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## A study on T.S. Eliot and contemporary feminist movement

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### Abstract

T.S. Eliot's women, on the other hand, are not liberal in spirit. His female companions are powerless. Poverty, exploitation, extortion, violence, destitution, and disease have all been perpetrated against them. His perspective on women's emancipation is limited to men's will. T.S. Eliot grants women one of the fundamental rights, namely the right to speak, but not the right to govern, dominate, reign, or order. He portrays the character of women as being submissive to their men's likes and dislikes. The poor and paralysed women of Canterbury, for example, must endure the brunt of the afflictions and are powerless to save Thomas Becket's life. Despite the Priests' censure, their foreboding of impending disaster goes unnoticed by others. Ordinary women are conversing in a frightened tone about an unknown misfortune in Canterbury. These women are conversing, or more accurately, whispering, on the streets. These women are powerless to prevent impending disaster. Their primary interest is with challenges that arise in everyday life.

**Keywords:** T.S. Eliot, Feminism, Poverty, Exploitation, Extortion, Violence, Destitution

### Introduction

Stearns Thomas On September 26, 1889, Eliot was born in the industrial metropolis of St. Louis, Missouri, in the middle of the United States. On his father's side, his ancestors left Somersetshire, England's East Coker (name of one of the Four Quartets) in 1668 and settled in Boston, New England, where they prospered as merchants. His grandfather was the one who moved to St. Louis from New England and founded a Unitarian church there. Despite the fact that William Greenleaf Eliot, Eliot's strong individual grandfather, passed away a year before Eliot was born. Eliot's family's entire history seemed to be plagued by his memories. The following passage highlights the impact of his grandfather during his early years:

**I never knew my grandfather: he died a year before my birth. But I was brought up to be very much aware of him. So much so, that as a child I thought of him as still the head of the family – a ruler for whom in absentia my grandmother stood as vicegerent. The standard of conduct was that which my grandfather had set; our moral judgments, our decisions between duty and self-indulgence, were**

**taken as if, like Moses, he had brought down the tables of the law, any deviation from which would be sinful.**

Eliot's mother, Charlotte C. Eliot, a well-known poetess in her own right, encouraged him to pursue literature. She attended private schools in Sandwich and Boston and graduated from the Normal School of Framingham in 1862, where she became a champion for women's rights. She worked to define the role of a woman in society and was an Ideal Lady with strong moral principles. She aided the underprivileged by joining the Wednesday Club and Humanity groups. Her poems were published in a number of magazines, including *Our Best Words*, *The Unitarian*, and *The Christian Register*.

Eliot's mother gave him a gift for poetry and play. His mother's influence is evident in his concentration on regeneration and his dramatic ability. Because of his moralistic upbringing and early influences, Eliot absorbed and carried them with him for a long time. The Christian morality of the Eliot family was strongly puritanical, and they were deeply religious. Eliot's home was therefore governed by a widespread adherence to rituals and

conventions. The poet's young and naive mentality was undoubtedly impacted by this. Eliot thus inherited from his family the three fundamental components of his nature: religious, commercial, and literary.

Eliot attended Smith Academy in St. Louis for his early schooling. Students were being trained by William James, George Santayana, Irving Babbitt, and Josiah Royce to realize their own potential. Eliot pursued his education at Harvard, where he studied Latin and Greek. He read John Donne here, and his poetic imagery greatly inspired him. His delicate mind bore a noticeable mark from studying Arthur Symonds's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. He was able to study Verlaine, Corbiere, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé thanks to the book. His relationship with Dante was formed through his study of the *Divine Comedy*. He received a fellowship for travel. At the age of twelve, Eliot started reading Latin, and a year later, Greek, at the Smith Academy in St. Louis. Despite his strong interest in Greek and belief that it was a "much greater language, a language which has never been surpassed as a vehicle for the fullest range and the finest shades of thought and feeling," he was awarded a gold medal for having the best understanding of Latin.

Palmer's method is reminiscent of Eliot's Dante essay. Eliot favored Petronius and Apuleius over other authors in the Latin literature course. Petronius is the source of the epigraph in *The Waste Land* as well as the epigraph and allusion in *The Sacred Wood*. He and Professor Clifford H. Moor read Petronius together, which sharpened his sense of humor.

Bradley's influence came to him at a pivotal point when he was strongly leaning toward Laforgue's ironic approach as a major freeing force. Bradley's distaste for "extreme positions" and his thought's "Catholic, civilized, and universal" characteristics in contrast to "the crude and raw and provincial philosophy of the Benthamites" enthralled him.<sup>31</sup> Bradley guided Eliot in developing his poetic perspective of reality in a conventional, systematic manner.

During his early years, Eliot wrote poetry and relied on French symbolists like Laforgue to provide him the inspiration he needed to rekindle England's dormant literary tradition. In 1908, he acknowledged, there was nothing in the English literary canon to encourage a young man attempting to write poetry. There was a group of vigilant masters in France. Because of this, Eliot's poetry has a French tone and skill, but its subject matter is American.

Eliot visited Bergson's lectures while residing at Sorbourne in Paris and was greatly impacted by his theories. According to Bergson, intelligence is made up of memory, the subconscious, and the surface view of the material world, whereas intuition leads to the direct perception of reality. So, the mind integrates and unites the various senses into a living entity.

Eliot is obviously influenced by Bergson in his thesis of impersonality in poetry. Bergson's theory that life changes and evolves in light of experience also made an impression on Eliot. After moving to London in 1914, Eliot got to know Ezra Pound, the most influential person in the English literary community. Pound had a keen sense of Eliot's abilities. Wyndham Lewis provides insightful commentary on Pound's impact in *The Making of T.S. Eliot*.

**It is no secret that Ezra Pound exercised a very powerful influence upon Mr. Eliot. Mr. Eliot was lifted out of his lunar alleyways and '*fin de siècle nocturno*' into a massive region of verbal creation in contact with that astonishing, didactic intelligence, that is all, 'Genntion' 1920 is a close relative of 'Prufrock', certain matters filtered through an aged mark at both cases, but 'Gerontion' technically is "School of Ezra".**

One other important influence on him in these formative years was the Burgsonian philosopher T. E. Hulme, who encouraged the use of imagist poetry. Hulme promoted concise language that is rich in powerful analogies and vivid imagery. He was the brainchild of a new mentality of the twentieth century.

Upon arriving in London, Eliot encountered financial difficulties and decided to become a teacher. He started working in the Lloyd Bank's foreign department in 1917 and stayed there until 1925. He was appointed director of the publishing house shortly after, which went on to become known as Faber and Faber. He composed a number of quatrain-style poetry between 1917 and 1920, following the French literary style. "Gerontion" is significant in this regard. *Prufrock and Other Observations* first appeared in print in June 1917. Because of Pound and Quinn's influence, he was named assistant editor of *The Egoist* that same month. *The Egoist*, formerly known as the *New Freewoman*, was a "individualist review" managed by Harriet Shaw Weaver. According to Weaver, "the new school campaigned in its paper until it was forced to close in 1919," and the literary part of the publication was already a platform for imagism.<sup>34</sup>

Richmond was much moved by Eliot's *Athenaeum* article. He accepted Eliot as a contributor and focused on poetry from the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Richmond's comments served as the inspiration for Eliot's essays on the drama of that time.

Eliot began working as an editor at *The Criterion* in October 1923. The publication "began to command a position of eminence in the world of the literary periodicals."<sup>35</sup> His *Poems 1909-1925*, which featured "The Hollow Man," were published in 1925. In 1926, 27 essays about Seneca—including "Fragment of a Prologue" and "fragment of an Agon"—were published. In 1930, *Ash Wednesday* first surfaced, and in 1931, incomplete *Coriolanus* did too. Eliot's perspective changed significantly in 1934. In his later years, he became interested in poetic drama. His 1934 piece *The Rock* was his first attempt in this direction. 1935 saw *Murder in the Cathedral* come next. Even though *The Family Reunion* was a disaster in 1939, Eliot was unfazed. *Little Gidding*, *The Dry Salvages*, and *East Coker* made their debuts between 1940 and 1942. *Four Quartets* was formed in 1943 by combining these three pieces with *Burnt Norton*. He penned *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* in 1948. His literary peers had already honored him, including Charles Eliot Norton, who served as Harvard's Professor of Poetry from 1932 to 1933, President of the Classical Association, winner of the 1948 Nobel Prize in Literature, and recipient of the Order of Merit in the same year.

Shaw penned three novels: *The Elder Statesman* (1959), *The Cocktail Party* (1950), and *The Confidential Clerk* (1955). He also wrote studies about poets and poetry in 1957. This was the creation of *An Invisible Poet*, whose uniqueness was only a growth over the course of his career. To borrow Mario Praz's words:

**His idea of the essence of Classicism is largely a polemical one, as it derives from writers who employed that term in order to contrast it with something against which they fought: From Matthew Arnold, who in order to integrate and counteract the Northern qualities of the English proposed to them the example of the literatures of Greece & France; From Irving Babbitt, who had been among Eliot's masters at Harvard and exploded and romantic idea of the world; From the French Polemical writers who flourished at the time Eliot's sojourn in Paris (1910-11), Lasserre, Scilliere, and chiefly Charles Maurras, whose *Avenir de L'Intelligence* (1905) made on Eliot a great impression.**

Eliot has been a huge inspiration and motivator for Urdu literature enthusiasts as well as scholars studying Hindi and Sanskrit. Because of his immense popularity in India, several Indian languages have translated his plays, critical essays, and famous poetry. Additionally, every Indian scholar speaks highly of T.S. Eliot's learned demeanor. But with his never-ending appetite for knowledge, it is nearly impossible to exhaust the influences that went into creating such a learned artist as T.S. Eliot. The following passage is an excerpt from a pen portrait of Herbert Read, a prominent critic of the day, which shows his persona, disposition, and habits:

**He was a serious, not necessarily a solemn man, a severe man, never lacking in kindness and sympathy, a profound man. He could mock folly and he was severe with sin, and there was people he simply did not wish to know. But his circle of friends, though never very large, was very diverse, and he could relax with great charm in the presence of women In personal habits he was scrupulously correct and clean, never a Bohemian in thought and appearance.**

The plays of renowned English writer T.S. Eliot center around the depths of spiritual development, and he was naturally passionate about assisting common people in realizing this awareness. Eliot bore many traits from his ancestors, who were driven by their superior erudition and puritanical thought to better society and educate people. He was raised in a rigorous religious home with a rigid code of conduct from birth, so ideas like original sin, purgation, confession, martyrdom, and salvation preoccupied him constantly. It is discovered that his ideas and personal convictions are reflected in all of his works. Their main concerns are spiritual and social. His only plays that address Christian themes, but not strictly Christian ones, are the first three. These themes include martyrdom, original sin, sainthood, and so on. In his later plays, the modern world takes center stage, transforming asterism into tolerance and renunciation into an embracing of life. His plays rekindle

the interest of the average person in religion and demonstrate its relevance to our lives in the morally complex and uncertain modern world.

### **Feminism**

In general, the modern feminist movement pursued female equality in the same way as feminism from the previous century. However, there are major disagreements in the movement's basic ideas on the nature of the biological differences between the sexes. Compared to modern feminists, the nineteenth-century feminist recognized more distinctions between the "male" and "female" natures. They believed that women were particularly suited for homemaking and childcare because of their innate instincts and the abundance of feminine traits inherited from their mothers. Modern feminists believe that socialization processes have a greater influence on the apparent behavioral differences between men and women than biology does. Feminists now contend that in a society where there is true equality, women would be in a position similar to that of males, who may currently combine their obligations as husband and father with their careers. Nearly everyone participates in this repressive socialization or conditioning, both consciously and unconsciously. Girls are encouraged to be feminine by parents, educators, toy companies, and children's book authors. Most people believe that feminism emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. Joan Kelly skillfully illustrates a strong, four-hundred-year-old heritage of women thinking about women and sexual politics in European culture prior to the French Revolution in her study *Women, History and Theory* (1984). The majority of Anglo-American studies on the women's movement recognized certain pioneers in the French and English Revolutions, as well as in specific individuals like Anne Hutchinson. However, it is only with Seneca that a constantly evolving corpus of feminist theory begins to take shape. French feminism refers to itself as "querrelles des femmes" and asserts a longer history. It is thought that the first person to adopt modern feminist beliefs was Petrarch, also known as Christine de Pisan (1364–1430). She was the pioneer feminist philosopher who ignited the women's movement that lasted for four centuries. The first modern woman was undoubtedly Christine De-Pisan, the poet and writer who brought her compatriots Petrarch and Boccaccio to Parisian society in the early 1400s.

The term "feminism" was not used by the early feminists. It would have been referred to as "Advocates" or "Defenders" of women. From Christine de Pisan to Mary Wollstonecraft, a distinguished line of professional women authors, establishes a perspective that informs the development of ideas. The social and intellectual milieu of the early feminists is reflected in their views. Feminist philosophy was, on the one hand, influenced by the greater demands placed on women by society. Conversely, aristocratic women experienced a significant decline in their economic, political, and cultural influence when compared to both men from their own class and their feudal ancestors. A new gender construction of the domestic lady gave rise to a class of women at the same time. The domestication of middle class women and the waning influence of women of rank are reflected in the ideas of early feminist thought. Many

radical English groups supported religious equality for women in the 1630s and 1650s. Some women in this environment managed to free themselves from the male ecclesiastical rule. Rather than being theorists, these women, like Anne Hutchinson, were "feminists in action." The women of the later revolutionary upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are their heirs. A women's movement for democratic change was sparked by the feminist theory later. There were some fresh concepts floating around on societal restructuring. The female members of a distinctly modern and literary class, representing the upper echelons of a hierarchical society, were primarily responsible for carrying on the struggle. These ladies were the ancestors of what Virginia Woolf referred to as "the daughters of educated men," daughters rising up against dads who had sent some of them to an exclusive society that was off-limits to other women.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, feminism concentrated on securing some fundamental political rights and freedoms for women. These included married women's ability to own property and sign contracts, defendants' ability to include women on juries, and most importantly, the ability to vote. Following a century-long fight, the right to vote was eventually achieved in America in 1920 and in England in 1918. However, literary historians recall Mary Wollstonecraft-the mother-in-law of poet Shelley and the wife of philosopher William Godwin-as one of the first advocates for women's freedom, even in the absence of her important role. She was well aware of the suffering that women endured merely because of their gender. She published *A Vindication of Right of Woman*, influenced by the revolutionary fervor of the moment and her affiliation with radical writers, painters, and philosophers such as Thomas Paine, author of *The Right of Man*, and William Godwin. This book sparked a widespread and violent reaction. Resolving not to read it, Horace Walpole denounced the writer as a "Hyena in Petticoats." Nearly every demand of the women's movement—including those for education, legal representation, voting rights, property rights, and access to certain professions—was foreseen in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. In a similar vein, the unique contribution to awakening feminine consciousness given by John Stuart Mill, son of utilitarian philosopher James Mill. *The Subjection of Women* (1869) was the most divisive and incited intense animosity of all his publications. He promotes the idea that each person's liberty is vital to the advancement of society. For the purpose of demonstrating:

**That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself and now one of chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on one side, nor disability on the other.**

The goal of feminism is to see women's equality achieved. It's an attempt to get women to think like men. Women are just as valuable as males, it is true, but since women do not enjoy the same rights as men, this value must be seen as difference rather than equality. Modern feminism is a historically particular movement that has its roots in British

liberalism (John Stuart Mill) and French enlightenment philosophy (Mary Wollstonecraft). As a result, it is deeply critical of ideas of justice, equality, truth, and freedom. In the final analysis.

**Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society.**

The women's movement gained prominence in politics during the 1960s and brought up a number of topics for discussion on gender, including science, economics, culture, and epistemology. Influenced by the movement, literary critics embarked on an entirely new endeavor. This involves rereading the canon of English literature in order to highlight the patriarchal ideology that served as the foundation for the canon's creation and to enable male-centered writing.

In addition, feminists of the 1980s and 1990s distinguish between gender oppression that is local, racial, and regional, moving beyond the essentializing inclinations of early feminism. Barrett contends that feminist critics may be phallogocentric in their overemphasis on the background of the works while neglecting the reader's role in creating and reproducing meanings.

Prior to the 1960s, feminism was not well recognized; nonetheless, two centuries of women's rights activism preceded it. On this topic, not even the Romantics and Restoration accomplished much. As a result, the 1960s feminist movement's global and particularly Western explosion was a natural consequence of women's rights rather than an accident. The founding text of modern feminism is Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Out of the shadowy, claustrophobic feminist shell, Fanny Barney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen described life from the perspective of women. They emphasized the value of social life, focused on women, and used it as the example. Two significant works on the emancipation of women are Jane Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Woman* (1869) and Margaret Fuller's *Women in the 19th Century* (1845). Virginia Woolf attacked patriarchal society in the 20th century with her several writings collected under the title *Women and Writing*, as well as her 1929 novel *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf is recognized as the pioneering advocate of feminism.

## Conclusion

Feminism is not the same as femaleness or femininity. Feminism is a social movement, femininity is a collection of traits established by culture, and femaleness is a biological issue. Similar to other "isms" that denote intricacy and obscurity, feminism refers to an ideology that supports full equality for women in all domains, including the political, social, economic, cultural, legal, and academic ones. A work that features a female protagonist or multiple female characters that are essential to the main topic or action and who experience injustice due to their gender is considered feminist. There are two types of feminism: implicit and explicit. Explicit feminism highlights the obstacles and struggles women encounter when attempting to subvert the



patriarchal society. This category includes American poet and dramatist Sylvia Plath. This pattern persisted from 1898 to 1955. The most important books in this regard are Margaret Browning's *The Dowry*, David Philips' *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*, and Grant Ellan's *The Woman Who Did*. The rise of implicit feminism occurred around the close of the 20th century. Notable authors in this field are Gertrude Atherton and Constant Harrison. They favor giving women greater independence. They deal with a heroine who was dependent on men in her second marriage and had two or three successful ones due to her previous marriage being vital. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is a seminal work in this area. Feminism is distinct from femaleness and femininity. Femaleness is a biological matter, and Femininity is a set of culturally defined traits. Feminism is a political movement, Femaleness is a biological matter, and Femininity is a set of culturally defined characteristics. Feminism is a theory that pushes for women's complete equality in all domains - political, social, economic, cultural, legal, and academic – like other 'isms' that stand for complexity and obscurity. Feminism refers to a work in which a female protagonist or numerous other female characters are crucial to the fundamental theme or action, and who are subjected to discrimination because of their gender.

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