

The Objectification And Anxiety Of Women In T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'

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Abstract

An Anglo- American rhymester, playwright, deskman, and critic, Thomas Stearns Eliot was the major trailblazer in modern English poetry. He is famous for his rebellious poetry that has in many of his poems, portrayed a man as hero who realizes a sense of his own scarcity and impotence, and who is painfully aware of the insipid and vanity of his own life as well as the life in general. In his all poems, he points out that the degeneration of modern civilization is caused by loss of faith in religion, lack of human relationships, commercialization of love, mental tension, war and politics. The present research work deals with the discussion of T.S. Eliot's view about the uselessness of the 20th-century people in various societies. The poet calls the city London an unreal city because lust, and cheating -go on freely. This paper also explores the anxiety and objectification of women and their spiritual insolvency that lead to total discouragement in T. S. Eliot's poetry. The surrender of women in many civilizations of all-time in T.S. Eliot's poetry shows the roots of infertility in a spiritual, moral and productive world resulting in nothingness.

Keywords

Materialistic, Barrenness, Anxiety, Survive, Women, Redeemed.

Reference to this paper should
be made as follows:

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*The Objectification And
Anxiety Of Women In T.S.
Eliot's 'The Waste Land'*

Notions Dec 2022,

Vol. XIII, No. 2,

pp. 65 - 74

Article No. 9

Online available at :

[https://anubooks.com/journal/
notions](https://anubooks.com/journal/notions)

T.S. Eliot uses the city as a source of inspiration and research tool because he lived and wrote in the capital cities of Great Britain and Europe. His masterpiece 'The Waste Land' has a direct relationship to modern life. The sufferings, horror, and spiritual decay of modern life are represented which are so unavoidable that any human being does not wish to deceive him with a systematic lie. T.S. Eliot leaned towards a pessimistic sense of urban failure. A feeling of mixed fascination and revulsion which are discernible in his writings and poems. My purpose is to reveal the personal cataclysm, isolation, depression, alienation and spiritual nothingness that are experienced by everyone in this city which evolved problems while living in the city. The qualities of mind and heart no longer much held importance in the 20th century. It naturally led to a breakdown of spiritual and religious values and beliefs. Barzani comments on the problems caused by First World War, "For example, it made many people Pessimistic, hopeless and worried" (48). The 20th century was that age in which doubt and uncertainty and the corrosion of human relationships were quickened and increased by the new discoveries in the field of psychology also. Sigmund Freud highlighted that idiocy and the insensibility had a great part to affect human conduct. Idiocy, indeed, came to be regarded as essential to human nature. Forces lying deep in human beings could easily conquer the so-called reason. This sort of background of uncertainty, indecision, anomie and instability altogether aroused the thoughtful heart in T.S. Eliot. It was against this background that he began to work. According to the Bradshaw, the objective of modern poetry was to put "a stress on transformation, exteriorization, and shock." (161) The inscription of the poem suggests the death wish of modern European people. It also points to the theme of decay and death in the wasteland. The epigraph is based on the story of Cumae, a sibyl who was beloved of Apollo. She asked Apollo to grant her as many years as the grains of sand in her land but carelessly she forget to ask for eternal youth. By the time she became old and finally shrank so small by her age that she was hung up in a cage and could only say: 'I want to die'. The sibyl links the medieval legend to classical myth. The misfortune of Cumae to be closed in confines and to wither away indefinitely being preserved from death in condemned like to Tithonus. To grow old symbolizes the condition of the people of the wasteland. It also points to the theme of decay and death in the wasteland. Furthermore, it also suggests the death which of modern European people.

Representation

Eliot remarks, Tiresias, is not a mere spectator but indeed a most important

character and personage in the poem *The Waste Land*, uniting all the rest. Tiresias has the experience of life both as a man and as a woman. He belongs to the past and to the present. Tiresias is linked between the wasteland of king Oedipus caused by his incest and the wasteland of modern people and civilization. The whole poem is dominated by the unearthly sight of the great modern city. T. S. Eliot used the word of *Inferno* to describe the city crowd that flowed up the hill and down the 'king William street' because only it could define the depth of their desolation. The title "Burial of the Dead" refers firstly to the burial of the feed productivity and secondly to the burial service of the Christian Church. In both burials, there is rebirth. The people of the wasteland do not like to disturb by the futile routine of the modern city life. Consequently, the idea of spiritual regeneration is painful as well as unattractive to them. So the poem begins with these lines:

'April is the cruelest month, Breeding Lucas out of the dead land.' (*The Waste Land*)

In the poem 'The Waste Land' T.S. Eliot shows a galaxy of women characters. Some women characters include a priestess, a princess, a fortune teller, a lady of the upper class, and a lower middle-class girl, a typist girl as well as the girls of the river Thames. None of them is happy in the true sense of in the epigraph we come across Sybil at Cumae who was hung in a cage. Children threw stones at her and asked, "what do you want"? In answer, she replied, "I want to die". Sybil represents the death wish of the 20th-century people. lacking faith, they have no hope for revival, they think that their lives on this earth are full of frustration, agony uncertainty and anxiety to survive.

The next woman character which T.S. Eliot presented is Princess Marie Larch, a countess and a relation of King Ludwig. The German Princess (I am not a Russian at all ••• a pure German from Lithuania) is an example of the rootlessness of the European citizens. In this society, summer and winter are mere seasons that indicate bodily comfort or discomfort.

Marie goes with the Archduke to the south in the winter. Her memories of childhood and her desire for physical comfort reveal her superficial state of living which is a common aspect of the unfruitful life of boredom of the people of 'The Waste Land'. Her autobiography, 'My Past' records her experience of sledding with the Archduke, her cousin. In the mountains, she felt very free because that place was free from palace intrigues. Later on, Marie was assassinated. Another

character that T.S. Eliot represents is Madam Sosostri. She is a major female character as she is representing the figures in the Tarot Pack of cards. The figures in the cards also present the major symbols in the poem. The cards remind the Egyptian tradition of using the cards for predicting the rise and fall of Nile waters which is connected with the events of the highest cultural importance of ancient civilization. Madam Sosostri used the card for vulgar fortune-telling. It shows the decline in the values in modern society. Madam Sosostri deals in the illegal business of making horoscopes for others. She is falsely regarded as the wisest woman in Europe. In the poem, she tells one customer to tell Mrs. Equitone that her horoscope is ready but she is afraid of the police as a business is illegal- "one must be so careful these days." she lacks peace of mind.

We met Belladonna (a beautiful lady in Italy), a society lady in the second section of the poem 'The Waste Land'. Belladonna resembles Cleopatra or Belinda. The chair on which she set was shone on the marble floor and it reminds us of Cleopatra's wherry. In that, chair fruited veins are wrought from which a cupid peeped out, another lid his eyes behind his wings. There is a paneled ceiling where a seven-branched candelabra were shining which seemed to touch her jewelry. At her dressing table, there were satin cases from where synthetic perfumes came out in rich profusion. In the ceiling, dolphins wrought with colored stones swam. On one of its walls, there was a Sylvian scene where Philomel was abused by force by her sister Procne's husband, King Tereus who cut her tongue but she managed to weave her painful story in a cloth which she sent to Procne. Procne in revenge cut up her own son and served it in a dish to Tereus and as soon as the king discovered it, he pursued his wife who fled to Philomel. According to the legends, God changed Tereus into a hawk, Procne into a swallow, and Philomel into a nightingale. In the drawing room of Belladonna, there were many other legendary characters that represent decorative purposes only. All the characters have lost their zest and moral significance in the modern wasteland and they all are the stumps of the trees, remains of the dead past. Lady Belladonna is waiting for her lover and hears the footsteps slowly climbing up the stairs. She is combing her hair under the blaze of light in a state of nervous excitement caused by the impending visit of her lover. In the neurotic society, women are trying to make their Silent lover into speech. The neurotic condition of the woman is expressed through her questioning. She first begs him to speak but he cannot speak, he simply meditates on his thoughts which shows the emotional starvation of modern life. When she asks

him, “what is the wind doing”? He answers “nothing”. while he mocks, she is afflicted by the nervousness and the boredom of meaningless life. She only thinks of rushing out into the street with her hair down.

Eliot shows the problem of married life which is described in the discussion of two cockney women in a London pub in the second half of ‘A Game of Chess’. It is a pub or public place as we hear the barman saying, “Hurry up, please, it’s time up”. He announces the closing time of the bar. We hear Loe, the deceitful and treacherous friend of Lil. Loe is talking about the incident of Lil’s abortion which is connected with the theme of the fakeness of the wasteland. Loe advises Lil to give Albert a good time who will return from the war after four years. Lil misused the money that Albert gave her for her dental treatment and she broke her health by frequent abortions. she also suggested Lil to look smart and attractive replacing her bed set of teeth otherwise there are other women who will satisfy him. Not only Eliot, but there are many other writers who have also represented the same ideas through their works. Some of them are Irving Babbit, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, H.G. Wells, George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. They all discussed the same ideas in their writings. According to Irving Babbit, “Unless there is a reaffirmation of the truth of inner life in some form, religious or humanistic, civilization is threatened at its base.” (quoted in Sherwood Eddy, 1934:180) We all are bearing eternal sufferings because we are forgetting our moral and spiritual values. as M.C.Bradbrook states in his work, “T.S. Eliot” : “It is a world devoid of any generally accepted standards of belief.”(12)

Discussing about almost all the characters both legendary in the modern, it can be concluded that women always have been victims of oppression by men. The Sybil when asked for immortality, Apollo, the Sun god, did not want her of the futility of her wish. As a result, her boon of immortality turns into a curse. The Princess Marie asserts that she is not a Russian but a German. Her loss of nationality, points to the refugee problem after the first world war. Her sledding with her lover in the mountains cannot give her true Joy as she is unscrupulous of physical pleasure. Madam Sosostriis is always afraid of the police because deals in an illegal trade of fortune telling though she is regarded as the wisest woman in Europe. Belladonna, the lady of situations in spite of a gorgeous dressing table, art architecture, and sculpture presented in the ceiling and walls of her room suffers from neurotic problems. The presence of a lover does not

bring any comfort rather she wants to run to the streets with the open-hair. Similar is the case with Lil or the typist girl. Lil lost her youth due to frequent abortions and is sure to be deserted by her husband when he comes back from war. The typist girl does not get true joy from her lover and she seeks artificial pleasures by putting a record on the gramophone. By all these examples T.S. Eliot has tried to show that women's life has been a life of agony, torture and pain which can be appeased by the exercise of the lessons of Upanishada - to give, to sympathize, and to control. It is a very complex and difficult poem to understand. As copper says: "The key of the poem may lie, paradoxically, in the fact that there is no single key to its meaning. Indeed, the poem needs to be read in a way that was unfamiliar to many contemporary readers of poetry in 1992 and still challenges readers today". (64)

An Analysis of The Wasteland Through Beliefs, Themes and Classification Applied

As a whole, Eliot's 'The Waste Land' basically depends on the ideals of death, sex and unhappiness. In the first part of The Waste Land Eliot immediately counters the idea of Chaucer about the month of April. Instead of depicting this month as a season of life and regeneration, Eliot prefers presenting this month at the darkest as what can be perceived in the opening line which says, "April is the cruellest month" Eliot (55). Some authors even regard this depiction of Eliot as a depiction of hell. In this part of the poem, Eliot reveals the association of women with sex slavery. In this poem, Eliot empathizes with women who were seen as mere sex objects during the repressive generation of the Victorian Era. Eliot also reveals the loveless sexual intercourses that show the reality of that time, women were just regarded as sex objects for men. This anxiety and pain are shown through this phrase: "As a rat crept softly through the vegetation / Dragging its slimy belly on the bank" (T.W.L.61) These are the major themes and beliefs which are presented in this poem. The term Modernism is clearly associated with T.S. Eliot's works. Because the peak of his career can be recognized to be characterized by this category. Peter Childs states about the term Modernism in his book 'Modernism' that this term is not easy to define. There are many views in defining this term he says, "Modernism located in the years 1890, 1930 with a wider acknowledgment that it develops from the mid-nineteenth century and begins to lose its influence in the mid-twentieth century" (Childs 18). The theme of sexual discontent is presented in the third part of the

poem, 'The Fire Sermon', where Eliot, shows the difference between the time from Buddha and St. Augustine to the present day, has tried to show how man's aspiration to a higher i.e. more spiritually mode of living is consistently baffled by his slavishness to his bodily appetites and his self - awareness. Frederick J. Hoffman rightly understands the situation and says, "Religious incentive is lacking, belief fails of a divine purpose, love has no real opportunity for issuing either in a meaningful sexual relationship or in life itself. The full terror of the situation is presented in terms of a dramatic analogy of faith and love given a concrete, social, human meaning". (336) Victorian age was that which was characterized by the repressive nature of its society. In the Victorian age, women were never granted the opportunities and privileges that were able to men enjoy education, freedom of expression and professional opportunities. This difficult situation for the women has long been attributed to the traditional nature of this period; however, what makes this issue more problematic are the events of abusive and discriminant treatments against women that caused several feminist movements. In the poem 'The Waste Land' there are several depictions of maltreatment and abuse of women. In lines 96 to 104, the function of women as mere sex objects by men was portrayed, but in a rather symbolic manner:

"In which a sad light a carved dolphin swam. Above the antique metal was displayed

As though a window gave upon the Sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there is nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable vice and still, she cried, and still, the word pursues 'jug jug' to dirty ears. And other withered stumps of time." (Eliot 58)

In the above lines, a rape scene can be clearly observed through lines like "so rudely forced" is explicitly forced an intimate act which is against the Philomel's will. In many ways, this event represents the reality which is unassailable during the period of the Victorian Era. In many ways, they appeared very concerned about the painful realities of gender and sexuality during at that time. This was the time when the entire society was being blinded by the unacceptable roles of women, Eliot has already aware that the situation does not appear objectionable. Eliot presents his thoughts on the perceived roles of women in a rather implicit manner.

Findings

Eliot regards consistency in poetry as one of its most powerful features.

With this, he considers poets, like Shakespeare, as 'great' since they are able to create one single meaning out of their works. He specifically notes, "The whole of Shakespeare's work is one poem (...) and it is the poetry of it in the sense, not the poetry of isolated lines and passages or the poetry of single features which he created, that matters most (...) one significant consistent and developing personality." (Eliot, quoted in Raine xix) With this work of T.S. Eliot, he tries to touch on several other issues which helped people to be awakened about how bad the society has got. From this point of view, this work by T.S. Eliot can indeed be regarded as one of his most valuable works. He proves the claim that literature during the Victorian Era has indeed played a powerful and implicative role as his work, *The Waste Land*, was able to induce some positive effects on the general awareness of gender equality. This poem has also given birth to a lot of a feminist movements that fought against gender discrimination, which is one concrete sign of how suggestive and relevant this work has been over the years.

The pain and anxiety of women are very common in every woman's character disregarded of class in *The Waste Land*. The first character Sybil at Cumae suffers from wrong decisions out of greed for immortality and the burden of age. The German princess cannot find peace of mind because he is involved in a physical illegal pleasure and also from identity disaster:

"With a shower of rain: we stopped in a colonnade' And went on a sunlight, into Hofgarten, And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.

Bin gar krine Russian, stamm aus Litauen, echt deutsch.

The second one is fortune teller Madam Sosostri. She is regarded as the wisest woman in Europe but she cheats people with seventy-eight packs of cards. She is always afraid of the police as she deals with the illegal business. Another one is Belladonna (the lady of situation). Although she is an aristocrat and a rich lady but she also suffers from a nervous breakdown which is common in the modern World. After reading and analyzing Eliot's poetry, it can be said that Eliot has been one of the most daring and fearless authors of the twentieth century. In his poem *The Waste Land*, he gives an advice to revive themselves and wishes that everyone in the world should be "Shantih Shantih Shantih" (L.433). Professor Radhika Shubhankar Mukherjee in her paper, "A Study of Ecology as A Metaphor in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*" discusses the theme of *The Waste Land*. She states: "Eliot suggests by his poem of the people of the twentieth century.

Europe, who are really sightless, blind to their own fate and lack of faith. The structure of the poem itself is an indication of this unfaithful society which is assorted and broken.”(4) At the time of the Victorian Era Eliot saw women like slaves not just of their own husbands but also slaves of the torturous and maltreating society. These things show the main reason why this work appears to be very expressive of the author’s view on the issues regarding gender and sexuality. Eliot also talks about one more issue i.e. morality from which the society is suffering during at that time. T.S. Eliot prefers to capture one of the most sensitive issues which he thinks the society needs to address. About the theme of T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land,’ Ackroyd says: “ It was Eliot’s belief that if Christianity disappeared our Civilization would disappear with it”(249).

Thus, from the above discussion, it emerges that Eliot’s most poems especially ‘The Waste Land’ serve as an appropriate example of a piece of literature that reveals the painful and publishing realities of women’s lives during the twentieth century, as well as their enslaved role during the tyrannized Victorian age.

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