
UNIT 45 T.S. ELIOT : *THE WASTE LAND* (I)

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45.1 INTRODUCTION

The first fifty years of the twentieth century saw the emergence of two major poets in Great Britain and their contribution to British poetry is of immense value. First came Walter Butler Yeats (1865-1939), an Irishman, who, while actively working for the Irish Nationalist Movement, made rich contributions to English poetry and drama. The other, Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), was an American who made England his home, and left behind him a wealth of literary works in prose, poetry and drama. Both the poets were modernists who came under the sway of contemporary European trends of art and literature. Their literary works show the influence of the French imagist and symbolist poets. The efforts that they made in relating English poetry to the ongoing European literary movements are second to none. Though differing opinions have been expressed about their relative merits as poets of international repute, it is best to regard them as two bright figures, that contributed equally to the enrichment of English literature. Both of them successfully worked for the revival of the poetic drama, which was virtually a dead literary form in Ireland and England. What is more, they inspired a young generation of English poets who appeared on the English literary scene in the years following the First World War (1914-18). In this Unit, we shall now tell you briefly about the life and works of T. S. Eliot. Further, we shall discuss the main features of his poetic art displayed in *The Waste Land*, a long poem of five sections that is prescribed for detailed study in the British Poetry Course of your M.A. syllabus.

45.2 T. S. ELIOT : LIFE AND WORKS

T.S. Eliot was born on 26 September 1888 in St. Louis, a large industrial city in the Missouri State of the U.S.A. His Calvinist (Puritan Christian) ancestor emigrated in 1667 from East Coker, a village in Somersetshire, England, to settle in a colony of New England on the eastern coast North America. Eliot's father, W.G. Eliot, moved in 1834 from Boston to St. Louis, and established the first Unitarian church there. A leading philanthropist of his time, he also founded the Washington University. T. S. Eliot was the seventh and youngest child of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Champe Stearns, and the family background had an important role in the shaping of his poetic sensibility.

Eliot trained himself to be a poet from the age often, when he brought out eight (hand-written) issues of a magazine called 'The Fire Side'. At school, his favourite writers were Byron, Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, R.L. Stevenson, Conan Doyle, Swinburne and D.G. Rossetti. Eliot's Family tradition took him to the University of Harvard, where he spent four years in the study of philosophy. It was at Harvard that Eliot, for the first time, read some works of Baudelaire, the French poet, in whom he discovered poetical possibilities that he had not found in any of the English poets. From the same source he learnt how the real and imaginary worlds could be brought together in literature. The Symbolist Movement in Literature by Arthur Symons



introduced Eliot to the French poets of the nineteenth century. Soon after getting his M.A. degree in 1910, Eliot went to Paris for a year to study French literature and philosophy. About the same time, he came under the influence of the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, whose lectures he attended in Paris. But that was a passing phase. On his return to Harvard, Eliot registered himself as a graduate student in philosophy since he intended to pursue philosophy as an academic career. He also studied Sanskrit, Pali and Indian philosophy. The Bhagvad Gita was one of the Indian classical texts that he studied with interest. He learnt about Buddhism the influence of which remained with him for many years. The concluding section of *The 'Waste Land'* shows the shadow of Indian spiritual thought on Eliot's poetic sensibility.

For a short while, Eliot studied in Germany, and later went to Oxford. Spending the years of the First World War (1914-18) in England, he married Vivien Haigh-Wood in June, 1915. Though he went on a short visit to America to see his family, he had made up his mind to settle down in England. At first, he worked as a schoolmaster, but in 1917 he gave up that job for one at the Lloyd's Bank in London, where he worked for eight years. Around this time, Eliot's poems began to appear, first in magazines and journals, and later in small volumes. A collection of his poems entitled *Prufrock and Other Observations* was published in 1917, and *The Sacred Wood*, a book of essays, in 1920. The earlier modernists in England had rejected tradition and the freedom of a poet's expression, but Eliot in essays asserted that an individual writer needs to retain his links with the past tradition, which he should carry forward to the future generations.

It was with the publication of *The Waste Land*, in 1922, that Eliot came to be recognised as a leading light of English poetry in the period following the Great War. We shall tell you about that poem in some detail in the next section (1.3) of this Unit. Giving up his bank job in 1925, Eliot joined a newly formed publishing house, which later came to be known as Faber and Faber. Two years later, he gave up the Calvinist faith and joined the Church of England. This was not due to a sudden change of mind but the culmination of a long process, which coincided with his becoming a British citizen. He declared in the preface to a book of essays that he was a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and an Anglo-Catholic in religion. This statement caused a flutter in the English literary circles where such firm beliefs were not publically expressed. In 1932, Eliot revisited America to deliver two series of lectures at the Universities of Harvard and Virginia; these were later published as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) and *After Strange Gods* (1934).

In the years that followed, Eliot brought out several poetical works including *Four Quartets* (1943) which many knowledgeable critics consider to be his greatest poetical achievement. Its four parts are: 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker', 'The Dry

BLOCK IX - INTRODUCTION:

As 1798 the year of publication of the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge marks the beginning of the Romantic period, 1922 the year in which *The Waste Land* was published indicates the advent of the modern age in English poetry. *Ulysses* by the expatriate Irish novelist James Joyce (1882-1941) was also published the same year. Both are highly experimental in character.

You will read *The Waste Land* and about it in this block. Here a word about *Ulysses*. It deals with a day, now known as 'Bloomsday', in Joyce's life in Dublin. This was June 16, 1904 when he first walked with Nora Barnacle. She later became his wife. One of the principal characters in the novel Leopold Bloom parallels Odysseus the Homeric hero; Stephen Dedalus Telemachus and Molly, Leopold's wife, represents Penelope. Joyce's style is highly allusive; he made use of parody and a curious mixture of realism and fantasy and the technique of interior monologue or stream of consciousness. In 1939, Joyce went on to publish his still more 'difficult' work *Finnegan's Wake* where he makes use of puns and port-manteau words and a wide range of allusions. This novel presents the dream-sequence of a night of a Dublin tavern-keeper, Humphrey Chimpden Erwicker.

The early decade of the 20th century could paradoxically well be described as the best of times and the worst of times. The two World Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939 to 1945 were expressions of human depravity. However, they churned out some of the best expressions of western culture. The high modernist phase of western culture could be considered to have been the product of the inter-war years in Europe.

It is interesting to recall that Albert Einstein's (1879-1955) most profoundly influential *The Foundation of the General Theory of Relativity* was published in 1916, six years before *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*. Einstein's theory challenged the fundamental ideas in physics such as those of mass, gravitation, energy and light. You should talk to some of your friends in physics in order to discover more about Einstein's contributions to physics and to early twentieth century culture in general.

You may be aware of the work of J.M. Keynes (1883-1946). Keynes's *A General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1936) showed how unemployment could take place 'involuntarily'. Keynes's ideas were very influential all over the world until the mid-seventies.

Some of you may like to study the expression of modernism in painting; to begin with, especially in the works of Picasso (1881-1973). Study *First Steps* (1937) printed in this block almost as you would read a poem. Modernism - just like Romanticism and neo-classicism in the late 18th and 17th centuries - began as a cultural movement that influenced all aspects of European culture of which poetry was just one, though a very important field of expression.

However, in this block you will study the poetry of only two representative, as they are now called, high modernist poets - W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) and T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). The first unit in this block will provide you with an introduction to the literary background of the poetry of this age. You should later, guided by your interest and subject to availability, read some other poets, critics and historians referred to by your teachers in the units.

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Salvages' and 'Little Gidding.' Eliot also wrote and lectured on a variety of literary and social topics. As the editor of the *Criterion*, a quarterly journal, he exerted far-reaching influence upon the English literary world. When the magazine stopped publication in 1939, Eliot turned his attention from literary criticism to poetic drama which, for several years, he had been wanting to revive in England. He was commissioned to write *Murder in the Cathedral* for the Canterbury Festival of 1935. Its publication was followed by that of *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958).

Eliot's first wife, Vivien, died in 1948 after a prolonged mental illness. Nine years later, he married his secretary, Valerie Fletcher, much to the disappointment of his friend, Emily Hale, whom he had known and corresponded with for more than forty years. By this time, Eliot's reputation and authority had considerably grown on both sides of the Atlantic, i.e., in England and America. If earlier he was known mainly to the younger generation of university students, now his merit as a poet, critic and dramatist acknowledged even by the traditionally conservative university scholars and teachers. While interpreting the age to which he belonged to itself, he had maintained the standards of the highest literary excellence in whatever he wrote, whether it was prose, verse or drama. Several prestigious awards were bestowed on him in the wake of his literary success. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948 and the Medal of Freedom (the highest American civilian honour) in 1964. After a severe illness in the winter of 1962-63, Eliot's health gradually deteriorated. He died on 4 January 1965. Among the distinguished mourners at the Westminster Abbey in London was his mentor, Ezra Pound, who told the gathering that the best tribute to Eliot would be to read his works.

Check Your Progress 1

- a. How and where was Eliot introduced to the French poets?

- b. Prepare a list of Eliot's major works in the chronological order of their publication.

45.3 THE WASTE LAND : ITS THEME AND ART

T.S. Eliot projects several levels of modern experience in 'The Waste Land'. These are related to various symbolic wastelands in modern times, such as,

- a. The wasteland of religion, where there are but no water;
- b. the wasteland of spirit, where all moral springs have dried up; and
- c. the wasteland of the reproductive instinct, sex has become a means of physical satisfaction rather than a source of regeneration.

The poet communicates to the reader his own sense of anarchy and futility that he finds everywhere in the contemporary world. He has no intention of expressing the

'disillusionment of an entire generation.' But the poem remains an important document of social criticism of the world to which Eliot belonged.

'The Waste Land' is mainly concerned with the theme of barrenness in the mythical wasteland of the twentieth century. The land having lost its fertility, nothing useful can grow in it; the animals and crops have forgotten the true significance of their reproductive function, which was meant to rejuvenate the land. The negative condition of the land is closely related to that of its lord, the Fisher King, who too, through illness and maiming (some kind of hurt), has lost his procreative power. There is some curse on the land and its master, and this could be removed only by a concerted effort at spiritual regeneration. This idea links *The Waste Land* to the legend of the quest of the Christian knights for the Holy Grail (the cup used by Christ at the last supper with his twelve original disciples before his crucifixion), which has been a recurring theme in the literatures of the Christian nations. The physical sterility of the original Christian legend is replaced by spiritual sterility in Eliot's poem.

At a different level of meaning, one of the themes of *The Waste Land* is also death; 'Death by Water' being only one aspect of it. According to Cleanth Brooks (a critic) the poem deals with the contrast of 'two kinds of life and two kinds of death': Death-in-Life and Life-in-Death, as you might have found in S.T. Coleridge's "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" (a ballad of the early nineteenth century). Life devoid of meaning is a kind of death, while death in a sacrifice is a renewal of life as it provides hope of life to come. Through all the five sections of 'The Waste Land', Eliot explores, at some length, the variations of this paradoxical theme. Along with this, he presents through his poetic art the wonderful trinity of religion, culture and sex. A combined ideal of the three concepts taken together ought to be the common goal of humanity, but, since these human impulses tend to work in isolation, we have the resulting corruption of the European civilization. Perhaps the Orient (Eastern World) could provide an alternative, and that is how 'The Waste Land' ends on a message of charity, hope and peace from the Hindu Upanishads.

45.3.1 Composition and Publication

The first mention of 'The Waste Land' was made by Eliot in November, 1919, in a letter to a friend, John Quinn. For many years even before that he had been writing fragments which were later included in the final version of the poem that appeared in the first number of the *Criterion* (October 1922), a literary journal edited by Eliot. The American edition of the poem appeared two months later. The first British edition was brought out by Leonard and Virginia Woolf (the celebrated husband-wife team of writers) at the Hogarth Press in 1923. The published versions of the poem differed from the magazine version by the addition of Eliot's explanatory notes. The French version (1947) contains additional notes by John Hayward (English critic).

The poem was mostly written in 1921, when Eliot was under great strain due to a breakdown suffered by his wife, Vivien. At that time, he was himself feeling mentally exhausted. Hence, the writing of the poem took longer than he had anticipated. Part of it was written at Lausanne in Switzerland, where he had gone to rest and recoup. In line 182, Section III of 'The Waste Land', there is a reference to 'the waters of Leman', which is the French name of Lake Geneva in Switzerland, close to the town of Lausanne. On his way back to London, Eliot left the completed draft of the poem with Ezra Pound in Paris. After going through the manuscript, Pound suggested shortening of the poem by cutting out some long and short passages. Eliot was grateful to him for taking such pains with another's poem, and willingly deleted a long episode about a ship-wreck at the beginning of Section IV, 'Death by Water', which was inspired by his reading of the Italian poet Dante's *Inferno* (part of the *Divine Comedy*). In response to Pound's criticism, Eliot also redrafted the opening lines of Section III, 'The Fire Sermon'. Pound diluted the dramatic and fictional elements of the poem, and removed some passages in parody or mock imitation of *The Rape of the Lock* of Alexander Pope, the early eighteenth century

English Poet. As a consequence, 'The Five Sermon' was reduced from about 200 lines to only 139. In this way, by his skilful editing, Ezra Pound helped to give 'The Waste Land' a greater unity and meaning than was possessed by its original version.

Check Your Progress 2

a. What are the different kinds of wasteland that you find in *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot?

b. In which journal and when did the poem appear for the first time in England?

45.3.2 The Form of the Poem

The manner in which *The Waste Land* evolved in its composition (as we told you in the last sub-section of this Unit) raises relevant questions regarding the process of poetic creation and the form of poetry. For instance, should a long poem be a group of short poems or a unified whole? Also, what do we understand by poetic or artistic unity? It appears that Eliot himself was not quite sure about the unity of 'The Waste Land', since he had initially wanted to divide it between two issues of the Criterion. (Please turn back to sub-section 45.3.1 of this Unit). Though Eliot thought of it as a 'series of poems', Pound persuaded him that the poem should appear as a single sequence. Reading the five parts together is more effective in understanding what the poet says; and the poem is likely to lose its full meaning, if its parts are taken up in isolation.

The unified pattern of *The Waste Land* appears clearly only when we regard it as a single poem of several movements comparable to those of a musical symphony, or to a play of five acts. Eliot is of the view that a poet should work out different elements of a poem separately, and then fuse them together to achieve the unity of an artistic whole. He disagrees with the contention of E. A. Poe (American poet, critic and short story writer of the nineteenth century) that a long poem is 'a series of short poems strung together'. Poe finds it difficult to write a long poem because he believes it should possess one mood and be without variations of style. Eliot, on the other hand, writes a long poem only for the purpose of expressing a variety of moods. This requires the bringing together of a number of different moods and themes, which could either be related in themselves or in the mind of the poet, who can visualize and combine together the diverse elements.

According to Eliot, the parts of a poem taken together form a whole which is more than the sum of the parts, and the pleasure that one gets from reading a part is enhanced by his grasp of the whole. This is what he means by the poetic unity of a work of literary art - be it a poem, play or novel. By these standards, 'The Waste Land' is a cohesive work of poetic art in spite of being divided into five parts or sections. It is difficult to question the totality of artistic effect achieved by Eliot in this poem through a fusion of form and meaning. The five parts are interwoven and linked together through cross-references and echoes of one or several occurring in the others. Through recurrence of images, figures, rhythms and lines, there are constant

reminders that what we are reading is basically one long poem, and not a disjointed group of five. The desolation and sterility of the first two parts is transformed by the purifying elements of fire and water in the middle parts to achieve the spiritual peace of the Buddha in the concluding section. That is the artistically unified pattern that emerges at the end of *The Waste Land*, and points to the possibility of attaining peace and tranquility in the midst of the confusion and bewilderment of modern times.

45.3.3 The Poet's Vision

Eliot's wasteland is the European scene immediately after the end of the First World War. He is dismayed by the emotional and spiritual sterility surrounding him everywhere in Europe. Consequently, his poem presents a horrifying vision of the modern world. It is linked to the popular myth of the Fisher King who became impotent through sickness, and whose lands were devastated by barrenness. The location of 'The Waste Land' is a place where the people, surprisingly, pray for winter but not for spring, since all normal values are topsy-turvy in that land. The Tarot pack of cards, once used for prophesying important events, is reduced in the hands of Madame Sosostris the 'famous clairvoyants' into an instrument of ordinary fortune telling. It is significant that she is not able to find in her pack the card of the 'Hanged Man' representing some hanged god (or even Christ on the cross), a symbol of redemption, life and fertility. This is another symbolic indication of the arid desert into which the green earth is transformed in the poet's vision.

Another picture of corruption is seen in the second part of the poem, 'A Game of Chess'. Shakespeare's Cleopatra (Queen of Egypt) amidst her affluence and wealth once again depicts the lot of the modern man of the twentieth century. The grand works of classical art no longer sustain him in his search ideal attainments. The rape of Philomel's virginity the metaphorically repeated in Eliot's wasteland, a perverse act which is the result of a combination of man's scientific temper with his spiritual dryness. In 'The Fire Sermon', the third part of 'The Waste Land', we encounter Tiresias, the blind visionary, who pronounces his judgement upon the existing relationship between modern men and women. According to him, this very significant and vital natural relationship is reduced to a meaningless physical ritual. Even Cleopatra, that great romantic figure of ancient history, is degenerated into a psychiatric patient who needs counsel and help. What Tiresias and all other characters in Eliot's poem see is the poet's vision of the futility of human behaviour in a social context. The only positive picture is that of the Hyacinth Girl, but the flowers she carries are doomed to decay in the fog and rain. This part of the poem ends with reference to quotations from the teachings of two visionaries, the Buddha of the East and St. Augustine (a Christian saint) of the West - and they are commenting on the physical aspect of love between man and woman. Both religious philosophers significantly use the imagery of fire to convey their impression of lust. On this point, the wisdom of the East and West somehow arrives at the same conclusion.

'Death by Water', the fourth part of *The Waste Land* contains some pictures of death by drowning and comments on the decay of youth into old age. The world is a whirlpool that draws high and low, rich and poor, Christian and Jew, into its destructive vortex, as there is no permanence of human endeavour. The fifth and last part of the poem, 'What the Thunder said', begins the journey over the desert to the Perilous Castle, which is connected with the legendary quest (search) for the Holy Grail. The vision of a land without water again presents a view of dryness and sterility. However, one is encouraged by the sight of Christ, walking with a hood over his head, after his Resurrection (rising from the grave). The search is complete with the Christian knight's arrival at his destination, i. e., the Perilous Castle. At long last, water comes in the form of falling rain, and provides a refreshing vision of freedom, fecundity and flowering of the soul. The voice of *Prajapati (Bramha)* in the Upanishad follows in the form of thunder; '*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata*'- give, sympathise, control. To sympathise is a kind of giving of oneself, and to control is to

discipline and govern. This concluding message is given for saving humanity from its spiritual drought. The poem ends on a note of peace: 'Shantih, shantih, shantih'.

Check Your Progress 3

- a. Write a short note on the unified pattern of *The Waste Land*.

- b. Sum up the vision of Tiresias and other characters in Eliot's poem.

45.3.4 Different Points of View in the Poem

In his essay on William Blake (English poet of the eighteenth century, whose poems you have studied in Block Unit of this course in The Sacred Wood, Eliot writes, 'You cannot create a very large poem without introducing a more impersonal view, or splitting it up into various personalities'. *The Waste Land* is a poem that includes a number of fragmentary monologues of several figures. The different voices and shifting points of view merge together in a manner that makes it difficult for the reader to distinguish one from the others. For example, it is not easy to identify and segregate the many speaking voices in 'The Burial of the Dead'. It is equally hard to make a difference between the 'I' (first person singular) and 'you' (second person singular) of the several narrators who project various points of view of the poet of *The Waste Land*. Then 'I' of 'The Fire Sermon' mingles with the Fisher King of the legend of the Holy Grail and the Ferdinand of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The self is not, therefore, a single entity but a shifting plurality of many voices, all of whom together speak in the 'objective voice' of Tiresias, the central figure in *The Waste Land*.

There is greater poignancy in the voices of the female figures, who speak freely of their loneliness and fear. Among them we have the Hyacinth Girl, Philomela, the Thames Daughters, the woman at the pub, and the sophisticated lady in 'A Game of Chess'. The satirical tone of the apparently impersonal Tiresias (the chief narrator) is influenced by an allusion to the tragic rape of Philomela, which manifests the recurring image of woman as victim in *The Waste Land*. The objects of Eliot's irony are not only women in general, but also the meaningless man-woman relationships such as those of the Earl of Leicester and Queen Elizabeth 1, the clerk and the typist, the rich young men and their girl friends. *The Waste Land* is a remarkable poem, in which several points of view merge together to project a single central voice, which belongs as much to Tiresias as to the poet himself.

The most significant point of view emerging out of *The Waste Land* is that of its central voice, which is the prophesying voice of Tiresias, who is a 'seer' in spite of being physically blind. Although not a character but only a spectator, he is the most important figure in the poem, uniting in himself all the others. As the one-eyed

merchant merges with the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not separate from Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What he says is 'in essence, what the poem is all about; Eliot admits as much in his notes to the poem. Hence, it is evident that Tiresias is a possible mouthpiece of the poet. He also provides the connecting link between the various parts of the poem, lending it a unity of perception so important in the context of the form and meaning of 'The Waste Land'.

45.3.5 Myth, Imagery and Symbolism

The first line of *The Waste Land*, 'April is the cruellest month...' is an inversion of the popular myth that April is a time of warmth, love and joy. The Christians connect it with Easter and the Resurrection of Christ. In the fertility myths, the coming of spring is associated with the growth of potency and fertility in mankind, animals and the earth. The trees and plants drawing life-giving sap from the land through their roots grow leaves and flowers in their branches. The flowers eventually develop into fruits with seeds that are a promise of the life to come in the following years. But these things are anticipated in Eliot's poem with fear rather than hope, and thus April is cruel rather than kind. Tiresias observes with dismay the coming of April and its perverse effect on the people of 'the waste land'. They fear the onset of the season of life-giving rain since they are incapable of enjoying the mysterious process of the regeneration of the earth. They prefer the cold of the winter to the warmth of the summer. To them, winter is a symbol of spiritual decay, of an animalistic life that involves merely eating, sleeping and breeding, which they seem to prefer to a meaningful life of spirituality and thought. Such a way of life, of survival by instinct, is contrasted by Eliot with April, the popular symbol of growth and regeneration.

The myths, and symbols of fertility and sterility are central to the first part of 'The Waste Land'. These are noticed in the images of the Hyacinth Girl, Madame Sosostris, the Phoenician Sailor, and the corpse in the garden, which are linked to speculations on life, life-in-death, death-in-life, decay and renewal (winter and spring), memory and desire (past and present). The fertility theme is projected through the symbolism of spring rain, wet hair, vegetation and flowers. At the same time, it is contrasted with the dryness of the arid landscape. A biblical allusion (Old Testament, Ezekiel, Chapter 37) again highlights the barrenness of *The Waste Land*. The dead trees provide no shelter, the dry stones give no sound of water. Caught between two shadows of morning and evening, of youth and age, the mankind is haunted by the fear of mortality and doom.

The two episodes of love in 'The Burial of the Dead' are studies in contrast, symbolising the gulf separating the ecstasy of love from the frustration in love. The Hyacinth Girl standing in rain with flowers in her arms is an image of youthful aspiration and passion that is bound to have a tragic end. That is how Eliot, the consummate poet, conveys his impression of the frustrations suffered by his contemporary generation. The Sweeney image (which should be related to Sweeney Agonistes - Fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama, a poetic drama of Eliot, published as early as in 1932) stresses the mental paralysis of humanity, since it can neither understand nor speak about the terrible state in which it finds itself in the modern world of the twentieth century. The prophesying Tarot cards of Madame Sosostris are now used for vulgar fortune telling, which marks the decline of values in the modern European society. Here it should be noted that Eliot makes extensive use of the pack of Tarot cards as a symbolic structural device in 'The Waste Land'. The image of the drowned Phoenician Sailor is linked with the allusion to the in *The Tempest* (a Shakespearean play) in which a character named Ariel (in a song) informs Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, of his father's death by drowning in a shipwreck. The symbolic pattern of these images is repeated in the fourth part of *The Waste Land*. 'Death by Water'.

Eliot, as he admits in his notes to the poem, uses ritualistic and mythic allusions in *The Waste Land*. All the figures depicted in the Tarot pack of cards symbolically unite in the dominating personage of Tiresias. He is the central consciousness the

various episodes from whose experience make up the poem. The 'unreal city' with its flowing crowd under the brown winter fog is a merging together of Baudelaire's Paris with Eliot's London - it could as well be Boston, Chicago, Moscow or even Srinagar, in Kashmir in December or January. In this city, men and women are ghostly figures without a vital social life; they have no permanent moral values, only pretensions and make-belief. The crowds flowing over London Bridge, every day, morning and evening, are not independent human beings, but the slavish victims of a mechanical way of life, bereft of the vitality of real living. The planting of a corpse in the modern wasteland is not a sacred ritual but its antithesis comparable to the action of a dog first burying and then digging up a bone. The dog digs up the bone in order to prevent it from blossoming into new life. It is obvious that Eliot deliberately uses symbolic and mythical imagery and literary allusions for expressing his deeply thought-out meaning through a well-ordered artistic pattern, which is his poem, 'The Waste Land'.

Check Your Progress 4

a. Whose are the different voices that you hear in *The Waste Land*?

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b. With which European cities could one relate the 'unreal city' of the poem, and why?

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45.4 SUMMARY OF THE UNIT

In this Unit, we introduced you to the life and works of T.S. Eliot, a major English poet of the first half of the twentieth century. Though born and educated in America, he made England his home, came under the influence of the Symbolist Movement in the French poetry, and at one time also studied some Indian classical texts. 'Prufrock and Other Observations' (1917) was his first published poetic work, and *The Sacred Wood* (1920) the first book of critical essays. With the appearance of *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot came to be recognised as an English poet of great promise. He worked as a schoolmaster and later as a bank clerk before joining the publishing house of Faber and Faber. The Criterion was a literary quarterly that he started, and the writing of *Four Quartets* (1943) was, perhaps, his greatest poetic achievement. Beginning with *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) he wrote a series of five poetic dramas. Eliot married twice, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948. Following a severe illness, he died in January 1965.

The Waste Land projects several levels of modern experience related to various symbolic wastelands, such as those of religion, spirit and the reproductive instinct. The poem is mainly about the theme of barrenness and infertility. The curse on the land and its master, the Fisher King, is linked to the quest for the Holy Grail. Death,

life-in-death, and death-in-life are some of the other themes of the poem. Life devoid of meaning is a kind of spiritual death. Eliot hopes that Eastern philosophy could possibly provide a redeeming alternative to the corruption of the European nations. *The Waste Land* was first published in the *Criterion*, and followed by its American and British editions. The poem was mostly written in England and Switzerland; it was revised and edited by Ezra Pound, Eliot's friend and mentor. It consists of five parts: I. 'The Burial of the Dead', II. 'A Game of Chess', III. 'The Fire Sermon'; IV. 'Death by Water' and V. 'What the Thunder said'. Though Eliot thought of the poem as a 'series of poems', Pound persuaded him that its five parts should appear as a single sequence, for it was likely to lose its full meaning if the parts were taken up one by one. The poem has a unified pattern like that of the different movements of a single musical composition. Hence, it is a unified work of poetic art even while having five parts. Eliot's wasteland is a poetic vision of the European scene immediately after the First World War. All normal values of society have turned upside down, and there is little hope of redemption, life and fertility. In the poet's vision, the green earth is transformed into a dry barren desert where there is no water, and hence no hope of life in the future. The vital relationship of regeneration between man and woman is reduced to a meaningless sexual ritual. What Tiresias, the prophetic central voice of 'The Waste Land', discovers and comments on is the poet's vision of the futility of human endeavour in a social context. The Buddha and St. Augustine, visionaries of the East and the West, respectively, seem to agree in their pronouncements on the physical aspect of love. The decay of youth into old age is only a pointer towards death and destruction. But in the midst of spiritual dryness there is hope in Christ's sacrifice and the message of the Upanishad: give in charity, sympathise with fellow human beings, control your desires. Eliot's poem ends on a note of peace: '*Shantih, shantih, shantih*'.

In *The Waste Land*, the different voices and shifting points of view merge together, making it difficult for the reader to distinguish one from the others. It is hard to separate 'I' from 'you' of several narrators projecting the different points of view of the poet. The female voices, though, speak freely of their loneliness and fear. The most significant voice in the poem is that of Tiresias, who provides the link among the five parts of 'The Waste Land'. The myths and symbols of fertility and sterility are central to the first part of the poem. The two episodes of love in the second part symbolise the gulf separating the ecstasy and frustration of love. The symbolic pattern of death and drowning recurs in the various parts. Eliot also uses ritualistic and mythic allusions in 'The Waste Land' to make his meaning clear to the readers. The 'unreal city' of the poet is any city where men and women are ghostly figures without a vital social life. The crowds flowing over London Bridge are not independent human beings but the slavish victims of a mechanical way of life.

Now you could begin by reading the text of the poem given in the Annexure. Here, we would like to tell you something about the Epigraph that follows the title of the poem, and introduces the theme of death-in-life. It is a quotation in Latin and Greek from a speech by Trimalchio (character) in the *Satyricon*, a satire by Petronius, the Roman writer of the first century. It means: 'For once I saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her, "Sibyl, what do you want?" she answered, "I want to die". The Sibyls were women in ancient Rome with prophetic powers.

45.5 ANNOTATED READING LIST

This is only a suggested reading list, and will provide additional help to your understanding of T. S. Eliot and his poem, *The Waste Land*.

1. Works of T. S. Eliot:

1. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'; an interesting early poem from *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*. (London : Faber & Faber, 1969).
2. 'East Coker' (out of *Four Quartets*) from the same book.

3. Essays on 'Hamlet' and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1928; repeated 1976).
 4. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Typescript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1971).
- II. Works on T. S. Eliot:
1. Helen Gardner, *The Art of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969). This is a very useful book on the poetic art of Eliot.
 2. F.O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (Oxford University Press). This is perhaps the most comprehensive study of Eliot's work during the years between the two world wars.
 3. G. Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot* (New York, 1953). This book will be a useful addition to the material provided by IGNOU for understanding 'The Waste Land'.
 4. Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet T. S. Eliot* (London, Methuen, 1969). This book will be of use to those who want to make a special study of Eliot and his poetry.
 5. Manju Jain, *A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991). This is a very useful book for a textual study of *The Waste Land* and some other poems of Eliot.
 6. A.N Dwivedi, ed. *Studies in Eliot* (New Delhi: Bahri Publication, 1989).

45.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1 a. It was at Harvard University that Eliot first read some works of Baudelaire, the French poet. After reading Arthur Symons' book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* he came to know about the contribution of the French poets of the nineteenth century.
- b. *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), and *The Elder Statesman* (1958).
- 2 a. The various wastelands that one finds in 'The Waste Land' of Eliot are those of (i) religion, where there are rocks but no water; (ii) spirit, where all moral springs have dried up; and (iii) the reproductive instinct, where sex has become a means of physical gratification rather than a source of regeneration.
- b. 'The Waste Land' appeared for the first time in the opening number of *Criterion* (October, 1922), a literary journal edited by Eliot in London. The American and British published editions followed in 1922 and 1923, respectively.
- 3 a. The unified pattern of 'The Waste Land' becomes evident when we regard it as a single long poem of several movements (five in all) comparable, to that of a musical composition or a play of five acts.
- b. Please refer to Section 45.3.3 of this Unit.
- 4 a. The central voice that we hear in 'The Waste Land' is that of Tiresias, the blind prophet. In his voice are combined the voices of the other figures, such as, the Hyacinth Girl, The Thames Daughters, Philomela, the woman at the pub, Madame Sastrotris (with her pack of Tarot cards), Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, and the sophisticated lady in 'A Game of Chess'. At the spiritual level, we hear the voices of Christ, St. Augustine and the Buddha. The literary voices are those of Chaucer, Dante, Spenser and Shakespeare.
- b. The 'unreal city' with its flowing crowds under a brown winter fog is a merging together of Baudelaire's Paris with Eliot's London. In this city, men and women are ghostly figures without a vital social life.