

## "The Waste Land"

### Introduction:-

T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" has been called "one of the most important poems of the 20th Century" and it might actually be one of the most important poems ever. The poem was first appeared in the United Kingdom in the October issue of Eliot's *The Criterion* and in the United States in November issue of *The Dial*. It was published in book form in December 1922. It is a 434 line poem consist of 5 parts.

The connection between these parts is far from apparent, and within those parts there are many smaller parts. The poem consists of images, quotations; entire lines are taken from other writers; there are over sixty different writers in more than half dozen different languages; from the past, present, modern, ancient, western and eastern. In its general framework, "The Waste Land" is constructed out of vignettes, patched quotations, and snapshots from different cultural, religious, and literary contexts. These references are from... factual, historical and mythological.

1. The Burial of the Dead (76 lines).
2. A Game of Chess (96 lines).
3. The Fire Sermon (139 lines).
4. Death by Water (10 lines).
5. What the Thunder Said (113).

In its original draft, the poem was almost twice as long as the published version. That's because T.S. handed the thing over to his buddy, Ezra Pound, who slashed a ton of material and made extensive editing suggestions. Eliot pretty much used every one of these suggestions, and even dedicated the poem to Pound, calling him "il miglior fabbro" in the inscription, which is Italian for "the better craftsman." So yeah, even though T.S. wrote the poem to end all poems in 1922, he still had some confidence issues.

Maybe what Eliot should have been concerned about was penning a poem that's considered incomprehensible by many first-time readers the world over. Yep, there's no getting around it: "The Waste Land" can be one tough cookie to read. The poem constantly shifts between different speakers without warning, and it's chock full of references to classic literature from cultures all over the world, many of which are more than a little obscure.

The Waste Land draws much of its symbolism and narrative framework from the mythological story of the quest for the Holy Grail, the sacred cup that Jesus Christ drank from at the Last Supper. The poem presents a bleak and gloomy picture of the human predicament in the twentieth century. In a way it presents the "disillusionment of a generation." The gloom and despair of the poet are mirrored in this poem. The poem thus presents "a vision of dissolution and spiritual drought". This spiritual and emotional sterility of the denizens of The Waste Land arises from the degeneration, vulgarization, and commercialization of sex.

Apart from its obscure allusions, "The Waste Land" can be difficult to read because it constantly shifts between different speakers and scenes, often without warning. At one

moment, you're a woman reminiscing about riding on a sled when you were young; at another, you're staring at a dead sailor who's decaying at the bottom of the ocean. But no matter how weird things get, make no mistake: this is a very, very serious poem about a very serious subject: the decline of western culture and the beauty that this culture once possessed, back in the good old days of classic times.

### **Structure:**

The poem structure is divided into five sections. The first section the burial of the dead introduces the diverse themes of disillusionment and despair. The second, the game of chess employs vignette of several characters alternating narration that addresses those themes experimentally. The fire sermon, the third section offers a philosophic relation to the imagery of death and use of self denial in juxtaposition influenced by Augustine of Hippo and eastern religions. After fourth section that includes a brief lyrical pattern the terminating fifth section, what the thunder said concludes with an image of judgment.

### **Section I: "The Burial of the Dead"**

The first section of *The Waste Land* takes its title from a line in the Anglican burial service. It is made up of four vignettes, each seemingly from the perspective of a different speaker. The first is an autobiographical snippet from the childhood of an aristocratic woman, in which she recalls sledding and claims that she is German, not Russian (this would be important if the woman is meant to be a member of the recently defeated Austrian imperial family). The woman mixes a meditation on the seasons with remarks on the barren state of her current existence ("I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter"). The second section is a prophetic, apocalyptic invitation to journey into a desert waste, where the speaker will show the reader "something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; / [He] will show you fear in a handful of dust" (Evelyn Waugh took the title for one of his best-known novels from these lines). The almost threatening prophetic tone is mixed with childhood reminiscences about a "hyacinth girl" and a nihilistic epiphany the speaker has after an encounter with her. These recollections are filtered through quotations from Wagner's operatic version of *Tristan und Isolde*, an Arthurian tale of adultery and loss. The third episode in this section describes an imaginative tarot reading, in which some of the cards Eliot includes in the reading are not part of an actual tarot deck. The final episode of the section is the most surreal. The speaker walks through a London populated by ghosts of the dead. He confronts a figure with whom he once fought in a battle that seems to conflate the clashes of World War I with the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage (both futile and excessively destructive wars). The speaker asks the ghostly figure, Stetson, about the fate of a corpse planted in his garden. The episode concludes with a famous line from the preface to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (an important collection of Symbolist poetry), accusing the reader of sharing in the poet's sins.

### **Section II: "A Game of Chess"**

This section takes its title from two plays by the early 17th-century playwright Thomas Middleton, in one of which the moves in a game of chess denote stages in a seduction. This

section focuses on two opposing scenes, one of high society and one of the lower classes. The first half of the section portrays a wealthy, highly groomed woman surrounded by exquisite furnishings. As she waits for a lover, her neurotic thoughts become frantic, meaningless cries. Her day culminates with plans for an excursion and a game of chess. The second part of this section shifts to a London barroom, where two women discuss a third woman. Between the bartender's repeated calls of "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" (the bar is closing for the night) one of the women recounts a conversation with their friend Lil, whose husband has just been discharged from the army. She has chided Lil over her failure to get herself some false teeth, telling her that her husband will seek out the company of other women if she doesn't improve her appearance. Lil claims that the cause of her ravaged looks is the medication she took to induce an abortion; having nearly died giving birth to her fifth child, she had refused to have another, but her husband "won't leave [her] alone." The women leave the bar to a chorus of "good night(s)" reminiscent of Ophelia's farewell speech in Hamlet.

### **Section III: "The Fire Sermon"**

The title of this, the longest section of *The Waste Land*, is taken from a sermon given by Buddha in which he encourages his followers to give up earthly passion (symbolized by fire) and seek freedom from earthly things. A turn away from the earthly does indeed take place in this section, as a series of increasingly debased sexual encounters concludes with a river-song and a religious incantation. The section opens with a desolate riverside scene: Rats and garbage surround the speaker, who is fishing and "musing on the king my brother's wreck." The river-song begins in this section, with the refrain from Spenser's *Prothalamion*: "Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song." A snippet from a vulgar soldier's ballad follows, then a reference back to Philomela (see the previous section). The speaker is then propositioned by Mr. Eugenides, the one-eyed merchant of Madame Sosostris's tarot pack. Eugenides invites the speaker to go with him to a hotel known as a meeting place for homosexual trysts.

The speaker then proclaims himself to be Tiresias, a figure from classical mythology who has both male and female features ("Old man with wrinkled female breasts") and is blind but can "see" into the future. Tiresias/the speaker observes a young typist, at home for tea, who awaits her lover, a dull and slightly arrogant clerk. The woman allows the clerk to have his way with her, and he leaves victorious. Tiresias, who has "foresuffered all," watches the whole thing. After her lover's departure, the typist thinks only that she's glad the encounter is done and over.

A brief interlude begins the river-song in earnest. First, a fisherman's bar is described, then a beautiful church interior, then the Thames itself. These are among the few moments of tranquility in the poem, and they seem to represent some sort of simpler alternative. The Thames-daughters, borrowed from Spenser's poem, chime in with a nonsense chorus ("Weialala leia / Wallala leialala"). The scene shifts again, to Queen Elizabeth I in an amorous encounter with the Earl of Leicester. The queen seems unmoved by her lover's declarations, and she thinks only of her "people humble people who expect / Nothing." The section then comes to an abrupt end with a few lines from St. Augustine's *Confessions* and a vague reference to the Buddha's Fire Sermon ("burning").

### **Section IV: "Death by Water"**

The shortest section of the poem, "Death by Water" describes a man, Phlebas the Phoenician, who has died, apparently by drowning. In death he has forgotten his worldly cares as the creatures of the sea have picked his body apart. The narrator asks his reader to consider Phlebas and recall his or her own mortality.

#### **Section V: "What the Thunder Said"**

The final section of *The Waste Land* is dramatic in both its imagery and its events. The first half of the section builds to an apocalyptic climax, as suffering people become "hooded hordes swarming" and the "unreal" cities of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London are destroyed, rebuilt, and destroyed again. A decaying chapel is described, which suggests the chapel in the legend of the Holy Grail. Atop the chapel, a cock crows, and the rains come, relieving the drought and bringing life back to the land. Curiously, no heroic figure has appeared to claim the Grail; the renewal has come seemingly at random, gratuitously.

The scene then shifts to the Ganges, half a world away from Europe, where thunder rumbles. Eliot draws on the traditional interpretation of "what the thunder says," as taken from the Upanishads (Hindu fables). According to these fables, the thunder "gives," "sympathizes," and "controls" through its "speech"; Eliot launches into a meditation on each of these aspects of the thunder's power. The meditations seem to bring about some sort of reconciliation, as a Fisher King-type figure is shown sitting on the shore preparing to put his lands in order, a sign of his imminent death or at least abdication. The poem ends with a series of disparate fragments from a children's song, from Dante, and from Elizabethan drama, leading up to a final chant of "Shantih shantih shantih"--the traditional ending to an Upanishad. Eliot, in his notes to the poem, translates this chant as "the peace which passeth understanding," the expression of ultimate resignation.

#### **"Symbolism"**

Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. Some time an action, an event or a word spoken by someone may have a symbolic value.

A symbol works two ways: it is something itself and it also suggests something deeper. Symbols associate two things, but their meaning is that both figurative and literal. Some symbols have widespread, commonly accepted values that should recognize. No symbols have absolute meanings and by their nature we cannot read them at face value. It is better to think what could the symbol mean or what they have meant.

#### **"Symbols in The Waste Land"**

*The Waste Land* is symbolically very rich poem. We rarely find such a variety of symbols except in T.S.Eliot's *Wasteland*. Living beings, animal or insect have been the important symbol. Land fertile and Barren both are depicted symbolically with deep meaning. River, water, Natural objects, drought, music, religion, song, king, queen and common people have

been used with symbolic reference.

### **Water:**

In Eliot's poetry, water symbolizes both life and death. Eliot's characters wait for water to quench their thirst, watch rivers overflow their banks, cry for rain to quench dry earth, and pass by fetid pools of stagnant water. Although water has regenerating possibility of restoring life and fertility, it can also lead to drawing and death, as in the case of Phlebas the sailor from the Waste Land. Traditionally water can be baptism, Christianity and the figure of Jesus Christ and Eliot draws these traditional meanings; water cleanses, water provide solace and water brings relief elsewhere in the Waste land and in "Little Giddings" the fourth part of four quartets. Water a predominant symbol of birth, death and resurrection appears through the poem as in the opening water signifies the giver of life. Yet it also stands for death. "Fear death by water", or those are pearls that were his eyes. The symbolic meaning depends with a deceased Phoenician.

"a current under sea picked his bones in whispers."

Eliot wrote:

"as he rose and fell he passed the stages his age and youth entering the whirlpool"

Now let's see water as symbol in what the thunder said- here water symbolize hope- the resurrection of the desolate Waste Land.

"Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves waited for rain,

While the black clouds gathered far distant, over Himavant."

### **The fisher king:**

The fisher king is one of the central characters in the poem; Eliot drew on from 'Ritual to Romance' a 1920 book about the legend of the Holy Grail written by Miss Jessie L. Westone for many of his symbols and images. The book is seen for the connection between ancient fertility rights and Christianity. It includes the evolution of the Fisher King into early representation of Jesus Christ as a fish. If we see it traditionally we find that the importance of death of the Fisher King brought unhappiness and famine. Eliot shows the Fisher King as symbolic of humanity robbed of its sexuality potency in the modern world and connected to the meaninglessness of urban existence.

### **Religion:**

The Fisher King stands for Christ and other religious figures associated with divine resurrection and rebirth. The speaker of "what the thunder said" fishes from the banks of the Thames toward the end of the poem as the thunder sounds Hindu chants into the air. Eliot's scene echoes the

Scene in the Bible in which Christ performs one of these miracles, Christ manages to feed his multitude of followers by the Sea of Galilee with just a small amount of fish. St. Augustine and the Buddha represent East and West's religious Music and Singing philosophy.

Eliot's been interested in dividing high and low culture. He symbolized them using music.

According to him high culture included opera and drama were on decline. On the other hand popular culture was on rise.

In the poem, T.S.Eliot blended high culture with low culture by juxtaposing lyrics from an opera by Richard Wagner with songs from pubs, American ragtime, and Australian troops.

Eliot splices nursery rhymes with phrases from the Lord's Prayer in "The Hollow Men", and

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is as the little, implies a song, with various lines

repeated as refrains. That poem ends with the song of mermaids luring humans to their deaths by drowning- a scene that echoes Odysseus' interactions with the Sirens in the

Odyssey. Music thus becomes another way to Eliot collages and references books from past literary traditions, elsewhere Eliot uses lyrics as a kind of Chorus, seconding and echoing the action of the poem much as the Chorus functions in Greek tragedies.

#### **Animals:**

Rat could be said to provide a model for Eliot's poetic process. Like the rat Eliot uses the bits and pieces to sustain poetic life. Somehow this is preferable to the more coherent but vulgar existence of the contemporary world-

"here represented by the sound of horns and motors in the distance intimating a sexual liaison".

#### **Drought as a symbol of death:**

The war's physical and emotional effects are visualized in the poem. The speaker of the poem uses drought as symbol of death.

"Here is no water, but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road

There is not even silence in the mountains

But dry sterile thunder without rain"

Throughout the poem drought has been the symbol of death. To heighten the anxiety of waiting for rain the speaker said that even the thunder, which indicates the possibility of the rain, is "sterile", thus killing what hope of rain there is in this stricken landscape.

Symbol of disconnection between human and natural world:

In a game of chess the speaker of the poem derides modern world that has lost touch with nature.



“the chair, she set in like a burnished throne  
Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
Held up by vines standard wrought with fruited vines”

Fruited vines belong to nature where as chair belongs to artificial world. The poet thus makes fun of the sense of personal disconnection in “The Waste Land”.

#### **Fire:**

Fire is used as a symbol sometimes of lust and sensual attachment, and sometimes as the purifying flame of purgation. In other words, fire in the poem appears as a symbol of two opposite concepts. In "The Fire Sermon" we get a fusion of St. Augustine's "cauldron of unholy loves" and Buddha's sermon in "Burning burning". Here fire is a symbol of lust.

#### **Buddhist:**

‘The Fire Sermon’ is the title taken from a sermon given by Buddha. Buddha encourages his followers to give up earthly passion (symbolized by fire). Buddha preached nonviolence and wanted his followers to rise spiritually. He symbolizes universal Non violence and peace.

#### **Thunder:**

Thunder strikes and does prophecy. There are many mythical tales about thunder in the Holy books of Mahabharata and Ramayana. It symbolizes the coming of good or evil time.

#### **Season:**

"I read much of the night and go south in the winter ".

Her woman mixes a meditation on the seasons with remarks on the barren state of her current existence.

Summer refers to joy,

Winter refers to grimness and

death. It refers to barrenness.

#### **City:**

Eliot’s London references Baudelaire’s Paris (Unreal city), Dickens’s London (“the brown fog of a winter dawn) and Dante’s hell (“the flowing crowd of the dead are similar. The city is desolate and depopulated, inhabited only by ghosts from the past.

Cities are destroyed, rebuilt and destroyed mirroring the cyclical downfall of cultures. Jerusalem, Greece, Egypt and Austria among the major empires of the past two millennia all see their capitals fall.

#### **River:**

The poem refers to Ganges in Himalaya. River is called the mother of civilization. The river symbolizes the flow continuity of life. Rivers are considered serene also. It symbolizes destruction as well as construction.

#### **The image borrowed from "The Tempest":**

The image contained in the line "Those are pearls that were his eyes", borrowed from "The Tempest" has a symbolic meaning. It suggests a death by drowning which leads to a new birth. Suffering and death may lead to a new life. Such is the significance of this image which occurs twice in the poem "The Waste Land".

#### **Philomela:**

In "A Game of Chess" the reference to the rape of Philomela by the "barbarous king" symbolizes lust and is linked with the violation of the three Thames-daughters where also lust plays the chief role. Both these situations have an obvious connection with the theme of sterile love dealt with above. Our contemporary waste land is largely the result of lust as distinguished from love, and lust defeats its own ends.

#### **"Characters in The Waste Land"**

##### **Speaker:**

Understood as a separate "character," the speaker is the prominent narrator who highlights the key themes in the poem and introduces all of the other characters and speakers in the poem. However, the speaker is simultaneously difficult to distinguish from the other personae, not the least because the lines often do not explicitly identify who is speaking, he assumes many different shapes and guises. For example, while Part 1 opens with an almost conventional perspective on the cruelty of April, it appears to introduce new speakers several times without any use of quotation marks or attribution. It is so difficult to distinguish "characters" in this poem, it could be argued that the speaker is also Madame Sosostris, Tiresias, the Fisher King, and so forth. Eliot himself hinted that several characters could be understood as one and the same.

##### **Madame Sosostris:**

A famous clairvoyant referred to in Aldous Huxley's novel Crome Yellow and borrowed by Eliot for the Tarot card episode. She suffers from a bad cold, but is nonetheless "known to be the wisest woman in Europe, / With a wicked pack of cards." Through her tarot cards, Madame Sosostris predicts many events and personages to come. For example, the "Phoenician Sailor" appears on one of the cards—and that character later appears in Part 4. The "Hanged Man," meanwhile, is not found among the cards Madame Sosostris lays out, but considering this tarot card refers to the ancient fertility rite of self-sacrifice, he figures prominently wherever those themes are featured, including references to Phlebas the Phoenician (the "drowned sailor"), the Fisher King, and the restoration of the wasteland.

##### **Tiresias:**



According to the ancient Greek poet Hesiod (c.700 BCE), Tiresias, who had spent seven years living as a woman, was asked to settle a bet for Zeus and Hera: who experienced more sexual pleasure—men or women? After answering that women did, Tiresias was instantly blinded by Hera, but given the gift of prophecy by Zeus. In a note to the poem, Eliot said that Tiresias was the most important figure in *The Waste Land* and that he united all the other characters. This means that Tiresias "throb[s] between two lives"—that of both men and women; he can therefore empathize with the women's plight in a way that other men cannot. Like Madame Sosostris, he has the power to foresee events, though he is powerless to stop them.

#### **Woman sitting on a chair:**

The woman sitting on a chair is one of several key female figures in the poem who are ill or injured in some way. When the reader first meets this woman, she is described living in absolute luxury, surrounded by perfumes and artwork. However, she has a story to tell: she has bad "nerves," gets no sympathy from her partner or lover, and is witness to physical and spiritual corruption in the figure of Lil, whom she speaks with in the pub in Part 2. However, she seems to show no sympathy for Lil, who suffers from some of the same problems as she.

#### **Stetson:**

A friend of the Narrator's, who fought in the war with him. Which war? It is unclear. Perhaps the Punic War or World War I, or both, or neither.

#### **Lil:**

Lil is a woman who is married to Albert and has become old before her time and generally ill as a result of having several children. She converses in the pub with the woman sitting on a chair in Part 2.

#### **Philomela:**

A character from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She was raped by Tereus, then, after taking her vengeance with her sister, morphed into a nightingale.

#### **A Typist:**

Lonely, a creature of the modern world. She is visited by a "young man carbuncular," who sleeps with her. She is left alone again, accompanied by just her mirror and a gramophone.

#### **Mr. Eugenides:**

A merchant from Smyrna (now Izmir, in Turkey). Probably the one-eyed merchant to whom Madame Sosostris refers.

#### **Phlebas:**

A Phoenician merchant who is described lying dead in the water in "Death by Water." Perhaps the same drowned Phoenician sailor to whom Madame Sosostris refers.

#### **Agent's Clerk:**

Appearing in Part 3 of the poem, the agent's clerk sexually assaults the typist, despite her disinterest.

#### **Phlebas the Phoenician:**

A drowned sailor, Phlebas the Phoenician turns up on one of Madame Sosostris's tarot cards, and appears as the main personage in Part 4. The "Phoenician Sailor" is not a figure that appears in the traditional tarot card pack but is an invention of Eliot's.

### **"Themes of The Waste Land"**

#### **Isolation:**

In "The Waste Land," the great despair of modern existence doesn't just come from a sense of meaninglessness, but from a very deep loneliness. This loneliness, in turn, is something Eliot thinks we create for ourselves by constantly pursuing our own selfish interests. It's pretty simple: you can't spend your whole life trying to beat the people around you, then turn around and complain about being lonely. Modern existence, with its emphasis on individualism, is a breeding ground for isolation and loneliness, and the major problem with modern people is that they don't seem to realize that they're responsible for the isolation that's always eating at their souls.

#### **Sex:**

In "The Waste Land," the status of sex is pretty much a measuring stick for how morally demolished society is. On several occasions, when it comes time for Eliot to show how truly low we've all fallen, he points toward sex—and not just sex, but the separation of sex from love. There's no getting around it; pop culture is totally obsessed with sex, and it tries to throw sex in our faces as much as it can. For Eliot, sex once had the potential to be a beautiful thing. But in modern times, this beauty (as with all forms of beauty) has been completely stripped of its significance, mostly because the act of sex no longer has anything to do with love. Call Eliot a little old-fashioned, but the guy's observations on sex pretty much still hold true for much of pop culture today.

#### **Death:**

Two of the poem's sections -- "The Burial of the Dead" and "Death by Water" --refer specifically to this theme. What complicates matters is that death can mean life; in other words, by dying, a being can pave the way for new lives. Eliot asks his friend Stetson: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" Similarly, Christ, by "dying," redeemed humanity and thereby gave new life. The ambiguous passage between life and death finds an echo in the frequent allusions to Dante, particularly in the Limbo-like vision of the men flowing across London Bridge and through

the modern city.

### **Rebirth:**

The Christ images in the poem, along with the many other religious metaphors, posit rebirth and resurrection as central themes. The Waste Land lies fallow and the Fisher King is impotent; what is needed is a new beginning. Water, for one, can bring about that rebirth, but it can also destroy. What the poet must finally turn to is Heaven, in the climactic exchange with the skies: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata." Eliot's vision is essentially of a world that is neither dying nor living; to break the spell, a profound change, perhaps an ineffable one, is required. Hence the prevalence of Grail imagery in the poem; that holy chalice can restore life and wipe the slate clean; likewise, Eliot refers frequently to baptisms and to rivers – both "life-givers," in either spiritual or physical ways.

### **The Seasons:**

"The Waste Land" opens with an invocation of April, "the cruellest month." That spring be depicted as cruel is a curious choice on Eliot's part, but as a paradox it informs the rest of the poem to a great degree. What brings life brings also death; the seasons fluctuate, spinning from one state to another, but, like history, they maintain some sort of stasis; not everything changes. In the end, Eliot's "waste land" is almost seasonless: devoid of rain, of propagation, of real change. The world hangs in a perpetual limbo, awaiting the dawn of a new season.

### **Lust:**

Perhaps the most famous episode in "The Waste Land" involves a female typist's liaison with a "carbuncular" man. Eliot depicts the scene as something akin to a rape. This chance sexual encounter carries with it mythological baggage – the violated Philomela, the blind Tiresias who lived for a time as a woman. Sexuality runs through "The Waste Land," taking center stage as a cause of calamity in "The Fire Sermon." Nonetheless, Eliot defends "a moment's surrender" as a part of existence in "What the Thunder Said." Lust may be a sin, and sex may be too easy and too rampant in Eliot's London, but action is still preferable to inaction. What is needed is sex that produces life, that rejuvenates, that restores – sex, in other words, that is not "sterile."

### **Love:**

The references to Tristan und Isolde in "The Burial of the Dead," to Cleopatra in "A Game of Chess," and to the story of Tereus and Philomela suggest that love, in "The Waste Land," is often destructive. Tristan and Cleopatra die, while Tereus rapes Philomela, and even the love for the hyacinth girl leads the poet to see and know "nothing."

### **Water:**

"The Waste Land" lacks water; water promises rebirth. At the same time, however, water can bring about death. Eliot sees the card of the drowned Phoenician sailor and later titles the fourth section of his poem after Madame Sosostris' mandate that he fear "death by water." When the rain finally arrives at the close of the poem, it does suggest the cleansing

of sins, the washing away of misdeeds, and the start of a new future; however, with it comes thunder, and therefore perhaps lightning. The latter may portend fire; thus, "The Fire Sermon" and "What the Thunder Said" are not so far removed in imagery, linked by the potentially harmful forces of nature.

### **History:**

History, Eliot suggests, is a repeating cycle. When he calls to Stetson, the Punic War stands in for World War I; this substitution is crucial because it is shocking. At the time Eliot wrote "The Waste Land," the First World War was definitively a first - the "Great War" for those who had witnessed it. There had been none to compare with it in history. The predominant sensibility was one of profound change; the world had been turned upside down and now, with the rapid progress of technology, the movements of societies, and the radical upheavals in the arts, sciences, and philosophy, the history of mankind had reached a turning point.

Eliot revises this thesis, arguing that the more things change the more they stay the same. He links a sordid affair between a typist and a young man to Sophocles via the figure of Tiresias; he replaces a line from Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" with "the sound of horns and motors"; he invokes Dante upon the modern-day London Bridge, bustling with commuter traffic; he notices the Ionian columns of a bar on Lower Thames Street teeming with fishermen. The ancient nestles against the medieval, rubs shoulders with the Renaissance, and crosses paths with the centuries to follow. History becomes a blur. Eliot's poem is like a street in Rome or Athens; one layer of history upon another.

### **"Allusions in The Waste Land"**

Allusion is the most striking of the ways on which poetry takes into its service elements and forms of experience which are not inevitable to life but need to be specially acquired. The difficulty which it raises is an instance of a general communicative difficulty. Allusion is the method that

gives the impression that modernist texts are difficult through the use of allusion brings complex feelings to the surface; either of belonging, in case the allusion is recognized or exclusion if the allusion remains unrecognizable. Knowing the allusion sources is not comprehending and understanding, it needs knowledge of why the poet uses it. There are over sixty literary allusions in the "Waste Land" to over forty different writers.

### **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 shows 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 s

ave the modern civilization from chaos and ruin.

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

In literature, April is considered the month of rebirth or regeneration but for waste-landers April is the cruelest month as they are not willing 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 sensual 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 Baudelaire'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 an 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 Sosostris" 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 rape 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 Satyr 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 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 symbolise 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 symbolise spiritual degeneration of the modern civilization. In lines 176, 183 and 184 "Sweet Thames" is an allusion from Spenser's Prothalamion. In line 182 "water of Leman" is another allusion, the reference is to Lake Leman, where Bonivard was imprisoned. Line 191 "Musing upon the king my brother's wreck" is an 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" symbolises London city, this is also an allusion taken from Baudelaire'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 an 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 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 wanderers 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 an 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" symbolises 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



the three doctrines i.e. to give, to sympathize 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 into 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.

The use of allusions in the "Waste Land" is highly effective; allusions connect this modern story with all of those old stories, to suggest that it is part of those stories, also the many allusions that occur in the "Waste Land" are of mutable perspectives, exactly just like cubism in painting, the expansion is mostly done through allusions. Allusions make it difficult for the reader to comprehend the poem; the difficulty is intended to show the complexity of the modern world. Allusion rouses two kinds of feelings either of longing and this is in case of comprehending the allusion or of exclusion and this is in case of unrecognized allusion. Eliot uses allusion to open up the meaning, and this is true to some readers, but it closes down the meaning to a lot of readers, for being unable to recognize these allusions. Moreover, allusions are used to show similarities or contrasts between the past and the present which means that life is the same through history. Eliot respects the classical and describes himself as classist so he gives the poem a place between the giants and the great works of Virgil, Seneca, and many others. At the same time Eliot examines the past through parallelizing texts of the past with these of the present and gave the past its true state. The biblical allusions give the poem emotive, effective, and instant feelings that are associated with its origin or clearly the Bible. Through literary allusions appear Eliot's respect to the old as kind of basis, yet through all types of allusions appear the respect of tradition, but at the same time he examines old traditions by putting them under comparison with the present traditions.

### **Reference:**

[www.bachelorandmaster.com](http://www.bachelorandmaster.com)

[www.shmoop.com](http://www.shmoop.com)

[www.gradesaver.com](http://www.gradesaver.com)

[www.cssforum.com.pk](http://www.cssforum.com.pk)

[www.coursehero.com](http://www.coursehero.com)

[www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com)

[www.examples.yourdictionary.com](http://www.examples.yourdictionary.com)

[www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

[https://youtu.be/jmV\\_6QzclvY](https://youtu.be/jmV_6QzclvY)

