

مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية  
مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

## The Wasteland Within: T. S. Eliot's Exploration of the Urban Dilemma through an Existential Lens

Asst. Prof. Hadeel Aziz Muhammed Ridha (Ph.D.)

القفر في الدواخل: استكشاف تي إس إليوت لمعضلة الحياة الحضرية من وجهة نظر الفلسفة الوجودية  
أ.م.د. هديل عزيز محمد رضا

### Abstract

This paper is an analysis of selected poetic works by T.S. Eliot, focusing on the themes of relationships between men and women, feminine identity, societal expectations, and emotional vulnerability. The paper explores how Eliot's portrayal of female characters reflects the impact of modernity on the human condition and the complexities of navigating societal norms. Through close readings of poems such as "Portrait of a Lady," "La Figlia che Piange," and "Cousin Nancy," the paper examines the multifaceted archetypes of women depicted by Eliot, ranging from idealized figures to individuals entangled within societal constructs. The analysis also delves into the power dynamics and gender relations present in Eliot's works, highlighting the challenges individuals face in forming meaningful connections and the influence of societal expectations on their behavior. Additionally, the paper explores the representation of modern women who defy societal constraints, examining their audacity, emotional vulnerability, and the clash between tradition and the spirit of the modern age. Moreover, the significance of the subject allowed for the inclusion of a survey exploring the historical and mythological women present in Eliot's poetry. Ultimately, this paper provides a deep understanding of Eliot's exploration of feminine identity, emotional complexities, and the human yearning for connection in the context of a rapidly changing world.

### المخلص

ان هذا البحث تحليل شامل لأعمال الشاعر تي. إس. إليوت، حيث يركز على موضوعات مثل العلاقة بين الرجال والنساء وهوية الأنوثة وتوقعات المجتمع والضعف العاطفي. يستكشف البحث كيف يعكس تصوير شخصيات النساء في شعر إليوت تأثير الحداثة على الحالة البشرية وتعقيدات التكيف السريع مع التغييرات في الحياة الحديثة، مما يؤدي في النهاية إلى الاستسلام للتوتر النفسي وفقدان السيطرة على الحياة.

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

### مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

كما يلقي البحث الضوء على تأثير أهم النساء في حياة إليوت، مثل زوجته الأولى فيفيان هايوود وزوجته الثانية فاليري فليتشير، وكيف أن تأثيرهن العميق والتعقيدات التي اقتحمت حياته تشكل مصدر إلهام له وتؤثر في نتاجه الشعري. يتناول البحث أيضاً تصوير المرأة في قصائد إليوت المبكرة مثل "صورة سيدة"، "لا فيليبا كي بيانغي" و"ابنة العمّة، نانسي"، وكيف تجسد هذه القصائد نماذج متنوعة من الأنوثة وتسلط الضوء على التوقعات المجتمعية وتحليل الهوية الفردية. تمت إضافة فقرة مكملة وهي بعض الشخصيات التاريخية والاسطورية التي ظهرت في شعر إليوت لما في ذلك من صلة مع موضوعة البحث. يقدم البحث بشكل عام فهماً عميقاً للأبعاد المتعددة والتوتر الذي تواجهه النساء في المجتمع الحديث، وكيف يؤثر هذا التوتر على الهوية الذاتية والعلاقات الإنسانية.

### 1. An Overview:

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) is renowned for his intricate elucidation of ideas, where the portrayal of certain perturbed characters stands as an extraordinary and uncharted domain relative to other authors. The impact of modernity on the human condition can be exemplified through various approaches, a pursuit indeed undertaken by numerous writers. Eliot emerges as the luminary who significantly pioneered the notion of dissociating the poet from the poem, as well as extricating the life's context and zeitgeist from the artistic opus itself (Murphy, 2007: p. 3).

T.S. Eliot's personal relationships were enriched by the presence of notable women, namely his first wife Vivienne Haigh-Wood and his second wife Valerie Fletcher. These remarkable women left an indelible mark on both the personal and artistic aspects of Eliot's life, serving as profound muses who inspired and molded his poetic creations through their profound influence and the complexities they introduced into his existence (Stringer, 2004: p. 193). It is most likely due to his experience with the women in his life that Eliot resorts to creating archetypes of the women in his poems, although he is "rarely overtly autobiographical" (Morrissey, 1978: p. 7).

Deliberately opting for a certain artistic trajectory, Eliot elected to manifest the conflict of modernity through characters characterized as perturbed or, more precisely, psychologically unstable. The expeditious tempo of the "constantly metamorphosing world" (McIntire, 2008: p. 2) provides Eliot with the creative impetus to depict characters who grapple with the challenge of swift adaptation,

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

ultimately succumbing to mental turbulence and relinquishing mastery over their lives. The advent of modern life witnessed a whirlwind of transformations at the dawn of the twentieth century, leaving individuals perpetually astounded by the relentless wave of innovations. Moreover, women gained newfound agency, while education broadened their cognitive view, acquainting both themselves and their families with the ever-evolving landscape.

### 2. The Representation of Women in T.S. Eliot's Early Poetry:

Within T.S. Eliot's poetic works, namely "Portrait of a Lady," (1917) "La Figlia che Piange," (1917) and "Cousin Nancy," (1915) an intricate exploration of female personas emerges, portraying a tapestry of archetypes and their profound influence on the male speakers. These compositions present a spectrum of perspectives on women, encompassing idealized images, societal critiques, and existential examinations of individual identity.

In "Portrait of a Lady," a nuanced portrayal of the eponymous lady unfolds, capturing both reverence and skepticism. She personifies an emblem of romanticized aspirations, yearning for an elevated existence through a more profound connection (Mays, 2005: p. 112).

You have the scene arrange itself — as it will seem to do—  
With 'I have saved this afternoon for you';  
And four wax candles in the darkened room,  
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,

("Portrait of a lady", lines 2-5)

However, the speaker, embodying the ethos of realism, resists her advances and maintains a polite veneer (Murphy, 2007: p. 355),

Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins  
Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own,

مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية  
مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

Capricious monotone

(“Portrait of a lady”, lines 32-34)

veering away from deeper intimacy. Her existence is nothing but waiting, though, and this monotony seems to be that of urban modernism:

Living requires effort which at times becomes so painful that death becomes desirable. Yet, when death approaches man shrinks from it due to fear. He prefers a monotonous existence. [. . .] death-in-life archetype [. . .] plays a dominant role in Eliot’s poetry. (Tiwari, 2001: p. 18)

In “La Figlia che Piange,” a tender and vulnerable depiction of a woman unfolds. The focus lies on the daughter’s tears and the speaker’s desire to offer solace.

So I would have had her stand and grieve,  
So he would have left  
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,  
As the mind deserts the body it has used.

(“La Figlia che Piange”, lines 9-12)

The woman assumes a delicate and emotionally affected persona, evoking sentiments of sympathy and concern (Murphy, 2007: p. 186). This portrayal challenges conventional notions of female strength and resilience, accentuating the speaker’s compassionate response to her emotional turmoil.

In stark contrast, “Cousin Nancy” presents a critical lens through which societal expectations imposed on women are examined. Nancy emerges as a social climber, adhering to societal norms and seeking validation and admiration from others.

Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked  
And danced all the modern dances;  
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,

مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية  
مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

But they knew that it was modern.

(“Cousin Nancy”, lines 7-10)

The poem blames her lack of authenticity and individuality, suggesting that she compromises her true self to conform to societal expectations (Longenbach, 2005: p. 181). It serves as a commentary on the restrictive nature and superficiality of social hierarchies.

Collectively, these poems unravel nuanced portrayals of women’s roles and experiences. They underscore the intricate interplay between societal expectations and personal desires, as well as the complexities of human relationships. The portrayals range from idealized figures to individuals entangled within the confines of societal constructs, each embodying distinct facets of femininity and illuminating the struggles encountered within social and emotional landscapes.

Through the tapestry woven by “Portrait of a Lady,” “La Figlia che Piange,” and “Cousin Nancy,” Eliot engages with the multilayered dimensions, vulnerabilities, and societal pressures women navigate. The poems offer profound insights into the intricate fabric of femininity, provoking readers to scrutinize prevailing societal norms and expectations surrounding women’s roles and identities (Murphy, 2007: p. 354).

### 3. The Role of Female Archetypes in T.S. Eliot’s Works:

While “Aunt Helen” (1915) and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915) are distinct poems with different narratives and tones, they share certain similarities in their portrayal of female archetypes in T.S. Eliot’s works.

Firstly, both poems present female figures who have a significant impact on the narrator’s life. Aunt Helen, in “Aunt Helen,” represents a nurturing and protective presence, while the unnamed women in Prufrock’s social sphere evoke a sense of longing and desire; women in “Prufrock” are what Tiwari calls the “fatal woman archetype” (2001: p. 18) who “leads to seduction of man and his downfall due to

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

contact with women.” Both female archetypes play a crucial role in shaping the emotional landscape of the poems, though differently.

Secondly, both poems explore themes of memory, nostalgia, and the loss of innocence. Aunt Helen symbolizes the narrator’s yearning for the innocence and security of childhood, whereas Prufrock’s interactions with women evoke a sense of longing for romantic and emotional connection. In both cases, the female archetypes serve as reminders of a past that is irretrievable and a longing for a sense of belonging and understanding. Both poems delve into the complexities of human relationships and the limitations and anxieties that arise from them. Aunt Helen’s nurturing presence in the narrator’s life is juxtaposed with the passage of time and the inevitable loss of her care. Similarly, Prufrock’s interactions with women highlight his feelings of inadequacy, social anxiety, and fear of rejection. Both poems explore the complexities and vulnerabilities inherent in human connection.

In “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” T.S. Eliot presents a rich tapestry of female archetypes that contribute to the broad themes of longing, insecurity, and the fear of social judgment. These archetypes reflect the complexities of Prufrock’s relationships with women and the challenges he faces in forming meaningful connections.

One prominent female archetype in the poem is the *femme fatale*. Prufrock encounters women who possess a captivating allure, depicted through vivid imagery such as “arms that are braceleted and white” (“Prufrock”, line 62) and “perfume from a dress” (“Prufrock”, line 69). These *femme fatales* symbolize temptation and sensuality, representing Prufrock’s desires and yearnings. However, they remain distant and unattainable, reinforcing Prufrock’s sense of inadequacy and his fear of rejection (Cooper, 2006: p. 50).

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”  
Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —  
(They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”)

(“Prufrock”, lines 37-41)

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

Eliot portrays women as observers and judges of Prufrock's inner world. The women in the poem engage in trivial conversations about Michelangelo and talk about his thinning hair. They become a collective voice that scrutinizes Prufrock's appearance, actions, and social status. This archetype highlights Prufrock's self-consciousness and the anxiety he experiences in the presence of women. It emphasizes the societal pressure and expectations placed upon individuals, particularly men, to conform to certain standards.

Furthermore, Eliot presents an archetype of unfulfilled love and missed opportunities. Prufrock recalls past romantic encounters and envisions himself approaching women, only to retreat into his own insecurities. The poem suggests that Prufrock's fear of rejection and social disapproval prevents him from pursuing genuine connections, leaving him trapped in a cycle of longing and regret. This archetype reflects the theme of isolation and the inability to bridge the gap between desire and action.

Through the depiction of these female archetypes in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot explores themes of desire, self-doubt, and the complexities of human interaction. The presence of these archetypes underscores Prufrock's internal struggles and his yearning for meaningful relationships. The poem serves as a poignant portrayal of the challenges individuals face in navigating their desires and confronting societal expectations in the realm of romantic relationships.

In T.S. Eliot's poem "Aunt Helen," the role of the female archetype takes on a different dimension compared to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Here, the titular character, Aunt Helen, represents a source of comfort, stability, and protection in the narrator's life. While she does not possess the complexity and depth of female archetypes in other Eliot works, her presence is significant in exploring themes of innocence, nostalgia, and the loss of childhood purity.

Aunt Helen is portrayed as a nurturing figure who offers solace and reassurance to a group of servants as well as animals.

Miss Helen Slingsby was my maiden aunt,  
And lived in a small house near a fashionable square



مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية  
مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

Cared for by servants to the number of four.

[. . .]

The dogs were handsomely provided for,

But shortly afterwards the parrot died too.

(“Aunt Helen”, lines 1-3, 8-9)

Aunt Helen embodies the archetype of the benevolent guardian. The poem depicts her as a guiding force in the lives of many people, protecting them from the harsh realities of the world, by providing jobs although she lives “in a small house” (“Aunt Helen”, line 2) and most likely needed little help. This archetype reinforces the theme of innocence and the preservation of a sheltered, idyllic existence that contrasts with the complexities and uncertainties of adulthood.

While the portrayal of Aunt Helen does not delve into the same level of intricate exploration as seen in “Prufrock,” she serves as a representation of a simpler, purer time in the narrator’s life. She embodies a nostalgic longing for the innocence of childhood and the loss of that innocence as one grows older. Aunt Helen’s presence is a reminder of the fleeting nature of innocence and the inevitability of life’s transitions.

Through the depiction of Aunt Helen as a nurturing and protective figure, Eliot highlights the significance of familial relationships and the role they play in shaping one’s identity. She represents a touchstone of stability and a refuge from the complexities and disappointments of the outside world.

#### 4. Gender Relations and Power Dynamics:

Tiwari believes that when the relationship between a man and a woman is “harmonious and firmly rooted in love,” it leads to the flourishing of life, but the presence of “friction” in this relationship often results in “misery and ruin” (2001: p. 41). T.S. Eliot’s “Portrait of a Lady” provides profound insights into the intricate dynamics that characterize relationships between men and women. Through its use of ironic foregrounding and rhythmic manipulation, the poem deconstructs



## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

conventional notions of innocent and conventionally pleasing verse music, rendering them unattainable (Cooper, 2006: p. 46). By employing epigraphs, such as the one drawn from Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, the poem evokes biblical ethics and brutally candid expressions, creating a striking contrast with the submerged eroticism that finds expression in oblique and symbolic couplings, notably the term "friendship" (Cooper, 2006: p. 46).

'You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends,  
And how, how rare and strange it is, to find  
In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends,  
[. . .]  
To find a friend who has these qualities,  
Who has, and gives  
Those qualities upon which friendship lives.

("Portrait of a Lady", lines 93-95, 98-100)

The intricate interplay of relationships between men and women is further illuminated within the context of the carefully coded speech of the salon. "Portrait of a Lady" is a

[. . .] *conversation galante*, a dialogue between a man and a woman in which at once too much and too little is being communicated (Unger, 1970: p. 9)

Here, sincerity takes on a formulaic quality, yet its words silently mobilize consent and convey an unspeakable duplicity that remains hidden from the male persona (Cooper, 2006: p. 47). The woman's conversation skillfully navigates a delicate balance through repetitions, interruptions, qualifications, and an exacting syntax, creating an illusion of distracted spontaneity that masks the underlying severity beneath the composition (Poole, 2012: p. 78). Calculation emerges as the hidden source of authenticity, as the woman seeks qualities in a friend that are

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

simultaneously given and possessed, although they dissolve within the generality of the discourse (Cooper, 2006: p. 47).

Moreover, the poem unravels the subtle dynamics of genuine candor and ritualized intimacies, juxtaposing the directness of the epigraph's tone with the manufactured candor of love affairs (Cooper, 2006: p. 48). The ritualistic inertia progressively paralyzes the male speaker, providing a backdrop for the ambiguous eroticism that the woman commands (Poole, 2012: p. 148). Social rituals and boundaries become avenues for the provocative interplay of desire, as the woman's discourse and the man's responses challenge limits and test the fragile membrane that separates them from genuine human connection (Cooper, 2006: p. 48).

Within the broader context of T.S. Eliot's works, the representation of relationships between men and women in "Portrait of a Lady" shares thematic parallels with the exploration found in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (Strandberg, 2017). In both poems, Eliot delves into the intricate complexities of romantic longing, entangled within the pragmatic constraints imposed by societal expectations (Strandberg, 2017). "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" vividly portrays a protagonist who finds himself confined by the rigid norms of society, struggling to articulate his authentic thoughts and emotions due to the pressure to conform to prescribed codes of conduct and conversational norms (Murphy, 2007: p. 76). Eliot, in "Prufrock",

boldly enunciates the repeated fear of contamination from the feminine that Eliot evinces in a great deal of his poetry, and uses this repulsion as a way to approach the feminized dangers of history. [. . .] the confrontation that emerges when (male) decorum meets the contagion of (female) hysterical laughter. (McIntire, 2008: p. 54)

Similarly, in "Portrait of a Lady," the female protagonist and the young man are confronted with the delicate task of maneuvering between their personal desires and the societal decorum that defines their time (Strandberg, 2017).

The carefully chosen epigraph in "Portrait of a Lady" assumes a crucial role, serving as a clarifying and illuminating force that provides invaluable guidance for

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

interpreting the intricately depicted events and situating them within their historical context (Cooper, 2006: p. 48). It acts as a poignant reminder of a bygone pre-modern era, wherein codes of conduct and affect were not arbitrary or capricious, in stark contrast to the obscured origins of contemporary codes that artificially stimulate desire while divorcing it from genuine emotional connections (Greenberg et al., 2004: p. 375). Through the poem, Eliot critically examines the prevalent phenomenon of drawing-room pornography during the time and instead embraces an earlier form of moral and sexual directness, subtly alluded to by the epigraph's significance (Cooper, 2006: p. 48). This historical backdrop of "platonic libertinism" that permeated late nineteenth-century middle-class culture serves to underscore the inherent sensuality and enigmatic fervor that defined the experiences of bourgeois sexuality during that period (Cooper, 2006: p. 48).

In essence, "Portrait of a Lady" serves as a luminous beacon, shedding light on the intricate dynamics that lie at the heart of relationships between men and women.

While the theme of estrangement between man and woman is, so to speak, an ultimate subject throughout much of Eliot's work, it also signifies the larger theme of the individual's isolation, his estrangement from other people and from the world. (Unger, 1970: p. 12)

Through a skillful blend of ironic foregrounding, masterful rhythmic manipulation, and the strategic deployment of epigraphs, Eliot artfully dismantles the established conventions of verse music, inviting us to explore the hidden depths of eroticism and the manifold pressures imposed by societal expectations. These profound themes resonate harmoniously with Eliot's exploration of the interplay between romance and realism in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," effectively accentuating the enduring complexities and simmering tensions that epitomize the multifaceted nature of relationships between men and women within his poetic oeuvre.

مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية  
مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

## 5. The Modern Woman and Societal Expectations:

Within the realm of T.S. Eliot's poetic works, two remarkable women emerge as intrinsic portrayals of modernity, defying the constraints imposed by societal conventions. These women are prominently featured in the poems "Cousin Nancy" and "Portrait of a Lady".

In "Cousin Nancy," a poem from Eliot's collection "Oxford Poems," we encounter a young woman who embodies the spirit of modernity within an urban landscape (Williamson, 1971: p. 79). She fearlessly rides her horse across undulating terrain, breaking away from the traditional pursuits of the past. Her audacity extends beyond equestrianism, as she indulges in activities such as smoking and contemporary dance forms, which carry a hint of scandal in the conservative milieu of New England hills. By disrupting established customs, she challenges the conventions of her time (Williamson, 1971: p. 79).

The stark contrast between the vibrant, unconventional young woman and the passive behavior of her aunts underscores a profound irony pervasive in Eliot's early poetry. The aunts, confined by traditional roles, can only categorize their niece's behavior as emblematic of "modernity" without possessing the ability to articulate or emotionally respond to her audacity (Williamson, 1971: p. 79). This portrayal can be seen as a caricature, distorting the genteel traditions they represent, and highlighting the clash between youthful vitality and the conformist tendencies of an older generation.

Similarly, in "Portrait of a Lady," Eliot presents a female protagonist who ardently seeks a deeper connection with a young man, encapsulating the tension between romantic idealism and pragmatic reality in the modern world. She defies the confines of societal conventions and persistently implores for a profounder union, employing the motif of friendship as her vehicle (Strandberg, 2017). However, the young man, embodying Eliot's veristic (or true-to-life) disposition, firmly rejects her advances and maintains a detached facade, adhering to societal norms (Strandberg, 2017).

Despite her unwavering efforts, the woman's pleas for intimacy go unanswered, leaving her resigned to a future constrained by social expectations. The young man

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

grapples with remorse for the psychological harm he has inflicted upon her, yet he attempts to rationalize his conduct, even contemplating her hypothetical demise as a means of absolving himself from guilt (Strandberg, 2017). This poignant portrayal epitomizes the complexities faced by modern women who strive for genuine emotional connections in a world governed by societal codes.

Eliot's speakers, or what Morrissey calls 'voices,' can be divided into two categories:

- (1) each individual is fundamentally incapable of distinguishing between himself and that which he perceives; and (2) each individual's experience is unique and not fully communicable. (1978: p. 4)

In both "Cousin Nancy" and "Portrait of a Lady," Eliot masterfully captures the essence of modernity through the portrayal of those two women who defy the limitations imposed upon them by society. These women embody audacious rebellion, embracing modern pursuits and yearning for authentic connections that transcend societal constructs. They challenge the conventions of their time, symbolizing the clash between tradition and the spirit of the modern age.

### **6. Feminine Identity and Emotional Vulnerability:**

In both "La Figlia che Piange" and "Prufrock," Eliot delves into the thematic exploration of feminine identity and the intricacies of emotional vulnerability, presenting nuanced perspectives within a sophisticated poetic framework.

If these characters fail to act or choose, they nonetheless desire and suffer, responding intensely to what they observe. This separation of inner and outer reality is also an isolation in self and the source of loneliness, frustration and futility; it is expressed in almost obsessive

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

talk about time and in an urgent need to share some inner yearning undefined but felt to be outside daily existence. (Gish, 1981: p. 3)

“La Figlia che Piange” engages with the notion of feminine identity through a contemplation of emotional fragility. The poem portrays a weeping daughter, capturing her vulnerable state and evoking empathetic responses. This portrayal symbolically represents the perception of women as delicate beings susceptible to emotional upheavals, thereby reinforcing the stereotype of their innate emotional susceptibility.

Likewise, “Prufrock” delves into the intricate emotional landscape of its male protagonist, J. Alfred Prufrock. Although the poem does not explicitly address feminine identity, it reveals Prufrock’s profound emotional vulnerability and his apprehension towards rejection and inadequacy in the presence of women. Prufrock embodies a pervasive sense of insecurity and anxiety, doubting his own worthiness to engage in meaningful relationships. His internal monologue reflects deep introspection into his personal identity and the struggle to navigate societal expectations and conventions.

Both poems effectively exemplify the interplay between feminine identity and emotional vulnerability, shedding light on the intricacies and fragilities of human emotions, particularly when experienced by women and in relation to women. By presenting these themes, Eliot prompts readers to critically scrutinize the societal constructs that shape feminine identity, as well as the emotional challenges individuals encounter in their pursuit of connection and self-realization.

Moreover, both poems convey a profound sense of yearning and longing. In “La Figlia che Piange,” the daughter’s tears symbolize a longing for solace and emotional release, while in “Prufrock,” Prufrock’s internal struggles reflect his yearning for authentic connections and a sense of belonging. These poems navigate the intricate tapestry of human emotions, emphasizing the universal yearning for emotional connection and comprehension.

Ultimately, “La Figlia che Piange” and “Prufrock”, suggesting that “dread may (fatally) be dread of the wrong thing” (Helmling, 1988: p. 55), offer distinct yet interconnected perspectives on feminine identity and the intricate nature of

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

emotional vulnerability. Morrissey believes that Eliot's "speakers prey on sensitivity and vulnerability" (1978: p.2). Through the depiction of vulnerable individuals and their emotional experiences, Eliot prompts readers to critically analyze the complexities of gender roles and societal expectations, while simultaneously underscoring the universal human yearning for emotional connection and self-acceptance.

### 7. Beyond the Mortal Veil:

In Eliot's poetic universe, mythological women serve as powerful vessels through which he delves into complex themes, elevating his verses beyond the mundane and the temporal. These figures from ancient myths and legends provide him with a timeless vocabulary to express and explore the deepest layers of human emotion and experience. This section will embark on a journey to unearth the significance of these mythological references and their implications for the portrayal of women in Eliot's poetry.

In T.S. Eliot's epic poem *The Waste Land*, the figure of Philomela emerges as a poignant and haunting portrayal of a mythological woman. Philomela is a character from Greek mythology, known for her tragic tale of violence, suffering, and transformation. Her presence in *The Waste Land* serves as a striking commentary on the theme of sexual violence and the silencing of women's voices in a desolate and fragmented modern world (McRae, 2003: p. 211).

In the poem, Philomela is referenced in the section titled "The Fire Sermon." Here, Eliot draws upon the ancient myth of Philomela to evoke the anguish and despair that pervade the contemporary landscape. Philomela's story centers around her sister Procne's husband, Tereus, who violates and mutilates her, then confines her in a remote location to prevent her from revealing the heinous act. Philomela's voice is effectively silenced, as she is transformed into a nightingale, only able to communicate her trauma through her haunting song.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot captures Philomela's voicelessness and her desperate yearning to be heard. He employs fragmented and disjointed language, mirroring the



## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

shattered state of the modern world, where coherent communication is elusive (Stockton, 1997: p. 375). The poem alludes to Philomela's transformation into a nightingale through phrases like "jug jug" and "coo coo," which mimic the bird's melancholic song. This portrayal not only highlights Philomela's pain and suffering but also symbolizes the silenced voices of countless women throughout history (Sicker, 1984: p. 424).

Later in his poetry, *The Four Quartets* represents a magnum opus, consisting of four interconnected poems - "Burnt Norton," "East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding." Published between 1935 and 1942, these poems explore profound themes of time, memory, human experience, and spirituality. Within this remarkable work, Eliot weaves together diverse allusions, including references to mythological and historical figures, to enrich the layers of meaning within the verses.

One such allusion appears in "Burnt Norton," the first of the quartets, where Eliot references the Hindu goddess Shakti. Shakti is a prominent deity in Hindu mythology, representing the divine feminine energy and power, often associated with creation and destruction (Bhatta, 2018: p. 61). She is the cosmic force that brings life into being and also holds the power to dissolve the universe, "Brahma and Shakti are inseparable like fire and its heat" (Bhatta, 2018). By alluding to Shakti, Eliot emphasizes the cyclical nature of existence, where creation and destruction are intertwined, and time flows in an eternal loop. The lines alluding to Shakti in "Burnt Norton" are as follows:

Shall we follow  
the deception of the thrush? Into our first world.  
[. . .]  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present. (lines 23-24, 47-48)

These lines reflect on the illusory nature of time and the interconnectedness of past, present, and future. The reference to Shakti aligns with Eliot's exploration of Eastern philosophical concepts, which suggest that time is not linear but rather a

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. By drawing on this mythological figure, Eliot emphasizes the eternal nature of life and the perpetual motion of the universe.

Another significant poem is “Ash-Wednesday” which was published in 1930, it marks a turning point in Eliot’s poetic journey as he moves towards a more religious and spiritual exploration. The poem is a reflection on the themes of love, suffering, and redemption, and it contains several allusions to the Biblical character of Mary Magdalene.

In the Christian tradition, Mary Magdalene is often portrayed as a woman who had a troubled past as a sinner but was redeemed through her encounter with Jesus Christ. She became one of Jesus’ most devoted followers, witnessing his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection (Kawalec, 2018: p. 139). In “Ash-Wednesday,” Eliot draws on this biblical narrative to explore themes of sin, repentance, and spiritual transformation.

The title of the poem, “Ash-Wednesday,” refers to the first day of Lent in the Christian calendar, a period of reflection and penance leading up to Easter. This setting creates a somber and introspective tone throughout the poem, as the speaker contemplates his own spiritual journey and the human condition. The reference to Mary Magdalene occurs in the following lines:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
 Because I do not hope  
 Because I do not hope to turn  
 Desiring this man’s gift and that man’s scope  
 I no longer strive to strive towards such things  
 (Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)  
 Why should I mourn  
 The vanished power of the usual reign? (lines 1-8)

Here, the speaker expresses a sense of resignation and detachment from worldly desires and ambitions. The allusion to Mary Magdalene suggests a longing for spiritual rebirth and a desire to leave behind a life of sin and material pursuits.

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

Through this reference, Eliot infuses the poem with a sense of hope for redemption and a yearning for a deeper connection with the divine.

Another character is the Cumaean Sibyl, also known as the Sibyl of Cumae, was a legendary prophetess from ancient Greece and Rome. She was said to have lived in the city of Cumae, located near Naples in Italy. According to ancient sources, the Cumaean Sibyl was granted the gift of prophecy by Apollo, the Greek god of prophecy, music, and healing (Barzinji, 2016: p. 82). The Cumaean Sibyl was renowned for her prophecies and wisdom, and she was considered a figure of great authority and significance in ancient times. Her prophecies were often cryptic and given in riddles, requiring careful interpretation (Barzinji, 2016: p. 82). The reference to the Cumaean Sibyl in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* draws on this historical and mythical figure's association with prophecy and enigmatic knowledge. In the epigraph *The Waste Land*, the Cumaean Sibyl is referenced through a quote from the ancient Roman poet Petronius. The epigraph sets the tone and theme for the entire poem, and it serves as an introduction to the complex and fragmented nature of the work (Barzinji, 2016: p. 83). The quote is as follows:

*"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis  
vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent:  
Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω."*

(Translation: "For once I myself once saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?' she replied, 'I want to die.'")

(Özserti, 2001: p.111)

This epigraph, in a way, encapsulates the theme of disillusionment, despair, and a sense of decay that runs throughout "The Waste Land." The reference to the Cumaean Sibyl hanging in a jar, expressing her desire to die, echoes the sense of hopelessness and futility that pervades the poem.

The image of the Sibyl hanging in a cage is a powerful and haunting one. It symbolizes a loss of freedom and agency, as if she is trapped and suspended, unable to escape her fate. The question posed to her by the boys, "Sibyl, what do you want?"

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

highlights the desire for understanding, meaning, and perhaps redemption, but her response, "I want to die," suggests a profound weariness with life and a longing for release from her burdens (Özserti, 2001: p.111). This portrayal of the Cumaean Sibyl in the epigraph sets the stage for the themes of mortality, disillusionment, and the search for meaning that are explored throughout the rest of "The Waste Land." It reflects the overall sense of despair and fragmentation in the modern world that Eliot conveys in his poem.

### 8. Conclusion

T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" is a groundbreaking work of modernist poetry that explores the decay and fragmentation of modern urban life through an existential lens. Eliot's focus on the existential dilemma facing individuals in the modern city reveals his deep concern about the dehumanizing effects of urbanization.

Through the use of fragmented and disjointed language, Eliot portrays the sense of alienation and isolation experienced by individuals in the modern city. He presents a bleak and fragmented picture of the world, highlighting the sense of disconnection and despair that characterizes urban life.

Furthermore, Eliot's focus on the existential crisis facing individuals in the modern city emphasizes the importance of finding meaning and purpose in life. The poem challenges us to confront the emptiness and futility of modern existence, and to seek out a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in our lives.

In conclusion, "The Wasteland" is a powerful exploration of the existential dilemmas facing individuals in the modern city. Eliot's use of fragmented language and his focus on the dehumanizing effects of urbanization underscore the importance of finding meaning and purpose in a world that can seem empty and meaningless. The poem remains a powerful and enduring contribution to the world of literature, challenging us to confront the existential dilemmas that lie at the heart of modern life.

مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية  
مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

## Bibliography

- Barzinji, M. N. H. (2016) The Function of Epigraphs to T. S. Eliot's Poetry. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 6(9): 79-84.
- Bhatta, D. C. (2018, December). Echoes of the Vision of Hindu Philosophy in T. S. Eliot's Writings. *Tribhuvan University Journal*, 32(2), 57-74.
- Cooper, J. X. (2006). *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gish, Nancy K. (1981) *Time in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot: A Study in Structure and Theme*. Macmillan Press, London.
- Greenberg, Jeff; Koole, Sander L. and Pyszczynski, Tom (ed.s). (2004) *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*. The Guilford Press, New York.
- Helmling, S. (1988). The Success and Failure of T. S. Eliot. *The Sewanee Review*, 96(1), 55-76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27545845>
- Kawalec, A. (2018). Philosophy of Rhythm: Grotowski reads Eliot. *Agathos International Review*, 9(2), 127-145.
- Longenbach, James (2005) "Mature poets steal": Eliot's allusive practice in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*/ edited by A. David Moody. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Mays, J. C. C. (2005) Early poems: from "Prufrock" to "Gerontion" in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot* / edited by A. David Moody. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McIntire, Gabrielle. (2008) *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McRae, S. (2003). "Glowed into Words": Vivien Eliot, Philomela, and the Poet's Tortured Corpse. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49(2), pp. 193-218.
- Morrissey, T. J. (1978). "Intimate and Unidentifiable": The Voices of Fragmented Reality in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot. *The Centennial Review*, 22(1), 1-27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23738409>
- Murphy, R. E. (2007). *Critical Companion to T. S. Eliot: A literary Reference to his Life and Work*. New York, Facts On File.

## مجلة كلية التربية الأساسية للعلوم التربوية والإنسانية

مجلة علمية محكمة تصدر عن كلية التربية الأساسية - جامعة بابل

- Özsert, Seher. (June, 2001) Sibyl revisited: Mythological figures depicting desolateness in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land". 3rd Rumeli 'Language, Literature and Translation Studies' Symposium: 109-116.
- Poole, Adrian (ed.) (2012) *Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Auden, Beckett* (Great Shakespeareans v. 12) Continuum International Publishing, London.
- Sicker, P. (1984, Winter). The Belladonna: Eliot's Female Archetype in The Waste Land. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 30(4), 420-431.
- Stockton, S. (1997, Winter). T. S. Eliot and the Rape of God. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 39(4), 375-398.
- Strandberg, V. (2017) The Works of T.S. Eliot 07: Portrait of a Lady : A discussion of T.S. Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady" from the online course Classics of American Literature: T.S. Eliot, retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-OUgG0jw0>
- Stringer, Jenny. (2004) *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature in English*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Tiwari, Nidhi. (2001) *Imagery and Symbolism in T. S. Eliot's Poetry*. Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi.
- Unger, Leonard. (1970) *T. S. Eliot. (Pamphlets on American Writers, Number 8)*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Williamson, G. (1971). "T. S. Eliot's Cousin Nancy." *American Literature*, 42(1), 78-79.