

# Despair and Alienation in T. S. Eliot's and Adonis' Poetry: A Comparative Study

Bassma B. Nomass

Department of English Philology, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, University of Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain

**Abstract**—This article sheds light on some outstanding topics that deal with modern literary themes like alienation and despair by showing their negative effects on modern individual's life. The definition of alienation, its types, and an analysis of the self and soul are done according to different philosophers who Eliot is influenced by. The paper also portrays the impact of the two world wars and how their related economic, social, and political events have worsened the physical and spiritual alienation. In their poetry, T. S. Eliot and Adonis accentuate this adversity throughout their quest for a meaningful existence. According to Eliot, returning to religion is a necessity for overriding the crisis of spiritual alienation and loss. On the other hand, writing poetry is Adonis' technique to surpass internal despair where realms of divine imagination are weaved to soothe the sense of isolation. The study also delineates how both poets have used symbolic and figurative language to present the bitter reality. Although Eliot uses an impersonal way for portraying alienation, Adonis tends to be biographical in depicting this trauma.

**Index Terms**—modernism, alienation, existence, despair

## I. INTRODUCTION

T.S. Eliot and Adonis, though belonging to different cultural and literary traditions, both delve into the themes of despair and alienation in their poetry, providing profound reflections on the human condition. T.S. Eliot, a prominent figure in modernist literature, explores these themes with a distinct blend of fragmentation, allusion, and cultural references. His seminal work, "The Waste Land (1922)", stands as a prime example of the modernist disillusionment with the post-World War I, portraying a society gripped by spiritual desolation and cultural decay (North, 2001, p. 91). However, Adonis' poetry often navigates the terrain of alienation, exploring the disconnection between the individual and society, as well as the ruptures caused by political upheavals and social transformations in the Arab world. Both Eliot and Adonis engage with the themes of despair and alienation, providing readers with a poignant understanding of the challenges and discontents that characterize the human experience in the modern era. Their unique perspectives, expressed through rich symbolism and evocative language, contribute to a nuanced exploration of these existential concerns in the realm of poetry.

Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher, defines the self as an intertwined component with the soul. In other words, the self encompasses psychological as well as spiritual dimensions. Aristotle argues that the soul gives life to living beings, considering it as the energy that moves the body. He believes that the mind differentiates the man from the animal and it is the highest domain of the soul that is responsible for thinking, contemplating, and understanding (Simpson, 2001, p. 309). Immanuel Kant, the philosopher of the Enlightenment age, defines the self or the "I" as something that cannot be known from direct experience but rather is the important entity to experience the world and shape the perception and organize empirical knowledge. The mind, from Kant's point of view, is the understanding of sensory information and retrieving it using certain concepts such as time and place. On the other hand, the mind also deals with a higher level of thinking and reasoning. According to Kant, the existence of the soul beyond the mortal world is something that cannot be proven because it is beyond the realm of empirical life. Kant's philosophy, concerning the self, mind, and soul, has a profound impact on the modern world and in shaping human consciousness as well as the knowledge of metaphysical concepts and empirical life (Fushihara, 1987, pp. 1-2). Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher, has a significant contribution to the philosophy of soul and self of individuals in the modern society. He argues that the self is a rich entity but it is shaped by different factors and circumstances such as environment, language, culture, traditions, and personal experiences which integrate to form one's sense of self. The soul, according to Taylor, is the core of human beings where the ethical perception lies. His exploration of the soul aligns with his identification with the self to guide human acts, beliefs, and behaviors. The mind to Taylor is the source of language, perception, interpretation, and meaning which has the role of understanding the world (Hittinger, 1990, p. 111).

In this way, Eliot's philosophy of the self can be explored from his literary experience, specifically from the modern state of individuals within his society. Eliot depicts the self as fragmented and disintegrated within the modern world and that is clear in his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, the address to his estranged and alienated self is clear in this line:

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table. (Eliot, 1963, p. 3)

Through the above two lines, the estrangement of the self is obvious in Eliot's poetry represented by the pronouns "you" and "I". It also implies that his self is divided into two personas. The disillusionment and alienation of the self are well portrayed in his literary works because his characters struggle for the existential quest and purpose in life (Eliss, 2022, pp. 8-9). These are regarded as modern movement topics which focus on how human innocence and spirituality are robbed and why modern man's existence is degraded into that of a machine without consciousness. The self, is depicted by Eliot, in a state of a perpetual paralysis represented by the image of "a patient etherized" (Eliot, 1963, p. 3). The self, according to Eliot, is a fusing of past experience, cultural impacts, and historical heritage. According to Adonis, the concept of self has been interpreted within a tension between tradition and modernity. Adonis breaks away from traditional forms, structures, and contents in his writings to depict the complex entity of the Arab self. Adonis delineates the self in its state of grappling for a sense of authenticity and belonging both spiritually and physically. Adonis also explores the theme of self-division in his poetry in the following line:

The I is not I, nor is it the Other  
Absence and exile constitute the only presence. (Adonis, 1994, p. xiv)

The above two lines reflect themes of despair and alienation. The first line: "The I is not I, nor is it the Other" suggests a sense of identity crisis or fragmentation. The poet struggles with the idea that the self (I) is not a stable or coherent entity. The reference to "the Other" suggests a disconnection or alienation from external entities or perhaps from societal norms. This could indicate a feeling of isolation or a struggle to define one's identity in the context of others. The second line: "Absence and exile constitute the only presence" emphasizes the dominance of absence and exile in defining one's existence. The use of the terms "absence" and "exile" implies a separation, reinforcing the theme of alienation. The assertion that these elements "constitute the only presence" suggests that the poet considers the experience of absence and exile as the primary, if not sole, aspect of their existence. This could signify a profound sense of loss, loneliness, or estrangement. So, these two lines from Adonis' poetry convey a deep sense of despair and alienation, exploring themes of identity, disconnection from others, and the overwhelming presence of absence and exile in the poet's lived experience. It is clear that Adonis explores the splitting and the estrangement of the self. His work offers a contemplative perspective into the layers of identity (Shboul, 2005, p. 62). According to modernists, Eliot is considered a pioneer figure of the modernist movement because of his two poems, "The Waste Land" (1922) and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915). He significantly influenced Arab poets who hoped to overcome the shackles of rigid classical Arabic styles and forms. Therefore, "The Waste Land" accelerated the spread of modernism throughout the world (North, 2001, p. 275). Eliot's characters reflect the spiritual quest of fulfillment and survival. The terms of identity, spirituality, unity, and tradition are weaved in his poetry as a kind of seeking the existential meaning and purpose in the face of the modern and disintegrated society.

Thus, Eliot's philosophy delineates the quest for identity and spirituality amidst the chaos of life and the perplexity of human existence. According to Eliot, through the connection with a divine power that is greater than the human potential, the self would find spiritual redemption, enlightenment, and coherence against "the bleak aspects of existentialism: alienation, nausea, absurdity, sanity, anomia, ennui, anxiety, estrangement, weightlessness, meaninglessness, purposelessness, and nihilism find expression in T.S. Eliot's poetry" (Pani, 2013, p. 303). Existentialism theory deals with human existential crises as well as the disappointment and confusion over their existence. Like existentialist belief in the construction of the self, Eliot explores the way of affirming the nature of the self and its interaction with the world. In this sense, Adonis has been regarded as a prominent Arab pillar of the modernist movement since the mid-1950s as he inspired by Eliot. He was recently recognized for his "radical critique of modernism" (Shboul, 2005, p. 62). Adonis portrays alienation and the estrangement of the self in modern man by repeating in his poetry images of wandering and the separation of the self from the body.

Karl Marx, a German intellectual, developed the term "alienation" which was derived from the German philosopher George Hegel's word "ent-fremdung" indicating people's problem of alienation in the modern capital society. Alienation emerges from an individual's sense of worthlessness and meaninglessness. According to Hegel, "alienation is categorized into two types: objective and subjective" (Sarfranz, 1997, p. 46).

Objective alienation occurs when individuals reside in a social realm far removed from their home, while subjective alienation manifests when individuals sense a detachment from both themselves and society, perceiving the social world as unfamiliar. In both forms of alienation, people experience profound disorientation in contemporary society. Marx sheds light on how economic pressures result in individuals becoming estranged from their household and home—symbols of belonging, stability, and comfort. These poets depict the distance individuals feel from their morality, spirituality, and identity, outlining the causes and consequences of losing a sense of individuality and continuity. Eliot's portrayal of home is steeped in an idealized past and cultural root, leading to a disconnected and dislocated life when these elements are absent. In contrast, Adonis explores themes of exile, the quest for identity, and the tension between traditions and modernity to define the concept of home. Unlike Eliot, Adonis seeks to break free from conventional content and structures due to dogmatic beliefs, senses, and decisions. Adonis illustrates how the notion of home crumbles under devastating elements like wars, political upheavals, colonization, cultural conflicts, and displacements. These factors collectively contribute to internal or external alienation in modern individual identity. Abrams and Hogg

(1990, p. 1) defined identity that it can be characterized as the perception individuals hold about themselves, the type of people they perceive themselves to be, and the manner in which they interact with others.

It possible to assert that Identity includes the values guiding individuals, influencing the decisions they make. It comprises various roles, such as being a mother, teacher, or U.S. citizen, each laden with meanings and expectations internalized into one's identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1990, p. 2). This sense of self undergoes continuous evolution throughout an individual's life, representing a dynamic phase interwoven with connections to land, culture, and people. Eliot underscores the significance of culture, land, and spiritual foundations in shaping identity, elements often lacking in modern and collective identities due to a sense of estrangement from the past, tradition, and a perceived purposelessness in a disconnected world. Adonis, too, observes the modern identity's struggle between the dynamic and static, past and present, and the clash between cultural heritage and modernism. Both poets express how modern identity is entwined with alienation, stemming from a feeling of detachment caused by the exploitative capitalist system. The theme of alienation permeates twentieth-century literary works, influenced in part by the devastating impact of the two world wars on Europe. The shock of humanity's capacity for darkness, evidenced by millions of innocent lives lost in wars and Nazi camps, spurred the modernist movement in the early 1900s—a rejection of the atrocities inflicted on unity, identity, and culture. Moreover, this movement reshaped literary writing, expressing nostalgia for pre-war life and rejecting old perceptions that failed to mirror the new culture, form, and societal life. Techniques like stream of consciousness and interior monologue were employed to shed light on the suffering of modern individuals in the wake of World Wars and industrialization (Jameson, 2007, pp. 156-157).

Throughout its political, aesthetic, linguistics, epistemological, and thematic concepts, modernity entails a plethora of philosophical meanings. It is a product of the Western enlightenment and industrial revolutions. Different key characteristics such as liberalism, freedom, secularism, and individualism have emerged from modernity and are criticized by Carl Schmitt, a German political theorist, due to their effects on people's unity and the state's power to make determined decisions in times of predicament (Sirczuk, 2010, pp. 4-5).

Eliot and Adonis have tried to provide answers to the dark nature of man. They were among the writers who experienced the external and internal alienation that both world wars produced in the people of their time. Eliot lived through both world wars, and Adonis witnessed several wars in Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, exile and alienation are present in the poetic writings of both poets. According to Eliot, "successful poetry is the fusion of experience, emotion, and intellect. For him, perfect poetry is the fusion of intellect and emotion, far from using the intellect to abandon emotion, as in seventeenth-century poetry, nor using emotion to neglect intellect, as in romantic poetry" (Mehsin, 2012, p. 10). Eliot's notion of impersonality underscores the importance of poets being objective rather than subjective in their poetic writing. According to Eliot, art is not an expression of the personality but rather an escape from it. Unlike Eliot, Adonis's poetry is having the tendency to personalize his poetry while revealing the modern malaise of alienation and other modern themes (Nsiri, 2018, p. 106).

## II. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ELIOT'S AND ADONIS' PORTRAYAL OF ALIENATION

Eliot and Adonis, despite belonging to different cultural and literary traditions, share certain similarities in their imagery and themes, particularly in their exploration of modern identity and the impact of societal changes. Eliot investigates the importance of cultural roots and spiritual foundations, emphasizing the role of these elements in shaping one's identity. His works often reflect a nostalgic yearning for a past era characterized by a sense of cultural unity. Adonis engages with the theme of identity, but he approaches it from the perspective of the struggle between past cultural heritage and the demands of modernism. Both poets highlight the tension between preserving cultural identity and embracing the changes brought by contemporary society. Eliot portrays a sense of alienation and dislocation in modern life, often highlighting the disconnection individuals feel from their cultural and spiritual roots (North, 2001, pp. 77-78). This detachment contributes to a fragmented and disoriented existence. Similar to Eliot, Adonis explores the theme of alienation, emphasizing how modern man's identity is marred by detachment from society and the self. The influence of the exploitative capitalist system is a common thread in both poets' works. Eliot's representation of home is grounded in an idealized past, and he critiques the disruptions caused by the absence of traditional elements. His works reflect a tension between the stability associated with tradition and the chaos of modernity. On the other hand, Adonis also struggles with the conflict between tradition and modernity. His poetry explores the constant struggle that individuals face in reconciling the dynamic forces of change with the static nature of tradition. Eliot's poetry reflects the loss of individuality and continuity in modern society. The erosion of cultural and spiritual foundations contributes to a sense of purposelessness and dislocation. Adonis similarly addresses the loss of identity in the contemporary world, attributing it to factors like wars, political upheavals, colonization, cultural conflicts, and displacements (Shboul, 2005, pp. 62-63).

However, both Eliot and Adonis share thematic elements related to identity, cultural roots, alienation, and the struggle between tradition and modernity. While Eliot tends to idealize the past and mourn its absence, Adonis confronts the challenges of modernism and the impact of external forces on individual and cultural identity. The following sections illustrate the main similarities between Eliot and Adonis in analyzing the themes of spiritual and physical alienation that have plagued humanity around the world through wars, other deteriorating policies represented by dictatorial regimes, and other natural disasters.

### III. SYMBOLS AND IMAGES OF DRYNESS

The recurring poetic images in Eliot's poem stress and reflect internal and external spiritual and physical alienation. Stones and rocks represent the toughness of the heart, the absence of morality, and harsh reality which prevent an individual's introspection and thinking:

Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road. (Eliot, 1963, p. 66)

The above lines convey a vivid and desolate landscape, embodying the themes of symbols and images related to dryness. The imagery of aridity and barrenness serves as a metaphor for spiritual and cultural desolation, reflecting the broader context of the modernist period. The repeated emphasis on "no water but only rock" underscores the theme of dryness. Water, a universal symbol of life, renewal, and vitality, is conspicuously absent. The barren landscape with only rocks symbolizes spiritual drought and a lack of rejuvenating elements. The rocky terrain and absence of water symbolize a barren and inhospitable environment. This imagery may be interpreted as a representation of the desolation and disillusionment experienced by individuals in a modern, fragmented world. The rocky landscape becomes a symbol for the spiritual wasteland that characterizes the poem. The sandy road winding through the mountains adds another layer to the symbolism. Sand, often associated with dryness and barrenness, reinforces the theme of spiritual desolation. The road itself implies a journey, but in this context, it appears to be a challenging and arduous path through a landscape devoid of life-giving water. Eliot describes the road as follows:

The road winding above among mountains

Which are mountains of rock without water

If there were water, we should stop and drink

Amongst the rock, one cannot stop or think. (Eliot, 1963, p. 66)

The above lines suggest that the barrenness has not only external, but internal consequences. The lack of water inhibits not only physical sustenance but also intellectual and contemplative activities. This imagery contributes to the overall sense of despair and hopelessness in the face of a spiritually dry landscape. The repetition of the phrase "mountains of rock without water" reinforces the starkness of the environment. Mountains, typically majestic and awe-inspiring, become symbols of lifelessness and sterility in the absence of water (North, 2001, p. 141). This repetition underscores the poet's insistence on the desolate nature of the landscape. However, the above lines use powerful imagery and symbolism to convey the themes of dryness, barrenness, and spiritual desolation. The absence of water in a landscape dominated by rock and sand becomes a potent metaphor for the cultural and spiritual challenges faced by individuals in the modern world, reflecting the broader concerns of the modernist movement.

Many images in Eliot's work symbolize the sterility, brokenness, and dryness due to isolation which is caused by the psychological, physical, and moral breakdown of the world after both wars. Eliot evokes the feeling of desolation and hopelessness that hovers over the modern landscape which seems inhospitable and also lacks nourishment and sustenance. For example, thunder is described as dry and sterile:

There is not even silence in the mountains

But dry sterile thunder without rain

There is not even solitude in the mountains

But red sullen faces sneer and snarl

From doors of mudcracked houses. (Eliot, 1963, p. 66)

The image of the mountain, here, symbolizes the higher spiritual power of faith and belief that acts as a strong protection which could be relied on in earlier times. According to Freud, who Eliot is influenced by, people need an exalted father; through him, they inspire their spiritual power, and through his fall, they become lost and ignorant. Freud highlights the symbolic relationship between high spiritual power and the psychology of human beings as he states:

Psycho-analysis has made us familiar with intimate connection between the father-complex and belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father, and it brings us evidence every day of how young people lose their religious beliefs as soon as their father's authority breaks down. (Freud, 2002, p. 73)

To some degree, Bellour denotes that Eliot keeps repeating the imagery of "Christianity and Buddhism" to sustain modern individuals' survival by the psychological guidance, avoiding their physical loss and spiritual destruction (Bellour, 2016, p. 432). Meanwhile, this isolation and loss are also analyzed due to materialism, which has permeated the family structure's life and destroyed the people's inherited cultural and moral ideology (Spengler, 1926, pp.4-5). It might also indicate that Eliot, throughout the image of "stone", seems to emphasize that modern civilization cannot develop any cultural values. In this sense, Eliot explores a further philosophical inquiry into the possibility of spiritual and cultural growth amidst the overwhelming sense of alienation depicted by "stony rubbish" which symbolizes a waste lander's civilization:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out of this stony rubbish? (Eliot, 1963, p. 53)

In Eliot's poem "What the Thunder Said," he depicts the sterility and deterioration of civilization through stony places, showing how people were once alive through the existence of civilizational and moral values while they are

recently dead. To this end, the line “those who were living are now dead” represents the transformation of humans’ awareness about their present existential level which is death in life (spiritual death):

After the agony in stony places  
The shouting and the crying  
Prison and palace and reverberation  
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains  
He who was living is now dead. (Eliot, 1963, p. 66)

To evoke more tantalizing emotions, Eliot delineates, in the following lines, the state of modern men’s state as if they are in the sense of a collective decay represented by “a heap of broken images”:

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. (Eliot, 1963, p. 53)

People seek, from a traumatic life, a sanctuary to find relief, compassion, insight, and wisdom, represented by embracing Christianity (the “red rock”) for saving them from metaphorical death, alienation, and disillusionment:

There is shadow under this red rock,  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock). (Eliot, 1963, p. 53)

As a matter of fact, there is an invitation to a divine refuge near the red rock that may eliminate the terror and fear of a mundane existence. It is a kind of promising transcendence from the dusky present. According to Kurraz’ quote, the literary talent of Eliot exists in manifesting the cons of modern spiritual nature and the pros of the pure spirituality of the past (Kurraz, 2011, p. 2779).

Adonis has been influenced by Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and collaborated in the translation of this poetic book. Meanwhile as a desire of transferring Eliot’s modernist poetry to Arab world, he wrote a comparable Arabic version entitled *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene* in 1961 (Adonis, 2019, p. xiii). These two works depict the barrenness and brokenness of modern life. Adonis’ poems are studied as similar to Eliot’s in that they have expounded on the themes of spiritual barrenness and physical desolation. Adonis summarizes the modern crises of life in these phrases quoted from his poems “an age that crumbles like sand,” “an age of submission and mirage,” and the phrase “perpetual decline” (Adonis, 2019, p. xiv). In all these hopeless images, the decline is evident in Arab’s life. In his poem “The Wound,” he portrays the image of “coming stone” as an external element that may bring either destruction or change (offering a crystal possibility for renewal) to the stagnant environment and withered world:

To the stone coming from afar  
to the dried-up world crumbling to dust  
to the time ferried on creaky sleighs. (Adonis, 2010, p. 32)

Adonis depicts a world in the throes of disintegration, symbolizing the collapse of culture, education, identity, and morality. This renders the global landscape lifeless, shattered, disassembled, and decayed in Adonis’s perspective. In his poem “Nothing but Madness Remains,” Adonis explores the stony attributes of humanity, depicting a resilient nature that emerged post-wars. This portrayal signifies the chaotic and unrefined realization of a collapsed societal structure, inviting scrutiny of both society and the human condition (Leavey, 2001, p. 81). To some degree, the surreal image of the “sleepless stone” conveys the existential restlessness inherent in human beings. The contemplation state for the individuals in the world is illustrated in the image of observation, seeking the understanding of the immutable side of present existence:

I see him now out of the window of my house  
sleepless among sleepless stones  
like a child taught by a sorceress  
that there is a woman in the sea  
who carried his history inside a ring  
and she will come  
when the hearth fire dies out  
and when night melts in sorrow  
among the ashes of the hearth. (Adonis, 1971, pp. 121-122)

The image of a “child taught by a sorceress” indicates the mysterious forces that guide knowledge and life. This poem projects the underlying chaotic elements of existence. The images of stones, bangs, whimpers, deserted streets, sterility, fragmentation, and death are recurrent themes in Adonis’s works also (Adonis, 2019, p. xiv). Adonis portrays a world where the laws and principles of life look alert; nevertheless, they are changing drastically. The Image of the rock in the water suggests a distorted truth in which he also inspects the boundaries of human perceptions, existence, and interaction in this surreal world:

I saw  
a child driving the wind  
and stones as if through water. (Adonis, 1971, p. 8)

The above lines “I saw a child driving the wind and stones as if through water” convey a vivid and imaginative image. The child symbolically controls powerful forces like the wind and stones, suggesting a sense of mastery or agency over

natural elements. The comparison of moving stones "as if through water" adds a dreamlike quality, possibly emphasizing the ease and grace with which the child navigates through challenges or obstacles. In the second set of lines: "Against them I fling the penance of this rock", there is a shift in perspective. The speaker contrasts their own actions against the child's control over the elements. The use of the word "penance" suggests a form of atonement or punishment. The speaker seems to be expressing a sense of guilt or remorse, perhaps feeling the need to counterbalance the child's power with a symbolic act of self-punishment (Arabi, 2015, p. 2). The use of "this rock" as the object of the penance adds a tangible and weighty element to the expression of remorse:

Others I know. Against  
them I fling the penance  
of this rock before I turn  
to face the time to come. (Adonis, 1971, p. 4)

The juxtaposition of these two sets of lines creates a rich interplay of symbols, contrasting the child's mastery of natural elements with the speaker's sense of guilt or responsibility. Adonis often employs vivid and symbolic imagery in his poetry, inviting readers to explore multiple layers of meaning and interpretation.

In the poem "The Fall (1958)", Adonis portrays images of clouds, wounds, and sparks, describing the profound balance for the two images the ethereal "clouds", which means the tangible and transcendent life, whereas the ephemeral "sparks" mean the fleeting and transient flashes of existence:

I live between clouds and sparks,  
in a stone that grows, in a book  
that knows secrets, and knows the fall. (Adonis, 2010, p. 36)

In the second line, Adonis depicts "a stone" as a dynamic entity growing in spite of its static state to imply the poet's transformative and growing wisdom from experiences and the evolving understanding of the mysteries of existence (Arabi, 2015, p. 6). This interpretation is boosted by the image of a "book that knows the secrets and knows the fall". The "book" means his developed wisdom, awareness, and understanding despite the limitations of the enigmatic existence. Personification is used to give the "stone" human characteristics as if it knows the profound truth concerning human existence.

#### IV. THE IMAGE OF MASK, SUPERFICIALITY, AND THE GENDER IDENTITY

Eliot and Adonis, influenced by him, have unveiled a widespread social malady represented by the mask and confusion of modern individuals who suffer from perplexity in their identity and tedious existence. Eliot, in his poetic writings, highlights the image of modern men's masks, which have plagued their psyches due to the lack of confidence. To hide their internal hesitation, and fear others' judgments, they start pretending something which is different in reality. Eliot also writes about the ambiguity of gender in the modern age. He addresses many issues, such as homosexuality, as well as the barrier in communication between people and how they begin to hide their true personalities behind masks as a kind of self-protection:

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands. (Eliot, 1963, p. 4)

To illustrate this recent social disease, Eliot tries in his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to criticize this developed crisis when he repeatedly and ironically asks himself "Do I dare? Do I dare?" (Eliot, 1963, p. 4). The poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", is considered a manifestation of modern man's dilemma with the surging traumas of superficiality, indecision, betrayal, hypocrisy, and hesitation. Eliot says, "for I have known them all already, known them all" (1963, p. 4). The line reflects Eliot's loss of confidence in people's outer faces and appearances. To project the focus on modern psycho-malady of foolishness, Eliot observes that "in the room the women come and go /talking of Michelangelo" (1963, p. 3). He sheds light on the triviality of modern people who have nothing to do, just the chit-chat (North, 2001, pp. 214-215). In this sense, he is insecure about his appearance and how people might criticize his thin arms, legs and long hair:

(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')

[...]

(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!'). (Eliot, 1963, p. 4)

It seems that Eliot is so meticulous about his appearance because people have become so judgmental. They begin judging others by their outward appearance rather than their inner knowledge, wisdom, and experience. The poet penetrates even deeper into the psyche of modern man's deception: "I know the voices dying with a dying fall" (1963, p. 4). According to the surrealist movement, this poem is interpreted as a remarkable meditation on the difference between appearance and reality. Since its emergence in World War I, this movement has sought to "express the true operations of the mind" (WriteWork Contributors, 1996). Although Eliot is not a surrealist, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" attempts to express the subconscious of the mind through images that follow no order. Eliot's erudite knowledge of Bradley's philosophy reflects the appearance of things (the external form of Prufrock's world) and their reality, which depends on the subconscious mind's experience and interpretation of the internal world (Skaff, 1987, pp. 444-445). Eliot, through Prufrock's dramatic monologue, conveys this philosophy to the reader through poetry, highlighting the modern

individual's estranged and diseased psyche. Prufrock's character personifies a true picture of individual's inner feelings, social illness, and the reality of the modern world. He repeatedly compares himself with weak characters such as "Lazarus", "ragged claws", and other images of everyday life and common conversations to evoke thematic similarities, exposing the social crippling and self-depreciation due to "human voices" (North, 2001, p. 231).

His perception of women's powers of seduction and deception is in his poem "The Waste Land" represented by the image of the "perfume" of women's "dress" and "the mermaid singing", who "lured sailors to their death through the beauty of their songs" (Eliot, 1963, p. 56). William Skaff points to the philosophy of Eliot, noting that there is a significant connection between Eliot's poetic books, which are considered "nightmarish," and the works of surrealist painters who depict the hell of life during and after the war in dark and depressed images (WriteWork Contributors, 1996). Self-loathing and deprecation are evident in Prufrock's persona, who compares himself to "ragged claws" because modern individuals' identities have become as alienated and uncertain as the nature of this animal hiding at the bottom of the dark ocean. Eliot underscores this fact in his poetry to suggest the sense of fragmentation, incompleteness, and inadequacy as well as the feeling of incompatibility with the traditions of the society:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas. (Eliot, 1963, p. 5)

The image of "Scuttling across the floors" symbolizes the purposeless movement in the indifferent environment by depicting it as a "silent sea". Everything in the poem starts with the structure of short sections and disjointed and bewildered questions, such as "Do I dare?" "And how should I presume?" and "What is it?" pointing to the persona's confusion, anxiety, and helplessness (1963, pp. 4-5). In Eliot's poem "Preludes", the theme of the masquerade is also evident when he shows that time also resumes a masquerade from the monotony and meaningless lives that people lead and also refers to the varied metaphorical masks and roles that individuals adapt throughout their lives. This line depicts the urban and modern life state of individuals' dehumanization and alienation:

With the other masquerades  
That time resumes. (Eliot, 1963, p. 13)

In the poem "The Hollow Men," Eliot also exhibits the theme of masks and how men, in modern real life, disguise themselves to camouflage their shame from themselves and the world. They hide their misdeeds at night when they indulge in gambling, drinking, and sex by morning's mask of decency and consistency as they fear others' criticism (Dhakal, 2012, pp. 30-31). Covering up their true identity and personality behind masks is to hide their despising to themselves and the society they live within. "Rat's coat and crowskin" are symbols of the individual's disguise, escaping life monotony beside that of hiding one's true self:

Let me also wear  
Such deliberate disguises  
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves  
In a field  
Behaving as the wind behaves. (Eliot, 1963, p. 80)

The above lines suggest a complex exploration of identity, superficiality, and perhaps the societal expectations associated with gender roles. These lines explore the unreality of the fragmented nature of modern existence and people. These lines may be also seen as a reflection on the complexity of identity and the challenges individuals face in expressing their true selves within the confines of societal norms. The use of disguises and the metaphor of behaving like the wind evoke a sense of fluidity and a yearning for a more authentic and liberated existence. Actually, what modern individuals desire is being spontaneous and liberated rather than being under the imposed disguising that society and conditions forced on individuals "behaving as the wind behaves" (1963, p. 80).

Adonis also addresses the theme of the mask behind which modern man has hidden as a result of alienation. Many social diseases plague the world. One of these social and mental disorders is the concealment of one's true personality behind misleading masks. Adonis also argues, in his poetry, the blurring nature of gender roles which means that in every person there is a multifaceted identity that passes the conventional division and notion of masculinity and femininity besides the inherent duality within the individual as well as the encompassed characteristics that inherently exist beyond social norms and binaries (Arabi, 2015, p. 20). It also indicates the intersected distinction between the external feeling of the self and the internal sense of the self; in addition, to the shared common emotions, experiences, sufferings, and other traits of identity which surpass the social definitions and constructs. These two lines are regarded as delving into the inner complication of identity within human beings:

A face of a woman who is a man  
a face of a man who is a woman. (Adonis, 2010, p. 214)

Adonis's poetic talent is intertwined in the image of "A frog wears history's mask", indicating that even the interpretations of conventional history bear multifaceted narrations, whereas a frog is a symbol of transformations that history has passed through. The image of "A beggar keeps the book of glory" implies a subversion of the prevalent expectations of the authoritarian source of knowledge suggesting that true narrations of history, wisdom, and knowledge can be found in marginalized groups or places that oppose a larger one (Arabi, 2015, p. 28). This image also underlies that dichotomies, dualities, and contrasts coexist within human experiences:

A frog wears history's mask

A beggar keeps the books  
of glory. (Adonis, 1971, p. 43)

Adonis sets these striking images of frogs with history's mask and a beggar with the books to attract reader's senses and imagination besides the repetition of sounds, rhythm, and alliteration enhancing the fluidity of the poem and drawing the attention of the reader by his symbolic language. In his poem entitled "Underground," Adonis shows how modern people are alienated from each other and enclose themselves in shells. The state of being isolated, suppressed, and hidden is clear in this poem and is regarded as an obvious depiction of the internal uproar of the human soul, mind, and body. The metaphor of the shells represents many underlying meanings such as social constraints, political oppression, and dark, spiritual, and mental entrapments in modern individual's life:

we live like snails  
within their shells. (Adonis, 1994, p. 3)

Adonis uses comparison and evocative images and language to compare man's alienation to snails' shells which represents a kind of shelter and resilience against the world's toughness and adversity. Nevertheless, the poet seems to have claustrophobia (a fear of enclosed places). The fact of modern man being suppressed mentally, culturally, and politically is represented by the symbolic name of the poem "Underground". In his poem "A Dream for Any Man," Adonis also addresses the subject of disguising behind different masks to underlay the interplay meaning of the social and psychological sickness of duality and the complexity of the utopian desire of the modern individual which is represented by a "surging wave". It also may express the modern individual's quest for meaning and purpose:

I live in the face of a woman  
who lives in a wave  
a surging wave  
that finds a shore  
lost like a harbor under shells. (Adonis, 1971, p. 18)

He confesses that he lives in the face of a woman, by which he may mean he is like a woman, being weak, indecisive, and hesitant to take action or make a decision. The symbol of "the face of a woman" can also be interpreted as a longing for social, political, and cultural change (Arabi, 2015, p. 33). By using striking images, the poet aspires to attract attention and the reader's emotions. In addition, the enjambment technique eases the flow of the poem from one line to another by not using grammatical breaks at the end of his poetic lines. The yearning for social communication and gender dynamic relationships such as love is a theme that is weaved with the used complexity and ambiguity besides their existential and philosophical depth.

In his poem "Remembering the First Century," Adonis uses nature as a sanctuary and solace for the modern individual from the obstacles of society and chaotic existence. The plea to return to the elemental state besides, to seek remedy and shelter in the place of purification is an obvious request to forget his personal struggles. To this end, Adonis adopts the anonymity where no judging or expectations are imposed by any society or culture:

"O God, we seek  
some shelter in the earth.  
let rivers hide us  
from the final enemy". (Adonis, 1971, p. 36)

The second place of his safe sanctuary after nature is being alone and lives within his innermost self, spirit, and emotions which are represented by "the shade of the heart" (1971, p. 52). Adonis believes in the transformative and creative power of poetry and literary works to heal and entertain broken souls and traumatized psyches:

I take my books and go,  
living in the shade of my heart,  
weaving from my verse's silk  
a new heaven. (Adonis, 1971, p. 52)

The metaphoric image of "weaving from my verse's silk" is used to indicate that through the act of literary writing a new realm of hope, reality, and perception of life is the outcome of his literary imagination that enables him weaving his thoughts and emotions to craft a personal and universal shelter from world's unrealities. Mask, disguise, superficiality, and alienation have become the distinct characteristics of modern man due to the burden and suffering of post-war life, which has turned people into "mute" and "voiceless" (Leavey, 2001, p. 81).

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on the presented analysis, alienation is the separation of the individual from his own self and the surrounding milieu. This study highlighted the suffering of people who have lost their soul due to their scattered identity that has been ruined by ruthless dictators, wars, and other deteriorated issues. As a matter of fact, alienation has become a distinctive topic as a result of the rapid development of technology and industrialization. World Wars and their backward effects upon the modern man have destroyed human beings physically, spiritually and morally. To this end, Eliot and Adonis, influenced by him, have depicted why desolation has become the current issue of modern era and how it takes different forms such as masks, superficiality, self-depreciation, and dehumanization. They have exposed how the meaning of gender has multifaceted concepts and complexities in modern interpretations. Eliot's depiction of



alienation has launched from his “impersonal theory” and philosophical readings while for Adonis it relies on his personal experiences, depicting the sense of detachment, and isolation. Adonis is inspired by Eliot’s philosophy, theories, literary themes, imagery and style. However, his style is slightly different being away from impersonality. His poetic books and criticism reflect Eliot’s deep study of the most famous works of different philosophers and the study of social, literary, and political critics. In his spiritual quest for idealism, Eliot rejects the division of the self, reflecting Freud’s study of the human psyche. According to Eliot, and based on Freud’s psycho-analysis, humans are always in need of a psychological guide (God), through him, they can survive spiritually. On the other hand, Adonis employs a different approach to overcome the spiritual loss, emphasizing on the significance of creative writing in weaving a safe shelter for soothing the trauma of alienation.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Prof. Dr. Santiago Rodriguez Guerrero-Strachan of the University of Valladolid due to his effort and useful notes in reviewing the manuscript of this article.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Abrams, D., and Hogg, M. A. (Eds.). (1990). *An Introduction to the Social Identity Approach*. In *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*. London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf.
- [2] Adonis. (1971). *The Blood of Adonis*. Translated by Samuel Hazo. University of Pittsburg Press.
- [3] Adonis. (1994). *The Pages of Day and Night*. Translated by Samuel Hazo. Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- [4] Adonis. (2010). *Adonis Selected Poems*. Translated by Khaled Mattawa. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- [5] Adonis. (2019). *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*. Translated by Kareem James Abu-Zeid and Ivan Eubanks. New Directions Publishing Corporation.
- [6] Arabi, R. (2015). *Adonis' Poetics of Vision and Modernity*. MA Thesis. The City University of New York, New York, USA.
- [7] Bellour, L. (2016). The Religious Crisis and the Spiritual Journey in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. *Arab World English Journal*, 7(4), 422-438.
- [8] Dhakal, R. (2012). *Rejection of Personality in T.S. Eliot's Selected Poetry*. MA Thesis, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
- [9] Eliot, T. (1963). *T.S. Eliot: Collected Poems 1909-1962*. New York: Brace and World, Inc.
- [10] Eliss, H. (2022). *A Detailed Explication of T.S. Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- [11] Freud, S. (2002). *Leonardo Da Vinci: A Memory of his Childhood*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- [12] Fushihara, M. (1987). *Kant's Philosophy of the Self*. MA Thesis. University of Massachusetts at Amherst.
- [13] Hittinger, R. (1990). Charles Taylor, "Sources of the Self". *The Review of Metaphysics*, 44(1), 111-130.
- [14] Jameson, F. (2007). *The Modernist Papers*. London: Verso Books.
- [15] Kurraz, A. (2011). "The Poetic of T.S. Eliot and Salah Abdel-Sabour: A Thematic Mythical Intertextuality". *An-Najah University Journal of Research (Humanities)*, 25(10), 2273-2298.
- [16] Leavey, A. (2001). The Pages of Day and Night by Adonis. *Translation Review*, 61(1), 81-85.
- [17] Mehsin, H. (2012). T.S. Eliot's Concept of Impersonality in The Literary Work. *The First International Conference of Kerbala University*, June, Kerbala, Iraq.
- [18] North, M. (Ed.). (2001). *The Waste Land: Authoritative Text, Context, Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- [19] Nsiri, I. (2018). Narrating the Self: The Amalgamation of the Personal and the Impersonal in Eliot's and Adonis' Poetry. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(2), 104-109.
- [20] Pani, P. (2013). Reflections on the Existential Philosophy in T.S Eliot's Poetry. *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 9(1), 301-316.
- [21] Sarfraz, H. (1997). Alienation: A Theoretical Overview. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 12(1-2), 45-60.
- [22] Shboul, A. (2005). The Arab Poet and the City: Modernism and Alienation. *Literature and Aesthetics*, 15(2), 59-74.
- [23] Simpson, P. (2001). Aristotle's Idea of the Self. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 35, 309-324.
- [24] Sirczuk, M. (2010). "Political Theology and Modernity. Is Carl Schmitt Useful for Post-Foundational Thought?" *Proceedings of the 60th Political Studies Association Annual Conference*, Edinburgh, UK.
- [25] Skaff, W. (1987). The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot: From Skepticism to a Surrealist Poetic. *American Literature*, 59(3), 443-445.
- [26] Spengler, O. (1926). *The Decline of the West, Volume I: Form and Actuality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- [27] *Surrealism and T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"* (1996). Retrieved August 10, 2023 from <https://www.writework.com/essay/surrealism-and-t-s-eliot-s-love-song-j-alfred-prufrock>.



**Bassma B. Nomass** was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1987. She obtained the BA degree in English language from Al-Jabal Al-Gharbi University, Libya in 2010, and the MA degree in English literature from the college of education for women, University of Baghdad, Iraq in 2015. She worked as a lecturer in Al-Bani University College in Baghdad, Iraq and as a translator in the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities in Iraq. Currently, she is a PhD student at the department of English Philology, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, University of Valladolid, Spain. Her main research interest is in English poetry.