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THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS OF THE MODERN WORLD IN *THE WASTE LAND*: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

A vivid of the uncertain world and the insincere manner of the mind is portrayed carefully in *The Waste Land*. Despite being a great modernist poem, *The Waste Land* is often criticized for its esoteric nature. Conscience of humanity is banished and disowned by thoughtless men and women; who live in illusions, joys, hopes and fears, what is deploring the loss of spirituality in the modern world. Violation of sex has always resulted in spiritual waste land, both in the past and present. It shows the degeneration of love into lust which is a burning cauldron. The sterile burning of lust is brought out by different sex experiences in the contemporary waste land, both in the east and west. Through an analysis of *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot's criticism of modern life progress is expressed in this writing. In this study some elements of the poem are analyzed what modern society ultimately believes because modernist beliefs are manifested in the modern individual's view of relationships.

Key Words: *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot, Modernism, World War I, Allusion and Fragmentation.

A well-known literary personality of the 20th century, T.S. Eliot published *The Waste Land* in 1922 after the Great War and this poem established Eliot's reputation as a great poet of his times. It is one of the longest poems, written in English with 434 lines and five sections, the poem is termed as a 'modernist classic'. To quote Harold Bloom, *The Waste Land* can be read as "a testament to the disillusionment of a generation, an exposition of the manifest despair and spiritual bankruptcy of the years after World War I".¹ Eliot is a stern realist acutely conscious of modern civilization with its manifold problems, as well as a visionary who looks at life beyond the limits of time and space. He

conceives of literature as a continuous process in which the present contains the past. He had begun by rejecting romantic faith — he didn't believe in being an escapist and cut off from the facts of real life. His poetry adapted itself to the changed environment. Life had grown urban and industrialized and a change in poetry was needed. Eliot established and expressed the complexity variety and intricacy of modern Life.

Life has become a good example at routine and tired nerves, what eventually results in spiritual barrenness and the decay of modern people. And people look for some excitement to relieve the monotony of today's modern life through money and sex. It is a graphic evocation of a world of loveless-loving and the life consequent degradation of the human self. Eliot constantly portrayed the

¹Bloom, Harold, *T.S. Eliot: Comprehensive Research and Study Guide*, Broomall P.A: Chelsea House, 1999, P. 40.

depreciating self of the humans of modern world who are helpless and have to face the unpleasant realities of life. And people like to run away from the harsh realities of life and take refuge where there is peace.

The source of inspiration and achievement was faith in the past. People only believed in religious values and elderly people were respected. But today the values have changed. Money is the god of modern people. People are hated and they pray just as a matter of routine, not for functioning spiritually. Perversion of sex has become common and a fashion what results in neurosis, boredom, ennui, frustration and disillusionment of the modern humans. In the past, people believed in intimate human relationship. There was the joint family system under which resources were pooled and the needs of all were supplied. Today there is the fashion of nuclear families, there is no sentiment of sympathy and compassion for the members of distant families each one thinks of his own interest.

Our values are different from those of the older times. We evaluate most of the things in terms of monetary value. But even then psychologically, the modern people are not satisfied with their getting and seem frustrated and suffer mental exhaustion in the fashionable society.

An important cause of disintegration of modern civilization is the enormous power wielded by politicians. Without consulting their own people, they own the power to make war against other countries. They bring untold miseries to their country-people, by their own action. Millions of people get affected by war directly and indirectly and wander as refugees in search of food and shelter.

Nowadays lack of religious faith and bond of spirituality has caused loss of purity and virginity as a result of the brutality of people. Spiritually we are dead; we are living only physically, as is shown by our indifference to religion. We are dying a slow death, suffering patiently the consequences of our own spiritual indifference. In Eliot's opinion, indifference or passive suffering is the worst thing, even worse than active rejection.

Life has lost its meaning because of too much of fondness towards creating the meaning in objectivity rather keeping things simple and subjective. Everybody wants here an identity of the self but on the basis of what just money and power. People get the desired success in this life either the right way or by choosing the wrong path but yet no peace of mind and a sense of remorse and oppression all the time. Everyone is stuck in the self of their being. But they have merely forgotten that the self can only be built by the help of the other beings around just not by the self. People think that they are living in freedom, in real they are just caged in the self. Everyone is so self-centered that should work for the other beings is banishing day by day. Modern time people have access to everything from connections to technology to high power integration. But the only thing that they yearn for happiness though they believe they have every possible thing to be happy yet they don't own the happiness that they are continuously searching and earning for. As their lack of depth of understanding of peace that lies in the true essence of love for God. And, after a time people get into depression and nervous breakdown because of this reason.

Modern commerce is dirty, as dirty and impure as modern life. The industrial progress plays the dominant role in every aspect of life. Man exploits woman sexually while the woman is utterly helpless and passive. Woman is the sufferer, the victim of masculine lust and brutality. But this scenery is also changing by time. The woman also now has learned to play the dominant role and they know how to take over men now. Women have learned it because of male exploitation. And such a change in the modern civilization was not unstoppable to come what was obvious. The modern society has become a show of the battle of sexes.

Love has degenerated into lust in modern time. Fulfillment of sensuous, pleasures and desires out of wed-lock are the causes of spiritual death and degeneracy in the modern world. This degeneration is to be seen in all sections of society: the rich, the poor and the middle class. Regeneration can come about only if the modern humanity heeds the teachings of the great moral and religious teachers both of the East and the West. But religion is also a

corrupted business now. So how do people rely on their life on it? or what do they do to purify them and rejuvenate peace? These questions always occur and then in the minds of modern day people as even in faith—there is faithlessness. The old civilization with its value and convention is dead and gone, leaving only a heap of broken images. Nothing seems to grow out of this stony waste land. It represents that people who once functioned like a shady tree and proved beneficial to others, but is no more, or say become extinct to the new day generation.

Sex is an expression of love and means of procreation. It is also an important aspect of life. But today sex has been perverted from its proper function and is being utilized for animal pleasure and monetary benefits. It has become a source of moral degradation. Eliot also draws the picture of a homosexual relationship and observes that the whole world is burning and getting destroyed by the fire of sex.

To emphasize the differences between the parole situations in the present and the past Eliot uses the technique of ironic contrast. Today prostitutes and call girls wander in the banks of river search of sex where once fairies walked and washed their feet. Nowadays sexual indulgence is a matter of routine and something no one bothers about. Simply, the poet does not consider that love outside marriage is sacred in the past as well as in the present. Such guilty love does not give a sense of satisfaction.

Eliot has also shown that the youth is indifferent to death. The fear of death keeps man under great tension. It shows that humans are just a handful of dust. This fear of death haunts man from the beginning to the end. It is only pure love which rids man of fear. The godless man is always in the grip of fear. But now even death is also devoid of significance. That is why people today plan the uncertain life if they are never going to die but do nothing purposeful of death what is certain to come. Life has become a symbol of fruitless activity and an occasion for some excitement to relieve the monotony of modern life. It is a graphic evocation at

a world of loveless loving and the consequent degradation of the human self.

The point is that people are afraid of themselves, of their own reality; their feelings most of all. People talk of love and its greatness, truth is love hurts and feelings are disturbing. It's said that pain is evil and dangerous. But how can love be dealt in there is fear of feel? Pain is meant to wake us up. People try to hide pain but it's wrong. Pain is something to carry. And that is how one feels the strength in the experience of pain. It's all in how a person carries it. This is the only thing that should matter. Pain is a feeling and feelings are a part of one's own reality. Feeling ashamed of the feeling and hiding it is letting the society destroy that reality of own. And this is where the modern reality stands with feelings of remorse and insecurity inside but showing the confidence with a big smile outside.

Eliot tells about the modern world of fret and fever, of science and materialism, logic and crookedness. There is no peace in this world torn by tension and trouble, sound and fury, conflicts and struggles, disappointments and frustrations, slavery and suffering. In his vision he abruptly sees a gyre or cone relating rapidly round a fixed center, informing about and signaling towards a change of civilization and age. Its circumference gradually widens and ultimately even the center fails to control its movements. Disintegration sets in; things fall apart, the center cannot hold. Man has to cease to hear the call of soul (spirit) because the work is too much with him. Since intellect and materialism, science, technology and rationalism is too much with us. It is leading us towards destruction. As a result sheer anarchy is let loose; everywhere there is violence and bloodshed. Disruption and convulsion is prevailing everywhere. There is no hold of control. Consequently, traditional and aristocratic life and thereby innocence and purity are in danger of extinction. The best, the wisest, the aristocratic have lost all faith and conviction and the worst, the masses, are fanatical, irrational, and violent.

Eliot is not so much concerned with the externals, as with mental states. He probes deeper and deeper into the human soul, analyses human emotions; and is concerned with what possess in the

subconscious or even the unconscious. Eliot in this poetry is realistic and the poet's consciousness of the grim realities of life has shattered all illusions and romantic dreams, the tragedy at everyday life has induced in the poet a mood of disillusionment and so the poetry of today is bitter and pessimistic. The pessimism at modern poet is more poignant and heart-rending. *The Waste Land* reflects the tragic gloom and despair of the post-war world. A panorama at the post war generation is to be found in the poem. In the poem we meet with boredom, hopelessness and depression, mental disintegration and nervous exhaustion and pathetic efforts to find the fragments of a shattered faith. But this does not mean that 20th century poetry is poetry of despair. The modern poet sees life as a whole wants to face it squarely and has no wish to escape from it into a world of dreams.

There was a complete breakdown of the agrarian way of life and economy at the last decade of the 19th century. Industrialization and urbanization brought in their wake their own problems. There have risen problems of overcrowding, significant rise in vice and crime, fall in the standard of sexual morality, and a rapidly increasing ugliness. The rise of the scientific spirit and rationalism led to a questioning of accepted social beheld, conventions and traditions. The modernist movement, a break from the previous era focus on experimentation characterized the period. Europeans and other western societies found them disillusioned and confused after the World War I, when the Victorian values of industrialization, social progress and scientific advancement seemed to falter. The effects of the war had undermined humankind's faith in the foundations of Western society and culture, and postwar modernist literature reflected a sense of disillusionment and fragmentation. In matters of religion it gave rise to skepticism and agnosticism. And Eliot's works reflect his age and his *The Waste Land* has been called the epic of the modern age, which presents a vivid and transparent panorama of the anarchy prevailing in the so called contemporary civilization. According to Brooker's description of Eliot's styles in his poems are "strikingly modern, avant-grade, and

fragmented".² As a most renowned modernist poem *The Waste Land* depicts a search for redemption and renewal in a sterile and spiritually vacant landscape. Because of its complex structure and obscure allusions, the poem is criticized for its confusing and esoteric qualities. Realism in the subject matter has led the modern poet to reject the highly ornate and artificial poetic style of the romantic poets. This racialism in diction and versification and in subject matter is a marked feature of the poetry of Eliot. Eliot sees life in its naked realism, and even the most prosaic and common place subjects are considered suitable. The heavy thud of bus traffic, the creaking of tramcars; the rattling noise of railway trains, the drone of an airplane, all these find their echo in modern poetry, like the poetry of T.S. Eliot.

Eliot does not love nature alone; he also loves and feels for the lower animals living in the lap of nature. For the modern poet, nature is a box of toys which delights his heart and which is very dear to him. Eliot does not write only nature, his poetry is written strictly urban with its complexity and intricacy which is in part of a reaction, a reflection of the complexity and variety of the modern life.

The visibility of the situations and actuality which strikes the senses here is the point of total reality. Reality is a frequent change as it is nothing more than an illusion as humans can wrap their minds around things and fit them into their version of reality. Reality for truth is only real when it is experienced. And Eliot has expressed his mind according to the flow of the thoughts what is pretty much spontaneous in motion in his *The Waste Land*.

There is organic unity in the structure of *The Waste Land*. The different parts are connected with one another by psychological ties. In the first section, *The Burial Dead*, Tiresias suggests that the souls of 'the dead' are boded under the thoughts, the words, and the deeds, of sensualist, unholy love, fraud, and the world. This section brings before us the death-in-life of the unreal city. In the, second section, *A Game of Chess*, the protagonist suggests that the modern materialistic woman looks upon life

²Brooker, Jewel, 'Dialectic and Impersonality in T. S. Eliot', *Journal of Literature and History of Ideas* 3, 2005, p. 130.

as a game of chess in which she is playing with man to keep him under her power till another lover knocks at the door. In the third section, *The Fire Sermon*, he suggests that the modern man is burning in the fire of sexual love. In the fourth section, *Death by Water*, he suggests that money-minded con never cross the ocean of worldly riches — the ocean of mirage. They shall be drowned in mid ocean. In the last section, *What the Thunder Said*, he suggests that man can save himself by choosing the path of Data (to give), Dayadhvam (to sympathize), and Damyota (self-control). The first two will make the soul noble and wilt fill it with love for man and God. Self- control of the mind and the senses — will enable to conquer sensuality, unholy love, fraud, and love for the world. In the beginning there is only barren desert and rock, but towards the end there is desire for water, there are clouds, and so the expectation of rain. In the last section, the poet points out the way for spiritual salvation through the following of the philosophy of the Buddha. Man must give himself over to the cause of religion, he must learn to sympathize, and he must practice self-discipline and self-control. It is in this way that one can achieve spiritual regeneration. Thus the poem examines the spiritual degeneration of the modern waste land, explores its causes, and finally suggests a way of salvation. Eliot has said that man must repent and bow to the almighty if he desires to gain his morality and spirituality back. To quote Maxwell, “we are made to see that hope remains. The rain will fall when its coming has been paid for by sacrifice:”³ and for that “sacrifice of self”⁴ is required. The poem is not fragmentary, but shows a coherent pattern-the poet’s research for spiritual wisdom. A number of traditions and fragments of cultures have been, interwoven into the poem, and the interleaving is not mechanical but organic, forming a coherent whole of meaning, and giving coherence to the apparently formless poem.

As it is stated that art produced after the First World War recorded the emotional aspect of this crisis; despair, hopelessness, paralysis,

angst, and a sense of meaninglessness, chaos and the fragmentation of material reality. Being under these effects, Eliot resorts to the process of reflecting them in his modernist poetry. The essay will handle the poems one by one, commenting on their title and certain lines along with their fragmented structure and the significance of this fragmented structure. To begin with, even the title *The Waste Land* suggests Eliot’s despair and disillusionment. Rabate argues that “*The Waste Land* is fundamentally a poem about Europe”⁵. Eliot uses the “dialectic of analogies”⁶ to metaphorically depict the condition of post war European society, demonstrating the “disillusionment of a generation”.⁷ Among many other critics, Ross shares his opinion about the poem that *The Waste Land* is a metaphor expressing the cultural infirmity of Europe after the Great War ... [as] a sign of [the] post-War time.⁸ If we regard the title as a metaphor for life, we can understand that his approach to life is a pessimistic one with despair and hopelessness. The quote at the beginning of the poem taken from Petronius *Satyricon* reflects Sibyl’s desperate psychology because she wants to die. This allusion to a mythological figure’s will of death is noteworthy because the poetic persona’s psychology is similar to Sibyl. Moreover, the subtitle, referring to the Anglican burial service, ‘*The Burial of the Dead*’ adds more to the gloomy atmosphere of the poem. Eliot opens his poem by calling April ‘the cruelest month’ because it creates an environment to combine both the dead and the alive. Lilacs are forced to come out of the dead land and they mix memory and desire. This scene and especially mixing of memory and desire depict how the poetic persona longs for his old days because memory and desire are combined and hence memory becomes desirable. In these opening lines, what we see is a conversion of vegetation myths. Normally, spring, namely renewal

³Maxwell, D.E.S., *The Poetry of T.S. Eliot*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, P. 114.

⁴*Ibid.*, P. 114.

⁵Rabate, Jean-Michel, ‘Tradition and T.S. Eliot’, *The Cambridge companion to T.S. Eliot*, (Ed. Anthony Moody), UK: Cambridge UP, 1994, P. 210-22.

⁶Kenner, Hugh, ‘Eliot’s Moral Dialectic,’ *The Hudson Review* 2, 1949, p. 433.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 421.

⁸Ross, Andrew, ‘The Wasteland and The Fantasy of Interpretation, Representations 8, 1984, p. 134.

of life, is welcomed arid celebrated, but in this case, it is reverse. It is because the poem is written from the perspective of people in *The Waste Land*. The people of *The Waste Land* are not happy by the return of the spring, of fruitfulness to the soil; they prefer the barrenness of the dead season. The poetic persona's reflection of a desiccated life begins right from this metaphor and continues throughout the poem. We can see 'dried tubers', 'dead tree', and 'dry stone'. Also, there is a reference to water's power of killing as an alternative of its being the so-called life-giver. The poetic persona is warned against water by Madame Sosostris; she says "Fear death by water."⁹ These imageries add to life's being desiccated for the poetic persona without any enjoyment or color. Besides, there are many biblical allusions in the poem, such as 'Son of man', 'broken images', and 'dust'. Use of these biblical allusions in such a context shows that religion fails to provide relief or hope for people. All of these allusions signify that the poetic persona is actually in a search of meaning in the dimension of art because he points out the invalidity of relief provided by religion or Tarot by questioning the trustworthiness of the two. The fortune teller cannot foresee that she will get a cold and also she is unable to see what 'one eyed merchant' carries on his back. As for religion, Eliot points out to the fact that 'Son of man' is unable to answer the poetic persona's question. Poetic persona's challenging the knowledge of the two seemingly omniscient and omnipotent beings is significant because it reveals the fact that people cannot be fooled by the two anymore. In fact, Eliot believed that "people should bring knowledge to the reading of texts. In order to collaborate with the poet in the making of a poem, readers must be willing to close the book and dwell awhile with Ezekiel and Dante"¹⁰. According to Lehman's analysis of the poem, Eliot "spent his life entranced by the objects of literary history- he alludes to Dante,

Shakespeare and Lancelot Andrews".¹¹ On the other hand, the fragmented structure of the poem suggests the over whelming sense of disorder and fragmentation caused by the modern materialist world. The converted sentence structures and mixing German and French into the poem adds more to poem's fragmentation. Such a structure reflects life better for the modernists because our life is not made up of continuous and linear events that follow one another chronologically but rather of fragmented bits and pieces that are connected to one another randomly. By the way, the ending is noteworthy because we see a reference to a buried dead but it seems that he is buried in an improper way. The poetic persona satirizes and mocks the dead body and Stetson who has buried the corpse. At first he regards the dead body as if it was a plant by using verbs such as planting and sprouting and by making a pun on bed. Like lacks hope and a sense of significance in a modernist society, many aspects of life lose their meaning and are reduced to trivial things. During the modern era one aspect of the life that is emphasized in the poem is human relationships. In *The Waste Land*, relationships between people in the modern society are reduced to something that is sterile, lifeless and dry. The various characters that appear in the poem are unable to carry a logical and coherent dialogue. As a part of the already fragmented whole, any attempt for conversation between people reflects the fragmented and incoherent structure and content of the poem. For example, in the second part the speaker's attempt to have a conversation, 'A Game Chess', demonstrates the impossibility of communication and thus relationship: 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".¹² Here the speaker is unable to communicate with person he is speaking to; this failure in communication reflects the isolation and lack of connection that characterize

⁹Vasant A. Shahane (Ed.), *T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems, Selection From Norton Anthology*, New Delhi: Book World, p. 31.

¹⁰Brooker, Jewel, *Mastery and Escape: T. S. Eliot and Dialectic of Modernism*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Publisher, 1994, p. 191.

¹¹Lehman, Robert S., 'Eliot's Last Laugh: The Dissolution of Satire in *The Waste Land*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32.2. 2008, p. 67

¹²Vasant A. Shahane (Ed.), *T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems, Selection From Norton Anthology*, New Delhi: Book World, p. 34

relationship within the disillusioned and dismal modern society. So, all in all, the poem is an embodiment of disillusionment and frustration caused by modernism developed as a result of the First World War. The significance of the individual, search for meaning, looking for order and pattern, etc. bring their own negation in the poem. Thus, we can see that meaninglessness is the ultimate meaning for the poetic persona as well as for Eliot himself. Another aspect of human relationships that is often trivialized in the poem is that of romantic love and thus the significance and meaning of love and relationships. In *A Game of Chess*, relationships and love are reduced to something that one seeks for self-centered pleasure. The discussion of the relationship between Albert and his wife suggests a sense of a lack of satisfaction and meaning; the characters "live sterile lives with synthetic comfort and sex that substitutes for love".¹³ Gunner notes that "sexual love in *The Waste Land* is a failure of spirit and loss of passion in the world".¹⁴ This idea of sterility and infertility pervades the image of barren landscape and the description of human relationships in *The Waste Land*. Pondrom notes that "the poem is about failure to achieve union-with an Absolute, an Other, the Self, an object for knowledge, and with culture and tradition-fragmentation is its ultimate condition".¹⁵ At last I can say with the quote that 'Poetry is having nothing to say and saying it,' shows the modern approach to the poetry and T.S. Eliot reflects this idea in his works.

Like many modernist writers, Eliot wanted his poetry to express the fragile psychological state of humanity in the twentieth century. Modernist writers wanted to capture their transformed world, which they perceived as fractured, alienated, and denigrated.

¹³ McGann, Mary, 'The Waste Land and The Sound and the Fury: To Apprehend the Human Process Moving in Time', *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. 9, 1976, p. 18.

¹⁴ Gunner, Jeanne, *T. S. Eliot's Romantic Dilemma*, New York: Garland, 1985, p. 24.

¹⁵ Pondrom, Cyrena, 'T. S. Eliot: The Performativity of Gender in *The Waste Land*', *Modernism/ Modernity*, Vol. 12, 2005, p. 427.

Eliot envisioned the modern world as a wasteland, in which neither the land nor the people could conceive. In *The Waste Land*, various characters are sexually frustrated or dysfunctional, unable to cope with either reproductive or non-reproductive sexuality: the Fisher King represents damaged sexuality (according to myth, his impotence causes the land to wither and dry up), Tiresias represents confused or ambiguous sexuality, and the women chattering in 'A Game of Chess' represent an out-of-control sexuality. The World War I not only eradicated an entire generation of young men in Europe but also ruined the land. Trying to process the destruction has caused the speaker's mind to become infertile: his head has been filled with straw, and he is now unable to think properly, to perceive accurately, or to conceive of images or thoughts.

Eliot simply and spontaneously expressed his thoughts as he viewed them with a complete stream of consciousness and fragmentation. Stream of consciousness is a narrative device that attempts to give the written equivalent of the character's thought processes, either in a loose interior monologue, or in connection to his or her actions. Stream of consciousness writing is usually regarded as a special form of interior monologue and is characterized by associative leaps in thought and lack of some or all punctuation. Stream of consciousness and interior monologue are distinguished from dramatic monologue and soliloquy, where the speaker is addressing an audience or a third person, which are chiefly used in poetry or drama. In stream of consciousness the speaker's thought processes are more often depicted as overheard in the mind (or addressed to oneself); it is primarily a fictional device.

The most prominent aspect of postmodernism is fragmentation. A whole and entire phenomenon on its own, the postmodernist movement began in the field of architecture but spread to art, literature, cinema, culture and philosophy in no time. Postmodernism seeks to maintain elements of modern utility while returning to classical forms of the past. James Morley describes it as an "ironic brick-a-brack or collage approach to construction that combines several

tradition styles into one structure.”¹⁶ In fields of postmodern artwork, fragmentation signifies the breaking rather than building up of information, to form a structure that would convey a hidden message rather than the obvious message to its audience. *The Waste Land* is written in a mosaic or collage pattern and the poet deliberately used this particular technique because he wanted to portray the fragmentation that had crept into the lives of modern man. Daniel Hipp observes that “Eliot’s personal perception of the cultural wasteland round him led to creation of the poem, and further, his need for the personal expression of his own psychological difficulties at that time led to creation of the poetic expression that served a specific personal need through the creation of such apparent objectivity”.¹⁷ Kinney gives an example of fragmentation in the poem demonstrated in ‘*The Fire Sermon*’. The stanza that begins in line 300 says, “On Margarate Sands./I can connect/Nothing with nothing. /The broken fingernails of dirty hands./ My people humble people who expect/Nothing.” Kinney suggest that these lines can be rewritten as follows: On Margarate Sands/ I can connect nothing with nothing./The broken fingernails of dirty hands./My people humble people who expect nothing”.¹⁸ The fragmented nature of *The Waste Land* is not merely a stylistic elements or an effect that a reader perceives from the poem but most importantly a principal concept of modernism. In the first part, *The Burial of the Dead*, the speaker describes the scene that he sees as a heap of broken images. Again, at the end of the poem, the he speaker says, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins”.¹⁹ Thus, from the beginning to the end of his reflections, the speaker of the poem is

aware of the fragmented images that he sees in the wasteland. The relationship between final lines and the rest of the poem is analyzed in Mary McGann’s study of the poem; the fragmented yet “brief moments of illumination lead into final epiphany which reflects the method of the entire poem”.²⁰ The speaker attempts to find a sense of resolution and order at the end of the reflections. However, despite this attempt, his thoughts are still fragmented and his words still obscure and ambiguous. In Eliot’s notes on the poem, he remarked that ‘*What the Thunder said*’ contains the theme of ‘the present deterioration of eastern Europe’. The speaker does not find resolution within the city or the development of western civilization because of this decline and decay, but he turns to an ancient eastern religious text. At the end of his search through the fragments of modern thought and society, the modern man finds his efforts and the society around him to be ultimately futile and meaningless.

The poem uses the themes of fragmentation and incoherence to purport an epistemological idea-the obscure nature of the text created by allusiveness and incoherence communicates, the notion that the text is ultimately incomprehensible. Though the poem communicates through the fragmentation of the text and the speaker’s failure to find meaning despite the disjointedness, the truth and reality are uncertain and fully unknowable. With a thorough understanding of the allusions and themes in the poem, the intentional obscurity and confusion within the text don’t change. The poem seems to ‘[promise], for a moment, to achieve a unity of vision with all of its voices... but the moment rapidly expires and gesture proves futile’. The prevailing message of this purposeful and artful absurdity is that the text is impenetrable, just as truth and meaning are obscure and impenetrable in the modern world.

¹⁶See James Morley, Defining Postmodernism, available at <http://elab.eserver.org/hf10242.html>

¹⁷Hipp, Daniel, *The Poetry of ShellShock: War Time Trauma and Healing in Wilfred Owen, Ivor Gurney and Siegfried Sassoon*, North Carolina: McFarland, 2005, p. 191.

¹⁸Kinney, Clare, ‘Fragmentary Excess, Copious Dearth: The Waste Land as Anti-Narrative’, *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Vol. 17, 1987, p. 276.

¹⁹Vasant A. Shahane (Ed.), *T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems, Selection From Norton Anthology*, New Delhi: Book World, p. 48.

²⁰McGann, Mary, ‘The Waste Land and The Sound and the Fury: To Apprehend the Human Process Moving in Time’, *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. 9, 1976, p. 20.

When European society was not quite sure what to do with itself, *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot was appeared at that time. Europe had just emerged from World War I, a war which had traumatized the continent and its society. Many felt the world was chaotic and inhumane. A sense of disillusionment and cynicism became pronounced and nihilism grew in popularity. This was also a time of personal difficulty for Eliot because of his tailing marriage and the disorder of his nerves. In his poem Eliot expressed all of these feelings. In fact, *The Waste Land* soon became known as "the work that best expressed the mood of a postwar generation disillusioned by the loss of ideals and faith in progress".²¹ However, *The Waste Land* does not express only despair in the condition of modern society but also conscious of its actual degradation, Eliot sought a means to escape it. He did a great deal of research concerning fertility rituals and myths and indicated that "his reading in these and similar studies provided a way of seeing behind present day actions a substratum of past beliefs and practices that, though now lost to consciousness, continue to inform our daily lives in hidden but significant ways".²² As Delmore Schwartz states, "Eliot's theme is the rehabilitation of a system of beliefs, known but now discredited".²³ Eliot felt that man needed to be brought back to these old beliefs, but was wary of stating this openly, fearing a direct approach would prevent the poem from being read. The modern man had become too hardened to accept Christian principles directly and, instead, must gradually be made aware of his condition. In order to achieve this, Eliot chronicled his Nihilism: (from the Latin nihil, nothing) a philosophical position which argues that the world, especially past and current human existence, is without meaning. Journey of realization and revelation in the form of *The Waste Land* using the protagonist of the poem to represent his own passage to spiritual awareness

and to convince man of the degradation of society and the need for reform the poem begins with the protagonist musing on spring: "April is the cruellest month, breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing /Memory and desire, stirring /Dull roots with spring rain./Winter kept us warm, covering /Earth in forgetful snow, feeding /A little life with dried tubers".²⁴

This passage is an indication of the extent of the degradation of man. He has sunken so low into depravity that he prefers to live a life of ignorance and to disregard the fact that he is living a halt life. April is a name of the month when spring begins, is no longer a joyous time in which new life is celebrated, but a cruel time of rebirth that reminds man that his own life is terribly empty. Then the protagonist addresses man directly, stating, "you know only / a heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / and the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / and the dry stone no sound of water".²⁵ He then invites us into the shadow of this red rock. Under this red rock, he will show the way to escape the mundane life that man has brought upon himself.

Later the speaker recalls the time when he first realized the emptiness of his life. In the springtime, he says, he gave his lover hyacinths. Looking at her, with her arms full of flowers and her hair dripping wet, he expected to see happiness and fulfillment, but saw nothing. Here he realizes that true joy cannot be found in transitory things. The world holds nothing for him desolate and empty is the sea. It is possible that Eliot came to this same realization through a similar cause, as he and his wife had a very unhappy relationship. Through society he protagonist then takes us on a journey which illustrates the full extent of human degradation and spiritual emptiness. In the first scene of 'A Game of Chess', a wealthy couple is shown at home, living meaningless lives composed of dull routines. Their relationship is forced and artificial, each so self-absorbed that neither can

²¹Dupree, Robert S., 'From Homer to Eliot: Intertextuality and the Epic', *An Intertextual Anthology*, Robert S Dupree (Ed.), Dallas, Texas: U of Dallas, 1994, p. 07.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 08.

²³Schwartz, Delmore, 'T. S. Eliot as the International Hero', *The Waste Land*, Michel North (Ed.), New York: Norton, 2001, p. 209.

²⁴Vasant A. Shahane (Ed.), *T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems, Selection From Norton Anthology*, New Delhi: Book World, p. 28.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 29.

communicate with the other. In the second scene of this section, the extent of degradation is further revealed. A woman is in a pub discussing with a group of friends, she gave the advice to her friend Lil when Lil's husband Alfred who was discharged from military service. She pointed out that Alfred, having been in the service for four years, 'wants a good time' and told Lil, "if you don't give it to him, there's others will".²⁶ She then rebuked Lil for looking so antique. And Lil replied that it was because she had an abortion. She had already given birth to five children and did not want more. In this scene, sex is reduced to a duty of a wife who must perform to please her husband, and children are an obligation, not a joy. In *The Fire Sermon*, the depravity of man is further illustrated. A woman is shown in her apartment eating dinner with her lover. Their encounter after dinner is described thusly: "The time is now propitious, as he guesses, /The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,/ Endeavors to engage her in caresses /Which still are un-reproved, if undesired /Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;/ Exploring hands encounter no defense;/ His vanity requires no response,/ And makes a welcome of indifference".²⁷ When he leaves, "her brain allows one half formed thought to pass: / Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over".²⁸ This attitude of indifference can be seen as even more depraved than lust and expresses the apathetic attitude of many after the war.

However, there is still hope. Sometimes, the protagonist can hear "the pleasant whining of a mandoline"²⁹ near the walls of Magnus Martyr, a church "where fishermen lounge at noon".³⁰ This brief glimpse of hope is an indication of the source of a meaningful life. The fish men remind us of Jesus' disciples who were exhorted to journey throughout the earth, telling men of the gospel of Christ and the way to salvation.

²⁶Vasant A. Shahane (Ed.), *T. S. Eliot: Selected Poems, Selection From Norton Anthology*, New Delhi: Book World, p. 35.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 40

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 40

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 41.

In *Death by Water*, the way of escape from the degradation of society is revealed. The protagonist tells us of Phlebas the Phoenician, who experienced death by water, which can be seen as a representation of baptism, the shedding of the sinful nature, and the acceptance of the living water of Christ. Phlebas is now dead to the world. He has forgotten "the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell/ And the profit and loss".³¹ He is no longer affected by the sin of modern society but lives separate from it. The narrator then addresses the reader: "Gentile or Jew/O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,/ Consider Phiebas, who was once handsome and tall as you".³² With this address, the narrator reminds us that we are as mortal as Phlebas, and we also require this 'Living Water'. This passage is a direct contrast to '*The Fire Sermon*' quenching the fires of lust with the 'Living Water' that provides spiritual cleansing. To truly experience life, our sinful nature must die.

The protagonist concludes by explaining his own realization that, like 'Jerusalem Athens Alexandria', modern society is deteriorating: "London Bridge is falling down".³³ At this time, he has a decision to make: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?"³⁴ Will he avoid the decay of society and abandon his meaningless life for one with significance? His decision is evident in the last stanza of the poem. Amid the madness of the ruin of society, the protagonist finds 'Shantih shantih shantih' a peace that passes understanding. Like Phlebas, he has Chosen to bid farewell to his dishonest, worldly self and surrender to the Living Water that has the power to quench the fires of corruption. It is through this passage that Eliot suggests his own discovery and his decision to experience the peace that passes understanding by surrendering the corrupt part of him. The poem, composed of seemingly fragmented ideas and stream of consciousness thoughts, ends on a note of peace, a peace that Eliot has attained and wishes modern man to experience.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 43.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 43.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 48

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 48

It is, however, to be greeted with a shock of recognition that forcefully counters the temptation to exist in a condition of complacent insensibility. There is a contrast between high life and low life in a vulgar setting. But despite this apparent contrast, they resemble closely in as much as life in both of them has lost all meaning. Eliot has linked up the past with the present, and universalized the topical. Thus he has thus shown that the spirituality sterility of the modern age is nothing peculiar to it. Sin, especially sexual perversion, has always resulted in spiritual decay and desolation. However, the deeper contrast lies between the life in the past and in the present. In the past, at least death, suffering, could lead to purification, while in the present not only life, but even death is devoid of significance. And in the modern waste land even death is sterile, it does not lead to anything higher, or spiritual regeneration. Purity of the hearts is possible, and the poet points out the way which can lead to it. Spiritual regeneration will result; life-giving rain will come, only when humanity is prepared to pay the price in the form of suffering and penance. Thus ends not on a note of despair, but with a message of hope for the inhabitants of the modern desolate land.
