



## Modernism in the Eyes of T. S. Eliot: Break From Traditional Writings With Literary Forms and Movements

Muhammad Ehsan<sup>[a],\*</sup>; Muhammad Zohaib Khalil<sup>[b]</sup>; Muhammad Ahsin Ayub<sup>[c]</sup>; Muhammad Mohsin Ayub<sup>[c]</sup>; Bilal Atta<sup>[c]</sup>; Asif Iqbal Gill<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>PhM Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>[b]</sup>M. Phill Student, The University of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>[c]</sup>Department of Entomology University of Agriculture Faisalabad-Pakistan.

<sup>[d]</sup>Institute of Soil and Environmental Sciences University of Agriculture Faisalabad-Pakistan.

\*Corresponding author.

Received 9 September 2016; accepted 12 November 2016

Published online 26 December 2016

### Abstract

This paper owes to uncover the modern aspects in the writings of T. S. Eliot. Modernism, a movement which erupts from philosophy and has a “self-conscious” break from traditional writings and worked with literary forms and movements. As a modernist he portrays about the standard of love, money minded people and self centered people. The research is entirely based on T. S. Eliot’s poetry and generalizing its work entirely which required depth study of his work and citation of the critic who entitled T. S. Eliot as a “modernist-poet”. This study is retro-spective which requires depth study in order to relate by the previous work done on generalizing T. S. Eliot as a modernist poet.

**Key words:** Modernism; T. S. Eliot, Societal change; Modernist theory

Ehsan, M., Khalil, M. Z., Ayub, M. A., Ayub, M. M., Atta, B., & Gill, A. (2016). Modernism in the Eyes of T. S. Eliot: Break From Traditional Writings With Literary Forms and Movements. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 13(6), 66-70. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9093> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9093>

### INTRODUCTION

This piece of work is based upon the concept of modernism or modernist theory. The scope of this work

is to show the modernist viewpoint, so T. S. Eliot has a massive and dominating person of that time. He is also known as pioneer of modernist poetry. We know that modernism is a philosophical movement that started in the late 19 century, and this theory changed the life of the people. Through this movement people changes their habits as well as the standard of life also. Intellectual life was rapidly changing at that time so Eliot shows how modernism effects the people of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This research also shows how life of modernist is changed and what are the qualities and characteristics have modernist. Through his writings we highlight the real face of modern man and modern existence. The study wants to show that modern man does not have any kind of hope even they do not believe in the religious concept. The society is pervaded by a sense of alienation and breaks down in communication.

Modernism is also known as “the lost generation”, in 1920s American writer brought modernism in the United States. British contemporaries and American’s Modernists excluded the forms and traditional values (Fitzgerald, 1940). The modernist movement totally converted the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, and its effects are still touched in today.

“Modernism is a style or a movement in the literature or art that’s aim to detract from the traditional or classical values and come across with the new latest social values on a wide scale (Peter child, *Modernism, second edition*)”. The age of modernism is the era that began with illumination (1687 to 1798). In the era of modernity Political leaders also supported the reasons in social changes, they believe with reason and equal social order. Such beliefs nourished the French and American democratic upheaval. Some major events and movements of modernity are urbanization, capitalism, democracy, industrialization, and science. The supporting flags of modernity are individual and freedom (Terry, 1997).

## 1. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNISM IN LITERATURE

Modernist writers start to look at new way of human life so they gave a new subject matter for writing. They also follow the more experimental and extremely individualistic method of writing. The new developments and scene of changing in that era, such as:

- Emergence of two fields of psychology and sociology and comparative religion studies of anthropology.
- Modern mass communication technology like radio, TV, cinema.
- Criticism of ideology of empire and British imperialism.
- Implications of policies about racial superiority in Germany.

## 2. SOME NEW APPROACHES IN MODERNIST WRITING

They adopt new style in writings like “stream of consciousness”, “logic of the unconscious” or the “logic of association”. They also use character, plot, point of view or focalization.

## 3. BIOGRAPHY OF T. S. ELIOT

T.S Eliot was born in ST. Louis, Missouri on September 26, 1888. He joined the literary journal in Harvard University, in which he published his first part of poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. During the higher studies from Harvard he met with Ezra Pound and Vivienne Haigh-Wood Eliot settled who proved to be influential to his writing. His writings and editing lead Eliot’s nervous breakdown and he recover at a sanitarium in Switzerland where he completed his poem *The Waste Land* in 1922 and in the same year he became a editor of the literary journal. Ezra Pound helped him in the endeavor and also suggested him to edit the poem *The Waste Land* from 800 lines to 433 lines. In 1940s he wrote his last four major works.” a) East Coker (1940), b) Burnt Norton (1941), c) The Dry Salvages (1941), d) Little Gidding (1942)”. Collectively these works were published as *The Four Quartets* (1943). In 1930 he started work on literary criticism and he also worked in drama, prose and poetry. In 1948 Eliot was awarded by the Nobel Prize in English order of merit and in literature. He died on January 4, 1965, in London (Collected Poem, [1909-1962], T. S. Eliot).

## 4. T. S. ELIOT AS A MODERNIST

The concept of modernism or modernist theory is clearly found in the T. S. Eliot’s whole work. He was a great poet

of his age, and his poetry has great and deep influence of his age, all economic, social, and political factors have impact on his poetry. T. S. Eliot has a place in the twentieth century, which is known as the modern age. As we know, that after the end of Victorian Age in 1900, the modern age started. Most importantly, there are the depictions of modern civilization in his sonnets like *Fiery Debris Wednesday* and *The Waste Land* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, like his epic *The Waste Land* has vivid picture of so called modern civilization. In which he portrays about the standard of love, money minded people and self centered people. The world war has unleashed forces which were not controlled that time and caused to be a great suffer of horror, lust and, loss of faith.

## 5. CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNISM AS A GENERAL IN T. S. ELIOT’S POETRY

### 5.1 The Hollow Men

The poem *Hollow Men* published in (1925) by modern poet T.S Eliot contains 95 lines. This poem is not an appendage to *The Waste Land*. Comparison of *The Hollow Men* to *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* is simple poem in structure and also simple in conception. On the other hand *The Waste Land* signifies the universal disorder. Its structure is episodic and it moves tangent to tangent. In the poem *The Hollow Men* T. S. Eliot portrays lacking of society and culture in faith, humanity, morality and religion. Some important themes of this poem are dreams, hopes, plans, identity, passivity, exile, and dissatisfaction which make us hollow from insight. He describes the flaw of modern men in his poem, modern human being is lusty, self-centered, money minded and hungry for their feelings satisfaction (Warner. 2014).

### 5.2 The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

The poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* published in (1915) and this modernist poem considered as one of the masterpieces. This poem is about the middle-aged man who is sexually frustrated with unfulfilled desires. This poem is about Prufrock’s disenchantment with the society. Eliot portrays the Prufrock as a man who is trying to handle with the wretched realities of life. Some major themes which T. S. Eliot highlighted in the poem are Appearances, manipulation, love, passivity, time (Annesha & Arindam).

### 5.3 The Waste Land

T. S. Eliot published this poem first in 1922 in his own magazine “*criterion*”. The work is considered one of inspiring works of modernist literature. This poem has a coherent structure and unified themes. T. S. Eliot writes a poem that includes many unrelated little like “references to history, mythology, religion and some other disciplines.

This poem is a highly complex, about the cultural and psychological crisis. After the World War I, these difficulties were come due to the loss of moral, religious, cultural and individual identity (Bedecarré, 2012).

Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* has five sections: The first section is *The Burial of the Dead* which introduces the various themes of *Despair and disillusionment*. The second section is *A Game of Chess* which tells *vignettes* of several characters. The third section *The Fire Sermon* tells us a philosophical thought in the views of self-denial and relation to the imagery of death in juxtaposition effected by eastern religions and Augustine of Hippo. In the fourth section *Death by Water* that consist of a *brief lyrical petition*, in the concluding fifth section *What the Thunder Said* concludes with an *image of judgme* (*The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot).

---

## 6. LINK TO PREVIOUS

---

Our word modern comes from the Latin word *modernus*, which meant "just now," although the term was not widely used before the 1500s, when it provided a way of distinguishing the period after the Renaissance from the ancient and medieval worlds. It also meant "new-fashioned, not antiquated or obsolete." Then, towards the end of the 1800s, the term became more closely attached to the "new art" of the coming twentieth century. Many modern designers insisted that they followed no "style" and indeed modernism was more than a style. Virginia Woolf famously designated 1910 as the year in which those changes coalesced into a cultural revolution: "in or around December, 1910," she wrote, "human character changed." In his provocative paper *What Was Modernism?* critic Robert Adams agreed with Woolf, identifying the Postimpressionist show at the Grafton Galleries in London as modernism's first defining moment: "Within five years either way of that date a great sequence of new and different works appeared in Western culture, striking the tonic chords of modernism. Ten years before that fulcrum of December 1910, modernism is not yet; ten years after, it is already." Another important figure in this development, and the first great modern architect, was the American Louis Sullivan, who coined the phrase "Form Follows Function."

Gropius was the leader of the Bauhaus, the school of art and architecture in Germany. Gropius aimed to unite art with technology, and he educated a new generation of designers and architects to reject historical precedents and adopt the ideology of modern industry. Le Corbusier, probably the most influential modern architect, introduced a fascination with the designs of engineers, such as grain silos, cruise ships, and automobiles. In the 1930s, many of the leading European Modernists Emigrated to the United States; thus the theory and practice of Modernism became widespread. The "tradition of the new", as Richard Weston called it, became the dominant mode of progressive

artists. What had begun as a cluster of loosely related artistic movements scattered across Europe emerged as the dominant style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Anthony S. Denzer, Ph.D). "During the mid-to-late-20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophical discourse focused on issues of modernity and the cultural attitudes and philosophies towards the modern condition. Berman put forward his own definition of modernism to counter post-modern philosophies". "*Others believe that the really distinctive forms of contemporary art and thought have made a quantum leap beyond all the diverse sensibilities of modernism, and earned the right to call themselves "post-modern"*". I want to respond to these antithetical but complementary claims by reviewing the vision of modernity with which this book began. To be modern, I said, is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: To be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows (Marshall Berman).

In a simpler way, everything you needed to know about contemporary architecture fits inside a neat pair. There was modernism that meant simple geometries, concrete slabs and mirrored glass, free of decorative frills and there was traditionalism. That was most everything else-architecture derived from historic styles dating all the way back to Babylon but now things are not so simple (Leon Whiteson, April 6, 1988).

The modernist writer strives for sensations, in the serious sense of the term; his epigones, in the frivolous sense. The modernist writer thinks of subject matter not as something to be rehearsed or recaptured but rather to be conquered and enlarged. He has little use for wisdom; or if he does, he conceives of it not as something to be dug out of the mines of tradition, but to be won for himself through an exercise in self-penetration, sometimes self-disintegration. He becomes entranced with depths—whichever you choose: the depths of the city, or the self, or the underground, or the slums, or the extremes of sensation induced by sex, liquor, drugs; or the shadowed half-people crawling through the interstices of society: Lumpen, criminals, hipsters; or the drives at the base of consciousness. Only Joyce, among the modernist writers, negotiates the full journey into and through these depths while yet emerging into the commonplace streets of the city and its ongoing commonplace life: Which is, I think, one reason he is the greatest of the modernist writers, as also perhaps the one who points a way beyond the liberation of modernism (Irving Howe Nov. 1, 1967).

Modernism, in the art a radical break with the past and the concurrent search for new forms of expression.

Modernism fostered a period of experimentation in the arts from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the years following World War I. In an era characterized by industrialization, rapid social change, and advances in science and the social sciences (e.g., Freudian theory). Modernists felt a growing alienation incompatible with Victorian morality, optimism, and convention. New ideas in psychology, philosophy, and political theory kindled a search for new modes of expression ( Kathleen Kuiper).

The Russian Revolution of 1917 set out to build utopia. Art was to become part of everyday life, and technology was to be extended to its limits and beyond. Avant-garde architects and artists threw themselves into the collective effort. They evolved new theories and institutions, developed new types of buildings and produced all kinds of innovative propaganda. Many worked under the banner of Constructivism, proclaiming that the task of art was “not to adore life but to organize it or form it” (Exhibition regarding’ Modernism).

As we know modernism is a movement not only come in literature but also come in architecture, music, painting, sculpture, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and also in the science.

---

## 7. MODERNISM AS A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

---

Some most influential personalities in modernism:

(a) **Charles Darwin** (who promoted a theory of natural selection and evolution).

Darwin’s most popular theory is a natural selection and evolution is a change in the population after the time but Darwin uses the term *descent with modification* rather an evolution in his publication. It expresses that developmental change gets through the creation of variety in every era and differential survival of people with diverse mixes of these variable characters. People with attributes which build their likelihood of survival will have more chances to repeat and their posterity will likewise profit by the heritable, favorable character. So after some time these variations will extent through the population.

According to Darwin four important observations of the nature:

- (a) Population’s member from the same species vary in their traits.
- (b) Traits can be acquired, or went from folks to posterity.
- (c) Populations are fit for delivering more posterity than nature can bolster.
- (d) Due to an absence of nourishment or different assets, a large portion of this posterity don’t survive.

From his four perceptions, Darwin made two inductions to clarify natural choice:

Individuals whose acquired qualities give them a higher shot of surviving and recreating in their surroundings tend to leave more posterity than different people. This unequal capacity of people to survive and duplicate, or differential survival and proliferation, will prompt the collection of great qualities in the populace over numerous eras. Natural selection prompts versatile advancement. An adaptation is a quality that a living being has that builds its possibility of surviving and replicating in its particular surroundings. An adaptation is “chose” for on the grounds that a person with a specific adaptation ought to have the capacity to survive and recreate superior to a person without the adaptation.

Example: This is a populace of moths. They are all the same species, yet they shift. Some are brown, and some are gray. Shading is a quality that can be acquired. In this illustration, brown moths produce brown posterity gray moths produce gray posterity. Every guardian produces numerous posterity, however just a couple of them will survive (Mayr, 2000).

(a) **Sigmund Freud** (who established revolutionized and psychoanalysis to the brain through the people’s thought).

(b) **Marks** (had delighted men’s reliance on law and structures outside their control and some of the time past their insight recorded and material determinism).

(c) **Max plank (1858-1947)** (was a founder of quantum mechanics. He was an important psycetrics of 20<sup>th</sup> century. He explained the relationship between quanta and elementary particles).

(d) **William James (1842-1910)** (American psychologist and philosopher, who first time introduce the stream of conscious, a continuous flow of feelings, thoughts and impression).

(e) **Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913)** (was a father of 20<sup>th</sup> century general linguistics. According to Swiss Language can be analyzed in formal way i.e. referent, sign, signifier and signified).

There are some modern novelist i.e. Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Foster, Hamingway, James Joyce, T. Mann and Some poets who wrote in modernism era they are: V. Mayakovsky, Andre Breton, E. M. Reilke, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, Paul Valery (Writers History, Literature Portal ).

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Banerjee, R. D. K. (1972). The Dantean overview: The epigraph to “Prufrock”. *MLN*, 87(7), 962-966.
- Bedecarré, J. (2012). *T. S. Eliot’s anti-modernism: Poetry and tradition in the European waste land*. Claremont McKenna College. Retrieved from <http://www.ResearchGate>
- Eliot, T. S. (1991). *Collected poem*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Eliot, T. S. (1922). *The waste land*. Horace Liveright, USA.

- Eliot, T. S. (1933). A commentary. *Criterion*, 12(48), 468-73.
- Eliot, T. S. (1969). *The complete poems and plays of T. S. Eliot*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.
- Eliot, T. S. (n.d.). *The waste land*. Coradella Collegiate Bookshelf Editions.
- Fitzgerald, S. F. (1940). *Biography—facts, birthday, life story*. Retrieved 2013, December 21 from <http://www.Biography.com>
- Hakac, J. (1972). The yellow fog of “prufrock”. *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, 26(2), 52-54.
- Jain, M. (2010). *A critical reading of the selected poems of T. S. Eliot*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mayr, E. (2000). Darwin’s influence on modern thought. *Scientific American*, 283, 67-71.
- Nasi, M. (2013). The mythic method and intertextuality in T. S. Eliot’s poetry. *European Scientific Journal*, 18(6), 1-8.
- Oser, L. (2012). Charlotte Eliot and “the love song of J. Alfred Prufrock”. *Modern Philology*, 94(2), 190-200.
- Prufrock, A. J. (n.d.). *The love song*. Durgapur Durgapur, West Bengal, India.
- Schneider, E. (1972). Prufrock and after: The theme of change. *PLMA*, 87(5), 1103-1118.
- Terry, B. (1997). *Modernism and postmodernism: An overview with art examples*. DC: NAEA.
- Warner, M. (2014). *Emmanuel Solorzano*. English 112B.