

Why is London called the Unreal City?

Writer: T. S. Eliot | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Why is London called the Unreal City? [NU: 2016]

T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) published “The Waste Land” in 1922. In its first section, London is called the “Unreal City.” This picture of London reflects the emptiness of modern life. The city is crowded but lifeless, filled with people who seem to have lost all hope. Eliot uses this phrase to show the spiritual death of modern society.

Crowds Like The Dead: People move like ghosts, without purpose or feeling. They are alive in body but dead in spirit. Eliot writes,

*“A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.”*

Loss of Human Connection:

The people keep their eyes fixed on the ground. They avoid contact, showing fear and isolation. The city is full, yet everyone is lonely. Eliot shows that modern life has lost true human bonds.

Echo of Baudelaire: The phrase “Unreal City” comes from Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal*. Eliot borrows it to show London as a modern hell. Like Paris in Baudelaire’s poem, London is corrupt, mechanical, and spiritually empty.

Symbol of Modern Decay: London appears as a place of gloom and sterility. The author says,

*“Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,”*

The bell of St. Mary Woolnoth strikes with a “dead sound.” These images show a city without warmth, hope, or renewal.

In final, London is called the “Unreal City” because it is a city without true life. Its people walk like shadows, without love or meaning. Eliot shows London as the symbol of the spiritual wasteland of the modern world.

LxNotes