

## T. S. Eliot and Eastern Spirituality

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### ABSTRACT

Eliot's lifestyle exemplifies his religion. The community that the book provides enables not just Eliot to gratify his own aspirations but also enables others to arrive at similar realizations and locate their place. The work is the culmination of Eliot's lengthy quest for structure and wonder in literature. In spite of Eliot's assertion that the letter in question is neither a manifesto nor a plea to society, its contents suggest otherwise. This work is a reflection of his quest to comprehend the inexplicable as well as his transition from Eastern philosophy, which he explored in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, to Western Christianity, which he adhered to until the very end of his life. The world we live in today is ethically bankrupt, and as a result, the physical takes precedence over the spiritual. The end outcome is a psychological imbalance, a crisis, and decadence. The contemporary surroundings of the waste landers and their unthinking dedication to want, which they believe will fill the gap in their psyches, are the root causes of the spiritual conflict that they face. The poet is looking for psychological coherence. The progression from "The Burial of the Dead" to "What the Thunder Said" alludes to the idea of an individual's eventual salvation from within. The ending of "The Waste Land" ushers in a new way of being in the world. Religion helps the contemporary man find transcendence, inner quiet, and coherence in a time when science, atheism, and sexual liberation are the prevailing worldviews. Religion has the power to ease the suffering of the person and unite his fragmented self into a unified and harmonious whole. Eliot looks to several religious practices for comfort. The idea of travel plays a significant role throughout Eliot's poem. When seen through the lens of an individual's pursuit of psychological and spiritual wholeness, the poem demonstrates forward movement.

**Keywords-** Eliot's lifestyle, Religion, Spirituality and Eastern philosophy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *Desire and the Religious Crisis*

If "I think therefore I am," is the axiom associated with Descartes, then "I feel therefore I am" is the axiom associated with Freud. As the poem makes clear, Sigmund Freud believed that the thing that distinguishes man from other animals is his capacity for desire. The characters in "The Waste Land" are driven by their baser instincts and yearn for human hearts. This is made abundantly clear in the confession made by the speaker, which reads as follows: "What have we given?/My buddy, blood shaking my heart." "By this, and this alone, we have survived; the terrifying courage

of a moment's surrender, which an age of wisdom can never withdraw" The lines provide the impression that an individual's feelings and wants are at their very centre, yet the inhabitants of the waste area are unable to resist their baser impulses. In this way, sensuality becomes victorious over spirituality. In the novel "The Waste Land," sexuality is portrayed as a subject of illegal connections and sentimentality that is suffocating. In point of fact, the modern age's overwhelming and morbid cravings have rendered existence unlivable.

Orienting Oneself Towards the Far East: Buddhism The concepts of suffering, attachment, detachment, and the cultivation of compassion are at the core of Eliot's Buddhist references, which can be found

throughout his body of work. This ancient religion is predicated on the idea that one must go through hell. Buddhists believe that every person and every part of the world is experiencing some form of pain, and the only way to escape this suffering is to follow the path of middle way. Detachment from the physical world is an important part of this spiritual journey. Detachment, on the other hand, does not imply that people should be indifferent to the people around them or give up all of the material belongings they have. Instead, we ought to work on developing our compassion for all living things. In point of fact, we ought to love all beings as much as we love ourselves, but in order to do this, we must do it without inducing sentiments of wanting or desire. 1 This objective of emotional detachment combined with a commitment to helping others builds community and prevents the development of a society centred on individualism. The cultivation of this form of compassion requires many years of dedicated meditation, reading, and self-reflection; the majority of people will not acquire this degree of compassion until they have spent many lives working towards it. Once a person reaches this degree of comprehension or enlightenment, they are required to maintain their humility; for their ego to delight in such an accomplishment would be counterproductive to the process of cultivating such a state. Eliot, who as a writer was focused on generating fresh critical viewpoints and on continuous progress, was undoubtedly drawn to the amount of dedication that was necessary, as well as the chance that a person would have to consistently strive towards these aims. Buddhism not only provided him with a route to follow, but it also provided him with a more definite set of spiritual and ethical ideals to achieve. Right intention, right action, right concentration, and right mindfulness are some of the eight objectives that need to be accomplished in order to complete the Noble Eightfold Path Buddhists work toward each of these objectives one at a time until they have mastered each stage in the process. While Unitarianism presented Eliot with a general idea of how one should live their life, Buddhism supplied him with a step-by-step procedure of how one should live their life.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study on T. S. Eliot breakdown, fragmentation and self-division
2. To study on symbol of fertility as well as a symbol of faith in Christianity

### *The Spiritual Pilgrimage*

Even though Eliot's study of philosophy caused his religious confidence to be shaken or destabilized, in the end he discovered that religion was the sole remedy for his psychological difficulties and dualistic thinking. Before making the decision to become a Catholic, Eliot explored a variety of religions, all of which led him to

the conclusion that a life devoid of faith is a barren wasteland. Because of this, he became aware of the possibility that religion may provide the centre of comfort and equilibrium that he desperately required. According to Brooker (2015), "One by one, like an inventory assessor, he eliminated Bergsonianism, humanism, aestheticism, and other early twentieth-century "-isms," and "in the light of Christianity, he denounced them all as deficient," Bergsonianism was one of the "isms" that he rejected. This puts an end to any religious issues that Eliot may have had in the past because he changed to the Anglican Church. He embraced a Christian worldview even before he wrote "The Waste Land," thus this puts an end to any religious doubts that he may have had. His bouts of illness provided him with the chance to engage in in-depth reflection on the question of who he was and to concentrate his focus on the action of defining who he was. Before he could be empowered to create a new version of himself, it was essential for him to go through events that led to his breakdown, fragmentation, and self-division. These were all necessary experiences.

In point of fact, Eliot's path toward Catholicism began a significant amount of time before 1927; more particularly, it began around the time when he was working on "The Waste Land." One possible interpretation of this poem is that it describes a journey that the speaker is doing in which they are looking for both themselves and their faith. In "The Burial of the Dead," the beginning of the speaker's quest for spiritual truth is described. In "The Burial of the Dead," the speaker extends an invitation to the audience to "come in under the shadow of this crimson rock," claiming that they would be seen "something unique from either." The offer does not explicitly state it, but it does imply that religion can serve as an alternative to living on the waste area. In the Bible, the rock is commonly taken to represent God or some other type of spiritual authority; nevertheless, this interpretation does not hold true in the current condition of affairs. Eliot does not believe either Fascism or Communism to be a workable alternative since he perceives both of these political philosophies to be contemporary manifestations of Satan. As a result of this, he does not consider either of these political ideologies to be a viable choice. Because of this, Eliot was able to fulfil his lifelong quest for inner peace through his conversion to Christianity and, eventually, the Anglican Church. It's probable that the preceding comment was making a reference to a difficult ethical conundrum when it mentioned the shadow. Regarding the meaning of the shadow, De Laszlo (2013) states, "The shadow is a moral dilemma that challenges the whole ego personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without great moral effort." This is in reference to the fact that no one can become aware of the shadow unless they make a significant amount of effort. The speaker was referring to the shadow when they said this. You must first recognise the shadow aspects of your

personality as being present in the here and now in order to become conscious of it.

In addition, the prophetic figure in "The Burial of the Dead" warns the inhabitants of the waste region of the impending spiritual destruction as well as the arrival of false prophets, whom he portrays as broken images: "What are the roots that grasp, what branches emerge out of this stone rubbish?" the poem asks. The prophetic figure in "The Burial of the Dead" also warns the inhabitants of the impending arrival of false prophets. "Son of man, you are incapable of speaking or speculating since all you have experienced is a pile of shattered pictures, where the son beats, and the dead tree offers no shade, the cricket gives no relief, and the dry stone does not produce the sound of water." Even if there is no answer to the problem, it is plainly evident that nothing that has roots can flourish in the desert. As a result, a life lived without faith is analogous to a form of death that is experienced while the person is still alive. These lyrics make a reference to a chapter in the Bible that describes how God chooses Ezekiel to be His messenger to Israel after addressing him as "Son of Man" and proclaiming Israel to be a waste area owing to the wickedness of the Israelites. He relates to us what happened next: "And he said unto me, Son of Man, rise upon thy feet, and I will speak vnto you." And the spirit entered me as he spoke to me, and it lifted me up so that I could hear him who was speaking to me. And as he spoke to me, the spirit came into me. These "broken representations" may be interpreted in the same way as the idols that the Israelites have crafted in order to worship gods that do not exist, which would indicate a decrease in morality within their culture.

***Sign of fertility in addition to being a symbol of trust in the Christian religion***

Additionally, the "dead tree" in "The Burial of the Dead" is the antithesis of the Tree of Life in the sense that it symbolises the spiritual values that have been demolished as a result of modern materialism, which diverts the individual from moral and religious obligations. In this sense, the "dead tree" is the antithesis of the "Tree of Life." In contrast to this, the Tree of Life, which represents the spiritual principles that have been maintained, can be seen in the background. Along the same lines, the fear of being saved is a resounding sign that those living in the waste land have already died on a spiritual level. The phrase "show you dread in a handful of dust" that was uttered by the speaker conjures up an image of the funeral rite that is described in the Book of Common Prayer. During this rite, it is stated that man is made up of dust and that he will return to dust once he has passed away. The speaker's phrase "show you dread in a handful of dust" In addition, the next sentence "Looking into the centre of light, the silence" seems to imply that the speaker is unable to understand what it means to attain a state of spiritual enlightenment. Because of its spiritual connotation, the word "heart" might be construed by some as a reference to "The

Sacred Heart of Christ." This interpretation is possible because the word "heart" has a spiritual sense. There is a connection between light and Christ or between light and spiritual comprehension here.

The comment that came before this one seems to indicate, in light of this information, that the individuals who now live in the waste area are spiritually blind. The protagonist of "The Burial of the Dead," who searches for enlightenment in the incorrect location, serves as an excellent representation of this concept. His attention is drawn to the strange ideas of a fortune-teller who uses "a dreadful deck of cards." It is the same person who is shown in "The Fire Sermon," "fishing in the drab canal/On a winter evening round behind the gashouse," and a few other places in the poem. The disheartened fisherman takes the wrong path to get enlightenment in his spiritual life because he decides to fish in a murky river in the evening during the winter. This is not a smart thing to do. The modern man does not look for guidance in the Bible; rather, he consults the cards of fortune tellers like Madame Sosostriis in the hopes of receiving understanding about the spiritual realm via their readings. At this point in time, the word "prophet" can also be understood in the meaning of "profit." This leads one to believe that Sosostriis is a professional seer of the future who receives payment for her predictions. As a consequence of this, the word "clairvoyante" is the most appropriate way to refer to her in French. This is due to the fact that the word "seer" is synonymous with "prophet" in the English language.

To put it another way, the moment an individual comes to terms with the fact that they are wicked is a watershed moment in their journey toward spiritual enlightenment, which is essential for the maturation of the soul. Therefore, the speaker in "The Burial of the Dead" becomes cognizant of his spiritual deadness and emptiness; similarly, to Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, he appears to say in a hushed voice, "the horror! The horror!" Therefore, the darkness in the first part may be symbolic of the horrible realisation of spiritual emptiness that prompted him (the speaker) to start a pilgrimage towards the city of God. This idea is supported by the fact that darkness is associated with spiritual emptiness. The setting of the verse provides evidence in favour of this interpretation. In everyday parlance, "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" refers to the last round of drinks ordered at a bar; however, in the context of the poem, it may be interpreted as an invitation to salvation, redemption, and cleansing. The speaker's plea to the audience to "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" is a colloquial term for the final round of drinks.

This line expresses the concept that one only has a certain amount of time on earth and that one has to make the most of every chance to progress in the right path in order to maximise their potential. In addition, the phrase "shadow at morning walking after you/Or your shadow at night rising to meet you" gives the impression

that the speaker is going on a pilgrimage to the East for spiritual reasons. The orientation of one's body with respect to the East is symbolic of the effort that is made by individuals to achieve enlightenment. The speaker of the previous lines, a nameless waste lander, is a pilgrim who is poised at the end of a dry season, waiting for rain, which is considered as a sign of grace and fertility. He or she is waiting for rain because rain is seen as a symbol of grace and fertility. As a result, travelling to the city of God is not an easy endeavour; this is especially true when taking into consideration the fact that this is symbolised by the severity of the seasons and the sluggish reaction of nature.

The sporadic and foul sexual craving finds its height in "The Fire Sermon," when seen from a perspective comparable to the one described above. In spite of this, the chapter draws to a close with the quester's agonising realisation that he has made mistakes and his comprehension of the imperative requirement for purification and atonement. The required cleansing can be attained by the listening of the songs "Death by Water" and "What the Thunder Said." Eliot is optimistic about the future because he is certain that asceticism and spirituality hold the key to overcoming the challenges he faces. A glimmer of hope is cast by the fact that he makes allusions to Augustine, the Buddha, and Christianity. Augustine and Buddha are two of the most well-known examples of people who followed a particular spiritual path.

#### ***Sexually promiscuous activities taking place at Margate and on the dunes of Margate***

The way in which Eliot alludes to St. Augustine stirs up powerful sentiments of religious fervour as well as sorrow for having indulged in sexual misconduct. In his book "Confessions," Augustine says that the sexual cravings he has are unable to bring him joy or fill the gap that he feels on a spiritual level. This is something that Augustine acknowledges in his writing. As a consequence of this, he comes to the realisation that one may accomplish both the fulfilment of one's own potential and the attainment of pleasure by being one with God. "The presence of St. Augustine and, by extension, of a deeply rooted sexual anguish in a civilization that is dissolving owing to the absence of spiritual resources, improves enormously" "The Waste Land," as stated by Coote (2015). It is possible to say that the effect that St. Augustine's apparition had at the poem's crescendo, "The Fire Sermon," reverberated throughout the entirety of the poem. At the end of the poem, after describing sexual encounters that took place at Margate and on the dunes of Margate, the author makes a reference to Saint Augustine. According to Eliot, the only way for a person to purge themselves of overpowering sexual desire, which kills one's soul, is via the practise of a religion. Gordon (2017) provides the following explanation as a possible meaning for the text in her commentary on these lines:

*When it comes to religion, sexual humiliation is usually considered to be the top priority. The penitent admits his idle lusts in the way of Augustine, and his consciousness of sin drives him to transition into the burning habit in an effortless manner. It is clear that he does not care about the abused women in London; rather, he is preoccupied with maintaining his own chastity. The statement that is presented here is a piece of evidence that points to the speaker's responsibility, and it is as follows: "He wept. He gave his word "a beginning from scratch."*

Following Gordon's line of reasoning, one could argue that the poem is a spiritual trip that is meant to deflect attention away from the material world. This would be consistent with the overall purpose of the poem. This would be in line with the definition of the term "peregrination," which describes the act of wandering. The seeker has progressed beyond the physical sphere because sexual desire is a diversion for man on the path to spiritual enlightenment. The seeker has moved beyond the physical domain.

In a similar vein, the fact that Eliot makes a reference to Buddhism is significant due to the fact that Buddhism is regarded as a psychological religion that rescues its adherents from the torment and misery of life and elevates them into the so-called state of Nirvana, which is characterised by an absence of desire in its practitioners. In other words, the fact that Eliot makes a reference to Buddhism is significant due to the fact that Buddhism is regarded as a religion that the coming together of Eastern and Western religions (Buddhism and Christianity) becomes a symbolic act of marriage that merges the shards of religion in order to bring back God, the image of whom has been distorted and converted into "a heap of broken pictures."

In the story "What the Thunder Said," a pilgrim who wanders through a barren area in pursuit of grace ultimately reaches the spiritual truth at the end of his journey. In his comments on the last stanza of the poem, Gordon (2015) writes, "I am certain that in order for Eliot to have been able to write this work, he must have had some 'sign.'" He went on to explain that creating religious poetry is difficult because it takes not only genuine experience but also short moments of illumination and self-awareness as well, both of which are extremely rare occurrences. To put it another way, Eliot, who wants faith and order, finally achieves his purpose of making peace with himself by performing the task at hand. This is made clearly evident by the fact that the poem finishes with a Christian benediction that says, "The Peace that passed all understanding," which translates to "the peace that surpasses all understanding."

Along the same lines as the imagery of water, the fish is considered to be an old sign of fertility. This belief dates back to ancient times. It is said that the fish is a sign of faith in the Christian religion as well. According to Weirick, the meaning of "the fish" in this

context comes from the Bible and refers to the pursuit for redemption and eternal life (2014). On the other hand, in the modern waste land, the symbolism of the fish does not have the same significance as it did in the past. This is due to the fact that the residents of the waste land are "fishing in the drab canal/On a winter evening round behind the gashouse." It is not a wise decision for the fisherman to go fishing on a cold winter evening in a dreary canal that has been polluted (both literally and figuratively) as a result of the industrial revolution. Because of this, the odds of the fisherman not catching any fish are significantly increased. Since of this, the main character in "The Fire Sermon" seems to be on the point of having a nervous breakdown because he has very little trust in the potential of attaining any type of spiritual enlightenment. As a result of this, the book's title refers to him as "The Fire Sermon."

#### ***In the Burial of the Dead brokenness and regaining a primal condition of harmony***

A moment of transcendent experience is depicted in the song "What the Thunder Said," in which there is a movement toward self-reintegration and completeness. On the other hand, "The Burial of the Dead" depicts a period of relational experience, which is the situation of being fragmented and divided. To put it another way, religion lifts the position of the poet from that of a sick person to that of somebody who is in league with God. Therefore, religion may be the centre that all of the parts should move toward in order to reclaim the fragmented sense of oneness that they previously possessed. "the connection to something beyond oneself could engender a sensation of the self as full again, united in the act of devotion," explains what Ackroyd has to say about the topic in question. In order to heal a personality that was on the point of splitting into pieces, he needed an object that was not human to which he could aim his ardent feelings in order to help him mend the personality that was on the verge of disintegrating into fragments. The narrator makes the phrase, "I can link nothing with nothing," which is immediately followed by a reference to Augustine's confessions. This conveys the sense that religion is the only method of rebinding the fragments of one's life and achieving oneness in the world. Through the practise of a religious faith, one can find the way to healing and inner harmony. This route can be found. The mere word "religion" stems from beginnings that signify rebinding, retying, overcoming brokenness, and reclaiming a basic condition of harmony, according to the words of Brooker and Bentley. It's possible that the waste land of the twentieth century is a place with a heightened awareness of separation, but in reality, it's only the most recent expression of a situation that's always been there. The feeling of yearning that Eliot has is for a community that, to the best of his knowledge, has never actually existed at any point in history. Religion, in point of fact, plays a crucial part in reaching the sense of wholeness and completeness that is severely lost in today's modern

society. This lack of sense of completion and completeness is sorely lacking in today's modern society. With the help of religion, one is able to get a feeling of cohesiveness as well as psychological completion.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

The fall in moral standards that has come to define the contemporary period is the primary reason why the age of sensuality has triumphed over the age of spirituality in our world. This results in a condition of psychological instability along with a crisis mindset and a sense of decadence for the individual. In point of fact, the spiritual predicament of the people who live in the waste land is a direct result of the conditions of modern times as well as the inhabitants of the waste land's mindless surrender to want, which they believe has the potential to fill the psychological void that exists within them. One interpretation of the poet's attention may be that it is primarily concentrated on the search for psychological coherence. The transition from "The Burial of the Dead" to "What the Thunder Said" is organized like a spiritual journey, which provides a clue to the possibility of locating salvation from inside oneself. When the author finally embraces the possibility of a new existence, "The Waste Land's" emotional and spiritual desolation is finally put to rest. At a time when the language of science, secularism, and sexual liberation govern the world, religion provides the contemporary man with the opportunity to have a transcendental experience, as well as inner quiet and coherence. Religion also gives the modern man the ability to have inner calm and coherence. Religion is the force that has the potential to alleviate an individual's suffering and to tessellate an individual's fragmented ego into a coherent whole. Instead of turning to carnal and morbid urges in search of solace, people should turn to religion as the driving force in their lives. Eliot comes to the realization that his religious beliefs might possibly act as a shield against the harrowing events that he has been through. To my astonishment, T. S. Eliot maintains his primary concentration on the travelling motif throughout the entirety of the construction of his poem, making it one of the most important structural elements he makes use of in the process. When the reader considers the poem in the context of a search for psychological and spiritual coherence, they are able to acquire a clearer picture of the progression of the poem. Eliot, on the other hand, gives the impression that he does not consider himself to be a mystic, and he suggests that the experience of poetry, or any artistic Endeavour for that matter, produces a redeeming force, a dimension that is both space less and timeless, and in which the impossible becomes possible. In other words, he suggests that the experience of poetry produces a dimension in which the impossible becomes possible. According to Eliot's point of view, art is a realm of infinite probabilities, and as such, it enables artists to

transcend their own constraints and get access, albeit imperfectly, to the ultimate truth, which is where all religions flow together like rivers into a single source. In other words, art is a realm of infinite probabilities, and as such, it enables artists to get access to the ultimate truth. This component serves as the focal point of his inquiry in the fifth movement of each quartet, as well as the focus of a later investigation that delves deeper into the topic.

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