
WOMEN AND SEXUALITY IN T.S. ELIOT'S THE WASTE LAND

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Abstract: In this paper I would like to shed light on the theme of sex with reference to female characters in T.S.Eliot's masterpiece *The Waste Land*. There are several occasions in which the women are tested in certain sexual encounter these sexual relations are different one from another like love, marriage, and casual seduction and even sometimes a perverted sex is involved. In all cases women are victimized and subjugated. My point is to assert that women are crushed under the male centered society.

Keywords: Gender, Sexuality, Futile Relationships, and Women subjugation

Introduction: One of the most sophisticated poems of Eliot is *The Waste Land*, considered by some critics the poetic equivalent of Joyce's *Ulysses*, the poem is the increasingly hallucinating description of a massive "waste" landscape, both symbolic and physical, in which myth and reality overlap. A literary work like *The Waste Land* is compactly loaded with themes that many of Eliot's other poems have touched upon. A literary work like *The Waste Land* can be thought of as a panorama that summarizes in one poem the gist of Eliot literary work of art, for it has a variety of themes, allusions, rich and vivid images, and references to many histories and mythologies, thus the poem can be seen as a metaphor for modern age disintegration and sexual regression. *The Waste Land* was written by the versatile and prolific poet T.S. Eliot, inspired by the two anthropological studies "From Ritual To Romance" by Jessie Weston, and *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer, and edited by Eliot's mentor Ezra Pound who deducted the lines to half; and it is said that his first wife Vivien also made some suggestions to remove some lines that are revealing about their disturbed relationship. Eliot has been accused of misogynic, however one can find that Eliot used women or female character to convey the idea of sexual degradation and abuses. As Potter commented on the women utilization by T.S.Eliot "Significantly, his earlier texts often connect chaos to women and form to me" (Potter, 223; 2004).

The poem was scorned to be abstruse for readers, the reason is that Eliot wrote the poem in his period of recovery from a neurotic disturbance besides his relationship with his wife. In his letters T.S.Eliot wrote to describe his wife impact on the poem "To her marriage brought no happiness and to me it brought the state of mind that brought about *The Waste Land*" (LOTS. 1988; vixxx) The major themes of this paper are located in this very poem I would tackle, add to that the Eliotic Theme is constantly repetitive in poems like *Prufrock*, and *The Hollow Men* they all share the main scope of the lack of joyful sex. The time of composing the poem was very critical and shaking it was marred with the chaos and agony

of the post-war circumstances of disorder, death of moral codes. In an ironic and sarcastic approach Eliot scolded the modern way of life. The poem is open to many interpretations mainly the emphasis is on the treatment of ladies from different layers of the society. In Bloom's words: *The Waste Land* is a poem of the city, and like a city it is crowded with people of all classes and types. Marie, Madam Sosostris, Stetson, the childless couple, the prolific parents Lil and Albert, the gossipy publican, the typist, the clerk, Tiresias, and other nameless speakers walk the streets or preside over the parlors and public rooms of Eliot unreal city. (Bloom, 193. 2009)

The biggest number of characters are women. The poem was considered as a journey of a quest for the redemption in the same manner the Fisher King made in the past. The Poem was implemented in the dramatic monologue technique, refrains, mixed meters with a variety of languages from all over the World. As in the episode of the female character from the upper class with highly decorative room, she is disappointed in love and unsatisfied in a blank verse from (77-79), the reason that Eliot dropped the meter is to convey the descriptions of beauty and glamour of the aristocratic lady, again the meter was taken away in the conversation at the Pub between the two lower class women to fit the poetic form lines (139-172)

Eliot shows us that women are the focus of *The Waste Land*. By displaying multiple sexual episodes in all of which sex is joyless, rape-like thing as in the allusion to the Thames daughters. These types of relationships are mechanized and meaningless. The sledding image of Marie at the opening section is so shocking and disappointing. The routine of love relationship in the typist sexual encounter. The disparate aristocratic lady who is unsatisfied. Finally the act of marriage and the fading looks Lil and her husband who came back from War to look for beauty in her or any other. Thus, Eliot shows the danger that circle women during wartime.

Sexuality: Despite the fact that *The Waste land* is a fragmented poem. The themes of sexuality, gender and relationships play a major role in giving a sense

of unity to the poem and connect it meaningfully through the mode of joyless sex acts. The sex in all episodes are sterile, futile and non-generative.

According to Eliot, "sex" has become mechanized and materialized for monetary aims, the reason that compelled Eliot to put sex as one of the basic factors that have led to the collapse of the western civilization. The sex perversion and prostitution are sordid images of the anarchy and futility of the modern civilization. Eliot's selection of sex as the most important factor that has led to the decaying of Europe in the post-war era. In the time when D.H. Lawrence called for the sex power in his novels, sex was the positive motive in his works, praise the relationships that are to be created among men and that among women, daring and bold sexuality were employed in D.H. Lawrence's which made some of his works like *Sons and Lovers*, and *Lady's Chatterly Lover* widespread and eventually the two novels were both banned. In Eliot's case a clear condemnation on sex as a reason for the degradation. The act of sex was like rape, executed in harsh and indifferently from both partners and if it was sex supposed to lead to children and generative purpose, Eliot doubted it depicting the lack of affection of it. Raine remarked on such case "If sex can be trivial, it can also be overpowering and daunting. We are schooled and programmed to think of sex as a 'normal' part of life. It takes a poet as great as Eliot to displace this impoverished stereotype, to remind us that the erotic can be overwhelming, its wonder awash with terror". (Raine, 2006;89)

Eliot shed light on the theme of "sex" from three different aspects like sex relationships i.e. prostitution, Marriage relationship and finally homosexual activities. Throughout *The Waste Land* all these mentioned relations no one is productive and generative and futility runs from the beginning to the end. The Impotent Fisher king is matched to the infertile land and Eliot deliberately used this legend to describe the atmosphere of nihilism where no life to begin "a desolate and sterile country ruled by an impotent king, in which not only the have the crops ceased to grow and the animals to reproduce, but the very human inhabitants have become incapable of having children" (Wilson, 1968;100)

As with the development of the modern age, the modern man has gone far beyond the laws of Nature and has deviated from the ways of God. Eugenics and birth control issues prevailed the modern age and Eliot reflected through the example of marriage relationship of Lil and Albert in the second section of the poem "The Game of Chess" "It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said"(159) thus the marriage relationship is also unproductive not by nature but by the futile way of thinking by modern man who is muddled with the chaotic war and have lost the sense

of fertility and productivity for the sake of the temporary lust. Sexuality is the more subtle theme in *The Waste Land*; and the sequent futility of it. The sexual intercourses lack the emotions and passion, while sex is the most important thing we have to give, so it is necessity and not a mere desire. The first sexual experience in the *Waste Land* can be inferred in the first section of the poem "The Burial of The Dead" namely the vision of Marie is the aristocratic German girl. Eliot used the image of Hyacinthus that is the God of flowers in the Greek mythology, this type of flowers grow from the blood of a male. Yet Marie was referred to as the Hyacinth girl. Marie recalls her journey with her cousin the Archduke; as she described the excitement in the mountains and the garden. Her memoirs are eventful as the lines from the poem elucidate:

*Yet when we came back,
late from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, could not Speak,
and my eyes failed, I was neither
living nor dead,
I knew nothing looking into the heart of light, the
silence.*

Oed' und leer das Meer. (The waste Land 37-42)

These lines establish the notion of nihilism of the real love and the inability to have a real love in such as land. The shock is apparent on the feelings and behavior of Marie. Eliot's allusion to Wagner's Opera "*Tristan und Isolde*" in which the watchman who reports to the wounded Tristan that Isolde's ship is nowhere in sight, the sea is empty". As Eliot used two quotations sequenced before and after the Hyacinth girl love experience to show two experiences, the love excitement and the ecstasy of going home and meeting the lover and in the other hand the shock, and disappointment at the loss of love. In the line "Oed' und leer das meer"(42). In the same way the relationship ended up for Marie as such. Brooks puts it this way:

The two quotations from opera which frame the ecstasy -of-love passage" thus take on a new meaning in the altered context. In the first love is happy; the boat rushes on with a fair wind behind it. In the second, love is absent; the sea is wide and empty, and the final line from the quotation reminds us that even love cannot exist in the *Waste Land*". (Brooks, 1968;133)

The second section of the poem "The Game of Chess" is inspired by the play by William Midlton "Women be aware of Women" in which the actual Game of Chess is being played to distract the attention from the seduction of the daughters. In every step of the game one step was to be taken towards the seduction. This section is an eventful one as far as the sexuality theme is concerned, it shows the sex relationships in different stratum of the society the higher and the

lower. Eliot used the first episode to reflect the futility and the anarchy of the high and exaggerated high class lady. The descriptions of the room she sat in is in the same ways of the hyperbolic in the language of the Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* "the room is filled decorative ornaments and cosmetics are everywhere with perfumes that attracts attention. Amidst the decorations and the extravagant decorations the painting of the myth of Philomel is centered in the room as a reminder of the chaotic and anarchic treatment of the lady who is now feeling lost, bored and brutalized. Eliot alluded to this myth in which Philomel was raped by the brutal king Tereus and cut tongued as well to keep the secret instead she was metamorphosed come into play and she was transferred into a Nightingale to reveal in bird songs the reality of her tragedy. As Maxwell elucidated it; "Among the elements of the sumptuous decoration is a carving which represents the rape of the legendary Greek heroine and her subsequent transformation: the change of Philomel, by the barbarous king/ So rudely forced. 'Rudely and barbarous "reflect a new and deliberate brutality into the poem. (Maxwell 1952;33)

The poem takes on the rape by force as a brutal and rough act of sexuality. Eliot's view is that the tragedy is one all over the ages, Philomel was abused and raped the feeling of modern decorative lady is the same. She is bored, disappointed and confused; and unsatisfied. The lines are fastened logically after the myth usage as follows: "Footsteps shuffled on the stairs, / Under the firelight, under the brush her hair/spread out in a fiery points" (The Waste Land 107-109) the footsteps are an omen of the arrival of the assumed lover, who is the past version of the fierce king in the Greek myth. Carelessly treats with her, she is anxious and nervous because she feels that sex is devoid of passion. The use of the Objective Correlative by T.S. Eliot here is to reflect the mood of mechanical movement that is already planned with no emotions and feeling of the moment. The last episode in this poem brilliantly sets the conditions of marriage life of the modern age as conveyed by the lower-class society or working class-women at the bar. The ladies were gossiping about Lil's husband who is returning from the army and wants to have good sex if not with his wife maybe with another woman.

Futile Relationships: one of the major problems of the modern age is the empty, shallow and meaningless relationship among the human beings. This is due to the effects of modernity, technological advancement and the war as well. Such reasons have led to a cold, indifferent and confused personality of modern man who couldn't create a communication. When the relationship is built it would be meaningless and sterile. There are two ideas that T.S. Eliot projects here, and those ideas

participates to the collapse and futility of the contemporary relationships. Firstly marriage relationship, and on the other hand is the case of birth control and Eugenics. The need for sex is urgent for Albert. So, he gave his wife some money to adjust her fading looks; represented by her teeth while the poor Lil has spent all her money on the abortion pills. "It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said/(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)" (The Waste Land, 159-160) The publican reminds Lil of this: And her only thirty one and again mentions: "What you get married for if you don't want children?" (The Waste Land, 164). They scolded her heavily for her withered face that threatened her marriage life and about the children as well. So why a woman gets married if she don't want children, thus regenerative sex is not at hand. Sex and love become empty of its real value, the modern man just want to live the effects of new technologies constipation preventive methods, to do the regular practice of sex without worrying about reproduction. As Bloom describes marriage as "Modern marriage is portrayed in *The Waste Land* as a fundamental alienating institution, but what of love, sex, or romance? (Bloom 2009;198). Thus, domestic sex of husband and wife relationship couldn't survive in the waste land.

Sexuality runs through *The Waste Land* taking a centre stage as the reason of the calamity in "The Fire Sermon" "where the direct reference to the female - typist's liaison with a 'carbuncular' man." A type of relationship that is supposed to be outside marriage "in *The Fire Sermon*" the sterility of sexual relationship outside marriage is explored." (Cahill, 1967;47) Eliot draws that scene in a manner of rape, that this female typist didn't resist it. The way in which the episode was fulfilled in a carelessness and indifference from the typist side. The mechanized and devoid love, through the sex that facilitates the idea of the earthly love, while the female typist lives her daily life with same with same routine, performs the sex intercourse with the young man 'Carbuncular' who is young and beastlike figure in his behaviour and looks, to reflect the savage image of rape T.S. Eliot used the term Carbuncular that means pimped face:

Endeavours to engage her in caresses

Which still are unreprieved, if undesired.

Flushed and decided, he assaults at once

Exploring hands encounter no defense; (The Waste Land, 237-240)

The young man in this relationship is indifferent, careless and rough he is being described by young male adolescent's Murphy as follows:

"(Eliot refers crudely to young male adolescents' faces that have apparently broken out in "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" as being "red and Pustular" ;he may, however, only be using that kind of

identifying characteristic as a sign of physical and ,so, behavioural immaturity ,rather than being insensitive.)” (Murphy, 2007;459)

This scene is one of the climaxes of the poem as it describes the moment of joyless sex ,is expressed through the easy flow of the lines if compared to the other scenes. Tiresias the old man ,Greek myth , a prophet and a seer whose importance is very highly valued in words of Eliot in his notes about the poem :”What Tiresias sees, in fact is the substances of the poem”(Eliot,1963;72).Thus, Eliot weighs much significance on the personae of Tiresias and what he sees is so familiar , he already experienced , Tiresias further explained that he had witnessed himself the same experience in the Thebes .So, the sexual derives are one whether in the past or in the present. Tiresias was the only prophet who knew the riddle in Oedipus Rex dilemma and he told the king Oedipus about the incest sex he had had with his mother .However, in Eliot’s context the characters are normal and average woman not a queen but a London citizen the typist who awaits the expected guess in a matter of waiting the daily routine and the practice of sex.Eventually the typist resumed her daily life by listening to music: *Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over’.*

*When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.* (The Waste Land, 252-256)

The sex act is over she is happy that it has come to an end .Their sex relationship has concluded and promised no fruitful outcome. The futile and the anarchic relationship represent the type of sex the modern man is all about. **Gender:** In a deviation from the laws of nature Eliot made a reference to sexual perversion in several occasion .Gender is the defining feature of man and women sometimes it gets confused and results in transexuality and interplay of gender in man case or even woman, Eliot has given gender rule a lot of attention through the ambiguous character of Tiresias reflected this fact.The unproductive relationship between man which leads to no generative result, Thus Eliot considered it a reason behind the collapse of the European civilization. In “The Fire sermon” Mr. Eugenides the ugly and unshaven homosexual merchant who takes the speaker of the poem to a place of homosexuals that hotel named Metropole Hotel” according to the poem: “To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel/ Followed by a weekend at the Metropole”.(The waste Land,213-214) Eliot deliberately imparted the double sex organs in the personae of Tiersias “ITiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,/Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see”(The waste land,218-219) to reflect the distorted and confused identity of the modern man.Towards the end of the

section “The Fire Sermon” Eliot moved abruptly and made an allusion to William Medlton’s play *Women Be Aware Women* particularly the Thames daughter and how they were seduced, incoherent lines that show the confused state of the three daughters who were seduced and raped crudely in separate occasion as follow:

*Trams and Dusty trees
Highbury bore Richmond and kew
Undid me .By Richmond I raised knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe* (The waste Land 292-295)

The first daughter of the Thames tells the experience of her seduction as she laid down on a small boat where sex is performed in a rough manner without passion which made sex look ugly, meaningless and chaotic. The second daughter was ravished at Moorgate as mentioned in the following lines:

*My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet, after the event
He wept. He promised "a new start."
I made no comment. What should I resent?'* (296-299)

These lines show the brutality bestowed upon the second girl , she was exited , frightened at the same time the man was crying and promised a new start .However, he may failed to satisfy that girl, and eventually promised to try again , such futility of sexual relationship has contributed to the regression of the society .The last daughter is confused to Eliot’s state of mind in a matter that he once had a nervous breakdown and went to Margate to recover:

*On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.’* (The Waste Land,300-305)

Since Eliot has written some of the poem at the Moorgate, in a time of recovery from the sickness so the identity of the intended here is confused between one of the daughters and Eliot himself. while other critics argued that the last daughter was so confused and was sexually violated .Thus ,she was fuzzy and couldn’t connect nothing with nothing.

In the multiple sex episodes Eliot has made it clear that “sex” in approach and context brings no life .Love is either unrated or invalid and brought about no fruitful results .The careless sex between the typist and the young man, the gay relationship, the indifference and seduction all resulted in sterility and vanity. The way in which sex is practiced and it shows brutality and mishandling from both partners men should focus on the noble reason behind sex that is the source of continuation of the generations .Man should not assume sex for temporary desire that leads to the futility and anarchy.

Women Subjugation: the women under the male centered society have to follow orders and never to objectify. They were enforced to cope with man even if their desires are restrained. The capitalistic view of *The Waste Land* is apparent in Eliot's treatment of women and their bodies in both sections "The Game of Chess" and "The Fire Sermon" Chadwick explain "It is not too difficult to see how rape functions as a disease of capitalism. The women's body becomes a commodity .Capitalism produces commodity ,and this fetishization enables the rapist to feel validated when he gets what he wants, even if she has to forcefully take it"(Chadwick,121) Women are weakly portrayed in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, They are subjugated and humiliated. Thus, the male or Patriarchic society violates women in the meantime women have to succumb to male.' When a lovely woman succumbed to a folly", This manifestation of the repressed emotions in female personage represents the most violating effects that have been considered as the implications for deviations of sex from its genuine path.

Conclusion: The poem attacks on the western civilization and invokes the cure in the Eastern culture Eliot resents the human behaviour and the

land as well. Thus ,the title of *The Waste Land* reflects the desolation and degradation effects on man and women as well .Throughout the incidents listed in the sections of the poem, Eliot made a clear panorama of the futility and anarchy caused by the war, chaos and the loose morality of the society. The theme of Sexuality is a devastating factor for the communities in London , Paris and other main cities that Eliot has mentioned in several occasions .The unreal city ,the cold nights with foggy dusk of London .The Atmosphere is bleak ,gloomy and filthy .The prostitution and joyless sex runs in the city. The death and nihilism alongside the immoral sexuality had cost the society too much of its intactness. Eliot was successful to display these themes as the reason behind the collapse of the western civilization and I think these themes are contemporary and everlasting reasons of the current "regression" that inflicted our world not only the Western .The rise of Technology , Wars, prostitution ,growing violence, capitalism and other developmental associated issues have led us to the same consequences that Eliot had diagnosed about a century ago in his master piece *The Waste Land*.

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