



The WasteLand

(by T.S. Eliot)

M.A. English Previous

Poetry – Unit-IV

Semester – II



Hello!

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T.S. Eliot and his important works

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in Missouri on September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri, an inland industrial city of America. He was the son of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Chaincey Stearns. His first volume of poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, appeared in 1917. Another most important poems appeared from 1918 to 1925 in which *The Waste Land* also include and it was published in 1922. Eliot's Christian Poetry appeared from 1925 to 1935. he also wrote some religious poetry, Prose and Verse Dramas. He was influenced by Indian Literature & Philosophy, Ezra Pound, Metaphysical poets, Dante and French Symbolists. Because of his big influence on poetry and his career achievements, T.S. Eliot was granted a Nobel Prize in Literature and an Order of Merit in 1948. A few of his famous poems include: "Four Quartets" (1943), "Ash Wednesday" (1930), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *After Strange Gods* (1934) and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1940). He is also known as a critic. *Tradition and the Individual Talent*" and *"Hamlet and His Problems* are his famous critical works. Some of his early critical essays were *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *Homage to John Dryden* (1924), *Selected Essays: 1917–1932* (1932), and *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933) also appeared. He died in London on January 4, 1965.

Introduction of The Waste Land

The Waste Land is Eliot's best-known poem, which was published in *the Criterion* in October 1922, and in *the Dial* in November 1922. The poem begins with a section entitled "*The Burial of the Dead.*" The second section is "*A Game of Chess.*" "*The Fire Sermon.*" is the third section of the poem. The fourth section is "*Death by Water.*" and the fifth section is "*What the Thunder Said.*" The poem is full of diagnosis of the malady of our time. The basic theme of *The Waste Land* is the disillusionment of the post-war generation and sterility of the modern man. The disintegration of the Modern Civilization is due to several causes which are mentioned by Eliot in this poem. These are (1) Sexual-perversion, (2) Loss of faith and moral values, (3) Lack of human relationship, (4) Commercialization of life, (5) Mental tension, (6) Politics and wars. But at the core is the Christian doctrine of re-birth through prayer and suffering and death. *The Waste Land* is not a poem of idea and thoughts but of feelings and experiences.

Analysis with the text of section One: “The Burial of the Dead”

The first part starts off with a portrayal of how terrible spring is. Then, a German woman named Marie is mentioned. Her childhood is explained thoroughly. The poet moves on to describe a literal ‘wasteland’ with a description of infertile grounds and dead trees. Last, “Burial of the Dead” is when the speaker goes into London that is overrun by zombies. Stetson, the dead figure from a past war was asked about the fortune of a dead body that was concealed in his garden. The poem started off with a glimpse of joy, where two girls were having fun sledding and drastically changed to a terrible description of spring and land. This shows how war can affect society heavily.

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I. The Burial of the Dead

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.

Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cicicket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you,
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

*Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo wärest du?*

“You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
“They called me the hyacinth girl.”
—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.
Oed' und leer das Meer.

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Analysis with the text of section Two: “The Game of Chess”

The second section of the poem, “A Game of Chess”, starts off with a wealthy woman sitting in her exquisite room. She waits for her lover, and she starts crying. An image is found on the wall of Philomel, a woman from ancient Greek myths who was raped by King Tereus. Then the section moves onto a conversation between two ladies in the bathroom of a bar. They speak of a friend called Lil whose husband has left for war. Lil’s hideous looks are caused by the medication she’s been taking for abortion after having five children, but her husband won’t leave her alone.

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II. A Game of Chess

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window; these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
“Jug Jug” to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

“My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
“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.”

I think we are in rats’ alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

“What is that noise?”

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Analysis with the text of section Three: “The Fire Sermon”

Furthermore, the third section, “*The Fire Sermon*”, starts off with describing the Thames River and how it has become polluted. The character expresses sorrow because of the extinction of magic. Philomel is mentioned again, and then a blind prophet called Tiresias from a myth, that was turned from a guy to a girl for seven years by the Goddess Hera. Then a story about two people having loveless sex is explained relating to the theme of the spread of violent love. The clerk having intercourse leaves Tiresias alone with sad music playing in the background.

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III. The Fire Sermon

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept. . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel

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Analysis with the text of section Four: “Death by Water”

The fourth section, “*Death by Water*”, describes Phlebas the Phoenician, who were famous in ancient times, for their skill in navigation. Now he has been dead for a fortnight. Now he no longer remembers the cry of gulls which he used to hear during his voyages. He has also forgotten all about the rise and fall of the waves of the deep sea. His materialistic activity has also come to an end. At last his body was caught in a whirlpool and was seen no more. Thus ended his earthly existence. We should learn a lesson from his tragic death. We should have faith in God, and leave our destiny in His hands.

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IV: Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

Analysis with the text of section Fifth: “What the thunder said”

Finally, the fifth section, “*What the Thunder Said*”, a huge stony land is present. It is dry of all sources of water. Then, two guys are walking along, and one notices a third person with them, but there wasn’t anyone actually there. Thunder cracks over them and it sounds like it is saying three words in Sanskrit, which mean “give, sympathize, and control”. Then the word Shantih is repeated several times during the scene, which stands for “the peace that passeth all understanding.” The write gives us hope at the end, showing that even if civilization is ruining itself there is still faith.

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V. What the Thunder Said

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses
If there were water

And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop
But there is no water

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you

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Important Questions –

*Q.1 Discuss the use of irony in **The Waste Land** with special reference to the poem?*

*Q.2 Discuss the important themes of **The Waste Land** in detail?*

*Q.3 Attempt a critical appreciation of **The Waste Land**?*

*Q.4 Examine the following statement with reference to **The Waste Land** : ‘A sigh for the vanished glory of the past’?*