

## The Element of Pessimism in T.S. Eliot's Poem "The Waste Land"

**Dr.Sanjeev Kumar**, Asst. Prof. (English), D.A.V. P. G. College, Bulandshahr

**Article Received:** 12/08/2022, **Article Accepted:** 15/09/2022, **Published online:** 16/09/2022, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.3.42

### Abstract

The present study tries to reflect the element of pessimism in T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" Where he records the effects of the World War I. on the society and a creative transformation of the world that is observed in the final section of the poem. The poem is divided into five sections as follows:

- (i) The Burial of the Dead
- (ii) A Game of Chase
- (iii) The Fire Sermon
- (iv) Death by Water
- (v) What the Thunder Said?

**Keywords:** pessimism, transformation

In his study the researcher is going to reflect pessimism in the American Poet Thomas Stearn Eliot's poem "The Waste Land"

The poem is structurally very large divided in five sections composed in 1921 when Eliot, on the verge of a nervous breakdown and was on a paid leave from his City London Bank to Switzerland. The poem represents both an assessment of the world as he felt it to be, and a creative transformation of it which is taken under consideration in the final section of the poem. The poem is basically the master piece of Eliot and is regarded as the land mark in framing

the modern poetry. It represents modern man as fragmented at the same time his psychological problems. His experiences use drawn from the individuals living during the world War I. They are fragmented and morals are thrown out of the door and are indulge in sexual urge. They still seek hope for good resolution. In the words of Leonard John (1996 -23) "The waste land is more of a story in poetical form."

The statement of the problem:

The reason of the study is to show that T. S Eliot is basically a pessimistic poet.

Significance of the study:

The importance of the study is to show that how his poetry Introduce reader to certain human circumstances around him whether they are favourable or in unfavourable through the note of pessimism.

**Objective of the study:**

- The study intends to achieve the objectives as follows
- To high light the elements of pessimism

To show very resolution of the problem highlighted and how does the society can fore build and to show how the society can be checked from committing suicide

**Hypothesis:**

Eliot is not always pessimistic

'The Waste Land' vividly portray the life of man during the 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 *Waste 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 Coker, Somerset, 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 Observations* (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 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 use a method in his study and that is collecting data about the element of pessimism at the same time he is going to discuss the element of pessimism at the same time he going to discuss the

element serial wise. Then the researcher will draw conclusion to prove his hypothesis

### **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 cruelest 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 indicate 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 cannot use her voice to convey her true feelings, which make it such an ironic situation and also reflects the rich woman's back 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 cannot 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 wants 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 west 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 mandoline 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 revival 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.

These 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:**

Now, to Conclude his note, the researcher reached the poits as follows  
 (i)The poetry of T. S. Eliot is pessimistic (on the basis of the five sections.(ii)All the section depicts modern man suffering from his human circumstances  
 (iii)The society can be restored or reconstruct by rapid development during its short tenure since introduction  
 It is an interpretive tool of analyzing nature writing which is commonly associated with environmental criticism.

#### **References:**

- Anderson, K. George, Buckler, William, E., Veader and Mary Harris (1979). The Literature of England. Harper Collins: The United State 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.

#### **How to cite this article?**

**Dr. Sanjeev Kumar**, "The Element of Pessimism in T.S. Eliot's Poem "The Waste Land"" Research Journal Of English(RJOE) 7 (3), PP: 294-300,2022, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.3.42>