Volume 19 Issue 21
Originally issued as A6



Global Journal of human-social science: A
Arts & Humanities - Psychology
Volume 19 Issue 6 Version 1.0 Year 2019
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Sexual Imageries in Eliot's *The Waste Land* as Plato's Critique of Immoral Art

By Khair Ul Bashar, Alam Zeb & Hakeem Khan

Abasyn University

Abstract- The paper attempts to make a critical analysis of The Wasteland which justifies Plato's belief about art. Plato's concept of 'mimesis' led to rejection of art and poetry as merely projection of sex, anger and other bodily pleasures which has a harmful effect on the rational disposition of individual. Eliot was not left behind and one step further to plunge into the wild waters of sexuality, revealing a remarkable sexual encounters through imageries which are rarely accounted for curative effect to the crazy world. Indeed, these sexual imageries are presented in most horrible picture which surely intended to spoil and demoralize the minds of the youth.

Keywords: mimesis, sexuality, rational disposition, imageries, demoralize, bodily pleasure.

GJHSS-A Classification: FOR Code: 190499



SEXUALIMAGERIESINELIOTSTHEWASTELANDASPLATOSCRITIQUEOFIMMORALART

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2019. Khair Ul Bashar, Alam Zeb & Hakeem Khan. This is a research/review paper, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Sexual Imageries in Eliot's *The Waste Land* as Plato's Critique of Immoral Art

Khair Ul Bashar [α], Alam Zeb [σ] & Hakeem Khan [ρ]

Abstract- The paper attempts to make a critical analysis of *The Wasteland* which justifies Plato's belief about art. Plato's concept of 'mimesis' led to rejection of art and poetry as merely projection of sex, anger and other bodily pleasures which has a harmful effect on the rational disposition of individual. Eliot was not left behind and one step further to plunge into the wild waters of sexuality, revealing a remarkable sexual encounters through imageries which are rarely accounted for curative effect to the crazy world. Indeed, these sexual imageries are presented in most horrible picture which surely intended to spoil and demoralize the minds of the youth.

Keywords: mimesis, sexuality, rational disposition, imageries, demoralize, bodily pleasure.

I. Introduction

Plato's critique of art originated from 'Mimesis' which means imitation or reproduction. It was considered to be the first mode of literary criticism, started from Plato and it runs through many great theorist of Renaissance up to some modern theorists as well. Such type of theory had been applied to literature, theater and visual arts to achieve critical appraisal of their works and lives. The theory demonstrates how the people are influenced by each other and the world around them. Mimetic criticism determines how well a work of literature connects with the real world by conveying universal truth, opposed to temporal or subjective truth. M. H Abrams defines Mimesis as term signifying two items and correspondence between them. (1959).

Plato's attributes to 'Mimesis' in terms of ethical and educational context when he said "guardians of an ideal state should be educated to imitate only what is appropriate" (Nehemas, 300). He subordinated art to morality and idealism. He regarded artist as imitator of imitation and subsequently the work of art is twice remove from the reality. Moreover, he also claimed that ordinary work of art affects badly on the audience because it represents imagination rather than truth and nourishes lustful feelings rather than reason. Plato thought that art is potentially dangerous for several reasons and none of them has any concern for morality. According to Plato, an art teaches us immoral lessons. He maintained that human existence in greater part is a struggle to master their emotions and sensual urges by employing reason and intellect. Therefore, art encourages immorality in the citizens of the state. The audience might uncritically accepts and admire immoral, vicious traits when they are attractively packaged by a skillful artist. Furthermore, violence and sex in art is capable of causing the mob more violent or entrench sexually obsessed with culture. In *Republic*, Plato said that "sex, anger and all desires, pleasure and pain are fostered by poetic imitation; thus, Homer and tragic poets are not true example of a citizen" (Annas, 280). The representations of 'sexual mania' can effectively stir strong emotions which would be a threat to the good of community and state.

The status of sex is pretty much a measuring stick for all modernist writers. The modern movement is generally caused in the part by shifting notions of sexuality and gender. "One of the chief aims of the modernist movement, as they defined it, was the restoration of virility to poetry" (Lamos, 55). *The Wasteland* which has brought fame to Eliot and kept him famous (and occasionally infamous) is often seen as the embodiment of Modernism. *The Wasteland* is a fragmentary poem despite of fact that sexuality plays major role by giving a sense of unity to fragments in the poem. The attractions of the poem for the present-day readers are in its sexual imageries to coherence, which led many critics to interpret it "as a critique of literary and sexual properties" (Lamos, 108). The women characters in *The Wasteland* are linked rather traditionally with sexual desire and reproduction. The poem is loaded with hallucinating descriptions and vivid images of sexual eroticism. Thus the poem demonstrates an inferno of sexual misrule and lawless intercourse.

Eliot's poetic outlook has opened a new vista of complexity and realism in modernity. He is critical of Romantic traditions, set forth objective ideas of control sensibility, order and impersonality. His poetry are the tragedy of modern life and his tragic heroes have ultimately lost the touch of common good and sunk into the abyss of corruption and decadence. However, Eliot seems to be paradoxical in presenting hilarious pictures

Author α: Lecturer in English, Department of English, Abasyn University Peshawar, Pakistan. e-mail: khairul.bashar@abasyn.edu.pk
Author σ: PhD Scholar, Department of English Literature and Applied Linguistics, Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.
e-mail: alam.zeb@abasyn.edu.pk
Author ρ: MS Scholar, Department of English, Northern University, Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.
e-mail: shawal85@gmail.com

© 2019 Global Journals

of European capitals especially in his treatment of sex and the absence of meaningful social and spiritual models in the modern world. Eliot's critical target is mostly focused on sex and its varied manifestation. He presents a quest that searches for some type of renewal or redemption and at the same time, the selection of sordid imageries of sex to create vulgarity has muddled out the narrative technique of the poem. If *The Wasteland* is hypothetically purse a work with addressing furious succession of lust and its deadly consequences then the poem becomes a critique of Plato's immoral art. Moreover, the possibility of redemption, fertility of the land, the foundation provided by the lustful experience has blurred much of its thematic consideration. Thus, regeneration is the subtle theme of *The Wasteland;* and the sequent foreplay of it. The paper extracts some the lines from the poem which its contextual meaning suggests a promiscuous orientation of characters in it's more perverted form and molested lasciviousness. So, *The Wasteland* allegedly conveys the central tenants of Plato's critique of art as genre at its best useless and socially dangerous.

II. Objectives of the Research

1. To investigate sexual imagery in Eliot's *The Wasteland*
2. To find connection of immoral art in Eliot's *The Wasteland*

III. Methodology

The research is carried out in the framework of qualitative approach. The approach follows three different types of techniques: textual analysis, close reading and contextual meaning. The close reading technique it seems quite apt for the analysis of the poetic lines. It requires citing direct textual evidence, analyze the words in context and sometimes sentences cumulatively unfolds an idea. In the poem *The Wasteland,* words and phrases present an image which refers to another image or idea which is more of infamy and hideous in nature. So the close attention to the text is a way to unravel the proposed argument and clear intentions of author's description.

IV. Analysis

The Wasteland was published first time in 1922 and consequently charged with hostile criticism. The central idea suggests that it conveys some core principles which a society should adopt to restore its intellectual dignity as they lost it in modern times. The historical consciousness would present to us the parallel events of degeneration and revival simultaneously. However, the common readers' approach to the poem is transcendent from the modern squalor and seediness. They are generally unaware from the impetuous panorama of futility and anarchy. Though, in *The Wasteland,* Eliot has shown himself as an erudite philosopher and moralist but his reformed policy is covered under the mist of obscurity. The remarks of Alverez applies particular to him, "a great deal of modern poetry seems often as specialized as modern science, and both required a degree of single-minded preparedness to which the general public is neither willing nor able to attain". (1976)

Eliot has deliberately subjected his poem to such exhaustive critical analysis that a common reader cannot find a single gist of exegesis including lines from foreign languages, onomatopoeic echoes and quotations. Therefore, the "heap of broken images" make the poem enormously complex one with the exception of erotic imageries more magnetic and demonstration of private parts of the characters have rendered to the juvenile mind an effect of voyeurism.

The first sexual imagery described by Eliot from the story of Hyacinth girl which in sexual premises can be classed as "Exhibitionism" (extravagant and conspicuous behavior intended to attract attention to yourself). It is generally involves in behavior that notified in case of dancing, singing or any other conspicuous ways of acting. The Hyacinth girl has been portrayed of having reminiscence of her past lover and the flower when they return from the garden. "Your arms full, your hair wet," (I. 37). So the story appeals to our sensual passions and "merely underlies how things have worsened since the moment in the hyacinth garden". (Seymour-Jones, 122)

In 'A Game of Chess', the 2nd part of the poem, Eliot employed rigorously the sexual imageries, even a worse and more perverted in its description. Here Eliot shows his mental disgust and meticulous distaste for the sheer physicality of sex. Two worst scenario of sexual activity witnessed in morbid Lady of Situation and fading look of Lil whose body exposure was the object of fear and revulsion and notes on "the deep hostility of the verses whose subject is a woman" (Seymour-Jones, 297).

The opening lines are affluent with rich and colored sensuous images "reminiscent of Keats in the Eve of *St. Agnes Shakespeare's Cleopatra"* (Swami, 995) which prepares the readers instinctively for voluptuousness. She has been shown as waiting excitedly for her lover. The appearance of a visitor lighted a fire of lust in her and quickly brushed her hair which is 'spread out in fiery points'. Eliot here conjures a scene of great sensuality; the lines are worth of reading:

"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."
I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones. (II, 111-116)

© 2019 Global Journals

It can be presumed from the close reading of the lines that both are found in sexual disposition in her boudoir. The lady repeatedly demands from the lover which is a focal point of erotic signification. Her conversation with her lover suggests that she has been in the state of what is called "Orgasm". It is the moment of intense sexual pleasure and people usually enjoy at the time of sexing. Despite of the presence and existence of such pleasure, she feels a sense of mental emptiness. "The disparate aristocratic lady who is unsatisfied and disappointed" (Jaleel, 122), indeed her disappointment can be typed as "Frigid" (when someone unable to arouse sexually). She feels that the lover does not expect a highly sexual relationship with her that makes her neurotic because it shows a remarkable lack of empathy and concerns for her desires. Therefore, her incessant conversations between the processes of sex suggest that she tries to give him pleasure to make the experience more enjoyable for her. Once it happened, the odds of her wanting to have sex more and giving him sexual pleasure increases dramatically. On the other hand, the lover replies back disappointedly "I think we are in rat's alley". The phrase 'The rat's alley' uncovers an image of more obscene and disgusted ignominy. I can here recall George's expression in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men,* "That's a dirty thing to tell around". The phrase in the line depicts an image of female's genitalia and expresses that how much depth she has got inside like an unending alley that corresponds to what Coleridge mentioned it in his poem *Kubla Khan,* "a cave measureless to man". It is certainly an image of "labia minora" and he feels a sense of vacuum and mundane which he feels the flesh without the bones. He thinks of her genital where merely dead people lost the lustful "boney" i-e penis erection. Similarly in The Fire Sermon, Eliot's indication of merry-making and the coarse laughter from the people nearby at the beach, he listens to:

The rattle of the bones, and chuckle
spread from ear to ear. (III, 186)

The dissolute image 'The rattle of bones' is central to perform sex intercourse in the most degenerating and vulgarization of sex. Of course, to interpret the lines moralistically is to shot much of its nuance and wit.

The obscenity does not stop here rather becomes more accentuated in the story of married life of Lil and Albert. The episode simply narrates that Lil's husband has come back from the war and wanted to revive his past pleasure and beauty from her. What's important in this episode is her ravaged look due to the loss of her teeth and failure to adjust herself some false teeth.

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with
that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set, (II, 142-146)

Her husband gave her money to get a new set of dentures to enjoy her again as he had before. The narrator reminded her that if her withered face is not adjusted then soon her husband will seek the pleasure from the other women. What did he enjoy? How she suffers from tooth decay? The imagery closely explains the unmentionable activity that her husband had once from her which can be called as an act of "fellatio". It refers to the oral stimulation of penis. In most of the cases, as medically approved that male's semen ejaculation into female's oral would cause the decay of teeth. Besides this, oral sex has been reported around as troublesome emotional experience between the couples and worsens the relationship because of sexual activity. Hence, Eliot manages to conceal the loathsome image in the complexity of dramatic action.

The next passage, in the scene of the typist girl and the young man of carbuncular offers one more example of the debased attitude towards sexual relations between men and women. The image is painted to show the mechanical relation between the typist girl and the clerk. The typist girl gives herself to the clerk with a sense of total indifference and apathy.

His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference (III, 241-42)

There is neither repose nor any pleasure, and this absent of feeling is a measure of what is known as "Pornocchio", generally refers to the state in sex-act where a person embellishes his/her sex life in order to sound cooler. The typist girl is described in the similar fashion. Here Eliot has exaggerated her sexual exploits in the routine practice of sex.

V. Conclusion

Plato's critique of art has its focus on educational and moral significance. Plato has argued that educational function of art depends upon its having the right kind of substantive moral content. I contend to see whether Eliot's *The Wasteland* lies primarily in the presentation of formal values that simply a sort of formal morality. The sexual imageries in the poem has devastating factor which put Plato at the head of the argument that art can negatively affect the education, development and character of individuals, especially young readers, by imprinting sexual ideas and unruly desires. *The Wasteland* expresses the images which are classified more of prohibition and exhibiting meanness and indecency. No doubt that Eliot's concern was to produce an art which highlights the sterility and degeneration of modern society caused by sexual encounters. But at the same time glorification of sex and

© 2019 Global Journals

other lecherous behaviours would incite unhealthy emotions and consequently weaken morality alliance with rationality. Thus, *The Wasteland* encourages virility and perceived as an expression of hysteria which subverts beauty of reason and conduce all art is generally immoral.

References Références Referencias

1. Annas, Julia. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic.* NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1981. Print.
2. Alvarez, Alfred. Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Carolyn Riley. Vol. 5. Gale Cengage, 1976. eNotes. com 12 Nov, 2018 http://www.enotes.com/topics/ lfred-alvarez#critical-essays-alvarez-lfred-1929.
3. Eliot, Thomas. S. *The Wasteland.* NewYork: Boni & Liverright Press, 1922. Print.
4. Jaleel, Abd Jaleel., and Kumar, Suresh M. "Women and Sexuality in T. S Eliot's The Wasteland". *Human Rights International Research Journal,* vol. 4, no. 1, 2016, pp.122-126
5. Lamos, Colleen. *Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.
6. Marks, Emerson. "Literature and Belief: English Institute Essays, 1957". : *A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts.* Ed. M. H. Abrams. Vol. 1. Detroit, Mich, Spring 1959. Print
7. Nehamas, Alexander. *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom and the Arts.* Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982. Print.
8. Seymour-Jones, Carole. *Painted Shadow: The Life of Vivienne Eliot.* London: Robinson, 2002 (Ist Publ. London: Constable, 2001).
9. Swami, Agrata. "T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land: A critical analysis". *International Journal of Applied Research,* vol, 2, no. 6, 2016, pp. 954-956

© 2019 Global Journals