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## Portrayal of Man's Sorrows, Impotence, and Lack of Spirituality through Flowering Judas, Dogwood, Chestnut, Hyacinths, and Lilacs in T.S. Eliot's Poems: A Textual and Analytical Study

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### Abstract

T. S. Eliot's poetry contains several floral references that are employed symbolically. This study investigates the symbolic connotations of T. S. Eliot's floristic symbolism in "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land". The form and essence of modernist symbols will be investigated to trigger profound and subconscious feelings in the reader, concentrating on the terminological and conceptual elements of the topic. The significance of flowering Judas, dogwood, chestnut, hyacinth, and lilac in Eliot's "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land" have been interpreted and explored using analytical, historical, and archetypal approaches as the "Gerontion" intended by the poet to be a prelude to "The Waste Land". Textual and analytical research has been conducted to demonstrate the unusual utilisation of five flora referred to in "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land". The poems' texts and theoretical and historical sources have been examined to collect the required data for the paper. One of the most essential research objectives of the paper is to find out how these blossoms were used symbolically in two of Eliot's poems. In various contexts of the poem (historical,

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biographical, mythological, cultural, anthropological, etc.), the symbolic and common meanings of each flower has been investigated.

**Keywords:** T.S. Eliot; “Gerontion”; “The Waste Land”; rebirth; floristic imagery in poetry; ‘flowering Judas; chestnut; dogwood; hyacinths, lilacs

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### المستخلص

يحتوي شعر تي إس إليوت على العديد من المراجع الزهرية التي يتم توظيفها بشكل رمزي. تبحث هذه الدراسة في الدلالات الرمزية لرمزية تي إس إليوت الزهرية في "جبرونتيون" و"الأرض اليباب". سيتم التحقيق في شكل وجوه الرموز الحداثية لإثارة مشاعر عميقة وغير واعية لدى القارئ، مع التركيز على العناصر المصطلحية والمفاهيمية للموضوع. تم تفسير واستكشاف أهمية زهور يهودا المزهرة، وخشب القرانيا، والكستناء، والياقوتية، والليلك في "جبرونتيون" و"الأرض اليباب" لإليوت، واستكشافها باستخدام مناهج تحليلية وتاريخية ونموذجية مثل "جبرونتيون" الذي قصده الشاعر ليكون مقدمة لـ "الأرض اليباب".

تم إجراء بحث نصي وتحليلي لإثبات الاستخدام غير العادي للنباتات الخمسة المشار إليها في جبرونتيون والأرض اليباب. وقد تم فحص نصوص القصائد والمصادر النظرية والتاريخية لجمع البيانات المطلوبة للبحث. أحد أهم أهداف البحث الأساسية هو معرفة كيفية استخدام هذه الأزهار رمزياً في اثنتين من قصائد إليوت. في سياقات مختلفة للقصيدة (التاريخية، والسيرة الذاتية، والأسطورية، والثقافية، والأنثروبولوجية، وما إلى ذلك)، تم التحقيق في المعاني الرمزية والمشاركة لكل زهرة.

### Introduction

There are various critical methods for analysing and interpreting the mythic and symbolic elements in European literature. First, they must be analysed, interpreted, and explained for educational purposes at various educational levels and cultural contexts around the globe. Second, the archetypal or symbolic framework of texts created in different cultures may contribute in a unique way to the existence of distinct analytic approaches. In the context of internationalisation and globalisation in education, researching and teaching world literature presents some challenges. In addition to broadening students' perspectives by exposing them to various literary traditions, scholars and teachers can also introduce concepts and values from other cultures.

The development of new analytical methods, critical concepts, and text explanations is one of the benefits of such cultural harmony. Hence, it makes sense to consider literary theories and ideas generated by various critical schools. Mythical and archetypal criticism is two of the most effective methods for interpreting and comprehending the mythological imagery in works of literature. Vital methodological devices were developed by the Russian School of Historical Poetics, beginning with Alexander Veselovsky's (1838–1906) works, which provided the theoretical foundation for the work of such Russian literary theorists and historians as Olga Freidenberg, Mikhail Bakhtin, Yezekiel Meletinsky, Sergey Averintsev, Mikhail Gasparov, and others. Mythological and archetypal critical theorists in the West, such as Maud Bodkin and Northrop Frye, made contributions to the study of myth and archetypes in literary narratives. In the 1963 collection of critical essays titled *Myth and Symbol*, for example, fifteen critics explored various interpretations through myth and symbol studies. "Critical Approaches and Applications" is dedicated to Northrop Frye, one of the authors of the book. In the foreword, the editor of this publication, Bernice Slote, states "Myth, both traditional and creative, is the narrative form of those particularly archetypal symbols that reveal in a coherent manner what man knows and believes. In its duality, myth is the objectification of vision; it exists in terms of what is most fundamental to human feeling and perception" (1963, V).

The purpose of this research is to comprehend the peculiarities of modernist symbolic imagery in Eliot's two poems "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land" (1922) by referring to various materials and critical approaches. Possibly one reason for the toughness of modern poetry is its utilisation of words with multiple meanings (indirect meanings) that are hard for learners and average readers to comprehend. The author has paid special attention to the symbolic uses of five images and their deeper meanings in "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land". This research could be beneficial for international students studying English literature. Different scholars (Northrop Frye, Grover Smith, Marianne Thormahlen) and others, but none of them explained all these flowers together, who have analysed the 'flowering Judas', 'dogwood', 'chestnut', 'lilacs', and 'hyacinths' in Eliot's poetry.

This paper aims to synthesise and consolidate the findings of prior pertinent research studies while introducing also novel ideas and approaches. In Eliot's poetry, a variety of flowers are mentioned, including geranium, nasturtium, primrose, dahlia, hawthorn, lavender, delphinium, cowslip, daffodils, lotus, roses (including paper roses), and other flowers. These floral references carry diverse meanings, implications, and symbolic correspondences within various contexts. Eliot's poetry exhibits varying degrees of symbolism and transformation in the utilisation of flower imagery. In the early works of the poet, flowers are depicted as a component of ekphrastic description, as seen in the portrayal of nasturtium in "Suppressed Complex" from 1915. Additionally, flowers serve

as a direct correspondence or objective correlative to convey specific emotional moods, as exemplified by the presence of a deceased geranium in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" from 1917. In the poems "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land," T.S. Eliot utilises intricate symbolic images that possess multiple layers of meaning, resembling a palimpsest. A complex network of allusions and cultural codes further enhances these images.

In the later stages of his poetry, there is a noticeable shift towards a more allegorical and esoteric portrayal of flowery vision. The rose, as a religious symbol, assumes various connotations such as divinity, sanctity, and virtue. It serves as a visual representation of ultimate achievement, or flawlessness, and is closely associated with extraordinary events and signs. Furthermore, the rose evokes notions of fertility within both the physical and spiritual realms. Within the context of Christianity, the cross symbolises the embodiment of Christ, the venerated figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and an assortment of saints. Conversely, in Eastern religions, the cross holds significant associations with the narratives surrounding prophets and demi-gods. The religion in question, regardless of whether it is perceived as esoteric, cabalistic, or divinely revealed, incorporates the mentioned figure or symbol as a representation or prompt of the ultimate. (Coleman, 1960) In both "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land," Eliot makes symbolic references to five distinct types of flowers, namely the flowering Judas, dogwood, chestnut, lilacs, and hyacinths. The poems demonstrate that, while there are five distinct types of flowers, their symbolic meanings intersect and complement one another. Given Eliot's traditional mythopoetic and individual myths, it is fitting to explore the symbolic dimensions of flower imagery. The utilisation of imagery holds significant importance within Eliot's vegetation mythology. The analysis of Eliot's symbolic imagery gives rise to numerous theoretical and literary-historical inquiries. A significant concern in this study pertains to a terminological dilemma. Can these ornate images be considered as symbols? What type of symbolism or symbolic elements was employed in this context? In her notable monograph titled "The Waste Land': A Fragmentary Wholeness," Marianne Thormahlen, a distinguished Swedish scholar, presents a series of thought-provoking inquiries. The traditional concept of a symbol as a straightforward and widely understood representation of something else is rarely applicable when considering Eliot's poetry (as well as the French symbolists with whom he shares similarities).

According to Thormahlen (1978), it is possible to classify his poetry as "symbolic" based on alternative criteria. In her monograph, Professor Thormahlen offers an analysis and interpretation of the diverse degrees and levels of symbolism found in the works of Eliot. Based on her research methodology, it would be of scholarly interest to explore various domains of symbolic associations and significances pertaining to five specific flowers as they appear in the poems "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land". The use of a textual approach proves advantageous in the analysis of the poems' text within its diverse contextual frameworks. The act of categorising various forms of symbolism within the poems can be considered a fruitful endeavour. These classifications encompass three distinct types: "general" symbolization, which pertains to universal and historical themes; "cultural" symbolization, which encompasses mythological, archetypal, literary, and artistic references; and "private" symbolization, which is intimately linked to biographical details and personal emotions. A comprehensive understanding of the symbolic and mythological significance of these five flowers is imperative for readers of the poems. The analysis will incorporate various references to the conventional symbolic applications of,

the flowers subject of the study as well as literary sources, anthropological works, and biographical episodes, among others.

### **Flowering Judas, Chestnut, and Dogwood in “Gerontion”**

It is obvious that the example of treachery is presented in Eliot’s poem "Gerontion" differently through the flower called ‘flowering Judas’. Many scholars have connected it with mystical life. Those who are associated with this prototype of treachery are:

... in the juvenescence of the year,  
Came Christ the tiger  
In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,  
To be eaten, to be divided. To be drunk:  
Among whispers: by Mr. Silvero  
With caressing hands, at Limoges  
Who walked all night in the next room; (Lines 17-25: 21-22)

The suspicious worldly people reject 'Christ, the Tiger.' 'In the juvenescence of the year' is a reference to one of the seasons of the year, which is spring, that brought 'Christ, the Tiger', who demonstrates the power of the Creator. He had come to talk about the Kingdom of God with those looking for illumination. Accordingly, Eliot employs the phrase "To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk." (Gerontion) This phrase might be employed to compare the setting of 'Christ's Last Supper'.

However, in contemporary society, individuals reject taking part in rites associated with religion. Their daily lives are filled with sexual desires and materialistic demands. Consequently, 'May' is known as “depraved May” because of the dogwood, chestnut blossom and Judas. The vibrant red colour of these blossoms, which represents the life of passion, is symbolic. Furthermore, Judas was the apostle who became treacherous and betrayed Christ for just a few silver pennies. 'May' represents rejection of spirituality since it coincided with the month of Christ's execution (Tiwari 62). Evidently, the spring season provides rebirth, but in the life of Christ, it resulted in depravity in the personalities of his followers, who left him at the final time. It is a time of the 'flowering Judas.' In this instance, 'depraved May' as well as 'flowering Judas' are iconic symbols of treachery. On the other hand, V.N. Mishra asserts that in Eliot’s poem, ‘flowering Judas’ is a growing of ‘depraved May’, which is connected to a bad sort of growing... that can mean treachery. ... The embarrassed and surreptitious signs of ‘Mr. Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist and Fraulin Von Kulp’ propose ‘the black’ mass in a mystifying multicultural location.’

Twentieth-century man is restless and alienated as he failed to listen to God and disobeyed him. The phrases 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?', are rife with sadness. They are related to the concepts of 'Original Sin' and the Fall of Man. Adam ate from the 'Tree of Knowledge', therefore losing his joys and purity. He was punished by God by casting him out of Eden. A human being has been an explorer on Earth ever since. This understanding 'of good and evil' created a fantasy in his subconscious, robbing him of all happiness and calm. This section's final line completes the image. It is written, 'These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.' The melancholy of man is the result of God's anger. This never-ending agony causes him to confess his sins.

As a result, tears of sorrow are shaken or created from 'the wrath-bearing tree,' which represents God. This is another typical picture, which is tied to the concept of Heavenly Decision, which states that for each sin or crime, man must suffer a penalty. He cannot obtain the mercy of God until he is purified by tears of remorse. Clark also considers

‘dogwood, chestnut and flowering Judas’ as emblems of the crucifixion of Jesus, (6) which is based on Christian understanding of that event; otherwise, according to Islam his soul was lifted to heaven and the one crucified was his resemblance. Min believes that May’s decadence is reflected in the sexual depiction of the red blossoming dogwood, the sexual ‘spikes of chestnut, and the’ picture of treachery of ‘the flowering Judas’ (136). Wilde, on the other hand, argues that the juxtaposition between the vibrant and sensual depiction of nature in its full bloom and the portrayal of an elderly man devoid of both passion (line 58) and sensory perception (line 60) is evident. The individual in question exhibits characteristics akin to a decaying tree without the ability to produce any kind of output as a result of their inherent inadequacy, including both cognitive and physical aspects (54). This view might be further substantiated by the symbolic representation of the tree, which is often associated with the concept of life and the perpetual rejuvenation of nature. This notion is profoundly ingrained in the human psyche, transcending cultural boundaries (Forstner, 1990). The dogwood is one of the early trees that bloom during the beginning of spring which denotes a new life, and it is a symbol of purity, faithfulness and hope. So, there is some hope from these trees to Gerontion. According to the legend, the dogwood felt remorse for the negative role it played in the death of Christ as stated in the website of power and branch.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, in Line 5, one may know that ‘the tree which’ people call ‘dogwood’ Greek people called it "dog's-tongue"; perhaps they meant that ‘the red-blossoming dogwood, were like the tongues of dogs in the chase’. Thus, the flower is frightening, and Ransom states that he does not know in which ‘sense it is sensual’. He goes on and says that it is rather as ‘the flowering Judas’ (402). In fact, the author of this paper intends to say that Eliot’s purpose is a phallic symbol as many other critics have pinpointed it.

#### **Lilacs and Hyacinths in “The Waste Land”**

The opening lines of the poem include a significant floral motif (Part One, "The Burial of the Dead"): April, regarded as the most merciless month, engenders lilacs from the lifeless terrain, amalgamating recollection and longing, and invigorating dormant roots with the precipitation of spring. According to Eliot (2015: 55), the subsequent floral representations within the corresponding section of the poem consist of hyacinths.

You gave me Hyacinths first a year ago;  
They called me the hyacinth girl.  
Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet,  
I could not Speak, and my eyes failed,  
I was neither Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence”. (“The Waste Land” LL. 35-41) [Eliot 2015: 56].

#### **The use of Lilacs and Hyacinths as Mythopoetical symbols**

The conventional mythopoetical semantics of these two flowers may be found in many sources, such as encyclopaedias, mythological dictionaries, collections of Greek stories, books on flowers, and online blogs, among others. The comprehension of the

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<sup>1</sup> This information was taken from this web site ([The Legend of the Dogwood | Bower & Branch \(bowerandbranch.com\)](http://The Legend of the Dogwood | Bower & Branch (bowerandbranch.com))) accessed on 06/10/2023.

classical antiquity and European mythical origins of lilacs and hyacinth semantics is essential for grasping the latent flower imagery in Eliot's poem. Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) is a flowering plant which belongs to the botanical family Oleaceae. The subject has its own narrative within the context of Greek mythology according to which Greek mythology, the deity Pan, who presided over woodland areas, had a profound and melancholic love for *Syringa*, a nymph. While traversing through a forest, Pan pursued her, causing her to experience apprehension about his advances. In order to conceal her identity, she found it necessary to transform into a lilac tree. Pan had the belief that he would be unable to locate her; yet, to his astonishment, he managed to discover the tree by virtue of the hollow reeds of the lilac tree. Following the act of severing the reeds, the individual proceeded to construct what is often referred to as the "inaugural pan pipe." The scientific nomenclature of this organism was taken from the Greek term "syrinks," denoting a conduit-like structure.

The semantic equivalence of the term "lilac" in Spanish and French languages remains consistent, whereas in Arabic, it is referred to as "lilak". The term "lilac" denotes the hue of its blossoms, which is characterised by a pale purple shade. The Russian term "syren" retains its etymological roots in Greek mythology. The interpretations of lilac differ throughout many cultures and time periods, with the Celts attributing a sense of enchantment to the flower due to its enticing aroma. In the Victorian Era, it was customary for widows to adorn themselves with lilacs as a poignant symbol of their enduring love for a past romantic partner. In contrast, throughout Russian culture, there exists a belief that the act of holding a branch of lilac over a baby is associated with the acquisition of knowledge. Ultimately, the United States exemplifies the resilient disposition of the inhabitants of New Hampshire. Lilacs exhibit a variety of colours. White lilacs are often seen as representations of purity and innocence. The colour violet is often associated with spirituality, while blue lilacs are frequently seen as symbols of happiness and tranquilly. Magenta lilacs, on the other hand, are commonly recognised as emblems of love and passion. Lastly, lilacs with a light purple hue are sometimes interpreted as symbolic of one's first experience of love. The hyacinth plant, scientifically known as *Hyacinthus*, belongs to the botanical family Asparagaceae.

The origins of this narrative may be traced to Greek mythology, namely to the tale of Hyacinthos, a tragic hero who had a romantic relationship with Apollo. Hyacinthos held the title of prince in the city-state of Sparta. Apollo was captivated by his youthful and attractive appearance, which distinguished him from the other deities. During athletic instruction, Apollo inadvertently struck Hyacinthos in the cranium with his discus, resulting in the unfortunate demise of the latter. The prevailing belief is that the demise of Hyacinthos was attributed to the actions of the other deities. It is possible that the deity responsible for his demise was Zephyr, the divine embodiment of wind that was driven by feelings of envy. Apollo, in a state of intense anger, refused to allow the retrieval of Hyacinthos' deceased corpse. Instead, he caused the blood droplets from the young man's head to be expelled into the ground, resulting in the subsequent growth of the Hyacinth flower, which is now recognised as the Larkspur flower. The user's text is too short to be rewritten in an academic manner. The evident connection between the narratives of ancient myths and a prominent subject within the poem, including elements such as unrequited love, anguish, sorrow, mortality, and the transformative experiences of youthful individuals, is readily apparent. According to Thormahlen, the Hyacinth narrative has other

qualities that are pertinent to "The Waste Land," including the implication of unfulfilled longing and sorrow stemming from the departure of a cherished individual. The presence of a keepsake in the flower serves as a lasting reminder of the tragic event. Therefore, the hyacinths described by Eliot evoke feelings of grief and desire, which aligns with the overall tone of the text (Thormahlen, 1978).

### **Anthropological Dimensions**

#### **Eliot's Concept of the Garden as a Symbolic Representation of Renewal and Regeneration**

The floral motifs of lilacs and hyacinths may be traced back to their mythical origins, which establish a connection between these flowers and vegetative deities, who are often linked to concepts of death and resurrection. Therefore, the depicted floral motifs are symbolic representations of vegetative rites and rituals, as well as the concept of the Rebirth Pattern. Within the legendary imagery presented in the first section of the poem, there exists another figure associated with Hyacinth, thereby encapsulating the overarching subject of mortality and rejuvenation. The individual in question identifies herself as Sibyl. ("I will show you horror in a handful of ashes"). This legendary figure has a common bond in Greek mythology since he was cherished by Apollo. Both pictures are connected to the mythological concept of fertility. The Cumaean Sibyl has been linked by Virgil and Ovid to the concept of the Golden Bough, which, as James Frazer explains, was widely regarded in many myths as a symbol of vitality and life. The figures of Greek myths, which are familiar to readers via the works of ancient poets, seamlessly align with the overarching framework of the "death-resurrection" paradigm. Within lines 35–37, the presence of hyacinths is seen in three distinct variations: "Hyacinth" as a proper noun with an initial capital letter, "the hyacinth garden," and "the hyacinth girl." Hyacinth is an archaic god associated with the cyclical processes of mortality and rebirth in the natural world and was venerated via the observance of the "hyacinthia" festivals during the spring season.

In the eleventh section of Ovid's "Metamorphoses," the author highlights the distinct perspective of Hyacinth as a god associated with the rejuvenated aspects of nature, akin to the symbolism often associated with the month of April. "Te quoque, Amyclide, posuisset in aethere Phoebus, tristiaspatiumponendi fata de dissent. qua licet, aeternustamen es, quotiens querepellit ver hiemem, Piscique Aries succedit aquoso, tutotiensorerisviridique in caespite flores" (P. Ovidi Nasonis. "Metamorphoseon". Liber 10. LL.162-166) [P. Ovidi http]. In this context, the "hyacinth garden" and the "hyacinth girl" can be identified with the spring "gardens of Adonis" and "the daughters" of Hyacinth [Грейвс 1992: 238–239]. The subsequent episode (specifically, the divination scene of Madame Sosostris, lines 43-59) further develops the symbolic sequence of images related to the topic of death and resurrection. The figures known as the "Hanged Man" and the "Phoenician Sailor" may be classified as archetypes within the realm of mythology, as identified by anthropologists. The deity known as the Hanged God had significant prominence within the context of reproductive ceremonies. The "Golden Bough" presents a comprehensive analysis of many approaches to the demise of the "man-god," including diverse roles such as king, priest, and sacrifice. Typically, such sacrifices were undertaken with the intention of enhancing the fecundity of the land. According to Burton Blistein's book titled *The Design of "The Waste Land,"* the designation of the "Hyacinth garden" is said to have originated from the figure of "Hyacinthus," a deity associated with hanging [Blistein 2008: 11].



The use of pictures depicting lilacs and hyacinths inside the poem should be examined within the framework of anthropological theories put forward by Frazer and Jessie Weston, as elucidated by Eliot, who significantly influenced the philosophical underpinnings of the poem. According to Northrop Frye, there is a presence of ritualistic flower imagery in T.S. Eliot's poems, which draws upon anthropological concepts prevalent during that period. This can be observed in the depiction of hyacinths in "The Waste Land," which symbolise the god's blood in these rites. Additionally, there are potential references to the poisonous plant "belladonna" or deadly nightshade, as well as the dogwood and Judas in "Gerontion," the lilacs in "Ash Wednesday," and other instances throughout Eliot's works. The demise of Adonis elicited grief from women symbolising the essence of the land, and the phrase "Murmuring of maternal lamentation" draws a parallel between this mourning and the biblical account of Rachel's crying [Frye 1963: 65-66]. The events labelled as "ritualistic" (lines 19-42) include more than the themes of "death in life" (referred to as "spiritual death") and "eroticism" (referred to as "carnal passion") as identified by scholars (Astvatsaturov, 2000: 165-168). The tale has a more general and objectified tone, characterised by an impersonal approach that aligns with the stories surrounding figures such as Sibyl, Hyacinth, Tristan, and Isolde. The rocky terrain from which branches extend ("What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow from this stony rubbish?") serves as the origin of both affection and mortality, decomposition, and vitality concurrently.

The convergence of mythological and literary narratives, musical motifs, anecdotes, and other elements amalgamate into a cohesive continuum characterised by infinite repetitions, oscillations between darkness and illumination, cycles of decay and rejuvenation, and the harmonious coexistence of inert matter and blossoming flora. These components are intricately interconnected and inseparable from one another. The duration of "The waste land" has persisted, however the state of stagnation and decay it embodies lacks the capacity to alter the fundamental rhythms of the global structure, whereby death serves as an essential prerequisite for the perpetuation of life.

#### **The use of lilacs and hyacinths as literary allusions**

Numerous scholars have examined the portrayal of lilacs in relation to Walt Whitman's renowned poem "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (1865), which serves as an elegy for the late American president Abraham Lincoln. According to Dafoe (2013: 109), there is a notable correlation between the lilacs mentioned by Eliot in his poem and the portrayal of lilac blooms as a representation of rejuvenation in Whitman's poem. According to Dafoe, the flowers shown in Eliot's work do not serve as emblems of birth and beauty, but rather as representations of the incapacity for rebirth. Contrary to popular belief, these two flowers do not serve as representations of happiness and rebirth. Instead, they embody sentiments of melancholy, despair, and desolation. This interpretation arises from the poet's poignant recollection of individuals who perished during the Great War, evoking a profound sense of sorrow inside him. The poet harbours an inability to embrace the month of April because of the profound impact of the bloodshed and subsequent metamorphosis of individuals, which ultimately bestows upon April its verdant and aesthetically pleasing qualities.

The melancholy associated with the blooms stems from their inability to regenerate due to the pre-existing soil degradation, hence extinguishing any prospects for rejuvenation. Eliot's potential for optimism lies mostly in the prospect of a hereafter,

whereby individuals may experience resurrection. According to Harold Bloom's analysis, the presence of lilacs in Walt Whitman's poetry is not directly related to the death of Abraham Lincoln. Instead, it symbolises Whitman's diminishing poetic abilities, which underwent a significant change after that event (Bloom 2007: 4). Several academics, like B. C. Southam and Ch. Ricks, have noted the effect of another significant literary source on the sad and epitaphic nature of lilacs. The aforementioned text refers to "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" (1912), a poem authored by Rupert Brooke, a renowned English poet who tragically lost his life in April of 1915 during the Great War. The juxtaposition of "hyacinths" and "hair" inside a single verse in Eliot's work is an intriguing choice. The term "Hyacinth curls" may be characterised as a longstanding metaphorical descriptor that has been used in poetry as a synonym for "beautiful" since the time of Homer. During the fin de siècle, hyacinths, like lilacs, gained significant popularity and were a prominent subject in many forms of artistic expression and literary works. There exists a multitude of instances whereby floral imagery is prominently included in poetry and other forms of artistic expression, including but not limited to impressionism, symbolism, and imagism.

Thormahlen (1978) establishes a thought-provoking correlation between the characters known as "the hyacinth girls" in August Strindberg's play "The Ghost Sonata" (1908) and T.S. Eliot's work. He asserts that the remarkable similarities between Eliot's and Strindberg's hyacinth girls are so pronounced that dismissing them as mere coincidences becomes challenging (Thormahlen, 1978). It is noted that the occurrence of "hyacinth lines" is seen subsequent to two distinct musical incidents, namely the ballet and opera acts. According to the observations made by Jewel Brooker and Joseph Bentley, the narrative of the hyacinth girl and her romantic relationship is encompassed by two excerpts from Richard Wagner's renowned opera "Tristan and Isolde." These excerpts serve as a paragon, or a framing device, as stated by Brooker and Bentley (1990: 69). It is known that the opera episode in question is a continuation of the scene referenced in the ballet "Narcisse," where the central protagonist is likewise a legendary figure transformed into a flower, namely a daffodil.

The lines 26–29 of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" consist of the first five lines from the poem "The Death of Saint Narcissus" (1915). The poetic imagery in this composition may have been inspired by the portrayal of Vatslav Nijinsky, a ballet dancer who performed as Narcisse in Nikolay Cherepnin's ballet "Narcisse" in 1911, which included the artistic embellishments of Leon Bakst. The interpretation of the image of a "hyacinth girl" in line 36 of "The Waste Land" is often associated with the Wagnerian context. This image can be seen as a colour reference to Bakst's renowned depiction of nymph Echo, who is depicted wearing a purple tunic and is commonly referred to as "a hyacinth girl" within artistic circles (1).

The intertextual connection between the floral imagery and the theme of rebirth in "The Waste Land" may be seen in relation to T.S. Eliot's earlier poems and the broader cultural milieu of neo-mythological anthropology at that period. The poem has several allusions to artistic and literary backgrounds via its depiction of lilacs and hyacinths. Lilacs and hyacinths as symbols of personal significance. T.S. Eliot posits that April, traditionally regarded as the most pleasant month, assumes a paradoxical nature as he labels it "the cruellest." This designation stems from its capacity to evoke poignant reflections on the profound human toll inflicted by war. Furthermore, according to George Monteiro, the presence of lilacs is consistently linked to emotions of discontent, grief, pain, and loss. This

association is not just rooted in the fact that the fragrance of lilacs serves as a reminder of Jean Verdenal, a friend who tragically lost his life at Gallipoli in May 1915 [Monteiro 2015: 33]. In 1934, T.S. Eliot observed a significant association between lilacs and his dear buddy, evoking memories of Verdenal's presence as he traversed the Luxembourg Gardens, holding a sprig of lilacs. The month of April is aesthetically pleasing; nonetheless, it evokes sombre emotions due to its association with the loss of cherished individuals, hence diminishing feelings of joy among individuals. The circumstances have undergone a transformation from a state of joy to one of sorrow. Lilacs are botanical specimens that exhibit the remarkable ability to flourish among barren terrain, so evoking poignant recollections of sorrowful episodes, despite the inherent joyfulness associated with the present occasion. Individuals who lack a sentimental attachment to the past may experience a sense of contentment when presented with circumstances characterised by the greening of the environment and improved weather conditions. However, the prevailing sentiment of melancholy arises as a result of the profound anguish experienced by individuals in their respective circumstances. The predominant hue of the lilac flower is purple. The significance of the purple colour in this context lies in its association with the notion of first love.

The primary interpretation pertains to the first romantic attachment experienced by the individuals, maybe accompanied by their untimely demise. Conversely, the secondary interpretation derives significance from the symbolism associated with the colour purple, often associated with melancholy. According to James Miller (2010: 71), Eliot ascribed a masculine symbol or sexual connotation to hyacinths, while there are other opinions that suggest Eliot may have linked hyacinths with females. According to Grover Smith, a renowned scholar of T. S. Eliot, it might be argued that Eliot deviated significantly from the established pattern by using a masculine symbol, the hyacinth, in his work. Additionally, the protagonist of the poem is shown as presenting flowers to the hyacinth girl. (Smith, 1967)

Thormahlen (1978) highlights the multifaceted nature of the traditional emblem of erotic and heavenly love, which is imbued with several connotations. Thormahlen explores the significance of this symbol, including its association with yearning for gay love and the preoccupation with heterosexual dissatisfaction (Thormahlen, 1978, p. 142-143). The floral imagery seen in the poem maybe associated with Emily Hale, the poet's first romantic interest. The early works of the poet, such as "Portrait of a Lady" from 1915, include the portrayal of identical flowers, such as lilacs, which are associated with the romantic development of a youthful poet. It is noteworthy to highlight that the portrayal of Emily as a "flower lady" may be seen in the letters between Eliot and Hale, as documented in the public introductions and reported by American academic Francis Dickey in her blog<sup>1</sup>. Hence, the lilacs and hyacinths may be seen as the objective correlatives representing the intricate and personal emotional turmoil experienced by the poet.

### **Correspondences of a General Nature: The Concepts of Time and Mood**

Based on the given context, the reader may discern the intended emotional connotation of the specific flower used by the poet in the poem, whether it is meant to evoke sentiments of melancholy or joy. The phenomenon arises when certain unfortunate events transpire, resulting in a shift in the connotative significance of a flower from joy to sorrow, or conversely. In T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land," the fundamental themes

focus on many aspects such as death, war, loss of innocence, destruction, and the corruption of both people and nature. These themes are explored extensively throughout the poem. Poets have consistently used flowers for many reasons, including religious symbolism. The theological significance of Eliot's usage of these two flowers remains ambiguous. However, it is evident that the hyacinth symbolises the first experience of love, which ultimately transforms into a love that is shattered, as represented by the hyacinth's girl.

Eliot has used the term "hyacinth" inside his poem on a singular occasion. The young woman, who is said to have romantic feelings for a young gentleman, is invoking the imagery of the hyacinth flower that he bestowed to her as a symbol of affection. Subsequently, she prompts his recollection of the manner in which others denoted her as the "hyacinth girl." This scenario illustrates the young woman's perception that the male lacks intentions of displaying loyalty towards her. It is possible that he may choose to disengage from her, thereby necessitating her to prompt his recollection of their shared experiences. The mention of hyacinths in her conversation with her boyfriend serves as an indirect allusion to their formerly meaningful love, which has now lost its significance due to her beloved's decision to end their romantic relationship.

The hyacinth flower serves as a representation of concealed affection that subsequently transforms into a poignant emblem of unrequited love, mostly because of the protagonist's breach of fidelity. The allusion is to Greek mythology, whereby the act of slaying an innocent young male by a deity of Greek origin bears resemblance to the perpetration of violence against blameless individuals in Eliot's poem. Eliot's depiction of several fatalities serves to evoke parallels with the demise of the virtuous protagonist from ancient literature. The phenomenon of blood being sprayed from the boy's body resulted in the emergence of a new floral species, namely a hyacinth. Consequently, this botanical entity assumes the dual role of representing rejuvenation and rebirth, while also evoking a sense of melancholy among readers due to the ephemeral nature of the preceding bliss. Likewise, the bloodshed of individuals affected by armed conflict contributed to the flourishing and vibrant state of the surrounding ecosystem (lines 35-40).

It is possible that the lilacs mentioned by Eliot in the poem represent the purple variety, since they are often associated with the symbolism of initial or first love. The explicit mention of "desire" in the third line of the first verse indicates that the lilacs referenced in the second line may serve as a metaphor for love. Lilacs, often associated with love, have a different symbolic significance within this particular setting, representing the profound sentiments of grief and pessimism surrounding the tragic death of innocent individuals, especially children and women, during the First World War. The presence of flowers within the context of the poem serves as a manifestation of the underlying philosophical framework of complete societal breakdown. It is important to note that these flowers are not used to depict favourable conditions or circumstances for human beings. Lilacs and hyacinths serve as symbolic representations of distinct realms: one embodies Eliot's personal and melancholic existence at a period of hardship, while the other signifies the broader context of societal upheaval and conflict during the age of Wars and Revolutions. Consequently, it becomes evident that Eliot used the imagery of exquisite flowers to depict his concealed melancholy. One might argue that both realms are replete with dramatic occurrences, for the poet and for mankind as a whole, much like the enigmatic nature of flowers that possess both allure and toxicity simultaneously. Human beings possess a certain aesthetic appeal akin to that of flowers, exemplifying beauty and

purity. However, this inherent charm becomes obscured when they engage in the violent acts associated with global conflicts. The poem's allusions to spring include a range of themes, including mortality, suffering, isolation, hopelessness, and culmination, as seen within both broader historical settings and individual experiences. The spring season serves as the backdrop for both the distressing and uplifting messages, including themes of rejuvenation, revival, and optimism.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, T.S. Eliot showcases his inventive use of symbols in his renowned works, "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land." The composition of a modernist symbol exhibits a significant level of intricacy, allusion, palimpsestic qualities, and meta-referential elements. The use of modernist symbols stimulates profound, multifaceted, and sometimes subconscious reactions from a reader. The symbols included in modernist literature possess an inherent openness, hence allowing for the potential emergence of several novel interpretations. The five flowers used in "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land" namely: flowering Judas, chestnut, dogwood and lilacs and hyacinths shown in the poems serve as symbolic representations of universal concepts and fundamental human encounters. In Eliot's poems "Gerontion" and "The Waste Land," the five flowers serve as potential symbols denoting themes of lack of passion, impotency, renewal, rebirth, and happiness. However, it is important to note that Eliot also used similar imagery as symbols representing sorrow, desperation, and isolation of man as they are spiritually empty (dry) as referred to in "Gerontion". Thus, they need rain to regrow their dead souls and enable them to gain religious belief, symbolically. If Eliot were to use standard symbolic connotations in a conspicuous manner, the poem would lack intrigue, necessitating readers to engage with it several times to grasp the underlying symbolism that is consistently present. "The Waste Land" does not depict the growth of hyacinth blossoms from the blood of Hyacinthos, nor does it suggest that the presence of lilacs brings about feelings of pleasure and tranquilly for any individual. In "Gerontion" the "dry month" of an "old man" in a "decayed house", "a dry brain" in a "dry season" could be changed with the three flowers mentioned in "Gerontion", which are symbols of hope, regrowth and rebirth. He has lost his "sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:" then Gerontion says "How should I use them for your closer contact?" ("Gerontion": l. 60-61). This is a symbol of impotency and infertility of Gerontion which is contrast to the vivid colours of flowers. The Waste land of the present age is adorned by Eliot's flourishing lilacs and hyacinths. Thus, hyacinths and lilacs are symbols of sadness in "The Waste Land", whereas, "flowering Judas, dogwood, and chestnut" on the contrary became symbols of revival and regrowth in "Gerontion" in the dry season in the life of Gerontion.

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