

Critic response of t. s. eliot's poem, the waste land



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The Waste Land is apparently a poem about World War I and its aftereffects on every aspect of life at the time – the title refers to Europe itself after the end of the war and the struggle to rebuild.. T. S Eliot himself seems to be critical of war and calls for peace with the famous closing line, “ Shantih shantih shantih” which means “ peace” in Sanskrit. Eliot was saying that since Europe had become so vapid and materialistic, it could not return to the dominance it had before the war. He was right – eventually North America and Asia rapidly became competitors to Europe. The poem was written during a dark time in Eliot's life where he was committed to a mental hospital in Switzerland – the fragmented, wild nature of the poem definitely reflects this. Of course, this could be off the mark. The poem is obviously designed to be esoteric and hard to understand, but I suppose that also means it could be interpreted in many different ways. At first glance the poem doesn't seem to really cover the death of European culture due to the war, but many aspects of the fragmented narrative point to this, like the ruined rivers, the death of the young Phlebas, and the thunder above the jungle. The poem is seen through the eyes of Tiresias, a mythological character who was said to be androgynous – Eliot provided a female perspective in a male dominated world.

Thomas Stearns Eliot was a writer and poet originally from Missouri, although he became a British citizen in 1927. He is known for poems like The Waste Land, The Hollow Men and Four Quartets, as well as plays such as The Cocktail Party and Murder in the Cathedral. He was born in St. Louis in 1888 and died in London in 1965 at the age of 76. He is typically seen as one of the most important poets of the twentieth century. Although his body of

work is comparatively small (when put up against other famous poems of the time) he is nonetheless viewed very highly, having received the Order of Merit (in the UK), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (in the US) and the Legion d'Honneur (in France). His style was somewhat satirical and critical, and you can feel undertones of self-deprecation and unhappiness in his work often.

Eliot discusses the decline of religious authority as well, and says that this has led people to become overall more belligerent and depressed. With the line " I will show you fear in a handful of dust" he reaffirms God's power, and that we are all dust in comparison to him. The overall " rebirth" Eliot hints at Europe having to undergo is easily compared to the Christ mythos.

References to Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism are dotted across the verses. Religion was obviously important to Eliot, and he was hurt by its declining influence on the populace.

Eliot seemed to be depressed about the future and what it held for not just him, but everyone. Culture, intellect, dedication to religion, and more all-encompassing aspects of humanity were on the decline in his view. To him, Europe was becoming a surface level, uncultured mess with no dedication or progress being made. His comparison of Europe to a literal wasteland is scathing and heavily critical.