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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 20: 7 July 2020**
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Spiritual Barrenness and Physical Deformities of the Distressed Modern People in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land:* A Critical Study

Rashed Mahmud
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Pabna University of Science and Technology
Pabna - 6600, Bangladesh
rashed.sust07@gmail.com

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Abstract

Thomas Stearns Eliot, one of the greatest modern English poets, has tried his best to mark his time by expressing the inherent dangers of modern civilization in his writings. He was conscious of the disordered and fragmented social condition of his time – a time of political instability, anarchy and chaos. In his exclusive poem "The Waste Land" he depicts an appalling vision of chaotic times and disturbed lives. The poem portrays a society that has been left barren – morally, spiritually, intellectually and sexually – by the First World War. The poem is an exclusive example of disappointment and spiritual vacuity of the modern civilization especially after the world entangled into a devastating war that resulted in millions of deaths. All through the poem Eliot depicts the modern waste land that represents the social anarchy and spiritual emptiness of troubled modern life which drives the individual to go deep into emotional crisis and intellectual despair. The paper intends to examine how Eliot's "The Waste Land" explores the spiritual barrenness and physical deformities of the distressed modern people.

Keywords: Spiritual Barrenness, Physical Deformities, Emotional Crisis, Intellectual Despair, Distressed Modern People

At once a classicist, a critic, a poet, a playwright, a mystic and a philosopher, Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) was a myriad minded man who enjoyed a long life span of more than 75 years and whose literary contribution extended over a period of almost 55 years. With his creative spirit he tried his hand in diverse literary genres – poetry, plays, essays, literary criticism, and so on, and dominated the literary landscape of the twentieth century. Through his writings, critical essays and experiments in versification, style and diction, he regenerated English poetry and influenced the direction of modern poetry. In his writings, he has tried his best to make his time conscious of itself and expressed the inherent dangers of modern civilization. He was conscious about the social anarchy and the spiritual vacuity of his time and in his writings, he

depicted the disaster, agony, horror, spiritual sterility, and alienation of modern people. His celebrated poem, *The Waste Land* (1922) presents a dark and gloomy picture of human sufferings in the twentieth century. The poem is a study of a civilization doomed by its own sterility (Coote 26). It refers to the spiritual and intellectual decadence of the contemporary world. The poem is an important landmark in the history of English literature and exposes the disillusionment caused by the First World War. To cite Harold Bloom, *The Waste Land* can be read as "a testament to the disillusionment of a generation, an exposition of the manifest despair and spiritual bankruptcy of the years after World War I" (40). Based on the legend of the Fisher King in the Arthurian cycle, the poem portrays London as a barren waste land. The poem is built round the symbols of drought and flood which represent death and re-birth respectively, and this fundamental idea is referred to the poem.

Eliot is one of those twentieth century writers who witnessed the socio-political turmoil and transformation of the post-war England. The war had destroyed all that were traditionally good. The most dangerous effect was the loss of spirituality. People became disillusioned by the futility and impotence of the catastrophic war. The war had left many people in a state of destruction and disappointment. Millions of women lost their husbands, children lost their parents, and a sense of abandonment and loss encompassed the nation. "Europe slumped into a monumental melancholy . . . the utopian social dreams evoked by wartime rhetoric were brutally erased by inflation, unemployment and widespread deprivation, not to mention an influenza epidemic that ravaged the world in 1918-1919 and killed more people than the war itself" (Ekstein 235). It is in this aftermath of the First World War that Eliot appears with his poetic masterpiece, *The Waste Land*. The poem had a significant influence on his contemporaries and is regarded one of the most important documents of its time. As David Moody observes:

> To many of T. S. Eliot's contemporaries, the whole poem was written in the accent of its times – an unmistakably twentieth-century, indeed post-war poem which records the collapse in the values of Western civilization. The main examples of this collapse are sterile, unloving sexual relationships, cultural confusion, and spiritual desolation. Eliot sees the root of the modern world's unhappiness and alienation in the fact that people are unable to bring together the different areas of their experience to make a complete whole. Their social, sexual and religious experiences are fragmentary and not unified. (338)

The poem portrays a debilitated world, a world that has declined or disregarded the spiritual life. In the poem, Eliot depicts the excruciating burden of modern city life, its lack of objective and direction, its lack of beliefs and values, reflecting the breakdown of values, total disarray and near collapse of the European civilization in the early 1920s. Many persons viewed the poem as

an allegation against the post-war European civilization and as an articulation of disillusionment with the existing society that Eliot viewed as spiritually barren.

The Waste Land was written at the time when the First World War had just ended placing the world in an age of depression, loss, and ultimately death looming over everyone (Ahmed 160). The poem centers round Eliot's reading of two contemporary influential texts – Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) and Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). Both of Weston and Frazer discussed the myth of the Fisher King in their books. Weston's book appeared at the very time when Eliot was seeking a coherent shape for the mass of intricate material that enters into his poem (Southam 127). Eliot makes particular use of Weston's account of the Fisher King, a figure which recurs in a number of fertility myths, and whose story is one of obvious relevance to this poem (127). According to the legends, the land has been blighted by a curse. The crops do not grow, and the animals cannot reproduce. The trouble of the land is caused by the plight of the king of the land, the Fisher King, who has been wounded in the genitals (Brooks 128-129). The injury affects the king's fertility, and his impotence is the cause of his country becoming a dried out 'waste land'. The curse can only be lifted by the arrival of a knight who must complete several rituals, "not by pursuing advantages for himself, but by giving himself to the quest of seeking the health and salvation of the land" (qtd. in Southam 128). Eliot picks up the legend of the Fisher King and his wasteland to describe the existing barren state of modern civilization. Eliot says he drew heavily on this legend for his poem, and critics have found that many of the poem's allusions refer to this idea (Ahmed 160).

The title of the poem consists of the central waste land symbol and refers to the intellectual and spiritual barrenness of the modern civilization. It conveys the idea of emotional and spiritual sterility and barrenness of the world that Eliot saw after the First World War. "The 'waste' is not, however, that of war's devastation and bloodshed, but the emotional and spiritual sterility of Western man, the waste of [the modern] civilization" (Southam 126). The title evokes the picture of a waste land devastated by drought and famine which leads to large-scale starvation, predicament and death. Through the waste land symbol, Eliot shows that the twentieth century civilization is just an infertile, arid world with no genuine retrieving characteristics. The land is barren, and therefore, unable to let anything grow. This barrenness signifies the intellectual and spiritual decadence that has occurred in the contemporary world, where no new hope of faith can develop. Eliot relates the waste land symbol to the 'Unreal City' such as London, the "arid plain" (l. 424)[*], where the readers get a sense of the "mountains of rock without water" (l. 334) and "the dry stone no sound of water" (l. 24). They see "a heap of broken images" (l. 22) made up of dirty roads, dead trees, desert rocks, dry bones, rats scurrying in sewers, empty cisterns, and exhausted

[*] All line numbers that follow are extracted from Eliot, T. S (2001). *The Waste Land*. Ed. Michael North. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

wells. Thus, the waste land pertains to the contemporary scenario of anguish and waste following the bloodshed of World War I.

The Waste Land is divided into five sections, each with a title like 'The Burial of the Dead', 'A Game of Chess', 'The Fire Sermon', 'Death by Water' and 'What the Thunder Said'. The poem is preceded by an epigraph which comes from the *Satyricon*, a satire of the poet Petronius (27 BC - 66 AD). The satire implies the endless world-weariness, blindness and absence of redeeming joy which characterizes *The Waste Land* (Coote 30). In English translation, the epigraph means, "For I once saw with my own eyes the Cumaean Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?' she answered, 'I want to die'." (Eliot 3) In Greek mythology, Sibyls were women endowed with prophetic power, the power to see into the future. The Cumaean Sibyl had been famous both for her prophecy and for her beauty. She was loved by Apollo who offered her immortality. She accepted the offer but forgot to ask for perpetual youth. Hence, as she grew older, both her memory and prophetic power faded. Trapped in the present she was only slightly aware of her mythical, magical past and quite indifferent to the future. As such, living in an apparently eternal present, her fate anticipated the fates of the inhabitants of *The Waste Land* (Saunders 35). Her death-wish is related to her wish to throw away the archaic life, just as the walking dead of the modern "Unreal City" have nothing to expect in life but death. Death alone offers escape; death alone promises the end. In this way the epigraph implies the theme of the poem– Life in the modern waste land is a living death or a life in death, like the life of Sibyl. In the story of the Cumaean Sibyl Eliot found an image which both encapsulated the dislocation of present, past and future time which he saw as symptomatic of the cultural plight of modern people (Saunders34-35). The prophecy of Sibyl sets the tone for *The Waste Land* as a poem that harshly focuses on the numbness and absolute barrenness of the post-war European civilization. The Sibyl's affliction reflects what Eliot perceives as his own–Eliot lives in a society that has degraded and dried up but will not perish, and he is bound to live with memories of its previous glory. Like the Sibyl the modern people have life but not the youthful vigor and productivity.

The opening section, 'The Burial of the Dead', starts with an account of the seasons. April appears as the "cruellest month" passing over a deserted land to which winter is more benevolent. It presents Eliot's view of modern sterility on the widest scale. The idea of sterility is expressed through the painful imagery of spring. Even though April is usually regarded as a symbol of spring and regeneration, and winter as a symbol of decay and death, in the modern waste land, April is not kindest but "the cruelest month," because it breeds "Lilacs out of the dead land" (l. 1-2) and stirs "memory and desire" (l. 3). In April there is stirring of life in nature. This stirring of life and advent of fertility is disappointing to the inhabitants of the waste land because it reminds them of their spiritual decay and makes them think of regeneration. Regeneration needs effort, and effort is painful to the degenerate people of the modern world. As W. P. Kenny observes, "April is the

cruelest month to them for in this dead land any reminder of Life is cruel, just as the awareness of a joy we cannot share, provoke pain" (27). The next stanza depicts the land as a land of "stony rubbish"– dry, infertile, without any life, quite clearly the "waste land" of the poem's title. Here, the narrator, a representative modern man, anxious for spiritual guidance, desperately searches for some sign of life– "roots that clutch," (l. 19) branches that grow– but he only finds dry stones, dead trees, and "a heap of broken images" (l. 22). It shows a tormented world replete with "stony rubbish," (l. 20) where "the sun beats" (l. 22) brutally down so that "the dead trees give no shelter" (l. 23) and the noisy cry of the cricket brings "no relief" (l. 23). In this forsaken situation, "the dry stone" gives "no sound of water" (l. 24).

In this way, in Part I, there are recurring images of an arid, infertile land: a "dead land" with infertile rocks, dead trees, "stony rubbish," "dry tubers," "dull roots" and "roots that clutch" (Mohammadi 94). The third stanza switches abruptly to a more prosaic mode introducing Madame Sosostris, a "famous clairvoyante" (l. 43) who is known as "the wisest woman in Europe" (l. 45) as she can tell the fortunes of people with her pack of cards. The consultation with Madame Sosostris that follows shortly thereafter represents the pathetic bankruptcy of modern life (Coote 34). Her character presents the vulgarity of contemporary Europe. She is a fake fortune teller and the pictures she shows through the cards metaphorically imply the cultural disintegration and decay of values (Garg 19). She presents the image of modern futility, "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring" (l. 56). They walk and walk but go nowhere. Then the readers come across the heart of the "Unreal City" (l. 60), the modern waste land, where a large group of people pass the London Bridge while "the brown fog" dangles like a winter cloud over the procession. This episode deals with the barrenness of city life in modern civilization. The unreal city refers to London even though it can represent any European city. This weird and cloudy image of London– its streets replete with "sighs, short and infrequent," and "each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (l. 64-65)– specifically and pitifully expresses the despair and harsh reality of the modern world. To describe the city, Eliot cites Dante twice: "I had not thought death had undone so many" (l. 63) from Canto 3 and "Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled" (l. 64) from Canto 4. The former quotation alludes to the area just inside the Gates of Hell and the latter alludes to Limbo, the first circle of Hell. So, symbolically, the commuters of modern London are seen as the equivalents of Dante's spiritual dead in the *Inferno.* London is a version of Hell. It becomes the eternal type of city of dreadful night, a place where the masses of modern society ebb and flow in a godless, mechanical routine of work (Coote 35).

The second section, 'A Game of Chess' depicts the sterility of sex relationship in the modern society. Sex has turned into a matter of interest and has become a trifling source of enjoyment and lost its spiritual significance. Among the wealthy and cultured it has become debased and neurotic, among the lower classes it is a matter of abortions and promiscuity. Nowhere

is there a sense of redemption or potency. All is barren – a Waste Land (Coote 38). The two women of this section represent the two aspects of modern sexuality– while one side of this sexuality is a dry, barren interchange inseparable from neurosis and self-destruction, the other side is an extensive productivity associated with a lack of culture and rapid aging. The first stanza opens with luxurious setting where an affluent lady sits on a "burnished throne" (l. 77) in a room furnished with all the belongings of the rich society. Some of the details point to unsuccessful romance or futile marriage: the "golden Cupidon" (l. 80) hides "his eyes behind his wing" (l. 81), the depiction of Philomela's rape– an instance of love turning into cruelty and violence. The ostentatious portraits and paintings on the wall are but "withered stumps of time" (l.104). The setting shows the living standard of the upper-class society who, despite being free from the stress of the daily struggle, faces the emotional and sexual subsidence owing to self-absorption. The lady is frustrated, overly emotional and neurotic. She accuses her lover of remaining silent and implores him to stay and communicate his thoughts. But the lover's replies are obscure. He says that he thinks they "are in rat's alley" (l. 115), implying the trenches of the First World War. The lover's subsequent answers that follow clearly show that he is somehow traumatized and has forgot many things about his life and refuses to converse or feel about it.

This failure of communication and mutual affection rules out any opportunity of love and mitigating the infertility of their lives. In despair, the lady asks her lover what she should do now, what they should do tomorrow– which reinforces the notion that their lives are void of meaning and they struggle to find ways to make their existence better. The lover replies, "The hot water at ten. / And if it rains, a closed car at four. / And we shall play a game of chess, / Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door" (l. 135-138). They will wait worryingly for a banging on the door if a ghost from the past or a new guest brings meaning to their lives. The situation signifies the distraction and deviation that normally masks the routine married life where love and care have been thrust to the border line.

The second stanza opens with a conversation between two women in a crowded bar that is about to close and negates the prospect that sex can bring regeneration– both personal and cultural. The conversation shows that they belong to the lower class society. Lil's husband has been demobilized from the army and he will want a "good time" (l. 147) from her. Lil's friend chides her to beautify herself so that when Albert returns, he finds her attractive, otherwise he may leave her for another nice-looking woman. She is "only thirty-one" but looks "so antique" (l. 156 -157) because she took abortion pills to "bring . . . off" (l. 159) her latest pregnancy. She has done everything properly– wedded, spent sufficient time with her soldier husband, gave birth to children. Despite all these, she is getting punished by her body– she has become feeble, lost her teeth and graceful look. Now, she does not want more children, but Albert will not leave her alone. It is ironical that, the demobilized war soldiers, far from returning to a country fit for heroes, return

to a London of women prematurely aged by abortions, their teeth missing and their friends hinting at affairs with their husbands. They look "antique" in a world where sex is having a "good time". They are downtrodden and joyless in a life of drudgery that can aspire to little more than the philosophy of "What you get married for if you don't want children? (l. 164)" (Coote, 37-38) Eliot contrasts the lives and experiences of the upper class society with that of the lower class society and asserts that eventually it is in the same situation. Among the lower classes, the love and sex lives have been debasing and the vivacity is absent because of the early aging caused by frequent feticides and debauchery. Among the upper classes, it has been materialistic and at times neurotic. In both classes, there is no life improving sense of delight, no life giving productivity.

The third section, 'The Fire Sermon' opens with a description of an actual Waste Land, a brown and leafless desert swept by the wind. The land is cold, arid, and sterile, stuffed with garbage. Unlike the desert, which at least burns with heat, this place is stagnant, except for a few scuttling rats. The wet banks of the river can no longer be thought of as the Thames in its Renaissance glory. Here is not the place for the celebration of marriage, of sexual and cultural potency. The river, usually an emblem of rejuvenation, is empty and has shrunk to a dull canal. The present ugliness is implicitly contrasted with the "Sweet Thames" of Spenser's time. The "nymphs" of Spenser's poem have left, as have "their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors" (l. 180). Eliot uses such images that represent modern life – "empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends" (l. 177-178). In Eliot's depiction, the Thames looks like a stagnant slate, without any debris and sign of life. What readers see is a period of mourning and barrenness, the absence of a redeeming spirit. This is a period not simply of physical but also of emotional and intellectual collapse, ". . . bones cast in a little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year" (l. 194-195). The readers are forced to view a world of corruption and decay, a sterility which is not merely a matter of mourning for past and lost ideas of redemption, but of the active wretchedness of modern, sensual man (Coote 40). In Sweeney and the women, the lumpishly physical is victorious and sex is a form of brutality. The actual sex encounters which take place are noticeably sterile. Mr. Eugenides offers a homosexual meeting, which naturally refuses fertility. The improbability of regeneration by such attempts is signified by the currants in his pocket– the dried out, deadened version of what were once fleshy, fertile fruits. Man has turned his back on the spiritual and is unable to glimpse the means of his salvation. He is lost, abandoned and desperate in a world where sex is devalued and meaningless. Swept up by a lust that has neither dignity nor purpose, and wretchedly living in a materialistic world that demeans the individual and makes a mockery of the cultural values of the past, modern life and love can be nothing more than the selfish and miserable conquest by the acne-covered clerk of the slatternly typist (Coote 41-42).

Eliot diagnoses his London and the world with an affliction of the senses, through which sex replaces love and ineffective sexual relation subsumes genuine emotional connection. The

female typist and her lover are equally sterile in their way, even though procreation is at least theoretically possible in their case. When the typist's lover, "the young man carbuncular" (l. 231), pays a visit to her, she is "bored and tired" (l. 236), and the young man, like Tereus, is full of lust. She allows her lover to sleep with her, and the lover leaves victorious, leaving her alone to think to herself, "Well now that's done; and I'm glad it's over" (l. 252). After that, the scene alters to an amorous encounter between Queen Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester. The queen seems unaffected by her lover's declarations, and she thinks only of her "people humble people who expect / Nothing" (l. 304-305). The section then suddenly ends with some lines from St. Augustine's *Confessions* and an imprecise indication to the Buddha's *Fire Sermon* – in both cases to a passage explaining the harms of youthful sexual desire. Both Buddha and Augustine caution against purely sexual desire because it must inevitably act as hurdle or obstruction to true faith and spiritual peace. All through 'The Fire Sermon', the melancholy of modern lovers with their broken relationships and promises of 'a new start' (l. 298) come into the forefront. Nothing connects. The world has lost its coherence, is impotent, polluted, and meaningless. The readers end up on the barren sand at Margate and become like the Old Testament prophets in their deserts in 'The Burial of the Dead' (Coote 42). Like them, the Narrator knows only 'a heap of broken images' (l. 22). Here, indeed, is the Waste Land at the core of modern life: motionless, sexually impotent, and spiritually barren.

The fourth section, 'Death by Water' carries out one of the predictions of Madame Sosostris. In the poem's first section, she says, "Fear death by water" (l. 55), after drawing the card of "the drowned Phoenician Sailor" (l. 47). The section forms a contrast with 'The Fire Sermon' which precedes it– a contrast between the symbolism of fire and that of water (Brooks 148). In this section, Eliot reveals the way of escape from the degradation of society. The narrator tells of Phlebas, the Phoenician sailor or merchant, who experienced death by water two weeks ago. His death is an example of baptism, the cleansing of the sinful nature or spiritual immersion, and the acceptance of the 'Living Water' of Christ. Phlebas is dead, "a fortnight dead" (l. 312). He is beyond "the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss" (l. 313-314). The sins of the modern society cannot affect him anymore; he is far away from them. The narrator addresses the readers, "Gentle or Jew / O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you" (l. 319-321). All persons look 'windward', wishing for the good tidings; but no matter whether luck or tidings are good or bad, it all results in death anyway. Through this, the speaker evokes the readers that they are also like the Phoenician Phlebas, and they need this 'Living Water' as well. To live the life perfectly, they need to give up their evil nature.

Some critics, especially Willy Wheeler, relate Phlebas' death to the trend of the society. They observe that things are getting dead and culture is becoming barren, but there are no efforts

to recover such barrenness. The social and cultural values are disappearing and becoming less important, which will lead to the ultimate break down like all great societies in history. The lines, "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers" (l. 316) suggest that Phlebas' death was gradual and quiet. The comparison of Phlebas' death with that of modern culture signifies that society's breakdown will take place in the similar style– slowly and quietly. There may not be a great war to annihilate civilization, but the social and cultural values will slowly break down until it is 'dead'. Eliot is of the belief that there is no expectation left for society, and it may be for this reason that death appears so many times all through the poem (Wheeler par. 1).

The fifth and final section, 'What the Thunder Said' is constructed on the description of death and sterility portraying "the present decay of eastern Europe" (Eliot 25). The only disparity with this section and the previous sections is, here Eliot shows optimism and offers a probable solution to the modern crises. The section begins with a discussion of Jesus Christ, "He who was living is now dead" (l. 328), which leads into scenes from Christ's journey to Emmaus after his resurrection. Following the images of Christ, Eliot describes a land without any water: only rocks, sand, dead "mountain mouth of carious teeth" (l. 339). The thunder brings no rain and is therefore sterile. The narrator laments the absence of water, he imagines the "drip drop" of water on rocks but concludes that "there is no water" (l. 57-58). These images present a barren, mountainous world, a waterless landscape of rock and sand far from Marie's childhood delights (l. 8-18) and much closer to the deserts of the Old Testament prophets (Coote 44). There is no rest here and no silence. Diabolic "faces sneer and snarl" (l. 344) while all around is the rumble of "dry sterile thunder without rain" (l. 342). Eliot refers to the scenes of battle, "hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth" (l. 368-369). The cracked earth refers to the waste land. Eliot incorporates more images of war and devastation, noting the "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers" (l. 372-73). The image shows a tower getting destroyed, and Eliot describes the image with a list of ancient cities which were ruined or decayed: "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London" (l. 374-75). Eliot's inclusion of London at the end of the destruction list signifies that the modern cities are also falling into decay, a moral and spiritual decay. What Eliot depicts here is a swarming, mindless anarchy reared on the 'endless plains' of Eastern Europe, which, with their 'cracked earth' and 'flat horizon', exactly correspond to the Waste Land itself (Coote 45).

The scene then moves to "the empty chapel" (l. 388), an allusion to the Chapel Perilous which in Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* describes as the final stage on the knight's quest to restore life to the waste land. The questing knight finds the chapel empty. There are no strange rites of initiation, no preparation for further revelations. Here's "only the wind's home" (l. 388). The knight pushes himself to the absolute and finds nothing: "Only a cock stood on the rooftree / Co co rico co co rico / In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain" (l. 391-94). This

"damp gust" brings rain to the dry and split land, and then the thunder speaks, "DA" – "Datta," "Dayadhvam" and "Damyata" (l. 401, 411, 418) meaning "to give," "to sympathize" and "to control" respectively. The suggestion in this Hindu gospel, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, is that through 'right action' – giving, sympathy and self-control – man may indeed go beyond his sterile world and hence revive the potency of the universe where he lives. What the thunder advises on man is love, the free submission of self and the resultant mental and spiritual health of the Waste Land improved. After that, in the concluding stanza, the Fisher King speaks, "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (l. 423-25) The king is still the psychologically wounded man. No permanent salvation has been ensured. So, he wonders what the solution is, how he can revitalize the waste land again. The answer (which is not direct though) is given in the bewildering collage of quotations with which *The Waste Land* ends. The city in which the Narrator lives is still "unreal", still "falling down" (l. 426). The sterility of the Waste Land is still very marked. Love is still horribly close to neurosis and barbarism, and the result is collapse– both personal and cultural. The poem ends with some phrases from various languages. The last line repeats the same words three times, "Shantih shantih shantih" (l. 433) which appears to be Eliot's final assertion that through peace and harmony, eventually, humankind will be able to restore their vitality.

Throughout *The Waste Land*, Eliot holds a mirror to the society and the mirror reflects the predicaments of modern life in a physical, moral, emotional and spiritual waste land where promiscuity, materialism and corruption were widespread and where there was a lack of communication and interaction between individuals. Beginning with the section one entitled 'The Burial of the Dead' that portrays a physical wasteland and buried human consciousness, Eliot continues to the section five titled 'What the Thunder Said' to find out a probable way out to the problem that afflicted modern life. Throughout the journey up to section five, the readers observe some serious problems of modern life like ignorance, sexual abuse, lust, hypocrisy, futility, the vain purpose of life, and so forth. The poem deals with the whole post War generation referring to the spiritual and intellectual decay of the modern world. The poem portrays a society that has been left barren – morally, spiritually, intellectually and sexually – by the war. Eliot takes the readers into the very heart of the waste land which is post war Europe and makes them realize the plight of a whole generation. That generation is effectively symbolized by the withered Cumaean Sibyl of the epigraph, with her desperate wish to die; by Madame Sosostris, the deceitful fortune-teller who knows nothing of the mysteries of life; by Mrs. Equitone to whom life has lost all variety and distinction; by Mrs. Porter and Sweeney, an old procuress and her crude client; by the lady of situations, a victim of her own nerves and of the hysterical relationship with her lover; by Lil, who looks so antique while she is still thirty-one; by the typist and her seducer going through the sex act in an indifferent, mechanical, routine-like manner; by the demobilized Albert who wants a good time, as do the loitering heirs of city directors; by Mr. Eugenides, the dubious merchant; and

so on. All these characters convey the idea of emotional and spiritual barrenness as well as the physical deformities of the world that Eliot saw after the First World War. That world is the Waste Land of the poem's title: motionless, sexually impotent, and spiritually barren.

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