
Love of Death and Death of Love in Modernist Poetry, T.S Eliot's *'The Waste Land'*

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Abstract

The following paper tries, as much as it can, to sketch a modernist view of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* by emphasizing one of the most fundamental themes instead of the central motif of the poem-- the Death of love and love of Death. By the Eliotic preview, the 20th-century modern society, delineated minutely in this poem, is something full of nothing but meaningful nothingness; sooth to say, a society where lifeless and loveless people lead a mechanical life in a living dead condition. They have anything but feeling, emotion, sensation, passion, compassion, affection, and attachment to living a living dead life in a land that is waste, desolate, desiccated, devastated, decadent, depreciated, infertile, barren, inhuman, sterile, feckless, unproductive, uncultivated and uninhabited.

Keywords: Modernism, fragmentation, anti-narrative, love of Death, Death of love.

Introduction

The period of high modernism was the twenty years from 1910 to 1930, and some of the literary 'high priests' of the movement (writing in English) were T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf..... (Barry 79)

At the beginning of the 20th century, poetry began to be modernized; it evolved as a minority art: in Wordsworth's time, poetry was the majority art; Drama in Shakespeare's time and fiction in Dickens's time took first place. The modern era transfigures the definition of poetry where Coleridge's definition conforms, 'Prose is words in their best order; poetry is the best words in their best order.' In prose, words are walking, but in poetry, words dance. Modern poetry emphasizes language and focuses on expression. It is emotive and connotative, starting emotion and ending feeling. Modern poets play with words that sometimes fly to give readers a cerebral perception of emotion. Whereas romantic poetry is the poetry of vision; Modern poetry is the poetry of revision; Modern poetry is by the

learned, of the learned, and for the learned:

Modernism was an aesthetic movement brought about by a radical shift in consciousness and a violent transformation of social conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Waugh, 409)

Around 1857, through the inauguration of modern poetry in France, Baudelaire, the high priest of modernism, fertilized the soil there; Whitman in America and T.S. Eliot in England tried to continue it and make it more fertile. Modernism is a child of Romanticism; Modernism is Romanticism without effusional expression. According to T. S. Eliot, literature is a journey from personal to impersonal; Poetry should be objective, impersonal, and image-centric. A Modern poet is like an oyster who transforms his diseases, agonies, and joys into a thing of beauty to make the pearl that is poetry; his mind is like a cooking pot wherein various thoughts and ideas as ingredients are cooked; the making of poetry is part chemistry and part mystery. Poetry is superior amusement; genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood, and the impact of poetry is like hypnotism.

Modern poetry differs in root and branch from contemporary and modernist poetry:

1. Contemporary-- born in modern times, but his outlook,

theme, and form are medieval; for example, Walter De la Mare's "Listeners" is a pre-modern poem.

2. Modern-- born in modern times, some of his attitudes (thematic) are modern, but other features are not modern. W. B. Yeats' "Easter 1916".
3. Modernist-- One whose birth, features, outlook, and everything is out and out Modern. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Modern time commenced around 1910, and the human mind began to change from that time, as Virginia Woolf wrote in her essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.":

On or about December 1910, human character changed.

The time also refers to the seminal exhibition Manet and the Post Impressionists, organized by Roger Fry. Modernism is sometimes called post-romantic. Romanticism is absorbed in modernism. Modern poems are usually short; brevity, irony, and elusiveness are their qualities. It abhors simplicity in that Modern civilization is complex and produces complex literature.

Thomas Stearns Elliot (1888 - 1965), the progenitor of the modernist movement in England, has so wonderfully portrayed the modern city in his phenomenal work, *The Waste Land*, that no one can ever compare him. Modernists proved that a poem has no geographical boundary;

cosmopolitan Poetry, The Waste Land, drafted in Switzerland by Eliot, revised in Paris by Ezra Pound, and published in Dial Journal, New York, and Criteria and Scrutiny in London. The Waste Land is a modern classic. There is a total break with the tradition; It is primarily a matter of quality, not chronology; images become the poem's core. The poem is like a bunch of flowers; each is an image. Romanticism provides us with ready-made garlands, but modernism only uses flowers to make garlands with our intelligence. The structure of the poem is anti-narrative, emotional and thematic structure, experimental, innovative, Avant-garde. Here, one art enters into another. It is multi-lingual; many languages are prevalent with sophistication and wit, irony and ambiguity; it is impersonal, in theory impersonal, but in practice personal:

Modernism, of course, was no more a unified movement or concept than post-modernism. (Malpas and wake, 118)

The poem's central theme is comprehensive sterility: physical, spiritual, relational, emotional, and social, but never intellectual. The central image is equal to the desert, Hell; the central myth is Death followed by rebirth. The Waste Land means land in its natural state; it is barren, uncultivated, uninhabited, unproductive, devastated, desolate, blasted, blighted and desiccated. The epigraph of the poem, taken from

Satyricon by Petronius, a romantic writer of the 1st century, confirms that the wastelanders all want to die so that there may be a rebirth. Living Death is worse than Death; Death is the fundamental theme. Love of Death and Death of Love is the poem's leitmotif. In the 20th century, the month of April opened the year, and it also opened the first section of The Waste Land, "The Burial of the Dead." April brings new life, but to the wastelanders of the century, April is cruel due to the incapacity and inadequacy of human response. It is not April's fault but the people's fault in 20th-century modern society. Similarly, spring begins a new life, which is unwanted because the wastelanders are not ready. That is why rebirth is painful to them. They prefer winter more because they are not fully alive; they are in a living dead condition. The Waste Land is full of fragments. As modern life is fragmented, modern poetry is also fragmented. The modern poet salvages these lines out of the wreckage of his age. There is a modern tone, but there is also a romantic undertone. According to Elliot, Romantic love leads to suffering and pain; It is useless to him. Passion is destructive. It destroys Tristram and Isolt, and Tristram dies in sorrow, separation, and agony.

Similarly, like the first part, "The Burial of the Dead," the second section, "The Game of Chess," also describes the Death of love and alludes to the play of Thomas Middleton, "A

Game of Chess" (1624), signifying that life itself is a game of chess, some loose and some win. This section tries to present married life with Death of Love. It begins with the greatest queen in human history, the Lady of situation, an aristocratic high society lady. Eliot is going to present the victimizing women in modern society in the disguise of Cleopatra and Philomela, who became the victim of cruel love. Victimization of love was there. It is also now in the modern era; Death of love is a myth, eternal recurrence. In addition, the section makes us feel the civilized cruelty of a couple's loveless marriage. These two are carrying the skeleton of marriage. There is no communication between them. Lack of speech connotes the lovelessness of modern marriage life, alluding somewhat to the marriage life of Eliot himself.

Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak. (Albert, 535)

The same is the case regarding the marriage life of Lil and Albert. The daily round of mechanical vacuous existence bores a tense modern couple to historical, frantic, frenzied despair and desperation. Nothingness is the only existing essence in their marriage life and the modern urban life of the 20th century. The following section, "The Fire Sermon," shows us mythical figures such as Diana and Acteon completely transformed into factual figures of modern society, Mrs. Porter and Sweeney, a customer of Mrs. Porter. In an ironic use of allusion,

Diana, the Roman goddess of chastity, the most chaste, juxtaposes the most unchaste Mrs. Porter, who is using bicarbonate of soda water to cleanse her ugly body after making a relationship of loveless lust with her customer Sweeney.

The Waste Land tremendously impacted the post-war generation and is considered one of the most important documents of its age. (Albert, 534)

Eliot is weeping to see the disappearance of love in society, where the relationship begins with individuation, mechanization of human feelings, and the relationship of profit and loss. It is also tantamount to the Typist-Clerk episode, where the typist girl will be involved in a casual, material liaison. The clerk, a loveless lover of modern society, comes to a loveless beloved for loveless lovemaking. Modern people become mechanical and automaton; machines are good, but mechanization is terrible; we should be the master of machines; machines should not be the master of us. Here, Tiresias, the most famous prophet of the classical world, blinded by Queen Hera and rewarded by King Juno, is the observer and commentator of this gross, materialistic, sickening, repulsive encounter between a man and woman in the sordid metropolis. Tiresias visited Hell, which is where murder is; sin is the murder of love--the degradation of human love; the modern couple has dehumanized themselves into subhuman creatures.

After the mechanical lovemaking is over, the typist girl feels relieved, as one feels after doing laborious work. Unlike Olivia, the typist girl does not think of suicide after her loss of chastity but reacts mechanically. A remedy for loneliness is love; after this encounter, the girl is alone because there is no love. Had it been love, it would be solitude. Romantics enjoy solitude, but the moderns suffer from loneliness.

Towards the end of this section, Eliot takes us to the London port to describe London's topography. The city is hopeless, despondent, and horrid from near and glamorous, glorified and bewitching from a distance:

What is the city over the mountains

Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air (Alexander 348)

The glamour of the city is artificial; the glory of the city is punctured, enchanting the view. Eliot is steering the civilization. Here, he had found the description of a grand church; the color of the wall is white, symbolizing sanctity and purity. Initially, the Thames River was limpid but has become turbid and muddy. Thames changed in the 1920s. Eliot shows us the similarities and dissimilarities between Queen Elizabeth and this obscure girl, Rhine Maidens. The common thing is the absence of genuine love. Elizabeth used love as a political thing, and Eliot also condemns that. He is describing an ordinary girl in a sordid situation in

society. We are just the helpless and helpless spectators. We do not protest, do not murmur; we know our destiny. We are ruthlessly shifted from one situation to another, where three girls speak helplessly. After the poem describes so many kinds of false love, the turning point of the poem appears when it moves from mundane to spiritual. Two types of asceticism—Western Asceticism, preached by Saint Augustine, and Eastern Asceticism, preached by Lord Buddha, wherein we are preached to get rid of last an indulgence. The modern city is compared to Carthage City, notorious as a city of physical love and lust, aberration, perversion, and degradation. The city is burning, boiling in the cauldron of unholy love. After this section, the poem turns into a corner. The fourth section, "Death by Water," is smeared with plenty of water and underwater images; there are many connotations, such as water and lack of water—both kills. Water in excess kills, as in Section 4, and its lack kills in Section V, "What the thunder said." Death is emphasized in Section IV in that it is the harbinger of rebirth. Modern people are like Phlebus, the famous tradesman whose life depends upon profit and loss trade values. Like him, degrading men and women of modern society cannot lead themselves to salvation because materialism cannot lead to salvation. He is to be out and out, engulfed, devoured by the whirlpool vortex. Poetically, the last section is the most

beautiful, with hypnotic musical effect. Along with the central theme, failure to live and love, we find two kinds of life and Death-- everyday life and spiritual life. Jesus is the scapegoat figure who sacrificed himself for us. His great sacrifice changed everything. Modern life has become like dilapidated houses, but we hope to be reborn. The ending is cautiously optimistic. If the modern inhabitants practice these three morals— Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyata, salvation may be available to them. People should not be ego-bound, like Broken Coriolanus, who was destroyed due to his arrogance. Madness is better than arrogance. Hieronymo pretended madness to take revenge; truth comes out from madness. Modern people should follow him. The poem ends on a tentative note of positive expectation--there is an end to despair, materiality, and physicality with the help of a

provisional hope. Mysticism cannot be intellectually explainable; Ineffable peace cannot be attained rationally or logically. The words Shantih, Shantih, Shantih from [Brihadaranyaka Upanishad](#) conform to that well and truly.

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