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Evaluation of T.S. Eliot's Poetic Canon

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Abstract: Thomas Stearns Eliot is a distinguished poet, editor, literary critic and dramatist in English poetry. He is measured as the most scintillating poet of the 20th century. His outstanding caliber can be witnessed during his college life when he wrote his first evergreen poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” in the year 1910 and other excellent poems like (i) “The Waste Land”, (ii) “Preludes” (iii) “Gerontion”, (iv) “Portrait of a Lady” (v) “Ash-Wednesday” (vi) “Four Quarters” etc are some of his notable poems that became the milestones in the history of twentieth century English poetry. His poetry is mostly known for its innovativeness, fragmentation, religious text, classical literature etc. The paper is an attempt to highlight some salient features of T.S. Eliot's poetry.

Keywords: Realism, Juxtaposition, Anaphora Allusion, Philosophical Element, Anti-Romantic Approach etc.

Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot was mostly known by his stage name T.S. Eliot. Eliot was born in the royal England family in the year 1888. Four careers he had to pursue i.e., literary critic, editor, philosophical poet and dramatist. He was the most learned person cum poet in his era. His first masterpiece poem was published during his undergraduate. He has shown his mastery and excellency in his first publication “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” Eliot has an important place in twentieth century English literature. Eliot was basically a poet. He called his literary thinking ‘Workshop Criticism’. That is, in the context of poetic creation, it is called the expansion of one's thinking. In other words, he wrote critical essays on the basis of the experiences he got during the process of composing his poems. Before Eliot, T.E. Hume had opposed the romantic poetic vision in 1913 and had declared objectivity and intellectual dryness to be the hallmark of best poetry instead of sentimental romanticism and fluidity. Eliot wrote that “the artist's progress is a process of constant self-giving, of constant obsolescence.” Immersion of ego is an important poetic principle of Eliot which is also called ‘the principle of impersonality’. He gave a new definition of poetry. His poems are landmark and

remarkable in the history of English literature. He won many prizes like 'British Order of Merit (1948)', 'Nobel Prize in English Literature (1948)', 'Tony Award (1950)' for his play 'The Cocktail Party' and another outstanding achievement was 'Presidential Medal of Freedom (1964)'. On the parallels and weight of Romantic poetry, he wrote that poetry must not be an expression of feelings, but a get way (escape) from feelings.

The available literatures on T S Eliot's poetry are: Drew, A. Elizabeth's (1949) *T.S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry*. It is a comprehensive critical interpretation of the poetry of T S Eliot's analysis of "The Waste Land", "The Hollow Men", "Gerontion", "Four Quarters" and many other poems. Faiz, Tanzeela's (2020) "Allusions in Wasteland by T.S. Eliot" in her paper she has described the numerous allusions in "The Waste Land" like "Sermon Fire" "Death by Water" "A Game of Chess" etc. Pondra, Rajender's (2015) "British Literature: A Study of Traditional and Cultural Founding in The Waste Land" the paper is about the traditional and cultural founding of T S Eliot. Guven, Samet's (2015) "A Modernist Approach to T.S Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" the author has described "how T.S. Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock reflects modernism in terms of its content and structure respectively"

The entire data for this paper was collected during various library visits to Assam University, Tezpur University and Gauhati University. For primary data some retired and present working Professors from the Department of English were interviewed. The books, research papers are also studied for closer study.

The primary objective of this research paper is to explore the features of T.S. Eliot's poetry includes "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "The Waste Land", "The Journey of Magi" "Gerontion" "The Hollow Men" etc.

Salient Features of T S Eliot's poetry

What immediately strikes in T.S. Eliot poetry is his anti-romantic approach to his intellectual content. The luscious and shallow creativity of Georgian poets reveals him as reactions against the romantic impulses and excesses; he comes out with his classical bout of mind. He rejects subjective emotions and lyricism is held in

check. Nostalgia, escapism and an obsession in nature retire in the background. Realism, the formal aspect in poetry, is given importance.

T.S. Eliot is not a mere realist, his fidelity to facts of life, his respect for realities of his time and milieu but a hard-headed, clear-eyed realist is portraying the boredom, impurities, blankness of modern metropolitan existence. In “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” he brings into focus the dissociation of sensibility, disintegration of modern soul, its dilemmas and social anxiety. Leavis (1961) has mentioned that “T.S. Eliot’s The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock carries the characteristics of modernist poetry such as objective correlative, fragmentation, free verse and irregular rhyming. It suggests a direct break with English romantic poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth” (p. 75). Eliot uses brilliant imagery and symbolism all around the poem. For instance ‘yellow fog’ stands for an invasive sense of rankle and depression in Prufrock’s life and “patient etherised upon a table” suggests a sense of immobility and dullness. The poem clearly shows the definition of poetic art by Eliot. This poem is about a man from a middle age who cannot dare to advance his life and approach women because of his shyness. Therefore, the poem’s title is ironic because Prufrock does not disclose his love feelings in the entire poem. His hesitancy led him towards aloofness in society as a developed person. It shows that Eliot is energizing the complexity of the contemporary world due to the incoherent psychology of Prufrock. Elizabeth Schneider makes it clear that love songs are away from affection. It is a representation of a person in misery and hell, but his reality is obviously recognized, but hell emerges to be insignificant people of a sterilized society. Apart from content, Eliot uses objective correlations to gain emotion from the use of objects. This poem centers on the quandary caused by contemporary society, so T.S. Eliot’s “The Love song by J. Alfred Prufrock” reveals modernity with regards to its composition and content.

“Preludes” poem brings to mind a succession of slides of sordid urban scenes which build up an emotional unity out of fragmentary impressions. The poem also utilizes various poetic techniques to paint a bright and miserable picture of urban existence and evoke a feeling of disenchantment. These are some of the literary devices used in the text, such as ‘personification’, ‘synecdoche’, ‘alliteration’, ‘sibilance’, and ‘allusions’, together with ‘metaphors’ and ‘similes’. It also emphasizes certain ideas and a disjointed structure to mirror the fragmented nature of contemporary urban existence. Eliot imbues inanimate objects and the passage of

time with human characteristics, such as "morning awakens consciousness" or "time dissolves consciousness," to evoke a feeling of the world possessing a sentient nature. The poem employs metaphors such as "burned-out ends of smoky days" to convey the sense of fatigue and weariness associated with the urban environment. Simile comparisons, like equating individuals to "ancient women," are employed to express a feeling of old age and exhaustion in the urban environment.

In "Gerontion", T.S.Eliot brings the state of condition of an old man and his reflection on youth and how the world has changed. Here we can see the ruthlessness, despair of the modern mind, spiritual and physical destruction caused by the Great War. The uncertainty of time and the unreality of human life make the poet reflective:

“ the world within a world unable to speak a word, swaddled with darkness”

Here we can say that the human condition is a very significant characteristic of T.S. Eliot's poetry. Alienation is another vital feature of his poetry. In *Journey of Magi* he visualizes the theme of alienation and helplessness of men in a new and changed world. The poem is a soliloquy, narrated by one of the magicians, as they recount their journey to Bethlehem to witness the birth of Jesus. The poem emphasizes the demanding nature of their journey, the obstacles encountered, and the resulting spiritual awakening and feeling of detachment they undergo. It delves into themes of spirituality, the loss of virtue, and the quest for purpose in a world experiencing profound transformation..

Religious confusion and the state of the world are other noticeable features of his poetry. This can be seen in the poem "The Hollow Men". "The Hollow Men" is the blunt exposition of the hollowness of the people of our time, diagnosis of hypocrisies, sordid images that disturb us, he tried to depict in this poem the spiritual emptiness and despair of the human condition during the First World War.

T.S. Eliot has faced the criticism of his darkness and pomposity. The poem 'The Waste Land' is possibly very difficult poem ever to have been written. As we know that it is the product of extreme slashes (cuts) by Ezra Pound, who was the close friend of T.S. Eliot.. Eliot referred to him as "the better craftsman," because he edited the text and cut it down to half its length. It has five divisions: i) 'The Burial of the Dead' ii) 'A Game of Chess' iii) 'The Fire Sermon' iv) 'Death by Water' v) 'What the Thunder Said'. All the names are highly important and carry significance. Although 'The waste-land' appears to lack a clear sequence or

developmental flow, it offers an array of episodes, vivid imagery, captivating ideas, and profound reflections interspersed throughout the poem.

In “The Waste Land” he presents the aired, outworn disintegration of society, horrors, sterility, disruption and disillusionment of the modern world. Here T. S. Eliot has shown his poetic mastery and is regarded as one of the best poems of the twentieth century. Here in the poem he has used many allusions. The first allusion is “The Burial of the dead (lines 1-76)” indicates disappointment, desolation and hopelessness of modern society. “A Game of Chess (lines 77-172)” indicates many characters exhibit the fundamental bareness and starkness of their lives. “The Fire Sermon” (lines 173-311) points out the ablaze mind of humanity in the fire of hate and lust. The section of “Sermon of Fire” (III Section) is a key point: the topic of spiritual expiration, the lumber of longing, and the possibility of transcendence via world detachment. The titles in the section that imply Buddhist speech emphasizes the importance of transcending secular connections and liberating suffering in line with a comprehensive investigation of modern society. “Death by water (lines 312-321)” shows the death of modern men by water the inhabitants of Wasteland. Here water stands for purification of the soul, rejuvenation, rebirth and symbol of life. “Death of Water” section is also important for comprehending the issue of mortality in poetry, the meaninglessness of modern life, and the exploration of meaning. It explicitly illustrates the strong reality of death and collapse, in contrast to the hope of regeneration that is frequently connected with water. Water symbolizes purification and rebirth. The last section is ‘What the Thunder Said’ (lines 433-434) serves as the final reflection of the subject of the poem and the sparkle of potential optimism. It is based on the representation of a barren, dark society through the previous section, which eventually illustrates a way of saintly renewal and redemption through the integration of Eastern and Western values and beliefs.

The philosophical element is another distinctive stamp of T. S. Eliot poetry. Here is a poet who is constantly observed in thought. It appears that he is constantly in quest of the truth in modern life and man. His search brings into the area of religion, the values of Christianity, the ideas of rebirth and renewal and he makes a journey from the material world to the spiritual like one of the Magi. In his later phase of Christianity he offers what is called music ideas. So the quest motif and philosophical element are one of the distinctive features of T.S. Eliot’s poetry.

What is special about T.S. Eliot's poetry is that like the metaphysical of the early 17th century it witnesses a tough reasonableness, a fusion of intellectual and passion. Eliot believed that tradition is not simply a fixed and unchangeable set of beliefs and practices handed down from the past, but a living and dynamic force that shapes the present. In fact it is his art of communication on craftsmanship that generates the deepest ripples of his influence and gives a new dignity with direction to the 20th century English poetry.

Here in the following we will witness some of the extra interesting features of TS Eliot poetry which are as follows:

- (i) Allusion: Eliot was widely recognized as the "master of allusion" and frequently used it in his poems
- (ii) Enjambment: In "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" Eliot employs enjambment, where the lines flow seamlessly with no punctuation or without any pause as can be seen in the opening line of the poem:

"Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats" (Lines: 1-5)

(iii) Anaphora: Anaphora are used to express rhythms and measures in most of his poems and prose. T.S. Eliot employs anaphora, the repetition of a phrase or word at consecutive clauses, in numerous of his poems, maximum extensively within the "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men." In "The Waste Land", we can see that the poet had repeated "We" at the start of lines in segment V. In "The Hollow Men", the word "between" and "And" are frequently repeated till the final phase.

(iv) Free verse: In poems free verse is a technique strict rules of rhythm or rhyme or meter are not applicable. It's known for its flexibility in structure, enabling different lengths and lines, inventive punctuations, and a smooth and natural flow of speeches. T.S. Eliot often utilized free verse, especially in his renowned poems such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" "The waste Land," and "The Hollow Men," Eliot's choice of free verse enabled him to delve into the splitted and intricate rhythms of contemporary existence, departing from conventional poetic structures to mirror the disarray and bewilderment and confusion life.

(v) Juxtaposition: T.S. Eliot often employs juxtaposition, a literary technique where distinct thoughts or feelings or images are positioned next to each other to emphasize their disparities or generate a particular impact. In "The Waste Land, Eliot" Eliot placed side-by-side elements of rich and poor culture, old and modern references, and classical and contemporary themes to capture the split and misguided aspects of contemporary life..

(vi) Image aggregation: T.S. Eliot's images are distinguished by the combination or aggregation of different fragments, equally factual and figurative or symbolic, which results in a complex and split portrayal of contemporary life. He combines various elements like '*concrete images*', '*allusions*', and '*personal experiences*' to delve into themes of splits, decay, and the quest for meaning in a contemporary society. This collection of aggregation of images is a defining characteristic of his modernist approach, prominently displayed in works such as "The Waste Land".

Conclusion

The importance of Eliot has been universally acknowledged in modern literature. He established a new era in the field of English criticism Eliot's poems and his styles are accepted as prototypical instances of modernism. He applies myth to organize the modern lifestyle, traditions and different voices are also juxtaposed, emphasized on poetic forms and innovative use of language containing musicality and verbal repetition. Eliot's poetry includes images, clusters of symbolism and numerous literary allusions. In the theory of individualism, Eliot gave importance to objective literature instead of subjective literature. He believes that the process of art is more significant than the emotions in which the author or the poet is not associated with it. T.S. Eliot is a mindful author who openly conveys the prevalent anxieties and emotions of his generation. In his artistic creations, Eliot emphasizes how in our contemporary, scientific, and money-oriented society, man gradually deteriorates with each passing day in complete darkness. His obsession with material possessions is causing him to neglect his moral and spiritual beliefs. To tell the truth, the entire ethical, religious, rational and moral, which are crucial for an individual to be humanitarian, are gradually disappearing by degrees, leaving him devoid of these qualities. In the desolate region, devoid of any signs of life, there exists a barren land that cannot sustain or foster the growth of the human spirit in the toxic atmosphere of contemporary society. This study examines how the poet explores and portrays a modern world

where individuals lead aimless lives. Elliot emphasizes the importance of having faith in a divine power, discovering one's true self, and finding redemption through his writings.

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