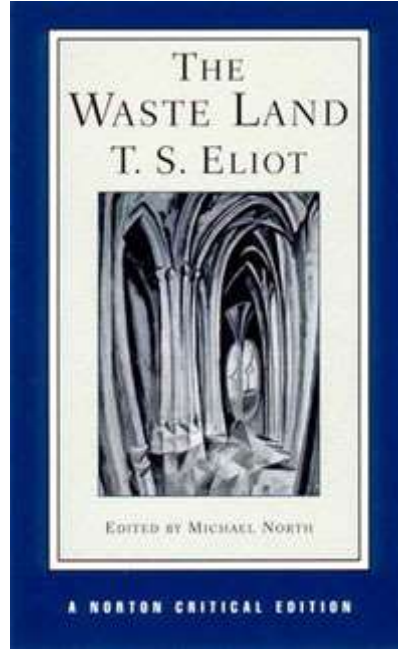


Incorporation of Absurd and Symbolic Elements in Eliot's *The Waste Land*

Dr. Sheeba Azhar, M.A., Ph.D.
Dr. Syed Abid Ali, M.A., Ph.D. (English), M.A., Ph.D. (Urdu)

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Abstract

Symbolism had been a powerful literary movement that dominated French poetry in the second half of the 19th century. Symbolism was the poetry of disgusted and sometimes disillusioned idealists, who sought in poetry an escape from the ugliness, hypocrisy, and rapacity of 19th century industrialized society. To these poets, the newly triumphant bourgeois class lacked culture and taste and seemed to care only for useful inventions, facts, or material products and wealth. In contrast to this materialist, utilitarian, and practical view of the world, symbolist poetry emphasized an ideal world beyond the material, and sought an ideal language to express that world.

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Symbols are essentially words, which are not merely connotative but also evocative and emotive. In addition to their meaning, they also call up or evoke before the mind's eye a host of associations connected with them, and are rich in emotional significance. A symbol can be used to convey "pure sensation" or the poet's apprehension of transcendental mystery. It is by the use of symbols that the poet enriches the texture of his verse and reveals the full significance and deeper meaning of a particular situation, events and happenings. On the surface there, might be merely a plain and simple narration or description, and the poem may be enjoyed as such, but a careful reading reveals the hidden and deeper meaning.

Present paper is an effort to examine the way how T.S. Eliot uses his symbols in his legendary poem 'The Waste Land.'

Introduction

Symbols are essentially words, which are not merely connotative but also evocative and emotive. In addition to their meaning, they also call up or evoke before the mind's eye a host of associations connected with them, and are rich in emotional significance. A symbol can be used to convey "pure sensation" or the poet's apprehension of transcendental mystery. It is by the use of symbols that the poet enriches the texture of his verse and reveals the full significance and deeper meaning of a particular situation, events and happenings. On the surface there, might be merely a plain and simple narration or description, and the poem may be enjoyed as such, but a careful reading reveals the hidden and deeper meaning.

Edmund Wilson defines symbols as:

"The medley of images; the deliberately mixed metaphors; the combination passion and wit, - of the grand and the prosaic manners; the bold amalgamation of the material with spiritual" ¹.

Symbols can be of two types, traditional and personal.

The Five Parts of *The Waste Land*

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Eliot's symbol is a word, a phrase, a clause, or even a sign. But it always stands for an abstract idea or thing such as emotion. In fact, "Eliot is a giant of personal symbolism." The five parts of *The Waste Land* are entitled:

1. The Burial of the Dead
2. A Game of Chess
3. The Fire Sermon
4. Death by Water
5. What the Thunder Said

Correspondence with Greek Classical Elements

The first four sections of the poem correspond to the Greek classical elements of **Earth** (burial), **Air** (voices – the draft title for this section was "**In the Cage**", an image of hanging in air; also, the element of **Air** is generally thought to be aligned with the intellect and the mind), **Fire** (passion), and **Water** (the draft of the poem had additional water imagery in a fishing voyage.) The title of the fifth section could be a reference to the fifth element of **Aether**, which is included in many mystical traditions (one line here mentions *aetherial rumours*).

Spiritual Decay

In *The Waste Land*, 'dry bones' signify spiritual decay, desolation, and 'rats' the ugliness and horror of modern civilization. In the same way 'dry grass', 'cactus land', 'rocks', 'winds' singing dryly are all symbols of spiritual sterility.

Personal Symbols

The other category consists of personal symbols. They are devised by the poet for his own purpose, to express the vague fleeting impressions passing through his mind, or to convey his own sense of mystery of life. As the readers are not familiar with such symbols, they create difficulties for them, though, at the same time, they enhance the richness of the language. Eliot uses his own personal symbols in a very meaningful way. The 'dog' is a

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symbol of human conscience, 'Red rock' stands for Christian church, which offers a place of refuge for the lost soul of man. There are certain symbols invented by Eliot from the facts of modern life. "The broken finger nails of daily hands" (L-303) represents the aimless and cheap life of three daughters of the Thames River "A sick hat on a Bradford millions" represents the unbecoming self-confidence of the young clerk. Even Eliot's personal symbols are easy to understand.

Abundance of Ambivalent Symbols

Many of Eliot's symbols are ambivalent. They are used in different and opposite sense. **Water**, for example, is a symbol of regeneration, of purification of life as well as death. Likewise, the basic symbol of fire is employed in double sense. In the 'Fire Sermon', fire stands for the destroyer, for the sterile lusts of the city. It is in the closing lines of the final section that fire represents the purifier, the purgatory flame. The meaning is to be found in the light of particular context in which a symbol is used. Matthiessen says:

The subtly different connotation of the chief symbols within the course of 'The waste Land' itself are one of the strongest means by which the poet conveys the complexity of the existence that confronts him.

Characteristics of Symbols

The **first** and the basic characteristic of the symbol is its figurative quality. The **second** characteristic of the symbol is its perceptibility. The third characteristic of the symbol is its innate power. The **fourth** characteristic of the symbol is its acceptability as such. Metaphor, symbol and myth have one thing in common which we have called existence and essence. Symbolic language is a "Secret code", and dream interpretation becomes a job of decoding. More simply Findal defines symbol as "an outward device for presenting an inward state"³

Allusions, quotations and references to past literatures, myths and legends, all acquire symbolic significance from Eliot's use of them and throw into sharp relief fact of life of

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modern, urban civilization. For example, “**The unreal city**”, and the crowds moving across London Bridge in **The Waste Land** are linked up with the city of Baudelaire and with Dante’s Limbo and in this way the decadence of contemporary life is emphasized.

Complex Symbols

There are **Complex symbols**, often compounded from the primary or elementary symbols mentioned before. Thus, in the first section, the life of the German princess, her journey to the south in search of warmth, symbolize the ruthlessness of modern humanity and its search for sensuous pleasures. No discussion of the symbolism of the poem that does not take into account of the symbols contributed by the Bible can be considered as complete or satisfactory. “**The cricket which gives no relief**”, “**some of man**”, “**the fear in a handful of dust**”, “**the rock**”, “**and the dead tree**”, “**the dry bones**”, are all Biblical symbols though Eliot has often modified them to suit his own purpose.

Significance of Waste

The Waste Land, Eliot’s first major work, sums up his vision of life within the contest of modern age, Eliot’s immediate “Waste Land’ is in the world, as he saw it after the 1914 – 18 war. The ‘waste’ is not however that of wars devastation and bloodshed, but the emotional and spiritual sterility of western man, the waste’ of our civilization.

The title of the poem consists of the central waste land symbol and a significant date 1922. For the title of his poem, Eliot chose the central symbol of a devastated land. The title evokes all the associations of a barren landscape blighted by drought and famine, leading on to wide-scale human starvation, misery and death. At another level, this symbolic title recalls the ancient vegetation or fertility myths and primitive folklore associated with the sterility of a land affected by the impotence of its ruler. Both the land and its people could be saved by a virtuous and daring youth whose life was ritually sacrificed so as to renew the earth. *The Waste Land*, as a title and symbol has a profound and subtle significance. Eliot uses it to refer to the post-war devastation of Western civilization as a

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modern counterpart to the mythological waste land. Significantly, Eliot affixed the date “1922” to the title suggesting thereby that his “waste land” pertains to the contemporary scenario of woe and waste following the carnage of World War I. For the most part, Eliot relates the waste land symbol of the title to the “Unreal City” such as London, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna or Jerusalem (all centers of human civilization destroyed in past or recent human history).

The Theme of the Poem

The theme of the poem is the salvation of the waste land, not as a certainty but a possibility of emotional, spiritual and intellectual vitality to be regained. The whole world has become a wasteland. It presents modern London as an arid, waste land. The poem is built around the symbols of drought and flood representing birth and death, and this fundamental idea is referred to throughout. The poem progresses through five moments; **The Burial of the Dead, the Game of Chess, the Fire Sermon, Death of Water** and **What the Thunder said**, Tiresias throughout gives it a spite of its complexities and apparent ambiguity, The Waste Land is powerfully moving presentation of sterility and disruption. In the words of Vikramaditya Rao:

The Waste Land views the contemporary human problem as a repetition and continuation of a permanent problem of humanity, while emphasizing everywhere the wide gulf that separates the Godless humanity of today from the early human society, when moral and spiritual values were intact to guide the human destiny and redeem man from the career of sin and crime.⁴

The Burial of the Dead

The opening section of **The Waste Land** entitled ‘**The Burial of the Dead**’ implies that the inhabitants of the contemporary waste land are spiritually dead and the very thought of re-birth or spiritual re-generation is painful to them. The poem begins with the month of April, which ushers the spring season. Nature, which is dead and cold during the winter-season, is revived and brought back to life by the spring rain. The spring seems to unite the

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past and the future, the past that is dead and the future, which is yet to come. Looking at **The Waste Land**, the poet observes that April as a bad month because the plants, like human beings, do not want to get a new life. They are quite content and happy with winter, “**winter keeps us warm**”. Winter stands for a life of comfort, of physical joy when the spiritual side of the mind and make him decree his blissful seat in heaven. They like winter, which is a symbol of spiritual death. It keeps them warm and looking for excitement and joys of life.

The Protagonist Tiresias

The protagonist, **Tiresias**, surveys the panorama of modern civilization and finds it spiritually barren and dead. The stones, dead trees, sun, all symbolize spiritual dissolution nothing spiritual can grow in this barren land. Broken images are the wrecks of old ideals and values in which man has lost faith. There is no relief, no shelter from the scorching heat of the sun except under the shade of a red rock. **The red rock** symbolizes the Christian Church, and the only hope of humanity lies in seeking shelter, i.e. accepting the message of Christ. The shadow of man, which is his death; in youth (morning) it is behind and in old age (evening) it is before him, ready to meet him. ‘**A handful of dust**’ is ‘man’ who is afraid of death and the anger of God both. It is this fear, which haunts him from his cradle to his grave. According to **F.R. Leavis**: “This fear is partly the fear of death, but still more a nameless, ultimate fear, a horror of the completely negative.”⁵

Dust is a reminder of man’s mortality. He can be immortal if he follows the Christian ways. If Christ was able to regenerate man in the past, he can do so in the present time also.

We are then, introduced to two episodes of guilty love, which are Eliot’s comment on the sexual compulsion in **The Waste Land**, where sexual art has become beastly and sinful because it is divested of all spiritual import, all considerations right or wrong. Tiresias observes two contrasting scenes of love depiction the intensity of emotion and feeling and undying faith in love even in the face of death, and the other refraction total breakdown of emotional communication. Tristan lay on a bank of flowers fatally wounded, longing for death and waiting for his beloved, and when he had the last glimpse of her, he opened his

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wound and breathed his last. Such a pappy death is not possible for the waste landers. The ecstasy of love possible is framed. The modern waste landers cling to life and fear of death.

Man-Woman Relationship

The second scene exposes the hollowness of man-woman relationship without occasional warmth. A young girl tells her lover that when they returned from Hyacinth garden a year before, her heart was filled with existential fear,

**-Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence. (L-36-41)**

These lines show the uncertainty of the relationship. Here a **hyacinth** is symbol of sensuous love. As their life was lusty, the lover lost his senses. Hence, there is desolation and emptiness in his heart. Eliot says that their love is guilty and hence instead of bringing sense of fulfillment, it brings a sense of satiety and boredom and futility of sex outside marriage.

The Tarot Pack

We, then, move to the very heart of the modern wasteland. The tarot pack used by madam Sosostriis was originally used to determine the events of the highest importance to the people, but in the contemporary world the function of the pack has degenerated and in the contemporary world the function of the pack has degenerated and it is used for trite and forbidden fortune telling. The immediate function of the passage introducing the pack, moreover, is to evoke, in contrast with what has preceded, cosmopolitan “high life”, and the charlatanism modern Sosostriis, suffers from bad cold and lives in constant fear of police. She has a pack of cards representing the different personages. One of there is of the drowned Phoneciam Sailor. He symbolizes the fertility God whose image was thrown into the sea every year to symbolize the end of summer.

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Belladonna and Other Symbols

Next is **Belladonna**, which generally means a beautiful woman. She is the woman of situation for she is adept in manipulating sex intrigues. She symbolizes womanhood in the modern waste land.

Another card present **Fisher King** and the three sticks sympathies and to control. The wheel symbolizes Buddha's Wheel of Dharma. It may also refer to the wheel of the ship linked with Phoenician sailor. This ward may also refer to encircling water of the whirl pool mentioned in the fourth section of this poem. It may also symbolize wheel of fortune, or the cycle of seasons symbolizing the vicissitudes of human life. Then is the '**one eyed merchant**' who refer to the merchant of **Smyrna** mentioned in the third section, which has one eye namely, the eye of commerce, the second eye of religion is dead. His one-eye also symbolizes the contemporary decay and desolation. The blank card represents the mysteries of religion. However, the waste landers are blind to religious truth. They are so degenerated that, to them, the card of religion appears blank.

'**The Hanged man**' is the sacrificed fertility God mentioned by Frazer and the crucified Christ. He is hooded and the fortuneteller cannot recognize him. This is the measure of their degeneration. The crowds of people refer to the office going men and women. These people lead aimless and futile lie in a cycle of routine. These people spiritually strike, describe a purpose less circle.

The Unreal City

The protagonist then surveys the '**unreal city**', London and the crowd that moves in the dead routine. As the crowd reaches **King William Street**, the church clock strikes the hour of nine but the hour means nothing to them except that it is the time for opening of offices. It is also the hour of Christ's crucification. In the modern mechanical and commercial world, there is a negation, of spiritual values. The devotion to business is a denial of Christ.

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The Blooming Corpse

Tiresias who is the mouthpiece of the poet recognizes a man named Stetson. He asks him whether the corpse, which he had planted in his garden, bloomed.

**“That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout?” (L-71-72)**

Here the corpse is the spiritual failure of Stetson or modern humanity. He further adds:

**“Oh keep the dog for hence, that’s friend to men,
Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!” (L-74-75)**

Here the dog is the conscience which will like to awaken humanity to its spiritual failure but this the spiritually dead human does not like, and so wants the dog to be kept away. Various interpretations regarding ‘the corpse’ and of the ‘dog’ has been given. **Cleanth Brooks** takes the dog to mean humanitarianism, rationalism or scientific mentality, which, “in their concern for man, extirpate the supernatural dig up, the corpse of the buried fertility god and thus prevent the rebirth of life”, The dog may stand for the Dog Star Which heralds the rise of Nile water and thus brings fertility to the barren soil. Dog may also stand for some destructive creative or the dog of lust, which may spoil the spiritual soil. He universalizes the symbolism of Stetson by identifying him with himself as well as with readers.

A Game of Chess

The second movement of the poem is fittingly entitled, “**A Game of Chess**”, for it exposes the failure of sex relationship in the modern wasteland. Sex has become a matter of intrigue, a matter of moves and counter moves between men and women. It has become a mere source of pleasure and has lost its spiritual significance. As a result, family life both in high and low society has reached stale, and life has become a round of dull routine. Eliot

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traces the futility, boredom, neurosis of modern life to the perversion of sex relationship. The title reminds one of the game of chess in Middleton's play *Women Beware Woman*, when a game of chess is played to hide a seduction. It also symbolizes the futile exercise of the mind upon problems, which by their nature are insoluble.

In order to cover a wide range of society, Eliot has picked up two suffering women, one from the rich aristocratic class and other from the poor lower class. Richness or poverty does not affect their fate. The 'she' in the first part of this section is 'Belladonna', the lady of Rocks, the lady of situations of the first section who represents the agony of all the women in the poem, who have been betrayed by their lovers? The entire passage is intended to bring out the artificiality and superficial mythical tales as comment upon her own tragic plight. Another scene painted above the mantel tells the story of the rape of Philomel whose 'inviolable voice' still fills the wasteland to whose inhabitants it is only the 'Jug Jug' of a bird song.

Lady Belladonna is waiting for her lover when he enters. She asks the lover to stay with her and speak to her for some time. But the lover has nothing to speak about. She asks her lover again what is in his mind and what about he is thinking.

**“Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak
What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
I never know what you are thinking. Think.” (L-112-114)**

These lines show that there is a mental vacuum. They are the victims of boredom and thoughtlessness of modern life. This indicates monotony of the routine life.

**“I think we are in rat's alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.” (L-115-116)**

This again shows the spiritual bareness and the decay of the modern man. The lover feels that human beings are like rats in their holes. They keep running around and this only disturbing the dead bones about. This shows the purposelessness and aimless life patterns.

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Another side of the same picture comes in view through the second half of ‘**A game of chess**’. The sordidness now is more candidly physical. It shows how Lil having undergone abortions, suffers from its effect and which has resulted in premature aging where the marriage is meant for regulation and discipline of sex- instincts and not for excessive sex relationship. The lower class people do not have much for recreation and indulge them in sexual activities and thus had made their life barren and desolate.

Sexual Violation

The chief symbol of this section is the sexual violation, the fiery hair, the chess game and the blindness. The fiery points of the woman’s hair present a **Medusa** like contrast to the wet hair of the **Hyacinth** girl, fire here is a symbol of lust, water of love. The key symbol in the second part, however, is abortion, which advances the theme of unfruitfulness and sterility. “The violet girl” is essentially a symbol of betrayed innocence. Lack of discipline in sexual relationship tunes it into a source of mere gratification of the senses. The consequence is a state of checkmate in the family life. Sex is merely escape and when it pulls, it converts marriage into tedious bondage. Both the women of high society and lower strata from nervousness and uncertainty and emotional imbalance obsession with sex is one of the main diseases of modern civilization.

Life is presented here as a game of chess. The game requires calculated moves. Nothing should be taken for granted. To the waste lenders, life has never been a serious game. As a result, life finds itself reduced to being a source of carnal experiments and material pursuit. That is why women in the poem ultimately had to come to such a plight. Tragedy lives in the fact that they are not least aware of their plight. No hope is seen to rise for them.

Use of the Sermons of Buddha

The title of these sections is borrowed from the sermon of Lord Buddha wherein he said that the world is on fire, “burning with the fire of hatred with the fire of infatuation, with

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birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief and despair.”⁷ All these are on fire, the essence of this section is that lust burns up life. One can conquer lust by suffering and pain, by passing through the fire.

The description of the river scene in the opening lines evokes a sense of the loss of purity and chastity. Winter has arrived. The branches of the trees standing on the bank of the river are lifeless. The nymphs, who used to play on the river bank, have gone away. This refers to the spiritual barrenness of the present society. The summer society girls along with their customers visited the river. After having their round of pleasure, they have all left. The river is strewn all over with empty bottles, cigarette cases, papers and handkerchiefs, the reminder of the orgy of pleasure on its bank. The water is a source of purification and regeneration but the degenerate modern man does not realize this, and so does not hesitate to defile the purity of the river, which, “**Sweats oil and tar**”. The pollution of the river symbolizes spiritual degeneration.

Vulgarization of Spiritual Values

Eliot’s pre-occupation with the vulgarizations of spiritual values is further seen in the reference to **Mr. Eugenides**, the **Smyrna** merchant. For him, sex is also a commodity, which he purchases wherever he likes. Thus, he represents a sex relationship, which is essentially sterile.

The mechanical animal like nature of sex relationship in the contemporary waste land is emphasized further by the actions of the lady after mating with her lover. The mating of the typist with the young man “carbuncular” is merely mechanical, indifferent. Symbolizing the physical sex-relationship in the waste land, the girl is indifferent. She does not repulse her advances, but she shows no pleasure and no signs of welcome. But this lack of response does not matter to the youth, soon the act is over and the lover departs with a final kiss.

Endeavours to engage her in caresses

Which are still unproved, if undesired.

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**Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit...**

(L-237-253)

It is her way of overcoming the ennui of life. In fact, she derives no pleasure from this act. The departure of her lover does not bother her at all. She looks in the mirror to see if her hair has been disarranged or the powder from the face removed, paces about the room and mechanically puts a record on the gramophone.

‘Well now that’s done, and I, am glad it’s over’ (L-252)

Tiresias observes a sordid liaison between a typist and a clerk. The passionless quality of the style implies the lack of genuine passion in their union, in the clause,

‘When lovely woman stoops to folly’, (L-253)

Tiresias compares her with **Oliver Goldsmith’s Olivia** in *The Vicar of the Wakefield*; who is full of shame and repentance and the only way to save her name from anonymity is to die. But the typist girl will never make this choice. She will die every moment spiritually. The Juxtaposition of the past and the present brings out the contrast, and in this way heightens Eliot’s satire in the contemporary perversion of values.

T

he poet now gives a picture of the river Thames. The daughters of the Thames lament the loss of their chastity at the hands of their seducers. They bemoan their loss of purity and virginity as a brutality of man. The three girls – first from **Richmond**, the second from **Margate** and the third from **Margate** sands tell their stories of rape. These girls are utterly frustrated and their life is equal to nothing.

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The Promise of Redemption

The section closes on a note of the promise of redemption from the sin of the flesh through repentance. Such sins have been committed by men in past as well as, after repenting of their sin, they became saints. ‘The Fire Sermon’ is the cardinal turning point of the poem. ‘**The Fire Sermon**’ closes on a note of hope that a degenerate soul can be spiritually rehabilitated by true repentance of the past sins followed by abstention from indulgence of sense and self-abnegation. Otherwise, the waste Landers will burn is the fire of poison and one day enveloped in the deep bottom of the sea of death. The name of love can only draw one further downward into the hell of the wasteland, with its seething caldrons of lust, then we must refit all burning D.E.S. Maxwell says.

The burning of lust, the sterility of love, the physical and spiritual drought, can be quenched only by the coning of the life giving water ...That is a death that can lead to renewed spiritual life. ⁸

Death by Water

In the next section, “**Death by water**,” Phlebas the Phoenician symbolizes man’, passion for worldly pleasures, which eventually devour him. He belongs to the commercial class, which works to govern life with wealth and property. While he is on the sea on his business expedition, he is drowned. He undergoes a slow process of death in the month of the demon of commercialism symbolized by sea.

According to **Miss Weston**, there is an ancient ritual in Egypt, where effigies of the fertility god was thrown into sea at Alexandria to indicate his death. There is a contract between the drowning of the effigy and the drowning of Phlebas: There is no rebirth in the case of the above sailor because he has wasted his life in worldly pursuit. Salvation is possible for those who pursue the things of the spirit and have faith in God. This is a warning to the modern man that he must bear in mind, the death of a drowned sailor and takes a lesson from him to devote his life to higher values. The last line sums up the moral of the section – “**Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you**”.

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The water, instead of being a savior, has become destructive. But the truth still evades the poor waste Landers. Death is not destructive but productive. It regenerates a new life. The waste-Landers will learn it only slowly. **The Bible** says – until a seed dies, it cannot bring out a new life. Moreover, the wasterlanders has to learn this truth in course of time. Tiresias tells all those who, like Phelbas, thinks that they turn the wheel of the world that they should gather a lesson from his death, who was not inferior to them, met his doom due to his mania for amazing sources of pleasure. The machinery he thought he owned and regulated crushed him.

Water is a symbol of purification and rebirth. However, there is no rebirth of the Phoenician sailor or modern humanity because of their modern degradation. The idea is that the people who devote themselves to worldly pursuits and accumulation of riches will be punished and drowned in whirlpool of death. Then youth, strength and wealth will not be of any use to them. Deliverance from death can be achieved only through pursuit of moral values and practice love of God. Complete secularism and rejection of the supernal is at the root of the contemporary decay and disintegration. In the notes, Eliot writes:

“In the first part of part V, three themes are employed, the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel perilous. and the present decay of Eastern Europe”.⁹

The moral of the section is contained in the message proclaimed by thunder for the liberation of society from spiritual barrenness. What the Thunder said concentrates on the essential of the scenes enacted in the previous journeys, summarizing their desolation. The social covering is stripped away, and without any distraction. People are shown faced with the horror of their self created desert. The original journey could not be completed not the thirst be relieved by the coming of rain. But here the poem begins with a rain shower.

In the first passage, we get an account or the scene of Christ’s arrest and later on, he was crucified. However, the poet says, that his crucifixion was not his real death, for Christ lived on through religion and in the heart of his disciples. However, we, in the 20th century, have killed him in reality by our indifferences. We are living only physically, spiritually we

are all dead. We are dying a slow death, suffering patiently the consequences of on spiritual indifference.

He who was living is now dead

We who were living are now dying. (L-329)

Tasting the Fruits of Action

The path of spiritualism is full of difficulties and those who follow it often have to undergo lot of pains. There is rocky deadness, lifelessness everywhere. There is no life giving water anywhere. The ‘sandy rock’ ‘dead mountain’ ‘dry strike thunder’, ‘dry grass’, ‘Mud rock houses’ all enhance the symbolism of lifelessness. This symbolizes the great thirst of pilgrims, which is increased as they gasp for death. A devotee has to face lots of hardship in this spiritual quest.

Weavers and vacillators have to taste the fruits of their actions. They cannot visualize reality or discriminate between evil and good. Doubt and disbelief will lead them to their doom. Tiresias presents a short scene of the illusion of two such persons who are compared to the two fools in Luke. There are two disciples of Christ walking together who are doubtful about the truth of the report that the dead Christ has arisen from the grave. One of them feels as if there is a third person with hood wasting along with them and asks:

Who is the third who walks always beside you? (L-359)

As he turns to verify, the hooded figure become visible. The third person is Christ himself – who accompanied his disciples and in indication of resurrection and thus is hope of redemption and regeneration.

Hopelessness

The contemporary hopelessness is in sharp contrast to the hopeful journey of the king who ultimately reaches his goal. When he reaches the top, a cockcrows, indicating the end of night and the birth of morning. There is a flash of lighting and a damp wind indication arrival of rain and fertility.

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‘Only a cock stood on the roof top’ (L-391)

Mantra

The scene shifts from Europe to India. Once, there was a total failure of rain in India, and when confused and perplexed people prayed to the Divine or God, He spoke to them in thunder, ‘**Da, Da, Da**’. Thus indication them to the three fold way of deliverance and spiritual salvation. It is **Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyanta**

The first “**Da**” means to give. It means giving oneself to a spiritual way of life or surrender for a higher purpose. The first “**Datta**” surely concerns the sexual blunder to which Tiresias had already confessed.

Secondly, ‘**Da**’ means “**Dyadhvam**” i.e. ‘**to sympathize**’ has proceeded from the same cause. The surrender to something outside the self is an attempt (whether on the sexual level or some other) to transcend one’s essential isolation. ‘Sympathy’ means going over to others or spiritual harmony with others, and this is essential for spiritual salvation.

Thirdly, ‘**Da**’, means “**Damyata**’ i.e. ‘**self control**’ and ‘**discipline**’. It also follows the condition necessary for control, sympathy. Spiritual discipline implies control over sensuous guidance on a calm sea. Spiritual discipline implies control over sensuous desires than life becomes a gay adventure.

In the closing lines, Eliot strikes a personal note and wishes to find out remedy for the reforming of spiritually decadent society. Pain is necessary for reconstruction of individual. Detachment of the soul is necessary for salvation. Tiresias closes his observation with his wish. May there be **Shantih** everywhere. “**The peace of God, which passeth all understanding**”.

Conclusion

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At the end we can say that Eliot's *The Waste Land* presents a veritable labyrinth of meanings and messages for our turbulent times. Eliot's use of complex symbols and intricate imagery adds richness and variety to the texture of the poem. It is replete with luxuriant allusions to myth, ritual, religion, history - both past and present. This makes the poem itself a virtual "waste land" or quagmire through which any aspiring reader must cautiously wade if s/he wishes to absorb the essence of its meaning or significance.

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Dr. Sheeba Azhar, M.A., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of English
College of Applied Medical Science
Hafr-Al-Batin University of Dammam
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
atif254@gmail.com

Dr. Syed Abid Ali, M.A., Ph.D. (English), M.A., Ph.D. (Urdu)
Lecturer
Department of English
College of Applied Medical Science
Hafr-Al Batin University of Dammam
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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abidurduenglish@gmail.com

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