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**Dehumanization and Lovelessness throughout History in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste***

***Land***

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The FINAL PROJECT is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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to

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by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paula Alvez Pereda", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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**Resumen**

Este ensayo describe cómo a través del método mítico, T.S. Eliot presenta la falta de amor en la humanidad desde el pasado hasta el presente. Además, se centra en la apatía y el vacío que surgen de esta frialdad que caracteriza a ambos mundos. Por una parte, la tradición occidental del amor y las parejas características de este periodo son analizadas. Estas representarán o un amor verdadero como Tristán e Isolde, Marco Antonio y Cleopatra, Dido y Eneas, o un trágico destino como Filomela. Por otra parte, se muestran personajes del mundo moderno caracterizados por ser seres mecánicos ausentes de cualquier tipo de afecto, como Lil y Albert, además de mencionar la forma en la que Eliot muestra una naturaleza árida, de la que no queda nada más que escombros. Por último, se incluye una sección final dedicada al Trueno, el cual aporta una solución a este hostil mundo que destaca por su esterilidad.

**Palabras clave:** T.S. Eliot, *la tierra baldía*, vacuidad, amor, esterilidad, destino

**Abstract**

This paper describes the way in which through the mythical method, T.S. Eliot presents the lack of love in humanity from the past to the present. Furthermore, it focuses on the apathy and emptiness that arise from this ennui that characterises both worlds. On the one hand, the Western tradition of love and the characteristic couples of this period are analysed. They will represent either a true love as Tristan and Isolde, Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, Dido and Aeneas, or a tragic fate such as Philomel. On the other hand, characters from the modern world are portrayed, defined as mechanical beings absent of any type of affection, such as Lil and Albert, as well as mentioning how Eliot displays an

arid nature, in which only debris is left. Finally, there is a final section devoted to the Thunder, since it provides a solution to this hostile world which stands out for its sterility.

**Key words:** T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, emptiness, love, barrenness, destiny

**Table of contents**

1. “Love compels cruelty to those who do not understand love...”: Introduction	6
2. The Western Tradition of Love	7
3. Lovelessness and Debris in the Modern World	12
4. The Parable of the Thunder	16
5. Conclusion	19
6. Works Cited	20

### 1. “Love compels cruelty to those who do not understand love...”: Introduction

Throughout the history of literature, the representation of love as an existential encounter has been the concern of many authors. The tradition of love depicts this feeling as a spiritual emotion, which brings a state of well-being and fulfilment. Shakespeare praises in his “Sonnet 18” the beauty of his beloved and states that he prefers her to a summer day. The main author of Renaissance Italy, Petrarch, observed love as a blessing in his sonnets. In contrast to this vision of love as sacred, one of the protagonists of Eliot’s theatre play *The Family Reunion* utters these words and portrays love as a cruel feeling: “Love compels cruelty to those who do not understand love...”. This facet of love as an emotion that implies suffering is also described in *The Waste Land*. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot presents the lack of love throughout human history and the desolation it causes in the past and the present. He establishes a contrast between love and lack of love, he depicts an affection that goes beyond death, characters who would undoubtedly give their lives for their beloved and who represent an ideal devotion, but also characters who suffer from the spiritual sterility that characterises contemporaneity. Eliot describes human beings who are barely able to communicate, they have no passion and lead a futile existence, cities and nature are also dry and full of debris, which mirrors what happens in human relations. Besides, he uses the mythical method first implemented by Joyce to explore existential void: “In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him” (Eliot 177). In Eliot’s article “Ulysses, Order and Myth” (1923), he discusses his strategy, to establish a parallelism between the past and the present, he turns to myth to bring order to the modern world, since the present is characterised by

sterility. For him, the modern writer resorts to myth to “control, order, give shape and significance to the panorama of anarchy and futility of the present” (Eliot 177).

This essay aims to disclose the lack of love from the past to the present throughout *The Waste Land*, and the apathy and emptiness that arise from this lovelessness. To do so, I analyse the Western tradition of love in Eliot’s poem. Then, I describe the modern world, represented by the wastelander’s hollow life. Finally, I mention the solution given by the Thunder to overcome this situation of futility and malaise.

## 2. The Western Tradition of Love

In contrast to this tradition of literature which observes love as a superior and spiritual feeling on which society is based, T.S. Eliot represents, through numerous references, the lack of love in the present and the past. Among other allusions such as the biblical, Eliot depicts the Western tradition of love. In it, there are some characters who stand for a powerful love, including Dido and Cleopatra and other stories such as the legend of Philomel suggest ruin and decadence, since she suffered an abuse in antiquity. In “The Burial of the Dead”, Eliot uses verses in German from Wagner’s opera *Tristan and Isolde* (1859) to refer to a love that defeats death<sup>1</sup>:

Frisch weht der Wind  
Der Heimat zu  
Mein Irisch Kind,  
Wo weilest du? (31, 34)

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<sup>1</sup> “Fresh blows the wind to the homeland; my Irish child, where are you waiting?”

These verses compose the song of a young sailor to his beloved. While he was singing, Isolde decides to drink a lethal poison with Tristan which, unexpectedly, turns out to be a love potion: “Richard Wagner reports the poisoning of Tristan and Isolde by a love potion. Shortly after the ingestion of the potion, the protagonists declare their love” (Weitz 1). After that, since Isolde was to be betrothed to Tristan’s uncle King Mark of Cornwall, the two lovers are discovered and Tristan is wounded, as a consequence, he dies in his beloved’s arms. Through this medieval romance, Eliot illustrates a love relation that overcomes death, not even the murder of Tristan can separate them.

Viorica Patea states in her “Introduction” to *La tierra baldía* that in this relationship, the spiritual values are superior than the materialism and greed that are present in the modern world (203). Thus, Tristan and Isolde can act as a model for the contemporary world since in modernity, human beings are driven by the need for power, whereas they represent completely the opposite. Their love is above everything else, for them, the most relevant is the love they feel for each other.

However, Eliot includes Tristan and Isolde to associate the romantic love tradition with the lack of love of the wastelanders. In fact, as Waldron points out, “Wagner’s operas sound resonances throughout the poem, they are not mere purveyors of ironic frisson, but intimately echo Eliot’s own leitmotif” (423). Therefore, Eliot uses these Wagnerian sounds to establish a reference to these lovers and anticipate one of the main themes of his poem, the lack of communication of these characters who lead a death in life: “These allusions are usually interpreted as ironically contrasting a romantic, epic, fictionalised love with the impotence of the inhabitants of *The Waste Land*” (Waldron 423).



Hence, the central event, the story between the hyacinth girl and her lover, is encapsulated in this passage from Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*. With this account, the lyrical "I" recalls his love experience in the hyacinth garden:

‘You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;  
They called me the hyacinth girl.’  
Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  
Oed’ und leer das Meer (35, 42).

The hyacinth girl of these verses is a promise of spring and fertility since “her hair is wet” and her hands are “full of flowers” (Eliot 202). She gives the encounter a mystical and erotic dimension which is absent in the relations of the inhabitants of *The Waste Land*. Nonetheless, this is a failed encounter, as the speaker is not able to respond to this love. He remains silent and blind, since he is “neither living nor dead” and as he claims, he “knew nothing” (Eliot 204). This displays the emptiness he feels, like the characters in the poem, “They cannot experience communion or transcendence of any kind because they are isolated, imprisoned in their own heads” (Bentley 106). Consequently, this frustrated encounter turns the garden into a place of ruin and the conclusion of this meeting is a kind of torture since the speaker has no power to respond: “The hyacinth garden, full of flowers, wet after rain, turns to dust” (Moody 82).

Besides, Wagner's quotation: “Oed’ und leer das Meer”, which is related to the last act of his opera, emphasises that Tristan is about to die as he waits for the ship that will bring Isolde. Similarly, the love in the hyacinth garden ends with a sense of calm and loneliness, since as Moody asserts, the image of the empty sea while Tristan is waiting

for his beloved, can be associated to the silence of the speaker in the hyacinth garden (128). Therefore, a desolate element of nature in which there is only silence, since Isolde's boat is not returning to meet her beloved, is connected with an encounter in which one of the two lovers can hardly speak, so the only thing that comes out of their encounter is silence, the same silence that the sea brings. As scholar Viorica Patea claims in the "Introduction" to *La tierra baldía*, this love encounter is one of the three luminous moments in *The Waste Land*, a moment of erotic love but also a moment of mystical love (203).

The tragic and ancient stories of Cleopatra and Mark Anthony, from Shakespeare's play *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1606), and Dido and Aeneas from the *Aeneid*, belong to the Western tradition of love. Eliot introduces them in "A Game of Chess" and he presents two women who preferred death to a life without love, to establish a contrast throughout the poem. These two heroines are the opposite to the modern characters who lead an empty and desolate life since: "Their 'little life' is composed of a compendium of mechanical gestures devoid of freedom, love or ethical values" (Patea 99).

In this section of the poem, there are two different and juxtaposed milieus: the aristocratic and the plebeian. In the aristocratic setting, there are different elements that belong to the literary tradition of "fatal love". Firstly, Eliot presents a rich and anonymous lady who is compared to Cleopatra, which is a reference to Shakespeare's tragedy *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1606):

The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,  
Glowed on the marble, where the glass... (77, 78)

Through numerous sensory perceptions, this woman evokes Cleopatra when she was sailing on the Cydno river. This goddess of love was surrounded by aristocratic elements,

including scented sails, the perfumes and a stern of gold. Hence, this environment represented by power suggested an atmosphere of seduction and true love.

Furthermore, Eliot depicts a reference to the “laquearia”, which is related to the tragedy of Dido and Aeneas:

Flung their smoke into the laquearia,  
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling. (92, 93)

The “laquearia” is a motif that belongs to Virgil’s *Aeneid*. It alludes to Dido’s palace and the banquet she gives, which evokes the devastation brought about by her passion for Aeneas, since Dido commits suicide when she discovers that Aeneas will leave her.

Eliot describes the love represented in the figures of Cleopatra, Dido, Tristan and Isolde but he also refers to characters who have a tragic destiny, such as Philomel. Through them, Eliot reinforces the idea of the lack of love present in man’s life throughout the history of humanity.

In the poem, the “sylvan scene” arises the tragedy and rape of Philomel and it recalls a loss of innocence. It is an allusion to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667): “So on he fares, and to the border comes of Eden, where delicious Paradise, now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green...” (Milton 65). In Milton’s epic, Satan looks down on Eden and in *The Waste Land*, he can be identified with Tereus, as the rape of Philomel refers to the act of ravishing Eden.

As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene  
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king  
So rudely forced... (98, 100)

The aristocratic woman presented by Eliot in the modern world is violated by the silence of her interlocutor in the same way that Philomel was raped by Tereus in antiquity,

hence both stories suggest ruin, conveying a powerful and clear relation between past and present. The atmosphere of the aristocratic woman's room arouses a sense of death and nothingness since she is talking to an interlocutor who is silent, he does not express his thoughts and he only answers in his mind. In the same way, the environment in which Philomel is abused evokes destruction. However, there are some differences between these two characters, Philomel is not a passive victim, she transcends her tragic destiny and turns her suffering into a song, however, the aristocratic woman of the modern world is dead in life, she is not able to feel or articulate her emotions, she has no agency or influence on her own life.

### **3. Lovelessness and Debris in the Modern World**

Throughout the poem, Eliot also depicts wastelanders such as Lil and Albert, the typist and the young man carbuncular and other characters with no identity to express the disillusionment of his generation.

In the plebeian environment of the section "A Game of Chess", Lil and Albert appear. Their story is told by Lil's friend and they are depicted as commodities in the love market:

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,  
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,  
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.

(147, 149)

In contraposition with the passion that emerges from the story of Dido and Aeneas, this modern couple represents the perfect examples of the wastelanders. They are a symbol of the absence of love and passionless sexuality which transform human relationships into power strategies. They represent the antithesis of the brilliance that

emerged from the stories of Dido and Cleopatra. In fact, Lil's deterioration, both physical and mental, contrasts with Cleopatra's energy and beauty: "You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique. (And her only thirty-one)" (156, 157).

The title of the section is relevant, in the same way that the figures of the chess are not free as their movements are predetermined, the wastelanders, in this case Lil and Albert, are mechanical beings bound to a pre-established life path, characterised by an extreme lack of love: "In the world of Albert and Lil, the typist and the young man carbuncular, human relations are dominated by the dynamics of the marketplace or those of a battlefield" (Patea 99).

In the section of "The Fire Sermon", Eliot presents the characters of the typist and the young man carbuncular. Tiresias is the one who observes this encounter of modern figures. He is an androgynous character, the meeting point for the other protagonists of the poem:

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs  
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest-  
I too awaited the expected guest. (228, 230)

Tiresias unites the masculine and the feminine traits, he is the global consciousness of the poem. He unifies past and present, men and women and sees the inner reality that survives in all experiences: "Tiresias, the mind of Europe, prophesies in *The Waste Land*-who, blind androgyne that he (she), is, has nothing new to learn about the human animal" (Moody 97). Tiresias, as a prophet, observes the encounter between them, just as he observed ancient encounters of couples. He is the figure who has perceived the lack of love in humanity from the past to the present and he recognises that the young man carbuncular does not seem to love the typist. In the same way, she is

extremely distant. Therefore, these characters do not even have an identity, they have no name and are mentioned as the “typist” and the “young man carbuncular.” Carbuncular refers to a word that probably comes from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Milton uses it to describe a serpent with carbuncle eyes: “his head crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes...” (171). They have neither passion nor desire and their movements are completely mechanical and monotonous: “Like a taxi throbbing waiting” (240). Besides, their language seems a military strategy, with expressions such as “the time is now propitious” (243) or “he assaults at once” (244). For him, this encounter is an act of pride, and he observes it in terms of conquest, however, she feels lack of desire and passion. To conclude, it is a mechanical encounter that provides neither affection nor devotion, an act of love that is corrupted.

Furthermore, Eliot introduces the three modern daughters of the Thames, through them, the readers are informed of their frustrated modern love stories. He parallels them with the Rhine Maidens in Wagner’s opera, who lamented the theft of the river’s gold, singing “Weialala leia”. These modern characters sing a song and they present the concept and feeling of nothingness in *The Waste Land*. In fact, the first story is a reminder of La Pia in Dante’s *Purgatorio*. As mentioned by Viorica Patea in her “Introduction” to *La tierra baldía*, Pia was thrown out of the window of her castle on the orders of his husband, since he wanted to marry another woman (251). Hence, even though this modern character is born in Highbury and finds her ruin in London, she resembles a wife who was betrayed and killed by her husband in the past, arising also tragedy and devastation in the modern world:

Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew  
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees  
Supine on the floor of narrow canoe. (293, 295)

Besides, Eliot mentions renowned poems such as Spenser's "Prothalamion" (1596) or Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" (1681). Through them, he reinforces the idea of modernity related to emptiness, with natural places that are full of garbage and without love or affection. In "The Fire Sermon", he introduces an allusion to Spenser's "Prothalamion", a poem in which Spenser presented the Thames as being related to a bucolic setting in which the double marriage of Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset took place: "A flock of nymphs I chanced to espy, all lovely daughters of the flood thereby, with goodly greenish locks, all loose untied..." (Spenser 20-22). Spenser's poem was written in honour of their wedding and the Thames was presented as idyllic. However, Eliot replaces this ideal environment, with a world of debris and catastrophe:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.  
 The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers.  
 Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends...  
 Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are  
 departed. (176, 179)

Eliot takes away the realistic illusion and the emotional imagery of the poem to portray a world in which there are no weddings, the nymphs are gone and the river represents pollution and garbage. This displays the sordidness and lack of love that represents the contemporary world.

Furthermore, he includes Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress":

But at my back in a cold blast I hear  
 The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to  
 ear. (185, 186)

In this poem, Marvell writes on the *carpe diem* motif. He portrays a speaker who wants to captivate the heart of a woman: “For, lady, you deserve this state, nor would I love at lower rate...” (Marvell,19-20). Nonetheless, Eliot rejects the *carpe diem* representation of the poem and he tinges it with darker colours. Eliot criticises modern life and the world that surrounds him, even acquiring sinister connotations. In fact, he takes away the lighter symbols to include figures related to bones and devastation: “In the 1920s there was the Eliot of *The Waste Land*, supposedly expressing the disillusionment of his generation” (Moody 15). In the modern world, the wastelanders represent a debased fertility ritual, with relationships that are insignificant, automatic and destructive, in contrast to the fertility rituals of primitive cultures, which constituted a passage from innocent to knowledgeable human beings.

#### **4. The Parable of the Thunder**

Eliot introduces the parable of the Thunder to conclude the poem. It comes from the ancient book of the *Upanishad*, a sacred Hindu book written in the Sanskrit language and it reveals the solution to this situation of futility of the present in which the characters live.

As Viorica Patea argues in her “Introduction” to *La tierra baldía*, Prajapati, who is the Lord of creation, speaks with his disciples, who are beings of three different kinds and can be differentiated as men, demons and gods. These creatures ask him to disclose his ultimate nature and he claims that the ultimate revelation is DA, Dharma, which means the law of the Universe (277). However, Prajapati perceives that they will not be able to recognize the full meaning of this sacred word since: “The god’s word needs an interpreter who will vouch for its meaning as well as someone, presumably, who will



vouch for the interpreter” (Miller 447). After that, he asks them what they have understood, and he realises that each of them understood something completely different. As Brooker and Bentley claimed, Prajapati says ‘Da! Da! Da’ and the three orders of beings: gods, men, and devils, interpret this message as three commands, ‘control, give, sympathize’ (187).

The men understand DA as Datta, which means give.

Then spoke the thunder  
 DA  
 Datta: what have we given?  
 My friend, blood shaking my heart  
 The awful daring of a moment’s surrender  
 Which an age of prudence can never retract  
 By this, and this only, we have existed  
 Which is not to be found in our  
 obituaries...(400, 407)

In this verse, the Thunder manifests an important question to disclose the last solution that it is going to provide. This question is: What have we given? Viorica Patea claims in her “Introduction” to *La tierra baldía* that in a mystic sense, the ultimate surrender is that of the self to God, and this contradicts the materialistic values that are represented by the solicitor (277): “Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor” (409). Besides, she asserts that Eliot adapts the present teaching of the Thunder to an existentialist philosophy of life, a doctrine which defends the act of “to be” and not “to have”, since we do not exist by what we have, we exist by what we offer, and this is related to the great demands of love. The power of love is completely necessary, however, it has been absent during the whole history of humanity. In the past, there are some stories that portray betrayal and decadence such as the legend of Philomel. Besides, in the modern world the wastelanders are

automatic beings characterized by their lovelessness. Hence, the thunder is claiming the need and importance of love in an empty humanity that only represents a state of lethargy.

Moreover, the demons understand it as Dayadhvam, have compassion, sympathize.

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key  
 Turn in the door once and turn once only  
 We think of the key, each in his prison  
 Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison  
 Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours  
 Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus  
 DA. (412, 417)

This verse discloses that universal compassion is the answer to eradicate pride, however, the wastelanders are locked in their loneliness, they feel empty, alienated and even lack identity. In this section, there is a reference to Ugolino, Dante's character in his poem *The Divine Comedy* (circa 1308-21) and to Shakespeare's tragedy *Coriolanus* (1623). Eliot mentions Coriolanus since he wanted to defend Rome, however, he was expelled from the city and he tried to ally himself with the enemies. These characters portray the reality of human beings, the way we are locked up in our own self-centeredness and own self, that we are not even capable of being empathetic, nor of communicating with each other: "...the isolation of the speaking self by pride and by failure of sympathy is presented as a hapless condition after all" (Rosenthal 183). In this way, Eliot urges the readers to have compassion with all the people who are not capable of being loyal or honest to their own values and morals.

The gods understand the word as Damyata, control yourself.

Damyata: The boat responded  
 Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar  
 The sea was calm, your heart would have

responded...(419, 421)

According to Viorica Patea in her “Introduction” to *La tierra baldía*, the last imperative depicts that the self can be able to achieve freedom if it controls its impulses in accordance with the divine rhythms (281). This suggests that the act of having compassion and giving is fundamental to attain and accomplish self-control. Besides, she claims that these diverse creatures understand the word in three distinct ways. Each of them understood their part, but this means only a part of the totality of the word, since the entire meaning needs to be composed of the three aspects, not only of one. The Thunder utters the final response, a final answer to all the previous questions that appeared throughout the poem. It reveals the universal order, the meaning of DA, which is the essence of the ultimate being.

## 5. Conclusion

T.S. Eliot depicts man’s lack of love through the mythical method first implemented by Joyce. He uses the connection with the past to give significance to the present and to portray the absence of love in the past and the present. To do that, he presents the Western tradition of love, with characters whose love goes beyond death, such as Dido or Cleopatra, Tristan and Isolde, Dido and Aeneas, but in this tradition he also introduces figures who illustrate decadence and who mirror the modern world. On the other hand, the modern characters are also represented by the wastelanders, they lack identity and live without love. Besides, in “The Fire Sermon” there is a world full of waste and debris in which mechanical movements and power are more relevant than feelings and affection. Nonetheless, at the end of the poem, the Thunder tries to provide a solution to this

situation of emptiness that is affecting the characters and it makes a powerful and clear revelation.

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