

A Structural Jazz Reading of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady* by T. S. Eliot

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Abstract: This article attempts to investigate two poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady*, picked from the first significant poem collection by T. S. Eliot, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, from a new angle and interdisciplinary point of view, suggesting the poet as a jazz improviser with fragmented phrasings through an asymmetrical structure, and jazz music's elements in the form of poetry. Having a jazz music perspective based on Ted Gioia's viewpoints, this study explores the invisible or lesser-known aspects of Eliot's poetry that have been less seen in the shadow of his contemporary popular music's footprint in an allusive sense rather than a formal impact. This interdisciplinary study, which links literature and music, presents a novel perspective on discourse analysis. It examines the text as a series of musical sounds analyzed through the lens of a specific genre, jazz, reflecting the sonic landscape of the poet's era. Eliot utilizes his era's soundscape as a jazz improviser in musical layers of rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, timbre, and form. Moreover, his jazz-shaped structure of poetry reflects its impact on the selection of imagery in the collection. In the end, it is concluded that Eliot, as a modern poet, has distinguished his verse works from his past and contemporaries by designating jazz music's structural characteristics in his first significant poem collection as a tool for objective correlation in the structural layer of verse in the trajectory of his art's improvised composition and his unique jazz musicality in poetry.

1. Introduction

Prufrock and Other Observations (1917), Tomas Stearns Eliot's (1888-1965) first poem collection, which garnered critical attention and an excerpt of its reading by Eliot was recorded by Harvard College in 1947,

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though described "absolutely insane" by Harold Munro, lends itself toward various interpretations and commentaries, which investigate its self-titled poem's musical quality as "to the accompaniment of shattering glass." (Cooper, 2006, p. 52). As a Modernist experimental poet evading conventional poetic forms, Eliot offers a jazzy and improvised basis, composing his poetry based on the soundscape of his contemporary popular music form, jazz, inspired not only by the lyrical content but immensely by its musical characteristics in all the seven layers of music's notions: rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, tone, and form. By its publication, *Prufrock and Other Observations* heralded the remarkability of its poet, about whom it is said that "His criticism represents as decisive a break with the past as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* breaks with the line of English poetry" (Cooper, 2006, p. 108).

Prufrock and Other Observations is a collection of twelve poems. At a glance, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady* focus on Eliot's deepest concerns, as Scofield marks them by similarities of form and also music (Scofield, 1988, p. 56), and depict Eliot's fragmented composing strategies that are based on the asymmetry and formlessness of improvisation, rather than a predetermined poetic form and therefore structure. This study depicts how Eliot manipulates the sonic layer of his poetry and shapes it as a sound sequence that fits the characteristics of a jazz improviser and represents its matching features with the discourse of jazz artists. It also discusses how Eliot's formlessness in composing poetry has affected the sound of his discourse.

Considering *Prufrock and Other Observations* poems, the variety in structure and imagery depicts Eliot as a jazz horn player who stays committed to his inner voice and improvises his compositions just at the moment, regardless of their shape. Eliot's phrasing as a jazz soloist does not intend to follow the formal structures. Instead, it stays personal and individualistic, both in structure and imagery. He never abandons the freedom of a jazz soul and keeps his poetry's form as an essential and active element of restless expression of self rather than a passive coffin to be laid to rest.

In this regard, *Prufrock and Other Observations* depict poetic compositions through which the element of structure is composed based on improvisation; meanwhile, poetic aspects of imagery and tone are influenced by the free nature of improvisation in the way that jazz improvisers use the elements of music. The surprise and disruption in the structure and imagery of poems, the liberation in blending various images and structures, agitated with flexibility and fragmented phrasings which are depicted in Eliot's lineation and stanza sectioning; spontaneity in

consonance and dissonance of the harmonic aspect of compositions and theme and variation as a formal aspect of composition are utilized for increasing the jazziness of the collection structurally. The resulting structure encounters the reader with jazz solos that shout the spirit of Eliot's era and reintroduce him as the Louis Armstrong of the world of literature. Considering a big-picture viewpoint, this research reintroduces the linguistic structure of Eliot's composition and interprets it through an interdisciplinary analysis in the light of jazz music discourse. Moreover, instead of comparing two works from two fields of music and literature, this study focuses on a practical reading of poetic language in the light of music discourse. For this aim, the researcher tries to answer the following questions:

1. How can the rhythmic characteristics of jazz, including syncopation and swing, be explored and detected in the formal structure of selected poems?
2. How can the melodic characteristics of jazz be explored and detected in the phrasing strategies of selected poems?
3. How can the formal structure of poetry be observed as a harmonic structure?
4. How can the shifts between harmonic consonance and dissonance, as a harmonic characteristic of jazz, be explored and detected in the poetry of T.S. Eliot?
5. How can freedom and variety, as two aspects of jazz's characteristic in timbre, be explored and detected in the selected poems?
6. How can the form in the selected poems be explained as an improvisation-based formal structure?
7. How can jazz music's common forms, including theme and variation, call and response, and an asymmetrical formal structure, be explored and explained in the formal structure of the selected poems?

1.1. Music and Poetry

1.1.1. The Relationship between Music and Poetry

On the subject matter of music's importance in poetry, Ezra Pound proclaims: "Poets who will not study music are defective" (as cited in Nicolosi, 1980, p. 192). A dominant difference between prose and verse is the musical quality of the latter. On the other hand, poetry and music share a dominant concept: time. It plays an important role in both art media, as it is said that "Objectively considered, the two arts are quite different, and yet both involve hearing, just as they both require a given quantity of performance time in order to be perceived: You can't hear a sonata or read a poem instantaneously" (Corn, 1997, p. 1).

Therefore, poetry's structure can be seen as a musical composition. Since poetry forms in verse, it comes with a sense of musicality and conveys a quality of rhythm. Despite what comes to mind at first glance, the musicality of the poetry is not just related to rhyme and rhythm but can be expanded to other angles of a musical structure as well. A musical structure may be detected and analyzed by seven elements: Rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, texture, form, and dynamics, which are the key elements to recognizing and evaluating the structure of a musical composition.

This study intends to detect and derive them in poetry's structure by considering and defining these musical elements as key terms. Thus, poetry can be considered music and analyzed in light of the music's key elements.

1.1.2. Ted Gioia: How to Listen to jazz: an imperfect art

Ted Gioia is a jazz critic, historian, musician, and the author of eleven non-fiction books in the field of music. His devotion to jazz music has made him focus exclusively on this tremendous music genre in his career. In his book *The History of Jazz* (Gioia, 2021), Gioia talks about the adventurous history of the genre from the prehistoric era to the present. In his book entitled *The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire* (Gioia, 2012), the author presents a vast repertoire of jazz songs that have lived through time and are the genre's trademarks. In his book *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture* (Gioia, 1988) and *How to Listen to Jazz* (Gioia, 2016), he depicts the features of jazz music in its context. He describes how each element of the music works in the jazz world. This means that Gioia instructs the reader to get into the jazz music in detail. By describing and discussing certain jazz elements and how the genre's canons create their works of art, Gioia gives a reliable viewpoint on the elements of jazz composition.

1.1.3. Jazz reading of poetry

Based on Gioia's writings, in the rhythm layer of a jazz composition, 'swing' and 'syncopation' are two accepted characteristics. Since rhythm is an essential common point between music and poetry, in discussion, these two rhythmic elements must be detected in poetry's structure to conclude that a poem carries a sense of jazz music in the rhythmic layer. Furthermore, Gioia explains jazz's point of view on melody and, specifically, jazz musicians' phrasing strategies, which are his subjects. As the phrases' structure and arrangement are other prominent aspects of poetry, a poem can also represent a shared sense of phrasing with jazz.

A 'spontaneous' and 'dissonant' harmonic structure is another issue that Ted Gioia discusses in his works. That means if a harmonic interpretation of a poem conveys these two features, that poem has a sense of jazz as a harmonic whole.

The next element of music that Gioia discusses is timbre. He explains that 'freedom' and 'variety' in timbre are two characteristics of jazz music. After defining the concept of timbre and expanding it into poetry, in the discussion chapter, these two features of timbre will be traced in poetry to see if a poem has a sense of jazz in its timbre.

According to Gioia, another significant characteristic of jazz music is 'altering density' in texture. He explains that the canons of this music genre brought a sense of 'diversity' in texture. In the discussion chapter, this diversity in texture will be traced in poetry to see if a poem conveys a sense of jazz music in its texture.

At last, the dynamic element - according to Ted Gioia - in jazz music is 'spontaneous', 'unexaggerated', and 'controlled'. On spontaneity of poetry, Rashidi and Fatehi Rad (2021) writes, "Some scholars viewed poetry as the organizer of creative spontaneity to the extent that it reinforces spontaneity's hold on reality" (p. 2). To investigate named features including dynamics in jazz music, an audio performance of the poem is necessary so these features, which are directly related to the sound, can be traced to see if the performance of a poem conveys the features of a jazzy dynamic.

In poetry and music, the artist does the task of composing a particular structure. Still, the material of the composition may be the words or the notes. Either way, the order of the utilized materials shapes an organized structure in which the composer's feelings, thoughts, images, or ideas are carried. Therefore, poetry and music can be analyzed and measured according to their structural aspects. Hence, it is possible to cross the lines, and the assessment process tools may be borrowed from other art media. That is because of the similarities in the items that give identity to a composition, whether a composition of words or notes. By knowing how jazz treats the elements of the music in its context, it is practical to investigate and detect the presence of these elements in the poetry. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to define the elements of jazz music in the context of poetry. This study defines the elements of jazz music according to Ted Gioia's depiction and, through an interdisciplinary process, will apply them to the structure of the poetry.

2. Literature Review

The closeness of poetry and music, around the works of T.S. Eliot, has attracted attention to the subject matter dominantly. The point that the qualities of different music genres, including jazz, are observable in Eliot's poetry has been discussed by scholars from different viewpoints.

Directly related to *The Waste Land's* musicality, in 1969, Paul Chancellor wrote an article entitled "The Music of *The Waste Land*" which discusses the possibility of turning the poem into a musical composition. He declares that it can be composed in the structure of a Sonata and majorly illustrates the composition through a conditional and imaginative process, based on myths and symbols. He shows an analogy between these aspects and musical motifs.

In 1980, Mildred Meyer Boaz wrote an article entitled "Musical and Poetic Analogues in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*". In this article, the author brings up some similarities between Eliot's work and Stravinsky's composition. For example, he chooses two works by them, and again, he describes an analogy between them, one of which is Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Boaz discusses the similarities in the beginning parts of the works. He compares different speakers of the poem with different instruments in Stravinsky's composition. He compares the rhythmic quality of the poem lines with musical accents in the song.

In his interviews, Ralph Ellison (1988) discusses how T. S. Eliot's poetry – specifically *The Waste Land* – concerns his roots in American culture and folklore materials. He continues that he has found a style of improvisation in Eliot's composition. Ellison believes "it grows out of a similar and quite American approach to the classics, just as Armstrong and any other jazz musician of that period would take a theme and start improvising" (Ellison & Kostelanetz, 1989, p. 26)

In 1990, Werner discusses the importance of music for the Afro-American audience and writes, "Most readers of the Euro-American modernists simply ignore Tolson, while most members of the Afro-American audience prefer music to literature and, on the occasions when they turn to poetry, respond more readily to the relatively direct calls of Hughes or Gwendolyn Brooks" (Werner, 1990, p. 471).

In 1992, Fleissner debates Eliot's inspirations from Black culture. Fleissner believes that Eliot was interested in Black culture and declares, "Eliot's attitude towards black culture is a healthy one: he was influenced by it, imbibed it in his work and, at the same time, influenced some black writers" (Fleissner, 1992, p. 113).

Chinitz (1993) examines the influence of jazz on the poetic forms and themes of T. S. Eliot and Langston Hughes. He explores how both poets incorporate jazz elements—such as rhythm, improvisation, and cultural context—into their works, reflecting the broader modernist engagement with contemporary music. By analyzing the interplay between jazz and poetry, Chinitz (1993) sheds light on the ways in which musical discourse informs literary expression in the early 20th century.

In 1995, Chinitz argues that popular culture has a multi-dimensional effect on Eliot's works. According to him, Eliot represents a primitive society where the arts are used as shared and public activity. To this purpose, Eliot popularized poetry in his contemporary Western society. *The Waste Land* did not come up as popular as Eliot himself intended in the first drafts of the poem because of Ezra Pound's editing. Chinitz argues that instead of routine, Eliot used allusions to popular songs as relief points in the middle of the most painful parts of the poem. He continues that Eliot was inspired by ragtime before his emigration in 1914. Later, African American performers and artists began to emerge in English music halls, and Eliot inevitably encountered jazz. Chinitz admits that in *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932), many elements suggest jazz music. According to the article, "the play re-creates the velocity and syncopation that to most listeners of the 1920s were salient qualities of jazz" (Chinitz, 1995, p. 244). In the last part of the article, Chinitz writes, "Eliot's patented cadences...were learned from, or discovered in, the sounds of popular music. Every moment that he sounds 'like Eliot,' Eliot is alluding to jazz" (Chinitz, 1995, p. 245).

In her 1998 essay, Mayer examines the intertextual relationship between Morrison's novel *Jazz* and Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. Mayer (1998) argues that while both works address the urban experience in the aftermath of war, Morrison offers a revisionary perspective that challenges Eliot's bleak assessment. By employing thematic correspondences and narrative techniques, Morrison provides a more nuanced portrayal of the postwar metropolis, emphasizing the historically and culturally specific experiences of African Americans. Mayer's analysis highlights Morrison's engagement with modernist texts to inscribe African American presence in Western literature.

The book *T. S. Eliot's Orchestra* (2000) is a series of selected essays on comparative aspects of Eliot's works and music. This book discusses classical music figures and their works, such as Richard Wagner and Igor Stravinsky, and how jazz music plays a role in Eliot's works. John Xiros Cooper, editor of the book, believes more work is supposed to be done between speech and song. Furthermore, he declares that the book "opens

a critical and scholarly discussion that will lead eventually to a new appreciation of Eliot's place in that largely undiscovered borderland between literature and music" (Cooper, 2020, p. xviii).

Barry J. Faulk (2001), in his article "Modernism and the Popular: Eliot's Music Halls," discusses the way that T. S. Eliot was engaged with the popular culture of his time and focuses explicitly on Eliot's 1923 memorial essay about Marie Lloyd, a figure that Faulk claims to be "the most celebrated performer of English variety entertainment" (p. 603).

In the article "In the Shadows: Popular Song and Eliot's Construction of Emotion" (Chinitz, 2005), David Chinitz discusses the way that Eliot was concerned with the concept of objective correlatives as a way of expression in art and how these correlatives "existed all around him in the popular culture and provisioned his imagination" (p. 462). Chinitz argues that the songs that Eliot utilized during the composition and in the primary drafts of *The Waste Land* (1922) are sources of allusions. He asserts that these popular songs "exerted a decisive influence on his [Eliot's] art" (p. 451). He claims that some of these songs, such as *My Eveline* and *By the Watermelon Vine*, are concerned with the relationships between African American couples and have influenced Eliot's relationships. Furthermore, Chinitz argues that races and their related issues bring a sense of modernization into art. This article declares, "We know that these songs were present to Eliot's mind as he composed *The Waste Land* and that he associated them strongly enough with his project to consider direct quotations from them" (p. 454).

In 2009, in his article "T. S. Eliot and the Jazz Aesthetic," Jantas argues that for Eliot, it was not a trouble to infuse musical elements of the African American genre into his works. Jantas believes that the melancholy mood of jazz is comparable to Eliot's experiences of post-World War I. He suggests that by using jazz elements, Eliot separated race from the writing process, and his descriptions parallel jazz music's expressionistic features. Jantas writes, "The comparative stylistic elements of Eliot's writing and jazz music are almost carbon copies of each other" (Jantas, 2010, p. 3).

In 2013, Powell debated *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and its musical potential. In his article "Prufrock's Waltz," Powell (2013) asserts that Eliot utilizes the rhythmic form of a waltz to convey specific meanings. Powell concludes that Eliot uses a waltz to depict the isolated state of the poem's protagonist, declaring, "This pattern is an easily overlooked rhyme scheme that specifically evokes the waltz form, an innately social dance performed in a closed position" (p. 178).

In 2016, in his article "Some Jazzy Aspects in T. S. Eliot's Poems," Saito (2015) argues that some lines of Eliot's poetry can be sung with jazz

rhythm. He declares that the soul of jazz in St. Louis influenced the young poet. Saito concludes that “the colloquial words of jazz and blues give Eliot’s poems a bold dynamism as a part of modernist culture” (p. 71). Lawrence (2022), in his dissertation “Words Move, Music Moves”: An Examination of Musical Settings of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot, investigates the limited number of art song settings of Eliot’s poetry, exploring the challenges composers face in adapting his modernist verse. Lawrence analyzes the interpretive and stylistic approaches of four composers who have set Eliot’s works to music for voice and piano. The study examines how the dense, allusive nature of Eliot’s poetry presents obstacles for musical adaptation. Lawrence concludes by suggesting alternative stylistic methods employed by late 20th- and early 21st-century composers to clarify the intent of musical settings of Eliot’s poetry.

McIntire (2025) explores the auditory landscape of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in her article “Sounds in The Waste Land: Voices, Rhythms, Music” (British Library, n.d.), emphasizing its rich tapestry of sounds and rhythms. McIntire examines how the poem’s diverse voices and musical elements contribute to its complex structure and thematic depth. By analyzing the interplay of various auditory motifs, the article sheds light on Eliot’s innovative use of sound to enhance the poem’s modernist qualities. This study offers valuable insights into the role of sound in shaping the reader’s experience of the poem.

Nicolosi (1980), in his article “T.S. Eliot, and Music: An Introduction,” writes about Ezra Pound’s attitude toward poets who do not study music and how he calls them defective. Nicolosi argues that, based on the inspirational effects of Edgar Allan Poe, French symbolists have been experimenting with musical qualities of language since the late nineteenth century. He continues that modern poets could not neglect the closeness of poetry and music, and symbolists aimed to make their poetry so musical. Nicolosi claims that musical allusions in the compositions of musicians such as Ives and Stravinsky parallel literary allusions, showing the quotations’ autobiographical dominance. Furthermore, Nicolosi compares the epigraphs of the poets to key signatures and tempo markings that a composer uses. According to the article, Eliot utilized musical genres and forms in the titles of his poems. The way he alludes to musical instruments in his poems is closer to the orchestration of modern music of his era. Nicolosi believes that Eliot’s early poems were mainly associated with his concentration on the musical side of his work, primarily based on “rhythm, rhyme [and] alliteration” (p. 196). However, later he began to use musical forms to extend his later poems. Nicolosi believes that *The Waste Land* (1980) can represent the aesthetics of the sonata cycle. Later

in his article, Nicolosi focuses on Paul Chancellor's *The Music of the Waste Land* and adds his thoughts to it. He continues that Chancellor considers *The Waste Land* a symphonic poem in sonata form, mainly close to Stravinsky or Schoenberg's compositions. However, Nicolosi believes that "there is still no direct poetic equivalent for such devices as key relationships, modulation, and counterpoint which are so vital in sonata form" (p. 197). As a concluding part, Nicolosi discusses the way that Clive Bell knows both Stravinsky and Eliot as "products of the jazz idiom, sharing the characteristic trait of syncopation" and Bell talks about "a ragtime literature which flouts traditional rhythms and sequences and grammar and logic" (p. 201).

In his article "Music," Fuller (1994) surveys how music emerges in Eliot's poetry from *The Waste Land* to *Sweeney Agonistes*. He also discusses music's allusive and structural roles in named works. Fuller claims that popular materials, specifically jazz, are utilized in Eliot's poetry as "the most obviously American element in the poetry of Eliot" (p. 135). Furthermore, Fuller adds that the rhythmic qualities of ragtime music are present in named poems. As a final point, Fuller declares that Eliot made recordings of his prominent poems, and this act is "like the composer's recorded performance of a score" (p. 142).

The article "Lines of Jazz: Jazz Poetry of Hughes and Eliot" (Musical Geography, n.d.) explores the musical-poetic interplay in the works of Langston Hughes and T. S. Eliot. It elucidates how Hughes infuses his verse with improvisational rhythms and syncopated patterns that evoke the vibrant pulse of jazz, while Eliot's layered tonal complexity suggests compositional depth akin to musical structure. Jazz is framed not only as thematic content but also as a formal device shaping cadence, voice, and fragmentation. This comparative study positions the poets within a musical—especially jazz-inflected—dialogue, demonstrating jazz's role as both a structural metaphor and a rhythmic principle in modernist poetry. By tracing these cross-genre resonances, the article enhances our understanding of the poetics of rhythm and structure in twentieth-century verse (Musical Geography, n.d.).

According to the literature review above, the majority of researches that focus on the impact of music on T.S. Eliot's career demonstrates the importance of its allusive and cultural aspects. Even the studies that aim to build a bridge between his poetry and music mainly concentrate on a comparison of his work with his contemporary musical artists. Besides, although some scholars suggest the significance of jazz characteristics in his poetry, they hesitate to depict a vivid detection of these aspects in the formal structure of his poems. This study intends to focus on this gap and

present an interdisciplinary approach in which Eliot's poetry can be read in the light of jazz music's theoretical frameworks.

2.1. Jazz

Jazz music is a genre primarily formed and played by African Americans, the inhabitants of New Orleans in the late nineteenth century. The genre is defined as a synergistic process of the "Africanization" of American music along with the "Americanization" of African music (Gioia, 2009, p. 9). On the overall approach in jazz, Lima and Funk (2024) write, "Jazz's creative energy, spontaneity, and constant experimentation stimulated improvisation and performance, two of the main distinctive traits that allowed it to go against the dominant epistemology, combining vitality, physicality, creativity, and content" (p. 2). Lawn and Binek (2024) state, "Some definitions of jazz assert that swing, a certain rhythmic phenomenon, and improvisation are two absolute criteria for authentic jazz" (p. 8). On the importance of improvisation in jazz, Havas, Johnson, and Horn (2024) write, "Since the late twentieth century, the US-centric narrative has come under increasing challenge as an adequate account of a music whose cultural importance resides in the collective meaning-making processes that establish improvised music globally as relevant in articulating human experience" (p. 36). Improvisation shapes the identity of a jazz musician as it stands in harmony with the idea that the concept of identity is "always in flux, never fully finished, and perpetually contested in and through speech, culture, and power" (Alishiri, Moradi, & Asadi Amjad, 2025, p. 90).

2.2. Eliot: *The Jazz Poet*

This study attempts to formulate an interdisciplinary analysis of a poet whose contemporary music genre appears central to his verse and aesthetic: Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888–1965), who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948 for his outstanding contributions to the poetry of his era and beyond.

In the field of poetry, the publication of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) marked "the beginning of an era in modern poetry" (Chinitz, 2005, p. 141). In drama, with the publication of Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), it was suggested that "Eliot was among the first of modern poets to express a hope that the new poetry is converted into a medium for the stage" (Brooker, 2004, p. 386). From the perspective of a literary critic, Eliot's essays defined key terms that became fundamental aspects of New Criticism. In *Hamlet and His Problems* (1920), Eliot defines the concept of the objective correlative as

a method for indirectly evoking the reader's emotions, which the New Critics later adopted as a crucial element. In his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), Eliot declares the impersonality of poetry and considers it an escape from emotion, an important doctrine of New Criticism.

Alongside Eliot's vast contribution to the literature of his time and afterwards, he emphasizes the importance of music and its dominant role in poetry. In his essay on the relationship between poetry and music, *The Music of Poetry* (1942), he declares that poets should be aware of and pay much more attention to what poetry and music have in common, what he calls "the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure" (Murphy, 2007, p. 334). The essay also addresses what he had in mind when composing *Four Quartets* (1943): "...a musical analogy to identify the quality and nature of the poetry that he was then writing" (Murphy, 2007, p. 197). Furthermore, Eliot suggests that musical analogies can be applied to poetry to see how elements of music appear in poetic composition. Even though Eliot does not propose a specific methodology to make this analogy practical, he insists that "a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one" (Eliot, 2002, p. 113). In addition, he notes, "The music of poetry, then, must be a music latent in the common speech of its time. And that means also that it must be latent in the common speech of the poet's place" (Eliot, 2002, p. 112), and most of his outstanding works were composed around or during the time that jazz was the popular music of the era, whose cultural influences were tangible. Moreover, on the ecological aspect of literature, it is argued that "ecological thinking, in metaphoric terms, could infiltrate fields as far apart as literature, economics, education, and technology" (Arjmandi & Gaffari, 2025, p. 28). On Eliot's poetry and its sense of jazziness, Ralph Ellison points out that "...*The Waste Land* seized my mind. I was intrigued by its power to move me while eluding my understanding. Somehow its rhythms were often closer to those of jazz than were those of the Negro poets, and even though I could not understand then, its range of allusion was as mixed and as varied as that of Louis Armstrong" (North, 2002, p. 166).

2.3. Gioia: Jazz Critic

Ted Gioia is a jazz critic, historian, musician, and the author of eleven non-fiction books in the field of music. His devotion to jazz has led him to focus exclusively on this genre throughout his career. In his book *The History of Jazz* (2021), he discusses the "Africanization of American

music” (Gioia, 2021, p. 1) and explores the adventurous history of the genre from its prehistoric roots to the present. In *The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire* (2021), Gioia presents a vast repertoire of jazz songs that have endured over time and are considered hallmarks of the genre. In *The Imperfect Art: Reflections on Jazz and Modern Culture* (1988) and *How to Listen to Jazz* (2016), he depicts the features of jazz music within its cultural and historical context, describing how each element functions in the jazz world. Through these analyses, Gioia guides readers to engage with jazz music in depth. By providing detailed descriptions and discussions of jazz elements and the ways in which the canons of the genre create their works of art, Gioia constructs a comprehensive perspective on the components of jazz composition.

The present research aims to provide a jazz-informed reading of two selected poems by T. S. Eliot, published during and around the Jazz Age (1920s). The rationale for selecting these poems and this period is based on the recognition that, although poetry has long exhibited inherent musicality, both poetry and music underwent significant transformation during the Jazz Age, adopting forms distinct from those of previous eras (Gioia, 2021). With the emergence of jazz, essential musical elements were renewed by musicians, resulting in changes across multiple layers of musical composition (Lima & Funk, 2024; Lawn & Binek, 2024). This study seeks to demonstrate how these new musical paradigms influenced the musicality of contemporary poetry and to illustrate the presence of jazz elements in the formal structures of the selected works.

Furthermore, the study examines not only the musical qualities of jazz as reflected in the poems’ structures but also the performative aspect of poetry as a complete composition, capable of being enacted in relation to its formal design (Rashidi & Fatehi Rad, 2021). The objective is to show that Eliot’s poems are not merely compositions reflecting the sound and spirit of their era, but that their formal structures actively guide readers to engage with them as jazz-like performances. The rationale for choosing these specific poems is threefold: first, they were composed during or around the Jazz Age; second, Eliot emphasized the significance of music in poetry throughout his career (Murphy, 2007); and third, these poems exemplify modernist innovations.

Indeed, musical qualities of poetry, such as rhythmic flow, harmonic structure’s consonance or dissonance, and phrasing strategies, have caused a renewal of the poetry of the modernist movement. Therefore, this study aims to formulate an interdisciplinary jazz reading analysis of a poet whose American origin, which depicts his rootedness in a jazzy environment, seems to be at the core of his poetry and aesthetics: T.S.

Eliot, an iconic figure in the English Literature of the modern era. This acclaimed literary figure has immensely drawn the attention of scholars from various angles. However, this paper intends to be among the few studies to analyze the music of poetry in detail and formulate an interdisciplinary analysis of the formal structure of two long poems, which again the common feature among them is to be dominant excerpts of modern poetry and the impact of jazz music seems to be at the core of their formal structure and their appreciation of the contemporary music of poetry.

As will be seen, the detailed and layer-by-layer analysis of the selected works reveals prominent musical qualities that shed an authoritative light on the significant role of music in poetry, specifically the significance of jazz in the poetry of the modern era and the Jazz Age. At first glance, the poems seem to be unconscious and neutral about the musical qualities, because of the prominence of the free verse form, which generally neglects the emphasis on the concepts of meter and rhyme (Abrams, 2018, p. 129). However, by closer observation, each poem represents certain aspects of musical elements, such as how jazz musicians utilize these features in different layers of music.

Hopefully, this study will complement the existing scholarship by providing a practical and comprehensive approach to interdisciplinary studies about reading literature in light of music's discourse. The value of this study lies in the contributions it wishes to achieve. On the one hand, analyzing the formal structure of the selected works through the framework of jazz characteristics in different musical elements provides a profound understanding of the music of poetry in the selected works of T.S. Eliot. On the other hand, it depicts how the poetry of the twentieth century was inspired by jazz, as the soundtrack of the Jazz Age. The revival of such jazz features as syncopation, dissonant harmony, fragmented phrasing, and improvisation-based structure in the selected works brings up the prominence of the musical quality of poetry and the way that jazz, as the popular music of the Jazz Age, has influenced the spirit of the art scene in its time. It can be observed how the formal structure of modern poetry enhances the content.

In his essay *The Music of Poetry* (1942), Eliot, himself a literary critic, suggests that musical analogies can be applied to poetry to see how elements of music can be found in poetry. Even though Eliot does not propose a specific methodology to make this analogy practical, he declares that “a 'musical poem' is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it...” (Eliot, 2002, p. 113). This study aims to test the

hypothesis that jazz music's characteristics—including rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, texture, form, and dynamics—can be detected in modernist poetry, specifically in selected works by Eliot. Additionally, it seeks to provide an interdisciplinary methodology in which poetry can be analyzed directly and in detail through the lens of musical elements (Murphy, 2007).

3. Methodology

The approach employed in this research was content analysis. Content analysis serves as a research method employed to identify the occurrence of specific words, themes, or concepts within particular qualitative data. Using content analysis, researchers can measure and examine the presence, significance, and connections of specific words, themes, or concepts. This study aimed to identify the characteristics of jazz in the layers of rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, texture, form, and dynamics. Following that and according to these identified characteristics, this study intends to provide insights into how these elements of jazz can be detected in the structure of poetry. The approach used to analyze and read the poems is a structural information review, based on a literature review with a library approach, and employs a variety of methods, ranging from the conventional technique of textual analysis to auto/biographical methods, discourse analysis, previous interviews with the authors, library research, the internet, and other search methods.

The poems and collections analyzed from a jazz perspective are *Prufrock* and *Portrait of a Lady*, both composed by T. S. Eliot. The primary focus is an interdisciplinary analysis of the poems with respect to jazz characteristics. The research employed specific measures to achieve a deep understanding and insight, including data collection and analysis methods, and examining lines, stanzas, and sections that could be interpreted through jazz music features. After careful reading, the researcher selected and organized the data to support the analysis.

This study applies a jazz-informed reading to reveal how the characteristics of jazz across different musical layers influence the formal structure of Eliot's poetry. The approach is interdisciplinary: to understand jazz features, a layered musical context consisting of rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, texture, form, and dynamics was used to identify perspectives from jazz music theory. Analytically, the poems were examined based on key concepts derived from another artistic medium—music, specifically jazz. The analysis emphasizes the formal structure of the selected poems, creating a comprehensive, layer-by-layer survey that considers the sense of syncopation and swing in rhythm,

phrasing in melody, vertical analysis in harmony, variety and freedom in timbre, diverse density in texture, improvisation-based structure in form, and personal spontaneity in dynamics, as these features manifest in modernist poetry. As noted, “an outstanding feature of literary language is its emotional aspect” (Azabdaftari, 2021, p. 222). The chosen poems were selected because they provide essential material for the study; thus, modern literary texts (poems) served as primary data sources.

The primary sources and numerous books, articles, and special issues of essential journals have provided much of the background and motivation for this research. This study was organized as follows: the first part provides an introduction to the elements of music from a generic viewpoint, divided into seven layers including rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, texture, form, and dynamics, followed by a close understanding of approaches and perspectives of jazz musicians towards these elements and the characteristics, brought up into each of these layers by jazz musicians. Subsequent chapters deal with the jazz reading of the named poems, followed by discussion, limitations, suggestions, contributions, and conclusion of the study.

According to Gioia (2016), another rhythmic feature of jazz music is the variety of the beats’ placement—an aspect that reflects jazz’s embrace of unexpected rhythmic accents and inventive timing (pp. 11–12). This variety is also traceable in the modern poetry of the 20th century. The length and the placement of the accents vary from line to line. This variety can also be seen in the speaker and imagery of the poem, and is known as another rhythmic feature that makes a poem sound jazzy.

To detect liberation and variety in a poem's rhythmic structure, comparing the length of each line, stanza, or even section of the long poem can be a practical approach to evaluate the named features. All the named features make a poem a hybrid in terms of rhythm quality. However, these different rhythmic personalities are still working together and blending. According to Gioia (2016), blending the various personalities within a group is another rhythmic feature of jazz music; one that infuses performances with a dynamic interplay of individuality and collaboration (pp. 5–6).

Finally, despite blending all the named features, the poem maintains cohesion as a whole composition. It is not fragmented or divided in structure. Hence, the poem swings as a jazz composition. In jazz, swing functions as a structural element rather than a mere rhythmic embellishment; it organizes time, accentuates off-beats, and creates tension and release across measures, producing a sense of forward motion that listeners perceive holistically rather than note by note. This principle

parallels the organization of poetry, where meaning arises not from isolated lines but from their interrelations within the whole. Just as a jazz ensemble relies on patterns of repetition and variation to generate coherence, poetic structures often work through recurring motifs and tonal shifts that echo the dynamics of musical phrasing. In this sense, the comprehension of a poem resembles the appreciation of a jazz performance: both demand an understanding of structural unity beneath surface-level diversity. It is this logic of underlying relations that Lévi-Strauss (1963) identifies in his analysis of myth: "Myths operate in the manner of symphonies: it is only by reading them as a whole, and in relation to each other, that we can understand their structure" (p. 230). Just as Lévi-Strauss emphasizes that myths derive meaning through the interplay of their parts rather than isolated units, Eliot's poetry similarly demands a structural reading, where recurring motifs, tonal modulations, and rhythmic variations create an effect akin to the swing of jazz—a dynamic coherence that emerges only when the poem is experienced as an integrated whole.

According to Gioia (2016), jazz musicians have unique strategies in their phrasing process. He writes that phrasing is as important as a band's collective pulse (pp. 20) and declares that a jazz improviser strives to have "an ability to fly above the ground beat" (p. 25). The phrases may not fit into an expected contour or length, and Gioia also notes there is "flexibility in phrasing" (p. 25) by jazz musicians. Another aspect he discusses is "intentionality," by which he means that the phrase is "the only combination of the notes that would have fit the circumstances" (p. 26). This emphasizes the righteousness of the phrases, not by theoretical or structural rules, but by the feelings of the musician, as they are meant to be performed intentionally. Therefore, according to Gioia, jazz phrasing's essential features are flying above the ground beat, flexibility, and intentionality.

The terms and definitions discussed by Ted Gioia help apply the melodic characteristics of jazz phrasing to poetry. That means by detecting these phrasing strategies of jazz in the structure of a poem's phrases, lines, stanzas, and sections, it can be recognized as a composition that carries a sense of jazz music. This means that when a phrase in a poem does not follow the expected appearance on the page, it is flying above the regular beat of the whole composition. That means phrases do not fit into standard rules of syntax and semantics and do not conform to usual writing principles.

On the other hand, this flying above-the-ground beat of the poem can also be detected by the arrangement of punctuation through the lines.

Musically, each of the utilized punctuations conveys a specific sense of cadence that functions as a closure to each phrase, line, or stanza. An unexpected appearance of punctuation in an irregular spot of a phrase or line can be recognized as a musical cadence that is applied to create a sense of closure, disruption, or break in the poem. Besides, the omission of the punctuation marks from an expected spot of a part of the poem can be interpreted as a continuous chain of phrases that intend to convey a coherent musical thought and are not separated.

Furthermore, these cadences can alter the regular phrasing rules and represent a sense of flexibility in the whole structure of the poem. That means the lines and stanzas of the poem are not meant to follow a specific formal structure and may vary according to the poet's desire. Therefore, the length, number of feet, and even the shape of the poem on the page may change freely and according to the poet's will. This flexibility in structure can also be recognized as a jazz feature in the poem's phrasing.

The last feature of jazz phrasing, based on Gioia's writings, is intentionality. This feature, too, can be applied to poetry. By this means, the structural and aesthetic rules of a particular verse form, such as sonnet, blank verse, or couplet, are not considered the poet's primary concerns. Instead, a composition based on a customized structure is preferred. This feature of intentionality justifies the freedom of form in the poetry of the canons of the modern era, and free verse can be a suitable example of such a phrasing strategy. It is prominent to mention that jazz music's melodic characteristics also apply to the speaker, tone, and the poem's imagery.

Hence, the intentions of the poet are before structural rules. It can also justify the variety of a poet's works during her/his career. This intentionality in composition is another jazz feature that can be applied to poetry. As a result, the characteristics of melody in jazz music can be applied to poetry.

According to Gioia (2016), blues players began to combine major and minor tonalities, moving freely and boldly between consonance and dissonance through their phrases (p. 82). Based on Gioia's declaration, it can be concluded that blues players did not limit their phrasing to a specific tonality that necessarily followed the harmonic background, and playing dissonant tones was a part of their routine. Blues musicians mostly build their phrases based on their sensation with an African background rather than playing melodies according to the conventional harmony of Western music theory. Nevertheless, jazz players continued the blues players' approach and treated harmony the same as the blues musicians. They, too, moved freely between consonance and dissonance.

On the other hand, Ted Gioia discusses the way that instruments simultaneously play roles in jazz composition. Gioia (2016) describes the sound of early jazz bands, noting that "all of the horns join together in spontaneous counterpoint, a give-and-take that requires each player both to stand out as an individual and blend into a larger whole" (p. 96). That means the band's instruments work as counterpoints and play their role spontaneously based on improvisation. This means that each instrument's line has two functions. First, all the lines have to sound harmonious with each other as a part of a harmonic whole. Second, each instrument is meant to sound meaningful as an independent ingredient of a harmonic whole. Hence, the harmonic features of jazz music, according to Ted Gioia, can be concluded as the bold movements between consonance and dissonance, as well as spontaneous counterpoint.

There can be two approaches to applying the harmonic features of jazz to poetry. First, according to a horizontal interpretation, and second, according to a vertical reading of poetry. To apply jazz harmony horizontally to poetry, the syntactic or semantic characteristics of each phrase, line, stanza, or section can be seen in interplay or contrast with the previous or following part. Furthermore, as a whole, the poem conveys a specific characteristic, and each part of it can be seen in interplay or contrast with the syntactic or semantic structure of the poem. The interplay of a particular part with another part or the whole of the poem can be considered the consonant function of that part. On the contrary, the contrast of a specific part of the poem with another part or its whole can be considered a dissonant function of that part. As Ted Gioia declares, "bold movements between consonance and dissonance" are characteristic of jazz harmony. Hence, bold movements between consonant and dissonant parts of a poem can be interpreted as a jazz harmonic feature represented in poetry.

On the other hand, one must look into poetry as a harmonic whole to apply jazz harmony vertically to poetry. In this regard, syntactic and semantic ingredients present in a poem can be seen as simultaneous ingredients. In that case, each phrase, line, stanza, or section of the poem can represent a part simultaneously with another. Based on a vertical interpretation of the poem, as each part remains an independent syntactic and semantic structure, still in comparison and relation to the other ones, various parts in combination with each other, as a harmonic whole, may differ and do not pursue a rational and conventional syntactic or semantic order. Therefore, if two or more parts of a poem - syntactically or semantically - convey a close relation, the combination of those parts can be interpreted as a consonant harmonic structure. In contrast, if two or

more parts of a poem do not convey a close and rational syntactic or semantic relation, combining those parts can be interpreted as a dissonant harmonic structure. Again, this alteration between consonance and dissonance can be recognized as a representation of jazz harmony in poetry.

To apply jazz's spontaneous counterpoints, feature to poetry, each poem's phrase, line, stanza, section, speaker, tone, or imagery must be considered an independent part interacting with the others. The consecutive conversion of parts from structure to structure and form to form can be interpreted as a spontaneity of counterpoints not limited to a particular structural form. This can be considered as the poet's liberty in the composition of a harmonic whole that carries a jazzy character in harmony. These ingredients make the wholeness of the poem, and each of them keeps its meaning as an independent ingredient. Poetry of the modern period carries these features of jazz music in syntax and semantics. As a result, the harmonic characteristics of jazz music can be applied to poetry horizontally and vertically.

Gioia (2016) explains that jazz's approach differs from classical music, noting that the saxophone, a dominant solo instrument in jazz, did not play a significant part in symphonies and therefore was played in various ways. He also observes that jazz musicians played trumpets in their own distinctive manner (p. 30). Therefore, it can be concluded that in a jazz band, the timbre of the instruments is different from that of a symphonic orchestra. In addition, in jazz bands, there was a sense of variety in the timbre of dominant solo instruments such as the saxophone or trumpet because of the various approaches of jazz musicians.

Gioia (2016) notes that jazz musicians often play their instruments with a “dirty” tone, producing timbres closer to natural or animal sounds, rather than the clean tones typical of classical music. He emphasizes that jazz players experience a sense of freedom in their tonal expression (p. 32). Hence, it can be interpreted that, according to Ted Gioia, timbre in jazz music conveys the sense of variety and freedom.

To apply these two features of jazz timbre to poetry, the initial concept of the timbre has to be expanded from a musical viewpoint to poetry's structure. In this regard, there can be two ways to interpret timbre in poetry. First, the basic timbre of each musical instrument in a composition can be construed as a distinctive speaker in a poem. Second, the various sound characters a musician produces with the instrument can be interpreted as different tones of a speaker in a poem.

To apply the first feature of jazz music's timbre-variety to poetry, the number of speakers present in a poem can be interpreted as the number of

instruments utilized in a musical composition. As a whole, all the speakers, alongside each other, organize the total background timbre of the poem, as all the instruments contained in a musical composition form the background timbre of a song. While all the speakers organize the total background timbre, each enounces distinctive phrases, lines, stanzas, or sections that can be recognized as solo sections performed by a particular instrument. While different speakers can take part as soloists, a dominant speaker in the poem still plays the role of the primary timbre and solo instrument in a composition. The alteration of the speakers in the poem can be interpreted as shifting solo sections among various instruments present in a musical composition. Besides, the variety of the tones in a specific speaker's part in a poem can be compared to the variety in the timbre of a distinctive instrument in a musical composition. The tone alteration in a particular speaker's part in a poem can be considered a shift in a specific instrument's timbre. Hence, the alteration of the speaker and a specific speaker's tone in a poem can be interpreted as representing a variety in timbre, a jazz music feature.

To apply the second feature of jazz music's timbre, which is freedom, to poetry, the number of speakers and their various tones can be traced in a poem to see if they are following a formal structure and are meant to shift in a logical, syntactic, and semantic manner or not. Suppose the speaker's shift and tone do not follow a regular rule of form, syntax, or semantics. In that case, the poet has made the alterations based on liberty without considering a formal pattern. Therefore, there is a sense of freedom in the timbre of the poem, which is another feature of jazz music. Gioia (2016) discusses the trademarks of prewar jazz music, highlighting "the thick big band textures" (p. 239). He also credits beboppers primarily for their "monophonic melody statements" (p. 241). Gioia emphasizes that the texture in jazz music varies across eras, and it is characterized by altering density and diversity, based on sound rather than pure notes.

To apply the features of jazz texture to poetry, it is required to expand the initial concept of the texture as a musical feature to poetry. As the first approach, each speaker's part in a poem can be recognized as a distinctive line in a musical composition. Accordingly, the number of speakers in a poem depicts the number of lines in a musical composition. The texture can be interpreted as monophonic if just one speaker is in the poem. The poem's texture is polyphonic if there are two or more dominant speakers. Eventually, if there are many speakers in a poem and one plays a dominant role as the main speaker, the poem's texture is homophonic. As the second approach, the concept of texture as a musical device can also be applied to the imagery and thematic structure of the setting in poetry. In this

regard, each image and setting in a poem can be recognized as a specific musical line in a musical composition. If the whole of the poem conveys a consistent setting that represents a coherent imagery and thematic structure, the texture can be recognized as monophonic. On the other hand, if two or more images and settings are present in the poem and each represents distinctive thematic structures, the texture can be interpreted as polyphonic. Eventually, if there is more than one image and setting in a poem and one of these them prevails throughout the poem, the musical texture of that poem can be recognized as homophonic.

To apply the alteration of density as the first feature of jazz music texture, based on Ted Gioia's writings, the number of speakers present in a poem must be detected throughout the poem. If the number of speakers changes in various stanzas or sections, it can be concluded that the density of the texture is not fixed and alters throughout the poem. This alteration of density represents a sense of jazz music in the texture of poetry.

Besides, based on Ted Gioia's writings, the previous feature can be utilized as a representative to apply diversity as the second feature of jazz music texture. By that means, if the density alters throughout a poem, its texture represents "diversity". Furthermore, on a larger scale, if a poet has a wide range of textures in different poems, it can be concluded that the poet does not focus on a single type of texture, and various textures are represented in their/works. Sound-based lines throughout the poem must be detected to apply sound-based textures, as the last feature of jazz music's texture in poetry. In this regard, those lines built of sound structures rather than standard linguistic structures must be investigated throughout the poem. Therefore, those lines can be recognized as the sound-based parts of a poem with diverse textures.

Gioia (2016) aligns with the general view on the diversity of inspirations in jazz music, noting how jazz musicians adapted elements from the blues, ragtime, and military music and combined them (pp. 75–76). He also observes that jazz musicians drew inspiration from the church, opera houses, and dance music (p. 76). About the concept of improvisation, Ted Gioia believes that, on some level, this fundamental feature of jazz functions as an element against the concept of form.

Gioia (1988) describes jazz improvisation as tending "towards apparent formlessness, towards a breakdown of structural coherence, towards access" (p. 95). He further explains that an improviser must "set one line against another and try to match them, bring them closer together" (p. 95). Thus, improvisation involves both a flexible approach to form and the careful matching of musical materials.

According to Gioia (2016), another key element of improvisation is the "personality" of the individual. He explains that during improvisation, the musician expresses their psyche, making the process a personal depiction (p. 43). Gioia also describes the common "theme and variation" form in jazz, which typically consists of a melodic statement, an improvisation section as a variation, and a melodic restatement (p. 53). Thus, his understanding of theme and variation aligns with the general perspective on jazz form.

Gioia (1988) discusses the concept of "call and response," describing it as "patterns found in African music" (p. 78). His perspective aligns with the general understanding of jazz form. Gioia also highlights "asymmetry" in jazz structure, noting that the usual symmetrical forms are often absent due to spontaneity and improvisation (p. 57). Therefore, according to Gioia, jazz form is characterized by improvisation, theme and variation, call and response, and asymmetry.

To apply these features of jazz form to poetry, each has to be interpreted in poetry's structure separately. The concept of "improvisation" is the first element that poetry can investigate. According to Gioia, the disjunction in the form of a composition is the result of an improvisation-based approach in the composing process, in which the composer's personality comes before the required formal structure. Expanding this idea to poetry, if a poem does not fit into a specific type of formal structure and breaks down the expected syntactic or semantic coherence of a whole, it can be recognized as a poem with an improvise-based form in which the personality of the poet as an individual comes before the formal structure. In addition, the allusions and quotations a poet uses may differ from the source in the context. That means the poet has kept some aspects of the original syntactic or semantic structure but has altered the rest of that borrowed phrase and has turned it into a personal interpretation. This can also be considered an expression of the poet's individuality. Gioia (2016) notes, "merely when they [jazz musicians] are interpreting a written melody, they demonstrate their mastery and express their individuality" (p. 21). This individuality may also convey a sense of humor; as Gioia states, "The jokester would impart a dose of humor to the [jazz musicians] performance" (p. 42). Therefore, syntactic or semantic alterations in allusions or quotations in a poem can be interpreted as another characteristic of improvisation, a feature of jazz music's form.

Gioia also mentions that the task of an improviser is to put the lines against each other. Therefore, an intention to match the lines together, especially the most unrelated ones, functions as a task of improvisation. Suppose the form of a poem is influenced by the association of unrelated

syntactic or semantic structures, and this association is based on the poet's artistic will rather than structural rules. In that case, the poem's form can be interpreted as improvisation-based.

Theme and variation, according to Ted Gioia, is another element of form in jazz music. To apply this feature of jazz to poetry, both syntactic and semantic characteristics of a poem can be observed. In this regard, a sentence, a phrase, or a word can be interpreted as a theme. Adding or omitting syntactic or semantic parts to the theme can be interpreted as creating new variations of the introduced theme. Therefore, if this process is recognizable in a poem, it can be interpreted as a jazz feature of poetry's form.

Call and response are the other characteristics of the jazz form that can be applied to poetry. In this regard, a dialogue in a part of a poem can be compared to a call and response between musical instruments. This process of call and response between the speakers of a poem can be interpreted as a characteristic of jazz music's form. According to Ted Gioia, "asymmetry" is the last characteristic of jazz music's form, which can be applied to poetry. When the whole structure of a poem does not follow a traditional formal template, such as the sonnet, it conveys an asymmetrical form, which can be interpreted as a feature of jazz music. By this means, leaving behind the traditional forms, such as a sonnet or blank verse, and using free verse can be recognized due to the asymmetry in form. Therefore, free verse's asymmetrical structure can be interpreted as a characteristic of jazz music in poetry.

4. Discussion

4.1. *The Love Song of Jazz*

In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot composes the opening stanza in free form and lineation. While the stanza's twelve lines suggest a surface symmetry, the length and metrical variation within each line reveal a flexible, improvisational structure, as when he writes, "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherised upon a table" (Eliot, 2002, p. 3). The formlessness in structure here reflects what Gioia (2016) identifies in jazz as "the sense of liberation" (p. 52), and Eliot's approach in improvised phrasing creates dynamic, fluid lineation. His lines vary in length and stress pattern, prioritizing intentional phrasing over metrical regularity, much like a jazz solo that adapts to the mood of the artist rather than strict rhythm patterns. This melodic fragmentation, seen in lines like "When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherised upon a table" (Eliot, 2002, p. 3), and again in the triplet of lines 5–7, "The muttering retreats /

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels / And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells” (Eliot, 2002, p. 3), echoes the jazz musician’s habit of improvisation. Gioia (1988) notes, “We enjoy improvisation because we take enormous satisfaction in seeing what a great musical mind can create spontaneously” (p. 69). Here, Eliot’s improvised structural approach suggests spontaneity, which contributes to the jazzy liberation evident in his fragmented phrasings. Lines 8–10 similarly function as structural variations, extending the improvisational feel, as in “Streets that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent / To lead you to an overwhelming question ...” (Eliot, 2002, p. 3).

Rhythmically, Eliot uses syncopation, the surprising disruption of expected beats, by leaving lines 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 without punctuation, maintaining an open, unpredictable flow. On the function of this enjambment, Com (2008) writes, “The effect is of constant, breathless anticipation of the next line” (p. 133). Eliot’s phrasing is spontaneous in form and structure, and he disrupts the lines with the liberation of a jazz improviser. The phrase “Oh, do not ask, ‘What is it?’” (Eliot, 2002, p. 3) introduces a new timbre, altering the tonal palette and mirroring how jazz solos pivot into unexpected registers and freely differ from the primary tone. This opening thus establishes Eliot’s jazz-like method of composition: flexible phrasing, syncopated lineation, and liberated lineation that illustrate an overarching improvisational sensibility, defining the poem’s modernist musicality and structure.

The second stanza, repeated as the fifth, functions as a jazzy motif in multiple aspects. Eliot (2009) writes, “In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo” (p. 3). This two-line couplet introduces a syncopation of imagery, interrupting the outdoor scenes of the surrounding stanzas and immersing the reader in an indoor, social environment. Such a sudden shift is akin to jazz’s unexpected modulation, described by Gioia (2016) as a “deliberate disruption in the flow of the music” (p. 84). The couplet’s appearance disrupts the protagonist’s solitary mindset, redirecting attention to a crowded social space. Musically, it functions as a “break” in jazz; what Gioia (1988) describes as “an improvised motif of determinate length—usually one or two bars—played by a single soloist in isolation from the band” (p. 78). This short and contrasting stanza stands as an improvised break and also a syncopation of the flow of the poem’s image, tone, and stanza’s flow. Moreover, in a jazz context, the Michelangelo stanza is a “hook”; a musical idea that Gioia (1988) describes as “the striking and immediate contrast of an individual voice against the preceding ensemble sound” (p. 78). Here, this short stanza is a hook that stands out as an individual image,

tone, and structure that contrasts with its previous and succeeding stanzas. This iconic stanza of Eliot's poem is a jazz motif in form, structure, image, and timbre.

Furthermore, this Michelangelo stanza serves as a harmonic dissonance within the poem's broader structure. When read vertically alongside other stanzas, it acts as a counterpoint, a dissonant but essential element that echoes the jazz musician's tendencies for harmonic tensions and what Gioia (2016) calls "bold movement between consonance and dissonance" (p. 32). Thus, these two lines embody the improvisational spirit of jazz music in Eliot's poetry. They are brief, surprising, and harmonically dissonant, a hallmark of Eliot's modernist experimentation. In the third stanza, Eliot's approach to form mirrors jazz improvisation, as seen in "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, / The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes, ... / Curled once about the house, and fell asleep" (Eliot, 2002, p. 3). In the first two lines, Eliot employs theme and variation, a jazz technique that Peters (2013) describes as "a short and memorable tune (the theme) is played repeatedly, each successive repetition somehow embellished or transformed (the variations)" (p. 9). Here, the poet improvises around the word "yellow" as the central theme, which is repeated and varied structurally within the stanza. The varied line lengths and flowing enjambments produce a free verse quality, prioritizing intuitive, flexible jazz-like phrasing over predictable patterns. Thus, the poem's third stanza becomes a poetic improvisation aligned with jazz's concept of theme and variations.

In the next stanza, Eliot introduces a new thematic word, "time," while still echoing "yellow" from the previous stanza, initiating a new set of theme and variation: "And indeed there will be time / For the yellow smoke that slides along the street... / There will be time, there will be time... / Time for you and time for me, / And time yet for a hundred indecisions..." (Eliot, 2002, p. 4). Structurally, Eliot repeats the form of the previous stanza, reflecting a feature of jazz form. As Monson (2009) notes, "Repeating a form and then inverting it through a process of variation is central to jazz" (p. 107). The theme of "time" recurs throughout the stanza, and Eliot improvises variations on this word; its repetition in lines 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 mirrors jazz phrasing based on the theme-and-variation principle. Varied line lengths create an asymmetrical, formless structure, and the sense of improvisation and syncopation is reinforced by leaving lines 1, 2, 4, and 7 unpunctuated. Additionally, beginning the majority of lines with auxiliaries produces a restless, spontaneous rhythm reminiscent of jazz improvisation.

Moreover, Eliot's phrasings are melodically fragmented in the same lines 1, 2, 4, and 7, breaking away from strict meter and flowing like an improvised solo. Rhythmically, Eliot introduces syncopation by surprising disruptions; lines 1, 2, and 4 are left unpunctuated and flexibly arranged, echoing jazz's unexpected, offbeat phrasing. This stanza thus demonstrates Eliot's intentional improvisation, revealing the poet as a jazz soloist in language, bending rhythm, repeating themes, and inviting the reader into his jazzy and spontaneous musical landscape.

In the following stanza, Eliot's phrasing becomes more harmonically structured, yet still embraces improvisation and the freedom of jazz: "And indeed there will be time / To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?' / Time to turn back and descend the stair, ... / Do I dare / Disturb the universe? / In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" (Eliot, 2002, p. 4). Eliot continues to improvise on the theme of "time," weaving in the new theme "Do I dare?" and creating melodic variations throughout the stanza, mirroring a jazz musician's approach to improvisation. Gioia (1988) asserts, "The great improvisational artist—whether in oral poetry or jazz music or whatever art form—transcends these limitations of spontaneous creation" (p. 136). Similarly, Eliot extends the poem's jazz qualities into the harmonic layer. The parenthetical lines (lines 5 and 8) function as harmonic counterpoints, interrupting the main melody and adding a spontaneous, syncopated layer to the poem's harmonic texture. This echo of jazz's dissonant harmony creates a dynamic interplay, which Gioia (1988) identifies as an essential element of jazz: "surprise" (p. 116). Lines 1, 9, and 11 are melodically fragmented, as Eliot prioritizes intentional phrasing over formal predictability, reflecting jazz's embrace of fragmented structure, which Gioia (2016) calls "a diversity of musical expression" (p. 77). Despite the stanza's surface harmony, Eliot's flexible phrasing and rhythmic disruptions create a vibrant, jazz-infused composition.

In the next stanza, Eliot continues to compose based on improvisation, prioritizing formlessness and asymmetry over a rigid structure, as in: "For I have known them all already, known them all — / Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, / I have measured out my life with coffee spoons; / I know the voices dying with a dying fall / Beneath the music from a farther room. / So how should I presume?" (Eliot, 2002, p. 5). Eliot chooses new themes, particularly "presume", which he will develop in later stanzas. He also weaves variations of the phrases "known" and "measured," and keeps the form of his composition based on jazz music's theme and variation form. The fourth line stands out rhythmically, as it's the only line of the stanza that ends unpunctuated. It depicts the disruption

of syncopation in the rhythm layer of the stanza. Eliot's decision to let the line trail off evokes the improvised fade of a musician's closing phrase. This syncopated disruption in line 4, combined with the improvised flow of ideas, reinforces Eliot's modernist experimentation, mirroring jazz's freedom from predictable cadences.

The next stanza continues Eliot's improvisation-based structure but stands out for its asymmetrical form of seven lines: "And I have known the eyes already, known them all — / The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase, / And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, / Then how should I begin" (Eliot, 2002, p. 5). The stanza's odd number of lines introduces asymmetry, a structural hallmark of jazz rooted in blues music. Peters (2013) emphasizes the importance of asymmetry in blues, noting that "The 12-bar blues is a distinctly American structure (and probably a twentieth-century one at that), which is unusual in western music for its asymmetry" (p. 11). Eliot's use of an odd number of lines reflects the asymmetrical structure of the blues and conveys the spontaneity of his phrasing, which does not aim to conform to a predetermined, symmetrical line count.

Eliot improvises around "the eyes" as a central theme and develops new variations of self-conscious vulnerability with spontaneous inflections. Line 5, "Then how should I begin" (Eliot, 2002, p. 5), melodically disrupts the stanza's flow, echoing the surprising syncopation of a jazz solo's unexpected rhythmic pattern. Its brevity and lack of punctuation introduce a half cadence that keeps the stanza open-ended and searching. Both here and in the previous stanza, Eliot concludes with a question, creating a musical half cadence that resists resolution, as Gioia (2016) notes: "the comforting harmonic resolutions of everyday music are no longer an option" (p. 136).

In the next stanza, Eliot introduces a harmonic counterpoint in the third line, creating an improvised tension: "And I have known the arms already, known them all — / Arms that are braceleted and white and bare / (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)" (Eliot, 2002, p. 5). The parenthetical third line acts as a spontaneous harmonic counterpoint. This textural variation echoes the jazz musician's improvisational layering, where unexpected lines emerge alongside the main melody. Throughout this stanza, Eliot continues to improvise on the theme of "arms," creating variations that feel fluid and flexible, an echo of a spontaneity that Monson (2009) describes as "absolutely central in the jazz improvisational aesthetic" (p. 84). The counterpoint of lines enhances the polyphonic texture of the poem, building a dense, improvisational soundscape that mirrors jazz's interplay of voices and timbres. Formally,

Eliot's line lengths and lack of final punctuation reinforce his formless, improvisational approach, reflecting what Gioia (2011) calls the "refusal of formal closure" that characterizes jazz's experimental structures (p. 112).

In the next two stanzas, Eliot syncopates the poem's imagery, disrupting its flow with bold contrasts: "Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets / And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes..." and "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (Eliot, 2002, p. 5). Eliot creates a bold movement between consonant and dissonant imagery, a technique akin to jazz's dynamic play of harmony and counterpoint (Gioia, 2016, pp. 82). The fragmented imagery of "lonely men in shirt-sleeves" abruptly transitions to the crablike "pair of ragged claws," a shift that echoes the startling bold movement of jazz harmony between consonance and dissonance. This approach to imagery is what Pinsky (1999) describes as a characteristic of free verse, which is "a standard of freshness, expressiveness and musicality" (p. 58), enabling Eliot to flow beyond traditional boundaries. In these stanzas, Eliot demonstrates that syncopation in poetry is not limited to rhythm; it also extends to the layering of images and ideas, bringing a vibrant, jazz-like motion to the poem's structure.

In the next stanza, Eliot showcases jazz-like formlessness and flexibility in phrasing: "And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! ... / Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter, ... / And in short, I was afraid" (Eliot, 2002, p. 6). The parenthetical phrase "(grown slightly bald)" in line 8 functions as a syncopation within the line's rhythm, an approach that mirrors jazz improvisation, where "it destroys these same expectations by employing false cadences, unexpected modulations, shifts in tone, and other similar devices" (Gioia, 1988, p. 118). This momentary shift interrupts the stanza's steady pulse, embodying freedom and flexibility. Ted Gioia (2016) discusses that "flexibility in phrasing is one of the chief delights of hearing jazz music played by the masters of the idiom" (p. 25). This phrase also acts as a harmonic counterpoint, introducing an unexpected, spontaneous voice within the line. On spontaneity in music, Gioia (2016) writes, "the element of spontaneity in the music rebels against codification and museum-like canonization" (p. 47). Eliot's decision to include it in parentheses amplifies the stanza's improvisational, fragmented quality, echoing Pinsky's (1998) insights on free verse as "a standard of freshness, expressiveness and musicality" (p. 58). Thus, this stanza reveals how Eliot's formless structure, with its shifting rhythms and layered voices,

captures the improvisational spirit of jazz, making the poem a living, evolving composition.

In the next stanza, Eliot's improvisational approach is clearly visible in his treatment of memory and allusion: "And would it have been worth it, after all, ... / To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead, ... / That is not it, at all'" (Eliot, 2002, p. 6). Eliot alters the biblical allusion to Lazarus, an act of spontaneous variation that Gioia (2016) argues is central to jazz: "The hard boppers constantly looked outside the jazz idiom for new concepts they could adopt and adapt, with everything from mambo to the boogaloo finding its way into their music" (p. 131). In this stanza, Eliot's Lazarus is no longer a figure of spiritual revelation but a symbol of self-conscious doubt, transformed to fit the poem's modern anxieties.

The quoted lines, "To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead'" and "That is not it, at all," create a shifting timbre, reminiscent of the musical interplay of solo and ensemble voices in jazz. Eliot's use of direct quotation, "That is not what I meant at all," introduces a new, contrasting voice, an effect that mirrors a feature of jazz, employed by Eliot. Here, the poet creates a new line, which is common in a jazz context. As Muyumba (2016) describes, this approach is "improvising within the universe of the composed song" (p. 147).

Additionally, the fragmented phrasing in line 6, "To have squeezed the universe into a ball," is another example of Eliot's syncopated, improvisational phrasing, resisting the expected cadence of a traditionally structured line. This fragmentation aligns with Gioia's (2016) observation that jazz musicians use syncopation, which he defines as "deliberate disruption in the flow of the music" (p. 84). Eliot syncopates his lines as a jazz improviser does. Thus, Eliot's layered approach here reflects the jazz musician's balancing act, honoring tradition while bending it into new shapes to express personal and immediate truths.

Melodically, the following stanza acts as a variation of the previous one, much like a jazz musician's improvisational return to a familiar theme: "And would it have been worth it, after all, ... / It is impossible to say just what I mean! ... / 'That is not it at all, / That is not what I meant, at all'" (Eliot, 2002, p. 7). Here, Eliot's formless structure and flexible phrasing echo what Gioia (1988) identifies as jazz's spontaneity, which has been dominant in the jazz idiom since its beginning (p. 116). Eliot returns to the phrase "Would it have been worth it" as a central theme, then spins out new variations with subtle differences in rhythm and image. He composes and improvises his lines as a jazz improviser, building his structure based on a theme and its variations. He keeps the form jazzy rather than fixed.

In the final two lines, “That is not it at all, / That is not what I meant, at all”, Eliot alters the timbre of the poem. These quoted voices feel like a shifting texture in jazz: a new instrumental line cutting through the primary melody and introducing a new line. They serve as a counterpoint to the preceding, more meditative lines, adding tension and syncopation in the conversational flow. Eliot’s improvisational freedom in this stanza, where the structure resists closure and the voices bend away from traditional cadence, epitomizes the jazz-infused approach to poetic form that threads through this entire collection.

In the next stanza, Eliot embraces jazz’s fragmented phrasing and formless structure: “No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; ... / Almost, at times, the Fool” (Eliot, 2002, p. 7). Eliot’s fragmented second line, “Am an attendant lord, one that will do,” interrupts the expected flow of the stanza. He, like a jazz improviser, syncopates this stanza by breaking the flow in the lineation. This intentional disruption of form and rhythm echoes jazz music’s rhythmic characteristic of employing disruptions as unexpected syncopations.

The stanza’s nine-line asymmetry reflects the freedom and improvisational formlessness that define jazz structure. Eliot’s self-effacing tone, “not Prince Hamlet... almost, at times, the Fool,” demonstrates his flexible phrasing, which bends around conventional sentence structure and flows with a sense of personal immediacy, favoring personal structures rather than fixed forms. By reworking the figure of Hamlet into his own fragmented, improvisational self, Eliot underscores the jazz-like capacity of poetry to reinvent traditional roles and bend them to the speaker’s private rhythm. Here, Eliot, as a jazz poet, improvises his personal image based on Hamlet’s and prioritizes individualism over restricted allusion. This individualism resonates with jazz music’s characteristic, which Gioia (2016) describes as the need to “stand out as an individual” (p. 96). Eliot’s poetry aligns with this jazz trait in both image and structure.

In the final five stanzas of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot shortens his lines and crafts asymmetrical forms, echoing the fragmented, free-flowing energy of jazz: “I grow old ... I grow old ... / ... / I do not think that they will sing to me. / ... / Till human voices wake us, and we drown” (Eliot, 2002, et al., 7). The one-line stanza, “I do not think that they will sing to me,” acts as a syncopated break in the poem’s rhythm. It disrupts the expected flow, creating a moment of quiet, dissonant pause that reflects the asymmetrical structure of the stanzas. Eliot, like a jazz improviser, freely shapes his phrases. On the freedom of jazz, Gioia (2016) notes that jazz musicians were given “so much freedom to

deconstruct and recombine all the music memes in the global jukebox” (p. 148).

The enjambments in the final stanzas, where lines flow into each other without punctuation, reflect Eliot’s jazz phrasing approach. He improvises his lines like a jazz soloist. Compared to his contemporaries, Eliot’s lineation parallels what Armstrong accomplished in jazz, as Gioia (2016) observes, “Armstrong clearly grasped the potential of syncopated phrasing at a level far beyond his predecessors” (p. 157). Eliot can be seen as the Armstrong of poetry, taking melodies to the moon.

Moreover, Eliot’s repeated images of mermaids and the sea create a fluid, layered texture, a polyphony of voices that never fully resolves and keeps the image fluid too. The shifting imagery and fragmented phrasings reflect Gioia’s (1988) insight that “the expressiveness of the musician” (p. 105) is a defining characteristic of jazz. In these final stanzas, Eliot’s composition becomes a culmination of improvisation, a poetic solo that fades into silence, leaving the reader with the lingering jazz-like tension of a work that is never fully resolved and always alive in its moment.

In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot masterfully crafts a poetic structure that resonates with the improvisational spirit of jazz. His use of asymmetrical forms, flexible phrasing, and fragmented. Throughout the poem, Eliot’s manipulation of theme and variation, from the repeated phrases of “Do I dare?” to the syncopated interruptions of parenthetical asides, creates a dynamic, layered texture.

The poem’s polyphonic voices and abrupt shifts in tone, as seen in the mermaids’ haunting chorus and the intimate monologue of Prufrock himself, reflect the timbre and texture variations that define jazz. Ultimately, this analysis reveals how Eliot’s poem, though rooted in literary modernism, breathes with the restless energy of jazz, a testament to poetry’s ability to absorb and transform the structures of music into new, vital forms.

In a broader context, *Prufrock’s* perception of form is tested as the poem adopts free verse, retaining its formless, unpredictable, and asymmetrical nature. Comparable to a jazz composition, the works’ improvisational structure accounts for these three distinct qualities. On individuality of poetry, Azabdaftari (n.d.) writes, “Poets are credited with their willingness to come up with new expressions; they are lauded for ripping the tight strictures of the language in a bid to express their ideas and feelings freely” (p. 5). In this sense, Eliot approached his composition like a jazz improviser, drawing from his heart and soul in the moment rather than adhering to a fixed structure to create the artwork in a predetermined form. *Prufrock* remains an improvisation from beginning

to end. Although Mr. Eliot's technical background lends coherence, its structure remains unique. This is where jazz's most crucial aspect comes into play. Despite all of the characteristics mentioned above, *Prufrock* swings perfectly. This means that despite the freedom and variety in its form, structure, imagery, and tone, it still conveys a sense of harmony and cohesion as a complete composition.

4.2. Jazz *Portrait of a Lady*

In *Portrait of a Lady*, Eliot (n.d.) begins with a harmonious setting: imagery of “December’s afternoon,” “wax candles,” “rings of light,” and “Juliet’s tomb” evoke a consonant, atmospheric backdrop (pp. 13–14). Against this carefully arranged background, the quoted phrase, “I have saved this afternoon for you,” acts as the melody that rises above the harmonic texture. Despite these harmonic underpinnings, Eliot’s structure remains asymmetrical and formless. The first end-stop in line 7 signals an irregular division of phrases, a feature that aligns with jazz’s tendency to “fearful asymmetry” (Gioia, *How to Listen*, p. 31). Eliot’s repeated mention of “four candles” and “four rings of light” might suggest symmetry, but his lineation refuses to settle and keeps the overall form of the poem asymmetrical and jazzy in structure. He improvises the form as a jazz musician.

The counterpoints that emerge, such as the lines beginning “We have been, let us say...”, mimic jazz’s layering of spontaneous solos over a consistent harmonic structure, and introduce a new line to the composition. Eliot’s quoted material, like the spoken line, in *Portrait of a Lady*, Eliot begins with a harmonious setting: imagery of “December’s afternoon,” “wax candles,” “rings of light,” and “Juliet’s tomb” evoke a consonant, atmospheric backdrop (pp. 13–14). Against this carefully arranged background, the quoted phrase, “I have saved this afternoon for you” (p. 14), acts as the melody that rises above the harmonic texture. Despite these harmonic underpinnings, Eliot’s structure remains asymmetrical and formless. The first end-stop in line 7 signals an irregular division of phrases, a feature that aligns with jazz’s tendency to “fearful asymmetry” (Gioia, *How to Listen*, p. 31). Eliot’s repeated mention of “four candles” and “four rings of light” might suggest symmetry, but his lineation refuses to settle and keeps the overall form of the poem asymmetrical and jazzy in structure. He improvises the form as a jazz musician. functions as an improvised solo, a variation of the theme that interrupts and enriches the primary melody. In the quoted lines beginning at line 19, Eliot thickens the texture by adding a new layer of voice and tone. As a jazz improviser, Eliot prioritizes his individuality and freedom

to alter the density of the poem. The quoted lines function as a solo by their speaker over the settled harmonic structure of the initial lines.

The italicized final line, “Without these friendships — life, what *cauchemar!*” (Eliot, 2002, p. 15), highlights a shift in musical timbre. Eliot’s choice to mark this line typographically underscores the liberty of tone that jazz musicians cultivate. As Gioia notes, “Newcomers to the music immediately grasp the freedom in jazz” (Gioia, *How to Listen*, p. 52). Here, Eliot takes this freedom of jazz culture and alters the timbre in phrasing, closing his solo with a different tone. Thus, in these opening stanzas, Eliot melds carefully structured harmonies with sudden disruptions, a poetic equivalent of jazz’s dynamic balance between form and improvisation.

In the last stanza of the first section, Eliot intensifies the poem’s jazz-infused character by revisiting the earlier theme of “violins and cornets,” but this time introducing a stark variation. The music transitions from the soft, atmospheric consonance of the initial scene to a harsh, unsettling dissonance, mirroring what Gioia identifies as the bold harmonic shifts inherent in jazz. He writes, “The horn players adopting quarter tones, cries, and dissonance as a way of expanding and stretching the jazz vocabulary from within” (Gioia, *History*, p. 365). Here, Eliot sounds jazzy with dissonant images of the setting, which are personalised to the speaker as a jazz solo.

Eliot writes, “Among the windings of the violins ... / Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins...” (p.15). Here, Eliot’s improvisatory approach to structure is unmistakable. The fragmented phrasings in lines 2 and 3— “And the ariettes / Of cracked cornets” depict both syncopation and fragmentation in phrasing and disrupt predictable rhythmic patterns. Eliot mirrors this in the broken phrasings and unexpected caesuras that give the stanza a syncopated and jazzy feel. He spontaneously disrupts these lines and does not follow an expected order in foot numbers or punctuation.

The reference to the “dull tom-tom” intensifies this sense of rhythmic dissonance, introducing a new texture and sound that contrasts with the delicate violins and cornets. Eliot’s tom-tom is a jarring, almost primitive beat, a counterpoint to the refined European instruments of the earlier lines, and throws the soundscape of the poem into the natural African sound-based approach to music that jazz musicians rely on and prefer in their texture and timbre. He recognizes this contrasting sound as an incorrect note, which suits the discourse of the Western world, while as a jazz improviser, he tends to break the border between correct and incorrect and compose his poetry spontaneously.

Finally, the lines that follow, “—Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance...” (Eliot, 2002, p. 9), restore a more symmetrical structure, as if Eliot were concluding the improvised solo and returning to the ensemble’s main theme. But even here, his free-spirited phrasing refuses the predictability of traditional forms. He keeps the number of lines odd and against a symmetrical form and improvises the lineation in length and foot numbers. The organized return to punctuation marks resembles the swinging groove of the whole section. Eliot blends the improvised lines with the overall pulse of this section and concludes in a coherent structure of lines.

In the first stanza of the second section, Eliot abandons symmetrical lineation in favor of a formless, improvisational approach that echoes jazz’s unpredictable phrasing. The opening lines establish a harmonic background, the gentle, atmospheric presence of lilacs, before Eliot overlays a melodic solo in the form of a spoken monologue, “Ah, my friend, you do not know... / And smiles at situations which it cannot see” (Eliot, 2002, p. 16). This layered structure, harmonic description followed by a melodic quotation, is reminiscent of theme-and-solo practice, in which Eliot’s lines turn into a solo section over the initial harmonic setting, established by him. Furthermore, the line “(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)” is particularly striking. Its placement in parentheses creates a syncopated interruption, a visual and rhythmic break that mirrors jazz’s fragmented phrasing and disruptive structure. In this regard, Eliot relies on the spontaneity of individualism, rather than the determinism of a fixed form. He composes his lines based on individualism.

Eliot’s refusal to adhere to a fixed pattern of line lengths or beats further underscores the flexibility of phrasing that represents jazz music’s fragmented melodic structures. Lines such as “I smile, of course, / And go on drinking tea” (Eliot, 2002, p. 9) are delivered with a casual brevity that undermines the previous monologue’s gravity and returns to the central harmonic background. By these two lines, Eliot reminds the reader of the initial background. Overall, this stanza exemplifies Eliot’s jazz-like method in composition: weaving harmonic settings, improvising lyrical “solos” with syncopated cadences, and building an atmosphere of layered textures and tonal contrasts. On the function of texture in jazz, Gioia writes, “to a seasoned fan of early jazz, this shift in texture is much more shocking than any of the novelty effects on the track” (Gioia, 2016, p. 62). By putting the main harmonic background together with the quoted lines as solos, Eliot creates a dense texture that is also altered in thickness and does not stay the same throughout this section.

In the following four stanzas, Eliot composes an extended quotation that unfolds as a melodic line, fragmented across multiple stanzas, a structure that mirrors the syncopated phrasing of jazz improvisation: “Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall ... / I shall sit here, serving tea to friends....” (Eliot, 2002, p. 10). Eliot’s decision to disperse this monologue across several stanzas, each varying in length, reflects the asymmetrical phrasing that jazz musicians employ when breaking away from the expected flow of the structure. As Gioia discusses the function of a single member of a big band in jazz, “Individual members of these expanded groups still had the opportunity to improvise— this kind of spontaneous creativity would always remain a calling card of the jazz artist.” (Gioia, 2016, p. 115) Throughout these four stanzas, the expanded monologue represents the “spontaneous creativity” that improvisation, as a form in structure, provides Eliot in his composition. He improvises the monologue as an expanded solo section of a big band member, and takes the liberty to form the phrasing and structure of his solo based on spontaneity. The fragmented structure of the quotation also functions as a syncopated rhythmic element; each stanza’s abrupt ending and the following stanza’s fresh start disrupt the poem’s expected flow and create tension. As a jazz poet, Eliot improvises the structure of the form.

Notably, the first two lines of the second stanza, “The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune / Of a broken violin...” (Eliot, 2002, p. 17), introduce a new speaker and new tonal color to this part, which is actually a return to the harmonic background of the poem. Here, the harmonic background, which is separated from the monologue, interacts with it. As Gioia discusses the function of the band members of a jazz big band, “They could support the soloist or engage in give-and-take with other sections of the band” (Gioia, 2016, p. 115). In these two lines, Eliot expands the function of the unquoted speaker. It functions as the reminder of the initial harmonic background, the supporter of the solo section, and also a giver and taker that interacts with the other speaker. As a jazz poet, Eliot composes his poem based on the functional aspects of the members of a jazz band, who are flexible in function and sound.

This change in speaker and perspective alters the timbre of the poem as well, aligning with Gioia’s observation that “in the early decades of the twentieth century, no one outside of the fields of jazz and blues was taking such freedom with tone production and distortion” (Gioia, 2016, p. 31). In these two lines, Eliot takes advantage of freedom in producing his timbre and changes it. Although the female character’s tone is justifying, soft, and tricky, the other character’s tone of inner voice tends to be pessimistic, harsh, and unpleasant. This contrast in timbre is another

quality of jazz. It also functions as a counterpoint, playing in parallel with the central melodic line while contrasting it harmonically. It's a depiction of what Gioia calls "bold movement between consonance and dissonance" (Gioia, 2016, p. 82). By considering the quoted lines as a solo section and the consonant flow of the melodic line, the altered two lines are their dissonant counterpoints that sound against the solo section. As a jazz poet, Eliot employs the harmonic qualities of jazz and composes his poem in a jazz harmonic layer.

The final, single-line stanza of the monologue, "I shall sit here, serving tea to friends..." (Eliot, 2002, p. 17), serves as a syncopated disruption within this extended solo. Its surprising brevity and abrupt closure mirror the sudden breaks and hesitations of the flow in the rhythm. This final phrase, unexpectedly short and rhythmically distinct, breaks the uniform length of the preceding stanzas and exemplifies Eliot's embrace of jazz's flexibility and improvisational approach. Here, the phrasing becomes more fragmented and surprising in structure. On the importance of the concept of surprise in jazz, Gioia writes, "When I first encountered jazz critic Whitney Balliett's description of jazz as 'the sound of surprise,' I could only nod my head in agreement: he had captured in those four words exactly what drew me to this art form" (Gioia, 2016, p. 203). Regarding this viewpoint on jazz, Eliot's lineation differs from the previous stanzas, and by the break in the flow of the stanza's pattern, he brings the element of surprise into this solo section and employs it as a dominant jazz-maker element in structure. As a jazz poet, he does not mind depicting surprise in his improvised composition.

In the following stanza, Eliot sustains his improvisational approach, embracing formlessness of form and an asymmetrical shape through an odd number of lines: "I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends ... / Are these ideas right or wrong?" (Eliot, 2002, p. 18). The uneven structure of the stanza, comprising 15 lines, reflects the asymmetry that jazz musicians often exploit to avoid predictable patterns. Eliot intentionally leaves lines without punctuation, particularly the opening line, producing an open-ended, syncopated phrasing that echoes jazz's tendency to disrupt cadences. On the structure of jazz, Gioia writes, "Songs sometimes change direction suddenly and unpredictably" (Gioia, 2016, p. 51). In this stanza, Eliot adheres to the improvisation characteristics that he utilized in the previous stanzas, yet he adds the sudden and unpredictable half cadence that appears in the final line. By closing the stanza by a question mark, Eliot improvisation does not resolve to stability, but tends to keep his melodic structure unresolved, restless, and unexpected in flow. He is a jazz poet who feels free to

prioritize his ego to what is expected to happen. His melodic lines are jazz, and therefore, unpredictable in form.

This flexibility in lineation and phrasing, where the number of feet per line varies, reveals Eliot's improvisational mindset, prioritizing the poem's expressive intent over rigid structures. As Ted Gioia argues, "Even in the earliest jazz, with its emphasis on ensemble playing, the incipient individualism of the art form was plainly evident" (Gioia, 1988, p. 77). Similarly, Eliot's freewheeling lineation aligns with this ethos of musical spontaneity. Moreover, the textural density of the stanza increases in the second half, as Eliot shifts from mundane observations to the haunting image of the street-piano, an image that resonates with the layered, multi-voiced textures of jazz improvisation and what Gioia calls a "shift in texture" (Gioia, 2016, p. 63). Eliot's use of soundscape imagery, "the smell of hyacinths," mingling with the mechanical piano's melody, creates a texture that is nostalgic, dissonant, and restless. He sounds as jazzy as his previous improvisation.

In the opening stanza of the third section, Eliot sets a harmonic background in the first four lines and the final line: "The October night comes down; returning as before / Except for a slight sensation of being ill at ease ... / My smile falls heavily among the bric-à-brac" (Eliot, 2002, p. 11). The imagery of "ill at ease" and the falling smile captures a dissonant undertone that resonates with the "tension" in jazz playing (Gioia, 1997, p. 6). In contrast, the quoted conversational lines between these musical backgrounds are consonant in tone, forming a bold juxtaposition of dissonance and consonance, a hallmark of jazz's harmonic play, according to Gioia (1997, p. 82).

Eliot's improvisational approach emerges in his free treatment of speakers and tone. Just as jazz musicians shift spontaneously between consonance and dissonance, Eliot shifts voices and mood with subtle but deliberate shifting in phrasing. This flexibility reveals Eliot's freedom in structure and deliberate improvisation. As a jazz poet, his melodic structure in this stanza stays fragmented and flexible in form. His individualism leads the overall structure of the stanza, and his harmonic approach is just as altering as jazz music's harmonic characteristics.

In the next stanza, Eliot crafts a composition of layered textures, improvising spontaneous counterpoint: "'Perhaps you can write to me.' ... / (But our beginnings never know our ends!) ... / My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark" (Eliot, 2002, p. 11). Here, lines 1, 4, and 6 form a consistent, thematic layer, while lines 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9 serve as a counterpoint. The fifth line, enclosed in parentheses, floats as an improvised variation that thickens the texture. As Gioia writes, in jazz,

“all of the horns join together in spontaneous counterpoint, a give-and-take that requires each player both to stand out as an individual and blend into a larger whole.” (Gioia, 1997, p. 96)

Eliot’s choice of different tonal expressions in these lines parallels Gioia’s claim on the function of players in a jazz band, both as individuals and as a blended ingredient to the whole. In this stanza, Eliot improvises on behalf of a full band and introduces each voice as an instrument that functions as both an individual and a part of the whole stanza. It’s a jazzy stanza that stands as a team of different voices, performed by a single poet, Eliot, the jazzman of modern poetry.

In the following stanza, Eliot thins the texture to a single layer: “‘For everybody said so, all our friends, ... / I shall sit here, serving tea to friends.’” (Eliot, 2002, p. 12). Structurally, this passage highlights Eliot’s ongoing improvisational approach, formlessness, and flexibility remain central. However, the reduction to a single textual voice removes the polyphonic complexity present in earlier stanzas, thereby smoothing the texture. As Gioia writes, this “shift in texture” (Gioia, 2016, p. 62) is a part of jazz texture and in this stanza. Eliot, as a jazz improviser, alters the texture of his composition to a monophonic one. Similarly, the poem’s pared-down structure here conveys the solitary, reflective tone of the speaker, maintaining the improvisational spirit while reducing other jazz features like counterpoint voices or syncopation in lineation.

In the following stanza, Eliot syncopates the first line, disrupting its structural flow and rhythm: “And I must borrow every changing shape ... / Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance —” (Eliot, 2002, p. 12). This opening line’s interruption with ellipses and flexible phrasing exemplifies Eliot’s ongoing improvisation. As Ted Gioia mentions, “Spontaneous creativity is an essential element in jazz” (Gioia, 2016, p. 182), and Eliot’s phrasing in this stanza is improvised based on this creativity. As a jazz improviser, Eliot improvises his images with the liberty of a jazz musician. He freely shifts from figurative language of “dancing bears” to spontaneous imagery of “parrot” and “ape”.

In the poem’s closing stanza, Eliot continues this jazz-infused exploration, using syncopated phrasing and an open-ended question to maintain improvisational energy: “Well! and what if she should die some afternoon, ... / And should I have the right to smile?” (Eliot, 2002, p. 12). The stanza’s closing phrase, “dying fall,” anticipates a final cadence or resolution, yet Eliot undercuts that expectation by ending on a question. On the importance of the concept of tension, Gioia mentions, “Much of the beauty in the music draws on this creative tension” (Gioia, 2016, p. 52). In the last line, Eliot, as a jazz improviser, creatively does not respond

to the expected complete cadence he anticipated in earlier lines. Instead, he creatively closes the poem with a half cadence and creates an unresolved tension in the closing line of his poem. As a jazzman, Eliot stays creative in the form and phrasing of the stanza.

Taken together, these stanzas show how Eliot uses jazz structures, including syncopation, improvisation, asymmetry, and flexible phrasings, to animate and deepen the emotional complexity of *Portrait of a Lady*. Rather than offering closure, he sustains the poem's energy with a sense of perpetual searching, a hallmark of both modernist poetry and jazz improvisation. Eliot's *Portrait of a Lady* emerges as a multifaceted improvisation grounded in the structural vocabulary of jazz. Through syncopated phrasing, asymmetrical lineation, and shifting tonalities, Eliot mirrors the flexibility, spontaneity, and tension of jazz music. As jazz thrives on unexpected transitions and layered textures, Eliot masterfully deploys them to render this poem a vivid, ever-evolving performance. In the end, rather than providing resolution, Eliot's jazz-infused structures sustain the emotional and imagistic complexity of the poem, affirming his place as a poet attuned to the improvisational spirit of jazz music.

5. Conclusion

The investigations of this study provide significant support for the notion that jazz's characteristics in various elements and layers of music play a crucial role in the structure of T.S. Eliot's poetry. The poems known as his remarkable works and the dominant instances of Modern-era poetry represent jazz music's characteristics in layers of rhythm, melody, harmony, and form. One outcome of this study is that both significant characteristics of jazz music's rhythm - syncopation and swing - are observed in the selected poems. Eliot's poetry depicts syncopations - a prominent feature of jazz rhythm - by his disrupting lineation, phrasing, and odd punctuation markings. Besides, although the impact of syncopation enhances the formlessness of his poetry, he still keeps his poems as a whole that remains coherent all along to the end as a single poem. This feature of oneness keeps his poem swinging, another feature of jazz music's rhythm. However, a key finding of this study is that syncopation is not limited to Eliot's poetry in structure and form but is also reflected in poem imagery, speaker, tone, and stanza divisions.

Another outcome of this study is that jazz music's significant notions of melody - fragmented phrasing, flexibility, and intentionality - are dominantly utilized by Eliot in his poetry and intensify the music of his poetry as a reflection of jazz as his era's popular music genre. Moreover, a key finding of this study regarding the concept of melody is that Eliot's

poetry is melodically improvised and comes from memory. That is why his allusions are not entirely accurate and detailed, but rather a self-impression of them and significantly intentional.

The other outcome of this study is the presence of jazz harmony characteristics – bold movements between consonance and dissonance – in the selected poems of T.S. Eliot. This study illustrates poems as harmonic structures in which images and settings are considered simultaneous incidents. Therefore, the bold movements in form, setting, imagery, and tone are regarded as the harmonic features of jazz.

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