International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies
ISSN(e): 2306-0646
ISSN(p): 2306-9910
DOI: 10.55493/5019.v14i3.5631
Vol. 14, No. 3, 378-389.

URL: www.aessweb.com

From abjection to hyperreality: Rethinking modern malaise in Eliot's *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Muhammad Tofazzel Hossain[1+]
Jannatul Ayesha Siddiquea[2]
Mohammad Rahmatullah[3]

[1,2]*Department of English, Southeast University, Bangladesh.*
[1]*Email: tofazzel.hossain@seu.edu.bd*
[2]*Email: ayeshajannatul61@gmail.com*
[3]*Department of English, Northern University, Bangladesh.*
[3]*Email: likhon661993@gmail.com*

(+ Corresponding author)

Article History
Received: 13 June 2025
Revised: 5 September 2025
Accepted: 18 September 2025
Published: 25 September 2025

Keywords
Abjection
Hyperreality
Simulacra
Modern Malaise
T. S. Eliot
Modernist Poetry.

ABSTRACT

This article offers a new critical pathway for interpreting T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by moving beyond Freudian psychoanalysis and instead employing Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. It reveals how Eliot's poems stage the modern crisis not simply as a drama of the psyche but as a cultural and semiotic catastrophe marked by the collapse of meaning, failed rituals, and proliferation of empty signs. Kristeva's abjection shows how characters and landscapes reflect loss of identity and symbolic order, while Baudrillard reframes the modern subject as endlessly performing hollow gestures. This dual approach situates Eliot's poetry as a prophetic meditation on modern and postmodern anxieties, providing a model for renewed critical engagement with modernist literature and suggesting pathways for interdisciplinary research. By foregrounding these perspectives, the article underscores Eliot's continued relevance for debates on identity, authenticity, and meaning. Reading Eliot through abjection and hyperreality illuminates neglected dimensions of his poetry and addresses how modern literature negotiates trauma, ritual, and performance of self in a fragmented world. It expands Eliot criticism and signals new directions for modernist analysis.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by reframing modernist criticism, moving beyond Freud's psychoanalysis to apply Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and Jean Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality to Eliot's poetry. The paper's primary contribution is finding that Eliot's modern malaise reflects cultural and semiotic collapse, not merely individual neurosis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the study of Eliot's poetry, especially Eliot (1922) and Eliot (1915), psychoanalytic approaches primarily Freudian have long dominated the critical landscape. Freud's theories of id, ego, and superego have been repeatedly applied to the stages of fragmented characters and existential crises in Eliot (Fancher, 2014; Gupta, 2020; Rennison, 2015). However, the saturation of Freudian perspectives has led to a scholarly impasse, where fresh insights into Eliot's negotiation of modernity, meaning, and subjectivity are urgently needed (Beasley, 2007; Kupfersmid, 2019). Contemporary critics have called for a theoretical reorientation one that moves beyond the interior dynamics of the self to address the broader cultural and semiotic crises that define modernist literature, as the complexities of the modern experience often outstrip the explanatory power of classical psychoanalysis (Barry, 2020; Black, 2020).

Eliot's major poems have long been recognized as artistic responses to the disintegration of cultural, moral, and spiritual certainties in the wake of World War I and the accelerating pace of modernity (Ellis, 2018; Rzepa, 2021).

The characters who inhabit *The Waste Land* and "Prufrock" are symptomatic figures of a civilization grappling with the collapse of meaning, ritual, and communal identity. As Abrams and Harpham (2014) contend, modernist texts such as Eliot's render visible "the fundamental ambiguities, anxieties, and disruptions" at the heart of twentieth-century experience (p. 278). Against this backdrop, the adequacy of traditional psychoanalytic models is increasingly in question, prompting the search for theoretical paradigms that can account for the breakdown of meaning and the emergence of new forms of cultural malaise.

This article proposes to reframe Eliot's poetry analysis through the dual lenses of Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and hyperreality. Kristeva (1982) articulates abjection as the experience of being cast out from stable structures of identity and meaning a sensation that resonates powerfully with Eliot's poetic landscapes' psychic and social dislocation. In Kristeva's terms, the abject marks the place "where meaning collapses" (p. 2), and her framework allows us to reconsider characters such as Madame Sosostris, Lil, and Prufrock as figures at the edge of symbolic dissolution. Simultaneously, Baudrillard's (1994) theory of simulacra interrogates late modernity's loss of authenticity and the rise of empty signifiers. Baudrillard's insight that "the real is no longer what it was" (p. 1) finds uncanny expression in the artificial rituals and surfaces of Eliot's modern city.

The turn to Kristeva and Baudrillard is not simply a rejection of Freudian analysis but a recognition of its limits when faced with texts that enact, not just personal neurosis, but the wider crisis of signification itself. Recent scholarship has underscored the need to approach Eliot's work as a meditation on the failure of meaning and the social rituals that once underpinned identity (Barry, 2020; Hawkes, 2018). By employing abjection and simulation as critical paradigms, this study aims to reveal how *The Waste Land* and "Prufrock" stage the modern crisis as an ordeal of representation a profound struggle at the borderlands of language, culture, and the self. This perspective not only revitalizes Eliot criticism but also offers a new theoretical model for understanding modernism's ongoing resonance in an era increasingly marked by the loss of authenticity and the proliferation of simulacra.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM PSYCHOANALYSIS TO ABJECTION AND HYPERREALITY

Psychoanalytic paradigms, particularly those derived from the Freudian model of the psyche, have historically dominated the interpretation of Eliot (1922) poetry. Freud (1989)'s tripartite division of id, ego, and superego has yielded considerable insights into the neuroses and anxieties depicted in Eliot (1922) and Eliot (1915). However, the limitations of this framework have become increasingly clear. Freud (1989)'s model privileges the internal dynamics of the individual subject, seeking explanations for psychic malaise in personal history and unconscious drives (Fancher, 2014; Freud, 1989). However, Eliot's modernist vision, marked by the fragmentation of self and the dissolution of shared symbolic structures, invites a theoretical apparatus capable of accounting for the collapse of meaning, ritual, and identity in the modern world (Abrams & Harpham, 2014; Barry, 2020). This section advances the argument that two major contemporary theories can extend and productively displace the psychoanalytic tradition: Kristeva (1982) theory of abjection and Jean Baudrillard's analysis of simulacra and hyperreality. These frameworks move beyond the interior landscape of neurosis to address the broader conditions of signification and modernity's cultural logics.

Kristeva (1982) marks a critical turning point in the theory of subjectivity and the analysis of cultural malaise. Kristeva (1982) defines abjection as the psychic and cultural process by which boundaries between self and other, subject and object, purity and pollution are threatened or collapsed. Abjection is defined as that which "disturbs identity, system, and order." What does not respect borders, positions, and rules? The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (Kristeva, 1982). Unlike repression, which expels unwanted contents into the unconscious, abjection marks the experience of confronting that which cannot be fully excluded or assimilated, generating feelings of horror, disgust, and existential instability.

The notion that abjection arises at the limits of the symbolic order those systems of meaning, language, and ritual that structure subjectivity and social belonging is central to Kristeva (1982) theorization. The abject signals the failure of symbolic authority, surfacing "where meaning collapses" and threatening the coherent identity of the subject (Kristeva, 1982). In modernist literature, and particularly in Eliot's poetry, this crisis of the symbolic is manifested in the fragmentation of narrative, the loss of communal rituals, and the emergence of disoriented, dislocated characters inhabiting liminal spaces (Ellis, 2018; Rzepa, 2021). In Kristeva (1982) terms, the modernist project is thus bound up with the abject the return of the excluded, the eruption of the irrational, and the constant threat to the structures that once stabilized meaning and the self.

The resonance of abjection with modernism's historical and cultural context is profound. In the aftermath of World War I, Western societies faced the collapse of old certainties religious, moral, and epistemological. The rituals and narratives that once anchored identity gave way to disillusionment and psychic vertigo (Barry, 2020). As Kristeva observes, "abjection, on the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of reality and unreality, is a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter" (Kristeva, 1982). The persistent imagery of pollution, sterility, and broken bodies in The Waste Land reflects the presence of the abject. Characters such as the typist, Lil, and Madame Sosostris are not merely neurotic individuals but become figures for a culture at the brink of symbolic dissolution a world where traditional borders of gender, class, and spirituality are no longer tenable (Ellis, 2018; Hawkes, 2018).

Kristeva's concept has proven particularly relevant to scholars seeking to understand how modernist texts dramatize the breakdown of order and the infiltration of the irrational and the excluded (Beasley, 2007; Rzepa, 2021). By reading abjection as a structure of feeling that pervades both individual and collective experience, critics have begun to locate in Eliot's poetry the symptoms of a wider cultural sickness the "horror" not only of lost personal identity but of a civilization that can no longer sustain meaning or ritual.

While Kristeva illuminates the psychic and social effects of abjection, Baudrillard (1994), Simulacra and Simulation address a parallel but distinct dimension of modernity: the evaporation of the real in a world increasingly dominated by representations and empty signs. Baudrillard's central thesis is that the distinction between reality and its representations (images, models, simulations) was progressively eroded in late modernity. In Baudrillard's terms, the "simulacrum" is a copy without an original, an image or sign that refers only to itself, circulating in a closed circuit of meaning.

Baudrillard famously asserts, "It is no longer a question of imitation, duplication, or even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard, 1994). This process simulation leads to what he terms "hyperreality," in which signs proliferate without stable referents, and authenticity becomes impossible to locate. The result is a culture saturated with images, rituals, and social performances that lack any experience or substance.

The implications of this theory for reading Eliot are considerable. The world of *The Waste Land* is one in which rituals are emptied of meaning, identities are performed rather than inhabited, and language itself is repeatedly revealed as inadequate to the task of making sense of existence (Barry, 2020; Ellis, 2018). "Unreal City," Eliot writes, "under the brown fog of a winter dawn" (*The Waste Land*, line 60) a place where social life unfolds as a series of hollow gestures and surfaces. Thus, Baudrillard's logic of simulacra maps directly onto Eliot's poetic world's performativity and fragmentation. Prufrock's anxious self-presentation "There will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Eliot, 1915), lines 26–27, epitomizes the subject caught in the web of simulation, endlessly rehearsing roles in the absence of authenticity (Brown, 2018).

Baudrillard's theory also exposes the limitations of readings that focus exclusively on personal or psychological crises. For Baudrillard, the malaise of modernity is not simply a matter of individual neurosis or social alienation but arises from the very structure of signification itself. The "real" disappears beneath layers of mediation; reality is not repressed but replaced (Baudrillard, 1994). Thus, Eliot's characters experience not only alienation from themselves

and each other but also a fundamental disconnection from any underlying reality a condition that Baudrillard (1994) terms "the desert of the real itself" (p. 1).

The critical turn to Kristeva and Baudrillard is prompted by the recognition that the explanatory power of Freudian psychoanalysis has become attenuated in the radical experimentation with form and meaning of modernist literature. Although Freud's concepts of repression, neurosis, and the divided self have illuminated many aspects of modern subjectivity, they remain limited to the dynamics of the individual psyche and its unconscious processes (Freud, 1989; Kupfersmid, 2019). However, Eliot's poetry stages crises that extend well beyond personal neurosis to implicate the very systems by which meaning, identity, and reality are constructed and sustained (Black, 2020).

Recent criticism has emphasized the need for theoretical models that can account for the dissolution of communal ritual, the proliferation of empty social forms, and the psychic violence of meaning's collapse (Hawkes, 2018; Rzepa, 2021). Kristeva's theory of abjection and Baudrillard's account of simulation respond to this need by foregrounding the breakdown of symbolic authority and the emergence of hyperreal environments. Both theorists offer tools for analyzing Eliot's world as a site of cultural trauma, where the old coordinates of meaning have vanished, and the subject is left to navigate a landscape of abjection and simulacra.

By situating this intervention within contemporary Eliot criticism, this study aims to break new ground in the analysis of modernist poetry. Rather than recycling familiar psychoanalytic motifs, it pursues a more ambitious agenda: to demonstrate that the malaise depicted in *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is symptomatic not only of individual psychic struggle but also of a seismic transformation in the cultural logic of modernity itself. The collapse of symbolic and real alike becomes visible in the abject bodies and hollow rituals of Eliot's poems, marking a crisis that remains urgently relevant to the present (Abrams & Harpham, 2014; Barry, 2020).

3. ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENTATION

3.1. "The Waste Land" as Landscape of Abjection

The world of *The Waste Land* is a devastated terrain a psychic, social, and spiritual wasteland. T. S. Eliot's modern metropolis is not merely a backdrop for neurotic characters but a living symbol of abjection, a state that Kristeva (1982) articulates as the breakdown of boundaries between self and other, order and chaos, purity and pollution. Eliot's figures Madame Sosostris, Lil, the Typist, Mrs. Porter are not simply suffering individuals; they are embodiments of abjection, each dramatizing the collapse of symbolic meaning in a world stripped of stable identities and rituals.

Kristeva (1982) asserts that "the abject has only one quality of the object: that of being opposed to I" (p. 1). The abject marks the place where the subject loses its distinction from the object, where the clear lines that separate the individual from what is other or unclean are transgressed. This experience is enacted most vividly in Eliot's *The Waste Land* through characters whose bodies and social positions reflect the dissolution and exclusion imposed by their fractured environment.

Madame Sosostris, introduced early in the poem as a "famous clairvoyante" (Eliot, 1922), exemplifies abjection. She claims wisdom and authority "known to be the wisest woman in Europe" but is simultaneously depicted as fraudulent and sickly, her vision clouded ("bad cold" [line 44]). The fortune-teller, with her "wicked pack of cards," occupies a liminal space between wisdom and charlatanism, order and chaos. She draws upon the past's arcane rituals but deploys them in a context emptied of their original power. In Kristeva (1982) terms, Madame Sosostris is abject because she "does not respect borders, positions, rules" (p. 4): her predictions are ambiguous, her rituals devoid of meaning, and her authority uncertain.

Lil, the exhausted mother whose story is relayed in "A Game of Chess," offers another portrait of abjection. Lil's body has been ravaged by childbirth, contraception, and poverty: "She's had five already, and young George nearly died" (Eliot, 1922). Her "pulling a long face" and consuming "those pills" reflect the abject's physical toll a body at the edge of collapse, no longer a site of maternal sanctity or erotic allure but of exhaustion and decay. Kristeva (1982)

writes, "abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship" (p. 10), and in Lil, we witness the residue of a nurturing role that no longer brings value or meaning to the new social order.

The typist, central to the "Fire Sermon," embodies abjection through her sexual passivity and emotional numbness. Her encounter with "the young man Carbuncular" is described as mechanical, devoid of love or passion:

"He, the young man carbuncular, arrives.

Explores hands at once.

Her brain allows one half-formed thought.

'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over." (Eliot, 1922).

Here, sexuality is stripped of transcendence or mutual recognition; it becomes an empty transaction, a physical act divorced from affect. As Kristeva observes, the abject is encountered "when meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2), and the Typist's encounter, replete with bodily exposure yet emotional detachment, precisely marks such a collapse. She is left to "smooth her hair with an automatic hand," a gesture of routine maintenance despite existential depletion.

Mrs. Porter, referenced in the bawdy song "O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter/And on her daughter/They wash their feet in soda water"(Eliot, 1922), is a figure of social and sexual marginality. The echo of public washing as a cleansing ritual ironically underscores her abject status, as the ritual is no longer effective. In Kristeva's schema, abjection is often signaled by failed purification; the very attempts at cleanliness only highlight the impossibility of genuine purification in a contaminated world (Kristeva, 1982).

Eliot's urban masses are similarly abject. The poem's iconic vision of crowds crossing London Bridge "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many" (Eliot, 1922), lines 62–63, blurs the line between the living and the dead, the individual and the collective. This mass is not a body politic but a procession of the wasted and undone. Their identities dissolve in the flow, recalling Kristeva's (1982) notion that the abject "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (p. 2). The city, meant to be a symbol of civilization and order, becomes a locus of collective abjection.

Critical readings have highlighted how Eliot's characters represent not only personal but also societal breakdowns. Ellis (2018) underscores the extent to which the "characters in *The Waste Land*" function as synecdoches for a fractured, postwar society (p. 60). Hawkes (2018) similarly observes that Eliot's poem is "inhabited by figures on the edge of social inclusion, of psychological wholeness, of religious meaning" (p. 458). By positioning these figures as abject, we move beyond Freud's emphasis on personal neurosis to a Kristeva (1982) understanding of how modernity erodes the very foundations of subjectivity and culture.

Rituals, whether religious, social, or sexual, are everywhere present in *The Waste Land*, but almost always fail. They are performed not as affirmations of meaning but as desperate attempts to stave off abjection. Kristeva (1982) explains that rituals are "elaborate defenses and purifications" meant to guard against the abject's intrusion (p. 17). When these methods fail, the subject or society is thrown into crisis.

Madame Sosostris's reading of the tarot is a poignant example. The cards Death, the Hanged Man, the "one-eyed merchant" are invoked with the trappings of mystery, but their meanings are fractured, and their power is lost.

"And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card.

Blank is something he carries on his back.

Which I am forbidden to see.

I do not find.

The Hanged Man. Fear death by water." (Eliot, 1922).

The reading is a prophecy simulacrum; it gestures toward the possibility of fate or meaning, yet it only reinforces a sense of emptiness and foreboding. The blank card, the forbidden vision, and the missing Hanged Man all signal a broken symbolic system. As Kristeva notes, "the abject is edged with the sublime." It is not the same moment on the

journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being (Kristeva, 1982). Instead of purifying or clarifying, Madame Sosostris's ritual multiplies uncertainty and abjection.

Sexual encounters also become rituals of abjection. The repeated references to failed or transactional sexuality from Lil's "antique" body to the Typist's "automatic hand" suggest a society where the act of union no longer brings communion or transcendence. Instead, these rituals become compulsions, haunted by the impossibility of a true connection. In Kristeva's view, failed rituals heighten anxiety and reinforce abjection, as the subject "finds that the rituals, far from appeasing, often revive the very anxieties they were designed to suppress"(Kristeva, 1982).

Purification by water a central motif in the poem is similarly frustrated. The quest for water becomes a metaphor for spiritual and existential renewal in the "What the Thunder Said" section, but the poem repeatedly laments, "Here is no water but only rock" (Eliot, 1922) (line 331). The absence of purifying water is the absence of salvation and of meaning. The ritual gesture toward purification is everywhere: "If there were water/And no rock/If there were rock/And also water" but it is always thwarted (lines 346–349). Kristeva (1982) argues that abjection "exposes the fragility of the law" (p. 65), and Eliot's landscape, where every effort at ritual restoration fails, testifies to modernity's precariousness of meaning.

3.2. Simulacra and Hyperreality in Eliot's Modern World

While Kristeva's abjection illuminates the psychic and bodily dimensions of Eliot's modern world, Baudrillard's (1994) theory of simulacra and hyperreality provides an equally powerful lens for analyzing the social and semiotic crises Eliot dramatizes. Baudrillard (1994) claims that, in late modernity, "the real is no longer what it was" (Baudrillard, 1994) is especially resonant in Eliot's work, where language, ritual, and identity have become performative gestures, emptied of stable referents.

Eliot's London is not simply a physical place but a space where authenticity is endlessly acknowledged. The city is a labyrinth of signs, surfaces, and encounters, where the distinction between reality and representation is continually eroded. Baudrillard (1994) explains that "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance." It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (p. 1).

The famous lines from *The Waste Land*—"Unreal City, / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn" (Eliot, 1922), lines 60–61, are often read as an evocation of spiritual emptiness. However, from a Baudrillardian perspective, the "unreal city" is more than a metaphor; it is a literal manifestation of hyperreality, where social life unfolds as empty signs are repeated. As noted earlier, the crowd crossing London Bridge is not a collection of individuals but a simulation of community, a flow of undifferentiated and directionless bodies. Barry (2020) observes that "the modernist city becomes a theater of surfaces, where the performance of self is incessant, yet always haunted by the sense that nothing truly lies beneath" (p. 175).

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the drawing rooms and salons "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo" (Eliot, 1915) (lines 13–14) are sites of perpetual social performance. The reference to Michelangelo, repeated without context or depth, underscores the sign's dominance over substance. Baudrillard (1994) argued that "the proliferation of signs is itself a defense against the threat of the real" (p. 20). Eliot's characters shield themselves with allusions, rituals, and chatter, evading any confrontation with authentic emotion or meaning. The city, both in *The Waste Land* and "Prufrock," becomes a hall of mirrors in which meaning is always postponed and never realized.

Critical discussions have recognized the performative and theatrical qualities of Eliot's urban scenes. Brown (2018) notes that Prufrock "moves through his world as a spectator, observing and rehearsing possible actions but never truly engaging" (p. 158). This hesitation is not simply personal anxiety but symptomatic of a larger crisis: the impossibility of distinguishing genuine feelings from social scripts. Thus, Baudrillard's theory illuminates how Eliot's city is structured as a simulacrum, a domain in which every gesture is a copy without an original.

The question of identity in Eliot is inseparable from the logic of simulation. In particular, Prufrock is emblematic of the modern subject as a performer trapped in a loop of self-observation and self-presentation. The lines "There will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (Eliot, 1915) (lines 26–27) are among the most frequently cited lines in modernist literature, yet they gain new significance when read through Baudrillard's theory. Here, the "face" is not the index of inner truth but a mask, a social consumption simulation.

Baudrillard (1994) argues, "we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (p. 79). Prufrock's obsession with how others perceive him, his rehearsals and anxieties, "Do I dare disturb the universe?" (Eliot, 1915) (line 45) are symptoms of a condition in which identity is constructed from the outside in, according to the demands of the audience. The self, rather than being discovered, is manufactured through performance, a notion echoed in Eliot's depiction of the "lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" (line 72), all watching and being watched, each trapped in a private theater.

The performative self in Eliot resonates with the hyperreal condition described by Baudrillard, in which "the simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false,' between 'real' and 'imaginary'" (Baudrillard, 1994). Prufrock's indecision "And indeed there will be time / To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?' / Time to turn back and descend the stair" (Eliot, 1915) (lines 37–39), is not just social awkwardness but also the uncertainty of a subject for whom authenticity is no longer accessible. The possibility that every act is merely another performance, another layer of simulation, casts a shadow over each gesture.

Barry (2020) noted that Eliot's characters "oscillate between anxiety and apathy, never certain if their emotions are truly their own or merely reflections of the social surfaces they inhabit" (p. 181). By foregrounding the mask, the script, and the audience, Eliot's poetry stages the drama of identity as a series of simulations a perpetual rehearsal for an authenticity that remains out of reach.

The convergence of abjection (Kristeva) and simulation (Baudrillard) in Eliot's poetry points toward a profound diagnosis of modern malaise. The modern subject, as depicted in *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," is not simply beset by private crisis, as the Freudian model would suggest. Instead, it is the product of a world in which the real and the meaningful have been systematically evacuated. The search for authenticity, whether in ritual, love, art, or identity repeatedly fails, leaving only abjection and simulation in its wake.

Eliot's repeated invocations of nothingness, "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (*The Waste Land*, line 30); "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, line 51), mark the exhaustion of depth, meaning, and continuity. The despair experienced by his characters is not only existential but also ontological: it is the despair of living in a world where the symbolic order (Kristeva) and the real (Baudrillard) have collapsed, leaving only the fragments of ritual and the endless play of signs.

This reading moves beyond the well-trodden ground of Freudian analysis. Whereas Freud focuses on the individual's unconscious and repressed desires, Kristeva and Baudrillard allow us to see Eliot's poems as staging modernity's collective and systemic failures. As Ellis (2018) observes, "*The Waste Land* is a poem that mourns the impossibility of restoration, even as it desperately seeks it" (p. 62). Hawkes (2018) adds that Eliot "maps the landscape of modern despair not as personal pathology but as a general condition one in which meaning itself is under siege" (p. 467).

In their synthesis, abjection and simulation reveal the despair of the modern subject as a symptom of a historical and cultural transformation in which both the body and meaning have been rendered precarious. The failure of rituals to restore order, the omnipresence of the mask, and the endless rehearsal of roles in social life all these phenomena attest to the inability of modern culture to provide a stable anchorage for identity or value.

Thus, Eliot's poems do not simply recount the woes of a handful of neurotic individuals. Rather, they chart the experience of abjection and simulation in the modern world, offering a literary, philosophical, and cultural diagnosis of meaninglessness and despair. By reading *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" through the critical frameworks of Kristeva and Baudrillard, we uncover a vision of modernity in which the ever-present threat of

abjection and the endless proliferation of simulacra haunt the search for authenticity a vision that remains urgent and resonant in the twenty-first century.

4. SYNTHESIS: NEW PATHWAYS FOR ELIOT CRITICISM

The preceding analysis seeks to reorient the critical understanding of Eliot's *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by shifting from a traditional Freudian lens to the less-traveled but deeply generative frameworks of Julia Kristeva's abjection and Jean Baudrillard's simulacra. This synthesis is not merely a layering of new theoretical perspectives onto familiar texts; rather, it proposes a genuine reframing of Eliot's work and, by extension, of the central preoccupations of modernist literature with trauma, authenticity, and the fractured subject. Here, we synthesize the preceding arguments, illustrate how this reading transforms key moments in the poems, assess broader implications for the field, and propose future research directions.

One of the most significant results of applying Kristeva (1982) and Baudrillard (1994) theories regarding Eliot involve the displacement of the interpretive center from the individual's repressed desire (Freud's focus) to collective, cultural, and semiotic ruptures. While previous readings often regarded Eliot's characters as isolated neurotics or sufferers of existential angst, frameworks of abjection and simulation enable us to recognize their experiences as symptomatic of a deeper and more widespread cultural malaise.

Take, for example, the repeated references to bodily decay and uncleanliness in *The Waste Land*: Lil's "pulling a long face" due to "them pills," the typist's emotionless "automatic hand," and Madame Sosostris's ambiguous fortune-telling (Eliot, 1922) (lines 159, 255, 43). Earlier readings such as those by Fancher (2014) and Gupta (2020), would interpret these as evidence of sexual repression or anxiety, rooted in personal psychodynamics. Yet, as Kristeva (1982) insists, "abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship" (p. 10): the horror on display is not merely sexual or psychological but arises from the breakdown of all borders bodily, social, and symbolic.

This theoretical realignment is particularly fruitful when examining the crowd flowing over the London Bridge:

"A crowd flowed over the London Bridge, so many.

I had not thought death had undone so many" (Eliot, 1922) (lines 62–63).

Traditional psychoanalytic readings might treat this image as the collective unconscious or death drive writ large. However, Kristeva's theory foregrounds the abject mass, the breakdown of individuality into a homogenized, corpse-like flow, where death is not repressed but rendered visible, collective, and inescapable (Kristeva, 1982). The city becomes a landscape of abjection, where "meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982).

Meanwhile, Baudrillard's notion of simulacra offers a new perspective on Eliot's depiction of ritual and social performance. For instance, the endlessly repeated salon conversation "In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo" (Eliot, 1922) (lines 13–14), no longer registers simply as ironic social commentary but as an enactment of simulation. The "women" and their conversations exist only as signs referencing other signs, and their performance is detached from any lived authenticity or meaning. As Baudrillard (1994) puts it, "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance." It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (p. 1). In this light, the drawing rooms of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and the crowds of *The Waste Land* are not failed communities or rituals per se; they are simulations, performances whose referents have disappeared.

Even moments of ostensible self-revelation, such as Prufrock's confession, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons," (Eliot, 1922) (line 51), become not revelations of private anxiety but symptoms of life lived through routines emptied of personal significance, where the gesture itself is a mask, endlessly repeatable and essentially interchangeable with all others. Barry (2020) notes that "the modernist city becomes a theater of surfaces, where the performance of self is incessant, yet always haunted by the sense that nothing truly lies beneath" (p. 175).

By shifting the critical perspective from Freudian repression to Kristeva's (1982) Abjection and Baudrillardian simulation, we arrive at a fundamentally different understanding of Eliot's poetry's crisis of modernity. This new lens

does not diminish the reality of trauma or anxiety; rather, it reframes them as the outcome of systemic cultural failures rather than individual pathology.

Modernist texts have long been interpreted as chronicles of alienation, loss, and fragmentation (Abrams & Harpham, 2014). However, this new synthesis argues that modernism is equally a literature of abjection a response to the 'collapse of the symbolic order' borrowed from Kristeva (1982). The rituals, myths, and communal narratives that once secured identity are inoperative. As Kristeva (1982) writes, "abjection is a precondition of narcissism, which, after a period of breakdown, can start anew on the basis of a radically reconstituted identity" (p. 45). Eliot's poems capture this process in medias res, mapping the wasteland not as the endpoint of civilization but as the necessary precursor to any possible renewal a landscape strewn with the detritus of failed meanings.

Meanwhile, Baudrillard's insight into simulation clarifies the new forms of alienation endemic to modernity. Eliot's characters are not only estranged from others and themselves but are also caught in networks of signs and performances, a world where "the distinction between reality and simulation breaks down, leaving only the endless play of surfaces" (Baudrillard, 1994). This insight is especially pertinent for understanding the culture of post-World War I Europe, where faith in authentic experience, progress, and community had been profoundly shaken (Ellis, 2018).

In Kristeva's terms, Eliot's world is a traumatized world one in which abjection is not an isolated event but a general condition. Hawkes (2018) observes that Eliot "maps the landscape of modern despair not as personal pathology but as a general condition one in which meaning itself is under siege" (p. 467). Trauma, here, is not only individual but also societal and is experienced as the failure of rituals and the omnipresence of abject bodies and scenes.

Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is equally crucial for understanding the experience of trauma in the modern subject. Trauma is compounded by the inability to distinguish between real and imaginary suffering and between actual loss and its representations in a world saturated by simulation. As Baudrillard (1994) argued, "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times" (p. 2). Adrift in a hall of mirrors, Eliot's characters rehearse not only their anxieties but also the trauma of endless mediation.

While the emphasis in both Kristeva and Baudrillard might seem relentlessly negative abjection as collapse, simulation as emptiness there is a nascent possibility for renewal. Kristeva (1982) proposed that abjection, though terrifying, is also "the prerequisite for rebirth" (p. 45), as it allows for the clearing away of exhausted forms and meanings. The persistent longing for water in *The Waste Land*, though often thwarted ("Here is no water but only rock," (Eliot, 1922) (line 331), suggests a residual yearning for purification and reconstitution.

Baudrillard is less sanguine, but the recognition of simulation opens a space for critical awareness even in his work. Barry (2020) argues that recognizing the hyperreal can serve as a form of emancipation, prompting the pursuit of new, if provisional, modes of authenticity. For Eliot, the condition of abjection and simulation may not lead directly to recovery, but it sharpens the awareness of what has been lost, thereby keeping the question of authenticity and renewal alive.

Through the lenses of Kristeva and Baudrillard, this dual-theoretical reading of Eliot makes several substantive contributions to the field of Eliot studies and to modernist criticism more broadly. Moving beyond Freud's focus on the interior psychic drama of individual characters, this approach invites scholars to attend more fully to the cultural, semiotic, and collective dimensions of modernist malaise. Kristeva and Baudrillard's theoretical apparatus enables a nuanced mapping of failed rituals, abject bodies, and simulated identities motifs that permeate not only Eliot's poetry but also the works of other modernist writers such as Joyce, Woolf, and Kafka (Beasley, 2007). Expanding the critical lexicon in this way allows for a richer and more productive dialogue between literary criticism, philosophy, and cultural studies, thereby opening new avenues for interdisciplinary engagement.

Focusing on abjection and simulation also compels a re-examination of the modernist form and style. Eliot's poetry's fragmentation, allusiveness, and polyphony are often viewed as symptoms of narrative breakdown or

hermeticism. However, these features can be more productively understood as formal strategies that respond to Kristeva (1982) and Baudrillard's (1994) crises. Instead of simply reflecting confusion or despair, such narrative techniques foreground the instability of meaning and reality in the modernist world. Abrams and Harpham (2014) captured this dynamic, noting that modernist texts "foreground the processes of signification and their limitations" (p. 300), making the act of meaning-making itself a central thematic concern.

Moreover, this theoretical perspective encourages a fundamental reconsideration of the modernist subject. Instead of viewing Eliot's protagonists as tragic heroes or clinical case studies, the focus on abjection and simulation reframes them as figures whose predicaments are symptomatic of broader historical, cultural, and semiotic ruptures. This reading highlights the intricate entanglement of the body, language, and society in the ongoing construction and deconstruction of subjectivity. In his exploration of Eliot and theology, Rzepa (2021) compellingly observes that "the breakdown of ritual and faith in Eliot is inseparable from the crisis of subjectivity itself" (p. 211), suggesting that personal and cultural crises are inextricably linked.

The application of abjection and simulation as interpretive tools not only reorients Eliot's study but also opens up multiple promising directions for future research. Comparative modernist studies could deploy these frameworks to analyze other writers of the period. For example, Joyce's *Ulysses* abounds in abject bodies and disrupted rituals, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* explores the city as both a mask and a simulacrum, and Kafka's *The Trial* is haunted by bureaucratic rituals that evoke anxiety rather than meaning. Such comparative work could reveal shared strategies and anxieties across the modernist canon.

Additionally, future research could explore intersections with trauma studies and media theory, investigating how abjection and simulation operate within digital cultures or how postmodernism intensifies the crises first articulated by Eliot. This approach could be extended to transnational and postcolonial contexts as well, offering new insights into ritual, identity, and authenticity in texts by writers such as Jean Rhys or Salman Rushdie, where the negotiation of cultural meaning unfolds in shifting historical and geopolitical landscapes.

Furthermore, this study encourages interdisciplinary connections. Scholars might draw on anthropology to consider rituals and taboos, sociology to examine collective trauma, or philosophy to interrogate the ontology of the real and the symbolic. Thus, the frameworks of abjection and simulation facilitate a rich cross-disciplinary dialogue, deepening our understanding of the relationship of literature to broader social and cultural currents.

Finally, applying these concepts to Eliot's later poetry such as the *Four Quartets* holds promise for further illuminating questions of renewal and spiritual quest after the collapse of meaning. Examining whether abjection and simulation persist or whether new forms of ritual and authenticity emerge could greatly enrich the study of Eliot's evolving poetics.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a critical reframing of Eliot's *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," moving beyond the traditional Freudian paradigm to explore the explanatory potential of Julia Kristeva's abjection theory and the simulacra and hyperreality concepts of Jean Baudrillard. Through these frameworks, the analysis has demonstrated that the malaise and fragmentation pervading Eliot's modernist poetry cannot be reduced solely to the dramas of individual psyche, repression, or existential angst. Instead, Eliot's characters and landscapes emerge as symptomatic of a much wider cultural and semiotic breakdown a condition in which the forces of abjection and the endless proliferation of empty signs threaten meaning itself.

By applying Kristeva (1982) insight that abjection "disturbs identity, system, order" (p. 4) and marks the place "where meaning collapses" (p. 2), this article has shown how the bodies and social relations in *The Waste Land*—from Lil's exhausted corporeality to the crowd's spectral anonymity embody the modern subject's encounter with a world stripped of ritual and symbolic security. Likewise, the repeated failures of purification, the breakdown of communal

rites, and the prevalence of bodily and psychic pollution reveal a society caught in the throes of abjection, unable to regenerate itself through traditional structures of meaning.

In tandem, Baudrillard (1994) analysis of simulation and hyperreality elucidates the performative and ultimately hollow social scripts that dominate both *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". In Eliot's cityscapes, authenticity is relentlessly deferred as the characters move through spaces where encounters are performed rather than inhabited where, as Baudrillard observes, "the real is no longer what it was" (p. 1). Prufrock's self-alienation and *The Waste Land*'s "unreal city" together stage a world in which individuals are condemned to rehearse gestures and rituals that have lost their grounding, enacting what Baudrillard terms "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (p. 1). In this light, Eliot's poetry stands not only as a record of personal crisis but also as a meditation on the dissolution of the real in a modernity governed by simulation.

These theoretical interventions reposition *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" as prophetic texts, offering early diagnoses of crises that would define much twentieth- and twenty-first-century culture. Ellis (2018) notes that Eliot's work "mourns the impossibility of restoration, even as it desperately seeks it" (p. 62). The perpetual crisis of meaning experienced by his characters is not merely a feature of postwar disillusionment but also a reflection of a broader and ongoing condition one in which the abject and the simulated become enduring features of the social and psychic landscape.

The continuing relevance of Eliot's poetry lies precisely in this: its capacity to anticipate and articulate the anxieties of cultures caught between the collapse of symbolic order and the dominance of simulation. By turning to Kristeva and Baudrillard, we not only recover new meanings in Eliot's major works but also sharpen our understanding of modernism's persistent engagement with trauma, loss, and the search for authenticity in an unstable world. In doing so, *The Waste Land* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" remain vital, resonant, and uncannily prophetic texts for readers navigating the perpetual crises of meaning in contemporary culture.

Funding: The authors received no financial support for the research. The APC for this article was funded by Southeast University, Bangladesh.
Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.
Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.
Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.
Disclosure of AI Use: The author used OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4) to edit and refine the wording of the Introduction and Literature Review. All outputs were thoroughly reviewed and verified by the author.

REFERENCES

Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. (2014). *A glossary of literary terms* (11th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Barry, P. (2020). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (4th ed.). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation (Trans. S. F. Glaser)*. Ann Arbor, MI, USA: University of Michigan Press.

Beasley, R. (2007). *Theorists of modernist poetry: T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound*. England, UK: Routledge.

Black, D. M. (2020). The working of values in ethics and religion. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 101*(5), 992-1013. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207578.2020.1776618

Brown, A. (2018). A metaphorical analysis of the love song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T.S. Eliot. *Accounting Forum, 42*(1), 153–165. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.accfor.2018.01.006

Eliot, T. S. (1915). The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock. *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, 6*(3), 130–135.

Eliot, T. S. (1922). *The waste land*. New York: Boni and Liveright.

Ellis, D. (2018). Modernism and TS Eliot. *The Cambridge Quarterly, 47*(1), 53-64. https://doi.org/10.1093/camqtly/bfx024

Fancher, E. (2014). My conversations with the superego and the ego: An experimental approach to psychotherapy technique. *The Psychoanalytic Review, 101*(1), 81-94. https://doi.org/10.1521/prev.2014.101.1.81

Freud, S. (1989). The ego and the id (J. Riviere, Trans.). *TACD Journal, 17*(1), 5–22.

Gupta, D. (2020). Synergy between teaching and Freud's structural theory of personality: Id, ego and superego. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology, 17*(6), 6723-6734.

Hawkes, J. (2018). Imposing order to see the disorder: Student depression and TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*: A (Mis) reading/diagnosis. *Journal of Medical Humanities, 39*(4), 455-471. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-018-9525-1

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection (Trans. L. S. Roudiez)*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kupfersmid, J. (2019). Freud's clinical theories then and now. *Psychodynamic Psychiatry, 47*(1), 81-97. https://doi.org/10.1521/pdps.2019.47.1.81

Rennison, N. (2015). *Freud and psychoanalysis: Everything you need to know about id, ego, and super-ego*. Oxford, UK: Oldcastle Books.

Rzepa, J. (2021). *Modernism and theology: Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Czesław Miłosz*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.