

From the ashes

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Reincarnation, at its roots, is a fundamental idea originating circa 1800 BCE in the Vedic scriptures that today define the Hindu belief system. However, the idea of reincarnation is applicable today as more than a spiritual cycle of death and rebirth. It can be symbolic of newfound healing, revival, and catharsis, and the principle of reincarnation offers a new perspective in our society - a society that is creeping ever so slowly towards absolute corruption and bigotry. T.

S. Eliot adopts this perspective in his poem *The Wasteland* by using Buddhist and Hindu religious allusions and vivid negative imagery to offer a solution to the deterioration of the modern world using principles of rebirth and regeneration. Foremost, Eliot takes advantage of his literary and cultural repertoire in order to apply foreign principles to his view of devalued modern world. Eliot's most prominent allusions include several references to Buddhist and Hindu beliefs, practices, and mythology all of which find their roots in the goal of ultimately achieving unity with god through breaking the cycle of rebirth (known as Nirvana in Buddhism and Moksha in Hinduism). Buddhism specifically preaches many of the same values as Hinduism in that Buddhists pursue a life devoid of materialism to reach a transcendent state of being. This process of abandoning the five senses and achieving self-enlightenment is known as the "Fire Sermon" which is coincidentally the title of part III of "The Wasteland."

" This particular section of the poem discusses the contamination of the Thames - a statement about an indulgent society without regard for consequences (Eliot). The pervading theme of opulence that Eliot communicates in this section speaks on the very reason that a monk must

perform the Fire Sermon. For humanity to regain what it has lost, its purity, we as a people have to relinquish our obsession with gluttony and instead look inwards for fulfillment. By applying a version of the Fire Sermon in our lives, we can achieve a purer living – an existence that Eliot is enraged does not already exist. This revitalization process is what Eliot hopes to bring to light as a way to pull back the reins on our degrading civilization. Similar to the Buddhists' sacrifice of material contentment, Hinduism demonstrates the idea of rejuvenation through several other methods.

The Ganges River in India is renowned for being one of the most sacred locations in the entire world, and Eliot alludes to its patron, Ganga the river goddess, in part V of his poem. Seeing the river “ sunken, and the [surrounding] limp leaves [waiting] for rain” creates a deeply disturbing picture of this once consecrated natural wonder (Eliot). This is Eliot's way of depicting the destruction of a way of life devoid of passivity and ostentatiousness. Portraying the Ganges as “ sullen” is a haunting reminder to us human beings that we are abandoning that which humanity once took pride in as an empathetic species. In fact, according to Eliot, we are so far detached from our empathy that we have even fallen out of favor with the goddess Ganga (or any other higher being) and polluted her domain. However, Eliot is once again not without a solution.

Following his description of the Ganges, Eliot references a Hindu myth in which the Gods, Demons, and Humans ask their father what the meaning of life is to which he replies with “ DA” (Eliot). This syllable, however, is heard differently by each of the three parties. The Humans hear “ Datta” meaning “ to give,” the Gods hear “ Dayadhvam” meaning “ to have compassion,” and <https://assignbuster.com/from-the-ashes/>

Damyata meaning “ to control oneself” (Eliot). While these are extremely abstract concepts in their religious context, Eliot references them for the purpose of using them as a weapon to combat our current existence. If we are able to apply compassion, generosity, and temperance in our lives, then we will have taken a leap towards the rebirth of a better humanity. Eliot’s message of redemption culminates in a final spiritual incantation in which Eliot pacifies us with “ shantih shantih shantih” – a Hindu chant representing a state of harmony, peace, and oneness with God (Eliot).

This peace represents the result of a devout life and “ redemption from rebirth,” escaping the cycle of reincarnation and achieving enlightenment (Christian Assemblies International). In Hinduism, escaping the cycle of rebirth is equivalent to attaining salvation. For Eliot, salvation is to rejuvenate society, and as a result, he adopts the teachings of both Buddhism and Hinduism – religions that teach spirituality as merely living a pure way of life. His goal through these references is to instill in the reader a vision of a new kind of reincarnation. The reincarnation of a better humanity.

To supplement his religious palette, Eliot uses his ability to evoke emotion by painting a rotting dreamscape for the reader. Eliot’s primary purpose in writing *The Wasteland* is to point out the shortcomings of humanity, and in order to do this, he puts our effusive reality on display. Historically, we as a species have enjoyed humble existences for the most part, reserving the majority of excess comforts for royalty. Unfortunately, today most of us strive for material successes in the form of “ satin cases poured in rich profusion” and “ standards wrought with fruited vines” (Eliot). However, instead of seeing our newfound ambitions as an evolution, Eliot sees them

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greedy and sinful. This “wasteland” of an existence we have created for ourselves is mirrored in his initial description of the desert where “roots that clutch...grow out of this stony rubbish” (Eliot).

While dark, this particular image has a redeeming quality. The purity of life, represented in the form of the roots, is displaying its resilience among the surrounding decay by reviving itself. This is Eliot’s way of reassuring the reader that he has not lost hope in humanity at all. He simply sees a divide between our consciences and our actions, an ideological divide that is impeding our collective ability to benefit our world. Eliot cares about humanity, the way God cares for his creations, in that he wants to see us redeem the qualities he already knows we have. So, when he describes our tendency to live in excess and speaks on the “burial of the dead” that we have made for ourselves, he is actually, very subtly, consoling us that all is not lost.

Like a disappointed father, he is scolding and reminding us to be the best versions of ourselves. Otherwise, he would not have moistened his wasteland with “spring rain” and he no doubt would have ensured we do not get a glimpse of a better future through spirituality (Eliot). If T. S. Eliot really did not see a future for humanity, he would have abandoned his pen long before 1922. Simply put, it is apparent that *The Wasteland* succeeds with flying colors in what it strives to prove: we, as a unified people, have strayed far off the path that God has laid out for us.

T. S. Eliot is able to masterfully articulate this argument line by line, and by the end, it is nearly impossible to deny that there are at least a few areas in

which society is lacking. His range of literary and mythological knowledge and impassioned descriptive ability create a depth to his poetry that shows us readers that we truly can resuscitate our existence. A depth that inspires reflection. It is in this very depth that Eliot entralls his readers, and it is his most effective tool in adjusting the loose cogs in the elaborate machine that is mortality.