

Tracing biopower: a
foucauldian reading
of t.s. eliots poems -
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Tracing Biopower: A Foucauldian Reading of T. S. Eliot's Poems

Tracing Biopower: A Foucauldian Reading of T. S. Eliot's Poems T. S. Eliot's poems have gained a reputation for its unique handling of Modernist thought processes and artistic expressions that any course or debate on Modernism is incomplete without a reference to them. In *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot presents a worldview that critiques the invisible power structures that contribute towards the miserable human conditions in the modern world. Even though he does not pinpoint the origin of such structures, it is implied that the state plays a significant role in defining and regulating human body in nationalistic, socio-religio-cultural and psycho-sexual realms. My attempt is to read the poems mentioned above with reference to the concept of biopower discussed by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*. The concept of biopower deals with the way states and their central structures of power control their subjects through the subjugation of their bodies. Eliot's poems are replete with the way modernism stifles human sensibility through its material effects. The arid, depressing scenario of all the three poems is apt settings for their themes. The roles played by all characters reflect the mechanical nature of life imposed upon them, and the modernist stroller or thinker of the poems is frustrated by the invisible strings of power that makes life complicated, and meaningless to some extent. The paper will be a comparative analysis of the three poems with reference to the concept of biopower in Foucault's later works. There will also be references to theorists who dealt with the concept in complex ways, like Hannah Arendt, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,

among a few others. My contention is that a close reading of the poems will reveal the effects of biopower in Eliot's time and provide useful links to problematise the identities of his characters.