



# Eliot's Remains; An Enquiry into the Architectural ruins in The Waste Land

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**Abstract**— *The research paper aims to examine the architectural ruins presented in the poem, The Waste Land by T.S Eliot. The scope of architecture and its destruction in the poem builds itself on the theoretical framework of Heterotopia given by Michel Foucault where the spatial structures and normative forms are challenged using figurative language. By advancing and applying Hauntology theory given by Jacques Derrida, it informs about Eliot's created spaces that haunt of historical past and cultural myths which furthers the poem's nuance. To reveal dislocated modernist spaces, the paper critiques on cultural collective memory, historical trauma and acknowledges how fragmented identities, memories, moral and spiritual failure places itself in the poem through physical destruction of architecture.*



**Keywords**— *Architecture, Hauntology, Heterotopia, Ruins, The Waste Land.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

T S Eliot's obedience and his vision for modernist sensibility allowed him to create The Waste Land. Like Milton and Chaucer, Eliot was able to space in and make an appropriate name for himself only to be titled as the 'Father of Modern Poetry'. Furthermore, it would be of no wondrous thinking that Eliot wasn't respected with a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948. A critical reader and reviewer of literature, he published his strong opinion under the essay titled as "Tradition and Individual Talent", where he assertively writes about how poetry examination needed to form a detachment from the poet's biographical and historical context. The rooted argument comes from a notion that poetry is impersonal and must not objection much on the poet's vision. To counter T.S Eliot's insight, The Waste Land relies heavily on metaphors, repository myths, trails and architectural ruins left behind. How shall one remain disillusioned to the rich historical backdrop and read the poem in fragments? Is it fair to remain devoid of the meaning of what the Grail legend serves in the poem or must we challenge our own understanding without the safety net of history?

## II. ANALYSIS

Our favorite modernist poet, Eliot, uses his creative tactics of visionary imagery, symbolism, metaphorical imagination, fragmented sentences to play with the decays of the modern world. Is it important that we conclude it to physical architectural ruins or must we think metaphysically to match with our poet's vision?

"Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter noon,

Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant,

Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants,

Cured the Saturday night fever."

The descriptive usage of the "unreal city" as a communicative ploy has been intelligently used by Eliot to account for the ruined space. It has been spinned into decay and confusion where the modern urban landscape is devoid of sentiments. This architectural raze has emotions of disconnect, and stands as a testimonial of societal collapse where people suffer from the robbery of collective communal identity. The civil industrial sites have built themselves into a mere physical entity and have robbed down the symbols of moral and cultural integration. Eliot

further himself to describe the unreal city with elements that of crowded streets, brown fog, and disoriented structures where people are fragmented and isolated in the urban space. They are mere spectators of architectural ruins where the modern landscape has falsely brought their identity. The rich historical cultural narrative is disturbed, and set in the backdrop of World War 1, Eliot's unreal city has scars of traumatic ruins and historical destruction.

Our poet's far sightedness of an unreal city has been infectious as the postmodern world has no structural elements that speak of our cultural background reflecting our collective beliefs and morals. The modern and postmodern architecture that of Vanna Venturi House, Philadelphia, USA built by Robert Venturi or the city spaces of London built by Zaha Hadid where she designed famously the London Aquatics Center for 2012 Summer Olympics, and the Roca London Gallery has disregard for historical narratives. There is no dialogue between the transformation from old to new and often the fabric of the city feels alienated. The possible assumption of dislocation can be felt where very often people are participants in the experimentation with design. The Avant-garde juxtapositions itself against the Roman architecture where it concerns itself with cultural insensitivity. Alienation of the space has been created when it has been stripped down from its natural historically rich environment. This perception creates dissonance where people feel foreigners and spectators in their habitual landscape. Kenneth Frampton, an architectural critic and historian discusses about the neglect for local and historical references in modern architecture in his seminal essay, "Towards a Critical Regionalism". He writes, "the more we can hold on to the specific nature of a place, the more we can have a structure that can become a kind of landmark." Therefore, this kind of unreal and out of place elements because of the displacement and the aftermath of war has been observed not on in architecture but also in its interdisciplinary fields.

A prominent scholar, historian and philosopher whose name knows only merit, i.e. Michel Foucault talks about the concept of "heterotopia" in his lesser known book called, *Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias*. A heterotopic space can be made specific by understanding and pushing the boundaries of realness. There is collapse of time, geophysical boundaries and cultural borders. Such space exists in a society but does not operate on what the normative structures ask for. They are therefore labelled as the 'other' because of the abandonment of it from reality and disruption of conventional systems.

This heterotopic space can be studied carefully and be applied to our text, *The Waste Land* because throughout the long poem, the architectural ruins and urban landscapes that

Eliot has presented to us is crowded with collapses of time, fractured spaces where there are multiple cultural and historical meanings embedded in one space.

"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?"

"I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me"

The Fisher King's Kingdom in the poem, serves as a myth taken from Arthurian legend, where the mythical figure's land becomes barren due to his infirm nature and failure as a king. In context to *The Waste Land*, the space serves as a mythical and metaphorical place to convey the barren, decayed lands of post-World War 1. The mythical past and the present disillusioned situation after the war have created a heterotopic space. Through the depiction of barren land which surpasses the boundaries of time, the mythical barrenness conveys that the king's broken body could only be recovered through a ritualistic act that of redemption (the Grail quest). However, Eliot uses this myth to write about the grave situation in Europe. There is literal destruction, psychological malfunction and the infertile land of the myth talks to us as a metaphor for spiritual and cultural barrenness in people's lives that Eliot observed. There was no meaning in traditional values, duties and structures, henceforth, everything had collapsed. This disintegration of space and multiple timelines have collided in one imaginary place representing the idea of heterotopia. The Fisher King although not explicitly mentioned in the poem, Eliot writes in his footnotes to give us clarity. Footnote to lines 218–219 (from *The Fire Sermon*): "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me", Eliot writes, "The Fisher King. See Miss Weston's book. From Ritual to Romance: chapter on the Fisher King."

*The Waste Land* and the ruins of Europe further can be studied through the idea of Hauntology to push our investigation. French philosopher Jacques Derrida is held responsible for the publication of his 1993 book titled as *Spectres of Marx* where he introduces us with the term Hauntology. The idea mentions of the return of the social and cultural past in the form of a ghost. The word combines haunt and ontology (the study of being) which comes to our understanding of how the past can never be erased but therefore be reshaped because of its lingering tendencies in the present. The mentions of physical spaces, architectural ruins and the ghostly existence of the past has been mourning throughout the text of *The Waste Land*. Eliot's poem has been haunted by mythological figures, spiritual dislocation and high cultural history that has been collapsed into barren lands due to the destruction caused by the World War 1. Although the poem has its setting after the crash of World War 1, the past cannot be forgotten as it is haunts the earlier civilians who built monuments, churches and places of worship. The

failure to continue the tradition serves as a phantom through the poem where people are possessed by its haunting nature.

"Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London".

The above mentioned lines suggest us to read and grieve for the dead. Once great cities with great buildings and architectural spaces has been now reformed to ruins and has been lost to history. Traditionally, these cities known for their intellectual and culturally thriving environment, the community is now dead. The careful use of "falling towers" suggests the crumbled of the central power ie. heritage that ruled the livelihoods of people. The decline of western civilisation haunts present landscape and the people devoid of emotions.

"In this decayed hole among the mountains / In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing / Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel".

The symbol of a worn out, dead chapel gives us an image in the mind to think of how a sacred space once, lies in destruction, rounded by graves. The chapel is holy space for renewal, hope and salvation, no longer serves its function but presents itself as a haunting structure. Liminal in description, a space that occupies between life and death, past and present. The mention of "tumbled graves" enhances the imagery of destruction where history has been forgotten, the dead have been put to ultimate sleep, and their graves are no longer considered sacred.

### III. CONCLUSION

The intelligent use of architectural motifs by T.S Eliot in the poem, The Waste Land is applaudable and when understood through the nuances of Hauntology and Heterotopia, the physical space, memories and cultural events all combine together to form an integral place where a desperate attempt has been made to make sense of the present. By the usage of vivid images, metaphors, repetitions, the Unreal City, The Chapel Perilous and the Fisher's Kingdom are all symbols that are haunting and echoing the voices of the dead to the present empty shelled people. The Waste Land, is not just about architectural spaces but about a world that stresses in tension of the ghosts of the pasts and on how to rebuild a paralysing future.

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