

City Dwellers in Eliot's *The Waste Land*

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Abstract

This article will be dedicated to study the modern city dwellers. The discussion will be divided to focus first on the general situation of the dwellers in Eliot's city. Then the focus will be shifted to some male dwellers who were able to reflect not only the image of the modern human being but also the image of the moral, spiritual and even sexual struggle the modern man is suffering from. Moreover, the discussion will tackle the female city dwellers who are of great importance since they reveal the idea of victimizing females over age in which the so-called equality of the modern age collapsed. Of course the relationship between males and females in this city will be of great importance since it reveals the robotic and mechanical relationship the modern city dwellers suffer from. This sad and depressing state of the modern residents will not be unchangeable in Eliot's point of view since he always leaves the door open for rebirth and regeneration.

However, we see that this required and aimed at regeneration is only applicable if this modern human being is willing to. Thus what saves the modern city and its inhabitants is in fact its inhabitants when they decide to rise from their death and re-establish a new modern age.

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ملخص

إن هدف هذه المقالة هو دراسة حالة سكان المدينة المعاصرين. ستتقسم المناقشة في هذه المقالة إلى أولاً التركيز على الوضع العام لسكان المدينة كما صورها إليوت ومن ثم سيتم التركيز على بعض سكان المدينة من الرجال الذين تمكنوا من عكس صورة المدينة في العصر الحديث بالإضافة إلى تصوير الصراع الأخلاقي و الجسدي والروحي الذي يعاني منه الإنسان المعاصر. كما أن هذه المقالة ستتطرق للحديث عن سكان المدينة من النساء الذين أدوا دوراً هاماً في تصوير وقوع النساء ضحية للاضطهاد في زمن انهارت فيه ادعاءات المساواة بين الرجل و المرأة. كما أن العلاقة بين الرجل و المرأة تحتل أهمية كبيرة هنا حيث غلبت عليها صفة الألية فأصبحت تشبه العلاقة بين رجال آليين بدلاً من أن تكون علاقة ملؤها المشاعر و العواطف الإنسانية. على الرغم من أن صورة سكان المدينة في القصيدة هي صورة سوداوية يغمرها الحزن و التشاؤم إلى أن إليوت ترك المجال لشعاع من الأمل في النهضة و الإحياء الروحي و الأخلاقي لسكان المدينة الحديثة. لكن يجدر الذكر أن هذه النهضة لن تحدث ما لم تكن للإنسان المعاصر الرغبة في النهوض و رفض غبار الحرب و التدهور اللاأخلاقي الذي نتج عنه. ولذلك فإن خلاص المدينة يكمن في رغبة سكانها بالخلاص و إحياء عصر جديد.

Through the first reading of Eliot's *The Waste Land* the reader notices that it is a multi-voiced poem, it is a poem in which more than one voice is heard and each voice tells a lot about the poem's personas as well as the dwellers of this waste land. Even this multiplicity of voices was referred to through the original title of the poem which was "He do the police in different voices" this line is taken from Charles Dickens' novel *Pur Mutual Friend*. This title supports the claim that although there are different voices in this poem, they all speak of one central consciousness, that is, the modern consciousness.

The *Waste Land* is composed of so many voices and narrations, males and females, young and old, in a variety of languages and styles. The shifts between these speakers is not clear so we are often unable to determine who is speaking. The poem shows how people viewed themselves and viewed each other through important questions like where do I come from and why I am here and where I am going. In the epigraph itself there

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are four different languages which means that he speaks to four different voices. So the poet uses multiplicity not only to reflect the situation of the people in this waste land but also to address the modern human being in general of whom this poem speaks. This multiplicity is present in and through the presentation of the city and throughout the relationship among the city dwellers on the one hand and between them and their city on the other hand. The sense of alienation that is presented in the poem and the presence of the different voices in the poem shows that city dwellers as lost and not belonging to their own city. Although the city reflects the lifeless state that those city dwellers are facing, its dwellers appear distant from their own city. They have a superficial relationship with their city, in a way they do not belong to their own city. Thus, there is a sense of otherness in the poem connected with the city dwellers. The many voices that appear in the poem and the sense of alienation that the reader feels while listening to these voices alludes to the idea that these city dwellers

are outsiders who are looking for an identity and a true relationship with their own city. This multiplicity of voices appears in the narration itself. One of the most difficult tasks would be describing or defining the narrator in this poem as it takes many different shapes. At times the narrator seems to be Eliot himself, at other times he speaks for all humanity. In "the fire sermon" he is at one point, the fisher king of The Grail Legend, and on another occasion he is the blind prophet Tiresias. Despite the multiple narration in the poem, the unity of the poem emerges from the fact that all these multiple voices and narrators unite into a single personality which might be called the modern consciousness. The fact that such a modern consciousness cannot settle into a fixed perception of things or even a fixed language and narration helps to convey the sense of the anxiety of modern world. The multiplicity of narrations and the variety of style and languages has collaborated in the making of the city unreal and a vision of the

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modern inferno. Thus *The Waste Land* is plentiful with multiplicity of narration in different languages and set of disordered images.

Moreover, these disordered images that *The Waste Land* expresses are in fact a result of the disillusionment of the generation. Many critics saw that *The Waste Land* made Eliot the spokesman of the disillusioned generation “ His *The Waste Land* established him decisively as a voice of a disillusioned generation”¹. Kenner sates that “Eliot uses this “dialectic of analogies” to metaphorically depict the condition of postwar European society, demonstrating the “disillusionment of a generation”² . Bloom also asserts that *The Waste Land* can be read as “testament to the disillusionment of a generation, an exposition on the manifest despair and spiritual bankruptcy of the years after World War I”—a dead land of spiritual famine and

¹ Suhil Kumar Sarker. *T.S. Eliot: Poetry, Plays and Prose*. (New Delhi Atlantic Publisher & Distributers LTD, 2008.)

² Hugh Kenner. “Eliot’s Moral Dialectic.” *The Hudson Review* 2 (1949): 421-48. JSTOR. Web. 5 Feb. 2012.

drought”³ The poem was written in the early 1920s; in a time of poverty and unemployment and much destruction unresolved from the end of the world war 1 in 1918. Because of all this chaos in post war world, people went on to enjoy themselves. In doing so they lost their direction and their beliefs and as a result, their individuality. This article deals with city dwellers in *The Waste Land* who are introduced to the reader through the picture that Eliot drew of them as being lifeless, walking zombies and immoral people. They all look as a copy of the same walking dead where individuality disappears. Both Eliot’s style and imagery convey that society is lifeless which is a common feeling in the period of traumas and despair following the first world war. However while reading the poem, one cannot but notice that the blame does not fall on the society in general but also specifically on those who choose to yield to the hopelessness and the immorality of the society. In *The Waste Land* the spirits are represented by the

³ Harold Bloom. *T. S. Eliot: Comprehensive Research and Study Guide*. (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House, 1999.)

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inhabitants of the unreal city; like the spirits the city dwellers are passive and isolated, looking at their feet instead of interacting with each other. These inhabitants of *The Waste Land* are like chessmen who move to their destiny without any anticipation “The people in *The Waste Land* belong to a drama that they do not understand, where they move like chessmen toward destinations they cannot foresee”⁴

In addition to the idea of individuality and the fact that these inhabitants were almost ghosts and spirits living in the superficial sense of life, they were also facing another difficulty that is the loss of identity. In this sense, *The Waste Land* is an embodiment of the loss of identity and the idea of not belonging. The city dwellers who live in such a chaotic world have lost all the links that connect them to their city, their country and their world as well. The life in the after war has affected the life of the people in that time; it made them suspect their belonging to their country

⁴ Jr Cleanth, Brooks. “*The Waste Land: An Analysis*”. *The Waste Land*. Ed. Michael North. (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2001) p.451.

and cut all the connections among them on the one hand and between them and their country on the other hand. "The Burial of the Dead", the first section of *The Waste Land*, begins with a sense of loss of belonging that comes from the superficial life. The broken nature of the opening lines suggests that parts of a conversation are being heard "with a shower of rain, we stopped in the colonnade" "Bin garkeine Russin, stamm aus Litauen echt Deutsch" " I read much of the night, and go south in the winter" this superficial chatter is the talk of a nation without roots. This nation is divided with no sense of belonging to the country where they live in. It could be argued that such statements are heard as an attempt from these dwellers to reestablish themselves. They engage themselves in trivial talk to escape their after war state. Eliot in this poem indicates how these dwellers have lost their roots and are unable to establish their identity. As a result, they are alive but they are not living, in other words they are no more than dead souls with living bodies. Eliot emphasizes this idea

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when he asks “what are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish”. The answer is given immediately “a heap of broken images, where the sun beats” here Eliot means that we live in a total waste land where the identity of the city dwellers is lost. However these city dwellers are waiting for the Fisher King who might be an allusion to Jesus Christ to come back and bring fertility and meaning back to their lives. Here the use of the Fisher King myth is a life symbol which goes back to ancient fertility gods as Weston implies when he mentions that “we can affirm with certainty that the fish is a life symbol of immemorial antiquity, and that the title of fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with Deities who were held to be specially connected with the origin and preservation of life”⁵

City dwellers in *The Waste Land* are seen through the presentation of certain personas in the poem. These figures are representative of the modern city dwellers in the modern times the

⁵ Hessie L Weston. *From Ritual to Romance*. (New York. Peter Smith, 1941.) P.119

poem expresses. We have many males and females city dwellers each one of them tells us a lot about the state of the modern city dwellers in general and they explain more to us the situation and the city life in the poem in particular. Eliot's choice to enrich the poem with many female, male and transgendered figures was one of the greatest benefits that contributed to making *The Waste Land* a mirror of the modern world in general and the modern city in particular with all its social component.

Mr. Euginides is one of the important male characters in the poem. He is the embodiment of many modern city dwellers. Mr. Euginides is a Smyrna merchant. He appears with his pocket full of currants, dried grape, which might be a symbol of the dead fertility in the modern city. Like the dried grapes, the modern city is a theatre of sterility and dried fertility. However, the fact that Mr. Euginides is holding these symbols of sterility is not a coincidence. In fact Mr. Euginides is a homosexual man, he symbolizes the modern human being's obsession with abnormality

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and homosexuality according to Lee so many modern writers and critics defined the modern era with the association with homosexuality according to Hermione Lee, Virginia Woolf "defined her generation's move away from Victorianism by their decision to talk openly about same-sex love". Moreover, she "felt that homosexuality was, for the next generation of writers, an exclusive passport for literary success"⁶. Michel Foucault claims that "homosexuality is in essence a construct of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; as an essence it is just as distinctively a characteristic of modernism as are atonalism in music, Cubism in painting, or interior monologue in the novel"⁷ So, the modern age is famous for this kind of sexual relationships, it is one of the hallmarks of the modern era. That is why Mr. Euginides is a representative of the modern city dweller who engages in such a kind of a homosexual relation. Moreover, homosexual relationship will actually lead to nothing, there is no hope for creating any new

⁶ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*. London (Chatto & Windus, 1996. P. 614)

⁷ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage 1980.) p 5-6

life from such a sexual relationship, that is why Mr. Euginides, the homosexual modern man, is carrying the currants, the symbol of sterility. Homosexuality thus adds to the image of the modern city as a sterile place where no new creation is possible.

One of the most important male figures in this poem that tells a lot about the city dwellers is in fact the Fisher King. The Fisher King is a mythical figure who is crippled by a magical wound and spends his days fishing on a lake near his castle. The fisher king is the guardian of the Grail, and his closeness to this object of supernatural healing makes it impossible for him to die of his injury, although such injury is somehow so deep that even the Grail is unable to completely heal it. Thus the Fisher King, like the waste land and its inhabitants, can neither change nor end his existence. When we read the poem we do not see a clear direct mentioning of the Fisher King, however Eliot alludes to him several times in the poem. This allusion to the Fisher King makes us connect this figure with the modern city dweller in the sense that

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this city dweller is never fully present in the city they live in. They are spirits roaming in the city that is why it suits to allude to the figure more than mentioning it clearly. To add, the Fisher King is wounded and unable to bring fertility back to his land, so he is somehow sterile, the same applies for the city dwellers, they are sterile because they are engaged in immoral and homosexual activities which can bring only sterility to the city. However the fact that this Fisher King is waiting for the Grail to bring back fertility to his land makes the reader sense that there might be a hope after all for those city dwellers. They might be able to find the Grail as well and bring fertility back to the modern city they live in. So just like the Fisher King who is unable to die and destined to wait for a restoration of the fertile state of the land, the city dwellers of the waste land are destined to live in this half alive state until this time of restoration of life or the regeneration time comes. The Fisher King spends his time waiting and fishing in the lake, the city dwellers do the same spend their time roaming in the city like

spirits. The Fisher king is waiting to restore his land to its former prosperity through outside help which is the Questing Knight, the city dwellers are waiting for Jesus Christ⁸ to resurrect and bring them their regeneration back. The fact that this figure, The Fisher King, is a mythical one strikes in our minds the fact that Eliot's intention or suggestion for any kind of regeneration lies in the past, in old and mythical legends. That is why future regeneration and resurrection lie actually in the past where faith, roots, origin and order exist.

When we talk about city dwellers in *The Waste Land* we should shed light on the female city dwellers and how they were presented through the female figures in such a poem. Eliot in *The Waste Land* pictures the dwellers of the modern wasteland as only half alive, whose main wish is death. To explain this fact about the

⁸ It is worth mentioning here that the mentioning of Jesus Christ in this sentence is done figuratively. What I mean by Jesus Christ is any spiritual power that brings the modern man his faith again.

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inhabitants of the wasteland, Eliot employs the myth of Sibyl, the symbol of fruitlessness in the ancient Greek tradition. Sibyl was a Greek woman who was granted a long life but not permanent youth and beauty. As she grew older, she became uglier and smaller in size, hoping for death. She got a futile wish of death that might symbolize all the protagonists when, being asked, "Sibyl, what do you want?" she replies, "I want to die".⁹ Actually the first part of this poem clearly focuses on the idea that these city dwellers who symbolize the modern human being in general actually enjoy death. It is not only Sibyl who wishes for death, people are afraid of life, they hate April, the fertility season "April is the cruelest month", and they enjoy winter the season in which life fades "Winter kept us warm, covering/Earth in forgetful snow, feeding/A little life with dried tubers."

One of the most important female figures in *The Waste Land* is Madam Sosotris who does not only tell about female

⁹ Cleanth Brook, "*On the Waste Land*" from *Modern Poetry and The Tradition* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina press, 1939),p.1.

figures, but also speaks a lot about the minds and beliefs of these city dwellers who fall under the spell of superstition. Introducing Madame Sosotris, Eliot introduces the essence of the poem through such a figure with her “wicked pack of cards”. Eliot reflects on people’s attachments to superstitions. People, devoid of spiritual belief, are likely to accept Madame Sosotris’ fortune-telling as an alternative to religion. “Thus any reminder of any religious messengers and oracles, have lost most of their insights and the efforts will fail because Madame Sosotris's advice is to "Fear death by water," or to welcome it as an essential sacrifice. "Madonna, the Lady of the Rocks, / The lady of situations," Sosotris is a “prime symptom of the decay of religion into superstition.” With her hand of cards, she sees the fortune of the main symbolic characters of the poem”¹⁰

Madame Sosotris, famous clairvoyante,

Had a bad cold, nevertheless

¹⁰ The Twenties , p. 333

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Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,

With a wicked pack of cards.

From these lines we can see that she is a fraud, a symbol of the nonsense and the superstition the modern human beings concern themselves with. Using the Tarot pack, she mentions the names as well as the roles of the main figures in the modern wasteland. Besides, she predicts drawing to one of them, which is a way of cleaning human being from his/her moral dirt and sins. But she knows nothing of divine knowledge. She does not find the Hanged Man who represents the figure of Christ, the principle of life and salvation for the modern wasteland. Then, she sees a "crowd of people, walking round in a ring." This item seems to be the fortune of the common people in the waste world who go in a circle, representing their sterile purpose in life. They are "ironically similar to the Grail procession displaying the talismans in the

legend."¹¹Through the figure of Madame Sosostris, Eliot implicitly contrasts the claims of the soul. Eliot believes that modern human being suffers the pain of spiritual death. He tries not only to diagnose this fault but also to suggest the possibility of salvation at the end of the poem.

Female representation does not stop with Madame Sosostris, in "A Game of Chess". Eliot compares a woman, who is surrounded by lavish and exotic materiality, with a woman who is physically unattractive. These two women are sterile and unable to bear children. Eliot describes the first woman through the object that surrounds her "burnished throne, fruited vines, candelabra, jewels, vials of ivory, and a carved dolphin". Eliot, however, describes the second woman as an ugly individual who receives advice from her friend to correct her flaws. The woman believes her abortion pills are the cause of her physical appearance. She embodies the core of Eliot's ideology. She is a woman who fully

¹¹ Fredrick. J Hoffman "Science and The Precious Object" The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade, rev.ed. (New York: Free Press, 1965)

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represents her culture; for she married to a British Army soldier and talking to her friend at a local English pub. She, however, is barren. The first woman is associated by allusion with Cleopatra or Dido, two great queens who committed suicide for love. The second woman has done everything the right way married, and supported her soldier husband, begot children yet she is being punished by her body. Interestingly, this section ends with a line echoing Ophelia's suicide speech in "Hamlet" which links her to the woman in the first section of the poem, who has also been compared to famous female suicides. The opening two stanzas of "The Fire Sermon" describe the ultimate "wasteland" as Eliot sees it. This echoing of Ophelia's death works to show the contrast between love in the past and love relationships in the present. In the past, Ophelia got mad because she was kept away from her lover while this woman in the modern world wants her husband to be away from her. This clearly shows how fragile and superficial modern relationships between city dwellers are.

Eliot's use of the myth of "Philomel", another female figure, has a psychological implication. "Philomel" was rudely raped by a barbarous king. This mythical incident implies humiliation to a human being by the effect of a sexual desire. George Williamson argues that "the desecration of human life by the dominance of lust is implied in the reference to the "Philomel myth." Like "Philomel", this modern woman is humiliated by the same sexual impulse since she is reduced to mere animalism. Eliot also implicitly suggests a contrast between the two women. The ancient rape of "Philomel" has transformed the voice into an "inviolable voice"¹² Here her voice resembles the modern woman's voice which has not been transformed into a beautiful cry; but rather, it has become hysterical and heard by no one. This means that woman is isolated and lonely even in her own suffering. Philomel represents the modern woman who is used for sexual pleasure, raped and made silent by cutting her tongue. The

¹² George ,Williamson. *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot* . London: Thames and Hudson, 1955.p. 136

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woman is used for sexual pleasure in old times and modern ones alike. Her voice is unheard and she is made silent by force. There is no way the woman is able to set herself free and expresses herself, the society will not let her, the same way Philomel is made silent, the society will force the woman to be silent. The fact that Philomel is turned into a nightingale is not liberating as so many people think, it is humiliating because it is as if we say the only way for a woman to speak up and to express herself is to change into something else, to wear another uniform. Here in this poem, Philomel changes into a nightingale, it is an animal; it is not liberating, but rather it is humiliating and it tells a lot about the state of women in every age. So it is like saying that no matter how times change, the state of woman is the same in the old ages and in the modern ones.

When we look at these female figures and the way they represent the modern woman, we notice that they are all the same women whether they are Philomel who was made silent or Lil who

is judged for her physical appearance. These women are all the same, they all subject for oppression by the society treats them as sexual objects that is why they should look nice for their husbands and whenever they have a will to express themselves, they are made silent and their tongues get cut. This society is sick with boredom caused mainly by sexual desire.

This boredom and sexual desire are the main features of the relationship between these dwellers in such a society. In fact, city allows for creating complex relationships more than any other location because of the complexity of the city. Besides, a society that is full of boredom and lifeless city dwellers will only produce a cold and loveless kind of relationships in which the emotions and feelings disappear and the sexual relationship becomes something mechanical that should be done although it is void of feelings. To talk about the social and physical relationships in this poem, we should mention three main types of relationships that appear clearly in the poem. The first type of relationships is an allusion to

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various literary works. For example, one of them is an allusion to Wagner's opera "Tristan and Isolde". In this opera Isolde is unhappy about her engagement to the king whom she does not love. Moreover, she falls in love with a knight named Tristan. However, in the end, both lovers die tragically because they do not want to give up their love. The second allusion is to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which a description of the relationship between a king and his sister in law, Philomela, appears. King Tereus rapes his sister in law and cuts her tongue to make her silent. After that she escapes and turns into a nightingale. The third allusion is a reference to Queen Cleopatra since there is a reference in the poem to a woman sitting on "chair...like a burnished throne" which is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In this play, Mark Antony thinks that his beloved, Cleopatra, is dead so he commits suicide, when she is awakened finally and finds out that her beloved is dead, she in turn commits suicide by a snake bite. Eliot in presenting these three allusions,

presents the kind of relationships that are associated with despair.

In *Metamorphoses* and *Tristan and Isolde*, both women are forced to be with men they do not love. And all of these three relationships involve violence and end tragically. This tells a lot about the relationships in such a city and how they are all destined to have a tragic end since love does not have a space in this modern city. Moreover, women in this kind of relationships are forced to be a sexual partner of a male they do not love or desire. They also do not have a say in their future, they are forced either to marry a king or to be silent forever because some king raped them and forced them to keep silent.

The second type of relationships that appears in the poem is the relationship between a husband and a wife, Albert and Lil. We listen to their story from the narrator who is in this time a woman in a bar giving her friend a piece of advice. Here the husband, Albert, is returning home from war and while he was away Lil's appearance became unattractive. Here the narrator is

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criticizing Lil saying “you ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique” here the woman is saying that the man has been in war for a long time and he needs “a good time” she is implying that Lil’s duty is to satisfy him sexually and if she does not, others will be glad to do it. At this point Lil tries to defend herself saying that her unattractiveness is caused by the abortion pills she used to take “It’s them pills I took, to bring it off, she said” The narrator here condemns Lil for her unwillingness to give birth to her sixth child saying that “what you get married for if you do not want children” as if the only purpose of marriage is to satisfy the husband’s sexual desire and to reproduce. Here the opinion of the narrator may be a reflection of the society’s opinion because at the time of the poem women were expected to get married to satisfy their husbands and to give birth to children regardless of their personal desires. Here this relationship reveals a lot about the type of relationship between men and women at that time, it also reflects the status of women as well since the marriage of a

husband and a wife appears to be loveless and void of any feelings where the desire of women is not taken into consideration and her existence serves only to please her husband.

The final relationship discussed in the *Waste Land* is when the blind prophet, Tiresias, describes a sexual relationship between a female typist and a male clerk. This type of relationship is presented through two examples of modern figures a “clerk” and a “typist”. These two figures reflect a lot about the relationship between these two modern people without any allusion to the past. They present the present which surprisingly has something in common with the past. Even their names mirror their personalities. For example the typist is “named metonymically for the machine she tends, so merged with it, in fact, that she is called the “typist” even at home”¹³The woman is alone at home preparing a meal when a man enters:

¹³ Michael ,North. *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991

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The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights

Her stove, and lays out food in tins.

He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,

A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,

One of the low on whom assurance sits

As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire,

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,

The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,

Endeavours to engage her in caresses

Which still are unreproved, if undesired.

Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;

Exploring hands encounter no defence;

His vanity requires no response,

And makes a welcome of indifference.

Although this man notices that his woman is "bored and tired" he still wants her to be engaged with him in a sexual

activity. Here the man is only interested in the pleasure he is going to receive regardless of the woman's desire, he "makes a welcome of indifference" which means that he wants her to be disinterested in this activity. Here the desires of the man are mainly sexual, they do not include any kind of feelings or emotions. The sexual intercourse of this couple summarizes the theme of lust in the poem. Their sexual act has no passion. This loveless sex increases the woman's boredom "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over." The episode of the typist with the clerk serves to emphasize the idea that modern man is a slave to his biological needs. This episode also highlights the mechanical relationship between them, as Burton Blistein writes: "Men and woman are in [Eliot's] view hardly more than automata or 'crawling bugs' that spawn and die... Just as a record always repeats the same tune, so we encounter repeatedly 'Birth, and copulation, and death.' Sustained by craving"¹⁴ As Blistein says,

¹⁴ Burtan , Blistein. *The Design of the Waste Land*. University Press of America. New York, 2008.

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there is no love involved in the exchange. It is also primal cravings and urges that even the most basic forms of life understand. We follow, in this view, a very strict form of life that never changes, especially in a world that is constantly pulling individuals apart¹⁵. The clerk and the typist are a great example of the modern man and woman and the relationship between them. The modern man is obsessed with his sexual desires. To add, his sexual desires seem to be extreme, he likes to have sexual intercourse with his wife even though she does not want to. But the woman seems bored as she lost every sexual interest; though that she is willing to give him what he wants as if her role is to satisfy him regardless of what she wants or does not want.

The narrator of this scene is the blind prophet from Greek mythology, Tiresias. He lived for some time as both a male and a female. This emphasizes the importance of gender in the poem. "has lived as both man and woman, as both sighted and blind, in

¹⁵ .Design of 'The Waste Land'. P.241-2

both this world and the next – where he continues to function as a seer, with command of time past, present, and future. Furthermore, in Sophocles's *Theban Trilogy*, it is he who sees the cause of the city's suffering"¹⁶ Because of his knowledge of both sexes, Eliot describes Tiresias as “ the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest”¹⁷ and says that “ the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem”¹⁸. Tiresias' explanation of the sexual activity in this scene is essential to understanding the gender relations that is presented in the poem. Also, choosing Tiresias to comment on this scene is important for he is a mythical figure who comes from classical times, however, he is commenting on a scene from the modern life. This actually helps to connect the classical times to the modern ones. The fact that Tiresias, the transgendered figure is commenting on this scene between the clerk and the typist

¹⁶ Coyle, M. Fishing, with the arid plain behind me: Difficulty, Deferral, and Form in The Waste Land. In Chinitz, David E. (Ed.), *A Companion to Eliot* (pp 157-167). West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2009

¹⁷ Martin, Scofield. *T.S.Eliot: The Poems*. Cambridge University Press, 1988(p.133)

¹⁸ The poems.

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helps to relate Tiresias to both the woman and the man in this scene since he is a woman and a man at the same time. Tiresias also represents the past and the present, he is a classical figure who is commenting on a modern scene so he is in fact connecting the past to the present. The fact that Tiresias is blind yet he is able to see more than any other figure tells a lot about the city dwellers in this poem. He is blind physically but he is able to see spiritually, this can relate to these modern city dwellers who are presented as dead due to their emergence in the physical world however they will be able to be alive and see when they reach spiritual awareness and maturity. So what matters is not the physical ability to see, what matters is being able to see spiritually, to be fully aware.

As we have already seen, Tiresias is the key to rebirth and regeneration in the poem, he is the reminder that rebirth is there when those dead blind city dwellers step up from their emergence in the physical and material world and reach the spiritual and

moral world. Thus we see that although Eliot presented the city dwellers as immoral, dead and blind people, he was determined to leave them a space and a chance for rebirth and regeneration. The regeneration of the city dwellers is felt in *The Waste Land* as much as the regeneration of the city they live in is felt in this poem. People are ghosts who are void of life walking in the streets of this city, passing over the London bridge, engaging in all sorts of immorality, yet there might be a rebirth awaiting for them only if they are willing to. As we have seen them at the beginning of the poem sharing a hatred for April since it is the month of cruelty, however at the end of the poem we hear the sound of the thunder announcing the coming of the rain which is regarded as a symbol of rebirth and a symbol of life. Thus life is possible, we hear its footsteps coming and we are waiting for its arrival at the end of the poem.

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All in all, the image of the dwellers as lifeless walking dead and the representation of the female figures in the poem, as well as the emphasis of the relationship between men and women in such a place collaborate in highlighting the main theme of the poem. That is the dwellers and inhabitants of this city were the mirror that reflects how city is presented in the poem on the one hand and reflects the state of the social relationship in the modern world on the other hand. The inhabitants of this waste land whether mythical figures or modern figures helped the poet not only to shed light on the modern social state, but also to create a connection between the past and the present. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is also considered to be a fine document of social criticism. It criticizes the spiritual emptiness and desolation the modern human being suffers from on the one hand and it also sheds light of the state of women in this modern age and it connects it to other previous eras. The poem did not stop at just picturing the present modern world, Eliot in his poem, after criticizing the sterility of the

city and the city dwellers, suggests a solution. The solution is done through the process of rebirth and regeneration. This rebirth process has its roots in the past, and the only way to reach it is when these modern inhabitants are willing to sacrifice and arise from their sterility to reach the aimed at fertility.

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