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T. S. ELIOT'S CONCEPT OF TIME AND HISTORY IN "THE WASTELAND"

KOMAL DABAS

M.A English Student, Department of English, University of Delhi

Email- komaldabas1@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

Twentieth Century is also known as the modern era and in those times when everyone was moving towards progression leaving behind the past, T.S Eliot was obsessed with the past. Being a modernist himself, he revolted against the ideas of progression. This revolt and constant clinginess to history and the previous era is evident in his works. In this paper, we are looking at how Eliot projected time and history in his renowned poem "The Wasteland".

Key Words: Modernism, Anti-Modernism, T.S Eliot, Wasteland, Time, History

"Time is the moving image of eternity - (Plato)"

In the beginning of twentieth century "Modernism" started as a movement/revolt against the past, it dreams of moving forward towards development. But T.S Eliot, belonging to that era, was more of a conservative kind, he seemed to be obsessed with time, history, and literary traditions, and the image of this obsession is seen in his poem "The Wasteland (Eliot)" - published in the year 1922. Eliot's works represent, unlike 'Modernist Texts', the idea of not moving forward, and to maintain a close connection with the poetic canon. Eliot believed that art is dead after "Modernization", and an artist can regain his ability to create art only if s/he develops, what he calls, a "Historical Sense". After reading Eliot's poems one can anticipate that he dwells upon history because he was somehow threatened by "Modernist Movement", that because of all these changes – people will no longer care about the old literary tradition- and being a true poet he took the responsibility upon himself to save the history in his works. He considered modernism to be damaging the European psyche. Therefore, we can say that "The Wasteland (Eliot)" is

the counter attack on modernism, and it's an attempt to maintain the contemporary history.

"The Wasteland" is considered to be projecting the breakdowns of relationships, marriages, poetry, language, and in fact the breakdown of entire world. The poem shows the effects of the First World War on the world, and how the only escape according to Eliot is 'Death'. He uses many cultural references and jumps from one speaker to another, one location to another, and to different times- which helps scholars to declare it as an obscure poem. Eliot manages to juxtapose all the question with one major question i.e. the role of poetry in this empty and meaningless world, which hints towards reading this poem as an "Anti-Modernist Text".

Eliot was not alone in this fight for saving literary traditions, in fact Jürgen Habermas- German Philosopher- share the similar views about "Modernism", for him "Modernity as a child of enlightenment still needs something to fulfil", and it's an "unfinished project". Like Eliot, Habermas too was interested in the historical background, he believed that modernization is the segregation of domains and high class institutions. He also tries to locate the value of modernity in the society, for him art is always removed from "modernism".

Eliot deals with the concept of time in his poem, he placed time on the high stature and presented it as the most important and instructive thing in the world. He experimented with his writing skills and showed his readers both present and past in one poem, he glorified the past in contrast with the corrupt present. Eliot plays with the concept of time and the stream of consciousness. Understanding the time structure of the poem is known to be the only key to understand the meaning of this poem. The complex movement from past to present is represented via allusions and references. The opening lines of the poem indicates that the poem is set in the month of 'April' and it is the present. But if we look at the epigraph of "*The Wasteland*", we notice that time is shifting in a number of directions – the line "with my own eyes" suggest the physical presence of the speaker, but at the same time when he says he 'saw the Sibyl' puts him in the past. From this one can anticipate the directions of time shown i.e. we go from reader's present world to the world of Eliot's present; the from that we move to Petronius's present; the at end to Sibyl's present; and while moving from one's present to another, the latter becomes the past. He is basically juxtaposing contemporary present with the mystic and religious past – this technique is used to show how past plays an active part in the present, and this fusion of past and present results into a new creation which has its own significance. Quotations from different languages like Sanskrit, English, German, and French are used in the poem, which hints towards the fact that the 'universal truth' projected in the poem goes beyond the concept of time and place. On an upper level the reader, after reading the poem, gets a sense that time is still and there is only duration, but the deeper sense of the poem shows the concept of timelessness. By putting a Sanskrit chant in the end of the poem, Eliot suggest that peace is achieved via cosmic dimension of duration. The poem gives the definition of past as a 'present memory of past'; and present as 'anticipation of future'. The timelessness of time on psychological/spiritual level, the continuous flowing movement of time as an experience, is similar to the stream of consciousness.

In this poem Eliot creates what we can call an utopic, moreover, an 'urban waste land' which goes beyond the concept of literal meaning of time, where there is improvement, universality and also has grounds, ethics, and reflection of past and history. "*The Wasteland*" is the change that poetry needed, its powerful words, and urban alienation become an inspiration for many post war readers and writers.

"WE CAN NEVER LEAVE THE WASTELAND BEHIND".

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