

## Allusive Technique in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

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### Abstract

Thomas Stearns Eliot is a multidimensional literary persona of the twentieth century. There are two significant mentions which are valuable to comprehend what T.S. Eliot expresses by the illustration of the strife in his work. It is echoed in the central declaration in his statement in 1928 “He was a royalist in politics, an Anglo-Catholic in religion and a classicist in literature.” The other is unambiguously expresses in the portrayal of T.S.Eliot by Vernon Hall as : “He is, in more than the theological sense of the word, dogmatic, and he declares in one place that the only people who can understand what he is talking about are those for whom the doctrine of original sin is very real and tremendous thing.” *The Waste Land*, his classic poem is a finest illustration to comprehend him further as a poet with no obligatory limitations. Allusion is generally measured a literary technique, but comparatively minute care has been shown to the concept of allusion as a literary form. This article attempts to define the ‘allusive form’ on the ground of T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land*. It symbolizes distinctive features of the allusive form. These are linkage, or a reliance upon external fonts for intelligence and meaning; keen and self-conscious unnaturalness; an argumentative approach toward the viewers; elitism, based on the exclusiveness of allusions; adoption of manifold values; and universal relic. Though disposed to many lapses, the allusive form permits the formation of an exclusive discourse between artist and viewers, as well as an unwarranted concurrence of past, present, and future.

**Keywords:** T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, allusion, form, elitism, theological sense, literary technique

### Over-burdened with Allusions

Critic after critic has termed ‘*The Waste Land*’ as a very obscure verse and the chief source of difficulty is the extreme allusiveness of Eliot’s style. *The Waste Land* contains several allusions – literary, religious, mythical etc., in which some are obvious, others disguised and still others were obscure. The poem consists four-hundred and thirty-three lines comprising excerpts, simulations to at least thirty-five authors which include Buddha, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, St. Augustine, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Ezekiel, Goldsmith, Marvell, Middleton, Webster, Kyd,

Spenser and Shakespeare. Early reviewers reacted adversely to this midley and concluded that Eliot was not a exact lyricist observing openly upon time in order to appeal lyrical substantial form, but a pseudo-poet who appeals his substantial from life by the glasses of volumes. The poem was also regarded as “ill-knit, loaded with echo and allusion, fantastic and crude, obscure and obscurantist”.

### **Mythical Milieu**

On the day before of the masterpiece of ‘*The Waste Land*’, T.S. Eliot had been reading Jessie Weston’s book ‘From Ritual to Romance’, and James Frazer’s famous book ‘The Golden Bough’. He has admitted that he was intensely predisposed by these literary works and the primeval and primeval legends which form the mythological contextual to the poem are obtained from these literary pieces. He procured the fable of the Grail and the Fisher King, the flora and rich legends and ceremonies from Miss Weston’s book and The Golden Bough respectively, especially those connected with Attis, Adonis and Osiris. These mythologies are vital in the poem – they are the “objective co-relative”, for the belief of the poet. Eliot relates these legends to the current condition and appeals it a Waste Land due to its mystical sterility. The myths of Adonis and Attis are of Frazer’s main concern in his monumental work The Golden Bough to which Eliot acknowledged his indebtedness for the construction of his The Waste Land. He attempted to express that the resurgence has been the chief mythical theme lying in the combined unconsciousness of all men throughout different ages, from primitives to modern men in the very introductory lines of *The Waste Land*:

“April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain”

Ibid. 1-4

### **Allusion to the Indian Religion**

Eliot does not confine himself to Western influence only, but also draws on Indian religion to reinforce his theme in the poem. The title of the Section III – The Fire Sermon is referred to the Buddha’s fire sermon which he discoursed against the fires of desire, fury, covet, and other desires that devour men. It also recollects one of the Confessions of St. Augustine where he signifies desire like a fiery boiler. The protagonist’s prayer at the end of the Section “O Lord Thou pluckest me out” primes on obviously to the subsequent Unit in which is indicated the possibility of purification. The various scenes of Section III show us the sterile burning of lust, and the references to the Buddha and St. Augustine are intended to show the need of an asceticism something to check pressures of desire. The Knowledge of the East and the West comes to the same thing on this point.

Both in the east and the west desire has been destined as a foundation of all immoral, but the mystically deceased recent humankind recognizes merely desire and no true adoration. The unit is a discourse, but it is a discourse by instances only. The disinfected fiery desire is carried out by diverse sex practices in the modern waste land.

### **Allusions of Earlier Writers**

The water is a foundation of refinement and rejuvenation, but the decadent human being does not comprehend this, and so does not vacillate to pass the river's pureness which, "sweats oil and tar". The river's effluence symbolizes mystical collapse. The river-section puts us in mind of a similar section in Spenser's Prothalamion. But in Spenser's scene the nymphs and their lovers prepare for wedding, but in the contemporary section they accumulate there just for a celebration of desire. The contrast is jarring, and it is a degree of the mystical collapse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The character laments the effluence of the stream's water. As he sits on its banks harpooning in the grey channel nearby the gas-house, an icy breeze setback. It carries to him the complete of the pointless mirth of London mobs who change about fast like desiccated skeletons. Reminiscences crowd in upon him, and he is retold of Bonivard in the Prison of Chillon in Byron's well-known work, mourning his damage of liberty on the banks of Lake Lemane; or the imprisoned Jews in The Bible lamenting by the river Babylon. Since he is the spokesperson of humankind, one whose reminiscences drive to the distant past, the section also retells him of the brother of The Fisher King, fishing for the rejuvenation of his brother. Water and fishing were signs of revolution and revival in the past, but now they have vanished their mystical implication. The settings of the river are muted, smarmy rats tiptoe by nude deceased bodies drift on the river, skeletons are dispersed all over, and are anxious as the rats move about. This is the mystical decadence in waste land. The wickedness is later represented by the point that Mrs. Porter and her daughter rinse their feet in soda water, not for their mystical refinement, but to mark their skin reasonable to entice more males. Reference to "sound of horns and hunting" in Day's Coy Mistress puts us in mind of Actaeon being brought face to face with Diana, the goddess of chastity. However, in this passage the 'horns' are the horns of motor cars, and they carry the beastly and coarse Sweeney to Mrs. Porter, a brothel keeper.

The line "When lovely woman stoops of folly", is from a song in Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield in which the lovely woman who has stooped to folly commits suicide. But here the woman, the typist, indifferently turns on the gramophone. Hence the association of the past and the present conveys the distinction, and in this way intensifies Eliot's irony on the modern distortion of morals. The lines are remarkable instance of ironic contrast in the manner of the Metaphysical poets of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Eliot weaves the very rhythm of modern life into the

fabric of his masterpiece in expressions, such as, “Like a taxi throbbing waiting”, and “puts a record on the gramophone”.

### **Allusion to Shakespeare**

Eliot’s reference to Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* forms part of an atmosphere and thematic pattern. In “The Fire Sermon”, Ferdinand reappears, in person now, identified with the figure fishing on the banks of the dull canal: “Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck/ and on the king my father’s death before him”. He is musing not upon sea-change, but upon the horror of mortality and the link between sexuality and physical decay and death. (Eliot’s change of “father” to “brother” is puzzling; it probably refers to a hermit brother of the Fisher King). On the whole memories of the atmosphere of *The Tempest* become a measure of the loss endured by the inhabitants of Eliot’s *Waste Land*.

“Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!”

Are taken verbatim from Act 1, scene 2 of *The Tempest*:

“Full fathom five thy father lies:Of his bones are coral made:Those are pearls that were his eyes...”

### **Allusions to the Myths**

The Tarot Pack of cards represents the different personages. In this section it represents the Smyrna merchant, the one-eyed merchant. In the past he conveyed both creed and sexuality to Europe. Now he has only one eye, i.e. signifies only sexual urges and has vanished his religious function. His ‘one eye’ also symbolizes the contemporary degeneration and dissolution. The card, which is absolute, signifies creed which he conveyed, and the decadent humankind cannot realise this mystical implication of the merchant. He is unshaven, unclean, his pockets are full of currents (symbolizing his merchandise) and documents showing that he is authorized to bring his goods carriage and insurance free. The degeneration of his function is further brought out by his inviting Tiresias to hotels which were the hot beds of corruption and homo-sexuality during the war, and the years which followed. Hence, he signifies a sex-relationship which is really infertile.

### **Conclusion**

In writing *The Waste Land* Eliot was not merely writing a poem of his age but with a sense that the entire literature of his specific nation and of Europe had a concurrent being. Thus, the allusions in the poem can be measured as a path of conveying the entire literature to deal with the then prevailing condition, bestowing it a comprehensive facet. Furthermore, it contributes the spirituality which Eliot felt was the answer to the Western dilemma. Thus, the overflow of allusions in *The Waste Land* allow a smooth and coherent understanding.

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