

The Incredible Images of Modern Land in *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot

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Abstract

The twentieth-century English literature is often called as the modern age. The social system of the modern age is filled with money-making men and money-minded mortals. The literary fields witness the reformation in poetic tastes and treatments. The main aspect of twentieth-century poetry is freedom. Modern poets practice their hands freely in the pages of poetry. They use rhymed verse, blank verse and free verse in their poems. They can use complex structures. Imagery is the literary term used in language that appeals to our five senses. Imagery helps the reader to sense the subject matter more realistically. An effective imagery in a literary piece can create a right mood and tone. Poetic imagery often works on multiple levels, depending on the context. Poets use imagery to draw readers into a sensory experience. T.S. Eliot is a representative poet of the modern age. He attracts the modern readers with his modernistic views on the scenes of society. *The Love Song Of Alfred Prufrock* is a popular poem of Eliot which describes the exact condition of modern life. *The Waste Land* is a striking poem of Eliot on the pages of twentieth century literature. He employs a set of spiritual and social images in this poem to guide the modern men towards the peaceful path. This paper will present the interesting images available in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. It will also highlight the hidden meaning behind the important images.

Keywords: T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Twentieth-century poetry, poetic tastes, imagery, modern age , spiritual and social images.

Introduction

Thomas Stems Eliot is an eminent poet, essayist, playwright and critic of the modern age. He is an important literary representative of modern times. His critical opinions affect the modern society deeply. *The Waste Land* was published in 1922. The whole poem is divided into five sections. Namely, A Burial Of The Dead, A Game Of Chess, The Fire Sermon, Death By Water and What The Thunder Said. Eliot satirises the cruel face of the first World War. The soldiers suffer a lot mentally and physically. The modern poetry introduces the idea of imagism to the English literary world. The imagism pictures a particular object or event which creates a series of strong emotional link in the minds of the readers. Eliot is an expert who uses symbolic language. He employs a set of spiritual and historical images in *The Waste Land* without affecting its

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classical poetic structure. Ezra Pound, who is a good friend of Eliot, cuts the prolonged lines of *The Waste Land* in order to improve its understandability. Eliot adds the required explanatory notes along the actual text. Let us see the incredible images present in each and every section of *The Waste Land*.

Discussion and Interpretation

The Imageries are the literary devices which are used across the literary world. Poets, novelists and playwrights make use of imagery for many reasons. Imagery is the literary term used in language that appeals to our five senses. Imagery helps the reader to sense the subject matter more realistically. An effective imagery in a literary piece can create a right mood and tone. Eliot applies referential words and phrases in *The Waste Land* to create mental images. Eliot's objective correlative depicts that a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events can create a particular emotion in the minds of the readers.

Initially, Eliot portrays the season of April, Winter, Spring. He says that our life too has several seasons. All seasons may not be fruitful. We have to be ready to receive winter and summer with the same hands. We cannot avoid any season for any reason. We substitute life with spring and death with winter. Death is also a season. Many of us don't want to receive a season named death. Eliot says that there is life after death. The poet conveys that April which gives life to humans and trees is cruel on this modern Earth.

*April is the cruelest month, breeding
lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
memory and desire, stirring
dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot 1 - 4)*

The title of the poem itself shows the image of landscape which is empty. The cycle of barrenness and fertility is common in the land of Nature. This poem talks about the spiritual barrenness of modern society. The modern men add less importance to the spiritual enlightenment. They run behind the money. They forget the heavenly Priest who created them on this land. The modern Land is a infertile in nature. Eliot cleverly explains the broken nature of modern life using the disarrayed structure of the poem. The poetic circle does not round straight. It changes its direction then and there. It comes back to the same point with different observations on the modern life. Any brilliant man cannot say or guess the true nature of modern life. The modern trees have empty branches filled with troubled insects and we cannot see the flowing water drops on the land.

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,

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And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. (Eliot 21 - 24)

Madame Sosostris is a fashionable woman who has an image of the fortune teller. All the people trust her words rather than their own labours. London is a popular city which is called as the unreal city in the poem. The bridge has to connect the people from one end to another end. Here, the foolish crowds move over London bridge without any aim. They destroy the bricks of the bridge with their brutal businesses. The poet specifies that the crowds over London bridge are the spiritually weak people. Their senseless actions turn London as the waste land.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many. (Eliot 60 - 63)

Ta-Ta is an informal way of saying goodbye. The poet uses the image of Ophelia who is a young heroine of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. She turns mad and commits suicide at the end in search of a flower. She utters goodbye to the world and rests in peace. Ophelia knows more sweet and soft women of her age. The modern women are mad at mind and unclean at heart. They cannot find a peaceful sleep like Ophelia. They do not have good nights because they are bad in days. In *A Game of Chess*, Eliot documents, "*Ta Ta good night, good night / good night ladies, good night sweet ladies, good night, good night*". (Eliot 172,173)

The poet states the famous sermon of Lord Buddha. Sermon is a religious instruction from the mouth of great saints. Buddha delivers a sermon about the nature of fire. We can use the fire to burn foods and the fire can burn us. The modern world burns with hatred and hegemony. Buddha advises us to throw off the inner fire which leads us to the path of destruction. We have to reject the physical materials to be free on this land. In *The Fire Sermon*, Eliot writes, "*Burning burning burning burning / O Lord thou pluckest me out / O Lord thou pluckest burning*". (Eliot 308 - 310)

The water is an essential part of human life. We need water to survive daily. The water is a symbol of purification and reformation. The pollution of the river symbolises spiritual impurities. Thames is a sweet smelling river of London. Spenser talks highly about the Thames, but Eliot observes the pollution around the Thames. The Thames loses its spiritual waters of the past. Mrs. Porter is a woman who involves in prostitution. Mrs. Porter and her daughter use soda water to attract more modern men. In *Death by Water*, Eliot shares, "*Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop / But there is no water*". (Eliot 358 - 359)

The image of thunder suggests the readers to hear the preaching of Jesus Christ. As a spiritual person, Eliot wants the modern men to follow the footprints of the ultimate God. Also we can

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say that Jesus can erase all the modern mistakes of men with his spiritual hands. He can pour rain on the dry lands.

The poet shares that a human can be a god as well as a devil. The modern men have to hold sympathy and empathy in their hearts. The poem emphasises the idea of Shantih. He repeats the word 'Shantih' for three times to showcase the importance of inner, outer and spiritual peace in the modern life. The modern men have to be silent to sense the system of life. Eliot concludes the poem with a Sanskrit quotation from the Upanishads. It shows the message of thunder to the whole world. Three is a significant number of the earthly life. We eat three times a day. An individual can take up three different roles. Namely, God, Human and Devil.

Thus, A Burial of the Dead talks about the different seasons of life and land. A Game of Chess shows the splendor of Cleopatra and a suicidal state of modern life. The Fire Sermon advises the readers not to follow materials. Death by Water shows the irony of life through the image of Water. What the Thunder said projects the message of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The Waste Land carries many great images about the modern world. It focuses on the eastern as well as the western philosophies of modern life. The modern men live in a world which holds a broken mirror. The broken mirror shows the split faces of the men. We come across the images of rock-like land, dead trees and dry stones. The land has a burning Sun and it is rare to see a drop of water. Even the sweat becomes dry. The lazy men never work under the Sun. The modern machines absorb all the sweats of employable labourers. The modern men give nothing to this society. They take every sources from the society and they don't return the wealth back to their community. They are uncompassionating and selfish. They don't exercise self control. Eliot perfectly showcases the present image of the modern world. He asks the readers to look at the past pages of our history. We have to learn from our mistakes to survive in the modern world.

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