

TO MAKE LOVE PUBLIC,
AND PUBLICATION JUSTIFIED:
T. S. ELIOT'S "A DEDICATION TO MY WIFE"
AND ANNE BRADSTREET'S
"TO MY DEAR AND LOVING HUSBAND"

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Received September 15th, 2013

Accepted December 6th, 2013

KEYWORDS

T. S. Eliot; Anne Bradstreet; "A Dedication to My Wife;" "To My Dear and Loving Husband;" *The Elder Statesman*; Puritan literature; poetic sincerity; poetic impersonality

PALABRAS CLAVE

T. S. Eliot; Anne Bradstreet; "A Dedication to My Wife;" "To My Dear and Loving Husband;" *The Elder Statesman*; literatura puritana; sinceridad poética; impersonalidad poética

ABSTRACT:

T. S. Eliot's "A Dedication to My Wife" and Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear and Loving Husband" share a number of Biblical allusions and images, as well as the theme of unity in love. Bradstreet wrote other similar poems for her husband. Eliot's "Dedication" is unique in his production, but it is closely related to his play *The Elder Statesman*. The celebration of human love in Bradstreet's poem may be considered subversive, but she succeeds in making it compatible with Puritan doctrine. Eliot's poem is strangely at odds with his theory and practice of impersonality, but it achieves its full meaning as the culmination of the poet's quest. Both poems can disconcert readers, but they are justified responses to the circumstances in which they appeared.

RESUMEN:

"A Dedication to My Wife", de T. S. Eliot, y "To My Dear and Loving Husband", de Anne Bradstreet, comparten algunas alusiones e imágenes bíblicas, además del tema de la unidad en el amor. Bradstreet escribió otros

poemas similares dedicados a su marido. El poema de Eliot es insólito dentro de su producción, pero guarda una estrecha relación con su obra teatral *The Elder Statesman*. El canto al amor terrenal que se permite Bradstreet podría considerarse subversivo, pero la autora consigue hacerlo compatible con la doctrina puritana. La teoría y la práctica de la impersonalidad quedan lejos de este poema, pero con él Eliot culmina de manera significativa su trayectoria poética. Ambos poemas pueden desconcertar al lector, pero son respuestas justificadas a las circunstancias en las que surgieron.

The art of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612-1672) has little in common, separated as they are by several centuries of changing literary tastes and conventions. Their perception as authors exemplifies the problems and ironies of establishing a national canon: Bradstreet, born near London, has come down in history as the first American poet; Eliot, born in Missouri, is generally considered a paragon of Britishness. Poets of later generations such as Adrienne Rich or John Berryman admired Bradstreet's poetry, but Eliot is unlikely to have been familiar with it—the field of American Studies did not consolidate during his lifetime.¹ Further, Bradstreet was considered a poet of historical importance, rather than literary merit. Interestingly, the American New Critics were the first to show an interest in the work of early American authors (Durán 97).

Both Eliot's "A Dedication to My Wife" and Bradstreet's "To My Dear and Loving Husband" have the potential to challenge readers' expectations. They will be approached comparatively, as autonomous texts and within the context of the authors' whole productions. The purpose is to explain how they work as poems, why they came to be and why they were published.

THE POEMS IN THEMSELVES

"A Dedication to My Wife" was the last of the *Occasional Verses* that closed T. S. Eliot's *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. The poet's obvious aim was to openly communicate his gratitude to his second wife, Valerie Fletcher Eliot. Clear from the very first words is a sense of indebtedness for the joy, encouragement and peace of mind that Valerie brought to Eliot's life:

To whom I owe the leaping delight
That quickens my senses in our waking time
And the rhythm that governs the repose of our sleeping time,
The breathing in unison (Eliot, *Collected* 220)²

¹ In a lecture given in Saint Louis in 1953, Eliot recognized the existence of a genuinely American literature. "American Literature and the American Language" was included in *To Criticize the Critic* (1965).

² The original layout is reproduced in all verse quotations, both lyrical and dramatic.

The predominance of organic imagery in these lines (reflex, heartbeat, relaxation, breathing) is striking and reminiscent of movement II of “Burnt Norton” (1936): “the trilling wire in the blood,” “the dance along the artery,” “the circulation of the lymph” (Eliot, *Collected* 178). In the first of *Four Quartets* (1936-1942), these images of bodily inevitability are unnoticed expressions of a cosmic harmony that Eliot calls “the dance” (Howard 42). The lovers’ physical sensations—the first thing conveyed to readers in “Dedication”—can also be considered integral to it.

Before becoming “occasional verses,” Eliot’s lines were published preceding the text of his last play, *The Elder Statesman* (1959), under the title “To My Wife.” Only the first stanza, quoted above, remained the same in the definitive version of 1963. Originally, the second stanza read as follows:

Of lovers . . .
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech
And babble the same speech without need of meaning: (Eliot, *Elder* 5)

The last two lines both imply and negate the sequence thought-speech, as well as the connexion between speech and its meaning. Carried on from the previous stanza (“breathing *in unison*”), the idea of the lovers’ union evolves into that of their mutual understanding. Dots, as used in the first line, seldom appear in Eliot’s poems. His readers are likely to disapprove of them as marks of “the general mess of imprecision of feeling” (Eliot, *Collected* 191)—as he had put it in the concluding movement of “East Coker” (1940)—of the flaw of vagueness, which every poet should struggle to avoid. Eliot seems to have regretted the dots and completed the line when he later gave poem status to “To My Wife:” “Of lovers whose bodies smell of each other” (Eliot, *Collected* 220). In so doing, he made the line cohere with the organic imagery of the previous stanza and with the central idea of unity in love. Further, the colon after “meaning” was replaced by a period, following the syntactically complex statement of the object, which takes up six lines.

The poet added a new stanza, apparently setting two images against each other (“winter wind,” “tropic sun”), but actually establishing a parallelism between them, clear in the syntax; their similarity consists in a common essential quality (“peevish,” “sullen”) and in their producing no effect (neither “chill” nor “whither”). Two symbols, whose great significance in Eliot’s poetry will be discussed below, are also introduced: the roses and the rose-garden. As in the first stanza, we find imaginative echoes of *Four Quartets*: nature, the seasons, mystic love. The lovers have each other and their strong, enduring affection:

No peevish winter wind shall chill
No sullen tropic sun shall whither
The roses in the rose-garden which is ours and ours only

(Eliot, *Collected* 220)

In the earlier text, published with the play, the last stanza constitutes a more explicit dedication: “to whom,” with which the poems begins, finally becomes “to you.” The first two lines are remarkably prosaic, and the third and fourth draw attention to the distance separating the lovers’ private knowledge from the public statement made to the readers:

To you I dedicate this book, to return as best I can
 With words a little part of what you have given me.
 The words mean what they say, but some have a further meaning
 For you and me only. (Eliot, *Elder* 5)

These four lines were reduced to two and their candidness toned down. In its 1963 form, the poem still contrasts the private (“you and me only”) with the public (“others”); in fact, more attention is drawn to the opposition as a result of Eliot’s editing of the poem: “But this dedication is for others to read:/ These are private words addressed to you in public” (Eliot, *Collected* 220).

In act I of *The Elder Statesman*, a distinction is made between the lovers’ private world and their public rapport (13-14); this distinction is paralleled by the uneasiness of a politician as he retreats into privacy (16). Eliot begins his essay “The Three Voices of Poetry” (1957), contemporary with the play, discussing the poems that Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning addressed to each other. In Eliot’s opinion, love poems are always expected to be received by the lover, but also by an ideal reader: “my opinion is, that a good love poem, though it may be addressed to one person, is always meant to be overheard by other people. Surely, the proper language of love—that is, of communication to the beloved and to no one else—is prose” (“Three Voices” 90). Prose for private love, poetry for public love.

Anne Bradstreet’s “To My Dear and Loving Husband” must have remained unpublished, waiting for “other people” to read it, for many years. It was included, about three hundred years before the publication of Eliot’s “A Dedication to My Wife,” in the second edition of *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (1687). Its frontispiece categorized it as one of the “diverse other pleasant and serious Poems by a Gentlewoman in those parts,” i.e. in the distant American settlements.³ The poet had married Simon Bradstreet at the age of 16, and they both settled in Massachusetts Bay Colony two years later. The poem opens with the image—typical of love poetry and also appearing in Eliot’s “Dedication”—of the

³ A digitalized image of the frontispiece of the second edition of *The Tenth Muse* is available at the website of the *Library of Congress* <<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/images/at0177as.jpg>>. Web. 2nd December 2013.

two lovers as one being. In the first four lines—three parallel sentences beginning with a conditional clause—the poet moves from the private (“we,” “thee”) to the public sphere, as other women are addressed and challenged:

If ever two were one, then surely we.
 If ever man were lov'd by wife, then thee;
 If ever wife was happy in a man,
 Compare with me ye women if you can. (Bradstreet, *Works* 225)

The two lines that follow express the husband's love's worth, with a choice of Orientalist terms of comparison: “I prize thy love more than whole Mines of gold,/ Or all the riches that the East doth hold” (Bradstreet, *Works* 225). The imagery of precious objects and goods is a counterpoint to the austere lifestyle of the American settlers, but the *Bible* has been identified as its source: “the judgements of the Lord” are “more to be desired than gold” (Pss. 19.9-10).⁴ Likewise, the characteristically Puritan restraint seems to be at odds with the image implicit in the following verse line—the inextinguishable flame of love—and with the fully rewarding, mutual dependence between the lovers, the apparent self-sufficiency of their feelings for each other: “My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,/ Nor ought but love from thee give recompence” (Bradstreet, *Works* 225). These lines also contain a Biblical echo: “Much water cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (Sg. of Sol. 8.7), from a source that is an imaginative influence for both Eliot and Bradstreet. The “Song of Solomon” sings of sensual love and the physical beauty of a woman metaphorically presented as a garden:

My sister, my spouse, is as a garden enclosed, as a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed up. Thy plants are as an orchard of pomegranates with sweet fruits, as camphire, spikenard, even spikenard and saffron, calamus, and cinnamon with all the trees of incense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. O fountain of the gardens, O well of living waters, and the springs of Lebanon. (Sg. of Sol. 4. 12-16)

This garden of love and fertility can be related to Eliot's rose-garden, a key image in poems like “Dedication” or “Burnt Norton”. Needless to say, the spices it yields are among “the riches that the East doth hold,” less dear than Simon Bradstreet's love. The sensuality of the “Song of Solomon” becomes canonical in the *Bible* and acceptable in “To My Dear” because of its symbolism. The appeal and significance of the garden image for the Puritans who arrived in America, on the other hand, need not be elaborated on.

Although, in the remaining lines of the poem the poet resorts again to syntactic parallelism, love is presented in a totally different light: the intensity of the

⁴ For the identification of Biblical allusions, see Gibert, *American* 49-50.

husband's love cannot be reciprocated by the wife on earth. "My love" and "thy love" become linked to eternity and will finally and inevitably be superseded by it:

Thy love is such I can no way repay,
 The heavens reward thee manifold I pray.
 Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,
 That when we live no more, we may live ever.
 (Bradstreet, *Works* 225)

THE POEMS IN THEIR RELATIONS

As we have seen, both poems revolve around the notion of the lovers' union. This union is matrimonial: it echoes Biblical texts and their presence in Western literature. Both *Genesis* and *Ephesians* emphasize the carnal, and could justify a Puritan poet like Bradstreet in her singing of human love: "Therefore shall man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2.24); "So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself" (Eph. 5.28).⁵ Allusion to these sources can be easily identified in other poems by Bradstreet, as in the last two lines of "A Letter to My Husband, Absent upon Public Employment:" "Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone/ I here, thou there, yet both one" (Bradstreet, *Works* 226). In yet another of Bradstreet's "letters to my husband," the elaborate comparisons—used by other Renaissance poets whom she admired—are finally resolved in the wish for the lovers' lifelong integration:

Together at one Tree, oh let us brouze,
 And like two Turtles roost within one house,
 And like the Mullets in one River glide,
 Let's still remain but one, till death divide. (Bradstreet, *Poemes* 90)

Finally, in the poem "In My Solitary Hours in My Dear Husband His Absence," the wife prays for the husband's speedy return, and her desire is made licit by her promise that they will praise the Lord together:

So both of us thy Kindness Lord
 With Praises shall recount
 And serve thee better than before
 Whose Blessings thus surmount. (Bradstreet, *Poemes* 94)⁶

⁵ Although T. S. Eliot would have drawn on the King James Bible (1611), quotations here are from the Geneva Bible (1560), which the Puritans used.

⁶ *Poemes* reproduces the original spelling; slight changes have been made to make the spelling in all quotations uniform.

David B. Dickens identified the final scene of the play—in which Monica and Charles avow their love and Lord Claverton's peaceful death is foreshadowed—with a symbolic setting, imagined at the beginning of "Burnt Norton:" "the door we never opened/ into the rose garden" (Eliot, *Collected* 177).⁹ This space of spiritual fulfilment and pure love—the final destination of Eliot's poetic journey, progressively leaving a barren wilderness behind—finally shelters the two lovers in "Dedication" and *The Elder Statesman* (169). A prominent aspect of the desert symbolism that—according to Dickens—dominates Eliot's poetry up to the late twenties is precisely the negation of love: stripped of all romanticism, frustrated by paralysis or inability, reduced to animalistic sex with a latent component of male brutality. Some scenes in the *The Waste Land* (1922) hint at the purity of (lost) love: the experience of the hyacinth girl and her lover, in particular, is one among "the recurrent and transformative energies of the poem" (Patea 100). Conversely, *The Waste Land* also illustrates the poet's negative vision: the "neurotic woman" and her companion, Philomel and Tereus, Lil and Albert, Ophelia and Hamlet, Sweeney and Mrs. Porter, Elizabeth and Leicester, Mr Eugenides and the man he propositions, the typist and the young man carbuncular. Their presentation in the poem, according to John Peter, proves that the "speaker sees a fundamental futility in all love affairs and flirtations, whatever the trappings in which they are decked out and however remote from his own time they may be" (157).

In an essay published in 1952, Peter argued that *The Waste Land* could be read as an elegy for a dead lover, a young man whom readers familiar with Eliot's biography would identify as Jean Verdenal, one of his closest friends during his student year in Paris, in 1911. This interpretation upset Eliot and caused him to ban the essay, as its author explains in a 1969 postscript (Peter 165). Here Peter also speculates that the disturbing effect his "new interpretation" had on Eliot was dramatized in his last play: "*The Elder Statesman* seems to provide a remarkably close 'objective correlative' for the predicament into which my essay had forced the author." Peter sees himself as the inspiration for the character of Federico Gomez and suggests that, like Lord Claverton, Eliot was confronted by ghosts from the past, was compelled to exorcise the demons of his love life (175).

The analysis of Eliot's poems up to *The Waste Land* would confirm that "all forms of human passion [...] are represented in his early poems as in some sense morbid" (Lamos 28). Yet, as we have seen, at the end of his career—when he produced *The Elder Statesman* and its dedication—, the playwright and poet asserts his belief in the redeeming power of love. When did his portrayal begin to evolve towards the affirmative? In Dickens' view, the turning point is in the poem

⁹ The rose garden scene in "Burnt Norton" has been considered to evoke the frustrated love story of Eliot and Emily Hale (Gibert, "Women" 114).

“Marina,” where “the attitude that had previously equated the sexual with sin and sin with death” is missing; instead, we notice “a cancellation of the negativism or uncertainty so characteristic of all the major poems up to this moment” (154). “Marina” appeared in 1930, three years after Eliot’s conversion to Anglo-Catholicism. It is inspired by the scene of Pericles’ reunion with his daughter Marina in Shakespeare’s play and expresses, like no other poem by Eliot before, the wish to embrace a new existence:

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, *Collected* 106)

The poet’s “unspoken speech” will be the language of “this” life and of a new literature that focuses on faith, purgation, expiation, redemption and transcendence. The phase that begins after this turning point includes *Four Quartets* and Eliot’s drama, culminating in *The Elder Statesman*.

THE POEMS JUSTIFIED

The evidence of the strict morality of the Puritans has fostered at least two questionable beliefs. The first is that, among them, women lived under unbearable repression. Historians have produced proof to the contrary: the enterprising spirit of Puritan women was not frowned upon, limited property rights were contemplated for them and gender-based violence was perceived as a problem for the future of the colonies (Brown, Tindall and Shi 95-96). The second is that their literature was dull because of the stylistic and thematic limitations imposed on it. A rather different perspective is possible:

The approach to literature was utilitarian, but there are different kinds of usefulness. [...] The Catholics and Anglicans supported their faiths with great poetry and prose; the colonial Puritan had to try to write as well as his adversaries. He had to find artistic principles which were suited to his philosophic and religious belief. His literary theory was limited in some ways, but it rested on a soundly reasoned conception of function and method, a philosophic or quasi-metaphysical basis, and was admirably adapted to its audience. (Quinn et al. 37-38)

Creativity for its own sake would have met moral censure but, as devoted and disciplined readers of the Bible, the Puritans must have developed an acute sense of the power of the written word—certainly, they did not disregard it as a suitable medium for devotion. Regarding the status of Puritan women, they were expected to confine themselves to the domestic sphere and not to neglect their roles

of wives and mothers—like their counterparts of other creeds, for that matter. Intellectual concerns or literary aspirations in women were viewed with generalized suspicion, in Puritan New England as in Europe. After qualifying the two popular beliefs mentioned, a woman writing in seventeenth-century New England seems less of an anomaly.

Anne Bradstreet had received an exquisite humanist education and had read widely (Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney, Raleigh): it is not so strange that she should feel the urge to write. The banishment of Anne Hutchinson from Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637, for her “heretic” interpretation of Scripture, was a warning for all the women in the community (Warn), but her trial was the enactment of an unheard-of possibility: women having their own views and arguing them. In that sense, Hutchinson’s public defiance must have paved the way for the circulation of Bradstreet’s poems, two decades later. Perhaps more important was the fact that, in general terms, her poetry conformed to the precepts of Puritan “plain style:”

The “plain style” was the Puritan’s term for the kind of writing he liked best. “Plainness” was the product of conscious art. Clarity and sound structure were fundamental. Diction must be accurate. Metaphors and similes must aid understanding. Biblical imagery and rhetoric were always acceptable. So was much in the Greek and Roman classics. (Quinn et al. 39-40)

If Bradstreet’s verse does not seem to have met direct religious hostility, it could never have escaped close scrutiny because of the author’s sex. In an often quoted stanza of her “Prologue” to *The Tenth Muse*, Bradstreet voices her awareness of this specific pressure:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue,
 Who says, my hand a needle better fits,
 A poet’s pen all scorn I should thus wrong:
 For such despite they cast on female wits:
 If what I do prove well, it won’t advance,
 They’ll say it’s stol’n, or else, it was by chance.
 (Bradstreet, *Works* 16)

The modesty of a traditional *captatio benevolentiae*—foregrounded in other stanzas of “Prologue” and famously in “The Author to Her Book”—is absent from the lines above. This is an example of Bradstreet’s courage and originality as a writer. She is an example that writing by a Puritan woman could be tolerated as long as it became subordinated to doctrine, as “the most colloquial phrase or the simplest event of everyday life could be turned to the service of truth” (Quinn et al. 40). Some of Bradstreet’s poems, however, do not project the authorial image of a tame believer. There is general consensus that at the heart of these compositions is the conflict between what the poet naturally feels and what she must accept: the elegies,

where she struggles to reconcile her bereavement with the acceptance of God's will, are good examples. In "To My Dear and Loving Husband," this dilemma takes a different form: how to love on earth without offending against the only Love that mattered. Puritans were expected to observe the doctrine of "weaned affections," which condemned excessive love for people or things as a spiritual flaw. A strict Puritan might have thought of Bradstreet as a weak or conceited woman misdirecting her love:

Since Puritans believed that spousal devotion was proof of piety, Anne Bradstreet's love for Simon was in harmony with God's plans for his creatures. But she must love him "in Christ" and not selfishly or carnally; to allow her physical or emotional desire for Simon to eclipse her greater commitment with God would be idolatry [...] Although Bradstreet experienced conflict between her passion for Simon and her duty to care for him selflessly, her love poems focus on her desire and longing rather than on duty or deference. (Martin 68)

As Oliver and Trench point out, Bradstreet is only partially subversive (92). How does she manage to make her declaration of love compatible with Puritan orthodoxy? By alluding to the Bible, as we have seen (Genesis, Song of Solomon, Psalms, Ephesians), and, in the closure of the poem, presenting marital love as a reflection of divine love that can grant the lovers eternal life: "Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,/ That when we live no more, we may live ever" (Bradstreet, *Works* 225). The couplet conveys the hope of transcendence, which we also find in the very last sentence of "East Coker:" "In my beginning is my end" (Eliot, *Collected* 191). Further, the doctrine of "weaned affections" can be compared with the mystic notion of the "emptying of the self," an essential component of *Four Quartets*. It requires a systematic and progressive purgation of hopes, affections, thoughts, memories, feelings. The following lines are from "East Coker:"

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
(Eliot, *Collected* 188)

Bradstreet's intimate poems surprise readers who come to them with preconceived ideas about Puritan women. Eliot's "Dedication" surprises readers with a well defined horizon of expectations that does not include poetic sincerity. At the beginning of his career as a critic, Eliot had argued for the necessity of impersonality in poetry and as a poet, he had put into practice this theory. Eliot's

ideas about poetic impersonality are most clearly set forth in the early essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), where he declares that “the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates” (*Selected* 7-8). After establishing this separation, the critic defines the art of a poet: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but the escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (10-11). Finally, Eliot gives absolute priority to the artistic object over the subject, when he writes about “*significant* emotion, an emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet” (11, author’s emphasis).

At the end of his career, Eliot wrote a poem contradictory with these views, a poem that could not be more *personal* about an emotion in *his* history. Several circumstances can be put forward in order to explain this. The essay was distant in time: it had been published two years before *The Waste Land*, a poem Eliot eventually distanced himself from. Refusing to consider it “an important bit of social criticism,” he reduced it to “the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life” (*Waste Land* 1). According to Eliot, then, his best-known poem, radically different from “Dedication” and coherent with his theory of impersonality, resulted from the need to come to terms with his own unhappy life. In retrospect, as had happened with the poem, a seventy year-old Eliot—after forty years of practise as poet and dramatist—is likely to have felt less strongly about the most dogmatic statements made in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.”

For two decades, Eliot had devoted himself to drama, which he came to regard as the most effective vehicle for poetry (Query 170). In it, authors are less visible; their feelings, if present, have to be objectified. A more impersonal genre by nature, but one that relies on convincing characterisation. It granted Eliot a higher degree of impersonality but, paradoxically, it made him more aware of individual personalities. As he explained in “The Three Voices of Poetry,” “in a verse play, you will probably have to find words for several characters differing widely from each other in background, temperament, education, and intelligence” (92). In the same essay, he claims that it is natural for playwrights and characters to influence one another:

Some bit of himself that the author gives to the character may be the germ from which the life of the character starts. On the other hand, a character which succeeds in interesting its author may elicit from the author latent potentialities of his own being. I believe that the author imparts something of himself to his characters, but I also believe that he is influenced by the characters he creates. (94)

This influence, these common personality traits, may have their correspondence in a common language: “There may be from time to time, and perhaps when we least notice it, the voices of the author and the character in unison, saying something

appropriate to the character, but something which the author could say for himself also, though the words may not have quite the same meaning for both" (Eliot, "Three Voices" 100).

"The Three Voices of Poetry" was given as a lecture in 1953 and published in 1957; *The Cocktail Party* had been premiered in 1953 and *The Elder Statesman* would be first performed in 1958. The similarity between the protagonist in the latter play and his creator, as mentioned above, was noted by John Peter. Dickens (168-169) also suggests that the Eliot of *The Elder Statesman*, like Lord Claverton, has "only just now had the illumination/ of knowing what love is;" the voice of the author and the voice of the character seem to coincide in a crucial sentence: "I am only a beginner in the practice of loving" (104, 106). Lord Claverton makes this confession to his daughter Monica after telling her that he loves her. If there is "some bit of Eliot" in Lord Claverton, Valerie may have been the inspiration for Monica:

It may not be just a coincidence that T. S. Eliot, once he had achieved a more serene state of mind after his marriage with Valerie Fletcher, finally depicted an attractive female character, that of Monica in *The Elder Statesman*, the first woman in Eliot's plays who is able to establish a satisfying emotional relationship with a man. (Gibert, "Women" 114)

It may not be a coincidence either that, in the poem "Marina," referred to above as a turning point in Eliot's poetic production, the lyrical speaker communicates the ecstasy of his spiritual rebirth to his daughter.

Valerie Eliot died on November 9, 2012. Her obituary in *The Telegraph* presented her as "the woman who achieved the miraculous feat of making him [Eliot] happy." In *The Guardian*, Ion Trewin gave details of their relationship: "All evidence shows that their marriage (Eliot died days before their eighth wedding anniversary) was blissfully content. At parties they would be seen holding hands. On a visit to New York they requested a double bed. They enjoyed the theatre, but also evenings in."

In considering "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and examining the causes of Eliot's categorical rejection of biographical criticism, Marjorie Perloff states that "Eliot's fear of self-revelation is, of course, legendary" (181). It would seem that his second marriage, so different from his first marriage with Vivienne Haigh-Wood, helped him overcome his phobia. That he improved "To My Wife" for publication in *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, that he chose it to close a book that comprises most of his *oeuvre* (a collection that begins with an ironic "love song"—Pruffrock's) are signs that Eliot did not consider "A Dedication to My Wife" an irrelevant or isolated poem, but rather a destination.

Unlike Eliot's "Dedication," "To My Dear and Loving Husband" is not unique in Bradstreet's work: her love poems are coherent not only with one another,

but with the Puritan doctrine she was expected to observe. Another important and interesting difference from Eliot is that Bradstreet's most personal poems—potentially the most controversial in her time—are those that have attracted the interest of contemporary scholars, tracing the evolution of her poetry: “From a *public* poet concerned with historical events and personified abstractions she became a *romantic* lyricist who revealed herself as a unique and striking *individual* against the backdrop of her times” (Laughlin 1, emphasis added). The most immediate level of analysis has revealed common images, themes and allusions, which show that both poems draw on and continue a rich tradition of love poetry. A second objective has been the search for connections (parallelisms, continuities, oppositions) with other works by Eliot and Bradstreet. Finally, the assumption that these are not the kind of poems one would expect from their authors has been assessed and questioned by reference to various contextual aspects, such as social pressure (patriarchal, religious) or the firm commitment to an ideal of poetry. Even if the poets took the risk of surprising, irritating or disappointing, “To My Dear and Loving Husband” and “A Dedication to My Wife” are fully justified poems.

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