

Myth, Sex, and Animality in T. S. Eliot's "Sweeney Among the Nightingales"

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Abstract

Many critical works on T. S. Eliot's use of myths, in his poems, have probed the subject in relation to his critical essays on the mythical method, following the guidelines of "impersonality" which requires the author's emotional detachment in the process of artistic creation. Thus, these critical works have not solicited attention to how Eliot's use of myth veers profoundly from his theoretical stance. This paper evinces that in his poem, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," the poet employs myths, which are concerned with gender antagonism and corrupt sexual relations to consolidate his misogynistic views and preserve the old patriarchal system. Significantly, misogyny in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" remains unexamined by Eliot's scholars.

Keywords: Myth, misogyny, sex, animality, T. S. Eliot, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales".

1-Introduction

Myths are part of the tradition, which Eliot endorses and urges authors to imbibe. He used his “mythical method” to control and order a contemporary history that he saw as an “immense panorama of futility and anarchy”(p.177). So, Eliot resorts to the mythical to impose order on a chaotic reality and to achieve a coherent and ordered point of view in art. However, his allusions to myths as sacred texts that explain human existence can be seen as a retreat to the past patriarchal system, ensuring continuity between the past and the present in a very particular way. Sigg contends that myth shows the similitude between the past and the present “implying that people behave in one sense outside time, that on some level their consciousness preserves some consistency-some ‘identical reference’-despite time’s changes”(2009, p.182) Some patriarchal behavioral patterns, which are repeated throughout history, are conveyed through myths which incorporate many attitudes towards gender. Eliot praises James Joyce’s *Ulysses* profusely because it mediates the Odysseus myth to tell a modern story. His interest in the mythic method is due to its “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity”(Eliot, 1975, p.177). For Eliot, the mythical method is a means of restoring order; it is “simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (Eliot, 1975, p.177). What Eliot, probably, means by order, which is disrupted in the modern age, is the patriarchal order, which is threatened by the New Woman¹. Thus, he uses myths as powerful patriarchal narratives that reveal explanations and truths about human nature. In “The Psychopathology of Everyday Life,” Freud, who relied on myths to coin some of his theories, stated that “a large part of the mythological view of the world [...] is nothing but psychology projected into the external world” (p.1328).

Many critics and scholars, astonishingly, ignore the gender aspect of myths that Eliot uses in his poems. They often read his resort to myths as an escape from modernity’s rationalism and materialism². Our view is that Eliot appropriates myths, as narratives of violence, to express his negative attitude towards women. Myths serve to express and strengthen male authors’ misogyny because, according to Girard, all myths originate from violence against an innocent victim. In his words, “all myths must have their roots in real acts of violence against real victims” (1986, p. 25) Eliot’s poem, “Sweeney Among the Nightingales,” expresses a vehement indictment of the feminine through the use of Greek myths. The choice of the latter is due to the fact

¹ The term “New Woman”, which was coined in 1894, refers to the modern woman who rejects the Victorian gender divisions, which pressures society to redefine femininity; hence, she becomes a major threat to the patriarchal norm of the status quo. The New Woman strives to rise above her traditionally assigned and subservient role and to achieve recognition as something closer to and equal with men of the time. She is well-educated, independent, and assertive.

² For further readings, see: Donoghue, D. (1997). Yeats, Eliot, and the Mythical Method. *The Sevanee Review*, 105 (2), 206-226.

that the vitriolic attitude towards women originated in ancient Greece. According to Gilmore, "[w]oman-hating in the West begins with the ancient Greeks, whose earliest myths and poems include continual reference to depraved and vicious females. The Greeks were on their guard against the she-demons, enchantresses, Sirens, Harpies, lamias, Furies, and equally horrific, wicked step mothers"(2001, p.115). In a related vein, Zajko states that "classical myth possesses huge cultural authority and has operated, for the most part, to perpetuate the oppression of women" (2007, p.396).

2- Literature Review

At the outset, it is important to evince Eliot's apparent theoretical position regarding myths. In his essay, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", Eliot spoke of myth as a means of "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (p.177). For him, it is a scientific process which rivals the modus operandi of "Einstein" and defines "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (p.177). Eliot went on to say that it "is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to be the first contemporary to be conscience" (p.177). It is, in conclusion, "a method" which poets "must pursue". In the same essay, Eliot stated that "instead of the narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art" (p.178).

From Eliot's essay, one might deduce that his use of the mythical method is for two main reasons. First, it was a response to the collapse of culture brought about by the crisis of modernity. Hence, his use of mythic references stems from his interest in the possibility of redeeming the spiritually bankrupt society by restoring the social order and the spiritual values of the past. The second reason for his use of myth is aesthetic or artistic. In Eliot's terms, it is an ordering structure which makes "the modern world possible for art"(p.178).

Some of Eliot's critics have followed his prescription. They opined that Eliot alludes to myths for artistic reasons and to express his disgust with the modern sterile age. According to Smith, the ordering principle underlying Eliot's use of myth is that of unity. He stated that the structure of Eliot's poems allegedly achieve "two kinds of unity, the one psychological, the other mythic"(p.97). In the same vein, Jones stated that Eliot's deployment of mythological materials is for artistic reasons. He supported his claim by quoting Eliot who avowed that his use of myth is for "making the modern world possible for art"(p.178). Jones went further to suggest that Eliot is "not...dominated by myth; he stands outside it and contemplates it as a form of thought ...for illustration and decoration"(p.59). For Jones, Eliot uses myth "merely as a structural device"(p.294). Another critic, Manganro, assumed that myths, which are "sacred sites" in Eliot's work, are deliberately "ambiguous"(p.109). My view is that Eliot's use of myth veers from what he proposes in his essay. As this paper evinces, his use of myths is meant to express his deep misogyny. Significantly, critics'

discussion of the use of myth in Eliot's poetry is only in reference to his poem "The Waste Land". The use of myth, in the other poems, remains largely unexamined.

In fact, many poets find "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" ambiguous, and few attempts have been made to interpret it. In his reading of the poem, Mathissen (1935) assumed that Eliot created a sense of foreboding to metaphorically assassinate Sweeney. This interpretation is inadequate because it ignores the comic tone of the poem. Another critic, Gwynn (1954), suggested that the poem's meaning is conveyed in the original epigraph which hints at moral degradation in the modern age. In his critical analysis of the poem, Eliot's prominent critic, Davidson (1966), asked the meaty question whether Sweeney is worth killing or not. Significantly, among the thousands of articles lavished on Eliot, there is, to the best of my knowledge, no critical work which deals exclusively with misogyny in Eliot's "Sweeney Among the Nightingales". This subject has gone hitherto overlooked in the poem's reception history, because it would seem unbelievable in the case of a canonical author who is deemed to be the saint of Modernism because of his theory of impersonality and his religious sensibility. Drawing on Eliot's mythical references, this paper argues that Eliot's use of the latter is to vent his pent up repulsion for women.

3-Myth, Sexual promiscuity, and Misogyny in Eliot's "Sweeney Among the Nightingales"

Eliot's poem "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" opens with an epigraph from *Agamemnon*, a play written by the Greek playwright Aeschylus. The epigraph is written in Greek, and it is translated as follows, "Alas, I am struck deep with a mortal blow"(Eliot, 1936, p.59). Agamemnon uttered these words while he was dying. Significantly, Aeschylus's tragedy revolves around sexual violence and abuse. In the play, Clytemnestra and her lover prepared to murder her husband Agamemnon who had been absent for ten years, fighting in the Trojan War. After returning from the war, with his mistress Cassandra, Clytemnestra killed him in the bath. Hence, she becomes nothing less than representative of the monstrous woman in Greek mythology. Eliot's reference to the myth of Agamemnon implies that women, in the poem, constitute a real threat to men. It also evokes the violence of heterosexual relations. Girard remarks that in the ancient Greek tradition, sexuality "leads to quarrels, jealous rages, mortal combats. It is a permanent source of disorder even within the most harmonious of communities" (1988, p. 38). And the act of murder is the ultimate act of violence. The story of Agamemnon reveals Clytemnestra's stepping beyond the borders of humanity, because she murdered her husband who is supposed to be the most intimate person to her. However, *Agamemnon*, which is a story about treachery and murder by women, is also about women's victimization. Before being murdered by his wife, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter. He also took Cassandra from Troy and forced her to be his concubine. The same is true in this poem; Sweeney also has many prostitutes, which means that his sexual deviant desire is a reiteration and a reenactment of ravaging desire in Greek myths. In fact, human history is described as a nightmare of sexual violence, savagery, and barbarism. Girard states that desire for violence is not a direct and original response to an object,

but it is rather a repetition of a past event, which is considered as an original reality. In other words, desire does not emanate spontaneously from the subject. It is not only caused by biological instincts, but it is also psychological. Girard writes, "We must understand that desire itself is essentially mimetic, directed toward an object desired by the model" (1988, p.164). In accordance with Girard's theory, desire, in the modern times, is an imitation of desire in the primitive times. Significantly, "Apeneck Sweeney" (59) whose nickname is a pun on ape, which means to imitate, is a slavish imitator of overtly sensual men like Agamemnon. We can say that his women are subject to the same violence as Cassandra.

Misogyny, in the poem, is evinced in Sweeney's fantasies of violence against women, which are reinforced by alluding to myths of fierce sexual aggression. According to Freud's psychoanalytical school, heterosexuality is intermingled with violence. As he states in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality", "the sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness-a desire to subjugate" (p.1484). The intersection between sexuality and violence is reinforced by the poem's references to the myth of Philomel. The poem originally included a second epigraph from an Elizabethan play entitled *The Raigne of King Edward the Third*. In this play, King Edward the Third fell in love with the countess of Salisburg whose husband was absent at war. King Edward was very impressed by the woman's voice, which he compared to the voice of the nightingale. King Edward utters the words of the epigraph enquiring, "And why should I speak of the nightingale? / The nightingale sings of adulterate wrong" (1996, p. 381). The myth of Philomel is well known, but it needs to be recounted briefly. King Tereus was the husband of Procnee. One day, he went to fetch his sister in law, Philomel, because her sister Procnee missed her. On their way to the palace, Tereus raped Philomel and cut her tongue to prevent her from telling her story. However, Philomel wove her personal tragic story of rape in a tapestry. When Procnee knew, she conspired with her sister to take revenge. They cooked his son and served him to Tereus as a dish. The father, horrified by the deed, tried to kill them both, but Philomel was transformed into a nightingale and Procnee into a swallow. The myth of Philomel reveals women's oppression by men in a patriarchal society. Like the Greek myths of Circe, Clytemnestra, and Medea, this myth also represents women as destructive. Procnee's monstrosity, for instance, is evident in feeding her husband the flesh of their dearest son.³

The nightingale, in this epigraph and in the poem's title, is a euphemism for sex. It brings to mind the tragic myth of Philomel, which is a story of sexual violence and cannibalism. Eliot's representation of misogyny is infused with the masculine pleasures of consumption and sex. He draws on this mythic story to show the nexus between rape and cannibalism. For Adams, the woman is considered as a commodity for satiating men's greed. Her body is treated as an edible object. In Adam's words, "women feel like a piece of meat after being raped" (2010, p.81).

³ For a detailed account of the myth of Philomel, see:
Ovid. (1958). *The metamorphoses: A complete new version*. New York: The Viking Press.

The myth of Philomel shows the close relationship between sexuality and violence. The voice of the nightingale becomes symbolic of mutilating and silencing the feminine. Cannibalism, which is often dismissed when discussing the myth of Philomel, evinces the analogy between sexual violence and meat eating. Adams states, “Sexual violence and meat eating, which appear to be discrete forms of violence, find a point of intersection in the absent referent. Cultural images of sexual violence, and actual sexual violence, often rely on our knowledge of how animals are butchered and eaten” (2010, p.68). In a patriarchal culture, women are treated like animals. Similar to the nightingales, they belong to the realm of the inhuman. In drawing a parallel between butchering animals and sexual violence, Adams finds that the two acts share three main processes: Objectification, fragmentation, and consumption (2010, p.73). Not surprisingly, in Eliot’s poem as well, women are viewed as objects of rapacious desire. They are fragmented by their description in terms of corporeal parts. They are also consumed by men’s gaze. Thus, Eliot writes: “[T]he man with heavy eyes [...] Leaves the room and reappears / Outside the window, leaning in, / Branches of wistaria” (1963, p.60). Moreover, their description as nightingales associates them with the sexual tragedy of Philomel. In fact, the myth of Philomel is in tune with the panorama of futility and anarchy, which marks the modern age. The human tragedy is similar. Like in the Greek myths, the relationships between the sexes, in Eliot’s critical view of modernity, are characterized by violence, murder, adultery, incest, and infidelity. Women are often the victims in this war of the sexes.

Misogyny, in the poem, is clearly evident in the portrayal of Rachal as a savage and aggressive woman, who “tears at the grapes with murderous paws” (1963, p.59). The line does not just suggest Rachal’s animality but also her sexual appetite and violence. Her eating of the fruit also denotes her inferiority because, in the patriarchal myth, vegetables and fruits are women’s food, whereas meat is man’s food. In this regard, Adams writes, “Women, second-class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables, fruits, and grains rather than meat [...] mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity” (2010, p.48). Masculinity is associated with war and violence, whereas femininity is associated with vegetarianism and pacifism. Thus, vegetarianism is a rejection of male control and violence since virility is interlinked with meat eating.

Also, other women, in the poem, are represented as lustful and vulgar. This representation tallies with the patriarchal myth in which sex is used “to denigrate woman; she is the flesh, its delights and dangers” (De Beauvoir, 1956, p. 161). The “person in the Spanish cape,” for instance, “[t]ries to sit on Sweeney’s knees / Slips and pulls the table cloth/ Overturns a coffee-cup” (Eliot, 1963, p.59). Her overturning of the coffee cups, which might be read as a rejection of bourgeois drawing room behavior, suggests her aggression, her carnivorous and sexual consumption. It also evinces her emotional derangement. It is plausible to think that her failure to garner and clamour Sweeney’s attention induces her anger. Her behavior also contributes to

the impression that he pushed her down. In fact, there is a total absence of harmony in heterosexual relations in the poem.

The woman, in the poem, is represented as "Other," which is emphasized by her foreign nationality. While Rachal is Jewish, the other woman is Spanish. Women's Otherness is due to their race and their gender. Let us consider that in the Greek world, slaves, women, and foreigners were viewed as Others. Rachal's nationality is important because in her, the patriarchal myth conflates with the Jewish myth. Eliot expresses his utter contempt for sexuality not just by comparing sexual intercourse to animality but also by using the figure of the Jew. His anti-Semitism can be read as a translucent veil for his misogyny, which is probably indebted to the contemporary sentiment and the long list of stereotypes lavished upon the Jews. As for Christians, they are considered as murderers. They are also made responsible for secularism and liberalism, which are in tandem with modernity. Eliot vents his loathing of the Jews elsewhere, saying, "[...] reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable" (1933, p. 20). The main feature of Jewishness that makes Eliot view the Jew as a symbol of negativity is his unrestrained liberalism. Though anti-Jewish prejudices are evidently manifested in the writings of many Modernists like Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and John Rodker⁴, Eliot's anti-Semitism bolsters his very negative view of the sensuality of human nature, especially in the modern age, which is marked by sexual promiscuity.

What makes the Jews primitive in the ladder of evolution is their unrestricted sexuality, which stains their purity and privilege as human beings.⁵ Eliot uses the figure of the Jew to strengthen his repulsive view of women. In accordance with the mythical image of the Jews, the latter are subhuman and possess unrestrained sexual drives. According to Julius, "[a]ssociating Jewish women with prostitution is a stock anti-Semitic practice; in late nineteenth century France, for example, it was a commonplace" (1995, p.88). In addition to their association with sexual excess, throughout history, the Jews are considered as conspirators and evil demons.

In "Sweeney Among the Nightingales", there are many hints to death, which suggest that Rachal and the Spanish woman are plotting to murder Sweeney. These women make Sweeney stiff with terror. Hence, he remains vigilant. The women, plotting against Sweeney, are reminiscent of Philomel and Procne who conspired to take revenge on Tereus by murdering his son Itys, "She [Rachal] and the lady in the cape/Are suspect, thought to be in league,/Therefore the man with heavy eyes/Declines the gambit, shows fatigue/Leaves the room and reappears/ Outside the window, leaning in" (Eliot, 1963, p.60).

⁴ These authors belong to the so-called men of 1914. Their writings are marked by vociferous anti-Semitism. They believed that the Jews are threatening to modern civilization. For further reading, see: Williams, D.P. (2004). "Modernism, Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity in the Writing and Publishing of John Rodker." Diss. University of Leeds, ProQuest Digital Dissertations. Web 20 January, 2015.

⁵ For more information on this subject, see: Julius, A. (1995). *T. S. Eliot, anti-semitism and literary Form*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.

In the patriarchal myth, sexuality and the female body are very horrific. They stir anxiety about masculinity and virility. Myth, De Beauvoir contends, perceives “woman [as] the Siren whose song lures sailors upon the rocks, she is the Circe, who changes her lovers into beasts, the undine, who draws fishermen into the depths of pools” (1956, p.182). Because of his intensified fear of women, Sweeney, who is described as the man with heavy eyes, escapes from women by pretending tiredness. The line, “Declines the gambit, shows fatigue” (p.59), signals his escape from their sexual demands. Like Sweeney, the other man in the café, who is described as “the silent vertebrate in brown”, is also suspicious of the two women. He “contracts and concentrates, withdraws” (p.59). The threat posed by these women is reinforced in an allusion to *Agamemnon*, in which Clytemnestra, in collision with her lover, killed her husband. Sweeney feels insecure among women, and he finds the atmosphere very hostile, portentous, and unfriendly. He says, “Gloomy Orion and the Dog / Are veiled; and hushed the shrunken seas” (p.59). Female sexuality is viewed as terrifying. As the title suggests, Sweeney exists in a room surrounded by women who are referred to as the nightingales. The congregation of these women engenders a sense of fear. The atmosphere of veiled stars and shrunken seas suggests women’s danger, which threatens Sweeney. The line “Death and the raven,” which “drift above” (p.59), foreshadows the woman who sits on Sweeney’s knees. The death tolls, approaching Sweeney, are both real and metaphorical, because they also suggest the menace of women’s sexuality.

In addition to the storms, which “[s]lide westward toward the River Plate” (p.59), there is a premonition of imminent death, which is intensified by the existence of the raven. This bird is a harbinger of a bad omen. It is said to devour animals, and it hovers over places where there are corpses. According to Ferber’s Dictionary of Symbolism, “[i]n a memorable simile the Chorus of Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* depicts Clytemnestra after she murders Agamemnon: “[S]tanding on his body like a loathsome raven, she hoarsely sings her hymn of triumph” (1999, p.168) At the end of the poem, Eliot alludes again to the bloody murder of Agamemnon; “The nightingales are singing near / The convent of the Sacred Heart, / And sang within the bloody wood / When Agamemnon cried aloud” (p.60). This allusion to the story of Agamemnon is meant to intensify Sweeney’s fear from women.

An important hint at the danger of the feminine in the poem is the reference to constellations, which are, in Greek mythology, associated with disaster by women. The myth runs briefly as follows: Orion of the eponymous constellation was a great hunter. He fell in love with Merope, the daughter of King Oenopion. The latter promised to give him the hand of his daughter if he freed the island from wild beasts. But after ridding the islands of the beasts, Oenopion did not fulfill his promise. One day, when he was drunk, Orion raped Merope. As a punishment for his deed, King Oenopion blinded him. Orion regained his sight, but a goddess killed him later by setting a scorpion on him. After his death, Zeus immortalizes him as a constellation in the sky.⁶

⁶ A more complete rendering of the myth of Orion can be found in:

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Characters, in Eliot's poem, are deprived of genuine emotions. Sweeney is indifferent to the women, and he does not respond to their advances. The Spanish woman's sitting on his knees, for instance, does not move or even touch him emotionally. Her behavior reveals that characters, in the poem, are like animals that stumble over each other. In fact, Human relationships lack the true meaning of intimacy, because they remain within the confines of physical and animal requirements. Eliot rages against the evilness of physical love. In fact, he views sexuality, in general, as defiling and disgusting.

Despite their differences, one can draw many similarities between the Greek Agamemnon and the modern Sweeney. The main similarity is that both are driven by sexual desire. They are the prototype of the pagan man. The ebbing away of morality gives way to bestial desire, which dissolves man's human identity and deconstructs the boundary human/animal. Characters' bodies are represented as lumps of flesh and meat. They are animals with raw sexual desire.

Eliot's prose vindicates that he read voraciously on the myth of evolution. According to Darwin, in primitive societies, human beings possess animalistic impulses. The conceptualization of man as an animal also finds an echo in Remy De Gourmont, who writes, "It is clear that man is an animal, it is also clear that he is a very complex one" (1922, pp.15-16). De Gourmont, who was an advocate of the myth of evolution, believed that human beings evolved from animals. For him, this explains the existence of similarities between human nature and animal nature. In his review of Paul Elmer More's *Aristocracy and Justice*, Eliot also asserts that human nature contains an animal side. He states: "At the bottom of man's heart there is always the beast, resentful of restraints of civilized society, ready to spring out at the instant this restraint relaxes" (1916, p.284). This savagery needs to be redeemed by dint of tradition and religion which are missing in Sweeney's world. Sweeney's guarding of "the hornid gate" (p.58) suggests his blocking of true vision. In Greek mythology, the horned gate is the gate through which human beings' true dreams pass.

Sweeney's animality is suggested by his appearance. In the first stanza, "Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees / Letting his arms hang down to laugh, / The zebra stripes along the jaw / Swelling to maculate giraffes" (p.59). As a result, Sweeney is "ape-necked", giraffe-spotted, and zebra-striped. Characters, in the poem, are uncivilized and cruel. They look like animals in a jungle or a zoo. "Apeneck," "zebra stripes," and "giraffes" give the setting an aura of savagery. The name "Apeneck Sweeney" indicates that he has not evolved from his low status as an animal. The word "maculate" used to describe him also connotes Sweeney's moral impurity and uncleanness. His riotous unexplainable laughter indicates his degeneration and lack of intelligence. According to Bakhtin, laughter has the power to "engender, bring down to earth, [and] turn their subject into flesh [...] Laughter degrades and materializes" (1984, p.20). Sweeney is described as a concupiscent beast. His "zebra" evokes zoophilia, which means sexual interaction between a human

Fontenrose, J. (1981). *Orion: The myth of the hunter and the huntress*. California: University of California Press.

and an animal. Like Sweeney, the man's "heavy eyes" suggest masculine vigor. Another man, who leaves the room but reappears "Outside the window, leaning in, / Branches of Wistaria / Circumscribe a golden grin" (p.60), has a lover sensual appetite. His behavior indicates his voyeurism. In the poem, human beings, like animals, feed on vegetables. The fruits that the waiter brings grow in countries, where apes and the orang-outang live.

Sweeney's relation with women is purely physical. His actions are motivated and determined by his biological instincts. They are restricted to those, which enable him to survive and thrive, activities that include eating, drinking, sleeping, and copulation. Such a kind of life makes him more akin to animals than to human beings. Indeed, "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" depicts a world in which human beings have not evolved from their violent instinctual impulses. Like Sweeney, the behaviors of "the silent man with mocha brown," are uncivilized. He "[s]prawls at the window-still and gapes" (p.59). This man is figuratively transformed into "the silent vertebrate in brown" (p.59), which indicates his degeneration from a human being to an animal. One of the features, which distinguish humans from animals, is language. Significantly, in the poem, characters do not speak; they just babble. This absence of a language of communication is another element that dissolves the boundary between human and animal. Sweeney and his cohort are inhuman, or maybe subhuman, subjects. Thus, they are an impediment to the kind of civilized society that Eliot discusses in his social criticism.

Like men, the women's actions and movements are similar to those of animals. Rachal is described as an animal. Her darts of cruelty are manifested when she "[t]ears at the grapes with murderous paws" (p.50). She is like a tigress tearing the body of her kill. According to Whiteside, her name Rachal born Rabinivitch, evokes a

rabid animal [...] it sounds like "Raven-a-bitch": a bitch dog with ravenous hunger [...] here we probably have woman's belly and vulva (oranges and figs) next to male's phallus and testicles (bananas and grapes) The grapes then are symbolically testicles, and Rachel *née* Rabinovitch is a bitch "Tear[ing]" hungrily at male testicles: an image of a female castration (1985, p.64-65).

Rachal's tearing "at the grapes with murderous paws" (p.59) also evinces her neurosis, emotional disequilibrium and derangement. Her bestial appetite reflects the patriarchal system's view of women as consumers. Felski maintains that "Women's long-standing association with nature and primordial desire helped to promote an identification of consumerism with feminine impulsiveness and irrationality" (1995, p.88). Like Eliot, many male Modernists promoted patriarchal ideas and assumptions in their writings. They vilified women whom they considered the inveterate enemies of the patriarchal system. Men became petrified by the waves of feminism, which threatened to sap manliness and engender a debilitating crisis of a virile culture. Examples of malicious portrayal of women in Modernist literary texts include W. B.

Yeats's "Prayer for my Daughter", Ezra Pound's "Portrait d'une Femme," Ernest Hemingway's *Garden of Eden*, and D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*.

The women of Sweeney's world do not have any sense of shyness. The patina of timidity is removed from them. The woman, in "the Spanish cape," for instance, "[t]ries to sit on Sweeney's knees" (p.59). She is first described as the "person in the Spanish cape" as if her behavior diminished her femininity. Her actions are very far from those of a civilized woman, because she "[s]lips and pulls the table cloth / Overturns a coffee-cup" (p.59). When she fell upon the floor, she boldly "Reorganized upon the floor / She yawns and draws a stocking up" (p.59). Though she never speaks, her behavior tells a great deal about her savage nature.

At the end of the poem, there is a reference to the "Convent of the Sacred Heart" (p.60), which suggests a group of nuns who are devoted to Christ. The line is ironic, because Sweeney and his prostitutes tear themselves loose from religion. Sexual vulgarity, in the modern age, emanates from the break with the Victorian tradition, which was highly reserved and conservative. The modern man believes that sexuality might procure him pleasure in a decadent world ravaged by war and cursed by the "death of God." One of the basic differences between human beings and animals is that the former are ethical subjects. But in this poem, characters' overdose of passion outweighs their spiritual side. Consequently, the human lapses into the animal. The absence of religion results in the loss of selfhood and humanity because the erotic side alone results in the so-called "becoming-animal" (Deleuze & Felix Guattari, 2005, p.307). The crying of the nightingales around the convent of the Sacred Heart is a paradox, for Sweeney's whores and the nuns are antithetical. Eliot conjoins the prostitutes and the convent of the sacred heart to invoke the Christian tradition, which vitriolically condemns sexuality as nasty and sinful. In the Christian myth of Eve, women are seen as lascivious. In this regard, De Beauvoir points out that "the flesh is sin. And [...] since woman remains always the Other, it is not held that reciprocally male and female are both flesh: the flesh that is for Christians the hostile Other is precisely woman" (1995, p.184). Eliot's religious sensibility, which is also discerned in his early poems, written prior to his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, is not devoid of the stains of misogyny. He aspires to be shut from the world of sensuality and to escape from women by dint of mystical yearning.

4-Conclusion

This paper vindicates that myths might portray the veracity of gender relations. In T. S. Eliot's poem "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," the personal conflates with the mythological. In this poem, Eliot employs myths in order to construct his own misogyny and to rekindle and perpetuate patriarchal ideologies. The bard vents his inmost misogyny not just by describing women negatively, but also by representing heterosexuality as a matter of illicit relationships and stultifying sentimentalism. His misogyny amounts to his depiction of sexuality as a devolutionary act, which engenders a combination of the human and the bestial. It induces primitivism and an animalistic view of human nature.

In this poem, there is a total absence of true equanimity of emotion and sense of connectedness between man and woman. There is just an animalistic erotic magnetism, which is devoid of true love. In other words, there is a dissociation of love and sex. Characters, in this poem, exist as isolated body parts. They are represented as possessors of aggressive sexual urges. In the poem, sexuality is intertwined with murder, cannibalism, and animality. This is reinforced by making allusions to mythical stories, which are concerned with gender and the relation between the sexes.

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