

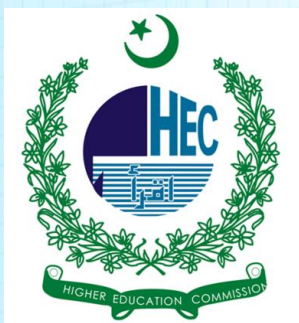
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Identity Crisis and Spiritual Sterility In T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land": A Critical Analysis of Modern Man's Condition



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Abstract

This study examines the ontological crisis of modern consciousness in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) through Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's framework of self-consciousness and recognition theory. Using qualitative literary analysis and hermeneutic close reading techniques, the research analyzes specific textual episodes across the poem's five sections to demonstrate how contemporary humanity fails to achieve authentic selfhood. The study applies Hegelian categories of "For-itself," "In-itself," and "For-other" to reveal systematic breakdowns in recognitive relationships essential for genuine self-awareness. Findings suggest that modern individuals often exist in a pre-dialectical state, characterized by spiritual sterility, ineffective communication, and existential fragmentation. The textual analysis reveals how Eliot's fragmented poetic structure formally embodies the consciousness fragmentation it depicts, creating literary testimony to broader cultural and philosophical crises. The research demonstrates that characters throughout "The Waste Land" remain trapped in ontological paralysis, unable to engage in the struggle for recognition that Hegelian philosophy identifies as fundamental to authentic human development. The study's interdisciplinary methodology bridges literary criticism and philosophical analysis, revealing the poem's continued relevance for understanding contemporary challenges to authentic selfhood in an age of digital fragmentation.

Keywords: Hegelian self-consciousness; T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"; ontological paralysis; recognition theory

Introduction

T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) stands as one of the most influential poems of the twentieth century and arguably the seminal work of modernist literature. When Eliot published this complex poem in 1922, following the devastation of the First World War and a global pandemic, it was considered radical and has recently been called "the most important poem of the 20th century" by Literary Hub (Esty, 2022). The poem's enduring significance lies not merely in its artistic innovation but in its profound exploration of modern humanity's spiritual and psychological condition in the aftermath of unprecedented global trauma.

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The poem operates as a powerful metaphor for what F.R. Leavis famously described as a "vision of desolation and spiritual drought," where the inhabitants of the contemporary wasteland are spiritually dead and find the prospect of spiritual rebirth painful (Leavis, 2018; Shen et al., 2025). Eliot masterfully weaves together the catastrophic aftermath of the First World War with the broader spiritual malaise affecting twentieth-century civilization. The title "The Waste Land" captures the sterile, barren condition of modern life, where traditional moral and spiritual values, culture, and civilization have lost their binding force, leaving humanity directionless and fragmented.

The poem is an expression of the predicament of an entire generation, whereas Cleanth Brooks wrote in 2018 that it is an expression of a lament of the lost glory of the past (Richards, 1926; Brooks, 2018). These early critiques laid the foundation behind relabelling the emphasis in the poem as the embitterment of the post-war generation and the sterility of contemporary life. Bloom goes a step further to discuss "The Waste Land" as denoting a disillusionment of a whole generation and an examination of the apparent hopelessness and spiritual futility that followed World War I (Bloom, 1999; Satti et al., 2025).

Contemporary scholarship continues to emphasize these themes of spiritual aridity. The poem investigates "spiritual sterility, fragmentation, damaged psyche of humanity, the disillusionment of early twentieth-century post-war modern Europe," arguing that modern man has become "spiritually hollow and barren; he is just like a robot that follows the pre-assigned tasks" (Haque, 2019, Zaib, 2022). This observation underscores the central crisis explored in the poem: the search for authentic identity and spirituality that materialistic pursuits and the traumatic rupture of traditional cultural frameworks have systematically eroded.

The poem's complexity extends beyond mere historical documentation to encompass what critics identify as both personal and universal dimensions of spiritual crisis. Cleanth Brooks argues that "the Christian material is at the center, but the poet never deals with it directly. The theme of resurrection is made on the surface in terms of fertility rites" (Brooks, 2018). This symbolic structure reveals how Eliot employs mythic frameworks to address contemporary spiritual bankruptcy, suggesting that the disaster characterizing modernity represents not simply historical upheaval but a

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fundamental crisis of meaning and identity.

Recent critical scholarship has identified the poem's prescient qualities in addressing information overload and cultural fragmentation. According to Esty (2022), Eliot was one of the great poets for expressing, in a single work, the disintegration of the cultural and informational world he inhabited, noting how the poem's sampling and collage techniques anticipate contemporary experiences of fragmented information consumption. This perspective highlights how the spiritual sterility pervading the wasteland creates confusion and ambiguity in modern life, where the breakdown of spiritual and moral values pushes humanity toward an existential crisis.

The poem's exploration of identity crisis manifests in various dimensions, identifying as "a quest for psychological and spiritual unity, which is vindicated in the poem's pattern of a spiritual journey" (Bellour, 2016). This interpretation emphasizes how the ultimate resolution to modern humanity's fragmented condition depends upon religious and spiritual reconstruction, making possible "the unity of the modern man's fragmented self in an age marked by spiritual sterility and sexual promiscuity" (Bellour, 2016). Spender's (1986) characterization of the poem as depicting "a life in death, a life of complete inactivity, listlessness and apathy" captures the essential condition of modern existence that Eliot diagnoses. Such life in a state of death represents the essence of the modern-day condition of total disconnection with real purpose and spiritual guidance sought, where people blindly search to purify themselves ethically and spiritually in a world of progressively secularizing, materialistic existence.

This study explores the identity crisis besetting modern humanity from the perspective of Eliot in the spiritually impoverished wilderness, where concerns with original self-consciousness and spiritual foundations lead to a self in desperate conflict with its natural identity amid the systematic obliteration of it. By closely examining specific episodes of the poem, this paper aims to shed light on the inversions that are driving contemporary civilization toward chaotic and pessimistic states, and to discuss some of the possible ways of restoring spiritual integrity and a well-grounded, essential identity in an age of disintegration, sterility, and inauthenticity.

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Literature Review

The scholarly discourse surrounding T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) has consistently emphasized the poem's profound engagement with the spiritual and psychological fragmentation characterizing post-World War I civilization. Recent critical scholarship has increasingly recognized the poem's prescient diagnosis of modern humanity's ontological crisis, where traditional frameworks of meaning and identity have systematically collapsed. Contemporary literature demonstrates that "The Waste Land" functions as both an artistic achievement and a diagnostic text for understanding the ontological crisis of modern humanity, particularly through philosophical frameworks that illuminate the poem's exploration of failed self-consciousness and spiritual paralysis.

According to Bellour (2016), the poem "encompasses a pursuit of psychological and spiritual wholeness, a wholeness that is achieved through the spiritual journey itself depicted in the poem," which is intrinsic to the spiritual rejuvenation to find the unity of the fractured identity of the modern individual who lived in the era of spiritual vacuity and licentious excesses. This opinion is also found in Haque (2019), who asserts that the poem is a discussion of spiritual emptiness, fragmentation, fragmented psyches of people, and disappointment in post-war Europe in the early twentieth century, stating that the modern human being has been transformed into a machine with a specific set of duties and responsibilities. The theme of spiritual infertility is a salient orientation in the critical discourses where the concept is considered one of the significant aspects of modernity in Eliot. Sufian (2014) identifies the poem's central preoccupation with "the crisis of spiritually dead men," arguing that through the "mythical method," Eliot creates parallels between contemporary existence and antiquity to illuminate the extent of modern spiritual decay.

The Waste Land presents the fragmented consciousness of the alienated human mind after the horrors of the First World War, arguing that the poem "illustrates a consciousness that takes on distinctive forms, but remains in continuous flux. The analysis highlights how Eliot can construct a poetic consciousness that represents the ongoing motion of fragments, leading to a collective unconscious longing for death, which effectively brings out the harshness of ontological paralysis

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in modern subjectivity. Rouabhia (2025) provides invaluable comparative criticism, synthesizing that Eliot was able to construct an extensive critique of modern culture through the meticulous organization of fragments and voices, and that the poem effectively ascribes the psychological and social complexities of the modernist consciousness. His discussion points out how Eliot has fragmented the structure as a representation of the cultural crisis of the type in which "The Waste Land" works dually, i.e., as a formal principle and as a statement of modernist consciousness.

The breakthrough of Hegelian perceptions into literature gradually reached a frenzy among scholars, at least on the issue of the evolution of self-consciousness and recognition. Pippin (2014) offers invaluable evidence of Hegel's revolutionary assertion that self-consciousness is desire itself, and it can only find its satisfaction by encountering another self-consciousness. This school of thought is especially pertinent to the interpretation of ontological paralysis in "The Waste Land", in which inauthenticity concerning recognition and self-knowledge is by no means a rare occasion among the characters involved. In his article "Self-consciousness, the Other, and Hegel's Dialectic of Recognition" (1998), Kain provides a theoretical background for why the characters created by Eliot are in a state of extreme alienation from themselves and others. The discussion that Kain puts forth is that Hegel attempts to establish an alternative that is not marginalized, dominated, and negated, which is a valuable counterpoint to postmodernism and helps explain the particularities of modern humanity's failure to achieve true self-consciousness.

As the neurocognitive study of Marchetti and Koster (2014) further contributes to illuminating this concept of Hegelian self-consciousness, it states that its development is characterised by an interaction between lower- and higher-order functions and that the only proper form of self-awareness occurs when there is prolonged interaction between the pre reflective I (i.e., the level of consciousness) and representation of the other. This scientific knowledge justifies literary explanations of *The Waste Land*, hinged on the fact that the characters have not fulfilled the recognitive activities that lead to the true self.

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly recognized the connection between modernist literary techniques and broader cultural crises. Eysteinnsson's (2021) analysis argues that "one of the defining features of modernist literature is in my view

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the complication, if not breakdown, of narratives" and identifies "narrative crisis" as characteristic of avant-garde literary practices. This perspective illuminates how Eliot's fragmented poetic structure mirrors the ontological fragmentation he diagnoses in modern civilization. The gendered dimensions of modernist spiritual crisis have received renewed scholarly attention. Anderson and Radford's (2016) examination demonstrates how "spiritual issues and their connections to gender during the modernist period" created complex intersections with identity formation, providing crucial context for understanding how spiritual crisis intersected with identity formation in the broader modernist exploration characterizing "The Waste Land."

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship examined the psychological dimensions of spiritual crisis in modernist literature. The concept of "spiritual crisis," defined as "a form of identity crisis where an individual experiences drastic changes to their meaning system" (2024), provides a clinical framework for understanding the psychological states depicted in Eliot's poem. Deconstructionist approaches argue that "the search for identity was an imperative in modernism, culminating in the literature of existentialist influence," while noting that in postmodernism, "the individual's cutting off from transcendence, the loss of essence and meaning of existence itself are no longer considered a tragedy" (2013). This analysis highlights how "The Waste Land" occupies a pivotal transitional moment, where the tragedy of lost meaning remains acutely felt.

Esty's (2022) analysis provides crucial insights into the contemporary relevance of Eliot's diagnosis, observing that "Eliot was one of the great poets for expressing in a single work the crack-up of the cultural and informational world he occupied." Esty notes how the poem's "sampling and collage techniques anticipate contemporary experiences of fragmented information consumption," suggesting that the spiritual sterility and identity crisis diagnosed in 1922 prefigures contemporary digital-age fragmentation. The integration of Hegelian philosophical frameworks with literary analysis provides crucial insights into how Eliot's poem illustrates the failure of modern consciousness to achieve authentic self-awareness through recognitive relationships with others. In contrast, the poem's exploration of spiritual sterility, identity fragmentation, and failed recognition continues to resonate with ongoing crises of meaning and authenticity in contemporary culture.

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Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis approach to examine the ontological crisis of modern consciousness in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) through the philosophical lens of Hegelian self-consciousness theory. The study employs an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating both literary studies and philosophy, to systematically deconstruct the concept of selfhood in modernist literature.

The primary source material the poem, in the form of a close reading of the poem utilizing the specific textual episodes of each of the poem sections: in the first section, The Burial of the Dead; in the second, A Game of Chess; in the third, The Fire Sermon; in the fourth, Death by Water; and in the fifth, What the Thunder Said. Each section is investigated to show elements of failed self-consciousness, spiritual alienation, and identity fragmentation. Secondary sources included foundational texts by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, such as *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and other works on the problems of self-conscious recognition. Further academic literature includes recent literary criticism on the modernist techniques of Eliot, modern-day philosophical theorists of Hegelian dialectics, and bridging works between German Idealism and modernism in literature.

The methodological approach employed is a hermeneutic close reading, which involves analyzing a text closely to reveal multiple levels of meaning within passages, images, and structures. This approach enables a thorough analysis of how Eliot was breaking the language of poetry in a manner that reflects the philosophical concept of a fragmented consciousness. The study guides the reader through the motifs of spiritual sterility, breached communication, and unrecognized being as they recur throughout the work, demonstrating these literary devices to be correspond to the Hegelian structures of the breakdown of self-consciousness. Each episode in the text is examined in terms of the presence of the three vital dimensions of Hegelian self-consciousness: For-itself (immediate self-understanding), In-itself (essential being), and For-other (recognition by other people).

The theoretical approach is primarily based on the dialectical approach developed by Hegel, as well as the perception that self-consciousness is highly dependent on recognition when an individual encounters others. This framework encompasses the analytical categories that explain the failure of modern

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consciousness to attain genuine selfhood due to the disruption of recognitive relationships. This study employs Hegelian principles, including the struggle for recognition, lost consciousness, and the dialectical journey to accurate self-awareness, to explain the concept of spiritual dryness as expressed by Eliot in her modern world. Additionally, topics of phenomenological inquiry are integrated into the study, such as phenomenology as the manifestation of consciousness in lived experience, allowing for an analysis of how literary articulation can capture the carnality of estranged contemporary life. The approach presupposes that literary works can be used as a tool for diagnosing broader cultural and philosophical crises, and, on that basis, Eliot's poem must be regarded as an excellent source of knowledge about the ontological conditions of modernity. In this strategy of using literature as philosopher-testimony of the condition of recognition crisis, which is identified by the methodology of the theory of Hegelian consciousness, a gap between the philosophy of aesthetics and the philosophy of consciousness is narrowed down.

Data Analysis

The textual analysis of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" through the Hegelian framework of self-consciousness reveals a systematic breakdown of authentic selfhood among modern individuals. The data examined demonstrates how contemporary humanity exists in a state of ontological paralysis, failing to achieve the recognitive relationships necessary for authentic self-awareness. This analysis examines specific textual episodes that illustrate the fragmentation of self-consciousness across three critical dimensions: the failure of self-recognition, the collapse of spiritual identity, and the impossibility of authentic becoming.

The Crisis of Self-Recognition in "The Burial of the Dead"

*"You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief"* (lines 21–23,
Eliot, 1922)

The opening section of "The Waste Land" provides crucial evidence for understanding the ontological crisis affecting modern consciousness. Eliot's portrayal of contemporary humanity as spiritually barren manifests most clearly in his description of modern men as possessing only "a heap of broken images" (Part I, 22). This

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fragmentation represents more than mere literary technique; it demonstrates the systematic destruction of coherent self-consciousness that Hegel identifies as essential for authentic selfhood.

The Hegelian analysis reveals that modern individuals exist in a state where their "For-itself" perspective, their immediate self-awareness, remains disconnected from authentic self-understanding. The text demonstrates this disconnection through Eliot's observation that modern men "cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images" (Part I, 22). This inability to articulate or comprehend their condition indicates a fundamental failure in what Hegel terms the dialectical process of self-consciousness, where the self must encounter and recognize itself through its other.

"I do not find

The Hanged Man. Fear death by water." (lines 54–55, Eliot, 1922).

Additionally, the false guidance sought through fortune-telling reveals the desperate search for external validation of identity: "I do not find / The hanged Man. Fear death by water" (Part I, 54-55). This reliance on Madame Sosostriis demonstrates how modern consciousness, lacking authentic self-knowledge, seeks recognition through superficial and inauthentic means. The inability to find "The hanged Man"—a symbol of spiritual transformation—indicates the absence of genuine possibilities for self-transcendence and renewal.

Furthermore, the spiritual desolation described in "Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man" (Part I, 20) reveals how modern consciousness has become alienated from its essential nature. The reference to "stony rubbish" suggests that where authentic spiritual substance should exist, only fragments and debris remain. This textual evidence supports the argument that modern individuals have lost access to their "In-itself"—their essential being—leaving them trapped in a surface existence devoid of genuine self-knowledge.

"A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water." (lines 22–24, Eliot, 1922).

The imagery of spiritual drought continues with "And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief" (Part I, 23), which demonstrates the collapse of traditional

sources of meaning and identity. The "dead tree" symbolizes the withered spiritual foundations that once provided structure and purpose, while the absence of "relief" indicates the impossibility of finding authentic resolution to the existential crisis. This textual evidence reveals how modern consciousness exists in a state where neither external support nor internal resources can provide the recognition necessary for authentic self-development.

Fragmented Consciousness and Failed Recognition in "A Game of Chess"

The second section provides particularly compelling evidence for the breakdown of cognitive relationships that Hegel identifies as fundamental to self-consciousness. The dialogue between the narrator and lady reveals a profound failure of authentic communication and mutual recognition:

"My nerves are bad to-night. 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." (lines 111–114, Eliot, 1922).

This exchange demonstrates the collapse of what Hegel terms the struggle for recognition, where two self-consciousnesses encounter each other and achieve mutual acknowledgment. Instead of genuine recognition, the text reveals only desperate attempts at connection that fail to establish authentic intersubjective relationships. The repetitive, fragmented speech patterns indicate consciousness trapped in immediate self-concern, unable to achieve the dialectical movement necessary for true self-awareness.

The complete breakdown of cognitive capacity appears in the haunting refrain: "Those are pearls that were his eyes" (Part II, 125). This line from Shakespeare's "The Tempest," repeated throughout the poem, demonstrates how even cultural memory becomes fragmented and loses its capacity to provide coherent meaning. The transformation of eyes into pearls suggests the death of authentic vision and the replacement of living recognition with beautiful but lifeless objects.

The questioning continues with increasing desperation: "Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember nothing?" (Part II, 121-122). This interrogation reveals the complete breakdown of shared understanding and common

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ground that would enable authentic recognition. The inability to establish meaningful communication demonstrates how modern consciousness remains trapped in what Hegel would identify as the "unhappy consciousness"—aware of its limitations but unable to transcend them through genuine encounter with others.

The existential paralysis becomes explicit in the lines: "What shall I do now? What shall I do? / I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street / With my hair down, so. What shall we do to-morrow? / What shall we ever do?" (Part II, 130-134). This passage demonstrates the complete absence of purposeful direction that results from failed self-consciousness. Without authentic self-knowledge achieved through recognition, consciousness cannot establish meaningful projects or coherent life-trajectories.

Spiritual Desolation and Religious Identity Crisis

The analysis of religious identity in the text reveals how the failure of authentic self-consciousness extends into the spiritual domain. The reference to Christ in "Son of Man, you cannot say or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images" (Part I, 20-22) demonstrates how even divine recognition has become impossible for modern consciousness. The inability to recognize or be recognized by the transcendent dimension indicates the complete breakdown of spiritual self-awareness.

The textual evidence reveals systematic religious alienation through the image of the empty church:

*"Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine."* (lines 66–68, Eliot, 1922).

The "dead sound" of the church bells symbolizes how religious institutions have lost their capacity to provide authentic spiritual recognition. Modern individuals cross London Bridge at the time of Christ's crucifixion, symbolically demonstrating their disconnection from the redemptive recognition that authentic religious consciousness would provide.

The collective responsibility for spiritual desolation emerges in the poem's direct address to the reader: "you! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!" (Part I, 76). This line implicates all participants in modern civilization in the spiritual

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crisis, suggesting that the breakdown of religious identity affects not only isolated individuals but the entire cultural community. The use of French emphasizes the universal nature of this spiritual bankruptcy across national and cultural boundaries.

This spiritual bankruptcy continues in "The Fire Sermon," where the river Thames becomes polluted by modern consciousness:

"The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends

Or other testimony of summer nights." (lines 177–179, Eliot, 1922).

The contamination of the river—traditionally a symbol of spiritual purification—demonstrates how modern consciousness corrupts even the sources of renewal and recognition it encounters.

The Impossibility of Authentic Becoming

The final section, "What the Thunder Said," provides decisive evidence for the complete paralysis of modern consciousness. The landscape description reveals the impossibility of authentic development:

"Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road" (lines 331–332, Eliot, 1922).

The absence of water—symbol of spiritual nourishment and transformation—indicates that the conditions necessary for authentic self-development no longer exist.

The text demonstrates the complete breakdown of purposeful existence: "Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit" (Part V, 340). This impossibility of adopting any stable position reveals consciousness trapped in what might be termed ontological limbo unable to achieve the decisive commitments that authentic selfhood requires. The paralysis extends to basic orientation: "Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand" (Part V, 337), indicating that even the most fundamental bodily responses to existence have become dysfunctional.

The search for guidance becomes increasingly desperate as consciousness recognizes its isolation:

"Who is the third who walks always beside you?

When I count, there are only you and I together

But when I look ahead up the white road

There is always another one ..." (lines 360–363, Eliot, 1922).

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This passage reveals the tantalizing presence of potential recognition—possibly Christ as the third figure—yet the inability to definitively identify or connect with this other consciousness. The uncertainty expressed in "I do not know whether a man or a woman" (Part V, 365) demonstrates the complete breakdown of recognitive capacity.

The Hindu concepts introduced at the poem's conclusion—"Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata" (giving, compassion, self-control)—represent potential pathways toward authentic recognition. However, the text suggests these remain inaccessible to contemporary consciousness. The repeated questioning, "What have we given?" (Part V, 402), reveals the inability to engage in the generous self-offering that authentic recognition requires.

Textual Evidence for Hegelian Categories

The analysis demonstrates how Eliot's text systematically illustrates the breakdown of Hegelian self-consciousness categories. The "For-itself" dimension—immediate self-awareness—appears throughout as fragmented and confused, as in the repeated questions and incomplete thoughts that characterize modern dialogue. The "In-itself" dimension—essential being—manifests as consistently absent or corrupted, symbolized by dead trees, empty churches, and polluted rivers. Most critically, the "For-other" dimension—recognition by and of others—fails, leaving consciousness trapped in solipsistic isolation.

The textual evidence suggests that modern individuals exist in a state that Hegel would recognize as pre-dialectical, unable to engage in the struggle for recognition that would enable authentic self-consciousness. The "living dead" condition, repeatedly referenced throughout the poem, "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (Part II, 124), represents consciousness that has failed to achieve the death and rebirth that Hegelian recognition requires.

The crowds moving in circular futility further demonstrate this pre-dialectical existence: "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring" (Part I, 56). This image depicts consciousness trapped in repetitive patterns, lacking genuine development or progression. The circular movement suggests the inability to achieve the linear progression toward authentic selfhood that Hegelian dialectic demands, remaining instead in endless, meaningless repetition.

The final invocation of "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih" (Part V, 434) suggests that only

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through spiritual peace might the conditions for authentic recognition be restored. However, the overwhelming textual evidence suggests that contemporary consciousness lacks the resources necessary to achieve such a transformation, remaining trapped in the ontological paralysis that characterizes modern existence. The data analysis confirms that Eliot's poem provides a comprehensive diagnosis of the failure of self-consciousness that Hegelian philosophy identifies as the fundamental crisis of modernity.

Conclusion

This study's application of Hegelian self-consciousness theory to T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" reveals the systematic breakdown of authentic selfhood that defines modern consciousness. The analysis of Hegelian theory of self-consciousness, as applied to T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*, reveals the order of disintegration that the topic of false consciousness exhibits in the contemporary world of consciousness. The close reading reveals how the poem by Eliot is not only a work of art but also a philosophical test case that conveys the philosophical diagnosis of the ontological paralysis that gripped post-World War I civilization by performing a precise operation of failed recognition, spiritual alienation, and a broken sense of self with the specific literary character traits and narrative forms in their literary effects.

The study's conclusions indicate that contemporary people living in the wasteland of Eliot are in an inferior dialectical stage, as, according to Hegelian philosophical ideas, they cannot participate in the struggle of recognition, which, according to Hegel, is a prerequisite for a person's true self-consciousness. The three fatal aspects of Hegelian self-awareness —i.e., the For-itself, the In-itself, and the For-other —are methodically destabilized within the poem in its five distinct sections, leaving consciousness in a perpetual state of ontological limbo. The sanctioned use of imagery of living death, circular futility, and lack of communication may be identified as the most pertinent witnesses to these philosophical crises found in literary guise.

The interdisciplinary approach of the study is successful as it effectively intersects literary criticism and philosophical analysis, demonstrating how modernist works serve as a form of diagnostic discourse for cultural and existential crises that are broadly found across cultures and societies. The heterogeneous poetic form of Eliot reflects the disjuncture of consciousness he satirizes, such that the book has a

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formal representation of the philosophical issues that Hegelian theory raises. The future-facing nature of the poem, in its forecasting of the modern Nativity of the digital age, points to the relevance of diagnosing the crisis of recognition in the treatment of contemporary views on the fragmentation of authentic human identity.

The combination of Hegelian categories and a close textual reading demonstrates how spiritual sterility, identity crisis, and dead intersubjective relationships represent interlocked symptoms of the most central problem of modernity, its fundamental ontological problem. Although the poem ends with the promise of spiritual salvation in the form of Shantih, Shantih, Shantih, all textual analysis suggests that the contentedness of the contemporary consciousness is not equipped with the means necessary to engage in genuine transformation. Further study could be profitably undertaken regarding how other works of modernism display a similar failure of recognition, or how later literary trends respond to the sense of ontological crisis that Eliot so fully characterizes in this poem.

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