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Revealing Ecological Issues in T.S. ELIOT's "THE WASTE LAND" Using an Ecocritical Viewpoint

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ABSTRACT:

The paper employs an eco-critical perspective to examine the ecological concerns in T.S. Eliot's well-known poem "The Waste Land". A comprehensive examination delves into the intricate connections between the poem's language, images, and concepts and the broader ecological context of the early 20th century. By assessing his work from this perspective, the investigation endeavors to elucidate Eliot's profound concerns regarding the environmental crisis and the consequences of human activity on the environment. The paper concisely places the poetry in the historical and cultural context of the era, characterized by the aftermath of World War I, rapid industrialization, and urban degradation. The study has uncovered a multifaceted array of ecological issues, such as the degradation of nature, the loss of spiritual connection to the natural world, and the consequences of human exploitation, through a critical analysis of the poem's fragmented narrative, symbolic imagery, and intertextual references. In addition, the investigation examines how Eliot employed language and poetic devices to articulate his ecological apprehensions. The essay investigates the extent to which the poet's fragmented and dissonant style reflects the fragmented state of the environment and the alienation between humans and nature. It also analyses Eliot's utilisation of river imagery, wasteland imagery, and metropolitan settings as metaphors for environmental devastation and societal despair. The current analysis will assist readers in better understanding Eliot's environmental consciousness and will offer a deeper understanding of the significance of "The Waste Land" as a critique of humanity's detrimental interaction with nature. The study emphasizes the importance of eco-criticism in shedding light on the ecological aspects of literary texts, as well as the importance of reading literature through an ecological lens to encourage sustainable behavior and promote environmental awareness. In summary, the investigation exposes the ecological underpinnings of the poem and underscores the ongoing significance of eco-criticism in environmental discourse and literary interpretation.

KEYWORDS: Ecocritical criticism, Environmental consciousness, Culture Discourse. Globalization Development, The Waste Land**.**

INTRODUCTION:

Although there was a growing consciousness about nature and environmental issues in the 1960s and 1970s, eco-criticism was not as organised as Marxism and Feminism. Leo Marx and Raymond Williams' books contain several important resources related to eco-criticism. However, William Rueckart's 1978 publication of the essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism" is considered the birth of the word eco-criticism. Rueckart wrote that eco-criticism entailed the “application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature." The study of environmental literature began as a major critical theory in the 1990s. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm officially heralded it with the publication of "Eco-criticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology," in which they urged literary critics to develop an ecological approach to literature, focusing on the cultural dimension of humans' relationship to the environment.

Another basic resource that reveals the diversity of ecological approaches is the ISLE Reader: Eco-criticism 1993–2003 edition by Michael Branch and Scott Slovic, as well as its British counterpart, the Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Eco-criticism, edited by Lawrence Coupe. In Fiona Becket and Terry Gifford's collection of essays, 'Culture, Creativity, and Environment: New Environmentalist Criticism," the contributors study texts ranging from Ralph Waldo Emerson's Nature to the animal stories of German writer Otto Alscher and question the goal of eco-criticism as a whole.

Another major text of eco-criticism is Lawrence Buell’s Environmental Imagination, which offers four criteria to determine whether a text is environmental. First, “the non-human environment is present, not merely as a framing device." Second, "the human interest is not the only legitimate interest"; third, "human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation"; and fourth, "there is one sense of the environment as a process." Buell also wrote "Writing for an Endangered World,” where he expresses his concern about the threats to the environment. In the 1990s, America took up this movement, and eco-criticism became a genre of literature. The Library of America was tasked with compiling key environmental texts, including text excerpts, into a single volume. The publication of the Eco-critical Journal (Association for Study of Literature and Environment) and its online presence are excellent resources now to pursue study in this field.

“Ecocriticism” is the word in the anthology entitled The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996), edited by Cheryll Glottfelty and Harold Fromm. This book is a collection of carefully selected essays on the ecological approach to literary studies. It signals the emergence of a new type of literary criticism, now unanimously accepted as ecocriticism. As the essays in this book indicate, ecocriticism aims to bring a transformation to literary studies by linking literary criticism and theory with ecological issues at large. To define it, Cheryll Glotfelty writes, “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (1996: xviii). Ecocriticism relies on literature to connect to today's environmental crisis issues. In other words, ecocriticism is directly concerned with both nature (natural landscape) and the environment (landscape, both natural and urban).

Authors such as E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Edward Thomas, and W. H. Auden consistently explore the natural world, portraying it either with a sense of agency and immediacy or with a profoundly

unsettling absence. According to critic Anne Raine, modernist literature exhibits a new environmental sensibility in how it depicts how new technological and scientific advancements are displacing and destroying the natural world, pushing it "into the past or into the margins of modernity" (101).

DISCUSSION:

The first chapter of The Waste Land, "The Burial of the Dead," underscores sterility and barrenness as it parallels the burial of the fertility god. The poem begins with the lines, April is the cruellest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire" (1-3). The way Chaucer portrays April in the reverdie section of the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales is in sharp contrast to Eliot's description of April as the cruellest month. Eliot's April is harsh and produces little life from the dead, whereas Chaucer's April is peaceful and revitalising. Thus, the irony is in the fact that spring does not provide any opportunity for rejuvenation, despite being a season of rebirth and renewal. Our world is as meaningless as a spring devoid of vitality. As a result, the poem's opening illustrates the barrenness and lack of fertility that characterise modern civilisation. The "dried tubers" are a sign that the environment is taking a back seat and suffocating everything it once supported.

The human figures depicted in the poem mirror nature's sterility. The introduction of Marie, the world traveller, in the poem is meant to imply that modern humanity is completely disconnected from nature and natural cycles, exactly like Marie, who spends a lot of her nights reading and making trips to the south in the winter. With April being the cruellest month, winter providing warmth, and summer delivering rain, Marie is the true embodiment of the modern wasteland.

In this approach, we might argue that Marie's life is currently empty since she disregarded her own biospheric instincts. The poem frequently serves as a reminder of how life cannot exist in a barren landscape when "the dead tree gives no shelter" (23). Trees are the life support system for the inhabitants of nature; they are its lungs. However, such a tree has died and is no longer able to shelter or sustain life, not even a cricket. This change of the land into a "desertscape" is a reflection of what our nature has become as a result of our ongoing abuse and disregard for it. Only "a heap of broken images" (22)—a metaphor for a faulty or insufficient memory—remain.

The final line of "The Burial of the Dead" makes a literal reference to the section's title. Has the corpse you put in your garden last year started to sprout? Has the recent cold disrupted its bed? Will it bloom this year? (73). The idea of greenery, in which the healthy soil creates a bed for the good seed to develop with adequate care and nurturing, is completely subverted by planting a corpse. A corpse has already expired and is no longer capable of giving birth. The literary character inquires once more about whether it will bloom this year. Modern society's misplaced optimism in a future that they believe will spontaneously materialise out of nothing is also suggested by this. Since we humans have completely exploited and squeezed the vitality out of nature, only corpses may now be planted.

The Fire Sermon, the third segment of The Wasteland, uses images of a polluted river to paint a picture of apparent environmental degradation.

The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of the leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song. (173–176)

On river banks, all civilisations developed and flourished. It opened the door for a rich culture that was firmly rooted in ethical and spiritual principles. However, human growth has gone beyond all natural limits, and as a result, mankind has completely lost what is known as an aristocratic spirit. The collapse of human civilisation began at that time and reached its apex in the wasteland depicted in the poem. It appears that we see final death and devastation just where we started, thanks to the image of the polluted river where the nymphs have vanished. Our moral character and harmony with nature are being destroyed by the filthy hands of sin. Ironically, Eliot refers to contemporary humanity as "humble people who expect nothing" (304). In actuality, nature gave us everything we needed and more without asking for anything in return. But because of excessive human greed, our vibrant, diverse ecology has been reduced to a wasteland that supports nothing and is sterile and lifeless.

To Carthage, then I came
Burning burning burning burning
Lord Thou pluckest me out
Lord Thou pluckest
burning (307-311).

These final words paint a vision of a dying Earth that is scorching and burning in purgatorial fires, which explains the alarming rate at which global warming is devouring our planet. These sentences also serve as the last scream and appeal of humanity, which longs to be immediately delivered from the deadly Earth and, as a result, begs God to take it away and put it somewhere.

The Waste Land's "Death by Water" chapter's fourth part discusses the lack of metamorphosis. The term also makes us consider how frequently, in mythology, death by water is followed by resurrection. However, even though Phlebas is decomposing in eddies, such a

Resurrection does not occur here. The Waste Land's concluding chapter, "What the Thunder

Said," gives us a dystopian vision in which urban and natural imagery coexist. This section brings everything that has previously been mentioned as characteristics of the poem's wasteland together. The apocalyptic lines "He who was living is now dead, and we who were living are now dying" (328–329) imply that life in the wasteland has become associated with death and destruction.

We have reached a point where only hard rock remains and no water. Since no living thing can survive without water, the absence of water is apocalyptic in nature. Death by water is impossible without water. There can be no resurrection without water. Additionally, life in the wasteland has grown monotonous and unchanging. Thinking and feeling have ceased, but then it is realised that the current dreadful situation is the result of this lack of ecological awareness.

The calm and tranquilly of the mountaintops have been drowned out by the material advancement of humanity, which has spread to every corner of the globe. Thunder is meaningless without rain, and it also implies that natural cycles are being disrupted. As a result, happiness and tranquilly have completely vanished from humankind, and city dwellers can be heard sneering and growling inside the city's structures. Once more, the modern man bemoans the ruin he has brought about and longs for a spring of water that will allow the situation as it is to completely transform. He longs to hear waves crashing on the rock. The people who live

in the modern wasteland yearn for the soothing sound of water sliding and gushing over the rocks. Even though this picture conjures up favourable emotions, the poet later adds, "But there is no water" (359), which brings back the desolation and gloom of the desert landscape.

CONCLUSION:

Finally, the present research emphasises the fundamental ecological issues expressed in Eliot's famous poem The Waste Land. The study provided a thorough assessment of the poem via an ecocritical lens, demonstrating the complex relationships between its themes, visuals, and language, as well as the greater ecological context of the early twentieth century. The research of the poem's historical and cultural context shows Eliot's long-standing concerns about environmental issues and how humans are hurting nature. The poem reflects the era's fast industrialization, urban degradation, and post-World War I period. Eliot's exploration of barren areas, broken narratives, and dissonant language express his critique of nature's decline and the loss of a spiritual connection to the natural world.

The findings of this study assist readers understand Eliot's environmental consciousness and his efforts to expose the negative impacts of humanity's destructive connection with the environment. The study emphasises the significance of "The Waste Land" as a powerful critique of current society's disregard of nature and its consequences. Eliot encourages readers to identify and address these ecological concerns by depicting the world's fragmented state and the distance between humans and nature through his sophisticated use of language and poetic techniques. The eco-critical approach raises environmental awareness by encouraging people to reassess their relationships with nature and adopt more sustainable lives. The lecture finishes by emphasising the poem's continuous value and the importance of reading literature via an ecological lens. This study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between literature and the environment by studying the poem's ecological themes and messages. It also highlights the importance of literature in raising environmental awareness and encouraging constructive change in our interactions with nature.

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