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T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*: A critical analysis

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Abstract

The poem *The Waste Land* gave a shock that had a curative effect to the crazy world. It was a great positive achievement and one of the first importances in the history of English poetry. This paper attempts to make a critical study of the different sections of the poem in order to justify their titles. The purpose of this paper is also to elucidate the influences of different spiritualistic cults on Eliot that forms the major section of his philosophy in this poem. In the first section the conflict in the poem is presented in the opening lines where in image, rhythm and association, the themes are given their first statement. The second part entitled '*The Game of Chess*' deals directly with the artificiality and lack of human mythical meaning in the central fertility symbol, in the marine relation of men and women. One of the important themes of '*The Waste Land*' is 'a vision of dissolution and spiritual drought'. This spiritual drought arises from the degeneration, vulgarisation, and commercialisation of sex. In the third section entitled 'The fire Sermon' Eliot was greatly influenced by Buddhist philosophy. *The Waste Land* has ample influence of the Rig Veda. This opens with a description of Nature. The Word nature takes a different meaning if we relate it to the primitive Arfan cult of nature and the season have a different meaning if we try to imagine what they mean far the singers of the Rig-Veda.

Keywords: Dissolution, spiritual drought, commercialisation, artificiality, human, mythical, fertility, symbol, nature and the season.

Introduction

T.S. Eliot began writing *The Waste Land* at Margate and completed it at Lausanne in the autumn of 1921. Eliot showed the draft to Ezra Pound who gave some constructive suggestions to him about the structure of the poem. He persuaded Eliot not to use as epigraph a quotation from Conrad's Heart of Darkness, not to use Gerontion as a prelude to *The Waste Land* to retain the section called 'Death by Water' and to delete about one third to one half of the lines. Eliot's decision to accept Pound's suggestions is largely responsible for the fragmentariness of this poem. It also accounts largely for the obscurity of the poem. "It is possible", says John press, "that the deleted passages contained matter which would have made *The Waste Land* more logically coherent than the final verses has proved to be" (25).

Textual Analysis

The Waste Land which is regarded as an extremely difficult poem gave the world a shock that had a curative effect, to the crazy world. It was a great positive achievement and one of the first importances in the history of English poetry. *The Waste Land* cannot be made comprehended without an understanding of symbolism in the poem. The basic symbol, that of *The Waste Land*, i.e. taken from Miss Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. In the legends which she treats there, the land has been blighted by a curse. The Crops do not grow and the animals cannot eat. The plight of the land summed up by, and connected when the plight of the lord of the land the fisher king, who has been rendered important by maiming or sickness the curse can be removed only by the tell the meaning of the Varian symbols which are displayed to him in the castle. of fear and reluctance which drive him back to safe forgetfulness. Then without transition the poem shifts to a rhythm of release and lightness. But it is a release into an artificial and sophisticated world where seasons reflect but the change of scenery. It is a world of sports and travel of the light superficial chatter of a rootless cosmopolitan culture, a world inhabited by tourists, rolling stones which are no part of the basic types who inhabit *The Waste Land*.

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A handful of dust, though it may be symbolic of death can at the same time become fruitful soil with the help of 'spring rain'. But whence this 'Waste Land' shall come the life giving rain? At first we are given a vision of the desert in all its perches heat and drought; then the hope or rather the yearning for relief and shade, the half-mocking invitation to come and find something different from the loneliness and emptiness; and finally the grim sardonic revel at of human reality without the shad *The Waste Land* was divided by T.S. Eliot into five sections.

In the first section the conflict in the poem is parented in the opening lines where in image, rhythm and association, the themes are given their first statement. The theme of the attractiveness of death or, of the difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of Waste land live, is developed in this section. Nature awakens to new life and fertility in its eternal cycle. April, the month of rebirth, is hot the most Joyful season but the cruellest. The sweet showers of April offer no glad welcome to the spring. The poet's feeling towards both winter and April, towards the stagnation of the life which he living and towards a rebirth is doubtful, mixing memory and desire. He is impelled to apathy and oblivion by winter. The possibility of renewal, the thought of being stirred into potency and growth, the compulsion towards it felt in the rhythm of the first four lines, and combined and mingled with a sense giving it the shape of a man in the expression "fear in a handful of dust". Belladonna, the lady of the Rocks, symbolizes the quality of all the woman in the poem. All of them suggest barrenness, the antithesis of the idea of fertility. She is the lady of situation, hot of fruitful union, and her name suggests poison and the numbing of sensitivity, together with the aridity of rocks. We have the poet's own explanation that the man with three stoves stands for the Fisher king himself and the wheel is the common symbol of cyclic pattern which also appears again in the '*Death by water*' section. The one eyed merchant carries on his back the secret of the mystery cults, which were spread all over the ancient world by the Syrian trades. Eliot tells us that the hanged man is associated in his mind with the Hanged god of Frazer, a myth of sacrificial death, and with the hooded figures in part V. Eliot throws his spotlight here and there about this vast stage in which the human drama is staged or rather flashes his torchlight and gives us a hint of this our age.

The second part entitled '*The Game of Chess*' deals directly with the artificiality and lack of human mythical meaning in the central fertility symbol, in the marine relation of men and women. The opening scene is rich and lovely; full of coloured sensuousness reminiscent of Keats in the *Eve of St. Agnes Shakespeare's Cleopatra* adds splendour to the scene but the vitality of the contemporary women in the dramatic glimpses that follow is that of queens on a chess board compared with that an the burnished throne of *Egypt*, and their 'games' with men are nothing but an empty pastime or an open hostility ending in a stalemate Eliot refers us to Middleton's play, 'women' beware women with its chess playing scene. There the game is used to distract the immediately the reader is awakened from memories so rich to the artificial and unnatural which pervade the following scene. In the male and female, enacting the tragedy or negative frustration, in this voluptuous setting, we are introduced once again to the living death of '*The Waste Land*', But before we pass to that we have a glimpse of the central theme of metamorphosis. 'As though a wind gave

upon the sylvan scene', "The change of Philomela, by the barbarous king so rudely forced yet there the nightingale. Filled all the desert with inviolable voice"(12). Speaking of 'The Fire Sermon, Eliot remarks that the Collocation of Buddha and St. Augustine "the two representations of Eastern and Western asceticism as the culmination of this part of the poem is not an accident".

Both there great attention of a simple woman while the Duke seduces her daughter-in-law, and the seduction is described ironically in terms of the moves of the pieces on the board. The regular metre in the first one hundred lines of '*The Game of Chess*' creates a soothing monotony in which luxury as the dominating note languishes without mental effort. Sound and sight are blended to accomplish atmosphere. The picture of a woman's boudoir created in the most lavish and luxuriant profusion of sense impressions, prepares the reader instinctively to hear of a passion which matches the richness of its setting.

In the midst of the profusion of rich echoes from Shakespeare and Virgil, which create the memory of two women who chose death rather than life without love, there is the starting intrusion of the world 'synthetic' in the description of the perfumes which "troubled, confused and drowned the sense in odours" religious teacher see the destructive element in the life in the life in terms of fire. The broken prayer of the protagonists that he may be a brand, plucked from the burning, leads on naturally to the next section, the possibility of the purification.

Buddha tells his disciples that are things, received as impressions through the senses or through the mind are on fire "with the fire of passion, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation: with birth, old age, death sorrow, grief and despair" (36). The only way to salvation or 'nirvanas' 18 to become 'free from attachment'. The 'fire' described in this with the quotation from St. Augustine, "To Carthage than I come, where a cauldron of unholy loves song all about mine ears" from the background of this part of the palm. The next passage, the scene of the typist and the young man carbuncular offers one more example of the debased attitude towards sexual relations between men and women.

In the brief section, *Death by water*, the sibyl's words, 'wish to die' are an undercurrent throughout. The whole rhythms indeed, the quiet drifting peace of it suggest the pull towards final forgetfulness. Yet the central figure, which is composite of the Phoenician Sailor and the merchant, points in the other direction they are symbols of the initiates of the mystery religious going back to the fertility cult with their ritual of consigning the effigy of the god to sea and welcoming it as reborn at the end of its Journey, Carrie by a predictable current under the sea. On this level, it symbolize the relinquishing of 'the natural man' to the current under sea' to the metamorphosis, suggested by the words 'picked his bones in whisper'. It is a no accident that this memory of the inseparable of life and death forms the transpiration of the next and final section of the poem. In the first part V, three themes are employed; The Journey to corruption and sexual degeneration at levels.

Another important theory of *The Waste Land* is sexual prevision among the middle-class people. This is seen in the mechanical relation of the typist and the clerk. The typist gives herself to the clerk with a sense of total indifference and apathy. There is neither repose nor any pleasure, and this absent of feeling is a measure of the sterility of the age.

According to Cleanth Brooks, the theme of *The Waste Land* is life-in-death. It suggests the living death of the inhabitants of *The Waste Land*. Throughout the poem it is evident that man is shown to have lost his passion, that is his faith in God and religion his passion participation in religion and this decay of faith has resulted in the loss of vitality, both spiritual and emotional. Consequently, the life in the modern waste land is life in death, a living death, like that of the Sibyl at Cumae. Emmaus, the approach to the chapel perilous, and the present decay of Eastern Europe. There is not peace at all in this section. The knight may have taken the decision to set out on his quest, to initiate to submit to his trials, but the outcome is all uncertain, the ordeal only too present. IN this part of the poem, there is no actor in the contemporary Waste Land. The drama has become purely an inward one of tortured personal consciousness, flung back and forth between hope and despair, haunted by landscapes of horror, lit only by a flash of lightning, refrained only by the damp guest bringing-rain.

One of the important themes of '*The Waste Land*' is 'a vision of dissolution and spiritual drought'. This spiritual drought arises from the degeneration, vulgarisation, and commercialisation sex. Eliot's study of the fertility myths of different people had convinced him that sex-act is the source of life and vitality. The poem, in its spirit, reflects the anxiety, despair, and mental vacuity of the modern age. In the contemporary Waste land there is Eliot was so greatly influenced by Buddhist philosophy that he decided to entitle the third section of *The Waste land* as 'The fire Sermon'. It is after the fire sermon of lord Buddha. He, however, fuses its subject matter, at the end of the poem of course, with reminiscences of St. Augustine's confessions. He himself comments, "the collection of these two representatives of western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of this poem, is not an ancient" (37). The three-fold message, of Thunder – "Da, da, and da" has been drawn from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The three words *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata* mean 'give' 'Sympathise', and 'Control' respectively. The parable related these three words tells how when the gods, men and the devils had finished student days with Prajapati, the Lord of creation, they asked him for some final words of wisdom. To each he uttered the syllables 'Do'. The gods understood this to have been '*Damyata*' meaning 'to be subdued' or self-controlled. Men thought he said '*Datta*' which the Sanskrit for 'give'. While the evil spirits thought they heard him say '*Dayachtram*' or be merciful.

The Waste Land has ample influence of the Rig Veda. This opens with a description of Nature. The Word nature takes a different meaning if we relate it to the primitive Aryan cult of nature and the season have a different meaning if we try to imagine what they mean for the singers of the Rig-Veda.

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