

A new way of being, the spirituality of the world in the poem Waste Land

Judy Michael (Research Scholar)

Department of English, Faculty of Humanities
Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam University, Indore, Madhya Pradesh
jmfk197913@gmail.com
9645441185

Dr. Priti Koolwal (Research Guide)

Professor (Eng.lit)
Department of English, Faculty of Humanities
Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam University, Indore, Madhya Pradesh
preetikoolwal273@gmail.com
9993464166

Abstract

T.S Eliot in “*The Waste Land*” marks a quest associated with spiritual unity that is vindicated in paradigm of the poem’s spiritual journey. This article concentrates on bringing out the spirituality of world that is envisaged through Eliot in his aforementioned poem. Eliot displays the West in modern age to be void of spiritual life due to which it has experienced a nullified form of spiritual values. Additionally, absence of religion tends to render modern world nothing but a “*waste land*”, according to the poet. Eliot interprets through his poem that in modern world, humans tend to sink into a desert associated with spirituality and there is a continuous struggle for searching peace and spiritual home for the humankind. It is essential to note that the “*formlessness of the poem*”, complies with fragmented and divided form of psychological make-up of the persona. It delivers the poem a unified form of structure of spiritual sterility. It also illuminates emotional carnality and tend to search for proper purgation as well as salvation. Eliot also enhances best possible symbolism that evokes “*Christian faith*”, and assures real form of possibility associated with redemption. Finally, this article has brought out the best interpretation of Eliot’s view of religion as a protective shield against the modern day trauma. Moreover, it views the poem as a potential quest related to spiritual illumination as well as psychological unity with context to the modern world.

Keywords- *Transcendent, Salvation, Christian faith, Spiritual journey and Sentimentalism*

Introduction

“*The Waste Land*”, by T.S Eliot was published in the year 1922. It contributed to various shifting scenario as well as multiple form of voice and potential changes in form, which summed up state associated with the modern consciousness. Eliot through his poem searched for a new form of spirituality in a world that have been emptied of religious belief and spirituality. The poem itself contributes to various allusions towards religion, occult as well as mythology while numerously contradicting plight with society. It is an essential form of poem that have been responsible for screaming the spirituality which was withered out due to the cultural dismay and fallen grace of the European society in the post war times associated with WWI.

Desire and Spiritual Crisis

"The Waste Land", comprises of carnal desires while potentially craving hearts. It is evident in the poet's confession, which is *"What have we given? we have existed"*. These lines in the poem refer to emotions as well as desires that makeup an individual but waste landers are not subjected towards controlling their instincts (Brooks, 1966). Therefore it assures that sensual victories over spiritual aspects. Additionally, the poem also brings out sexuality that becomes an affair of illicit associations and relationships, which shuts down sentimentalism and spirituality in the poem. Excessive as well as morbid form of desires is illustrated in the poems, which have resulted in ruining lives present in the modern era.

It is essential to note that numerous critics view the poem to be a potential illustration of *"degradation of spiritual values and morality"*, in the modern age. According to the *"critic Coote"*, Eliot marks a profound as well as very moving illustration of modern age spiritual plight (Coote, 1985). The opening lines associated with the poem signals centrality associated with the desires along with senses of man that results in extreme suffering along with utmost misery related to men of modern age. The poet also views month of April as the cruellest form of month, which also suggest that ignited senses of men are dangerous due to they being potentially awake and resulting in extreme lust as well as desire. Therefore, desires of men needs to be left hidden.

The first section related to the poem, that is *"The Burial of the Dead"*, Eliot discusses inability of controlling desire, which is an excitement as well as a thrill at the same time related to *"risk of a sleigh ride"*. It implies that as people tend to permit their feelings along with emotions towards blindly guide them or direct their ways, it tend their minds towards slowly losing proper grip and could be driven compulsively into devastation and spiritual decline. In this context, the portrayal of *"crowds of people, walking round in a ring"*, in the poem implies waste landers tend to roam in an aimless manner in pursuit of potential pleasure, excitement as well as comfort (De Laszlo, 1958). This is because lives of such men are meaningless and completely devoid of any form of spiritual guidance. Therefore, Eliot through his poem portrays a potential crisis associated with spirituality, which is a result of valorisation associated with sensual aspects over the spiritual attributes of men. Thus, it has resulted in leaving the men of modern times with a pessimistic, morbid as well as despairing mood.

The Religious Crisis in the Poem

It is essential to note that the poem also illustrates decadence of spirituality present in the Western society that is evident from Marie present in *"The Burial of the Dead"*, section associated with the poem. Her pure anxiety along with insistence regarding not being Russianare is based on exclusion of spirituality or religion (God). It is a reaction towards the existing communist system and evokes a victory associated with

secularism present in the modern times while triggering “*decay of faith*”, in the Western society (Eliot, 1964). Eliot portrays that all form of secular as well as psychological therapies are not subjected to offer solace towards man or relief regarding the maladies present in the soul. However, religion marks a recuperative form of power, which helps in finding the meaning of life especially in this modern age that is full of lust and sensual aspects over the spirituality. The potential ruin and extreme decadence present in modern times are further attributed towards spiritual sterility, which is brought through the modernity.

The arguments further justify reasons in which Eliot utilises strong form of symbolic images and depicts the same in terms of describing devastation of the spirituality aspects. The strong metaphor used by the poet regarding water, for instance, tends to play a crucial part in the poem. The absence related to water, in “*The Waste Land*”, potentially suggests absence of proper faith, spirituality as well as salvation of modern men. Additionally, portrayal associated with “*dryness and sterility*”, present in the aforementioned section tend to symbolise dryness related to the spirit of modern men (Eliot, 1968). In this context, image related to the dry form of stone that do not comprise of any sound of water evokes a sense of lacking spirituality and moral-values in the twentieth century. This could be strongly contradicted with reference to biblical times, in which Moses comprised a proper ability of procuring water from dry rocks, utilising and incorporating his “*divining*”, rod for helping the thirsty me of Israel that roamed down the desert. With contradiction to the mentioned part, the waste-landers present in the poem, symbolizes modern men that are not being able to find no water among any rock. The immense hope related to drawing water from red-rock is a strong metaphor used in the poem for bringing out substance from potential matter. Eliot portrays lack of faith and spirituality in the modern era that is leading to decaying of faith of modern men in the twentieth century.

Additionally, the poem also brings out a similar form of image associated with “*dead sound on the final stroke of nine*”, which evokes the time of crucifixion of Jesus, bringing out the Christian or biblical reference to the poem (Ferber, 1999). The image tend to portray Church of modern times as a potential decaying and fallen house, that results to the decaying faith and spirituality decadence of modern. Therefore, London turns into an unreal form of city or a hellish place to dwell in which people cross church in theirway towards work. Therefore, the poem portrays that people overlook a holy place, whichoften tend to symbolize lack of grace along with salvation among modern times. The red rock in the poem is a strong symbol to remind people or waste-landers in the poem that they are void of their spirits. “*The Red Rock*”, is a strong symbolic aspiration associated with religion or faith. Therefore, the poet directly invites modern men of Western society or waste-landers for entering God’s kingdom, giving them a hope for attaining the decaying spirituality and faith through his poem. Apart from this “*the dead tree*”, which is present in the first section of the poem tend to symbolize the lack of faith.

As per Campbell the story of Christ indulges a sublimation of a very vegetal image. Jesus is the fruit of the tree, symbolising the potential fruit associated with eternal form of life, which comprised of second forbidden form of tree present in “*Garden of Eden*”. In this aspect, the dead tree present in the poem could be overviewed as a potential antithesis related to the “*Tree of Life*” (Morrison, 1996). In this context, demise of tree marks a suggestive form of spiritual crisis. In the second section of the poem, that is “*A Game of Chess*”, Eliot marks a symbolism associated with wicked play with sexual or forbidden desires along with potential emotions.

In this context, Eliot's reference associated with Cleopatra marks a significant role in terms of portraying destructive influences related with excessive form of desires. It portrays or indicates the case of "*Antony and Cleopatra*", which lost their ability of monitoring or potentially controlling sexual form of desires, which resulted in wiping out the empire. Therefore, Eliot strongly views that inability of controlling desires results in discontent along with degeneration associated with modern form of civilization. In this context, this section also discusses that waste-landers are further scared of attaining salvation as per the poet. "*Death by Water*", in this section marks a strong symbolic form of representation regarding the soul's rebirth process which is further frightening to the waste-landers (Unger, Leonard, 1970). Therefore, it marks an extreme form of denial associated with the spiritual life of modern men.

The Poem's References to Buddhist Fire Sermon Symbolizes Spiritual Alignment

Eliot reinforces an ideology of subjecting his poem with a loose form of mythic structure that is drawn from an "Arthurian legend" and a work associated with different types of religious study. In this context, the typist present in "*The Fire Sermon*", section of the poem marks a good form of instance which involves him of copying or potentially repeating things that have been already stated by other people. When the typist gets back to home her food is further processed and arranged in tins and even her sex-life comprises of mechanical as well as repetitive terms, which Eliot properly captures with his utilisation associated with regular form of quatrains in the poem. It is essential to note that Eliot states that the music which is listened by the typist is contradictory to the kind of music that have been listened by Ferdinand on enchanted island in "*The Tempest*". Therefore, it implies that modern life has been subjected to potential loss of every sense associated with magic as well as meaning. The poet also utilises the story associated with "*The Fisher King*", which also marks a strong sense of allegory associated with the modern world. In this context, Eliot portrays that the king has been further wounded in groin, and it impacted the kingdom adversely in which the King rules. Therefore, once fertile as well as abundant form

of soil of the kingdom has further stopped towards yielding any form of crops. Therefore, the land has resulted in terms of turning to nothing but waste-land.

Desire also comprises as one of the prominent and clear concern that is associated with the poem. In this context, the sections of "*The Fire Sermon*", in which Sweeney and Mrs Porter respond as per the rhythms related to hormones, is subjected to out of grace related to any form of ritual. Similarly, the image related to fisherman in term of "*fishing in a dull canal.....gashouse*", comprises of a best form of objective that is correlative in terms of sexual incest (Weston, 2011). According to critiques, to fish in proper Biblical sense is towards seeking potential salvation as well as eternal life. However, in the Waste-Land, the spiritual or religious implications have been further lost. Therefore, the implications are quite different in terms of every standard. The fisher-king presently in the poem do not catch or clean exhilarating form of medium in an industrially-polluted form of canal. Therefore, these lines tend to suggest illicit form of sexual action associated with most impersonal kind. In this context, fishing in dull or industrially polluted canal further suggests search regarding the self-fulfilment, which is not present in terms of religion but in terms of sexuality. This is relatable to another form of instance associated with the "*Thames- daughters*", which lost their dignity due to their sexual desire, which they could not control. Such form of desire could not procure any

kind of individual satisfaction or terms of pleasure.

Eliot portrays "*The Fire Sermon*", as a potential form of reminiscent associated with the "*Buddha's Sermon*", that presented man tends to burn in fire associated with desire, greed as well as lust. According to Buddha, man tends to feel complete and satisfied when he is adequately detached from sensual pleasure or lust. This form of detachment further liberates man from all forms of selfish desires for making satisfied as well as happy from the inside while reaching ultimate standards of satisfaction or satiety. The poem beautifully depicts that as per Buddha all the things are present on fire and the impressions of things are further received through eye is also on fire. A wise man therefore conceives potential disgust for things related to senses, that he tends to remove his heart or removing the cause associated with suffering.

The Wasteland as a strong symbol for modern men to control lust and desire

Eliot depicts that the only way present out of the waste-land is towards freeing oneself from properly blinding power associated with desire. Buddhism further promises towards offering man to palpable form of solutions to their misery while attempting to free them from the uncontrollable lust which inflicts in the modern time. It can be stated that the poet's attraction towards Buddhism has not been a simple philosophical perspective. In this context, Nirvana constitutes to be potential extinction as well as annihilation associated with the desires. Nirvana also comprises of freedom from all form of sensual and desirable attachments of modern men. Therefore, Eliot displays that freedom could only be attained through freeing oneself from strong sense of lust as well as desire

In this context, "*The Waste Land*", is full of various manifestations associated with lust and Eliot tend to illustrate ways in which inhabitants are further enslaved and bound through lust and desire. Freedom can therefore come when the lust has been potentially over-come by the modern men. Eliot displays a new way of looking towards spirituality and that is through turning towards God. In this aspect, Marie voices the potential viewpoint of Eliot as

"In the Mountains, there you feel free" (Eliot, 1968, p27)

The above line displays the potential freedom, which Marie is further longing for and portrays a proper form of freedom from desire. It is again alignment of Christianity in which mountain tends to stand as a proper symbol associated with the enlightenment of spirituality. In Biblical references, mountains comprises of sites associated with revelation to natural along with supernatural aspects (Coote, 1985). Therefore, the quote assures that quester in "*The Waste Land*", searches for potential transcendence amidst spirituality. Therefore, Eliot makes Marie a proper mouthpiece of the poem that has a deep yearning in terms of attaining purification.

It is significant to note that the water, that is a way towards salvation as described in "*the Fire Sermon*", is subjected towards becoming polluted. The strong image associated with the polluted river tends to turn into a place related to the prostitution aspect, which symbolizes polluted form of soul. It is significant to note that images of water along with the fish are potentially considered as an ancient form of symbol associated with the fertility aspects. Therefore, symbol of fish and water marks a symbol related to faith in Christianity or Biblical

references. The fish marks a pure Biblical form of sense towards seeking salvation along with eternal form of life. In contradiction to this, the waste-land comprises of the fish that is not symbolic aspect associated with the forms of spirituality as the waste-lander or modern man tends to be fishing in a dull or industrially polluted form of canal. Therefore, the fisher is extremely unlikely for catching any kind of fish as it is not properly wise towards fishing in any winter evening or in a dirty or polluted canal. Therefore, protagonist of the section associated with "*The Fire Sermon*", seems potentially to be present at nothing but the "*edge of collapse*", as they comprise of very little hope related to receiving any kind of illumination in the religious perspective.

Eliot asserts that a weak form of management associated with potential instincts or a permanent form of failure for gaining gratification could lead to neurosis. Therefore, Eliot states that desire is a strong sense of potential destruction, which is threatening towards the existence of man. He explains regarding proper experiences associated with his sexual desire along with religion. However, Eliot also confesses that it is proper religion, which comprises of him as a durable form of satisfaction. Therefore, the poem by Eliot could be considered as a potential recapitulation associated with the aforementioned experiences. Eliot in the poem assets a concrete form of image related with the spiritual drouth. The poem is subjected to occurrence partially in real-world of the contemporary parts of London, while the other half is situated in a haunted form of wilderness of the waste-land present in the medieval times (Brooks, 1966). Therefore, the poem further reflects not only mental state associated with existence of modern man but also screams Eliot's ways of seeking spirituality in the age of spiritual collapse. Before the conversion of Eliot into Anglo-Catholicism, the poet experienced a long form of process associated with the struggle as well as spiritual form of torment, that have been portrayed in "*The Waste Land*". This could be associated with his poem not being only a literary form of piece but also constituting and travelling a timeless aspect of journey, which allows modern man to overview reflection associated with their lives.

The Spiritual Pilgrimage as a Conclusion of the Poem

Eliot could be depicted as a potential pilgrim that traverses a waste-land in potential quest for grace, while reaching the spiritual truth. The last section associated with the poem marks rich sense of symbolism in terms of evoking proper Christian faith along with endorsing real possibility associated with redemption. The protagonist of the poem is subjected to seeking for water, which is a quest associated with personal form of salvation. The coming of rain, that suggests potential purification along with baptism associated with humanity, is adequately related with an Indian symbol of "*enlightenment*". It is essential to note that "*The Cock*", whose crow in Gospel further announces betrayal related to Christ sings further for awakening humanity towards a new form of start. It marks birth associated with a new kind of order implying a new instance of life. Therefore, the cock further announces the new dawn of life, which is capable for lifting up the weight related to suffering and core darkness of the life.

The last section associated with the poem also is subjected to symbolizing "*House of God*". In this context, the success related to quest of Eliot in "*The Waste Land*", comprises of a psychological as well as spiritual form of aspect. The words associated with the thunder further confer on protagonist of the poem offering a divine call. The thunder, as illustrated in the poem assures delivery of self-control while preaching three disciplines, that is required to be

properly followed, which are “*give, sympathize and control*”. It is again a biblical reference that son of God or Jesus came down in this world for being potentially crucified for awakening hearts towards compassion and help the world from suffering. Similarly, the reference of wounded kind is maimed king related to the Grail legend, which is subjected towards being a potential counterpart of Christ. He is present for evoking proper compassion along with bringing a dead form of wasteland towards life. The poet emphasizes on proclaiming purification as well as salvation through abandoning the world while seeking mental satisfaction, loneliness and solitude. Therefore, the protagonist’s loneliness during the ending of the poem marks a proper quality of a potential mystic, who has been able to attain spiritual awareness. The poet behaves like Buddha, which is responsible for seeking solitude while ending line of the poem further carries the poet’s movement to a transcendental form of spiritual experience. Therefore, it can be concluded that the poet’s experience of individuality the poem resembles movement associated with relational to transcendental form of experience.

Bibliography

Brooks, Cleanth. (1966). *The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth. In Cleanth Brooks. Modern Poetry and the Tradition.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Coote, Stephen. (1985). *The Waste Land.* London: Penguin Critical Studies

De Laszlo, Violet S.(1958). *Psyche and Symbol: A Selection From the Writings of C.G. Jung.* New York: Doubleday & Company, INC.

Eliot, T. S. (1964). *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley.* London: Faber and Faber.

Eliot, T.S. (1968). *The Journey of the Magi. (1968). In The Waste Land and Other Poems.* London: Faber and Faber.

Ferber, Michael. (1999). *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols.* New York: Cambridge University Press

Morrison, Paul. (1996). *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Paul de Man.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Unger, Leonard. (1970). *T.S. Eliot.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Weston, Jessie L. (2011). *From Ritual to Romance.* New York: Dover Publications