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The Bodhisattva in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land": A Journey through Spiritual Desolation

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Abstract

T.S. Eliot's seminal modernist poem "The Waste Land" has long been recognized for its intricate web of literary and philosophical allusions, including references to Mahayana Buddhism. This paper aims to examine the presence and significance of the Bodhisattva, a central figure in this tradition, within the poem. By leveraging Sallie B. King's theory of Buddha Nature (1992)*, which posits the inherent potential for enlightenment within all beings, this analysis seeks to shed new light on Eliot's portrayal of spiritual desolation, disillusionment and the quest for transformation. Through the lens of Buddha Nature, the fragmented characters and desolate landscapes depicted in "The Waste Land" are re-examined, revealing hidden layers that resonate with the notion of inherent enlightenment in apparent spiritual crisis. The paper explores how Eliot's engagement with Buddhist philosophy, as reflected through the concept of Buddha Nature, bridges eastern and western worldviews, offering a platform for cross-cultural dialogue and interpretation. By synthesizing King's scholarly insights with literary analysis, this paper sheds light on the transcendent potential embedded within the poem. It seeks to unravel Eliot's nuanced exploration of human suffering, the quest for enlightenment, and the interplay between spiritual emptiness and the inherent Buddha Nature. The Bodhisattva's commitment to guiding others toward enlightenment echoes the potential for transformation and renewal embedded within Eliot's desolate world. Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse surrounding Eliot's masterpiece, offering fresh perspectives on the poem's engagement with Buddhist philosophy and its universal themes of suffering, enlightenment and the human condition. By illuminating the presence and significance of the Bodhisattva and Buddha Nature in "The Waste Land", this paper hopes to inspire further exploration of the transcendent potential within Eliot's work and its enduring relevance in the modern world.*

Keywords: Buddha figure, Buddha nature, enlightenment, Mahayana Buddhism, redemption

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Introduction

This research paper aims to unravel the layers of symbolism and significance surrounding the Bodhisattva in "The Waste Land", shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions of spirituality, despair and redemption within the poem. By navigating through Eliot's intricate web of allusions and references, we seek to discern the Bodhisattva's role in both shaping and reflecting the poet's vision of a world adrift in spiritual desolation.

This research grapples with the ambiguity surrounding the Bodhisattva, seeking to address fundamental questions such as: How does Eliot construct and define the Bodhisattva within the poem? In what ways does the Bodhisattva serve as a bridge between Eastern and Western philosophies? What implications does this synthesis hold for the interpretation of the spiritual and cultural desolation depicted in "The Waste Land"? Additionally, the study aims to explore whether the Bodhisattva, traditionally associated with compassion and alleviation of suffering, acts as a catalyst for potential redemption and transformation within the individual and societal realms of despair portrayed in the poem.

The Bodhisattva in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" functions as a multifaceted and symbolic entity, embodying a transformative force that transcends the boundaries of individual and societal despair (Eliot 3-20). Through the intricate integration of Eastern and Western thought, Eliot employs the Bodhisattva as a catalyst for potential redemption within the spiritual desolation depicted in the poem (Surette 45-78). The Bodhisattva's ambiguous and elusive nature contributes to its role as a dynamic symbol, allowing for diverse interpretations that resonate with the complexities of the modernist era (Moody 67-89).

This qualitative research aims to explore the representation and significance of the Bodhisattva in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", employing a textual analysis approach and applying Sallie B. King's theory of *Buddha Nature* (1992) as a theoretical framework. The study seeks to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in Eliot's portrayal of the Bodhisattva and its role in navigating spiritual desolation within the context of the modernist landscape.

The research offers a nuanced understanding of the Bodhisattva's role in "The Waste Land", shedding light on its symbolic significance and its contribution to Eliot's exploration of spiritual desolation within the modernist landscape. The study aims to contribute valuable insights to the fields of literary analysis, cultural studies and Buddhist philosophy.

Siddhartha Gautama: The Buddha

Buddhism holds a profound significance not only within the spiritual and philosophical realms of Nepal but also on a global scale as one of the major religions. Its inception can be traced back to Siddhartha, also known as Gautama, who underwent a transformative journey to attain 'Enlightenment' and consequently became 'The Buddha'. Siddhartha, born to King Suddhodana of the Shakya clan and Queen Maya Devi, exhibited contemplative tendencies from a young age. Despite his father's attempts to anchor him in worldly matters and the affairs of the kingdom, the young prince severed these ties upon witnessing the harsh realities

of aging, illness, and mortality (Armstrong 12-13).

Opting to renounce his princely life, Siddhartha embarked on a quest for salvation. Initially seeking guidance from religious scholars, he found no solace for his inquisitive and restless mind. Rigorous self-mortification and extreme ascetic practices failed to yield true wisdom in his pursuit of understanding the root cause of suffering and the path to complete liberation. Rejecting this harsh approach, he embraced a middle path of self-discipline, recognizing that extreme physical austerity would not extinguish desires or lead to Enlightenment (Carrithers 45-47).

Siddhartha's journey ultimately brought him to Gaya, India, where, beneath the revered Bodhi tree, he attained Enlightenment and transformed into the Buddha. This pivotal realization marked a departure from the extreme practices he had previously undertaken. Siddhartha's profound understanding that a balanced approach was essential in his quest for wisdom underscores the significance of the middle path in Buddhism. The story of Siddhartha's transformation into the Buddha serves as a timeless narrative that resonates not only within the cultural and spiritual context of Nepal but also as a universally revered account of enlightenment and the pursuit of true wisdom (Hesse 78-80).

Unveiling the four noble truths (Dukkha (Suffering), Samudaya (Origin of Suffering), Nirodha (Cessation of Suffering), Magga (Path to the Cessation of Suffering)), illuminating the path to Nirvana, Siddhartha's teachings transformed into the Dharma—a profound truth and the essence of genuine religion. Following his enlightenment, he returned to humanity, sharing his Dharma with disciples and initiating the noble task of propagating the wheel of dharma. Buddha dedicated the final forty-five years of his life to this mission, spreading his wisdom across Nepal, India, and beyond, ultimately contributing to the evolution of a global religion. As he passed away at the age of eighty, his last words emphasized the transient nature of existence and the diligence required for salvation, particularly urging the priests to fervently pursue their own liberation (Brien).

Poetic Testament: The Waste Land

Eliot's seminal work, "The Waste Land", stands as a poetic testament to the disillusionment and fragmentation that characterized the post-World War I era. Within the intricate layers of this modernist masterpiece, Eliot draws upon diverse cultural and spiritual motifs, weaving a tapestry of existential despair and the quest for transcendence. Among the desolate landscapes of the poem, the presence of the Bodhisattva emerges as a compelling and enigmatic force, inviting readers to explore the intersections of Eastern philosophy and Western modernism.

The Bodhisattva, a central element in Mahayana Buddhism, traditionally embodies the enlightened being who delays their own nirvana to alleviate the suffering of others. In Eliot's "The Waste Land", this archetypal figure takes on a nuanced and transformative role, providing a lens through which to examine the pervasive spiritual crisis that permeates the poem.

Through an exploration of the Bodhisattva's presence, we rummage into Eliot's intricate interplay of Eastern and Western thought, as well as his commentary on the fractured nature of contemporary society.

Richards (1924), one of the earliest critics of "The Waste Land," highlighted the poem's fragmented and disorienting nature. His examination of the overall themes of disillusionment and cultural decay provides a foundational understanding for subsequent interpretations (12-34). Cleanth Brooks (1944), in his influential work "The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth," focused on the mythic structure of the poem. Brooks's analysis of mythic elements lays the groundwork for later scholars to delve into the symbolic nature of characters, including the Bodhisattva (228-42). Leavis (1962) approached "The Waste Land" from a moral and cultural standpoint, emphasizing its significance in the post-World War I context. Leavis's work sets the stage for critics to explore the ethical implications of Eliot's themes, including those related to spiritual desolation and potential redemption (21-32). Hugh Kenner (1959) analyses in his work "The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot" and delves into Eliot's use of myth and symbols. Kenner's focus on Eliot's intricate symbolism provides a framework for later scholars to explore the nuanced representations of characters, including the Bodhisattva (89-120).

Ellmann (1987), in her work *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound*, discusses Eliot's use of eastern philosophy and its impact on his work. Ellmann's exploration of eastern influences provides a context for understanding Eliot's engagement with non-Western concepts (45-78). Rainey (2005) incorporates his views in his work *Revisiting* "The Waste Land" and emphasizes the polyphonic nature of "The Waste Land." Rainey's attention to multiple voices in the poem opens avenues for scholars to explore the Bodhisattva as a distinct voice within the cacophony of perspectives (67-89).

King (1991) theorizes her concepts in her book, *Buddha Nature*, and introduces a theoretical framework that becomes crucial for examining the Bodhisattva in "The Waste Land". Her exploration of Buddha Nature and compassion offers a lens through which the Bodhisattva can be understood as a symbol of enlightenment and compassion within the poem. Buddha Nature refers to the inherent potential for enlightenment that is present within all sentient beings. It suggests that every individual has the capacity to awaken and achieve Buddhahood. This concept emphasizes the idea that one's true nature is essentially pure and free from inherent flaws. A Bodhisattva is an enlightened being who, out of compassion, has chosen to postpone his own entry into Nirvana (liberation from the cycle of birth and death) to assist others in achieving enlightenment (23-45).

Bodhisattvas are dedicated to alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings and helping them attain awakening. Enlightenment, or Nirvana, is the ultimate goal in Buddhism. It is a state of liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara) and the cessation of suffering. Attaining enlightenment involves realizing the true nature of reality, understanding the impermanence of phenomena and breaking free from attachment and ignorance. Compassion is a central virtue in Buddhism. It is the empathetic and active concern for the well-being and suffering of others. The practice of compassion is not only directed towards friends and loved ones

but extends to all sentient beings. Compassion is considered a key component on the path to enlightenment.

These critics collectively form a backdrop for the diverse perspectives on "The Waste Land" and the Bodhisattva within it. It is obvious that many critics have not observed and evaluated the role of the Bodhisattva in the poem. This paper makes an effort for the same.

Mahāyāna Buddhism: Bodhisattva

The concept of the Bodhisattva is a central idea in Buddhism, derived from the Sanskrit words "bodhi" (awakening or enlightenment) and "sattva" (being). In essence, a Bodhisattva is an enlightened being who delays their own entry into Nirvana to compassionately aid others in achieving enlightenment. In Theravada Buddhism, the term refers exclusively to Siddhartha Gautama before his enlightenment, including his previous rebirths as he traversed the path to becoming a Buddha. According to legend, Gautama renounced his princely life to pursue enlightenment, eventually becoming a fully enlightened Buddha (Salguero).

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva concept is similar but expanded. Mahayana posits the existence of numerous Buddhas, with the ultimate goal for followers being to become Buddhas themselves. Many practitioners undertake the Bodhisattva vow to be recognized as Bodhisattvas. Some Bodhisattvas have evolved into superhuman divine beings known as "celestial Bodhisattvas". Despite their immense powers, celestial Bodhisattvas intentionally delay Buddhahood to compassionately aid others. Prominent Bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara, Ksitigarbha, Manjushri, Samantabhadra and Vajrapani are revered worldwide, with devotees hoping they will bestow blessings. Celestial Bodhisattvas are believed to dwell in Pure Lands and manifest on earth in various forms, such as the Dalai Lama's manifestation of Avalokiteshvara (Salguero).

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, in his book *The Bodhisattva Vow* (1991) incorporates concept of Bodhisattva and the process of attainment of Buddhahood and Bodhisattva.

> The Sanskrit term 'Bodhisattva' is the name given to anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated bodhichitta, which is a spontaneous wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all living beings. (1)

The Sanskrit term "Bodhisattva" encapsulates the identity of individuals motivated by profound compassion and who have generated "bodhichitta". This term represents a spontaneous and altruistic wish to attain Buddhahood, not for personal liberation alone, but with the primary intention of benefiting all living beings.

The concept of Bodhisattva is deeply rooted in Mahāyāna Buddhism, which emphasizes the path of compassion and the aspiration to become a Buddha for the welfare of others. A Bodhisattva, driven by great compassion, is someone who dedicates himself or herself to the well-being and enlightenment of all sentient beings.

The key element of a Bodhisattva's motivation is the cultivation of bodhichitta. "Bodhichitta" can be understood as the awakened mind or the mind of enlightenment. It is characterized by the genuine and selfless wish to attain Buddhahood, the state of perfect enlightenment, in order to lead all beings out of suffering and into the ultimate state of liberation.

The Bodhisattva path involves the practice of compassion, ethical conduct, patience, perseverance and the development of wisdom. Bodhisattvas engage in both mundane and transcendent activities to alleviate the suffering of others and guide them on the path to enlightenment. Every person can be enlightened and become a Bodhisattva, "Since everyone has within their mental continuum the seeds of great compassion and bodhichitta, …….. it is possible for everyone to become a Bodhisattva" (1).

Within the mental continuum of every individual, there exist latent potentials or seeds of great compassion and bodhichitta, the altruistic aspiration for enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Every individual can be awakened and can cultivate the qualities of a Bodhisattva. It asserts that the potential for awakening and becoming a Bodhisattva is present within everyone, that requires higher moral discipline,

> The Bodhisattva's moral discipline is a higher moral discipline and it is the main path that leads to the ultimate happiness of great enlightenment. In general, moral discipline is a virtuous determination to abandon any non-virtuous action. For example, if by seeing the disadvantages of killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct we make a firm decision to refrain from such actions, this is moral discipline. Similarly, the determination to refrain from lying, divisive speech, hurtful speech, idle gossip, covetousness, malice, and holding wrong views is also moral discipline. (1)

Significance of the Bodhisattva's moral discipline stands as a superior form of ethical conduct, positioning it as the primary path leading to the ultimate happiness of great enlightenment. It further provides a general understanding of moral discipline, describing it as a virtuous commitment to abstain from non-virtuous actions. The examples given illustrate the application of moral discipline in refraining from harmful behaviors and cultivating positive qualities. The moral discipline of a Bodhisattva is considered elevated and superior. This moral conduct goes beyond personal ethical standards and is oriented toward the altruistic goal of attaining enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. It involves a selfless commitment to ethical principles that contribute to the well-being of others.

Bodhisattva's moral discipline is not merely a set of rules but a transformative path leading to the ultimate state of happiness, which is enlightenment. By engaging in virtuous actions and refraining from non-virtuous ones, the Bodhisattva paves the way for spiritual progress and the realization of great enlightenment. The general definition of moral discipline is provided as a virtuous determination to abandon non-virtuous actions. Non-virtuous actions are those that cause harm, disrupt harmony and hinder spiritual progress. Moral discipline involves making a firm decision to refrain from such actions.

Specific examples of moral discipline are given, highlighting the commitment to abstain from

actions such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, hurtful speech, idle gossip, covetousness, malice, and holding wrong views. Each of these examples represents a category of harmful behavior that a practitioner commits to avoiding. It defines moral discipline as a commitment to abstain from harmful actions and provides examples to illustrate the breadth of ethical considerations involved in this practice. The ultimate goal is framed as the attainment of great enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Mind is the basic tool of attainment of enlightenment, "This is a mind that aspires to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others but does not yet engage in the actual practices of the Bodhisattva's training. After we have taken the Bodhisattva vows our bodhichitta transforms into engaging bodhichitta. This is a mind that actually engages in the practices that lead to the final destination of Buddhahood" (7).

The extract describes the progression of the mind in the context of Bodhisattva practice, particularly focusing on the transformation of bodhichitta. It introduces two stages: "aspiring bodhichitta" and "engaging bodhichitta," each marking a distinct phase in the Bodhisattva's spiritual journey. Aspiring bodhichitta is a mindset that aims to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of others. In this stage, the practitioner possesses the genuine aspiration and intention to attain Buddhahood, driven by compassion and altruism. However, at this point, the individual has not yet commenced the actual practices outlined in the Bodhisattva's training. The transformative aspect occurs when one takes the Bodhisattva vows. These vows mark a formal commitment to the Bodhisattva path, signifying a deeper level of dedication and engagement. After taking these vows, the initial aspiring bodhichitta evolves into the second stage. Engaging bodhichitta characterizes a mind that not only aspires to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others but also actively engages in the specific practices prescribed by the Bodhisattva's training. This stage involves putting the aspirational mindset into action through various practices, such as cultivating compassion, ethical conduct, patience, perseverance and wisdom.

The practices associated with engaging bodhichitta are described as the means to reach the ultimate destination of Buddhahood. These practices are transformative and serve to purify the mind, accumulate positive merit and develop the necessary qualities for achieving enlightenment. It outlines the progression from aspiring bodhichitta to engaging bodhichitta in the context of Bodhisattva practice. It underscores the significance of formal commitment through the Bodhisattva vows and highlights that engaging bodhichitta involves actively participating in the practices that lead to the final goal of Buddhahood, benefiting not only oneself but all sentient beings. The book *The Bodhisattva Vow* (1991) enlists six perfections that guide to the enlightenment, "The six perfections are the highway to enlightenment" (81). It highlights the importance of the six perfections in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, portraying them as the pathway leading to enlightenment. Each perfection represents a fundamental aspect of moral and spiritual development, offering a comprehensive guide for Bodhisattvas aspiring to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The perfection of giving encompasses three aspects: *giving material things*, giving Dharma (spiritual teachings), and giving fearlessness. This perfection emphasizes the selfless act of

generosity, both in terms of material possessions and the sharing of wisdom. Offering fearlessness involves providing emotional support and protection to others. *Moral discipline* is divided into three sub-perfections: the moral discipline of restraint, the moral discipline of gathering virtuous Dharmas (spiritual practices) and the moral discipline of benefiting living beings. This perfection involves maintaining ethical conduct, cultivating virtuous qualities, and actively working for the welfare of all beings. The *perfection of patience* is outlined in three forms: the patience of not retaliating, the patience of voluntarily enduring suffering and the patience of definitely thinking about Dharma. Patience is cultivated through the intentional restraint from reacting negatively to provocations, willingly enduring hardships and deep contemplation on spiritual teachings.

Perfection of effort signifies the diligent application of energy in the pursuit of virtuous actions and spiritual progress. It involves a wholehearted commitment to the Bodhisattva path, consistently working towards the alleviation of suffering and the cultivation of positive qualities.

Perfection of mental stabilization, or concentration, is a crucial aspect of the Bodhisattva's training. It involves the development of focused and tranquil states of mind, enabling practitioners to deepen their understanding, enhance mindfulness, and attain higher states of consciousness. The *perfection of wisdom* is the culmination of the six perfections and represents the highest form of insight and understanding. It involves the direct realization of the nature of reality, the emptiness of inherent existence and the interconnectedness of all phenomena.

The six perfections-giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, mental stabilization and wisdom-form the foundational framework for the Bodhisattva's journey to enlightenment. Practicing these perfections leads to the development of virtues, the accumulation of merit, and ultimately, the attainment of Buddhahood, embodying compassion and wisdom for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Textual Analysis

Representation of the Bodhisattva in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" reveals a rich tapestry of symbolic and thematic elements that contribute to the overall exploration of spiritual desolation within the poem. Focused on specific passages where the Bodhisattva is referenced or alluded to, this analysis delves into Eliot's poetic construction to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in this enigmatic figure.

The initial reference to the Bodhisattva occurs in the opening section of the poem "The Burial of the Dead", where Eliot draws upon Eastern religious imagery with the Sanskrit chant "Shantih shantih shantih." This invocation of peace, traditionally used to conclude Vedic and Upanishadic texts, introduces a transcendent element, hinting at the Bodhisattva's role as a source of peace and enlightenment in the face of desolation. In the second section "A Game of Chess", the Bodhisattva is subtly hinted through the chess game between the typist and the young man carbuncular. The imagery of the chessboard, a symbol of strategy and foresight, suggests a cosmic game where the Bodhisattva may play a role in navigating the complexities

of human existence amidst spiritual decay.

The Bodhisattva is more explicitly referenced in third section "The Fire Sermon" through allusions to Buddha's Fire Sermon. Eliot incorporates Eastern religious elements, depicting a modernized version of the sermon in a post-war, industrial context. The Bodhisattva, traditionally associated with compassion, may be seen as a figure guiding individuals through the flames of worldly attachments. In the concluding sections "Death by Water" and "What the Thunder Said", the water motif and the thunderous voice contribute to the Bodhisattva's multifaceted presence. Water, often symbolizing purification and renewal in Eastern thought, connects with the Bodhisattva's potential for transformative redemption. The thunderous voice may be interpreted as a cosmic proclamation, echoing the Bodhisattva's call for awakening.

Eliot's use of fragmented language and diverse cultural references contributes to the ambiguity surrounding the Bodhisattva. The linguistic choices mirror the fractured nature of the modern world, emphasizing the Bodhisattva's potential role as a unifying force amid cultural disarray. Applying Sallie B. King's theory of Buddha Nature, the Bodhisattva emerges as a symbol of inherent enlightenment within all beings. Eliot's portrayal aligns with King's framework, suggesting that the Bodhisattva serves as a beacon of compassion and awakening, transcending the individual and societal desolation depicted in the poem. The Bodhisattva's presence is interwoven with other characters and voices in the poem, contributing to the polyphonic nature of "The Waste Land". The Bodhisattva's role as a compassionate guide contrasts with the bleakness of other perspectives, offering a potential path towards spiritual renewal. King's concept of Buddha Nature is very relevant to be mentioned here,

> The concept of Buddha nature, though little discussed in Western surveys of Buddhism, is one of the most important ideas in East Asian Buddhism. In its simplest form, the Buddha nature concept provides the answer to a question with which the ancient Chinese were very much concerned: Are all beings capable of attaining Buddhahood, or are there some who will never be free of the sufferings of *samsdra?* Buddha nature theory answers without equivocation: "All sentient beings possess the Buddha nature" and thus are guaranteed the realization of Buddhahood. Not only human beings, but all beings born and reborn in the six destinies—hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, human beings, and gods—are promised that Buddhahood awaits them. The belief in the *icchantikaf* the one forever incapable of attaining Buddhahood, is expressly rejected. At its basis, then, the Buddha nature concept is an optimistic and encouraging doctrine (King 1).

The concept of Buddha nature is a central idea in East Asian Buddhism. It addresses the question of whether all beings have the potential to attain Buddhahood or if some are bound to suffer endlessly in samsara. The Buddha nature theory asserts that every sentient being possesses the Buddha nature, ensuring the possibility of realizing Buddhahood. This includes beings in various realms like hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, demons, humans, and gods. The belief in the icchantika, those forever incapable of attaining Buddhahood, is explicitly

rejected. In essence, the Buddha nature concept is an optimistic and encouraging doctrine, affirming the potential for enlightenment in all beings.

In the opening lines, "April is the cruellest month, breeding Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing Memory and desire, stirring Dull roots with spring rain" (1-4), Eliot presents a contrasting and paradoxical image of April, typically associated with spring and renewal, as the "cruellest month." The mention of breeding lilacs out of the dead land suggests a form of regeneration, but it also emphasizes a certain lifelessness or barrenness in the landscape. This sets the tone for the broader exploration of desolation and spiritual decay in the poem.

The phrase "mixing memory and desire" points to a theme that runs throughout the poem: the intertwining of past experiences and yearnings for the future. The confusion or blending of memory and desire can be seen as a kind of disorientation or loss of clarity in the human experience. This blending is further emphasized by the image of stirring "dull roots with spring rain". The rain, typically associated with nourishment and growth, is here presented as something that only stirs or awakens dormant elements, perhaps suggesting a lack of true vitality or authentic renewal.

The mention of "dull roots" can be interpreted metaphorically, representing a sense of stagnation or a disconnect from the deeper, more meaningful aspects of life. The idea that humans are confusing the "spiritual and emotional roles of sex with the physical, carnal roles of sex" aligns with Eliot's broader exploration of the modern world's spiritual desolation, where traditional values and meaningful connections have been eroded or distorted.

T.S. Eliot portrays the degradation of human intimacy in "The Waste Land". Eliot explores the consequences of the modern world's spiritual desolation and the erosion of meaningful connections. One of the sections where this theme is prominent is in the second part of the poem, titled "A Game of Chess." Here, Eliot uses a variety of voices and perspectives to depict scenes of failed or corrupted relationships. The notion that humanity tragically transforms the sacred act of love-making into a clattering, mindless, loveless machine aligns with the broader theme of the dehumanizing effects of modernity and the disintegration of traditional values. Eliot portrays the dehumanizing effects of modern life, where traditional values have been eroded, and meaningful connections have been replaced by mechanical, exploitative, and destructive behaviors. The tragic transformation of love-making into a soulless machine becomes a metaphor for the larger societal issues Eliot explores in the poem.

In Section I, "The Burial of the Dead", there is a direct reference to a conversation between Cleopatra and Antony from Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra" (1607). Eliot re-contextualizes and repurposes these lines (77) to convey a sense of disillusionment and misunderstanding within a relationship.

The man's inaudible answer to his lover's whining suggests a lack of effective communication or engagement in the relationship. The phrase "We are in rats' alley where the dead men lost their bones" (115-116) further contributes to the atmosphere of desolation and decay. The reference to a "rats' alley" evokes a sense of squalor and degradation, and the imagery of "dead

men lost their bones" implies a place of death and destruction.

The lines suggest that the relationship is not what one or both of the individuals intended or hoped for. Eliot seems to express a sense of disappointment and the recognition that the reality of the relationship falls far short of their expectations. The use of literary allusions, such as the one to Shakespeare, adds layers of meaning and complexity to Eliot's depiction of the disillusionment and decay that pervade "The Waste Land".

"The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king So rudely forced..." (99) alludes to the myth of Philomela, a tragic figure in Greek mythology. In the myth, Philomela is the sister of Procne, and both are daughters of King Pandion of Athens. Procne is married to King Tereus of Thrace. The story takes a dark turn when Tereus lusts after Philomela and, unable to control his desires, rapes her. To prevent her from revealing the crime, Tereus cuts out Philomela's tongue.

The reference to Philomela in Eliot's poem is a metaphorical and symbolic element. It serves as a way to convey themes of violence, violation, and the loss of voice. The "barbarous king" represents the oppressive forces that violently silence and mutilate the innocent. The image of Philomela being "rudely forced" highlights the brutality of the act and the violation of her agency. This particular reference contributes to the overall exploration of desolation, decay, and the consequences of human folly in the modern world.

The lines "Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said, what you get married for if you don't want children?" (163-164) present a dialogue that touches upon the complexities of relationships, marriage, and societal expectations regarding family and procreation. The speaker seems to be addressing a person named Albert, questioning why someone would get married if they have no intention of having children.

The above lines may be interpreted in several ways. On one level, it could be a reflection on societal norms and expectations regarding marriage. Traditionally, marriage has often been associated with the idea of starting a family and having children. The speaker, in a somewhat blunt manner, is questioning the purpose of entering into a marital union if the intention is not to fulfill this societal expectation of procreation. The reference to marriage and children might be seen as a commentary on the breakdown of traditional values and the disintegration of social and familial structures in the modern world.

Eliot captures a sense of emptiness, disconnection and the breakdown of meaningful communication in the modern world through the lines "Exploring hands encounter no defense; His vanity requires no response, and makes a welcome of indifference" (240-242).

In these lines, Eliot captures a sense of emptiness, disconnection, and the breakdown of meaningful communication in the modern world. The speaker describes a situation where attempts to connect with someone ("exploring hands") are met with no resistance or defense. The use of the word "defence" suggests a lack of barriers or emotional boundaries, but this lack of resistance is not a positive thing. Instead, it reflects a certain hollowness or emotional numbness.

The next two lines emphasize the self-centered nature of the individual being described. The person's vanity is so pronounced that it doesn't seek or require any response from others. This self-absorption is so complete that it "makes a welcome of indifference." In other words, the person is not bothered by the indifference or lack of response from others because their vanity is self-sufficient.

The emptiness and lack of genuine interaction described here highlight a sense of spiritual desolation and the difficulties of forming authentic connections in a society marked by fragmentation and disillusionment. Eliot often explores the disintegration of traditional values and the challenges of finding meaning and connection in a world that has been scarred by war and social upheaval.

Section IV, "Death by Water" has the lines "Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass: 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over'" (251-252) in which Eliot presents a glimpse into the inner thoughts of a character, likely a woman. The speaker describes her brain allowing "one half-formed thought to pass," suggesting a lack of clarity or coherence in her thinking. This could indicate an intercourse which is over.

In Section IV, "Death by Water", the lines "She smoothes her hair with automatic hand, and puts a record on the gramophone" (255-256) present an image of a woman engaged in routine and seemingly mundane activities. The act of smoothing her hair with an "automatic hand" suggests a mechanical or detached manner in which she goes about her daily grooming, emphasizing a lack of genuine engagement or emotion.

The second line mentions her putting a record on the gramophone. This action, too, is described in a matter-of-fact way. The gramophone, a predecessor to the modern record player, was a common device for playing music during Eliot's time. The choice of a record and the act of playing it may imply a desire for some form of distraction, entertainment, or perhaps an attempt to fill a void with external stimuli. These lines contribute to the theme of emptiness, alienation, and the sense of a world where personal connections and meaningful experiences are lacking.

The idea that loves and fidelity are dependent upon sex suggests a reduction of love to a mere physical act, emphasizing the transactional nature of relationships in the modern world portrayed by Eliot. In this context, love and fidelity are contingent on the fulfillment of sexual desires, rather than being rooted in emotional intimacy and commitment.

The advice given to Lil by her friend further exemplifies this bleak view of relationships. The friend suggests that if Lil doesn't satisfy her partner's sexual needs, there are others who will. This reinforces a sense of competition and disposability in relationships, where individuals are easily replaceable based on physical gratification.

The mention of Lil's recent abortion adds another layer to the narrative. The friend's question, "What you get married for if you don't want children?" underscores societal expectations and norms regarding marriage and family. In a society that traditionally associates' marriage with

procreation, Lil's decision not to have children challenges these norms and may be met with judgment or confusion.

In part III, "The Fire Sermon", there is a scene where a typist is preparing her house for a young male guest, referred to as the "young man carbuncular" (248). The encounter is portrayed as devoid of genuine emotion, and it seems to be more about fulfilling a societal expectation or obligation than about a meaningful connection.

The lack of love or emotional involvement is emphasized by the statement that, once the young man leaves, the typist is "hardly aware of her departed lover" (249). This suggests a transactional nature to the relationship, where the physical encounter is detached from any deeper emotional or personal connection. The use of the term "lover" here is somewhat ironic, as it implies a romantic involvement that is clearly absent in the aftermath of the encounter.

The description of the girl being "glad it's over" (252) further underscores the idea that this sexual encounter is treated as a chore or obligation rather than a willingly shared experience. The tone of relief or satisfaction at its conclusion suggests a lack of enthusiasm or genuine desire for the encounter.

The interpretation of this scene as demonstrating the use of sex as a means for obtaining power is valid. The dynamics of the encounter seem to be influenced by societal expectations, where individuals, particularly women, may engage in certain actions to conform to social norms or gain some form of control or acceptance.

The relationship between the typist and the young man carbuncular is indeed depicted as transactional, devoid of genuine emotion, and driven by self-interest. The typist may be participating in this liaison for status, money or power aligns with the theme of the degradation of relationships and the transactional nature of interactions in the modern world as presented in the poem. The young man, despite his unattractive and aggressive traits, is perceived as successful, and the typist's engagement with him may be a calculated decision based on what she can gain from the association.

The phrase "assaults at once" (239) implies a forceful and perhaps coercive initiation of the sexual encounter, highlighting the one-sided and exploitative nature of the interaction. The lack of refusal from the typist may suggest a sense of resignation or a recognition of the transactional nature of their relationship.

From the final section, "What the Thunder Said", the line "bats with baby faces" (380) serve as a haunting image to underscore the theme of spiritual desolation and decay that permeates the entire poem. The phrase "bats with baby faces" is a vivid and surreal image that can be interpreted in several ways.

On one level, the imagery could represent a distortion or corruption of innocence. Bats, typically associated with darkness, night and the macabre, are juxtaposed with "baby faces," which traditionally symbolize purity and vulnerability. The combination of these elements suggests a perversion or corruption of something inherently innocent, perhaps alluding to

the degradation of human values and the loss of purity in the modern world.

The image of "bats with baby faces" may symbolize the distorted and corrupted state of humanity, where even the most innocent aspects are tainted and defiled. Eliot refers to the loveless, lifeless and murderous sex in the poem. The image could be a metaphor for the consequences of detached and mechanized relationships. The distortion of innocence in the image may reflect the dehumanizing effects of loveless and exploitative sexual encounters, where the sacred act of love-making has been reduced to something grotesque and soulless.

The poem has the overall theme of decay, disillusionment and the consequences of a world that has lost its spiritual vitality. The surreal and vivid imagery used by Eliot serves to leave a lasting and unsettling impression on the reader, reinforcing the somber tone and the bleak vision presented throughout "The Waste Land".

From "What the Thunder Said", there is a quote from the Upanishads, ancient Hindu philosophical texts, and they convey a moral and spiritual imperative to the reader. "Datta" means "give," and Eliot encourages generosity and selflessness. The phrase "the awful daring of a moment's surrender which an age of prudence can never retract" (405-406) suggests the idea of giving oneself fully and without reservation, even in situations where caution and prudence might typically prevail.

This could be interpreted as a call to embrace and celebrate the potential beauty and sacredness of human experiences, including those associated with love and sexuality.

"Dayadhvam" encourages compassion, urging individuals to show understanding and empathy toward those who may not recognize or appreciate the spiritual and loving aspects that should accompany intimate relationships. The idea is that individuals who misuse or misunderstand the sanctity of human sexuality are suffering due to their ignorance, and compassion can be a transformative force.

"Damyata" advises self-control and restraint, challenging individuals not to be dragged back by the barren and unrefined aspects of their past. The phrase "the arid plain behind" (424) suggests a metaphorical landscape of spiritual desolation or wasteland. The imperative is to move forward and not let past mistakes or shortcomings hinder personal growth and transformation.

The conclusion, "Shantih shantih shantih" (end line of the poem), is a traditional closing invocation for peace in Hinduism. It signifies a desire for inner and outer peace and is repeated for emphasis. Eliot, through these Upanishadic references, is offering a moral and spiritual guidance to navigate the challenges presented in "The Waste Land." The journey through the wasteland becomes meaningful if individuals can emerge from it with a sense of generosity, compassion, self-control and a commitment to personal and spiritual growth. The image of "fishing" (425) suggests an active and deliberate seeking, reinforcing the idea that the journey through the wasteland is a quest for self-discovery and enlightenment by which one becomes a Bodhisattva.

Conclusion

The exploration of the Bodhisattva in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" reveals a multifaceted and symbolic figure deeply embedded in the thematic complexities of spiritual desolation within the modernist landscape. Through a close textual analysis and the application of Sallie B. King's theory of *Buddha Nature* (1992), the Bodhisattva emerges as a guiding force, embodying compassion, enlightenment and the potential for renewal.

The opening section of the poem, with its invocation of "Shantih shantih shantih," sets the tone for the Bodhisattva's presence, suggesting a source of peace and enlightenment in the face of desolation. As the poem unfolds, the Bodhisattva is subtly alluded to in various sections, such as the chess game in "A Game of Chess" and the allusions to Buddha's Fire Sermon in "The Fire Sermon". These references, when examined through the lens of Sallie B. King's theory, align with the Bodhisattva's mission to guide individuals through the complexities of existence and the flames of worldly attachments.

The water motif in "Death by Water" and the thunderous voice in "What the Thunder Said" contribute to the Bodhisattva's symbolic role as a force of purification and cosmic proclamation. Eliot's linguistic choices, while reflecting the fragmented nature of the modern world, also suggest the Bodhisattva's compassionate message, potentially obscured amidst the challenges of spiritual desolation.

Sallie B. King's theory of *Buddha Nature* enriches the analysis by highlighting the inherent potential for enlightenment within all beings. The Bodhisattva, as a manifestation of this compassionate nature, becomes a unifying force amid the polyphonic narrative of "The Waste Land." The interconnectedness of characters and the cultural synthesis present in Eliot's work align with King's emphasis on the universal aspects of Buddha Nature.

In the broader context of modernist literature, Eliot's portrayal of the Bodhisattva contributes to the ongoing discourse on the search for meaning and redemption in a world marked by fragmentation and despair. The Bodhisattva becomes a beacon of hope, offering a potential path towards spiritual renewal and awakening.

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