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## Critical Analysis of Allusions and Symbols In The Poem *The Wasteland* by Thomas Stearns Eliot

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### Abstract

Modern man is spiritually hollow and barren; he is just like a robot that follows the pre-assigned tasks. He wakes up early in the morning, changes his dress, takes his breakfast, goes to office, takes his lunch, returns to his home, spends time with family, takes dinner, goes to his bed and next day in the morning again follows the same routine. Modern man is inhabitant of Wasteland, although he has gained progress in science and materialistic culture, yet he has no values, he is spiritually dead. He has only one eye of Commerce his spiritual eye is closed, so he is spiritually blind. Few of the reasons for modern man's destruction are sex perversities and gambling, making false love and religious waywardness. He is confined to his routine work and helpless to act upon his religious doctrines or moral values. Religion is the only way to get deliverance, man is mortal he can be immortal just like the Holy Christ by adopting the message of God. The poem "The Wasteland" digs the graves of ancients and shows us their immoral activities, waywardness and spiritual barrenness and this is the great craftsmanship of the poet. Through the symbolic and allusive analysis of this poem the researcher will try to show the images of hollowness and barrenness in the present age.

**Keywords:** Allusions, Symbols, Wasteland, Hollowness, Modern Man

### Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot stands as a great poet of the twentieth century. He is regarded as a rebel poet, who discusses city life, its barrenness, hectic activities, sex perversities, immoral attitude of the city people, and loss of faith in religious traditions, spiritual sterility, and snobbery and so on. It is said that, a great poet in writing of him, writes his age, we find the same quality in the poetry of Thomas Stearns Eliot. He uses both traditional as well as personal symbols in his poetry. He is an obscure symbolist; an ordinary reader can never easily understand his symbols. As for as allusions in his poetry are concerned, he uses Shakespearean and Miltonic as well as Dante's and Lord Buddha's references in his art. He also uses some particular Christian myths and at the same time he introduces us Greek mythology. The *Wasteland* was published in 1922; it is a remarkable poem in the history of English Literature, written in 433 lines. The poem consists of five section "The Burial of the Dead", this section deals with spiritual decadence and death of waste-landers, "A Game of Chess", the game is played to hide the seduction of a young girl by a noble man, "The Fire Sermon", a reference to Buddha's famous sermon, which suggests that the whole world is on fire of hatred, lamentation, misery, grief and despair, "Death by Water", water is a symbol of life but for waste-landers it's a symbol of death, "What the Thunder Said", here we find solution to get rid of barrenness and sterility of waste-landers or modern man.

#### **Critical Analysis of Allusions and Symbols:-**

There are four waste lands in the literary history. The First Waste Land is of King Oedipus of Thebes, which show Oedipus complex i.e. sexual intercourse between mother and son. The Second Waste Land is of King Fisher, who became impotent (lacking sexual power) due to some immoral activity. The third Waste Land is the Biblical Waste Land; it is concerned with the sufferings of people who worshipped idols. The fourth or modern Waste Land is written by T. S. Eliot which signifies the sins and fire of lust in modern society. Well at the end of every waste land we find a solution and penance of rebirth or regeneration. Similarly, the modern waste land by T. S. Eliot also ends in the ray of hope; here T. S. Eliot gives us a message that the three "DA's", Datta, Dayadhvam and Damyata are the solutions to save the modern civilization from chaos and ruin.

#### **Symbols and Allusions in First Section "The Burial of The Dead":-**

In literature, April is consider the month of rebirth or regeneration but for waste-landers April is the cruelest month as they are not will to revive. In line 20 "son of man" symbolizes the Holy Christ. In line 22 "heap of broken images" symbolizes loss of spiritual values in the modern man. In line 23 "dead tree" symbolizes complete barrenness of modern civilization. In line 25 "red rock" symbolises Christian Church. In lines 35, 36 and 37 "Hyacinth" is a plant which is a symbol of sensuous love. In line 52 "one-eyed merchant" symbolizes the modern man whose commerce eye is opened but religious eye is closed. In line 60 "Unreal City" symbolizes London city, this is also an allusion taken from Baudlaire's poem in which this phrase refers to Paris. Line 62, "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many," is parallel to Dante's line in *Inferno*. Line 64, "Sighs, short and infrequent, were

exhaled," is allusion from Dante's Divine Comedy. Line 68, "with a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" is an allusion towards the boring mechanical life of waste landers and "final stroke of nine" symbolises the death time of Christ. There is another allusion from the opera of Richard Wagner's Tristan and Isolde in lines 32, 33 and 34 which are

"Der Heimat  
zu Mein Irisch Kind  
Wo weilest du?"

"In line 43 "Madame Sosostriis" is an allusion taken from Aldous Huxley's novel Crome Yellow. Line 48, "Those are pearls that were his eyes" is an allusion from Shakespeare's play "The Tempest". In line 49 "Belladonna" symbolizes beautiful women, the description of Belladonna is also an allusion from the paintings of Virgin Mary by Leonardo De Vinci. In line 61 "brown fog" symbolizes the barrenness of city life.

#### **Symbols and Allusions in Second Section "A Game of Chess":-**

This section is about the rap of a young girl and problems of married life in lower class families. The title of this section is allusive which is taken from Middleton's play "Women Beware Women". In line 77 "The Chair she sat in" is an allusion taken from Shakespeare's play Antony and Cleopatra. Lines 92 and 93 are allusion taken from Aeneid in which the ceiling of a banquet hall of Queen Dido of Carthage is described, the lines are "Flung their smoke into the laquearia/ Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling"

In Line 98 "sylvan scene" is another allusion towards the painting showing a forest scene and the Satan entered the garden. In line 99 "The change of Philomel" is an allusion about the story written by Ovid in his book Metamorphoses, in which god transformed Philomel into a nightingale after facing many tragic events in life. In line 103 "Jug Jug" is a French term which symbolises sexual intercourse. In line 115 "rat" is a symbol for modern man and in line 116 "dead bones" symbolises men with dead souls. Line 125 "Those Pearls that were his eyes" is an allusion from Shakespeare's play "The Tempest". Line 138 "Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door" this is an allusion taken from the Middleton's play "Women Beware Women", in this play a game of chess is played with mother-in-law to diverge her attention to enable a lustful Duke seduce her daughter-in-law. In line 161 chemists selling abortion pills symbolises the one eyed merchant who has only commerce eye. The last line of this section, line 172 is "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night." This very line is taken from Ophelia's farewell in Shakespeare's play Hamlet, this line symbolises the tragic life of lower class families after marriage.

#### **Symbols and Allusions in Third Section "The Fire Sermon":-**

This section is about the sex perversities in modern man, and tells about the rape of three daughters of River Thames. The title of the poem is allusive and is taken from the Sermon of Lord Buddha. Lines 177 and 178 are about the pollution of the river Thames, these lines symbolises spiritual degeneration of the modern civilization. In lines 176, 183 and 184

"Sweet Thames" is allusion from Spenser's Prothalamion. In line 182 "water of Leman" is another allusion, the reference is to Lake Leman, where Bonnavard was imprisoned. Line 191 "Musing upon the king my brother's wreck" is allusion taken from Shakespeare's play "The Tempest". In line 204 "Jug Jug jug jug jug" is a French term which symbolises sexual intercourse. In line 207 "Unreal City" symbolizes London city, this is also an allusion taken from Baudlaire's poem in which this phrase refers to Paris. In lines 218, 229 and 243 "Tiresias" is another allusion taken from Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. Line 221, "Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea", is an allusion taken from Stevenson's play Requiem. Lines 277, 278, 290 and 291 are a reference to Wagner's Opera. In line 279, "Elizabeth and Leicester", is a allusion to Queen Elizabeth and Leicester sailing upon the river Thames in the past time. Line 292 "Trams and dusty trees" is a symbol of the progress of materialistic culture in London. Lines 307, 309 and 310 are allusions from St. Augustine's confession, who prayed to God to save him from the fire of lust. Line 308, "Burning burning burning" is an allusion to Buddha's fire sermon where he says that the world is burning in the fire of lust and hatred.

#### **Symbols and Allusions in Fourth Section "Death by Water":-**

This is the smallest section of the poem; Eliot wants to tell us that we are like dead bodies although we are physically alive, yet spiritually dead. Water is a symbol of rebirth, life and purification but for waste-landers it has become a source of death. In line 312 "phlebas" is a symbol for 20th century modern man, in the same line "Phoenician" is a symbol for London city. Line 317 "He passed the stages of his age and youth" is allusion towards the captivation of the image of nice Osiris who gets old as he rises and falls on the waves, later he is reborn.

#### **Symbols and Allusions In Fifth Section "What The Thunder Said":-**

This is the last section of the poem and about how the modern man can get deliverance. The title symbolises hope and rebirth. In line 327, "thunder of spring" symbolizes rebirth of Holy Christ. Line 328, "He who was living is now dead" is about the Fructification of Holy Christ. Line 354, "And dry grass singing" is a symbol for minor spiritual revival. Line 358, "But there is no water" symbolises that in order to gain spirituality one has to face hardships. Line 373, "Falling towers" stands for Christian Churches. In line 411, "I have heard the key" is an allusion to the story in Dante's Inferno. Key symbolises one's release from one's own ego. Line 416, "Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus" is another allusion borrowed from Shakespeare's play Coriolanus. In line 418, "The boat responded" is an allusion from Wagner's Opera, Tristan and Isolde. Line 427, "Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina" is an allusion borrowed from Dante's Purgatory, this line means please remember my pain. In line 431 "Hieronymus" is an allusion from Kyd's Spanish Tragedy. In lines 402, 411, 418 and 432 "Datta, Dayadhvam and Damyata" these words are allusions towards Indian Mythology. Datta means to give, Dayadhvam means to sympathize and Damyata means to control. Eliot wants to say that deliverance can be achieved by acting

upon these three doctrines i.e. to give, to sympathies and to control. Line 428, “Quando fiam uti chelidon---O swallow swallow” is an allusion towards the story of Philomela and her sister and their transformation in to nightingale and swallows respectively.

### Conclusion

Eliot's allusive and symbolic technique is far reaching. He uses more allusions and symbols than that of John Milton. He wants to relate the present to the past, in order to convey some didactic purpose from the past incidents. Through these allusions and symbols he forecasts the future of modern man and modern civilization. Modern man can attain deliverance by acting upon the message of Thunder i.e. give, sympathize and control. He quotes the references of more than thirty writers. Mostly he takes those allusions from the past which symbolize spiritual hollowness, degeneration in free sex and sterility. In waste land the modern men are full of lust, there is barrenness of spiritual feelings. The major themes in the work the waste land is the disillusionment of generation the spiritual and emotional sterility of the modern world. Eliot uses the waste land to draw connections between the mechanization and technological advancement in everyday life and the degradation of human dignity. Eliot's poem can be read as criticism of the industrial revolution and its effects on society. To conclude we can say that, the use of mythical elements and symbolism makes the waste land more complicated to understand for the readers.

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