



A PRACTICAL DISCOURSE ON LACAN'S 'LANGUAGE AND UNCONSCIOUS', C.G. JUNG'S 'COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS' AND NORTHROP FRYE'S 'ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM' IN T.S. ELIOT'S "THE WASTELAND"

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ABSTRACT

'*The Wasteland*' has been psycho-analytically studied to understand the poet's psyche, the metaphor of images, symbols, etc. for new untouched and unexplored findings in the genre of practical criticism. The poem has been deciphered on the basis of three psychoanalytic models (a) *Lacan's 'Language and Unconscious'* (b) *C.G. Jung's 'Collective Unconscious'* and (c) *Northrop Frye's 'Archetypal Criticism'*.

Lacan's 'Language and Unconscious', attempts to read '*The Wasteland*' in the likeness of three-stage order of childhood formation viz *imaginary, symbolic and real*. The unveiling of author's step-by-step sub-conscious unfolds his psyche. *C.G. Jung's 'Collective Unconscious'* codifies the *literary allusions, myths and symbolisms* of the poem to form a *collective-identity* transcending across times and culture as something imbibed in the very human conscious from times immemorial. '*Archetypal Criticism*' by Northrop Frye links *psychological states* with *literary symbols* which he identified as '*universal*'. The poem draws upon *transcendental genres* such as *Romance (summer), Tragedy (autumn), Irony/Satire (winter) and Comedy (spring)* which have been codified as basic archetypal structures in the poem.

KEYWORDS: Archetypal Criticism; Collective Unconscious; Language and Unconscious; Metonymic Displacement; Primordial Images; Psycho-analytic Criticism.

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Psycho-analytic Criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psycho-analysis in the interpretation of *literature*. The psychoanalytic critics give central importance in literary inter-relation to the demarcation between the conscious and the unconscious mind. They associate the literary work's '*overt*' content with the conscious and the '*covert*' content with the unconscious. Further, an interesting practice of these critics is to privilege the latter over the former, and aim to disentangle the two.

'*The Wasteland*' by T.S. Eliot is one such complex literary piece which could be read against the foreground of psychoanalytic criticism. For a better understanding of the poet's psyche and the metaphor of images, symbols etc, used in the poem, the poem could be deciphered on the basis of three psychoanalytic models (a) *Lacan's 'Language and Unconscious'* (b) *C.G. Jung's 'Collective Unconscious'* and (c) *Northrop Frye's 'Archetypal Criticism'*.

(a) LACAN'S 'LANGUAGE AND UNCONSCIOUS'

Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst constructed a model of *identity-formation* for childhood. This model was a three-stage process or 'orders' as Lacan had called it.

(i) The Imaginary

In this stage, Lacan said that the child makes its first identification. This is the '*mirror stage*'. The child associates co-ordinated limbs and movements in the mirror with itself (Nayar, 75). Here the child's sense of self is similar to his conception between himself and his mother (that both are same). The child works with '*misrecognition*' that the smooth, co-ordinated and whole image which appears in the mirror is he himself.

In the poem '*The Wasteland*', T.S. Eliot made his first identification with his proposed Wasteland with this order. This was the Lacanian '*mirror stage*'. Whatever the poet observed during those days got associated with his images of '*The Wasteland*'. The horrors of devastating World War-I, sexual perversion of the society, loss of spirituality, growing materialism, etc. all formed mirror-stage images in the contemporary wasteland. At the same time, this was also the stage of misrecognition for the poet. The horrors, sexual perversions, loss of spirituality, growing materialism, etc., whatsoever was observed by the poet in the mirror-stage, was accepted by him to be the smooth and co-ordinated image of '*The Wasteland*' he had thought of. It was this misrecognition which might have tempted him to draft a modern-epic which showcased the fall of contemporary society and loss of values which earlier were virtuous.

(ii) The Symbolic

In the second stage, the child acquires language and thus enters into society and societal relations said Lacan. The child discovers that '*I*' bears a name, '*Mother*' is female and it is a social relation to '*I*'. Hence, the child associates a *chain of signifiers* in a *metonymic displacement* (Nayar, 75).

In '*The Wasteland*' it could be thus seen that the poet after confirming to his first stage advances for the symbolic order. In this order, the poet enters into societal relations metaphorically. These societal relations in the context of the poem

were the pack of literary allusions, myths, legends and images which the poet incorporated in his poem. He found that every horror of the contemporary century which he brought about in the poem found a voice as well as bore a relation to many literary texts of past and present both. The poet associates a *chain of signifiers* in a *metonymic displacement*. In the poem *loss of spirituality* is associated with '*a heap of broken images*', '*the final stroke of nine*', '*he who was living is now dead*', and '*empty chapel*'. Similarly, the metonymic displacement of *sexual perversion* is indicated by '*the sylvan scene*', '*the typist girl*' and '*the lament song of three Thames' daughters*'. As Lacan points that this order was also the stage of identifying '*absentee*' or a '*lack*'. This identification results in a '*desire*' to gain or achieve the '*absentee*' or a '*lack*'. In context of the poem, it could be observed that the poet identified an '*absentee*' or a '*lack*' in the contemporary society. It was this *lack* which was craved by the poet at many places in the poem. It could be understood that the poet craved for *higher sensibility* in '*The Wasteland*'. The poet's *desire* for *higher sensibility* is reflected by the poet's allusion to Buddha's '*Fire Sermon*', St. Augustine's '*Confessions*' and towards the end of the poem, thrice repetition of the sound of thunder '*Da, Da, Da*' from *Brihadrankya Upanishada*.

(iii) The Real

In the third stage, both the *Imaginary* and *Symbolic* are in competition with each other and try to control. According to Lacan, this is the order where the child's illusions from the *Imaginary* are at odds with the sense of *Otherness* from the *Symbolic* (Nayar, 76). This order is the one where meanings conceived by the first two orders are signified.

In the context of the poem, it could be argued that the poet's illusions are at odds with the rich set of literary allusions employed by him. We find a clue of this sense of poet's feeling of *otherness* towards the end of the poem. After showcasing the horrifying and devastated state of '*The Wasteland*' in all the five sections of the poem; the poet might have finally realised that the sense of *otherness* of the *symbolic*, in his *unconscious*, was not the real signified meaning. He might have realised that this *otherness* also bore a sense of

mysticism and irrationality. What he might have assumed till then was arbitrarily rationalistic and un-mystified. But for the poet to revert back to square one for an altogether new-epic composition might have been unwise. Hence, after being at odds and disillusioned by the control of the first two orders, the poet might have decided to end up with a sense of *optimism* (the third order of 'Real'). The vast knowledge and experience of the poet's consciousness might have consoled his disturbed state of mind to conclude with epical Sanskrit words 'Shantih, Shantih, Shantih'.

These psycho-analytic findings about T.S. Eliot safely establish that 'The Wasteland' stand as a composition which was constructed in the likeness of *identity-formation* for childhood as postulated by Jacques Lacan. Unconsciously, T.S. Eliot was constructing a poem which followed the three-stage process or 'orders'. His pre-conceived notions about war-struck Europe, subsequent devastations and loss of values are reflected in the *mirror-stage*. What the poet experienced might not had been his conscious self-experience. The prejudiced ideas of the society found a voice right through the opening lines of the poem and continued to harness almost all the five sections and much of the content of the poem. The cascading effect of this mirror-stage is carried forward almost up to the last section of the poem where the 'imaginary' first-order finds a prophet in the 'symbolic' second order. The dormant seeds of 'mirror-stage' are harvested to fruition with the tools of literary allusions, myths and symbolisms to aid and validate the poet's pre-conceived notions about 'The Wasteland'. The poet was convinced to believe during this 'symbolic' second-order that 'goodness' was a matter of yester-years; and that the assumed 'wasteland' was capable of bearing only the 'Otherness of Goodness'. This is exactly what the reader experiences through the poet's rich library of literary allusions, myths and symbolisms. But safely this wasn't how 'The Wasteland' was destined to end. The anti-gravity mechanism for the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic' orders is propelled by the 'real' third-order. The last section of the poem acts as an eye-opener for T.S. Eliot where a realisation of certain magnitude unconsciously jerks the poet to believe, think prophesise and propagate

that there does exist a brighter hope and possibility for 'The Wasteland' to bear 'Goodness'. Undoubtedly, it could be said that this optimistic vision was catapulted with the unconscious culmination of Lord Buddha and St. Augustine into the singular figure of Tiresias. Also, it is interesting to note that Tiresias as a Greek legendary figure triggered the poet's sub-conscious with exact precision to make him believe that this spiritual culmination of the east and the west (Lord Buddha and St. Augustine) happened within the poet himself. The force of this spiritual union was so strong that the blinded-poet regained his vision. The unseen belief in the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic' orders is shattered and a strong belief towards the 'real' third-order is firmly established. This instigated the poet's unconscious mind to de-subtle the pessimism of 'The Wasteland' with the vigour of optimism towards the end.

T.S. Eliot's sub-conscious mind as exhibited through his masterpiece 'The Wasteland' could also be psycho-analysed by C.G. Jung's theory of 'collective unconscious'.

(b) C.G. JUNG'S 'COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS'

C.G. Jung, a philosopher and psycho-analyst treated the human-self as the totality of all psychic processes. Unlike the theories of Freud, where *libido* was restricted only and only to impulses of sex; Jung proposed that *libido* was energy that could be channelised into any field. He proposed that while the *unconscious* was important, the *self* (*conscious*) was also influenced by social norms and the world around it. The human psyche, postulated Jung, drew upon a set of *primordial images* (Nayar, 73). These *primordial images* are often cross-cultured and are existent for a long time in the *collective imagination* of the human race itself. The human imagination drew upon *image* and *ideas* from *myths* and *legends* that occur across cultures and time-spans. These images emerged from a *collective imagination* common to all mankind and were not restricted to a particular individual or self, and often exhibited *universal images*.

A meticulous and a close study of 'The Wasteland' highlights this feature of the poet's *collective unconscious*. As obvious from the poem that the poet liberally alludes to myths, legends,

symbolism and imagery; both from past as well as present. All these depict universal images of a *lost generation* and are *cross-cultural* in nature. This further leads to suggest that '*The Wasteland*' was not restricted to a limited geographical area but it was to be found across cultures and time-spans. There are many instances in the poem which elevates '*The Wasteland*' and de-restricts its limitations of *time* and *space*. In the poem, Tiresias could not find '*The Hanged Man*' on the *Tarot Cards* which symbolises loss of spirituality and fertility both. This loss was then cross-cultural and sublimed over different time-spans as it alludes to *Jesus Christ* (Luke 23: 20-23) and *Attis*, the Phrygian deity both (James G. Frazer, Chapter 9: *Attis*). Both of them are from different cultural backgrounds with striking parallels. Similarly, the myth of Philomela's violation could be seen parallel to modern day's *loss of chastity*. This similarity suggests that such brute actions weren't restricted to those days contemporary society alone. They were inhibited in the collective unconscious of the very human race since times immemorial. The lament of the Rhine daughters is transmuted to the lament of the Thames' daughters which again manifests the *loss of chastity* across cultures. Likewise, the poet shows *Buddha* and *St. Augustine* culminated into a singular figure of Tiresias, the poet's mouth piece. This convergence of the two great religions, *Buddhism* and *Christianity* foregrounds the different cross-cultural and time-spanned backgrounds. Moreover, it also highlights the essence for purity of spirit in the respective contemporary societies.

Similarly, in the last section of the poem, the poet alludes to the thrice repetitive sound of thunder '*Da*' from *Brihadrankya Upanishad*. While alluding to it, the poet also incorporates the thrice spoken '*Da*' in the contemporary century of his times towards the desire for redemption. This again is an attempt by the poet towards *collective unconscious* where they might have felt that '*Da*' from different culture and different time-period could be the possible anecdote for the redemption of '*The Wasteland*'. Overall, it could be said that the imagination of the poet's '*The Wasteland*' drew upon images and ideas from myths and legends over different cultures and time-periods. The reception of

the poet to see the century of his times as a barren land devoid of redemption could well be seen in the collective unconscious of the past era, where materialism and loss of spirituality has overpowered the human existence. In the past too, such psychic processes of human race contributed towards barrenness and loss of faith. It had been the similar set of *primordial images* which found their way into '*The Wasteland*'. An interrogative retrospect towards the contribution of *C.S. Jung's 'Collective Unconscious'* would be to imagine '*The Wasteland*' without these *primordial images*, that is without myths, legends and symbolisms of the past era which the poet has alluded to. The reader would get only null expressions in their attempt to imagine '*The Wasteland*' by removing these *primordial images*. Hence, it were these *primordial images* which exalted the *collective unconscious* across cultures and time-spans and contributed as universal images which eventually were used by the poet in '*The Wasteland*'.

This psycho-analytic dissection of T.S. Eliot's mind, leads us to believe that the universality of '*The Wasteland*' should not be attributed to the geographical, political or social similarities of war-stricken Europe; rather it were the '*primordial images*' in the form of myths, legends and symbolisms which universalised and mass-appealed the essence of '*The Wasteland*'. Interestingly, the symbolisms and myths used in '*The Wasteland*' could also be codified as *literary symbolism* and *Myth Literature* and further psycho-analysed in terms of *Northrop Frye's 'Archetypal Criticism'*.

(c) **NORTHROP FRYE'S 'ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM'**

Northrop Frye developed *C.S. Jung's* psycho-analysis in literary studies. *Frye* codified *literary symbolism* based on what he termed as *myth Literature*. He drew upon *transcendental* genres such as *Romance (summer)*, *Tragedy (autumn)*, *Irony/Satire (winter)* and *Comedy (spring)*. He further codified these genres and uncovered their basic archetypal structures (Nayar, 73). According to *Frye*, *summer* stood for the *culmination of the year's seasons*, *spring* stood for *fantasy* and *wish-fulfilment* and coldness of *winter /autumn* suited the *disillusioned mockery of satire*. *Northrop Frye's 'Archetypal Criticism'* linked

psychological states with literary symbols which he identified as 'universal'.

The poem begins with an allusion to April as could be observed in the lines 'APRIL is the cruellest month'. With the application of archetypal criticism April represents spring; and further spring could be seen to symbolise fantasy and wish-fulfilment. The poet saw the chaotic-order of the society and the horrors of *World War I* which would have sub-consciously influenced him towards the composition of 'The Wasteland'. The poet might have a strong desire that the society could redeem itself of such frustrations. It was the absence of this wish-fulfilment which unconsciously would have made the poet to pass disparaging remark for April as being *the cruellest month*. Similarly, the poet shows the vision of an unreal city enveloped under the brown fog of a winter dawn as observed in the lines 'Unreal City, Under the brown fog of a winter dawn'. The poet might have observed a loss of spirituality and at the same time affection for materialism in the contemporary society. The metaphor of a winter dawn, as per Frye's archetypal criticism found a suitable parable for the poet's skeptic views on the disillusioned society. It needed to be mocked upon which the poet does by giving the society the adjective of an unreal city. The poet's lost hope to redeem the society of its barrenness found an ascent again when he observed blooming of the corpse of disbelief as evident in the lines 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?' Sub-consciously the poet might have hoped that people in his wasteland would once again turn towards spirituality. Spring is said to be the most favourable time for plants and flowers to bloom. Once again with reference to archetypal criticism, it could be argued that the poet might have fancied that faith should once again creep in which might have made the poet to show a sudden shift in the poem from winter dawn to the season of blooming. In the last section of the poem, the poet makes a reference for sunken Ganga and black clouds as could be observed in the lines 'Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves waited for rain, while the black clouds gathered far distant, over

Himavant'. Both Ganga and black clouds as symbolism represent the summer season in Indian scenario. It is evident through archetypal criticism that summer is the period for culmination of the year's seasons. Much likely, after all the lost hopes and disillusioned views, the poet turns towards the East hoping for redemption. It was this faith of the poet to find answers to all the spiritual problems of the West which sub-consciously might have made the poet to shift to the summer season. The poet might have wished that it should bring an end to all the spiritual problems and redeem 'The Wasteland' of its curse of barrenness.

A literary critic while attempting the task of literary criticism upon a given literary piece, usually looks at overt aspects of form, style, genre, ideas formulated, etc. Meanwhile, the covert aspects of the given literary text remain untouched and isolated. A psycho-analytic criticism of a text offers to look into the unconscious and sub-conscious mind of the writer. A look into the author's mind exposes those untouched and isolated areas which might not just surprise the reader but the author as well. Slips, metonymic displacements and other such tools offer a help to look into the unconscious self of the author. A psycho-analytic look into 'The Wasteland' has revealed many new findings which have remained dormant as of yet. The old belief that the overall tone of the poem is pessimistic has been juxtaposed. The psycho-analytic mode of literary criticism has critically justified that although much of the content of the poem may hint at some sort of cynicism; yet the under-expressed but powerful emotions of the poet, visible only if meticulously observed with the microscopic eye of psycho-analytic criticism makes it evident that 'The Wasteland' is a poem of brighter hope for future. The poet culminates the East and the West into a singular figure which is highly indicative that the brighter hope for future in 'The Wasteland' would be universal in nature. In a nutshell, 'The Wasteland' as a piece of literary text of the post-World War I era has offered ample scope to be dissected through psycho-analytic criticism.

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