

Ghost in T. S. Eliot's Poetry

Manaar Kamil Saeed

Lecture, Faculty of Languages University of Kufa, Iraq
manark.shubbarali@uokufa.edu.iq

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Abstract:

As a poet, Eliot interacted with the spirits of the eminent dead. He is always calling up ghosts in his literary practice because of how heavily he uses the echoes of deceased writers. Eliot sees Dante and Donne as live ghosts, but he attempts to cast off additional historical figures as dead weight. There are good and bad ghosts, and early Eliot saw Milton—whose subtle influence seeps into English poetic diction—as a bad ghost. In addition, Eliot wrote ritual poetry designed to elicit spiritual encounters, frequently represented by spectral beings. Dante provides a wide range of ideas for stand-alone ritual pieces, such as the ones found in the haunting sequences of "Little Gidding" and "Burnt Norton." The presence of ghosts in Eliot's writing is not directly connected to his belief in the Communion of Saints, even though he was a devoted Christian. Eliot creates a quasi-pagan faith akin to spiritualism to connect with a secular society. Ghosts are powerful symbols in T.S. Eliot's poetry that represent the poet's concern with the breakdown of contemporary society, the vanishing of spiritual principles, and the unrelenting march of time. Through the use of the ghost motif, Eliot gives a profound contemplation on the fractured nature of existence while capturing the haunting spirit of the human predicament.

Keywords: *Ghosts, Spirituality; Eliot; Ritual Dance; symbolism; the West Land; Haunting; conjuration.*

1 Introduction

T.S. Eliot was a prominent modernist poet known for his complex style and exploration of modern consciousness. The poems analyzed in the study reflect themes of despair, spiritual emptiness, and existential crisis. The presence of ghosts adds to the atmosphere of haunting and decay in Eliot's work. The study aims to analyze the various forms and functions of ghosts in his poetry and explore their symbolic significance in the overall themes of his work.

When discussing imagination, people frequently treat it as a single entity, a context-free space, or a unique landscape that each one of them can visit independently. Talking like this can sometimes give the impression that people cannot think creatively or imagine anything new, which limits their ability to see the world in countless ways. Everyone has his / her own imagined landscapes, filled with very specific experiences; poetry, other artistic mediums, and other novel creations help people attach to their imaginations by opening the door and letting them into those worlds. It also makes the doors between all of their imaginations easier to see considering everyone may go to and share with others while creating new things. Imagination is both particular and universal, real and unreal, obscene and sacred, and a location of rest and discontent. (Maya, 1994, 23)

The material world is fully engaged by the shared imagination. Through poetry, one can share the physical space of the imagination with other people. By creating a haunting place that resembles this one and populating it with genuine physical objects, poets can create connections between this world and other worlds. The creation people make in other people's minds when reading poems is what matters most about it. For this reason, the prospect of a world beyond this one exists. It is vital to believe in material, and imagination because people do more with poetry than just recreate this one. Writers envision a generative, endless universe that poetry can help create. (Sophie, 2018, 51)

This study contends that Derrida's theory of hauntology would not have been revolutionary if it had not been entwined with the politics of hegemony, being, and time, in light of the extensive corpus of literature on ghost and spectrality concerning Eliot's poetry. In his discourse, Derrida presents how hauntology challenges the hegemonic totalitarian autonomy, temporal definiteness, and the conventional benefits of being. Derrida states that haunting is a part of every hegemony's structure, emphasizing the connection between hauntology

and hegemony. As his reasoning develops, it becomes evident that spectrology, in his view, entails two crucial acts: conjuration, in which the conjurer and the specter share agency, and haunting, in which the ghost has complete control over the haunted subject. (Harold, 2002, 75)

Conjuration is largely seen by Derrida as a partnership, sometimes as a political alliance. It is about neutralizing hegemony or undermining an authority. He explains the medieval usage of the term "conjuration" to refer to the bourgeois alliances that occasionally battled a prince to establish free cities. He also describes how, in occult society, certain subjects (individual or collective) can summon a powerful political foe by forming alliances and representing forces in the service of shared goals. Thus, to achieve justice, conjured specters have always been linked to unsettling hegemonic forces. Derrida presents this emphasis on justice as the driving force behind his conceptualization of specters. He clarifies that by mentioning that "I'm planning a long speech about ghosts, inheritance, and generations of ghosts—that is, about certain individuals who are not here, who are not living at this time—either to us, inside us, or outside us. I'm doing this out of justice". Derrida's explicit assertion that haunting must be incorporated into the construction of all concepts, starting with the concepts of time and being, encapsulates the interconnectedness of temporality and existentialist hauntology. We would refer to that as a hauntology here. (Jacques, 1994, 73)

The concept of spectral temporality is consistently emphasized in his research. Derrida argues that haunting is historical but not dated in his definition. It is never obediently assigned a date in the daily sequence of gifts based on the calendar's established order. It's also clear that the phrase "houses" about ghosts is contemporary. Hence, rather than being a phantom, a ghost is a revenant whose comings and goings are unpredictable. According to him, a ghost is a first time and a repeat at the same time as well as a final time. It's the real thing each time, and it concludes with the first instance. Through his theoretical application to literary works, Derrida notes that similar to Hamlet's story, everything starts with the appearance of a specter; more precisely, everything starts with the imminence of a re-appearance, only this time it's the specter making a first appearance. (Colin, 2005, p.73) He writes, "Remember the specter of Caesar and the well of Macbeth." He returns after having run out of time. Brutus continues again. Derrida contends that an apparition of a specter exists outside of time and that a ghost is hence unpredictable and elusive. Even if a haunting specter in temporality originates in the past, it inevitably returns and exists in a liminal space. Derridean hauntology thus challenges fixed concepts of time and linear historicity; if ghosts of the past are to haunt us in the present as well as the future, then the idea of a temporally restricted ending appears dubious. *Hamlet's* proverb "Time is out of joint" is used by Derrida to illustrate this idea of temporality. There are always historical personalities, occasions, and concepts lurking beneath the surface that have the potential to influence the present and mold the future. Life existed in the past at all times (Colin, 2005, 73)

The tradition of ghosts in English literature stretches back through the ages, reflecting changing beliefs and cultural contexts. Ghosts, often manifestations of the spirits of the dead, have been a perennial theme in English-speaking cultures, stemming from pre-Christian animism or ancestor worship. The Old English word "gást" (from which the modern English "ghost" derives), also meant "spirit" or "soul", and could refer to any good or evil spirit. From the ninth century, it was used as a synonym for the "Holy Ghost" in translations of the Anglo-Saxon Gospel. The modern meaning of "the soul of a deceased person appearing in visible form" only emerged in Middle English in the 14th century. Ghosts feature in medieval English literature, most notably in Shakespeare's *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, where the shade of Hamlet's father appears to demand revenge against his brother, the new king. In the Victorian era, the "classic" ghost story arose, with authors like M.R. James, Sheridan Le Fanu, Violet Hunt, and Henry James exploring the supernatural. The theme of ghosts has also been taken up in more modern poetry. Poets such as Cynthia Huntington Ghost, Rae Armantrout's *Unbidden*, and Jeff Clark's *The Ghost Has No Home* delve into the psychological and existential aspects of ghostly appearances. (Eliot, 1922, 47).

2 Methodology

Analyzing ghosts in T.S. Eliot's poetry involves a comprehensive approach. It begins with a thorough review of existing scholarly literature, followed by the selection of specific poems featuring ghosts for close reading. The researcher examines the textual evidence, identifies recurring themes and patterns, and considers the historical and cultural context of Eliot's work. Comparative analysis with other poets and the application of theoretical frameworks are also employed. Through interpretation and persuasive argumentation supported by close textual analysis, the researcher aims to understand how ghosts function in Eliot's poetry and their

connection to broader thematic concerns. This methodology ensures a rigorous exploration of the motif, contributing to a deeper understanding of Eliot's poetic vision.

3 Results

The article analyzes the various forms and functions of ghosts in Eliot's work, and how they relate to the thematic concerns and artistic vision present across his influential body of poetry. Eliot's use of ghosts is seen as a powerful literary device that prompts readers to reflect on the complexity of human existence, the weight of history, the alienation of the contemporary world, and the universal search for meaning and spiritual salvation. In summary, the article explores how Eliot employs the motif of ghosts and haunting in his poetry to explore profound themes related to the human condition, history, spirituality, and the modern experience.

4 The Employment of Ghosts in Eliot's Poetry (Discussion)

T.S. Eliot's poetry often consorted with ghosts, the spirits of the illustrious dead, who formed a constellation around him. His works invoked ritual scenes designed to induce encounters with the spiritual realm, often embodied in ghostly figures. Eliot's Anglican beliefs strongly influenced his work, and he strongly believed in the Communion of Saints; however, the presence of ghosts in his poetry is more secular, acting as guides for spiritual questers. They are portrayals of the living spirits of the dead, visible only to those open to their presence. "Burnt Norton", the first of the Four Quartets, features a ritual scene in a ghostly rose garden, where the speaker is invited to inhabit the past. The ghosts in Eliot's poetry are ambivalent; they are both gracious guests and unwelcome presences. They are exorcised in "The Family Reunion", yet also appear to guide the spiritual seeker. Eliot's ghost is said to have haunted his childhood home in Massachusetts, where a recent occupant, Dana Hawkes, claimed to have seen the poet. There is a certain appropriateness to this, given Eliot's often spectral persona and haunting works.

One method is to impose routines and ritualize life to bring out this depth dimension. Stephen Spender claims that Gerontion and the other characters in *The Waste Land* are devoid of this "ritualist sensibility." But the poet also imposes ceremonial patterns, as in the instance of Elizabeth and Leicester's stately boat journey in the distance, and the confused memories of three prostitutes combined into a Song of the Thames-Maidens. Every reference to modern pandemonium in *Four Quartets* is seen as a series of ritualistic movements, or macabre dances. (Shusterman, 1994, 63)

T. S. Eliot acknowledged that he was unsure about the likelihood that Poe had an impact on him, saying, "One cannot be sure that one's writing has not been influenced by Poe." This comment embodies the entire essence of Poe's influence on Eliot's poetry — the pressure of a ghost. If Poe had not been Eliot's critic, the essay from which it originated could have been titled "From Poe to Eliot" rather than "From Poe to Valéry" because Poe can be credited with creating the tradition that influenced much of the early Eliot's work, and is not that itself a form of "influence"? Eliot, however, intended something more stringent when he used the word influence. He seems to be in line with Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry, and their poetic philosophies and practices in "From Poe to Valéry," even as he implies that his expectations for poetry have gone beyond theirs without rejecting them. Poe's presence in the tradition is implied. However, there is some disagreement over whether Poe ever had a defining role in Eliot's poetry, one that extended beyond his assistance to poets in between. It is contended that he did perform this role, albeit in a very discrete and unobtrusive manner. (Valerie, 1971, 3)

The "Burnt Norton" speaker "I'm a middle-aged," lonely man who broods over a potential love interest, much like the main character in Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle." Like the lead character in another eerie Jamesian story, "The Jolly Corner," he was thinking back on the person he could have been. The idea that the present is full of opportunities gives an elderly man very little encouragement. The thoughts of unrealized potential, a path not taken, and a person unloved prey on his mind. This theme is central to James's ghost stories. In "The Jolly Corner," Spencer Brydon confronts his ghost as a result of reflecting on the life he might have had if he had stayed in America. If John Marcher had chosen to love May Bartram, he may have become something different from the mourner in "The Beast in the Jungle" who is glaring at him. As a false Englishman at the end of his extraordinary career, Eliot must have experienced the same sufferings that James is reported to have mentioned in 1906. "I'd immerse myself in American culture." I'd not know any other country. The combination of Europe and America that you see in me hasn't worked out well. "I would investigate its beautiful side." Gomez captures the acute loneliness experienced by expatriates in *The Elder Statesman*, saying, "It is only when you come to see that you have lost yourself/ that you are quite alone." (Shusterman, 1994, 63)

The artist creates a different persona in an attempt to make his life right. *Le temps retrouvé* by Proust reimagines the life left un-lived through art. It's unlikely that his "involuntary memory" of paradisaal Combray is much related to the child's actual experiences in dull, poky Illiers. Poetry is not a celebration of happy childhoods or marriages; rather, it is born out of the pain of unfulfillment. As a result, the childhood that "*Burnt Norton*" evokes is a spectral one, composed of memories associated with books, a trace of Lewis Carroll, and Kipling's "They," a tale of ghost children. Eliot's rose garden, which he imagined as a kind of shrine, may turn into a faded emblem or perhaps a ghost. The prospect of making the most of the few days left is at best dimmed by the tyranny of linear time, which laughs at impractical attempts to recreate what could have been. However, the poet hopes to transform the past into a treasure by giving it a new meaning: "History may be servitude." History could be a source of freedom. "Everything will be well" is different from "all will have been well." Agatha says in *The Family Reunion*, "Success is relative and is what we can make of the mess we have made of things." That's an efficient interpretation of the phrase "redeem the time, redeem the dream." The thought that regret and longing rise to the buried, spectral possibilities that are both who we are and could have been, to form the substance of our destiny that opens in eschatological expectation, is even more majestic. (Jacques, 1994, 5).

Eliot was a fan of Browning, and a number of his poems—"The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," "Gerontion," "Journey of the Magi," and "A Song for Simeon"—are dramatic monologues. In a dramatic monologue, the orator—typically in conversation with the hearer—can thoroughly convey his personality and reflect on his life. Eliot keeps the final element in the opening line of "*Prufrock*," in the phrase "you and I," and in the speakers' troubling queries, such as "And would it have been worth it after all?" "And should I have the right to smile?" and "Were we led all that way for/birth or death?". (Valerie, 1971, 31) Though the speaker is primarily advising himself in these monologues, it would be more accurate to refer to them as "interior monologues" because the "you" in question is a ghostly figure who frequently interacts with the reader—especially in the case of the "you" who receives instruction in *Four Quartets*. In "Gerontion," the phrase "you" might refer to Christ at one point: "I that was near your heart was removed from that place." Using typical dramatic monologue parts, the poet presents his persona to the readers in *Four Quartets*. This is introduced in "East Coker" II with the famous line "That was a way of putting it not very satisfactory" and is continued in "The Dry Salvages" II, III, and V, "Little Gidding" III, and the third and fifth sections. (Valerie, 1971, 31)

"The deception of the thrush?" The term "deception" in *Ghosts as Gracious Guests* may refer to a pessimistic view of the likelihood of arriving in paradise or the realization that the poet's surrendered imagination transports him to an idealized rather than the actual world. The poem now shifts to ritual, as though calling forth the spectral beings required for this to happen, they were, dignified and invisible.

The ghosts in Eliot are visitors; they are only "there" for the spiritually attuned individual who welcomes them into his life or who is opened to them by shattered experiences of anxiety or guilt. Gerontion's lament, "I have no ghosts," could be interpreted as an admission of insensitivity, implying that she is nothing more than the sum of her experiences, the vile details of her past and present. There isn't a glimmer of memory or imagination to help me realize the importance of my life. The phrase "I have no tradition" could also imply that no ancestors support each person individually and give life purpose. Agatha guides Harry through a ritual of accepting the family ghosts in *The Family Reunion*; this acceptance leads to healing from the traumas of childhood and an unhappy marriage. (Shusterman, 1994, 63) The ritual ends with a vision that conveys both the joy of "time regained" and a religious understanding of reality, symbolized by the union of the Christian rose and the Buddhist lotus:

"And the lotos rose quietly,
The surface glittered out of the heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: Humankind cannot bear very much reality."

Like the postmortem triangulation in Virginia Woolf's elegiac novel *To the Lighthouse*, the image is finished, the dead are seen from a distance in time, and the shape of the picture is made up of the shadows left by both what has occurred and what may have happened. In this ghost scene, the stately "they" stand in for historical parents, while the "children in the foliage" stand in for the future. As a result, we are "Where past and future are gathered" (Sullivan, S., 1973, 80), and the way that both patterns overlap allows us to access a moment in

time: "Only by the form, the pattern, / words or music reach" The second foursome's first section, "East Coker," features another ritual dance. Here, the earthly realm of generational time replaces ethereal ideas about time and eternity. The story opens with eerie old houses that "shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto" due to change and destruction. The poet then indulges in a ghostly vision in the "open field": "If you do not come too close if you do not come too close, a summer midnight, you can hear the music" The scene is one of ritual dance. The language echoes back to the sixteenth century, adding to the eerie effect. What do the "Mirth of those long since under earth" and this rustic dance mean? It concludes with "Dung and death" and is hardly observed. "Eliot's treatment of living and generation, of both the human and the primordial energies of nature, orders them into a dance of death," is something that strikes me as obvious, even though many readers would prefer to believe something different. Compared to the first and fourth Quarters, this one has far less impressive spectral elements and less intense personal involvement. The deceased villagers almost seem to be performing folk dances. (Moody, 1994, 208)

Derrida, a prominent French philosopher, developed the concept of hauntology as a way to explore how the past continues to influence and "haunt" the present. Hauntology is derived from the word "haunting" and refers to the idea that the past, even though it is absent, still exerts a presence and affects the present. In the context of Derrida's work, ghosts symbolize the traces of the past that persist in the present. Derrida argues that these spectral traces disrupt traditional notions of linear time and reveal the inherent instability of meaning and identity. When examining T.S. Eliot's writing, particularly his landmark poem "The Waste Land," we can see connections to Derrida's ideas. The complex and disjointed composition of "The Waste Land" shows how modern society is decaying and dispersing. It draws on a vast array of literature and culture to provide a plurality of voices and points of view. Eliot's poem deals with themes of despair, social decay, and emptiness. It portrays a fractured world in which the past is always present and the present is the past. Derrida's concept of hauntology – the nonlinear disruption of the past and its impact on the present – is reflected in the disjointed organization and inter-textual references of 'The Waste Land'. Both Derrida and Eliot are interested in challenging binary systems and rigid interpretations. The deconstructive method of Derrida raises questions about the presence and absence of the past, while Eliot's poem criticizes traditional narrative frameworks. To sum up, what do Derrida and what's Eliot have in common? Both Derrida's and Eliot's perspectives challenge accepted ideas of time and emphasize the mysterious, malleable nature of purpose and identity. In many ways, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* encapsulates the spirit of profound disillusionment following World War I. The poem contains many ghostly voices, including the voice of the narrator's previous love who confronts and haunts him in a dark London. The poem also touches on the aftermath of the battle with the ghost of a companion's ghost from the battle of Mylae in the poem. According to Eliot, the poem is a "eulogy" to a culture he believed to be dead, a culture whose existence is overshadowed by the presence of the living dead. Many references to other works, including some with spectral elements, evoke a sense of the otherworld. The last part of *What the Thunder Said* refers to the coming of the thunder, which according to Hindu mythology means the telling of truth. One of the main themes of *The Waste Land* is the theme of rebirth, and this is symbolized by the water, which purifies and renews. This theme of rebirth is similar to the one of the ghostly characters, who find peace only after death. Eliot's use of ghostly imagery and the supernatural helps to emphasize the poem's central theme of meaning and rebirth within a post-war landscape of cultural and spiritual disintegration.

T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* explores the mind of its neurotic lead character, J. Alfred Prufrock, whose thoughts jump about a lot. The poem's dramatic monologue structure as well as its exploration of Prufrock's inner life perfectly suits Eliot's contemporary character. As a middle-aged man, Prufrock feels isolated in modern society. He suffers from feelings of inadequacy, humiliation, and missed opportunities in life. His social relations are characterized by anxiety, hesitation, and a lack of initiative. Although he is aware of society's standards and desires to engage in social activities, he feels isolated. The ghost figures in the poem may represent the inner universe of Prufrock. He is haunted by the past and faces an uncertain future. Hence, the ghosts may represent his fear of social rejection and his isolation from the world. His relationships with women are especially noteworthy as he expresses a deep sense of sexual inadequacy as well as dissatisfaction. He knows they will judge him for his thinning hair or his physical weakness, but he is too ashamed to face them has also been speculated by biographers that Eliot wrote this book because of gossip about his shyness towards women when he was a student at Harvard. Therefore, Eliot's self-presentation as the ghost of his potential love interest might also reflect his anxieties and shortcomings. Prufrock refers to himself as a "pair of jagged claws crawling across the floors of the quiet waters," reinforcing his notion of himself as a spectral being. He feels as isolated and cut off from the world as this spectral being does.

The connection between Derrida's views on ghosts and hauntology and T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" may be examined via the lenses of literary theory and philosophical ideas. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot presents a protagonist whose anxieties and memories plague him and prevent him from fully interacting with the world. Derrida's hauntology—the idea that the past influences and affects the present—is exemplified by this sense of being haunted by the past. (Derrida, 1994, p. 161) Prufrock is a perfect illustration of how the past can haunt the present because he is obsessed with his shortcomings and the burden of his past experiences. Prufrock's awareness of the past is further reflected in the poem's disjointed form and references. The broken concepts, disjointed images, and connections to various literary and cultural allusions create a feeling of temporal dislocation and the rupture of linear time (Eliot, 1915, pp. 1-17). The non-linear structure of this framework mirrors the non-linear characteristics of hauntology, which permits the past to continue impacting the present rather than limiting it to a certain point in time. In addition, Derrida's analysis of the breaking down of binary thinking and fixed meanings is also relevant to the theme of unfulfilled love and the fear of intimacy in "The Love Song". Prufrock's inability to fulfill his desires and connect with people reflects a longing and a desire for connection that is always accompanied by fear and insecurity. The shifting demands and fears of Prufrock illustrate one of the main pillars of his philosophy: the breakdown of binary interpretations and fixed meanings. The theme of unfulfillable love, the fracturing of identity and time, and the haunting force of the past in the present are all themes that Derrida explores in "The French Patient" and in "Ghosts" and in his work on hauntology. The poem has topics and methods that are in line with Derrida's philosophical views, and it offers a rich framework for the application of hauntological analysis.

5 Conclusion

T.S. Eliot incorporated the ghost metaphor into his poetry in a nuanced and complex way, exploring the depths of the human psyche. Eliot's ghosts serve as a reminder of past actions and their lingering effects on the present, symbolizing the universal struggle for spiritual growth and forgiveness. These spectral figures offer a unique perspective on the complexities of life, history's burdens, and the inherent loneliness of modern existence. In poems like *The Waste Land*, Eliot's ghosts represent the souls of a society on the verge of moral and cultural collapse, haunting a world disconnected from spiritual reality. However, these ghostly presences also bring hope for enlightenment and the possibility of transcendence. They act as a catalyst for self-reflection, encouraging individuals to face their fears, embrace the past, and pursue spiritual rebirth.

Eliot's sophisticated use of the ghost metaphor evolves into a powerful literary device towards the end of his career. Through this technique, Eliot prompts his readers to contemplate the profound themes of life, the weight of history, and the universal desire for meaning and salvation.

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