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English Literature

REVEALING ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS IN T.S ELIOT'S 'THE WASTE LAND' THROUGH ECO-CRITICAL LENS.

KEY WORDS: Eco-criticism, Ecological Concerns, Environmental Discourse, The Waste Land, T.S Eliot.

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ABSTRACT

The present paper applies an eco-critical perspective to examine the ecological concerns present in T.S. Eliot's well-known poem "The Waste Land." The study explores the subtle relationships between the ideas, images, and language of the poem and the larger ecological setting of the early 20th century through a thorough analysis. The study seeks to illuminate Eliot's deeply held worries about the environmental problem and the effects of human activity on the environment by evaluating his work through this perspective. The paper has briefly placed the poetry in the historical and cultural backdrop of the era, which was characterised by rapid industrialization, urban blight, and the aftermath of World War I. A complex tapestry of ecological issues, including the degradation of nature, the loss of spiritual connection to the natural world, and the effects of human exploitation have been revealed in the study through a critical analysis of the poem's fragmented narrative, symbolic imagery, and intertextual references. The study also looks at how Eliot used language and poetic devices to express his ecological concerns. The essay examines how the poet's fragmented and dissonant style represents the environment's fragmented state and the alienation between people and nature. It also examines Eliot's use of metropolitan settings, wasteland imagery, and river imagery as metaphors for societal despair and environmental destruction. The present analysis will help its readers comprehend Eliot's environmental consciousness better and provide insight on how important "The Waste Land" is as a critique of humanity's detrimental interaction with nature. The study emphasises the value of eco-criticism in illuminating the ecological aspects of literary texts and the necessity of reading literature through an ecological lens in order to promote environmental awareness and motivate sustainable behaviour. In a nutshell, the study reveals the ecological foundations of the poem while highlighting the ongoing importance of eco-criticism in literary interpretation and environmental discourse.

DISCUSSION

Through their creations, most of the modernist writers manifest, a self-conscious testimony to the fundamental shifts in the way human beings relate to earth. Many modernist literature critically examine accepted notions about nature and cast doubt on our anthropocentric worldview. In addition to lamenting the loss of a focal point and a sense of isolation from oneself and society, modernism also bemoans how disconnected humanity is from the natural environment. The "hyperseparation" between the human and the non-human world that began especially since the Industrial Revolution in western civilization reached its pinnacle in the early twentieth century (Plumwood 47-55). Although modernist literature occasionally affirms conventional, romantic conceptions of nature, it also constructively challenges and problematizes them. The writings of authors like E M Forster, T S Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Edward Thomas, and W H Auden reveal a persistent interest in the natural world, which is either portrayed with a sense of agency and immediacy or with a deeply 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). These books foreshadow the development of ecological discourse that "complicate, critique, historicize, or abandon the concept of nature" (Raine 103) even though they may not directly address environmental issues. Similar to this, Elizabeth Black examines the significance of place, nature, and the environment to British modernist poetry. She finds a heartbreaking loss of some essential link to the soil in the works of some significant poets, like T. S. Eliot. She makes a strong case for why modernism should be a key focus for ecocritics, arguing that doing so does not entail "anachronistically foisting current environmental opinions" onto modernist texts but rather emphasises "existing anxieties" to better understand how artists have responded to the natural world (40).

Lotos Rose, which is perhaps the first full-length book addressing Eliot's poems ecocritically. He believes that Eliot's "Earth-engagement" is most notable for the astonishing way his poetry rediscovers the path that leads from emptiness to something meaningful (185). Eliot's depiction of seemingly inactive natural entities that eventually change into something vivid demonstrates his understanding of nature's agency. Terblanche contends that the earth has vibrancy and agency, and that it responds to human action. He contends that Eliot's greatest poems reject a reductionist or essentialist view of the non-human universe, viewing Eliot's poetry as a precursor to the idea of new materialism. The idea of coexisting with idealised nature in union and harmony, which is pervasive in traditional environmental imagination, is prevented by new materialist ecocriticism, which seeks new perspectives on traditional dichotomies such as nature vs. culture, being vs. thing, and material vs. immaterial. In a post-industrialized environment, those who reduce matter to simple matter and reject its agency find themselves in a "Prufrock's dilemma" (Terblanche 186). He says that Eliot's poetry critiques a materialist culture that simply ignores its connections to nature while briefly outlining Eliot's concern for the polluted Thames. As a result, there is an intriguing connection between ecocriticism and Eliot's modernist poetry in the current ecocritical discourse, which mostly emerged in the previous three decades.

Eliot's poetry can be studied through an ecocritical lens to learn new things about the poet and the modernist conception of nature. To fully appreciate the wide range of Eliot's poetic activities, which are frequently connected to "urban spaces, social commentary, and linguistic experimentation" (Black 7), it is essential to reconsider him as a landscape poet. The concept that environmental catastrophe is a primary concern in the poem is strongly supported by Elizabeth Black's description of The Waste Land as a distressing vision of a society that is "estranged from nature and on the brink of environmental collapse" (7). She strengthens the case by viewing the poem as a forecast of "environmental crisis and climate change" and making references to broader observations made by Eliot in other writings on the risks associated with intensive farming and the depletion of natural

In a similar vein, Etienne Terblanche explores an ecopoetic interpretation of T. S. Eliot's poetry in relation to new materialism in T. S. Eliot, Poetry, and Earth: The Name of the

resources by contemporary industry (89). In a similar spirit, Terblanche contends that *The Waste Land* alludes to what we today refer to as "global warming and the ecological crisis," which is exhibited in the individual and societal alienation of humanity from the planet in the shape of lack and desertification (71). There is undoubtedly room for disagreement over how far-reaching or out of date the poem's theme of global warming and climate change is. The poem does, however, include potential environmental themes and issues that demand serious examination, as confirmed by the contemporary ecocritical trend towards modernism. I investigate how water is portrayed in *The Waste Land* by Eliot in order to advance this ecopoetic perspective of the novel. The absence or presence of water is so ubiquitous in the poem's construction that it calls for a close reading from an ecocritical perspective, even if Terblanche and Black just briefly mention it in their analyses of the poem. In doing so, this paper—which is primarily influenced by materialism ecocriticism, environmental ethics, and elemental ecocriticism—seeks to significantly contribute to the growing ecopoetic discourse of Eliot's poetry.

The first chapter of *The Waste Land*, "The Burial of the Dead," emphasises sterility and barrenness since it reads similarly to 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 in the Prologue to *Canterbury Tales* is a 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 backseat and is 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. Marie, in the words of Brooker and Bentley, "perceives the dualistic and paradoxical present as cruel because, in remembering the past and intuiting the future, she is left in a vacuum in the present moment, an absence in the middle of her life" (62). Her disconnection from the here and now suggests not just that she has lost touch with the seasonal cycles, but also that she has completely neglected her relationship with nature. 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). The life support system for the inhabitants of nature, trees 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 wisest woman in all of Europe, Madame Sosostris was a well-known clairvoyant who had the ability to accurately forecast the rise and fall of the Nile. However, such a prominent figure has reduced herself to nothing more than a subpar card reader, beneath a bridge. She had once been so

close to nature that she could interpret even the smallest clues that it created. She now declares that she "fears death by water" after separating herself from the natural system (55). Water is a highly significant component of nature, valued for its purifying and rejuvenating properties. Shakespeare's *Tempest* depicts death by water as transforming, but when Madame Sosostris foretells "fear death by water," she almost seems to be saying "fear transformation as well as regeneration." The dry urban cityscape of London quickly replaces the arid landscape. The inhabitants of the "unreal city" of dreams are depicted as being firmly ingrained in the mechanical rituals of contemporary life. The city's thick brown fog is an indication of the industrialization-related pollution. The masses just kept their eyes on their feet as they moved up and down. This hints at both despondency and a lack of a future vision. The current environmental degradation, which is utterly devoid of an ecological conscience, is a glaring example of this lack of foresight.

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 would bloom this year. The modern society's misplaced optimism in a future that they believe would 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 second half of the poem "A Game of Chess" offers glimpses into the life of those who dwell in the wasteland and how they are cut off from one another and unable to interact. The poem begins with a description of a woman waiting for her boyfriend alone at home, but obviously in an unproductive relationship. They only exchange glances when he comes; they don't exchange words. The phrase "burnished throne" alludes to Cleopatra, whose undying love for Antony is legendary. According to this quotation, conditional love, which lacks vibrancy and sincerity, has replaced unconditional love in modern society.

Nothing again nothing
Do
You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
Nothing?
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head? (120-127)

The lack of warmth and substance in interpersonal connections is reflected in these sentences. For peace to exist in nature, the connection between men and women should be amicable in both the ecological and spiritual realms. Man has broken his bond with both his fellow creatures and Mother Earth. Therefore, the degradation of the ecosystem and its effects on the human world illustrate how everything is interconnected.

Lil and her husband Albert, who is getting back together with her after a long absence, provide a second example of a loveless relationship. Their interaction presents sex as a purely mechanical affair. The majority of man-woman relationships of this kind are futile in the wasteland. This section has numerous instances of the phrase "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" (141). This can be viewed as a wake-up call for all of humanity to begin and launch initiatives that would prevent the ecosystem from suffering a total catastrophe.

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 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 civilizations 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.

The satirical words "The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends" (177-178) imply that the river is almost on the edge of dying because it has been overrun by all contaminants. Modern goods include silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, and cigarette ends. Through the typewriter and her lover, the poem paints yet another depiction of a loveless relationship. When the lover sees that the moment is right for him, he attacks her. She made no attempt to defend herself since, in her opinion, "His vanity requires no response, / And makes a welcome of indifference" (241-242). When the deed is finished, she is hardly conscious of her deceased lover, and she exclaims, "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over," according to whatever half-formed thoughts her brain lets slip (252). Here, we can use Heideggerian ecophilosophy, which lets things develop naturally rather than giving them an instrumental value that inadvertently makes the thing more marketable. According to this statement, "responsible human beings have an implicit duty to let things disclose themselves in their own inimitable way, rather than forcing them into meanings and identities that suit their own instrumental values" (Garrard 34). Here, we tend to understand that we have been harming Mother Earth in trying to satisfy our physical and material desires by equating nature with a woman. Since we have gone beyond all of nature's boundaries, she has been passive all this time, but it is inevitable that she would respond in kind very soon.

The line "The river sweats / oil and tar" (lines 266-267) is another allusion to the river's predicament in the poem. Sweating is a natural process that allows the body to expel extra and undesirable liquid. Similar to how the river sweats, which produces oil and tar instead of the water it is made of naturally. Additionally, water and oil do not mix. This implies that memory and desire are no longer compatible and work in opposition to one another. Additionally, the river contains more artificial substances than just water, primarily leftovers from industrialization, such oil and tar. These compounds add an additional layer to the water's surface that blocks sunlight from penetrating, signalling that the river is suffocating from a lack of oxygen. As a result, there are no longer any living things in the river. The word "drift" in the phrase "The barges drift" (268) refers to the paradigmatic shift that the river has undergone over time. "The Fire Sermon" concludes with an account of the nothingness of the postmodern world. It says,
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing. (301-305)

These lines once again discuss the loss of connection, which is necessary for a contented and sustainable way of life. The postmodern person, its environment, relationships, and all facets of life all reflect the emptiness. Only the fleeting

contacts, devoid of closeness and sincere thought, remain. All genuine interactions have been superseded by technology and artificiality, leaving us in a spiritual vacuum. 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 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, despite the fact that Phlebas is literally 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/ We who were living are now dying" (328-329) imply that life in the wasteland has become associated with death and destruction. There is only rock here and no water.

Rock and water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the hand
If there were only water amongst the rock. (331-337)

We have reached a point where only hard rock remains and no water. Since no living 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 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.

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 snarl
From mudcracked houses
If there were water
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water (341-349).

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. Despite the fact that 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.

The cities of the past and the present that have crumbled to the Unreal make up the unreal city. "Falling towers/ Jerusalem/ Athens/ Alexandria/ Vienna/ London/ Unreal" (374-377). All historic cities with a rich cultural legacy have been combined to create the withering and decaying Unreal city. "Merged into the single Unreal City, it has become the wasteland, nothing more than the desiccated ruins turning to dust among the mountains" (Morrell n.p.). The line "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down" (427) implies that there are no more cities and that people are still cut off from nature because it is no longer able to sustain them. The "falling towers" and "Murmur of maternal lamentation" (368) give us a glimpse of the impending apocalypse. From the wasteland, where life has been drained out, cries have already begun and will soon be heard throughout the entire world. Mother Earth herself might be crying out in pain over her planet's waning vitality.

The Fisher King is shown towards the poem's conclusion sitting on a bank and fishing while debating whether to bring back fertility to his lands, but "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (431) indicates that there is no hope for the reader. As the poem draws to a close, all of the issues it raises may be boiled down to a single deficiency, or "crisis of perception," as Fritjof Capra terms it. In the end, these issues must be viewed as merely several manifestations of a single crisis, which is primarily a crisis of perception. It stems from the fact that the majority of us, and particularly our massive social institutions, subscribe to the ideas of an outmoded worldview, a sense of reality unsuitable for coping with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world. (Capra 25)

Capra urges a paradigm shift in our beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives. This is the one thing missing from Eliot's wilderness. What Eliot proposes with the phrases "shanti shanti shanti" and "Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyata" can only be viewed as an admirable objective. This, though, is a far cry.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present paper highlights the significant ecological concerns that are present in Eliot's famous poem-The Waste Land. The study has offered a thorough examination of the poem through an eco-critical lens, revealing the complex relationships between its themes, images, and language and the larger ecological setting of the early 20th century. The analysis of the poem in relation to its historical and cultural setting has revealed Eliot's enduring worries about the environmental issues and how humans are affecting the natural world. The poem is a reflection of the period's rapid industrialization, urban blight, and post-World War I period. Eliot's exploration of the barren lands, fragmented narratives, and dissonant language reflect his criticism of nature's deterioration and the loss of a spiritual connection to the natural world.

The results of this study help readers comprehend Eliot's environmental consciousness and his efforts to highlight the negative effects of humanity's detrimental interaction with the environment. The significance of "The Waste Land" as a potent critique of contemporary society's ignorance towards nature

and its effects has been highlighted by the paper. Eliot urges readers to recognise and solve these ecological concerns by capturing the fractured state of the world and the gap between humans and nature through his intricate usage of language and poetic techniques. The eco-critical viewpoint promotes environmental consciousness by motivating people to reconsider their interactions with nature and pursue sustainable lifestyles. The paper concludes by highlighting the poem's ongoing significance and the necessity of reading literature with an ecological perspective. This research enhances our understanding of the relationship between literature and the environment by examining the ecological themes and messages contained in the poem. It also emphasises the significance of literature in promoting environmental awareness and inspiring positive change in our relationship with nature.

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