T.S. Eliot: The Waste Land in the Context of Postwar Britain

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Odjel za anglistiku
Anglistika (dvopredmetni)

Helena Lukin

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T.S.Eliot: The Waste Land in the Context of Post-war Britain

Završni rad

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Zadar, 2019.



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Zadar, 23. rujan 2019.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> Some day, I want to write an essay about the point of view of an American who wasn't an American, because he was born in the South and went to school in New England as a small boy with a nigger drawl, but who wasn't a southerner in the South because his people were northerners in a border state and looked down on all southerners and Virginians, and who so was never anything anywhere and who therefore felt himself to be more a Frenchman than an American and more Englishman than a Frenchman and yet felt that the U.S.A. up to a hundred years ago was a family extension.
>
> - T.S.Eliot, Letters (IV, 137-38)

Attempting to "pin down" Thomas Stearns Eliot to a particular category, nationality, movement, or an ideology is quite a challenge considering the fact that even the poet himself felt scattered and divided, belonging nowhere in particular. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in a middle-class family as the youngest of seven children. Surrounded by five sisters, his mother who was a former schoolteacher and his nurse who was a devoted Catholic with who he had long discussions about the existence of God, Murphy remarks that, in fact, "it was the women in the young Eliot's early life, who would have the most profound effect upon the developing literary genius" (4). After graduating from Smith Academy in St. Louis, he moved to Harvard College in 1906 in order to pursue a degree in English literature. It was during these years that Eliot was introduced to Italian and French symbolists from who he first learned about the idea of expressing poetic emotions through a mask of symbols. However, Eliot was occupied with variety of other studies ranging from Japanese Buddhism to advanced mathematics making him one of the most diversely educated poets of his time.

He believed that poetry should be reserved only for scholars and educated people who will have capacities to understand the complexity and mastery of this genre. As Chinitz writes "Eliot represents a particular idea of culture distinguished by high seriousness, traditionalism, and purity of exclusivity" (3). In other words, he was in favour of "high-brow" literature which means that art would be reserved for well-educated scholars who are capable of comprehending and dissecting "an intellectual poem". As he continued shaping his poetic ideals, it was becoming more and more apparent that his infatuation with classical writers such as Dante, Shakespeare and John Donne was in complete contrast with mass-producing ever-increasing American popular culture. "The Americans feel themselves uncivilised, young, inexperienced, and Europe seems so old, wise, and beautiful. Europe absorbs America- it has continuity of tradition, and the tradition is old and valuable" (Brugess 217).

Convinced that Europe is where he wants to belong and whose tradition he wants to follow, he moved to England in 1914 where he settled down and achieved his literary success. It was also in England where he met Ezra Pound, another American writer with an English address who influenced Eliot in incredible ways. Soon, he started writing essays on variety of scholars and poets in which he challenged the last 200 years of literary tradition, criticising mostly Romanticism for being overly subjective and pathetically emotional. According to him, Methaphysical poets were the last "valuable" authors after which poetry took a wrong turn. Eliot coined a couple of new concepts such as "objective correlative" in which chain of events represents and evokes emotions, "unified sensibility" which is the fusion of thought and feeling, as well as a theory that work of art is independent of its creator. According to Eliot, it was no longer necessary to study the life of the author since the lyric "I" in the poem is not the poet himself but rather an idea, symbol, or an entity which is chosen to represent the larger whole. And Eliot played a major, if not the most important role in this shift which was part of the New Critical movement.

Nevertheless, his main focus remained on the magnificence of ancient times and the brilliance of their literary works. Therefore, Eliot implored to go back to the past and examine its virtues and values as well as technique and style of their writings which can be found in Shakespeare's and Dante's works. In this spirit he wrote the most demanding, compelling and outstanding poem of the 20th century, *The Waste Land*.

2. GREAT BRITAIN IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

2.1. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

> War! Strike! Women! The Irish! Or (within the popular press), Nihilism! Relativism! Fakery! This century had scarcely grown used to its own name, before it learned the twentieth would be the epoch of crisis, real and manufactured, physical and metaphysical, material and symbolic. (Levenson 4)

It is undeniable that the First World War was an absolute watershed in the history of humanity. It shook the very foundations of civilization including its traditions, cultures, and beliefs. Empires were destroyed, nations which were once powerhouses of the entire world were now shattered and were drowning in major debts, and those who physically survived the war were now spiritually dead. Even though Britain was among victorious countries, it, nevertheless, suffered an enormous political, economic, and demographic loss. Turner addressed that "about ¾ million British subjects died in a battle, just under 7 per cent of the male population between 15 and 49". Moreover, "by the end of the fighting Britain, which in 1914 had been one of the world's greatest creditor nations, owed nearly $5 billion to the United

States" and, consequently, "ten years after the end of the war 40 per cent of British government expenditure went to servicing war debt". However, Turner continues:

> Women won greater economic and political freedom, the state accepted new responsibilities for the welfare of its citizens, the working classes acquired a greater homogeneity and political solidarity, and the social and political dominance of the landed aristocracy was broken. (7)

Nevertheless, Britain, as it was once known, no longer existed. "The First World War was a critical episode in Britain's long retreat from territorial and economic domination of the world, or that after 1918 the social and economic world of Edwardian and Victorian Britain was irretrievably lost" (Turner 4). After such traumatic experience and gruelling fifty-five months, the change of human spirit was bound. As Levenson remarked, "it is fair, and indeed important, to preserve memory of alienation, an uncanny sense of moral bottomlessness, a political anxiety. There was so much to doubt: the foundations of religion and ethics, the integrity of governments and selves, the survival of a redemptive culture" (5). There was a loss of faith, despair, sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness. Human psyche was burdened by anxiety and fear and people felt that there was no longer any space for mercy, forgiveness, true love, or hope.

Having no longer any energy to expect a better future, the inner void quickly became an unbearable burden. The easiest way to fill that never-ending emptiness is to completely immerse oneself in physical pleasures. Sexual immorality was the main source of temporary pleasure which Eliot often criticised through his work. There was no harmony, nor sense of control, people felt lost and isolated. Real connections died, all that remained were shells of what once were family unions, friendships and relationships. "The loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, the violence of war, and a nameless, faceless anxiety" is what the human spirit was reduced to after the war (Levenson 5).

2.2 MODERNISM IN BRITISH LITERATURE

Modernism is a movement which started in the early 20th century as a response to horrible events which were happening at the time, namely the First World War. Nevertheless, the term modernism has been in use before it became an actual movement. According to Anselmo, "the *nomen agentis* referring to 'modernism', that is, 'modernist' dates from the late sixteenth century where it named a modern person; in the eighteenth century it came to denote a follower of modern ways as well as supporter of modern over ancient literature" (11). However, perception of the terms shifted and now it is quite challenging to define it because "in constructing its identity, modernism constantly deconstructs itself; the process of construction is steadily accompanied by deconstruction, which makes movement elusive to definition" (Eysteinsson and Liska 29). Nonetheless, its distinctive and progressive values and characteristics made it quite different from any other historical and artistic movement.

Firstly, as the name suggests, modernists were mostly preoccupied with modern technology, innovations, experimentations, and anything that had to do with contemporary life. Consequently, they rejected tradition and cultural customs, focusing completely on the future without any regards to the past because "an artist who can look back to a few hundred years of continuous belief and tradition based on belief, and take it for granted, is in a far happier position" (Burgess 215). However, they do not idolize this new, urban society. In fact, they observe it with caution and undeniable recognition that the fast-paced type of lifestyle and the ugliness of new metropolises leave less and less space for art. For modernist writers, the construction of large urban areas was something to celebrate but also something to condemn because it was the start of human alienation.

Additionally, modernist writings are quite complex. "Modernists stretched the boundaries of conventional creativity, imposed a metamorphosis on the literary world as they

knew it, shaping the word to a world which demanded new categories for understanding and representation." (Armstrong 8). Therefore, their writings overflow with allusions, juxtapositions, ambiguities and paradoxes. Writers were sometimes purposefully nonsensical and they used many references which, if one is not extremely well educated, can be almost impossible to understand. Moreover, since the world was irreversibly bruised and scattered, poets conveyed this chaos through fragmentation of their poems. In other words, syntax is broken, verses and stanzas are not linearly connected, there are many lyric "I's", different storylines are intertwined and are unfolding at the same time which leaves the reader rather lost and confused.

However, that is intentional because this is exactly how the contemporary society felt like; nonsensical, disconnected and scattered. Therefore, "the secular society occupies the centre and its superficial, but spiritual emptiness is exposed with an ironical detachment and corrosive scrutiny which border on cynicism" (Rai 19).

What is more, this was the time of the shift from expressionism to impressionism. Poets were concerned with the subconscious, dreams, illusions, psychology, and psychoanalysis. Therefore, "stream of consciousness" or, in other words, automatic writing of one's thoughts, dreams, or impressions, flourished at the time. The reason behind this is because such style of writing "shows awareness of the fluidity of unconsciousness, of the force of the unconscious, of the division between consciousness, which epitomizes the personal self, and conduct, which epitomizes the social self" (Armstrong 9).

This also leads to the ever-present dichotomy between the "mass" and "self". Modernist poets are preoccupied with the question of how one finds their own identity and purpose in a barren, alienated society. Moreover, what is the poet's role in this chaos? How can he impact and possibly help the world which is enveloped in darkness? However, not many poets felt like change was possible. Their works are fraught with cynicism and pessimism since "many poets

experienced this fall, out of a world where gallantry and decency might still be possible into an inferno of technological slaughter" (Kendall 20). As a consequence, "the artist does not provide any valid answers as to how solve or remedy them. Reader is left, so to speak, without any guidance, and is alienated from the external reality, lost in its multiplicity and lack of any unifying *Weltanschaung*" (Eysteinsson and Liska 29).

Therefore, it is obviously difficult to define the term precisely by putting just one label on it or by situating it in a precise historical period. It is a complex movement, often divided and disconnected in itself. Many modernist writers would often disagree with each other depending on in which decade they were active. Modernists kept inventing and reinventing themselves and their ideas. As Armstrong nicely puts it:

> Modernism is in fact characterized by a series of seeming contradictions: both a rejection of the past and a fetishization of certain earlier periods; both primitivism and a defence of civilization against the barbarians; both enthusiasm for the technological and fear of it; both a celebration of impersonal making and a stress on subjectivity. (5)

Nevertheless, it featured prominently in Western literature despite its high demands on a reader: "What modernists disliked was not "popular art," but "a commodified, mass-produced, supposedly 'feminine' culture that took the form of slick-paper magazines, Books-of-the-Month, and big-budget production from Broadway and Hollywood" (Chinitz 8). Although it never took root in British poetry and was heavily challenged by subsequent British poets, British modernism produced the greatest poetic work of the era: T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.*

2.3. FRAGMENTED UNITY OF *THE WASTE LAND*

The Waste Land is one of the most important poems of the 20th century and it reflects modernist ideas rather graphically. Although complex, Eliot succeeded in producing a principal poem in the "waste land" of British modernist tradition. One of the hall-marks of this poem is the poet's impersonality and detachment. Eliot chose objects, situations, chains of events, and multiple voices through which he expressed the state of the current society more broadly and objectively. The new principle of such writing is called "objective correlative" which is a writing technique used to evoke particular emotions by means of symbols and images without openly expressing what the emotion should be. Instead of personal proclamation of one's feelings, a conscious poet should opt for impersonal objects which are symbolic representations of those emotions. Therefore, "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (*Tradition and the Individual Talent* 4). It is poet's duty to find creative ways of illustrating an emotion while reader's duty is to decode it.

Another notion, known as "unified sensibility", is "the unity of thought and feeling, the capacity to present 'emotional equivalents of thought', which means that poetry is not a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', but the art of making emotion capable of intellectual formation" (Rai 6). In other words, should an artist achieve a perfection, he must achieve a fusion of intellect and emotion in a way that he does not demonstrate a keenness for either, but rather uses their differences to find the best possible way of representation. This is why Eliot heavily criticised literary movements, especially romanticism, for overemphasising one over the other. Moreover, Eliot's ultimate goal was to bring forth the spirit of the society and their emotions and struggles, not his own. A poet must detach from his own impressions and serve the nation. He enabled the current generation to express itself by giving them voice and quieting his own.

Spears Brooker and Bentley noted that "Eliot juxtaposes many perspectives of the same idea or object, thus causing us to be aware of the limits of every perspective and of the desirability of moving from one perspective to another and, finally, of comprehending many perspectives at one" (11). By incorporating many voices and perspectives, he was able to bring forth a broader and more credible objective truth. This means that experiencing the outside world through the eyes of one individual gives rather emotional and personalized impression of the reality. That was not of interest to Eliot who wanted to show a universal portrait of the horrible state the world was in. Therefore, it is not surprising to find many different voices, symbols, images and actions in one poem in order to paint the broadest portrait of the current actuality. What is more, he also insisted on classical tradition while incorporating modernist ideas. Levenson notes that "Eliot thought closely about the paradoxes of tradition in relation to creativity; the most original talent is not only bound within a tradition but is most likely to reaffirm it" (16).

That was another one of Eliot's goals; to re-establish and remind us of "true" literature. This is reflected in his use of intertextual devices as there are references to more than thirty authors ranging from Dante and Shakespeare to the Bible. He is quoting numerous works in different languages and thus intertwining various cultures and literary traditions. There are also archetypes such as death-rebirth, rain-draught, and moral and physical sterility which are recurrent symbols or motifs in literature, art, or mythology. Consequently, by implementing fragments of many literary works he is, in a way, saving them from being forgotten because now, when someone decides to read his poem, he is also reading many other novels, poems, and myths. As Bloom argues:

> So in a civilization reduced to "a heap of broken images" all that is requisite is sufficient curiosity; the man who asks what one or another of these fragments

> means – seeking, for instance, "a first-hand opinion about Shakespeare" – may be the agent of regeneration. (26)

Moreover, he frequently juxtaposes past and present, East and West, mythology and realism, the urban and the rural order to achieve a dramatic fusion of different realities and therefore, offer a reader a full spectrum of current society.

Even though *The Waste Land* conveys the image of the Western society in the post-war circumstances, it can also stand for the state of literature as this poem is largely constituted of the bits and pieces of other literary works. Its fragmentedness echoes the image of the broken world but also of the broken literature. It is this quality which makes it so difficult to understand. As we dive into the first lines of the poem we are immediately immersed in the action without being introduced to the person behind the lyric "I" or their story and this unknowingness continues throughout the poem.

The Waste Land was written in 1922, four years after the end of the First World War and addresses the issues which were laden upon contemporary society but also literature. As Rai describes it:

> It is a nightmare vision through which we are made to witness the antics of the ghostly inhabitants, a crowd of benighted and empty bipeds pouring like a flock of sheep over the bridge or swarming on the arid plain, ringed by flat horizon only, stumbling and falling into the cracked earth. (41)

The depressive and pessimistic view of the human state continues throughout the entire poem until the very end where the poet hints at the light at the end of the tunnel in the form of self-transformation and spiritual awakening. This poems suggests that society as a whole is destined to alienation and meaninglessness until each individual reaches own mind and soul and commences a spiritual renewal.

The poem is dedicated to Ezra Pound who took it upon himself to polish it and discard any unnecessary components. In the words of David Daiches, it is:

> complex, allusive, using abrupt contrasts and shifting counter suggestions to help unfold the meaning, eliminating all conjunctive phrases or overt statements that might indicate the relation of one scene or situation to another... *The Waste Land* was pruned by Pound of every unnecessary explanatory phrase or merely 'poetic' description. (1124)

Consequently, the poem boasts its fragmented structure, formlessness and the lack of one coherent voice. This fragmentation mostly derived from Pound's suggestions and the reduction of many elements. According to Spears Brooker and Bently "there is a continuous instability in which images dissolve, re-for, melt, and overlap" (31). Even though these fragments are individual entities, they are still connected through underlying maze of symbols and meanings. This might also function as a reflection of contemporary society in which every individual felt alone in their pain not noticing that it is the sorrow which binds them together. Nevertheless, he still succeeded in obtaining the realistic and credible narrative as Murphy writes:

> In the case of *The Waste Land*, however, even amid doubts as to who is speaking and what is being spoken about and why he or she is speaking about it, there is still a semblance of concrete realities of the months and the seasons, dried tubers and Hofgartens and sleds, and cousins, and archdukes, to make a reader imagine that something is occurring somewhere to someone, even if none of it is very clear. (194)

As previously stated, Eliot was extraordinarily well educated which is shown through his brilliant ability to use simple words and give them heavy, complex meaning. Daiches argues that Eliot "was the explorer of the experience who used language in order to build up rich

patterns of meaning which, however impressive their immediate impact, required repeated close examination before they communicated themselves fully to the reader" (1123). Words are easy to read, yet, quite hard to understand. This is because Eliot, and modernist poets in general, used syntax to describe the current reality. By breaking the poem into fragments and using allusions, juxtapositions, and irony, authors painted a picture of an equally scattered and ambiguous society. Spears Brooker and Bentley highlighted that "the hall mark of his major poetry is the use of language that is conscious of itself and of its finitude and thus is designed to put itself under erasure. A major subject of *The Waste Land*, we shall argue, is the contingency of language" (6). This means that Eliot is interested in the "language economy" or, in other words, giving multiple meanings to the same word. He also used trivial words and gave them meaning through incorporating them in the poem since he held a belief that art is powerful enough to give importance to those words which are usually empty and meaningless. For example, the words "twit twit twit/ jug jug jug jug jug jug" (57) make no sense but the poet gave them meaning by connecting them to the myth of Philomela in which she was sexually assaulted by King Tereus. Now they are no longer senseless words but rather denote sexual and moral downfall of the human nature.

2.4. WAR IMAGES THROUGHOUT THE POEM

*The Waste Land'*s primary theme is society's moral, economic and political collapse. It is a:

> picture of a materialistic age dying of lack of belief in anything: the solution to the problem of living in such an arid Waste Land of a civilization seemed to be to accept it

> as a kind of fiery purgation and to gather together such scraps of civilization and faith as have not yet been destroyed. (Burgess 217)

The epigraph which precedes the poem is in Latin and it comes from the Satyricon of Petronius. It conveys a prophetess Cumaean Sybil wishing to die since in her request for immortality she forgot to ask for eternal youth which resulted in her withering away in a jar. First out of five sections, titled "The Burial of the Dead", introduces us to the major theme of the poem and that is death. "April is the cruellest month" Eliot states in the first line of this section because this is the time of the renewal and new beginnings. Spring awakens nature out its hibernation and fresh streams of water bring life to the soil. However, that is not the case in this barren land. The narrator wonders "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/ Out of this stony rubbish?". The atmosphere is gloom and deserted. There is no sign of life and everything is sterile. Ugliness and utmost disgust prevail as the lyric "I" observes his surroundings. There is nothing but "a heap of broken images, where the sun beats,/And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/ And the dry stone no sound of water." (53)

Nature's barren state is a symbol for the destitution of the human spirit and faith. The same "dead tree" which gives no shelter and dead roots which give no life are picture of lack of fertility and sterility which plagued the society. April is cruel because it makes us face these thruts. "Winter kept us warm, covering/Earth in forgetful snow" (53) but also, covering our eyes from seeing the reality of our actions. Thick layer of snow keeps us safe in our comfort zone but, once it melts, nothing protects us from our actuality. Nevertheless, society is in quest of rain. In order to start again and to awaken this dead land, people need to embark on a journey of new beginnings and hopes, something they loathed due to the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Moreover, we are introduced to the first voice of the poem which seems to be a woman called Marie. She conveys national confusion of the new, post-war Europe: "Bin gar keine

Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch". ("I'm not at all Russian, I'm from Lithuania, actually German."). It represents a memory of past empires which vanished due to wars and illustrates the sense of not knowing one's origin, or home.

And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter. (56)

Here we have a notion of personal freedom which will later on be challenged by the feeling of entrapment and isolation. However, it is only "an illusion of liberty which is no more than impatience with human society and relief at a temporary change" (Bloom 16). In this wasteland, people are isolated and are held captives of their destiny. Marie recalls her childhood where she was "free". She was anxious to go down the road however, she also knew that she was not alone, she had her cousin. Therefore, she took a leap of faith and embarked on a journey. But this is a distant memory because in the post-war world, even though everyone was in it together, the notion of togetherness and personal connection dissolved into nothingness.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (55)

"Unreal city" refers to London. This is allusion to Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* in which Paris is the dead city but for Eliot, it is London. Eliot refers to Dante as well by using the same

picture from Inferno by quoting him: “I had not thought death had undone so many.” As Dante pondered how it could be that so many people found their faith in hell, Eliot also ponders on how it could be that so many people died spiritually and became empty shells walking meaninglessly in circles. They are crowded together yet so isolated and lonely fixing their eyes solely before their own feet highlighting the notion of dissociation and alienation. Furthermore, the character of Madame Sosostris appears and according to Rosenthal, she is a “comic and satiric variation while introducing themes from the deeper world of prophetic mystery though she does not understand them” (171). However, she is not just some clairvoyant witch who offers tarot readings, “she is the image of the late phase of Roman civilization, now vanished; she is also “the mind of Europe,” a mind more important than one’s own private mind” (Bloom 17). The first part concludes with Boudlaire’s line: “You! Hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!” reminding the “hypocrite reader” that we should not judge them for such behavior for we are the same and our lives are the same, and we are likely to repeat their mistakes.

The second section “A Game of Chess” revolves around the decline of marriage, isolation between lovers, human’s perverted nature, and destruction of love and, therefore, family unit, all of which happened after the desolation of the war. It illustrates sterility in the marital sexual relations. Two different kinds of narratives are presented here yet with the same conclusion and that is that love between two people has grown cold and there is no salvation through human relationships. A peek into human alienation is presented through a disconnected and unemotional marriage partnership. Love does not offer satisfaction and security anymore, it leads to death just as everything else in this land of the dead. The first storyline deals with an unhappily married couple in which anxiety and discontent are highlighted.

“My nerves are bad tonight. 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." (57)

The first lines are noticeably very short, abrupt and agitated. Frustration, aggression and desperation is felt in every word that comes out of this woman's mouth. She is pleading with her husband to speak to her, to connect with her, to stay with her. However, their communication is non-existent. Although they are physically together, they are distant which is manifested through short, erratic questions in which there is a hint of accusations out of fear: "I think we are in rats' alley/ Where the dead men lost their bones". He responds to her in a pessimistic and depressive way. He seems to imply that nothingness prevails and it is the only outcome of our lives. Not even our dead bones will remain once we die, as an absolute void is what awaits us and in that void no meaning is found. This nothingness becomes the focal point not just of their conversation, but of their lives as well. These protagonists feel anxiety, fear, and sadness which are expressed throughout this entire section. There is no solution except a passive agreement to stick to the safe routine. This is to be expected because in the unstable society, where nothing is safe anymore, staying in unsatisfying yet secure circumstances seemed like the only certainty people could hold on to.

In this section there is also a story of Lil and her husband: "And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,/ He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,/ And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said" (58). We are introduced to the notion of sex in marriage. It is portrayed as detached, and unsatisfying. It is also presented as a means of manipulation or punishment. This furthermore highlights the lack of intimacy and connection through human touch. Sex is no longer an expression of love and commitment but rather the means of obtaining meaningless pleasure. It is reduced to a physical, robotic act. This is the peak of human sterility and emotional dissociation.

"The Fire Sermon" conveys lust in which materialistic and sexual pleasure is explicitly portrayed. The title of this section is a reference to the famous Buddha's sermon in which he explained the source of all human evil and suffering. It stems from a need to dominate, vain longing for fame, money, material goods, self-obsession and adoration. Desire is the root of every evil and all men should burn their selfish needs and wants in order to become free. Since war shook the foundations of human faith and belief, people were searching for any kind of spiritual and emotional fulfilment in exterior pleasures and far away from God who, in almost every way, lost people's trust and love. This section starts with the image of the river Thames which symbolizes fertility and the abundance of new life. It bears "no empty bottles, sandwich papers,/Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/ Or other testimony of summer nights". It runs softly unlike the river in the wasteland which is just"the dull canal" surrounded by "White bodies naked on the low damp ground/ And bones castin a little low dry garret" (59).

Consequently, "the Nymphs are departed" from such a place. "Nymphs" are mystical creatures who represent beauty, creativity, and art. Them leaving behind London represents modernist idea that urban, overcrowded areas kill the art and creativity because they are cruel, ugly, sand cold hiding "under the brown fog of a winter noon". Art, inspiration, and creativity cannot survive in such a place and therefore, they have departed and „have left no addresses" (61) so we could find them. The rest of this section deals with broken love and alienation. Sex is portrayed as robotic and heartless where there is no space for a true connection. Through these passages: "…the world of erotic desire and its full implication of painful self-awareness reenters the poem…" (Rosenthal 171). "Exploring hands encounter no defence;/His vanity requires no response,/ And makes a welcome of indifference" (61). This is society's key condition. Even in the most passionate moments, people are unable to express any emotions except indifference and disinterest. Everything revolves around personal pleasure and emotional emptiness. Because people are unable to love they turn to lust which empties them

even more and leaves them half-alive looking for another carnal pleasure to distract them from their misery. This part ends with a desperate prayer in which a person is begging the Lord to "burn" his desires and to "pluck him out" of his misery in order to finally experience freedom which this barren, dead land no longer offers.

"Death by Water" is the shortest but equally important part in which the death of routine and the never-ending circle of life are depicted. Moreover, it is also an ironic title as in the rest of the poem the importance of water and its lack in a waste land is highlighted. However, in this section, there is water which does not bring life, but death.

As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you. (65)

Death is our inevitable destiny and this is a call to remind everyone that, even though it is not easy, one must rise above past traumas and continue their life with a purpose. The goal is not to let the routine of everyday life smother the spark and creativity. One should focus on the light ahead and not on the darkness around them. This was difficult because the wounds were still extremely fresh, however, it was necessary in order to repair the broken world and prepare it for future generations. However, the destiny of society lies in the hands of every individual and their personal integrity. That is why everyone is called to reflect upon Phlebas and his mortality because it is only when we come to terms with our own finitude that we can take our lives in our hands and make them meaningful.

The final section is titled “What the Thunder Said” and it begins with the dark picture of the world’s current state. However, it also shows people the path toward spiritual renewal. The key to that rebirth lies in our hands and our willingness to open our hearts and our minds for a new start. This section starts with a gloomy picture of the current world and even though it is spring time, there is no life in this waste land. There is only death, silence and emptiness.

Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road

The road winding above among the mountains

Which are mountains of rock without water. (66)

Water is a symbol of grace, new life and spiritual rebirth. It gives freshness and vitality and we cannot live without it. However, there is not one drop of water in this waste land. This signifies the utmost spiritual drought of the current society. People are lost and they no longer cling to material security because everything they have has been destroyed. It is in situations like these that faith must take a centre position but they do not have the strength to achieve that just yet. What follows is a series of hypothesis, wonderings and wishful thinking. “If there were water we should stop and drink”, “If there were only water amongst the rock”, “If there were the sound of water only” (67). They all convey natural human longing for hope and purpose, but they are unable to see it because everything is dead around them. This resembles the story of the road to Emmaus in which two men are incredibly sorrowful after the death of Jesus Christ. They are so deeply hurt by human evilness that they are unable to recognise Jesus when he approaches them. They were too fixated on the world and their current circumstances to be capable to see that new opportunity has been offered to them.

“Who is the third who walks always beside you?

When I count, there are only you and I together

But when I look ahead up the white road

There is always another one walking beside you

Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded

I do not know whether a man or a woman

—But who is that on the other side of you?" (67)

The inability to see a chance for a new life is what Eliot found most tragic about the post-war society. According to him, it is not the lack of material security and safety that puts man in danger but rather his inability to believe. Through painting this picture, Eliot tells us that just because we are unable to see the light, it does not mean that there is no light. It only means we are blind to it and in order to see it, we must open our hearts and our minds:

What is the city over the mountains

Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air

Falling towers

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria

Vienna London

Unreal (67)

The cities which are depicted here are a mix of ancient and modern metropolises which were destroyed, rebuilt and then destroyed again. He calls them "unreal" because they too are easily subjected to destruction and death. They are the image of decay and transience. After the war, these great cities and civilizations are nothing more than barren and dead land. Their magnitude and glory is only part of our memory now and not reality therefore, they are "unreal". And even though Eliot blamed these urban areas for the lack of human warmth, alienation and general discontent, he also knew that they are the only catalyst to the recovery of this broken society.

The last section of the poem brings hope for new life in a symbolic manner. Rain is starting to fall and the thunder is no longer silent. It is bringing forth messages to people which

will help them rise above their destiny and create a better and more meaningful life. The thunder said "DA" and principles behind it are: "Datta. Dayadhvam.Damyata./ Shantih shantih shantih" (69). These are the three concepts for the betterment of the world. "Datta" means to give. This is encouraging people to freely give themselves, their time or whatever they have to one another so there would not be any isolation anymore. The second notion is "Dayadhvam";to have compassion. By this, we are thought that the only thing that will get us out of our cages of solitude and isolation is opening ourselves to each other and to understand and have compassion for ourselves and everyone else. The third notion is "Damyata"*:* control. It is recalling the story of Jesus and the stormy sea which responded gaily to the hand of its master. It suggests that people should let go of control, especially when the times are the toughest. Eliot ended this poem with a prayer "Shantih" which is translated as peace. This is giving a hopeful and optimistic outlook on the future. The only condition is to follow the principles of "DA" in order to move forward and whether that will happen depends on us as individuals.

3. CONCLUSION

The Waste Land is one of the most prominent poems of the 20th century. Through his brilliancy, T.S.Eliot was able to describe and reflect the general atmosphere of the post First World War Britain. Reading his poetic, insightful, and profound yet also extremely demanding and complex verses, we do not need much imagination to completely get immersed in the aura of the contemporary Western society. Feelings of absolute despair, loss, tragedy, anxiety, and loneliness are felt within every line and the more we get into the storyline, the more we begin to understand the human nature and our differences and similarities. This entire poem revolves around the quest of a modern man for rain or, spiritual rebirth. It demonstrates the collapse of

Western civilization as well as human morality and spirituality. Although it paints an extremely gloomy and pessimistic picture, there is hope for this waste land and it is found in personal spiritual rebirth. That is why the final section of the poem ends on a positive note. However, this is not to say that Eliot is imposing faith or religious beliefs on anyone. By painting a depressive picture of the society that killed itself by running after the worldly pleasures, the poet indirectly warns us about our possible future should we completely ignore spirituality and religion.

This is an exceptional poem which is absolutely deserving of every praise. However, even though it is one of the most important poems of all time, it certainly is not the most popular. Its fragmented structure, numerous allusions and references, non-linear narrative and multiple anonymous narrators can be quite off-putting for many readers but that is exactly what made T.S.Eliot stand out. Reading this poem requires focus and knowledge and it is most definitely not aimed towards the general public. Nonetheless, those who do decide to put effort into studying these verses will not be disappointed.

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T.S.ELIOT: THE WASTE LAND IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-WAR BRITAIN:

Summary and Key words

Summary

This paper sets out to analyse how T.S. Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* articulates post-war atmosphere in Great Britain and in the West in general. Along with examining modernist

characteristics and features of this most important modernist poem of all time, in my analysis I focus on images, symbols and allusions T.S. Eliot used in painting a rather bleak picture of Western civilization.

Key words

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, fragmentation, spiritual rebirth, anxiety, modernism

T.S.ELIOT: PUSTA ZEMLJA U KONTEKSTU POSLIJERATNE BRITANIJE:

Sažetak i ključne riječi

Sažetak

Ovaj rad analizira način na koji T.S.Eliotova pjesma iz 1922., *Pusta zemlja,* opisuje poslijeratnu atmosferu u Velikoj Britaniji kao i na Zapadu općenito. Uz analizu modernističkih karakteristika i svojstva najvažnije modernističke pjesme svih vremena, u mojoj analizi fokusirala sam se na pjesničke slike i aluzije koje je T.S.Eliot koristio da naslika prilično turobnu sliku Zapadnog svijeta.

Ključne riječi

T.S. Eliot, *Pusta zemlja*, iscjepkanost, duhovni preporod, anksioznost, modernizam