prose, which enables the production of meaning and exposing the depths of emotion.

### **"EAST COKER": THE DESIRE FOR THE LAND OF THE MOTHER AND MATRILINEALITY, THE MATERNAL BODY REVISITED**

The musical qualities in *Four Quartets* continue to persist also in "East Coker". The music in the poem seems to be dispersed all throughout the lines and because Eliot uses words as images rather than conveyors of meanings, reading the whole poetry turns into listening to a musical composition that speaks in another language unheard so far. In other words, Eliot heightens the limits of poeticity in "East Coker" more through maternal rhythms, alliterations, melodies and opposites, thereby making the poem flow like a river. Keeping in mind that a post-structural feminist analysis does not pay attention to the core linguistic aspects, i.e. the construction of meaning through structures, it can be proposed that Eliot establishes meaning through plurality and open-endedness implied through the non-stop cycle of decay and regeneration.

In "East Coker", the paradoxes become an important means for Eliot to articulate his personal philosophy. As Sheena J. Vachhani (2019) states, the politics of *écriture féminine* and includes "ambiguities, contradictions, paradoxes, or being exiled or personally attacked for these endeavours" (p. 20). As an example to how paradox and subversion function in "East Coker" and how the forgotten, misrepresented other could be brought to speech, Murphy expresses that the very first lines of "East Coker" allude to Mary, "the queen of Scots" and her being "executed for treason in 1587" (2007, p. 204). Popping out as a refrain throughout the poem, "In my beginning is my end" refers to a mind-set "that all too often seems to be on the verge of slipping away into the vagueness of reflection" (Murphy, 2007, p. 204). The paradox in Mary Stuart's motto therefore "is in itself an instance of that emphasis upon circularity rather than upon straight-line progress as the basis of meaningful patterning, which the poem as a whole insists upon" (Blamires, 1969, p. 41). What is more, this line entails a philosophy which purports that everything is together with or combined to or co-exists with its opposite. Paying attention to the principle of difference, this line is the representative of a philosophy that revolts a dualistic worldview and defends that there is a realm in which there is no hierarchy or classification. Taking into consideration the mystic tone of the poet, this realm may be taken as the spiritual attainment or a purgatorio; yet, for the purposes of our discussion what holds important is the elision of boundaries between binaries and the desire of the poet to escape from the patriarchal realm of the mundane. Actually, as the poet emphasized beforehand "the imprecision of words", he tries to go to the roots where meaning and eternity are entrenched and unbound to language. Here is surely either the maternal or a locus arrivable through the maternal body.

The story of Mary's persecution does not only function to imply the blurred boundaries between opposites. Since Eliot's great grandfather was also a dissenter "from the so-called established church headed by the king" (Murphy, 2007, p. 204), he had to leave the place for reasons of security. As well as giving the message that language goes in many directions and the opposites created by it are actually fluid, Eliot also touches upon his own story to provide justification for how an end may lead to a beginning and vice versa.

The fact that "East Coker" symbolizes earth, "the ancestral soil from which the poet is sprung" (Schneider, 1975, p. 188), strengthens the idea of motherhood embedded into *Four Quartets* in general and "East Coker" in particular. His use of water and fire in the following parts again veer around the transformative and somewhat reproductive power of these natural elements. How fire can be reproductive bedazzles the mind; however, it might be either through cleansing of the soul from worldliness and sin or turning back to original state by burning. While on the one hand dismissing the importance of all man-made systems including modified forms of religion, law, epistemology, science and language and focusing on natural phenomena, Eliot superimposes a new philosophy of the maternal. Stone (2012) contends that "In Western civilization there has been a widespread tendency to understand the maternal body and the self in opposition to one another" (p. 10). If one is to become a subject, that person has to tear the bonds with the mother. However, Eliot does the reverse. He turns back to the mother, tries to strengthen the ties to form another form of semiotic subjectivity. Through this new philosophy, Eliot grants the feminine natural elements a power, therefore a position of subjectivity.

Eliot's desire to escape from the "iron grip of symbolic" as stated by Kristeva can also be read through Irigarayan mother-daughter perspective (as cited in. Lorraine, 2001, p. 11). Since psychoanalysis is not confined to gender but its implications at the symbolic and metaphorical level, the mother-daughter theory fits in the discussion of "East Coker" in which the poet tries to "institute basic social justice and rescue the natural world from destruction...through continued questioning of the primary symbols of our culture, including religion and law" (Joy et al., 2002, p. 69). Therefore, Eliot's search for a new theology and spiritual attainment and resorting to myth with the hope of redemption can be linked to his search of an undistorted history, as "history as expressed in myth is more closely related to female, matrilineal traditions" (Irigaray, 2002, p. 71). Besides, even if Eliot is not a daughter, his poetry can still be read in the light of Irigarayan mother-daughter theory, since the psychoanalytical process in Irigaray's terms "finds the threads of her entry into the Underworld, and if possible, her way out" (Irigaray, 2002, p. 72). Despite the fact that Irigaray here revisits an ancient myth related to Demeter and Persephone's union, the same case applies for Eliot who is unable to speak in the margins of the symbolic law and language and needs a re-union with the mother to redeem his existence through "going back in time" and "to find the traces of her estrangement from her mother" (Irigaray, 2002, p. 2). What Irigaray defends in all these statements is that the symbolic realm separates the individual from the maternal to ensure its continuity and a process of matricide endlessly goes on. The poet, becoming aware of this, questions history to dismantle a possible connection to the primal jouissance and depicts how the ideas of reason, science and progress fail, as can be understood from "the late November", "the

disturbance of spring" and "snowdrops writhing" (Eliot,1963, p.184), all of which implicitly allude to the barrenness in his *Waste Land*. The lines in *Ecclesiastes* below are truly the opposite of what Eliot says in "East Coker", in which time as a concept is distorted and disillusionary.

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal. (3:1-3)<sup>2</sup>

As opposed to the *Ecclesiastes*, for Eliot "Houses live and die: there is a time for building/And a time for living and for generation" (Eliot, 1963, p. 182). Even if everything seems to be bound with time, there is a constant evolution in nature and the world and things happen in a different time frame than of God's. Therefore, it is impossible for boundaries to remain fixed all the time. Instead, one thing becomes transformed to the other in the course of time. While our existence turns into corpses, making us inside-out when heard and therefore is abject, the meaning of the social, political, economic and cultural systems made by man lose their significance. And if they are discursive, can we talk about their stability and fixity? Nonetheless, the fact is that all these discursive systems are impotent and unable to generate eternal and infinite meanings. Even if time seems to govern all the courses of events in the world, the end-result is decay and perishment. Only through the blessing of nature (M)other, what decays turns back in another form, rejuvenated and embellished. However, manly constructions are always apt to get lost.

Irigarayan maternal philosophy defends that one must be separated from the maternal body to enter into the symbolic or become a subject. So long as one is together with the maternal body, he/she cannot become a true subject in the paternal discourse. Whereas in the maternal realm there is yet no differentiation between the subject and object, the paternal realm divides everything into two opposites. Eliot undulates towards the maternal and seeks to bring the opposites to a reconciliation by exposing the inherent cycle in nature. All things mingle with their opposites and nature hosts a continuous transformation within itself. The poet elsewhere again brings the opposites together by subverting the linear processing patterns of the mind and leads us to think in an upside-down manner. This opposition to linear processing patterns of the mind is also associated with a revolt to male time, the time of history. Eliot escapes from the fixed boundaries of space and time while saying "In order to arrive at what you are not/You must go through the way in which you are not" (Eliot,1963, p. 187). These lines also hint towards a non-patriarchal, non-western, non-rational and non-invasive ways of a new epistemology. In this epistemology, the idea of self is annihilated and instead there is an 'I' positioned afloat, without an opposite 'object'.

If absence and silence are feminine and the function of poetic language is to bring back what is lost and repressed, the lines below refer to a moment when logos as a discourse loses supremacy over what it has dominated. In other words, the poem describes a scene of paralysis of expression, a silent hysteria on faces and following these is a stage of liminality in which the poet is on the verge of illumination. The darkness is an element through which the soul will undergo purgation

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<sup>2</sup> The quotes are taken from [Ecclesiastes 3 NIV - A Time for Everything - There is a time - Bible Gateway](#)

and the self will be dissolved. Either in a theological or a deconstructionist feminist context, the oblivion of self opens up a space for the 'other'.

And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence  
 And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen  
 Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about,  
 Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious  
 of nothing. (Eliot, 1963, p. 186)

In "East Coker", the gaps between the lines give us hints of the loss of patriarchal consciousness and the diffusion, not the erection of a feminine voice that either articulates itself through divinity or the mixed boundaries and cyclic time of the nature. Though these two seem to be different, in fact they are the same in the sense that nature is the reflection of the divine. As opposed to the divine image of man as the representative of the patriarchal God, Eliot's theological assumptions are ones that are modified in favour of the feminine and motherhood of God. He brings man and woman together in the dance, writing of no hierarchy.

The association of man and woman  
 In daunsinge, Signifying matrimonie-  
 A dignified and commodious sacrament.  
 Two and two, necessarye conuinciton,  
 Holding eche other by the hand or the arm  
 Whiche betokeneth concorde. (Eliot, 1963, p. 183)

Eliot's allusion to his great grand father Thomas Elyot and the use of archaic language in the above stanza may be associated with "phantasy of the 'Primal Scene'—Desire here symbolised by both music and bonfire, drum and pipe allegorizing male and female as they hold hands circling the flames" (Brown, 2003, p. 9). Haffey (2019) develops a parallel line of thought concerning this and reads these lines as a moment of reconciliation of time and eternity (male-feminine) by maintaining that "the dance is the place at which seemingly contradictory elements are able to coexist, including time and timelessness" (p. 75). She further highlights this recurring theme of the reconciliation of opposites and the stillness and movement in these words: "For Eliot, this union between movement and stillness, between time and timelessness, is significant because it represents the place in which humans can achieve momentary union with God" (Haffey, 2019, p. 75), which in turn strengthen the mystical and non-patriarchal/feminine aspect of *Four Quartets* in general and the dance scene in particular. Eliot therefore moves from fantasy and worldliness towards a mystical union of opposites through the figure of dance which embodies harmony, cyclicity and rhythm. The cycle of life that consists of birth, growth, maturation, breeding, old age and death is meaningless. Instead of these progressive moments coming after one another, the still point in which there is not any difference but the union is important. The point where he converges the mystical and spiritual union holds significance for the poet since he is incapable of expression and cannot exist anymore within the enclosed space of human language: "A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion/ Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle/ With words and meanings The poetry does not matter" (Eliot, 1963, p. 184). In the face of this

wrestling with meaning and the (male) surgeon's inability to heal, the (feminine) healer/saviour arises like Christ. The wounded surgeon may be alleged to be Christ as he is the supposed saviour and Eliot again comes up with the idea of godliness of the feminine and the femininity of God, since compassion will resolve the fever.

The wounded surgeon plies the steel  
That questions the distempered part,  
Beneath the bleeding hands we feel  
The sharp compassion of the healer's art  
Resolving the enigma of the fever chart. (Eliot, 1963, p. 187)

Constantly reiterating the compassionate and healing side of the (maternal) God in "East Coker", Eliot's focuses on attainment of spiritual union and bringing together the opposites for the sake of unity. Establishing his own spiritual theology and philosophy of knowledge, Eliot pays attention to experience as the source of information. In Western Aristotle-based thinking, the source of illumination and knowledge is senses and reason. Being quite a deterministic and dualistic epistemological stance, the Western philosophy is founded upon these concepts and the same philosophy harnesses the religion within its paternalistic ends. Nevertheless, Eliot deconstructs the accumulative (knowledge as a cumulative, progressive concept) nature of Western epistemology and replaces the concept of knowledge with 'wisdom' that depends more on experience than on senses and reiterates the idea of dynamism behind wisdom formed after each experience. As opposed to the hubris of the modern man who knows all through reason, Eliot comes up with humility, a prophetic stance, "which opens up selfhood to the other" (Brown, 2003, p.12). Besides exposing the importance of humility against patriarchal standards of "old men", Eliot hammers the dualistic (subject-object) aspect even prevalent in the human and God dichotomy.

Do not let me hear  
Of the Wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,  
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,  
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.  
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility. Humility is endless. (Eliot, 1963, p. 185)

*Four Quartets* indeed works on two basic premises. One is the purgation and purification of the patriarchal self through matrilineality and its transcendence and unity with the God and the second is the vanity of worldliness and meaninglessness of personal experience that is defined by time. The poet, who at the same time behaves like a social scientist and observer, protests against the idea that (patriarchal) civilization rests on progress and hierarchical ordering. This can be exemplified with the lines: "O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark / The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant, / The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters" (Eliot, 1963, p.186). The poet loads the darkness with multiple meanings. The first meaning, the darkness where all go implies oblivion and vanity. Suddenly the poet leaps towards a second meaning, which is contextually the opposite of the first one. It is the darkness at the threshold of

illumination. Whereas the first darkness is literally associated with death and a total loss, the second darkness, "darkness of God" (Eliot, 1963, p. 186) is reproductive and signifies the rebirth of a self that is cleansed and purged and united, not split into two. As well as putting forward a harsh criticism against the trends of modern and 'already' dead society, the poet delineates the disillusionary nature of rational-patriarchal Western civilization. Furthermore, he implicitly states that being civilized is getting far away from the prime essence of humanity, our mothers and God. I also read the words "do not let me hear" (Eliot, 1963, p. 186) as an instant of hysteria on the poet's part, since he will not be able to respond back in the symbolic language if he hears something and his body or existence seeks ways of a re-expression in another language, the very first language of the mother, in the form an escape.

### CONCLUSION

In *Four Quartets* Eliot aims at perceiving the whole through fragments, on one hand showing the transience of time and on the other hand trying to reach salvation and unity through eternity. Creating a distinct theology of his own, Eliot creates a space that is out of the reach of the symbolic realm and uses poetry, the language of the mother, to conquer the ultimate reality. Subtly interweaved with themes from religion, philosophy and history, "*Burnt Norton*" and "*East Coker*" lay bare the significance and indispensability of the maternal as savior. Blurring the language's relation to immediate space and temporality, Eliot writes from memory and of imagined territories of childhood, which Kristeva sees as an exploration of primal jouissance and mingles myth, religion and subconscious to subvert the classical notions of time and space and to come up with a solution to the crisis of (masculine) authorship and war.

The two poems veer around the idea of the intersection of time with timeless and a desire to cling to the 'still point' in the face of a relentless warfare and a heedless technology turning lives upside down. This 'still point' refers to the maternal, which will save the child from the Blitz of war besides reconstructing the wretched patriarchal self of the poet., The feminine –though not always being an opaque figure- is a governing element. As opposed to the representations of women in Eliot's early poetry usually within a misogynistic or 'vulva dentata', the female as monster context, in *Four Quartets* the feminine becomes transformed from 'absence and silence' to the one who will save and open up the boundaries or constraints of male-normed theology, philosophy and epistemology.

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