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Exploring the Themes of Loss and Alienation in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and Sylvia Plath's "Daddy"

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Abstract:

This study examines expressions of poetic loss and alienation in T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (Eliot, 1922/2002) and Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy' (Plath, 1965), considering how these concerns correspond to broader cultural and psychological responses to trauma. Through close reading and reading against the grain, with the assistance of critical perspectives, this study demonstrates how Eliot's modernist break-up and Plath's confessional excess are both distinct and parallel ways of expressing profound voice fracture. Whereas Eliot writes about the experience of collective cultural alienation through a mythic grid and allusive distancing, Plath's poem deals with individual, personal loss through the direct experience of the emotions involved and the gendered power relations they evoke. This juxtaposition illustrates the transformation of responses to loss or alienation in the context of modernist and postmodernist currents, informing our understanding of the relationship between personal trauma and art. Keywords: modernist poetry, loss, alienation, T.S. Eliot, Sylvia Plath

ملخص:

وقصيدة "بابا" لسيلفيا (Eliot, 1922/2002) تتناول هذه الدراسة تعبيرات فقدان والاغتراب الشعري في قصيدة "الأرض البابا" لت. س. إليوت مع دراسة كيفية توافق هذه الاهتمامات مع الاستجابات الثقافية والنفسية الأوسع للصدمات. من خلال القراءة المتعمقة، (Plath, 1965) بلاث والقراءة المعاكسة، وبمساعدة وجهات نظر نقدية، توضح هذه الدراسة كيف أن تفكك إليوت الحداثي وإفراط بلاث في الاعترافات هما طريقتان متميزتان ومتوازيتان للتعبير عن انكسار عميق في الصوت. فبينما يكتب إليوت عن تجربة الاغتراب الثقافي الجماعي من خلال شبكة أسطورية. وتباعد تلميحي، تتناول قصيدة بلاث فقدان الفردي والشخصي من خلال التجربة المباشرة للعواطف المعنية وعلاقات القوة الجنديرية التي تثيرها. يوضح هذا التقابل تحول الاستجابات للفقد أو الاغتراب في سياق التيارات الحداثية وما بعد الحداثية، مما يُثري فهمنا للعلاقة بين الصدمة الشخصية. والفن الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الحداثي، الفقد، الاغتراب، ت. س. إليوت، سيلفيا بلاث.

1 Introduction The 20th century witnessed unprecedented historical traumas that irreversibly altered the human psyche and artistic achievements. Two world wars, the Great Depression, political upheaval, and technological transformation — all conspired to create a profound dislocation that inspired poets to invent new forms and languages for describing the experiences of loss and alienation. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (Eliot, 1922/2002) and Sylvia Plath's *Daddy* (Plath, 1965), separated by almost half a century and belonging to distinct poetic movements, are striking artistic reactions to the *modus operandi* of modern life. What is assumed to be Eliot's epic, "The Waste Land," also post-World War, is the copyrighted essence of modernist poetry: the feeling (of fragmentation, of spiritual emptiness) of post-war Europe. In the poem's fragmented form, the languages kaleidoscopically jostling within, and in how it weaves an impenetrable web of allusions, it enacts the alienation inherent in what it describes. From the confessional movement in mid-century American poetry, Plath's "Daddy"

explores the same themes of loss and estrangement, but with a more personal and emotional language on a grander scale. Composed in the months immediately preceding Plath's suicide, the poem addresses the trauma of paternal absence and its psychological reverberations with shocking Holocaust imagery and unflinching emotional confrontation. This article focuses on how these two key poems express the horrors of loss and alienation, considering the question: How do their varying methods interpret the changing poetics of trauma from modernist to postmodernist? What do both the shared and the separate elements of their oeuvres show us about the connection between personal experience and the creation of art? By bringing together these texts, this study aims to shed light not only on their particular achievements, but also on broader trends in twentieth-century poetry's engagement with dislocation and fragmentation. The analysis employs multiple theoretical frameworks, including psychoanalytic approaches to trauma and mourning, historical contextualization of cultural alienation, and feminist perspectives on gendered power dynamics. Through close reading of key passages and engagement with critical scholarship, this paper demonstrates how both poets transform experiences of loss and alienation into innovative poetic forms that continue to resonate with contemporary readers.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Critical Perspectives on "The Waste Land"

Critical scholarship on "The Waste Land" has consistently identified loss and alienation as central thematic concerns, though interpretations of these themes have evolved significantly over time. Early criticism, influenced by Eliot's notes and by New Critical approaches, focused primarily on the poem's allusive structure and mythic framework. F.R. Leavis's influential reading emphasized the poem's diagnosis of cultural fragmentation and spiritual aridity, arguing that Eliot's fragmented form mirrored the disintegration of Western civilization after World War I (Leavis, 1932, pp. 89-92). More recent scholarship has expanded this cultural-historical framework while also attending to psychological dimensions of loss and alienation in the poem. Shastri argues that "The Waste Land presents a highly eloquent account of despair, its powerful vision of urban alienation spoke to a generation of young post-war readers" (Shastri, 2023, p. 60). This reading connects the poem's formal innovations directly to its thematic exploration of modern alienation. Similarly, Mahmood and Mohammed examine how the poem articulates "loss of identity" through its fragmented structure and disconnected voices, suggesting that "the hollow men feel alienated from themselves and others" (Mahmood & Mohammed, 2023, p. 42). Psychoanalytic approaches have further illuminated the poem's engagement with loss. Tung contends that Eliot "registered this prisonhouse of alienation" through formal techniques that enact psychological fragmentation (Tung, 2006, p. 215). This perspective has been complemented by ecocritical readings that identify alienation from nature as a central concern. Zhang argues that Eliot "deeply felt the absurdity of the 'alienated world'" and used natural imagery to highlight modern humanity's disconnection from organic rhythms and cycles (Zhang, 2023, p. 4).

2.2 Critical Perspectives on "Daddy"

Critical responses to "Daddy" have similarly emphasized themes of loss and alienation, though often with greater attention to biographical context and gender dynamics. Early readings frequently connected the poem directly to Plath's relationship with her father, Otto Plath, who died when she was eight years old. This biographical approach has been both productive and limiting, as noted by Schwartz, who argues that while the poem engages with paternal loss, it transforms this personal experience into a broader exploration of "self-loss, an alienation bringing about a split in the mirror" (Shastri, 2023, p. 60). Feminist criticism has significantly reshaped the understanding of alienation in "Daddy," connecting personal paternal alienation to broader patterns of gender-based oppression. Ghasemi contends that the poem expresses "anger and bitterness" resulting from "alienation and depression" linked to patriarchal power structures (Ghasemi, 2008, p. 44). This perspective is developed by Nazki, who analyzes how the poem's "Daddy-Daughter, Hitler-Jews" metaphor represents "feelings of alienation and victimization" within gendered power dynamics (Nazki, 2024, p. 3). The poem's engagement with historical trauma, particularly its controversial use of Holocaust imagery, has generated substantial critical debate. Swiontkowski argues that this imagery serves to universalize personal loss, connecting individual trauma to collective historical catastrophe (Swiontkowski, 2003, p. 124). Conversely, Lowe suggests that the Holocaust references function primarily as "overwhelming metaphors" for psychological alienation rather than as direct engagement with historical events (Lowe, 2007, p. 219).

2.3 Comparative Approaches

Despite the rich body of scholarship on each poem individually, comparative analyses of "The Waste Land" and "Daddy" remain relatively limited. Existing comparative studies have typically situated these works within broader surveys of modernist and postmodernist poetry rather than engaging in sustained comparative analysis of their treatment of specific themes. This gap presents an opportunity to examine how these landmark poems, representing distinct poetic movements and sensibilities, articulate similar thematic concerns through different formal and rhetorical strategies. The present study builds on existing scholarship while addressing this comparative gap, examining how Eliot and Plath develop distinct poetic languages for articulating experiences of loss and alienation. By placing these works in conversation, this analysis aims to illuminate not only their significance but also broader patterns in twentieth-century poetic responses to dislocation and fragmentation.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Defining Key Concepts

However, before turning to text per se, we need working definitions for the key concepts in question. Loss, as used here, includes concrete loss (of death, of departure, of deprivation) and abstract loss (of meaning, of faith, of cultural coherence, of identity). Alienation conveys a sense of estrangement or disconnection from oneself, from others, from nature, from younger cultural traditions, and from language itself. These ideas are inextricably connected and yet quite distinct: loss often creates alienation while alienation can heighten experiences of loss. A brief overview of this literary movement, which developed in the first decades of the new century, reveals that Modernism (1914-1945) is defined by its formal innovation, hyper-allusiveness, density, and skepticism towards previous sources of meaning and authority. Confessionalism: The Relevance of a Label. Confessionalism, which emerged as a major mode of American poetry in the mid-twentieth century, stresses individual experience, emotional frankness, and the exploration of once-taboo topics. Though these movements emerge at separate historical periods and pursue distinct aesthetic goals, they nonetheless respond to the modern world's landscape of dislocation through strange and inventive poetic idioms.

3.2 Methodological Approaches

In analyzing the selected poems, various theoretical models are considered to reveal the diverse dimensions of loss and alienation. Psychoanalytical perspectives, influenced by Freudian and post-Freudian theories of mourning and melancholia, offer interpretive insights into how both poets negotiate the role of unresolved grief and trauma. Historical framing places each piece in a distinct historical context, linking individual expressions to broader lived experiences. Feminist lenses enable a view of how gender conditions experiences and articulations of loss and alienation, not least in Plath's struggle with patriarchy. The approach is based on close reading of select passages and attention to critical theory, including formal features (structure, imagery, diction, rhythm) and thematic content. This provides an in-depth text analysis, while also being sensitive to the historical, cultural, and biographical contexts.

4 Loss in "The Waste Land"

4.1 Cultural and Spiritual Loss

The first strophe of "The Waste Land" contains perhaps the most famous paradox of modern poetry: "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 1-4). The reversal of traditional spring imagery sets the reader on notice that loss is a dominant theme right from the first lines of the poem. Here, renewal is not a cause for celebration but for lament, reminding the speaker of his loss. The "dead land" implies a wasteland that is more than simply a physical desolation; it is a spiritual and moral, as well as a physical and cultural, desert, in which a civilization has become dead to itself (Shastri, 2023, p. 18). This sense of cultural decline pervades the poem, particularly in its engagement with literary and religious heritage. Eliot's jarring references from disparate sources — Shakespeare, Dante, Augustine, the Buddha — both summon and lament a lost cultural patrimony. As Shastri contends, "The poem reflects the horrors of degeneration and alienation, played out in a sinister world of spiritual desolation and menace." (Schwartz, 2011, p. 58) In the case of Tiresias, he represents this cultural loss. "Tiresias, who has 'foresuffered all' or whose prophetic wisdom is ignored in the modern waste land" (Eliot, 1922/2002, line 243). Religious imagery throughout the poem also suggests spiritual loss. The Fisher King represents both personal suffering and collective spiritual crisis. The Hanged Man, "a card of the Tarot pack," appears as "Fear death by water," invoking Christian sacrifice but in a context of fortune-telling rather than faith (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 54-55). These religious references, divorced from their original contexts and meanings, highlight the loss of spiritual coherence in modern society.

4.2 Personal and Collective Loss

While cultural and spiritual loss operate at a civilizational level, "The Waste Land" also explores more intimate dimensions of loss. The hyacinth girl episode presents a poignant moment of personal loss: "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago; / They called me the hyacinth girl" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 35-36). This memory of past connection contrasts sharply with the present state of disconnection: "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 38-40). The failure of speech and vision suggests not only the loss of a relationship but also the loss of self that often accompanies profound grief. Throughout the poem, personal losses accumulate and blend into collective ones. The drowned Phoenician Sailor, with "pearls that were his eyes" (Eliot, 1922/2002, line 48), represents both an individual death and the broader human condition. Similarly, the typist's mechanical sexual encounter—"She smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 255-256)—depicts personal emotional deadening that reflects wider social alienation. As Mahmood and Mohammed observe, "The original themes with which the poem starts are the loss of identity, including 'The Hollow Man,' 'The Waste Land,' and the loss of self-awareness" (40). This interweaving of personal and collective loss creates a complex tapestry of grief that operates simultaneously at multiple levels, suggesting that modern alienation affects both individual psyches and entire civilizations.

5 Alienation in "The Waste Land"

5.1 Urban Alienation

"The Waste Land" depicts the modern city as an area filled with alienation, exemplified by the crowd flowing over London Bridge: "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 62-63). This image, reminiscent of Dante's vision of Hell, depicts city denizens as spiritually dead people going through lifeless motions. The refrain of "Unreal City" in the poem underlines this theme of urban unreality and disconnection. The sci-fi city is inhabited by people who cannot, or do not, form legitimate connections with one another. This isolation is illustrated through the interaction between the clerk and the typist: "The time is now propitious, as he guesses, / The meal is ended, she is bored and tired" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 235-236). Their sex is also represented as a mechanical act, devoid of emotions: There is no sentence saying he was not used to it, but that was impossible to explain to him (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 239-240), No more embarrassed with advice, /or quick to share the gossip of her friend, /Or too much stung by lies (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 249-252) His vanity requires no response, / And makes a welcome of indifference (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 241-242) This portrayal of sterile sex is symptomatic of a wider disassociation from human life in the city. As multiple scholars have noted, Eliot's portrayal of urban alienation reflects the rapid urbanization and industrialization of the early twentieth century. The "brown fog" that hangs over the city suggests not only physical pollution but spiritual contamination, an environment hostile to authentic human connection. This alienated urban landscape becomes a physical manifestation of the spiritual wasteland that gives the poem its title.

5.2 Linguistic and Communicative Alienation

Beyond physical and social alienation, "The Waste Land" explores linguistic alienation—the breakdown of language as a medium for meaningful communication. The poem's famous line, "I can connect nothing with nothing" (Eliot, 1922/2002, line 301), explicitly articulates this communicative failure. The fragmented structure, abrupt transitions, and multilingual passages enact the very disconnection they describe, requiring readers to experience the alienation rather than merely read about it. The pub conversation in "A Game of Chess" demonstrates this communicative breakdown: "What you get married for if you do not want children? / HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 164-165). The intrusion of the bartender's call disrupts the conversation, which itself consists of disconnected remarks rather than genuine dialogue. Similarly, the nursery rhyme fragment "London Bridge is falling falling falling" (Eliot, 1922/2002, line 426) appears divorced from its original context, suggesting the degradation of cultural forms into meaningless fragments. Tung argues that "Eliot registered this prisonhouse of alienation in his poetry" through formal techniques that mirror communicative breakdown (Tung, 2006, p. 215). The poem's linguistic alienation reflects broader social and spiritual disconnection, suggesting that language itself has become unreliable in the modern wasteland.

5.3 Alienation from Nature and Tradition

"The Waste Land" also depicts alienation from nature and cultural traditions. The opening section, "The Burial of the Dead," presents a landscape where "the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water" (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 23-24). This barren environment, contrasting sharply with traditional

pastoral imagery, suggests humanity's estrangement from natural cycles and rhythms. Similarly, the poem portrays a sense of alienation from cultural and religious traditions. References to the Grail legend, classical mythology, and religious texts appear in fragmented form, suggesting that these traditions no longer provide coherent meaning. The Fisher King's wound will not heal; the chapel is empty; the thunder speaks, but its message ("Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.") requires translation and interpretation (Eliot, 1922/2002, lines 400-433). These broken connections to tradition intensify the sense of cultural alienation throughout the poem. As Zhang observes, Eliot "deeply felt the absurdity of the 'alienated world'" and used natural imagery to highlight modern humanity's disconnection from organic rhythms and cycles (Zhang, 2023, p. 4). This alienation from nature and tradition contributes to the overall sense of dislocation that characterizes the poem's wasteland.

6 Loss in "Daddy"

6.1 Paternal Loss and Its Psychological Impact While "The Waste Land" primarily addresses loss at the cultural and collective levels, "Daddy" confronts the intensely personal loss of a father figure. The poem opens with a direct address to the deceased father: "You do not do, you do not do / Any more, black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot" (Plath, 1965, lines 1-3). This image of confinement within a "black shoe" immediately establishes the psychological impact of paternal loss—the speaker has been shaped by absence, defined by what is no longer there. The biographical context of Plath's own father's death when she was eight years old informs but does not limit the poem's exploration of loss. As Schwartz notes, "Her history was shaped by Daddy's domination" even after his death (58). The poem explicitly references this childhood loss: "I was ten when they buried you. / At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to you" (Plath, 1965, lines 57-59). This passage connects paternal loss to suicidal impulses, suggesting that unresolved grief has profound and lasting psychological consequences. The father's absence creates a void that the speaker attempts to fill through imagination and memory: "I never could talk to you. / The tongue stuck in my jaw. / It stuck in a barb wire snare" (Plath, 1965, lines 24-26). This communication barrier represents not only the literal impossibility of speaking to the dead but also the psychological obstacles to processing loss. The father becomes mythologized in death, transformed into a "ghastly statue" and "marble-heavy" figure that looms larger than life (Plath, 1965, lines 8-9).

6.2 Loss of Identity and Agency In "Daddy," paternal loss is more than just missing a person; it becomes a loss of identity and agency. The speaker claims to be fragmented and unfinished: "Bit my pretty red heart in two. / You were buried when I was ten. / For what is a lamentable wound / unless to get back, back, back, back to you" (Plath, 1965, lines 56-59). This is a sequence that implies the father's death has cleaved the speaker's self and has resulted in a wound that will not heal. The Nazi imagery in the poem exacerbates this feeling of loss of identity. "I consider myself Jewish with a German somebody father, I thought any German was you. / And the language obscene / An engine, an engine / Chuffing me off like a Jew" (Plath, 1965, lines 29-32). Such an identification with the victims of historical trauma seems to imply that the absence of the father has determined the speaker's self-dispossession, which has made her into a victim, into a powerless figure. Indeed, Laleh contends that Plath's works "exhibit her sense of desertion and disparity with the world" that her father's death left her hanging with (Nazki, 2024, p. 3). In addition to detailing the quest to redeem oneself through symbolic gestures of defiance and emancipation, the poem concludes with the statement, "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I am through" (Plath, 1965, line 80). This closing line implies both fulfillment ("through" with the poem) and freedom ("through" with the father's authority), a reclaiming of identity and authority in the wake of loss.

7 Alienation in "Daddy"

7.1 Familial and Paternal Alienation

"Daddy" presents familial relationships, particularly the father-daughter bond, as sites of profound alienation. The poem's opening metaphor of the black shoe establishes this alienation immediately: the speaker has "lived like a foot" within the confining space of paternal influence (Plath, 1965, line 3). This image suggests not intimacy but imprisonment—a relationship characterized by a power imbalance rather than emotional connection. The father is depicted as distant and unattainable, "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God, / Ghastly statue with one gray toe / Big as a Frisco seal," (Plath, 1965, lines 8-10). These images underscore distance and disproportion—the father is godlike, statuesque, oversized—and impart a sense that the divide between father and daughter can never be bridged. The language barrier compounds this disconnection: "I never could talk to you. / My tongue, now and then / Jew to the fat Articulations of it" (Plath, 1965, lines 25-26). Nazki says Plath's interest is to: "[examine] the father-daughter relationship and [represent] it as 'a source of alienation and victimization within the sacred precincts of family life'" (Nazki, 2024, p. 3). The poem's chilling equivalency of

this relationship to the one between Nazis and Jews – “I thought every German was you” (Plath, 1965, line 29) – is an example of the farthest extreme of familial alienation: the idea that family and close relationships can be places of literal terror and estrangement.

7.2 Gender-Based Alienation

In addition to the specific alienation within families, "Daddy" examines the more general phenomenon of gendered alienation in systems of normative power. The poem's well-known lines “Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face” (Plath, 1965, lines 48-50), are nothing but a sarcastic statement on power and gender, almost as if the writer were saying women are taught to love a man who resembles a father, whose authority is reminiscent of that of a father. This gendered estrangement extends to the speaker's relationship with her husband, which replays the script of paternal domination: “I made a model of you, / A man in plaster / And a swastika... and a love of the rack and the screw” (Plath, 1965, lines 64-66). The repetition of this pattern—working father as patriarch—at the level of many other married men, further signifies that structures of patriarchal power also produce conditions of alienation that can be consistent across differing areas of personal relationships. Feminist interpretations have focused on how the poem connects individual experiences of alienation with those of systematic, gendered powerlessness. As Ghasemi writes, "Daddy" is a poem of "anger and bitterness" stemming from "alienation and depression" in patriarchal societies and class power relations (Ghasemi, 2008, p. 44). The poem's tone is one of confrontation and aggression, marked by violent imagery, as it seeks to conquer alienation by directly engaging with its causes.

7.3 Cultural and Linguistic Alienation

"Daddy" also examines cultural and linguistic estrangement, most notably through its interaction with the German language and identity. The speaker says German is "obscene, an engine that manufactures" that "you can travel with" and that it takes her "along with it as a Jew," "to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen," lines from (Plath, 1965, lines 30-36). This representation of language as a weapon of oppression is indicative of extreme linguistic alienation: words are actively dangerous; they are like foreigners. The poem's mention of German locations, such as "Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen" (Plath, 1965, line 33), and cultural symbols, including "The Luftwaffe," "The Panzer-man," and zombies, as well as the swastika (Plath, 1965, lines 42-46), provides a figure-and-ground distinction of cultural diaspora. The speaker is cast as an outsider to this German culture; however, at the same time, is influenced by it: "I am a little bit of a Jew" (Plath, 1965, line 35). This ambivalence of cultural positioning reveals the ambivalence of alienation, whereby these "others" are unable to fully both accept and reject the culture that shapes them. This cultural and linguistic alienation, as Banu notes, soundly contributes to the state of mind of the speaker, who is experiencing "the worst of the kinds that is alienating oneself from oneself" (Zhang, 2023, p. 4). Consequently, the poem's use of German words and Nazi imagery is more than historical allusions, but an attestation to a deep sense of alienation from language and culture.

8 Comparative Analysis

8.1 Convergences in Treatment of Loss and Alienation

The Waste Land vs. Daddy, though on two different platforms, both works speak of the same themes: loss and alienation. Both the second and first poems use fragmentary periods of construction that thematically serve to reinstate, as it were, their psychological fragmentation. Eliot's fragmented quotations and broken transitions reflect the shattered nature of post-war Europe, while Plath's short rhythms and mutating metaphors gestate the fractured psyche of the psychologically damaged. Both poets also situate personal loss in larger historical cataclysms. Eliot's allusions to the First World War and to the fall of European civilization construct a context for the experience of disconnection in the modern world. Likewise, Plath's evocation of Holocaust imagery links private, paternal bereavement to more collective, historical trauma. In this way, it universalizes private bereavement, prompting an equivalence between personal and social experiences of adversity. Moreover, both poems use myth to frame their inquiries into loss and dislocation. Eliot uses fertility myths, the Grail legend, and allusions to classical sources to form a foundational myth for contemporary life. Plath develops a personal mythology of the father figure, embodying him as a Nazi, vampire, devil, and god. It is within this mythic realm that both poets can raise the personal to the archetypal.

8.2 Divergences in Treatment of Loss and Alienation

Despite these convergences, "The Waste Land" and "Daddy" take quite different attitudes to loss and alienation. The most apparent of these differences is one of scale and scope: Eliot's poem is concerned with a cultural and spiritual alienation that is universal in scope and civilization-wide in extent, while Plath's is preoccupied with personal and familial alienation to an extreme degree. The Waste Land is a panoramic account of modern

dislocation in various settings and voices. "Daddy" offers up a single, consistent speaker belatedly addressing a specific absence. The two poems also differ significantly in emotional tone. Eliot's ironic detachment is achieved through allusion, citation, and the use of perspectives, and it affects what Leavis characterized as "an impersonal ordering of intensely personal material" (Leavis, 1932, p. 90). In contrast, Plath employs direct emotional address, utilizing emotive imagery and a confessional tone to create an immediate emotional impact. This discrepancy is indicative of a broader distinction between modernist impersonality and confessional forthrightness. Their resolutions are also quite different. "The Waste Land" ends with the Sanskrit "Shantih shantih shantih" – perhaps by default "the peace that passeth understanding" (Eliot, 1922/2002, line 433). Its ending is an ambiguous spiritual resolution, and the potential for transcendence, if at all, of modern fragmentation. 'Daddy' ends with "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I am through" (Plath line 80), indicating that confrontation, instead of some form of epiphanic tranquillity, can provide a moment of cathartic release. The poems also contrast in their gendered orientations toward alienation. While "The Waste Land" portrays alienation in human terms, sometimes through feminine points of view, but not directly about gender and alienation, "Daddy" is explicitly about alienation inside patriarchy. In Plath's poem, personal paternal alienation is linked with systemic gender oppression, something we never find in Eliot's work.

8.3 Historical, Cultural, and Gender Factors

Such convergences or divergences of ideas were symptomatic of wider cultural, historical, and gender differences that made their work challenging for these poets. Eliot wrote in the wake of World War I, reacting to the unprecedented cultural disruptions of that conflict. His modernist tools — fragmentation, allusion, ironic distance — were products of a particular historical moment, when traditional forms appeared unequal to the task of representing modern experience. As a male poet writing in established literary traditions, Eliot could assume a pose of cultural authority even while criticizing that culture. Plath was writing during the Cold War, when the Holocaust had emerged as a potent emblem of human malevolence, and when American poetry was shifting to greater personal revelation through the confessional movement. This tension produced, for Hayles, poetry grounded in "direct address, an encountering of bodies, the sensual wherever it occurs, an intense investment in feeling and the foreign." her methods — direct address, provocative imagery, emotional intensity — reflect at once the material conditions of her day and her role as a woman poet who with her writing was pushing out against the patriarchal fortress of literary and social order. Whereas Eliot could merely assume cultural authority over everyone, Plath had to take it on through confrontational poetic tactics. Gender also significantly influences how both poets express their feelings of alienation. Eliot's aliens, Tiresias, the typist, and the clerk, are out of joint with a dismembered culture but not specifically concerning gender's logistics. Plath's speaker, on the other hand, endures an estrangement that is rooted in her status as a woman in patriarchal systems, from daughter to wife. This distinction is not just an idiosyncratic accident, but it is embedded in how gender was lived in the two different eras and how it was experienced.

9 Conclusion

This point-by-point comparison of "The Waste Land" and "Daddy" illustrates how two defining poems from distinct poetic traditions and sensibilities explore related themes through different formal and rhetorical structures. Both the memoir and the poems grapple with the experience of modern fragmentation. In inventing capacious forms, the two records of loss and estrangement resonate for readers today. The study shows that Eliot's modernist mode foregrounds cultural and spiritual alienation through allusive distance and formal dissonance, whereas Plath's confessional mode grapples with personal and gendered alienation through emotional immediacy and provocation. These contrasts represent not only personal aesthetic preferences but also the broader historical, cultural, and gender contexts that affect the work of each particular poet. This study contributes to the scholarly appreciation of each poem in isolation and to the broader discussion of poetic responses to trauma in the 20th century. By comparing and contrasting how these works come together and fall apart in their engagements with loss and alienation, we can also perceive shifts in poetic approaches to expressing experiences of wandering and brokenness. Further work could broaden this comparative framework to consider more poets with diverse backgrounds, including variables such as race, nationality, and class, and how these factors condition the poet's articulation of loss and alienation. This broadened frame of comparison would cast yet more light upon the intricate interplay of personal and historical circumstance with the exigencies of artistic form in modern and contemporary poetry.

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