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The Waste Land: A Tapestry of Spiritual Journey

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Abstract

This paper explores The Waste Land as a profound tapestry of spiritual journey, where fragmented imagery, mythological references, and literary allusions converge to depict a world marred by disillusionment and moral decay. Exploring the degeneration of modern men's various aspects of life, this paper shows how humans have suffered moral degradation and spiritual destruction by running madly after dull routines, wealth, lust, power and temptation. The paper also addresses how the absence of religion has given way to atheism by capturing humankind to make desire the engine and direct individual life. The analysis highlights how the poem's complex structure mirrors the spiritual disintegration of its age, offering a profound meditation on humanity's enduring hope for spiritual rebirth. The study finds The Waste Land shaped by the Grail legend, Eastern religious thought, and Christian symbols, capturing both personal and collective spiritual crises, mirroring Eliot's own journey from hopelessness to a vision of salvation.

1. Introduction

The Waste Land (1922) is widely regarded as one of the most significant works of modernist literature, capturing the disillusionment and fragmentation of the post-World War I era. However, beneath its complex and often cryptic surface lies a profound exploration of the spiritual void that characterises the modern world's individual and collective experience. Here, Eliot weaves together a tapestry of myth, religion, history, and personal disillusionment, depicting a world in moral and spiritual crisis. The poem portrays a civilisation on the brink of collapse, haunted by despair and confusion, where the search for meaning seems increasingly elusive. This exploration of spiritual desolation is not merely a depiction of nihilism but also a reflection of the possibility for renewal. Through a series of fragmented voices, symbols, and references, *The Waste Land* becomes a spiritual journey that contemplates the tension between spiritual decay and the potential for redemption.

Intricately woven with themes of spiritual desolation, existential crisis, and the search for redemption, *The Waste Land* stands as a monumental work of modernist literature. The poem encapsulates a quest for meaning amidst the ruin of civilisation, drawing parallels to the pilgrimage of the soul in its efforts to reconnect with divine or transcendent truth. Through the diverse voices and experiences embedded in the text, Eliot illustrates the struggle for spiritual renewal, suggesting that redemption can be found only through a reconciliation of past spiritual traditions and the present fragmented 'self.'

T. S. Eliot's religious inclination depicts the different stages of spiritual consciousness, which takes its roots in a world of sickening monotony and agonising boredom and further

develops into an intense recognition of uprootedness and the spiritual metamorphosis of a civilisation. After long contemplation, his religious quest ends by recognising faith as Man's only way out. To Eliot, Man's faith is lost but should be regained. *The Waste Land* aims to pursue regaining this faith as the ultimate goal of the religious *Odyssey*.

2. Literature Review

Literature has been greatly influenced by philosophical thought, 'existentialism.' Literature reminds us of society's social, political, religious, racial, and cultural influences. The review of works by several writers and various existentialist opinions helps us discuss the different ways the selected writer intimates the theme of his/her work.

Numerous critics have analysed *The Waste Land* from various perspectives. The poem features a succession of drastically shifting styles, with its thematic aspects encompassing disenchantment, spiritual aridity, and casual sexuality. It depicts a figurative representation of the contemporary world as arid and barren. Humanity is emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually desolate; thus, this depiction inherently deconstructs the centrality of ideologies in both Western and Eastern contexts.

The poem's introduction delineates a terrain of spiritual desolation, mirroring the disenchantment of postwar civilisation. Eliot's portrayal of a barren, desolate planet corresponds with Crawford's (2016) characterisation of a culture experiencing "cultural exhaustion." F. R. Leavis (1960) views Eliot's work as a critique of the moral degradation of modern civilisation, contending that the poem reveals a deficiency in ethical and spiritual vigour. Likewise, Brooker (1990) posits that the poem's imagery of aridity and deterioration signifies a profound crisis of meaning. This stage signifies the acknowledgement of a spiritual void, an essential precursor in the quest for rejuvenation.

The poem's fractured structure is one of its most contentious characteristics. The poem's fluctuating voices, sudden shifts, and intertextual allusions initially seem fragmented. Cleanth Brooks (1947) contends that the poem exhibits an intrinsic coherence, claiming that its seemingly chaotic nature is, in reality, "a unified whole." Brooks asserts that the shards are meticulously organised to create a cohesive artistic concept. Brooker (1994) reinforces this perspective, proposing that Eliot's fragmentation embodies the state of modern consciousness, while also providing a method for rebuilding meaning. Consequently, fragmentation serves as both a depiction of spiritual turmoil and a means for its resolution. The poem functions as a tapestry, with individual strands contributing to a broader design.

Eliot's use of myth is largely acknowledged as fundamental to the poem's framework. Utilising fertility myths and the Grail narrative, he develops a symbolic framework of mortality and regeneration. Brooker (1994) characterises the "mythic method" as a means of imposing structure on contemporary disorder, so integrating the modern world into a universal narrative. Crawford (2016) contends that myth facilitates Eliot's linkage of personal experience with shared cultural memory. Cleanth Brooks (1947), too, asserts that these legendary themes integrate the poem, enhancing its thematic coherence. The desolate terrain signifies spiritual demise, yet the pursuit of water embodies the potential for renewal. Consequently, myth serves as a structural and symbolic framework throughout the spiritual journey.

A salient characteristic of the poem is its integration of several religious traditions. Eliot incorporates elements of Christianity, Buddhism, and Hindu philosophy, generating a syncretic perspective on spiritual rejuvenation.

The concluding segment references the *Upanishadic* directives *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, and *Damyata*, signifying 'Give, Sympathise, and Control' (Krishnananda, 1983), which provide moral principles for transcending spiritual desolation. Crawford (2016) views this as an endeavour to transcend the constraints of Western religious paradigms. F. R. Leavis (1960) emphasises the ethical gravity of Eliot's oeuvre, indicating that the poem eventually advocates for a revaluation of values. This ethical aspect elevates the poem from a simple cultural critique to a prescriptive spiritual inquiry.

Notwithstanding its progression towards rebirth, the poem defies conclusive resolution. The concluding *Shantih* implies 'tranquillity,' however, its reiteration expresses ambiguity. Cleanth Brooks (1947) contends that this ambiguity is crucial to the poem's significance, since it embodies the perpetual existence of spiritual conflict. Brooker (1994) similarly observes that the poetry presents not answers but possibilities. This ambiguity emphasises the notion of the poem as a tapestry: a dynamic and ongoing construct rather than a definitive ending.

The Waste Land presents a deeply intricate examination of the contemporary spiritual state. Eliot creates a complex portrayal of spiritual journey through its representation of solitude, innovative fragmentation, dependence on myth, and incorporation of several religious traditions. The aforementioned literature assessment indicates that underlying the poem's ostensible disorder exists a cohesive and intentional structure. The poem does not fix the depicted dilemma but provides a framework for comprehension and navigation of it.

3. Methodology

A descriptive and analytical approach was adopted to prepare the paper. For that, a quantitative content analysis was employed to find the trends of recent research works, trace the innovative contributions to Indo-Anglian literature, and establish a base for future research. A quantitative content analysis aids in summarising several research articles and presenting a solid and justifiable generalisation in the research field (Ozcinar, 2009). The study was based on research papers from different database websites using keywords such as 'Desire and Redemption, Modern Civilisation, Modernist Poetry, Psychotic problems, Religious Crisis, Spiritual Journey.' Out of more than two hundred research articles available on different websites, only forty were found relevant to keywords, having full text with open access availability.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1.Desire and the Religious Crisis

Comparing the Descartesian axiom, 'I think therefore I am,' and the Freudian one, 'I feel therefore I am,' for making the essence of man, I have found *The Waste Land* going with Sigmund Freud. The speaker's confession in the poem suggests that the characters in the poem have carnal desires and crave hearts. The speaker says:

> "What have we given?
> My friend, blood shaking my heart
> The awful daring of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract
> By this, and this only, we have existed…" (Eliot, 1922).

Emotions and desires, as the above lines imply, are at the individual's core, but the wasteland's inhabitants cannot check their fleshy instincts. Consequently, the sensual triumphs over the spiritual. The poem portrays sexuality in the form of illicit relationships and stultifying sentimentalism. Excessive and morbid desires have ruined modern man's life.

To most modern critics, *The Waste Land* represents the twentieth century's value degradation and morality breakdown. For instance, Coote (1985) finds the poem 'a profound and very moving picture of modern man's spiritual plight.' The poem's opening line also supports Coote's statement by signalling the centrality of desires and senses to the misery and suffering of human beings. The speaker's statement that "April is the cruellest month" (Eliot, 1922) suggests the danger of the awakened and ignited senses because they stir desire and lust. They are, therefore, better when left dormant and covered. Morrison (1996) also contends, "April is the cruellest month […] because it awakens 'savage' or archaic [sexual] desires." The thrill and risk of a sleigh ride are very well remembered by our inability to control desire, dealt with in the first section of the poem, 'The Burial of the Dead.' In other words, blind adherence to our emotions and feelings makes us lose our minds and fall into disaster. The line "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring" (Eliot, 1922) also suggests that, owing to the

emptiness, meaninglessness, and lack of any spiritual guidance in their lives, the waste-landers are aimlessly running after pleasure, comfort, and excitement. Someone has rightly said that whenever man suffers from a religious and spiritual crisis resulting from the valorisation of the sensual over the spiritual, he is left only with a despairing, pessimistic, and morbid mood. The same is true with modern man.

Furthermore, in the poem's first section, the speaker prophetically warns modern man against the spiritual devastation and the coming of false prophets. He says:

> "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> 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,
> And the dry stone has no sound of water" (Eliot, 1922).

The question raised in these lines is almost beyond any answer. However, it is evident that as the survival of roots in a desert is beyond imagination, life without religious and spiritual faith is a form of 'Death' disguised in life. The lines mentioned above very well allude to the *Bible*, where God, addressing Ezekiel as the 'Son of Man,' chooses him as His messenger to Israel, which has gone to a wasteland due to the wickedness of the Israelites. Ezekiel says, "And He said unto me, Son of Man, stand upon thy feet and I will speak to thee. And the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me and set me upon my feet, and I heard Him speaking to me" (Bandstra, 2008). The 'broken images' in *The Waste Land* can be seen as the idols created by the Israelites to worship the false gods, signalling the moral breakdown. Also, 'the dead tree' is an antithesis to the 'Tree of Life' as the latter symbolises the spiritual values that modern materialism has demolished and diverted the individual from moral and religious obligations. The spiritual 'Death' of modern man can best be understood from his fear of salvation. Evoking the burial service image, the speaker's warning in the poem that "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (Eliot, 1922) is suggestive of man being made of dust. He will return to and disappear in dust after Death. However, the line "Looking into the heart of light, the silence" (Eliot, 1922) shows the speaker's inability to comprehend spiritual enlightenment. Here, the word 'light' refers to Christ or spiritual knowledge, and the word 'heart,' which contains a spiritual connotation, might allude to the 'Sacred Heart of Jesus,' an object of devotion. Nevertheless, the previous line also suggests that the inhabitants of modern wasteland are spiritually blind.

In the poem's first section, the searcher, drawn to the superstition of a fortune-teller with 'a wicked pack of cards' (Eliot, 1922), is searching for spiritual enlightenment at the wrong place. The same person appears in the third section of the poem, 'The Fire Sermon,' "…fishing in the dull canal/ On a winter evening round behind the gashouse" (Eliot, 1922). These lines suggest that the man is disillusioned. He is following the wrong path to obtain spiritual enlightenment. To fish in a polluted river on a winter evening does not imply wisdom. To obtain spiritual knowledge, the modern man ignores the guidance in the *Bible* and runs after the cards of fortune-tellers, such as Madame Sosostris. The contemporary man's reading of the word 'prophet' as 'profit' presents Madame Sosostris as a professional fortune-teller getting paid for her wisdom.

The horror of 'Death,' revealed by Madame Sosostris' warning to 'Fear Death by water' (Eliot, 1922), is at the poem's core. However, this warning also presents Sosostris as a non-believer who lacks belief even in the hereafter. Moreover, this very absence of faith keeps the modern man constantly plagued by a sense of insecurity. Madame Sosostris, herself a waste-lander unable to solve the pilgrim's problems, fails to read the blank card representing the 'Hanged Man.' It is evident in her confession as she says:

> "And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
> Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
> Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find

The Hanged Man" (Eliot, 1922).

The poet's ironic description reinforces Madame Sosostris' spiritual barrenness and shortsighted vision, as shown in these lines: "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante/ Had a bad cold" (Eliot, 1922). Even though modern man is fully aware of God's existence, he cannot reach Him. Consequently, he looks like a lonely entity encircled by its sphere and distanced even from the Creator. Eliot, here, rightly finds Madame Sosostris' misguided attempts at enlightenment, and highlights the failure of secular and pseudo-spiritual alternatives.

The speaker in "Gerontion," a part of the original version of *The Waste Land*, also says, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now" (Eliot, 2002). Here, 'knowledge' might refer to the modern man's realisation of religious and spiritual emptiness and the resultant 'horror' in him. Sosostris' Tarot card image of 'the one-eyed merchant' symbolises the modern man's one-dimensional (materialistic) vision, throwing religion aside. To me, the merchant is the antithesis of Tiresias, a physically blind but spiritually enlightened prophet of Apollo in Thebes in Greek mythology. The modern man, unlike Tiresias, is physically eyed but spiritually blind. In other words, he is almost dead in life. The line "That corpse you planted last year in your garden" (Eliot, 1922) further emphasises the idea of the merchant and suggests the prolonged spiritual 'Death' of the speaker. Here, the term 'corpse' connotes a soulless physical body or a dead spirit waiting for revival. Based on the above points, the religious plight of the modern man is concurrent with the conditions of his age. In modern philosophy, one can obtain knowledge through experience. In other words, the house of knowledge can be built on the solid ground of sensual experience.

The hysterical woman's statement in the poem's second section, 'A Game of Chess,' might refer to such empirical experience. As she says, "Do/ You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember/ Nothing" (Eliot, 1922)? It is clear that knowledge for the wasteland's inhabitants is alienated from spiritual substance. Also, the industry, taking part in the religious crisis and the abandonment of God, contributes to the spiritual crisis. The following line offers a metonymical inference for knowledge expansion in modern civilisation: "I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter" (Eliot, 1922). It suggests that these secular ideas, derived mainly from the atheism of Darwin, Nietzsche and Marx, are stimulated by the conditions of the twentieth-century world. For example, the 'Dog' in 'The Burial of the Dead' stands for science to alienate the individual from the spiritual. Brooker and Bentley (1990) rightly observe:

> "In Webster's day, it was the wolf who dug up corpses. But in our day, it is a friendly dog. The dog is God [sic!] spelt backwards; a coincidence picked up not only by Eliot but by several modern writers. The dog 'that is a friend to men' suggests a modern god substitute that seemed to be a friend but has become a destroyer in numerous senses. Eliot is here concerned with rampantly reductive scientism (including that practised by Frazer) that demythologises myth by digging up the buried god or hero and revealing its nature. One might say a myth can function only when approached with reverence."

Modern science, giving sense to the lives of people for centuries, has waged a war against religious beliefs and spiritual values, resulting in 'the death of God.' The religious crisis in Europe took its birth after the execution of God (Christ), and science became the new religion. To modernists, all human problems and misery could be swept away, and science could elevate the individual above the world. Hence, they take religion as irrational. McGrath (2004) says, "The reemergence of atheism as a serious intellectual option dates from the dawn of modernity. Atheism is the religion of the autonomous and rational human being who believes that reason is able to uncover and express the deepest truths of the universe." A man's absence of religious values makes him an autonomous and self-sufficient being and bars him from looking beyond himself to explain the meaning of life. Over time, agnostic thought starts prevailing, and man starts feeling free to own his existence to himself. Thus, atheism turns out to be a means of escape.

The passage about Marie in 'The Burial of the Dead' shows the spiritual decadence of the Western world. Showing her anxiety and insistence on not being a Russian, she possibly reacts to communism, based primarily on the exclusion of God. It suggests Russia's evocation of the triumph of secularism and the decay of faith in the modern age. However, only the spiritual side of human nature makes him a human being. No secular and psychological therapy can offer man solace and relief from the maladies of his soul. The recuperative power lies only in religion, which makes life worthy. Hence, only the spiritual sterility brought about by modernity is responsible for the ruin and decadence of values in the modern wasteland.

These points very well justify Eliot's strong symbolic images of spiritual destruction. For instance, the water metaphor plays a significant role in *The Waste Land*. Wilson (2001) rightly observes, "[A]s Gerontion in his dry rented house thinks wistfully of the young men who fought in the rain, as Prufrock longs to ride green waves and linger in the chambers of the sea, as Mr. Apollinax is imagined drawing strength from the deep-sea caves of coral islands, so in this new poem Mr. Eliot identifies water with all freedom and illumination of the soul." Hence, the absence of water symbolises the lack of faith and salvation.

The images of dryness and sterility, like the metaphor of water in the poem's first section, symbolically show the dryness of the spirit. For example, the 'dry stone' image with 'no sound of water' evokes twentieth-century spiritual and moral sterility. In biblical times, Moses, using his 'divine' rod, could procure water from rocks to help the thirsty Israelites wandering the desert. In contrast, modern man does not find water among the rocks. The hope for drawing water from the 'Red Rock' is an illustrative drawing of substance from matter. However, the modern man suffers from denial. Evoking the ninth hour of Jesus' crucifixion, the image of the 'dead sound on the final stroke of nine' (Eliot, 1922) not only portrays a decaying and crumbling Church but also suggests the decadent faith and dwindling life of modern man. As such, contemporary London becomes an unreal city, a hellish place where people cross the Church while going to their work. They even ignore the holy place, a symbol of grace and salvation.

The red rock symbolism of religion also reminds us of the spiritual void. As Rosenthal (1960) says, "The rock's shelter holds another terror, however, that of our recognition of our soul's peril and of the sacrifices needed for self-purification." As a symbol of religion, the red rock in the following lines can be read as an invitation for the west-landers to enter God's kingdom: "(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),/ And I will show you something different from either" (Eliot, 1922).

In addition to the red rock symbolism of a spiritual void, the image of 'the dead tree' also suggests the absence of faith. As Campbell (1991) puts it, "The Christ story involves a sublimation of what originally was a very solid vegetal image. Jesus is on the Holy Rood, the tree, and he is himself the fruit of the tree. Jesus is the fruit of eternal life, which was the second forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden." Thus, the demise of the tree suggests the crisis of spiritualism.

'A Game of Chess,' the second section of *The Waste Land*, presents the wicked play of emotions and sensual desires. Eliot makes a significant reference to Cleopatra to indicate the destructive effects of excessive desire. The uncontrolled sensual desires of the famous lovers, Antony and Cleopatra, wiped out a whole empire. Here, it is also the failure of modern civilisation to control its desire, which is considered the central reason behind its discontent and degeneration. Like the speaker, the Waste Landers, in this section of the poem, are scared of salvation. The speaker says, "And if it rains, a closed car at four" (Eliot, 1922). The image of water in the poem needs to be more consistent. It is present, but it lacks recognition as a means of survival and salvation. On the contrary, it is absent when it is needed. Brooker and Bentley (1990) comment, "Death, in the sources, particularly in Frazer, Weston, and the *Bible*, is the prerequisite for life, and in all three, 'Death' by water is a central ritual in physical and spiritual rebirth. In all three, 'Death' is not an end, it is a beginning." 'Death' by water in the poem can symbolise the soul's rebirth, which frightens the waste-landers, and hence, the poem

denies spiritual life. As Madame Sosostris warns her client, she says, "Fear death by water" (Eliot, 1922).

The role of 'desire' in *The Waste Land* is one of the prime concerns. 'The Fire Sermon' section of the poem, for example, clearly shows Sweeney and the lascivious Mrs Porter responding only to their hormonal rhythms, standing outside the grace of any ritual. The image of the fisherman, in the same section, 'fishing in a dull canal/ On a winter evening behind the gashouse' (Eliot, 1922), presents the best objective correlative for sexual incest. Weirick (1971) rightly observes:

> "To fish in [the] Biblical sense is to seek salvation and eternal life. But here in The Waste Land, the spiritual meaning has been lost. Indeed, the meanings are different on every level. The Fisher King is now seeking his catch in an industrially polluted canal, not in a clean, vital, exhilarating medium. Finally, these lines suggest illicit sexual activity of the most impersonal and unrewarding kind."

'Fishing in the dull canal' is a symbolic suggestion to the search for self-fulfilment, not in religion but in sexuality. The image of 'Thames-daughters' is another example which suggests the loss of their virginity and dignity because of their uncontrollable sexual desire. Such a desire remains unable to procure an individual's satisfaction and pleasure. It is not for nothing that Tiresias confesses his witnessing of the same story taking place in the lives of millions of people, a story about how a man's unchecked desire leads to his failure to possess anything that can quench his thirst.

This section of the poem reminisces about the Buddha's sermon, which presents man burning in the fire of lust, desire, and greed. To Buddha, man's detachment from lust completes him and liberates him from all selfish desires so that he may achieve happiness and satisfaction in his life. Buddha sermonises:

> "All things are on fire; the eye is on fire; forms are on fire; eye-consciousness is on fire; the impressions received by the eye are on fire; and whatever sensation originates in the impressions received by the eye is likewise on fire. And with what are these things on fire? With the fires of lust, anger and illusion, they are on fire, and so are other senses and the mind. Wherefore the wise man conceives disgust for the things of the senses and, being divested of desire for the things of the senses, he removes from his heart the cause of suffering" (Coote, 1985).

So, the only way to come out of this wasteland lies in freeing oneself from the blinding power of desire. Buddhism offers palpable solutions to man's misery, the result of his lust and desire. This could suggest Eliot's encumbrance of Buddhism when he was composing this poem. Ackroyd (1984), Eliot's biographer, maintains:

> "Eliot's attraction to Buddhism is not simply a philosophical one. Nirvana (salvation) is extinction – the annihilation of desire, the freedom from attachments – and there was, as can be seen in his poetry, an over-riding desire in young Eliot to be free […] the Eastern religion had more romantic affiliations for someone who wished to break free of the familial bond which otherwise held him."

There is no way to achieve freedom except by overcoming lust and desire. Weirick (1971) also contends, "*The Waste Land* is full of different manifestations of lust, and Eliot illustrates how the inhabitants are enslaved. Freedom will come only when lust has been overcome." In the opening section of the poem, Marie also voices this view when she says, "In the mountains, there you feel free" (Eliot, 1922). Here, Marie's longing for freedom is the same as what Buddhism talks about. Christianity often presents mountains as symbols of spiritual enlightenment. Ferber (1999) rightly maintains, "In the Western tradition, […] are often the homes of gods, being near to heaven and dangerous to mortals […]. In the *Bible*, mountains are the sites of revelations, both natural and supernatural. Christ gives a 'Sermon on the Mount' […], and Christ's temptation in the wilderness takes place on the exceeding high mountain."

Like the symbolic image of water, fish are the ancient symbols of fertility and faith in Christianity. However, in the twentieth-century wasteland, the fish no longer remains a symbol

of spirituality. The fisherman is interested in something other than fishing on a winter evening in a dull and dirty canal, polluted (literally and figuratively) by the industrialisation of the land. This shows the protagonist of this section of the poem lying on the verge of collapse as he lacks the hope of religious enlightenment.

The three worthy commands of thunder, identified as 'Give, sympathise, self-control' in the poem's final section, suggest that the expression of passion should simultaneously be controlled by means of faith. However, people of the modern wasteland do not follow the worthy commands of thunder. God, in *Ecclesiastes 12:5*, says, "And when shall they be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets" (Brooks, 1965). This indicates the need for temperance lest it turn into a vice.

Furthermore, if instincts are not managed correctly or gratification meets a permanent failure, this situation could give rise to neurosis. It is, thus, modern man's 'uncontrolled desire' which leads to spiritual crisis. Bush (1983) contends, "Little wonder that in *The Waste Land* 'the awful daring of a moment's [sexual] surrender' generates feelings of 'a broken Coriolanus.'" Thus, desire, for Eliot, is an agent of destruction, a threat to man's existence. According to Gordon (1977), "He talks about his experience with sexual desire and religion but confesses that it is religion which has brought him a durable satisfaction." The poem might recapitulate these two experiences.

4.2.The Spiritual Pilgrimage

His pursuit of philosophy shook Eliot's religious certainty. However, he finally got the only panacea to his psychological issues and dualistic thinking at no other place except religion. Before his conversion to Catholicism, Eliot came across several beliefs and realised that life without faith was a wasteland. Moreover, he became attentive to the real need for religion to be an epicentre of solace and equipoise. Brooker (1994) contends, "One by one, like an inventory examiner, he rejected Bergsonianism, humanism, aestheticism, and other early twentieth-century 'isms'; and in the light of Christianity, he rejected them all as inadequate." Hence, Eliot's conversion to Christianity ended his religious doubts, and he embraced a new worldview while writing his masterpiece. His religious illness made him reflect on himself and focus on his self-definition. Getting empowered by the experience of his breakdown, fragmentation and self-division, he created himself anew.

In the *Bible*, the rock usually stands for God or spiritual power; this is not the case in the modern state. Both Fascism and Communism, viewed as images of a modern Satan, are not adequate alternatives for Eliot. It is for this that Eliot, for his internal tranquillity, searched for long in Christianity. The term 'shadow' in the above quote might refer to a moral issue. de Laszlo (1958), in his discussion of shadow symbolism, believes that "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. Becoming conscious of it involves recognising the dark aspects of personality as present and real" (de Laszlo, 1958).

Spiritual awakening is the moment when one becomes aware of one's wickedness. Similar to Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, crying in a whisper, "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad, 1902), the speaker in 'The Burial of the Dead' becomes aware of his spiritual Death and emptiness. Thus, the word 'shadow' might refer to the terrible awareness of spiritual emptiness that pushed the speaker to a pilgrimage to the city of God. The line 'HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME' (Eliot, 1922) is an English dialect for the last call at the bar, but here, written in capital letters in the second section of *The Waste Land*, it might refer to the speaker's cry for an invitation for purification, redemption and salvation. This bold line implies the shortness of life and suggests the opportunity to follow the right path. The lines "Your shadow at morning striding behind you/ Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you" (Eliot, 1922) suggest the speaker's journey to the East for his spiritual journey. In Western countries, moving

towards the East symbolises man's search for religious wisdom. Thus, poised at the extremity of a dry season, the pilgrim speaker of the previous lines is waiting for rain, a symbol of grace and fertility. However, symbolised by the cruelty of the season and the sluggish response of nature, the journey towards the city of God does not look easy.

'The Fire Sermon' section of the poem shows the culmination of the sporadic and sordid sexual desire of modern man. However, it concludes with the speaker's painful awakening to his sins and recognising the need for his purification and redemption. Followed by the final section of the poem, purification takes place in 'Death by Water,' the fourth section of the poem. Convinced of spiritualism and asceticism as the solutions to his problems, Eliot, citing St. Augustine, Buddha and Christianity, offers a glimpse of hope. St. Augustine and Buddha are among the best examples of following the path of spiritualism. Eliot's allusion to St. Augustine exemplifies the deep feeling of religious emotion and remorse for a sexual sin. St. Augustine, in his Confessions, accepts the inability of his sexual drives to grant him pleasure or heal his spiritual emptiness (Augustine, 2009). To his realisation, self-fulfilment and happiness can best be attained through union with God. Coote (1985) rightly observes, "The presence of St. Augustine and, hence, of deep-seated sexual unhappiness in a civilisation collapsing through the lack of spiritual resources enriches The Waste Land considerably. The inclusion of St. Augustine at the climax of 'The Fire Sermon' may be felt throughout the whole poem."

The allusion to St. Augustine precedes the sexual promiscuity scenes at Margate and on Margate sands in the poem. Eliot takes religion as the only means to purge men from excessive sexual desire, which is responsible for the soul's ruin. Commenting on St. Augustine's inclusion in the poem, Gordon (1977) opines:

> "Again, sexual guilt precedes religious fervour. The penitent confesses, in the manner of Augustine, to his idle lusts, and his sense of sin propels him smoothly into the burning routine. There is no concern for the abused London women, only for his purification. The speaker's guilt is evidenced in the following line: 'He wept. He promised a new star.'"

Traversing in a wasteland searching for grace, the pilgrim finds the spiritual truth in the poem's final section. In the final part of this section, Gordon (1977) says, "I am sure that before Eliot could have written this section, he must himself have had a 'sign.' He said that religious poetry is so difficult to write because it demands experience, those moments of clarification and crystallisation which come but seldom." This suggests that Eliot, striving for faith and order, finally succeeds in making peace with himself.

Indeed, the poem reflects many traces of spiritual enlightenment. For example, the last section of the poem, 'What the Thunder Said,' opens with the 'Death' of the 'Saviour' so that the cultural and spiritual life of his people can be secured: "He who was living is now dead/ We who were living are now dying/ With a little patience" (Eliot, 1922). To Eliot, rebirth follows 'Death.' The figure or shadow is always 'walking beside you' (Eliot, 1922). Evoking spiritual rebirth, the shadow, here, alludes to a Biblical story about the stranger on the road to Emmaus, who turns out to be Jesus Christ. Christ is an archetypal representative of the wholeness and unity of the human being. de Laszlo rightly explains, "Christ exemplifies the archetype of the self. He represents the totality of a divine or heavenly kind, a glorified man, a son of God […] unspotted by sin" (de Laszlo, 1958). Hence, the waste-landers, being potential candidates for religious life, meet their search for internal union.

This is, perhaps, the reason for the death themes winding throughout the poem. Spiritual rebirth, in Christianity, demands sacrifice and crucifixion. Eliot's eagerness for spiritual illumination can be understood from Sybil's longing for 'Death' in the epigraph and the pilgrim's longing for the revival of the buried corpse in the opening section of *The Waste Land*. Reiterating the same idea in "Journey of the Magi," Eliot says:

> "…I had seen birth and Death,
> But had thought they were different; this Birth was

Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our Death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death" (Eliot, 1930).

These lines portray 'Death' as the primary step towards renewing one's life. Schwartz-Salant (2003) also says, "Death is an interim stage to be followed by a new life. No new life can arise, say the alchemists, without the Death of the old. They liken the art to the work of the sower who buries the grain in the earth only to awaken to new life." The acceptance of 'Death' in *The Waste Land*, thus, is indicative of the poet's or the waste-landers' attempt, under the guidance of the Christian Gospel, to embark on a new life.

Perspectively different to the life instinct, the death instinct propels the organism to return to its first state of wholeness and purity. To Wellman, Carl Jung's 'Thanatos,' contrary to the Freudian literal and human concept of 'Death,' is a psychological state or reality. In other words, the Jungian concept of 'Death,' to Wellman, implies a return to the original state of unity. As Mark Welman says:

> "Thanatos is oriented, on the one hand, towards a 'return' of the ego to its primal origins and, on the other, towards a transcendent union of opposites" (Welman, 2005). Death, here, indicates a movement towards the reintegration and restoration of the lost self. As Welman adds, "Experiences involving the collapse or the transcendence of personal boundaries are captured by the imagination as images of 'Death.' In these terms, 'Death' and dying are metaphors through which one lives the awakening of the symbolic life and a deepening of personal identity and of one's experience of the world" (Welman, 2005).

Symbolically rich, the 'What the Thunder Said' section of the poem evokes Christian faith and the real possibility of redemption. For example, the protagonist's search for water implies a symbolic quest for salvation. "Gerontion," too, like The Waste Land, echoes the same idea: "Here I am, an old man in a dry month/ Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain" (Eliot, 2002). Being suggestive of purification and baptism of humanity, the coming of rain, in the last section of The Waste Land, is associated with lightning, an Indian symbol of enlightenment. The crowing of the cock symbolises a moment of revelation. It is a symbolic awakening of humanity to a new start, to the birth of a new order and meaning of life. In other words, the cock's crowing here infers the arrival of dawn to lift the weight of darkness and suffering from human life (Krishnananda, 1984).

In the poem's last section, the chapel with dry bones is symbolic of the house of God. Brooker (1994) also says, "In the Church Age, i.e., after Pentecost, the bodies of Christians constitute the house of God." Interestingly, the 'Walk to Emmaus' gets mixed with the approach to the chapel perilous. To Jessie L. Weston, the chapel perilous initiates unfolding the mysteries of physical and spiritual union (Weston, 2011). If the medieval legends' successful quest is a signal of restoring the physical powers of the wasteland and its King, the successful search in Eliot's The Waste Land is purely psychological and spiritual. Eliot's mentioning of Tiresias offers a glimpse of hope for a way out of the wasteland because it is Tiresias who, in the Odyssey, helps Odysseus find his way home. However, the passage of the thunder commands bears more significance. The thunder's words confer a divine call on the poem's protagonist. To Miller (2006), the thunder commandments "suggest a spiritual transformation of the hero, as though he has given alms, found compassion, and learned self-control." The three commands given by the thunder – give, sympathise, self-control – must be followed. The first command, 'give,' suggests stepping out of one's selfishness, self-centredness and isolation. Commenting on this command, Viorica Patea (2007) says that "The ethical Hinduism of the Upanishads (religious texts) conceives life as a form of 'being,' not of 'having' […] Human value is not a function of 'I am what I have' but of 'I am what I give.'"

The second command, 'sympathise,' which is at the heart of Christianity, invites the Waste landers to be compassionate. Campbell (1991), commenting on the second command, says:

> "The Son of God came down into this world to be crucified to awaken our hearts to compassion and thus to turn our minds from the gross concerns of wrong life in the world to the specific human values of self-giving in shared suffering. In that sense, the wounded king, the maimed king of the Grail legend, is a counterpart of Christ. He is there to evoke compassion and thus bring a dead wasteland to life."

The third command of the thunder, 'self-control,' suggests having control over one's excessive desire to make harmony between the intellectual and the emotional self. Clarifying this command, Fulweiler (1993) says, "After commanding a self-giving surrender and sympathy, the thunder announces the third saving virtue, control. Eliot's image is one of organic unity: human cooperation with the wind, the archetypal image of the spirit, a union of heart and skilful hands." This means that if the collision of feeling and intellect, subject and object, is not controlled, the individual's inner contradiction or dualism will lead him to a life of emptiness and nihilism.

Abandoning the world and seeking solitude and loneliness may be claimed as one of the ways for purification and salvation. By the end of the poem, the protagonist's loneliness suggests the quality of a spiritually awakened mystic. Unger, too, says, "Isolation and alienation from the world become a stage in the discipline of religious purgation, an ideal to be further followed" (Unger, 1961). Lord Buddha, for example, took solitude, sat under the Bodhi Tree (the tree of immortal knowledge), got illuminated and has been enlightening us for the last twenty-five hundred years. Jesus, too, went into the desert for forty days. Moreover, this solitude in the desert made him come up with his message. Plainly speaking, one, like Eliot in The Waste Land, needs some solitude to get a sense of unity with oneself. Echoing Unger, Gordon also finds the lonely pilgrim, who "sat upon the shore/ Fishing, with the arid plain behind me" (Eliot, 1922), to be the poet himself traversing a psychological wasteland through religious fervour. Gordon (1977) says:

> "Early in the history of the manuscript, in 1915, an engaging personality appears, a would-be saint, who was to become shadowy and diffuse in the long, more impersonal Waste Land. Eliot named the character after Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem […] In The Waste Land, the Narcissus figure reappears as the prophet in the desert in 'The Burial of the Dead,' as the penitent who is 'burning' at the end of 'The Fire Sermon,' and as the solitary pilgrim in 'What the Thunder Said,' who abandons civilisation and its history in search of a new life."

The concluding line of the poem, *shantih, shantih, shantih*, meaning 'peace, peace, peace' (Eliot, 1922), entails the poet's movement towards a transcendental experience. The experience of the 'self' in *The Waste Land* possibly resembles F. H. Bradley's movement from 'relational experience' to 'transcendental experience' (Bradley, 1930).

The first section of the poem, on the one hand, momentarily represents relational experience, the fragmented and disunited state of the 'self,' the last section, on the other, is a momentary representation of transcendental experience, a movement towards self-reintegration and unity. Phrasing it differently, the poet transforms from a sick person into a league with God through religion. Therefore, religion might be the nucleus for all fragments to revolve around to restore the lost unity. Peter Ackroyd (1984) rightly observes, "The attachment to something outside oneself can create a sense of the self as a whole again united in the act of worship. He wanted an object for his intense feelings, which were not human, to heal a personality which threatened to shatter apart."

The allusion of the narrator's saying, 'I can connect nothing with nothing,' to St. Augustine's confession suggests religion is the only tool to rebind fragments and achieve unity. It is only through religion that inner peace and harmony can be achieved. Brooker and Bentley (1990) contend:

> "The very word 'religion' comes from roots meaning rebinding, retying, transcending brokenness and regaining a primal condition of harmony. Although the twentieth-century wasteland is a place of intense awareness of disunity, it is only a recent version of a constantly recurring condition. Eliot's nostalgia is for a community that he knows has not existed in history."

Religion fulfils the search for wholeness, an utterly missing element in today's age of modern technology. It helps get a sense of unity and psychological integrity. In order to seek refuge from the distress and psychological breakdown of modern life, Eliot converted to Christianity. To him, religion can only ascribe meaning and value to one's existence. Commenting on the role of religion, William James (2002) argues, "Happiness! Happiness! Religion is only one of the ways in which men gain that gift. Easily, permanently, and successfully, it often transforms the most intolerable misery into the most profound and most enduring happiness."

Echoing James' view, Schumaker (2001) also finds religion as a curative power for mental health as it reduces "…anxiety by providing cognitive structures […] that help to impose order on a chaotic world; offer existential grounding in the form of meaning, purpose, and hope, which, in turn, generates emotional well-being […] foster social cohesion and a sense of community; afford members a social identity, and sense of belongingness" (Schumaker, 2001).

Some critics may find an inextricable relation between Eliot's sexual and spiritual maladies. They may attribute this to Eliot's finding of religion as an essential means to escape his domestic horrors and perverse sexuality. To them, it was the frightful discovery of his wife's insanity and marital woes that pushed Eliot further to surrender himself entirely to the divine. Defending this view, MacDiarmid (2003) says:

> "We tend to view Eliot's conversion as a cowardly attempt to suppress the catalysts of his obsessive-compulsive disorders, his 'sexual attacks,' which we can interpret as anxiety about his sexuality and subjectivity. This means that we diagnose Eliot's impulse to religious witness or Christian mysticism as a symptom of pathology and remember that hysteria is defined as a 'conversion disorder.' Religious feeling, confronted with the scepticism of the twentieth century, becomes egotistical delusion."

Eliot's conversion, the Marxist concept of religion as the 'opiate of the people,' and the psychoanalysts 'substitute gratification' notion of religion are similar to each other. The moral insanity and neurotic problems of Vivien, Eliot's wife, essentially put Eliot on a long purgatorial journey ending in peace and unity in Christianity. Eliot's embrace of the Catholic mystics' way of asceticism not only makes him feel redeemed from sex but also capable of escaping Vivien, at least morally. However, MacDiarmid (2003) is of the view that:

> "…the bulk of current critical and popular readings of Eliot attribute his conversion to his gynophobia and his hatred of domesticity. Specifically, critics and biographers such as Tom Matthews and Peter Ackroyd read Eliot's Ash Wednesday as an abandonment of Vivien and his atonement for that 'sin.' Secondarily, they view his alliance with the Church of England as an official repudiation of the embarrassingly mercantile flavours of his St. Louis roots, the humanist influence of his grandfather, Andrew Greenleaf Eliot, and his mother's overbearing intellectual and social ambitions" (MacDiarmid, 2003).

Rooted in his early years, Eliot's confirmation to the Church, thus, signals a repudiation of his grandfather's Unitarianism. Nay, his behavioural resistance to the Puritan family code indicates his spiritual departure from his family. His conversion, in a sense, separates him physically and spiritually from his hysterical wife and gives him the freedom to cut her out of his life. Working as a defence mechanism, religion, to Freud, vouchsafes the individual's protection against neurotic illness. As Freud (2002) says:

> "Biologically speaking, religiousness is to be traced to the tiny human child's long-drawn-out helplessness and need for help, and when, at a later date, he perceives how truly sad he is when confronted with extraordinary forces of life, he feels his condition

> as did in childhood, and attempts to deny his despondency by a regressive revival of the force which protected his infancy."

Eliot's desertion of his family to settle in Britain indicates his deep sense of loss, alienation and spiritual fall. His Puritan family's strict observation of the standard of conduct made him discontent. However, Eliot, far from his parents, was aware of the fragility of his existence. So, to compensate for the loss of his parents, he searched for unity with God to make Him his alternative father. In this connection, it is worth mentioning Freud, when he maintains:

> "Psychoanalysis has familiarised us with the intimate connection between the father complex and belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than a heavenly father. It also provides evidence every day of how young people lose their religious beliefs as soon as their father's authority breaks down" (Freud, 2002).

The poem's title, *The Waste Land*, in a sense, alludes to Jessie Weston's book, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), as both take moral degradation as responsible for the modern wasteland. According to the legend, the wound of the Fisher King in Weston's book is caused by passion. This suggests the legend's association of sterility with sexual sin. In one of the versions of the Holy Grail, some maidens were there on the sacred hill who offered hospitality to the passers-by with their golden cups. One day, the Fisher King outraged one of these maidens and stole the golden cups along with his knights. The rape incident of these maidens by the chieftain fuelled the priestesses of the vegetation cults, and the land, as a result, became waste and sterile (Coote, 1985). Brooks (1965), in his discussion of the Holy Grail legend, says, "…the court of the rich Fisher King was withdrawn from the knowledge of men when certain of the maidens who frequented the shrine were raped, and their golden cups were taken from them. The curse on the land follows from this act." The story also reminds us of the Oedipus myth when the plague was inflicted upon Thebes and its inhabitants because of Oedipus' incestuous marriage with his mother, albeit unknowingly.

However, the poem also symbolises man's withdrawal from God. It might also be read as Eliot's spiritual autobiography bearing a flagrant similarity to that of St. Augustine, whom Eliot read in his early years. St. Augustine, after his conversion, confesses, "But I deserted you, my God. In my youth, I wandered away too far from your sustaining hand and created of myself a barren wasteland" (Augustine, 2009). It suggests that life without God is nothing but sterile and aimless; it is a directionless, long journey with no hope of searching for self and revival. In the twenties, Europe, like Carthage in the time of St. Augustine, was seen as a picture of a moral wasteland. Wilson (2001) rightly says:

> "Mr. Eliot uses The Waste Land as the concrete image of spiritual drought. His poem takes place half in the real world – the world of contemporary London, and half in a haunted wilderness – the wasteland of the medieval legend, but The Waste Land is only the hero's arid soul and the intolerable world about. The water that he longs for in the Twilit desert is to quench the thirst that torments him in the London dusk."

Thus, the poem reflects not only the modern man's psychological state of existence but also Eliot's state of mind and religious collapse. It is a culmination of his experience, before his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, of a long process of spiritual torment and struggle. This suggestive poem is a literary piece and a timeless journey, a reflection on the modern man's life.

5. Conclusion

In the contemporary era, characterised by a decline in moral ideals, the sensuous prevails over the spiritual. This leads to psychological imbalance and a perception of crisis and decline. The spiritual distress of the waste-landers arises from contemporary surroundings and their uncritical capitulation to desires they believe would alleviate their psychic emptiness. The pursuit of psychological coherence is central to the poet's focus. The transition from "The Burial of the Dead" to "What the Thunder Said" exemplifies a spiritual odyssey, thereby

implying the potential for inward redemption. The psychological and spiritual desolation of The Waste Land culminates in the acceptance of the potential for renewal. In an era dominated by scientific discourse, atheism, and sexual liberation, religion facilitates the modern individual in attaining a transcendental experience and achieving inner peace and coherence. Rather, pursuing comfort in sensual and macabre cravings, religion serves as a catalyst to alleviate individual suffering and unify the fragmented person into a cohesive entity. Eliot perceives religion as a safeguard against his trauma. The subject of wandering serves as the major structural element employed by Eliot in his poem. By interpreting the poem as a pursuit of spiritual enlightenment and psychological cohesion, the reader might perceive its progress.

Reading modernist spiritual poetry, especially those of T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats, changes the reader's view of spirituality in modernity's broken setting. Like *The Waste Land*, such poetry represents the early 20th century faith crisis, as religious certainty is destabilised and spiritual dislocation is substituted. It emphasises subjective, internal heavenly experiences, encouraging readers to value introspection over institutional orthodoxy. As in *Four Quartets*, modernist spiritual poetry maintains a fruitful tension between doubt and belief, implying that spiritual revelation may come from uncertainty rather than orthodoxy. Its unique use of myth and symbolism, especially in W. B. Yeats' writing, challenges readers to rethink cultural and religious traditions as dynamic and developing. Such poetry raises awareness of existential fragmentation by integrating spiritual crisis with modern alienation, and its complex, allusive language requires a slow, deliberate reading. Modernist spiritual poetry forces readers to address fundamental ethical and existential problems, creating a complex, critical, and intensely personal connection with spirituality in the modern world.

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