

Pessimism in T.S. Eliot's Poem “The Waste – Land”

Bilal Elimam Hammad

English Language Department, Faculty of Arts/ Elimam Elmahdi University, Sudan.

Corresponding author: rahofa67@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to reflect the Pessimism in the poet: Thomas Stearns Eliot's poem “The Waste Land” in which he represented both an assessment of the World situation in the time of World War I as he felt it to be, and a creative transformation of the world that is observed in the final section of the Poem.

The Poem “The Waste Land” is divided into five sections under the title of :

(I) The Burial of the Dead. (II) A Game of Chess. (III) The fire Sermon.

(IV) Death by water and (V) What the Thunder Said.

Each section is discussed and analyzed and then the researcher draws a conclusion that Eliot is:

Not always pessimist.

Eliot's poem shows the society during the World War 1.

Keywords: Pessimism, Transformation, The Waste Land

The researcher is going to reflect the pessimism in the American poet Thomas Stearn Eliot's poem “The Waste Land”.

The poem was originally a larger sequence, composed for the most part in the fall of 1921, when Eliot, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, obtained a paid leave from his city of London bank to Switzerland. M.L. Rosenthal (1988:102).

The writing of the poem represented both an assessment of the world as he felt it to be, and a creative transference of it; which is shown in the final section “ What the Thunder Said “.

His work is reduced to 433 lines. Eliot's poems reflect the chaotic lives of individuals and society as a whole, as Teetah O2 (2001:4) says: “ Modernism thus marks a distinctive break with Victorian bourgeois morality; rejecting nineteenth century optimism, they presented a profoundly pessimistic picture of a culture in disarray”.

Eliot's most distinguishable piece of work concerning the disorder of the community was the Waste Land. Which contains five parts, he produces characters based on the manners of individuals living during the World War I generation. The characters are going through distress and morals are thrown out the door while they still seek and hope for a good resolution. The stress of the poem is on the conflict surrounding faith instead of the declaration of it. "The Waste Land" is more of a story in poetical form. Leonard John (1996:23).

The Statement of the Problem

The main reason behind the study is to show that T.S Eliot was a very influentially pessimism.

Significance of the study

The importance of this study is to show that Eliot's poetry informs the reader of certain human circumstances whether they are brilliant or disturbing. Also to show the implicit pessimism within the poem.

Objective of the Study

The study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- To highlight the issue of pessimism.
- To show that the conscious mind and the conscious nation can renew, and rebuild civilization, and save the world from committing suicide.

Hypotheses:

- Eliot is not always pessimist.
- "The Waste Land" portrays vividly the society during World War I.

T. S. Eliot's Life and Career

Thomas Stearn Eliot (1888-1965) had both American and English ties. He was born in St. Louis. Missouri, on September 26.1888. He was educated at Harvard. But he settled in London in 1915 and acquired British citizenship in 1927.

To many people, he is the poet who clearly expresses the sense of loss and fragmentation of modern world-a view that is apparent from the title of poetic works such as the Wast Land and " The Hollow Men". Robert (1985:624).

His father Henry ware Eliot (1843-1919) was a successful businessman, president and treasurer of the Hydraulic in St. Louis. His mother was Charlotte Champe

Stearns (1843-1929), wrote poems and was also a social worker. Eliot was the last of six surviving children.

Eliot was a poet, dramatist, and literary critic. The family, Unitarian in religion, was descended from one Andrew Eliot who left East cod, Summerset, England in the mid-seventeenth century and settled in Massachusetts in America. His earliest writings appeared in the magazine of Smith Academy, St Louis in 1906. In the following year he entered Harvard, where he edited and contributed poems to the Advocate. While still in college he wrote several poems, including the title work, published in *Prufrock and other Observation* (1917). Kermode, F. and John (1972:1970).

Eliot,s main academic interest was philosophy, and in 1910, armed with Harvard Bergson (1859-1941). In 1911 he was a graduate assistant in Philosophy at Harvard, and in 1914 he went to Germany with the intention of studying Philosophy at Marburg. In September 1914, the war having begun, he went instead to Oxford-Philosopher F.H. Bradley. Ronald.(1999:5).

In 1915 Eliot married, and taught for some time before joining a bank, where he was to work for eight years. During this time he was and editor of the *Egoist*, a London magazine, he was also writing poetry, still influenced by the French symbolist poets. He was also studying the “metaphysical” poets and the Jacobean drama. In 1927 Eliot took British citizenship, and was received into church of England. In 1930 he published *Ash Wednesday*. Kermode, (1972:1971).

In 1947 Eliot’s wife from whom he had been separated for many years, died after a long illness. In 1957 he married Varlerie Fletcher. Eliot died of emphysema in London on January 4.1965.

His body was burnt and, according to Eliot’s wishes, the ashes taken to St Michael’s church in East Coker, the village from which Eliot’s ancestors emigrated to America. There, a simple plaque commemorates him. Miller, J. and James, Lr (1968:372).

Literature Review

The researcher is going to take a glance at some previous studies and criticisms of Eliot.

Eliot’s poetry was first criticized as not being poetry at all. Another criticism has been of his widespread interweaving of questions from other authors into his work notes on the waste land which follows after the poem, gives the source of many of these, but not all this practice has been defended as a necessary saving of tradition in an age of fragmentation, and completely integral to the work, as well adding richness through unexpected juxtaposition.

It has also been condemned as showing a lack of originality, and for plagiarism. The prominent erotic F. W. Bateson once published and easy called “T.S.Eliot: the poetry of Pseudo-Learning”.

Eliot has been paid tribute from many famous fellow writers, and critics. According to the poet Ted Hughes, “ Each year Eliot’s presence declares itself at a deeper level, to an audience that is surprised to find itself more chastened, more astonished, more humble. “Hugh Kenner,” (1969:150).

Eliot has been the most gifted and influential literary erotic in English in the twentieth century, “ C.S. Lewis, however thought his literary criticism” superficial and unscholarly “. In a 1935 letter to a mutual friend of theirs, Paul Elmer Moore Lewis wrote that he considered the work of Eliot to be “ a very great evil “. Although, in a letter to Eliot written in 1943, Lewis showed an admiration for Eliot a long with his antagonism towards his views when he wrote: “ I hope the fact that I find myself often contradicting you in print gives no offence, it is a kind of tribute to you-whenever I fall foul of some widespread contemporary view about literature I always seem to find that you have expressed it most dearly. One aims at the officers first in meeting an attack.”.

Lennard, J. (1996:145) says “Eliot has a reputation as a difficult poet, and if you give a class a passage ascribed to Eliot, many students seem unable to respond because “Eliot’s too difficult for me.”

Stephen, M. (1984:97) says: “ The modern age in poetry really begins with T.S. Eliot. His poetry moved from skepticism and despair to a Christian faith and hope. And the Waste Land (1922) revolutionized poetry”.

Objective of the Study

Main objectives

- To show that T.S Eliot was a very influentially pessimism, he is famous for pessimism, and constantly succeeded on his hatred of little things, and his love life.
- To show that Eliot’s poetry informs the reader of certain human circumstances whether they are brilliant or disturbing. Also to show the implicit pessimism within the poem.

Specific objectives

The study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- To highlight the issue of pessimism.

- To draw attention to the whole poem “The Waste Land” in which Eliot loves to mock and scorn his ex-wife.
- To reflect Eliot’s life as both clever and religious.
- To show that the conscious mind and the conscious nation can renew, and rebuild civilization, and save the world from committing suicide.

Hypotheses

- Eliot is not always pessimist.
- “The Waste Land” portrays vividly the society during World War I.

T. S. Eliot’s Life and Career

Thomas Stearn Eliot (1888-1965) had both American and English ties. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888. He was educated at Harvard. But he settled in London in 1915 and acquired British citizenship in 1927. To many people, he is the poet who clearly expresses the sense of loss and fragmentation of modern world—a view that is apparent from the title of poetic works such as the *Wast Land* and “*The Hollow Men*”. Robert (1985:624).

His father Henry Ware Eliot (1843-1919) was a successful businessman, president and treasurer of the Hydraulic in St. Louis. His mother was Charlotte Champe Stearns (1843-1929), wrote poems and was also a social worker. Eliot was the last of six surviving children. He was known to the family and friends as Tom, which was the namesake of his maternal grand-father Thomas Stearns.

Eliot was a poet, dramatist, and literary critic. The family, Unitarian in religion, was descended from one Andrew Eliot who left East cod, Summerset, England in the mid-seventeenth century and settled in Massachusetts in America. His earliest writings appeared in the magazine of Smith Academy, St Louis in 1906. In the following year he entered Harvard, where he edited and contributed poems to the Advocate. While still in college he wrote several poems, including the title work, published in *Prufrock and other Observation* (1917). Kermode, F. and John (1972:1970).

Eliot’s main academic interest was philosophy, and in 1910, armed with Harvard Bergson (1859-1941). In 1911 he was a graduate assistant in Philosophy at Harvard, and in 1914 he went to Germany with the intention of studying Philosophy at Marburg. In September 1914, the war having begun, he went instead to Oxford-Philosopher F.H. Bradley. Ronald.(1999:5).

In 1915 Eliot married, and taught for some time before joining a bank, where he was to work for eight years. During this time he was an editor of the *Egoist*,

a London magazine, he was also writing poetry, still influenced by the French symbolist poets.

He was also studying the “metaphysical” poets and the Jacobean drama. In poor health he obtained three months leave from his bank, and at a clinic in Lausanne, made “The Waste Land” ready for publication. In January 1922 he stopped in Paris to consult Ezra Pound about the poem until 1939. The Waste Land appeared in the first number. In 1925 Eliot became a director of Faber and Faber, the publishers. In 1927 Eliot took British citizenship, and was received into church of England. In 1930 he published Ash Wednesday. Kermode, (1972:1971).

In 1932 Eliot wrote his first play, Murder in the Cathedral. It followed by many plays and poems. In 1940 he wrote his last important poem “ Little Gidding”, which is written twenty-three years before his death. In 1948 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He wrote three more plays in 1950, 1954, and 1959.

In 1947 Eliot’s wife from whom he had been separated for many years, died after a long illness. In 1957 he married Valerie Fletcher. Eliot died of emphysema in London on January 4.1965.

His body was burnt and, according to Eliot’s wishes, the ashes taken to St Michael’s church in East Coker, the village from which Eliot’s ancestors emigrated to America. There, a simple plaque commemorates him. Miller, J. and James, Lr (1968:372).

Methodology

The researcher is going to show the way of getting his data. He divided the poem into five parts, each part had been paraphrased, its content was discussed and analyzed. Then the researcher drew conclusion to prove his hypotheses.

Analysis and Discussion

In this part the researcher is going to analyze. The Waste Land, by dividing the poem into five section under the titles: The Burial of the dead, “ A Game of chess “The fire sermon”, Death by Water and what the Thunder said.

The first section: “ The Burial of the dead “ Eliot prefaces the poem as follows:

*April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers*

The poem starts with describing the month of April. It is described as the cruellest month, passing over a barren land to which winter is far kinder. Eliot shifts from this vague invocation of time and nature to what seem to be more specific memories: a rain shower by the Starnbergersee, a lake outside Munich. She stopped in the colonnade. And went on in sunlight, into the Hofarten where they drank coffee, and talked for an hour. She explained that she is Russian, not German this stanza ends with her telling him her childhood stories. The poem points that her name is Marie and she is an aristocrat. In this stanza, Eliot uses “Lilacs”.

The usage of the colour to symbolize death and the image “tuber” (flower bulbs) to indicate the world climate as stage of Hell, which is also depicted by the season April.

The first stanza of the poem contains a few romantic and beautiful imagery from the past, which will not again reappear in the rest of the poem.

This past describes the rural life as a sharp contrast to the horrifying images depicted throughout the rest of the poem-degenerating, destructive, decomposing and debilitating, which in result creates a very disturbing picture of the Waste Land-the world we live. He uses Queen Elizabeth’s voice.

The second stanza is told from Soldier’s point of view, (Marie’s lover) here he portrayed the destroyed city buildings and churches that symbolize the destroyed western civilization as in the lines.

*A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter; the circuit no relief,
And the dry stones no sound of water, only
There is shadow under this red rock,*

The above lines indicates the barren and sterile situation of the modern world assimilating the primitive stage of the civilization of the stone age he continues:

*And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you,
I will show you fear in handful of dust.*

The above lines show his state of loneliness. The land is a land of death and depress after the war. Any handful dust may contain remains which he fears to touch. Also he is very homesick and wants to return to his love and home. He says:

*Your arms full, and your hair well, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I know nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
(Oed und leer das mear) Desolate and empty the sea.*

Eliot shows Un-real city and starts off by describing London (without translation). The image is that of the horror of Hell.

*Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crown flowed over London Bridge, so many.
I had not thought death had undone so many.*

The lines explain the image of the soldiers from the battle-field as horrifying. He used the term and image of death plus his confused statue of mind. The lines show his suffer mentally; they also symbolize death reproduces death. He ends section one with his reference to the dog that all soldiers who died in the battle-field were murdered and their bodies will be dug up. On one word, it shows his resentment towards the war.

*Oh keep the dog far hence, that's friend to men,
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!*

The poet goes on to the second section “A Game of chess” begins with a description of a woman sitting on a beautiful chair that looks “like an old throne “ the poet makes reference to Cleopatra and her first encounter with Anthony.

The woman described in this stanza lives in very wealthy environment but is as lonely and frustrated as Cleopatra in her relationship with Anthony, places a contrast to her emotional world of darkness, boredom and isolation as the lines below mentioned:

*The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought peeped out*

“The Game of Chess” as fellow:

*Burbed green and orange, framed by the coloured stone
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues
‘Jug Jug’ to dirty ears.*

The remainder of this stanza describes that it is night. The carved dolphin symbolizes the impasses, the incapability to escape just like woman herself. The scene over the fireplace the “sylvan scene” where Philomel, a girl, who was raped by her sister’s husband, the barbaric king Tereus, who also cut her tongue, she was changed into the nightingale, is being pursued by him and the sound she can utter

is only “jug jug” the singing voice of a nightingale not the voice of her, she can not use her voice to convey her true feelings, which make it such an ironic situation and also reflects the rich woman’s lack of ability to express her emotions.

The second stanza of the second section is reflective of loneliness. It is conversation about the absence of conversation between the two parties included as the result of inability to express how she truly feels:

*My nerves are bad to night. Yes, bad stay with me
Speak to me – why do you never speak. Speak
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
“I never know what you are thinking. Think...”*

She is so angry and not understanding. She is ready to argue opposite to what she had planned to do a romantic, night, a reunion. She can not deal with the silence from her partner. But her partner answered. He explains the war syndrome. It is obvious that the turmoil arose from all the deaths in the war was still haunting the war participant when he said:

*I think we are in rats, alley
Where the dead men lost their bones*

The loneliness and dryness of their relationship is described. She is tired of being in the house, of doing nothing, and of not having a decent conversation, “what shall I do now? ... “ I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street I with my hair down, so ... “ Here she is ready to be disloyal to her lover because of his lack of presence on their relationship or his loss of manhood in the war. The reply is coming at once from him:

“ What shall we ever do ...? And we shall play a game of chess. Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door “. His sounds so distant and absent, minded. He even suggests his consent to her cheating by saying “ play a game of chess”. Also he displays his war syndrome by saying he can no longer sleep (lidless eyes) and is just waiting for death to knock the door “ But actually Lil’s husband got demobbed”.

The rest of section two show the dialogue between two women are chatting, about the coming of Lil’s husband from the war so as to be pretty for him, otherwise he will desert her to another, Marie is hurrying Lil to get her teeth fixed, she suggests that if she is not someone else will be. Lil has five children and started to take contraceptive in order to prevent any more children so she was appearing “antique”. The ironic message in this scene is that Lil is the only who believes “What you get married for.

If you don’t want children and yet she is withering away – she is only thirty – one – like a Waste Land. As the line says:

*Well, if Albert wonts leave you alone, there it is I said,
 What you get married for if you don't want children?
 Hurry up Please its Time*

The researcher is going to touch section three . the Fire Sermon. Here Eliot describes his world in which he lives. He uses the image of the dead Earth with the bare trees and the empty spaces to convey the feeling of death being dominant and the vacancy it has left behind as in these lines.

*The rivers tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
 Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
 Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.*

The poet also describes the city which has been abandoned for some time and no human activities can be seen in the town which is reflected in the below lines:

*The river bears no empty bottles sandwich papers
 Silk hander chiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
 Even the bank executives have left for good leaving*

The departure was not by choice it was against their will, can be observed in these lines.

*Departed, have left no addresses
 By the waters of lemon I sat down and wept*

The above creates a dominating sad mood of loss. The below line,

The above creates, a dominating sad mood of loss. The below line, “ the rattle of the bones and chuckle spread from ear to ear”, personifies death and its contentment with its recent triumph the deserted land covered with deathly pale, and the memories of war.

Eliot uses the war song which describes women washing their feet in the soda water to symbolize the alluring trap which will kill them the lines show lovers no intentions of resulting in marriage or reproducing off spring. This description indicates the opinion of an infertile land – a theme that permeates throughout the entire poem. Also Eliot uses music to symbolize the past, and the beautiful flowing waters which have become distant memories, they brunt away as the bodies and the building went up into flames. As we observe on the lines:

*This music crept by me upon the waters
 The pleasant whining of mondoline
 Under my feet. After the event
 He wept. He promised “ a new start”
 I made no comment what should I resent?
 Nothing*

La La

.....
Burning burning burning burning

The song takes us to ascenc where Queen Elizabeth and her loves Leicester are having a great time together. Unfortunately Queen Elizabeth discovered Leicester disloyalty. But really she had own reasons why she could not marry Leicester because she feels she belongs to her people.

Sections four and five Death by Water and what the Thunder Said:

The poet uses Phlebas, the Phoenician's story to convince the usage. There will be no revial or resurrection after ones death Like Phlebas whose bones are destroyed by the ocean currents. Eliot uses water to represent the illusion of tranquility and the troubles one goes through life. The quote “ picked his bones in whispers” expresses how ironic water can be where – although – it is peaceful but has deadly side.

This shows the effect misconceptions have on one's judgment and the grim picture of the future. The whirlpool is a grave the same as a tomb. We cannot escape from death no matter who you are. That observed in the lines.

*Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
 He passed the stages of his age and youth
 Entering the whirlpool*

In the last section Eliot portrays a vivid image of the Waste Land. The mountain symbolizes nature which usually has the power to regenerate itself now is dead. Rain symbolizes hope. Hope is almost invisible “ The red sullen faces “ sneer and snarl “ remind us of animals who are frustrated and intimidated and ready to attack. That be seen in these lines:

*There is not even silence in the mountains
 But dry sterile thunder without rain
 There is not even solitude in the mountains
 But red sullen faces sneer and share!
 From doors of mud cracked houses*

The poet portrays the chaos of Eastern Europe after world war I. also he turns towards the eastern cultures and their ideas to seek a solution to all these pending issues in the western world.

Eliot ends his poem “ The Waste Land “ with the words;

Dominique (2008:5) says: “ Shantih, shantih are eastern words that suggest we will gain peace by giving up our needs, by reconciliation with the world, and by creating a zen state of mind. Only in this way the world can be in peace. If people maintain this, the end result would be fertility of our land again”.

Conclusion

In conclusion to the previous knowledge about Eliot's poem "The Waste Land". Eliot's poem informs the reader of certain human circumstances. The world was suffering from a turning point caused by the World War I and many of the population's young men were killed.

References

- Anderson, K. George, Buckler, William, E., Veaider and Mary Harris (1979). *The Literature of England*. Harper Collins: The United States of America.
- Anthony, J. (1995) T.S Eliot, Anti – Semitism, and literary form. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bertens, H. (2008) *Literary Theory*. Netherlands: Atrecht University.
- Besty, B. (1924) *the Norton Introduction to Literature Fiction Emory*: Emory University.
- Eliot, T.S. (1971) *the complete Poems and Plays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Harmon, W. (1880) *A handbook to Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.
- Hugh, K. (1969). *The Invisible Poet*: T.S. Eliot. New Dalhi: Prentice – Hall.
- James, E. Miller (1977). *T.S Eliot's Personal Waste Land*. London: The Penn University Press.
- Kennedy X. J. and Dana Giola (2005). *Literature, An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. New York, and Mexico city: Paris Cape Town.
- Kennedy, X. J. and Dana Giola (2005). *An Introduction to Poetr* New York, and Boston: Hong Kong.
- Kermode, F and John Hollander (1972). *The Oxford anthology of English Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lennard. J. (1996). *The Poetry Handbook*. Cambr Oxford University Press.
- Martin, S. (1996). *An Interductory Guide to English Literature*. UK: Rout – Ledge.
- Miller, J. and James, Jr (1969). *T.S. Eliot. The Making of An American Poet*. Pennsylvanian: Pennsylvanian University Press.
- M.L. Rosenthal (1988). *The New Poets. American and English Poetry Since World War (ii)*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Rebert, G. (1985). *British and Western Literature*. Iowa city: Iowa.
- Stephen, M. (1984) *York Handbook. An Introductory Guide to English Literature*. Hong Kong: York Press.
- Dominique (2008:5) http://www.tagnycv.org/Nyco40522/Poetry_Index_by_josefina_wasteland_index.htm.
- James, E. http://www.solidpapers.com/papers/famous_20_people/2663.htm.
- Keep, Ch.(1993) [http://www.josefina.village.virginia.edu.html.24 April T.S. Eliot \(1985\) ‘World Book Encyclopedia. World Book, Inc. 1985, pp, 185-186.](http://www.josefina.village.virginia.edu.html.24 April T.S. Eliot (1985) ‘World Book Encyclopedia. World Book, Inc. 1985, pp, 185-186.)
- Ronald,Bush (1999) c: Documents and settings/Mohammed/desktop28/htm. Teetah02.File (20001)