

Echoes of the Past: Revisiting Myths in T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*

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Abstract

In The Waste Land (1922) T.S.Eliot presents the degraded, infected and corrupted view of modern day London. In the modern day, humanity has lost its faith in religion, in spirituality as well as in other humans. Eliot continuously tries to compare the present situations with the past just to show us that it is not only the present day Europe which is ailing or ill, but people have suffered the same loss even during the past. Since experiences in the modern day world are so complex therefore he compares the present with the past drawing using mythical methods and allusions from Greek and Roman myths, Christian and pre-Christian and pagan myths and rituals to show the decay of humanity in the present day. Eliot in the poem marvelously and skillfully juxtaposes the present with the past. And thus they comment on each other. This paper is an attempt to show how the past still echoes in the present with the images drawn from various civilizations.

Keywords: degradation, modern, myth, past, present

Introduction:

“...the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent the past’s awareness of itself cannot show.”

(*Tradition and the Individual Talent*. T.S.Eliot)

The rise of the twentieth century saw the massive destructions of humanity. The two world wars took a heavy toll on life. After the world wars, everything was shattered and Europe was fragmented, especially central Europe. People lost their nationality and whether one liked it or not, they were annexed to other countries. Eliot himself refers to this crisis in *The Waste Land* through the voice of Marie Larisch who belonged to a princely state now finds that her state is annexed to Russia. She is deprived of her nationality, her ‘identity’. She says-

“Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.”

Roughly translated as “I'm not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a true German.” Thus, when society is shattered, nobody could perceive things with clarity. This also had an effect on the overall literature of the age. Given such a situation, the poet also had to represent a fractured world in fragmented forms. In poetry, for example, there is a movement away from the direct revelation of the character or feelings of the poet, which coincides with an increasing absence of objectively verifiable meaning; we find the disappearance of the authorial or poet's voice and an appreciable distance between the poet and the speaker in the poem; there is also a new emphasis on psychology or character and the presentation of a particular perspective or perspectives. Plus, given the compact form of poetry as opposed to

that of the novel form where things can be described in greater detail, the poet has no license to present things in an explanative manner. What he does is, he presents the events in a dense and solid manner. However, if we speak of 'modernity' in literature, it is to be noted that the concept cannot exist without a certain encounter with the traditional forms. It is not a direct break from the past but the echoes of the past continues to support the narratives of the present. This encounter happens in three ways as put forward by Thomas Mautner in *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*-

- By recasting the past symbols.
- By rejecting the representation of tradition altogether.
- By absorbing the past.

Keeping these factors in mind, the paper will analyze how T.S.Eliot in *The Waste Land* makes proper use of the past, intertwines it with the present to show that there is a string of continuity between them.

Discussion:

T.S.Eliot in his great poem *The Waste Land* (1922), presents the degraded, infected, corrupted and besmirched as well as the grim view of modern day London. Humanity has lost its faith in religion, in spirituality as well as in other humans. Eliot continuously tries to compare the present situations with the past just to show us that it is not only the present day Europe which is ailing or ill, but people have suffered the same loss even during the past. Since experiences in the modern day world are so complex therefore he compares the present with the past drawing using mythical methods and allusions from Greek and Roman myths, Christian and pre-Christian and pagan myths and rituals to show the decay of humanity in the present day. As said earlier, one cannot bring in explicit and elaborate references of the past in a poem because of its compact form and genre. Therefore, Eliot marvelously and skillfully juxtaposes the present with the past. And thus they comment on each other. An interesting observation is made by Helen Gardner in his book *The Art of T.S.Eliot* (1980) where he says of *The Waste Land*-

“Although the *Waste Land* may begin with the dilemma of the modern mind, it discovers that the modern dilemma is the historic dilemma.”

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses the mythical method to set the actual framework of the poem. It is to be remembered that mythical method is not the use of myth but a comparison of the past with the present. Eliot uses myth only as a platform and a base to give his poem a structure. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is the most sustained and complex use of the mythical method. Taking as its underlying pattern the great myth as interpreted by Jessie Weston, Sir James Frazer and others and weaving the theme of barrenness, decay, death and the quest for life and resurrection which he found in these anthropological sources with the Christian story, with Buddhist, Hindu and other oriental analogies and incorporating into the poem both examples and symbols of the failure of modern civilization, moral squalor and social vacuum - which are in turn mythically and symbolically related to the anthropological and religious themes, Eliot endeavored to project a complete view of civilization, of human history and human failure and of perennial quest for salvation. Eliot warns the readers of *The Waste Land* that while reading the poem, one should not isolate himself thinking that it is only a piece of art. Because every reader of *The Waste Land*, is a part of 'the waste land'. He states in 'The Burial of the Dead' -

“You! Hypocrite lecteur!- mon semblable, -mon frère!”

That the modern poet concerned with the complexities of his civilization can no longer count on any common body of knowledge in the light of which he can confidently use myth and

symbol. When history, science and philosophy fail, the poet restores to myth. It is the comprehensive aim of *The Waste Land* to make necessary dependence on a synthetic myth. *The Waste Land* might also be considered in the light of Derrida's idea of 'differance' as meaning here is always delayed and is dependent on traces of other texts. The poem on the whole signifies in terms of intertextuality; it discovers significance through the relation contemporary experience, myth and already existing texts, as perhaps the present only signify in these terms.

Eliot has frankly acknowledged his debt to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1919) and Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), specially the portion dealing with the fertility rituals. Frazer's work was significant for Eliot because it demonstrates the continuity between the primitive and the civilized and revealed the bedrock of savagery and violence beneath the surface of civilization. The mythical method of Eliot, however, is different that of Joyce in *Ulysses*. Joyce follows the technique of elaboration and expansion, but Eliot has adapted the technique of compression and telescoping, with poetic shorthand. In *Ulysses, Order and Myth* (1923), Eliot states-

In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him ... it is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history ... psychology... ethnology, and *The Golden Bough* have concurred to make possible what was impossible a few years ago. Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.

Eliot found in *The Golden Bough* not merely a method for controlling experience but also an imaginative extension of experience and an affinity with Frazer's pessimistic view of history. For Frazer, savagery is the source of civilization and a permanent component of it, for there is no permanent existence of a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society and unaffected by the superficial changes of religion and culture. Every religion at the bottom draws from the primitive rituals.

The Waste Land draws basically on the ideas of infertility. Eliot's *The Waste Land* on the larger canvas draws from the myth of the Fisher King Anfortus. According to the Celtic legend, the land of the Fisher King was under a curse so a hero had to undertake a journey, a daring task so that the land is restored to fertility. Anfortus was a very generous ruler and in his kingdom lays the Perilous church where according to legends, the grail was kept and worshipped. During his rule, some of his soldiers committed heinous crime by outraging the chastity of some nuns. After this the curse fell on the king and his own land. The king became physically weak, impotent and infertile. And the whole kingdom was turned into a desert-barren, full of diseases and misfortunes. Until and unless this crime is repeated, nothing can bring change in his kingdom. When any knight of virginal purity comes to the land, this land will regain fertility. Thus someone had to take over this heroic task to redeem the king and his land.

The second myth focuses on Jessie Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance* which talks about the Holy Grail legend. When Christ was crucified, his blood was collected in the grail. This grail and the blood became automatically miraculous and had certain medicinal powers. This was kept in a church. And from the church, one day suddenly, this Holy Grail goes missing. The knights went out in the dark night to look out for the Grail. Many of them also lost their lives on the way. It was visible only to the knights who had virginal purity. They could witness it in the sky. The Grail was also a symbol of male and female fertility. Thus when it got lost, the land became infertile. It was considered a grave sin. Therefore the land

had to suffer great infertility. It underwent a curse. The people in the land were diseased, infertile and faced miseries. This was because the actual sex was devoid its function. It was only done in the way of animal lust. Because of the loss of the Holy Grail, the land became wasted, thus a waste land. These ideas of loss of fertility and impurity are recurring symbols in the poem.

The third myth centers on Tiresias who was a blind prophet of Thebes. One day, Tiresias was just going through the forest and he accidentally disturbed two snakes copulating. Then the snakes cursed him and he became a female and lived his life as a female for several years. One day again, he went through the forest and disturbed again a pair of snakes who were copulating and the snakes made him a man once again. So Tiresias was a man changed into a woman who was again changed into a man. He was thus the most experienced in the entire human race. Eliot in *The Waste Land* describes Tiresias as-

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts.

One day, Jove and Juno asked him that during sexual experience, who gains more pleasure. Tiresias said it was the woman. Listening this, Juno was enraged and she struck him blind. But Jove was happy so he blessed Tiresias with the gift of prophecy and immortality. Tiresias is the witness to all events in history. This Tiresias serves as the important link in Eliot's *Waste Land*. According to some critics he is also the chief protagonist of the poem.

Besides these three general mythical allusions, the very first myth that draws our attention in *The Waste Land* is that of the Sibyl of Cumis. Like Tiresias, the Sybil has outlived her age. Now she is nothing but in a miserable state. According to the myth, the Sybil of Cumis was a seer, a prophetess who wished for an eternal life. Though she wished for an eternal life, she forgot to wish for an eternal youth. The epigraph of the poem sets the tone of the entire waste land in general. The epigraph roughly translated as-

Now myself with my own eyes saw the Sybil of Cumis hanging in a cage
And when the boys said to her: "Sybil what do you want?"
She replied "I want to die."

The epigraph is taken from the ancient Greek poem *Satyricon* by Petronius. It is said that once the Sybil of Cumis was a prophetess in service of Apollo and had a great beauty. Apollo wished to offer her anything she desired. The Sybil asked to live on for many years like the grains of dust in her hands. Apollo granted her wish. But, she forgot to ask about her eternal youthfulness. After years and years of her life, she became old, haggard and antiquated. Thus, there is a want within her to die. The prospect of death is something to be desired. This act of desire, yearning for death and salvation runs throughout the entire poem. A want to leave all earthly desires and lay at peace. In the waste land that we live, there is no meaning of life. Only death is seen to be desirable. Perhaps death is the only way out- the only real hope of peace and silence.

The first section of the poem, 'The Burial of the Dead' deals with this prospect of death.

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

April here is presented as the cruel, malicious month which unlike Chaucer's April where he says "When in April the sweet showers fall." April is seen as the archetype of spring, reawakening and renewal. It is the month of the mating season, season of renewal and reawakening. April seems to reawaken us from the cold, drab winter. So technically speaking, April is not the cruelest month of the year. Yet Eliot's April is opposed to that of

Chaucer. This is because in the absence of God and religious faith, there is an absence of purpose in modern life. In this waste land that we live, the spring rain comes, mixes with the dull roots. Therefore, though the spring rain comes but it cannot do anything to rejuvenate mankind. This is the irony that Eliot presents for the waste landers. Thus, April is the cruelest month. It brings rain without the prospect of it. Like the Sybil of Cumis, we human beings 'desire' for an eternal prospect of glory and yet in the waste land, there are only dull roots which symbolize that there are nothing that could provide us any real possibility. The following lines suggests this barrenness-

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of these stony rubbish?

Eliot mentions the picture of a crowd in London Bridge which is a reference to Baudelaire's poem. He states-

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.

Baudelaire describes Paris as an unreal city- surreal and ghostly. Eliot uses it to describe London- the unreal city in modern world filled with walking ghosts. Underneath the fog- that isolates us, blinds us, confuses us and prohibits us from seeing, Eliot refers to a crowd flowing over London Bridge. This is like Dante's *Inferno* in which Dante comes to the pit of Hell and peers downwards where he sees many layers of hell spiraling downwards to the center of the earth. This is analogous to the modern day world where people are seen shuffling around London Bridge pointlessly, purposelessly- leading a monotonous life of isolation. Although we see people are jammed together with each other, there is an absolute isolation which lurks within each one of them.

This can be compared to Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' where he states about the war field- "Men marched asleep." There is a want within each and every individual to give up their lives and leave this world by clutching the fingers of death. Because no waste landers has the wish to live on. Hence, according to the waste landers, winter is the best time of the year-

Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow

Thus, we can see that like the Sybil of Cumis who now regrets asking for an eternal life and desires to die, the waste landers too are looking for death. A death that will release humanity from this invaluable life. Like the Sybil, perhaps death is and will be the only real hope of peace and silence. There looms large the concept of "Death in Life"- where people are deathlike, ghostly, just surviving and going in motion without actual meaning and emotion; and the concept of "Life in Death"- wherein someone is expected to sacrifice to save humanity. But given the context of a wasted land, who will take this mammoth task? As Cleanth Brooks observes in *The Waste Land: Critique of Myth-*

The contrast is between two kinds of life and two kinds of death. Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be life giving, an awakening to life.

In this waste land, people are living and not living at the same time. One is forced to think-

What shall I do now? What shall I do?

What shall we do tomorrow?

What shall we ever do?

But death is not the ultimate solution. Eliot also draws rigorously from oriental myths to describe this situation. The burying ritual is seen as one of the purest ritual after which the soul is set for salvation. According to Frazer, at the festival of sowing, the priest used to bury the effigy of Osiris- the Egyptian God, made of earth and corn. When these effigies were taken out again, the corn would be found to have sprouted from the body of Osiris. According to Egyptian myths, Osiris had to travel for a particular period of time in the underground and then came out of it. This signifies rejuvenation and renewal. This is also a fertility myth, symbolizing rejuvenation and rebirth.

But unlike Osiris, the waste landers do not want to be buried. Since there is no spiritual salvation, the body and soul cannot be resurrected anymore. 'The Burial of the Dead'- the title is taken from the Book of Common prayers which speak about the prospect of life after death- about eternal life and rebirth. Our final hope is Christ. Christ says "I am the Resurrection and the Life" and one who believes in Christ, shall never die. This is presented as an irony in *The Waste Land*. What if there is no prospect of rebirth, renewal or resurrection? And that what if there is no fertile soil in which anything that is buried can be grown up once again? Osiris regenerates but there is no hope for the waste landers to be resurrected again. Towards the end of the first section, the prospect of resurrection is brought out which is analogous to the myth of Osiris. But it is juxtaposed here by Eliot just to focus on the futility and vainness of the ritual.

"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,

"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?

Everyone is living and not living in the same time. So how can they be buried? The 'corpse' mentioned in the above lines can be could be a buried memory or the buried life of the self. This corpse that is buried or will be buried in earth may, or may not germinate. We have no result of it. Then we have one important image of a dog digging up the ground.

"Oh, keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,

"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

Eliot's note refers to the readers the dirge sung by Cornelia for her son in Webster's *The White Devil*. She sings for the friendless bodies of unburied men. The clichéd familiar notion of a dog friendly to man is juxtaposed with a menacing image of the dog in the Old

Testament. The basic idea that Eliot presents here is that the dog will dig up the soil and hence there will be no peace for the dead to rest peacefully.

In the next section- 'A Game of Chess', Eliot moves on to describe different women from different class hierarchies to denote the fact that women had been and still are betrayed by their lovers. He again draws upon various myths and symbols from mythology to substantiate his arguments. There are however, certain words that strike a bell to the readers which take us to the myths of the past. In the very first part, Eliot mentions about an upper class woman who is seen sitting in front of the mirror and dressing herself. It is not known who her lover is, whether he will come or not. But the description-

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,

Glowed on the marble,

This reminds us of Cleopatra's description given by Enobarbus in Act II- Scene ii of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* when Cleopatra comes to the market place by the side of river Cydnus. The riches described around her dressing table can also be related to the dressing table of Pope's Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*.

In fattening the prolonged candle flames,

Flung their smoke into the laquearia,

Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.

The word 'laquearia' here rings a bell. It takes us to Virgil's *Aeneid* referring to the banquet hall of Dido. It reveals the love story of Aeneas and Dido- Queen of Carthage. Because of Juno and Venus' manipulation, Dido is infatuated with Aeneas. Later she knows that her love with Aeneas will surely fail and she is unable to change the course of her events. Aeneas has to continue his journey to fulfill his destiny. Later when she comes to know that Aeneas is planning to leave Carthage, she becomes wild with rage and dies on a pyre of burning corpses thus committing suicide. This proves her tragic death and her unfulfilled love for Aeneas. Similar is the case with the women in waste land. They are seen waiting, getting up ready for their lovers to come. But all are futile. At the end of the first passage in 'A Game of Chess', Eliot says-

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.

This passage and the reference to the first woman take us back to the image of Demeter looking for Persephone who had been abducted by Hades to the underworld. "...her hair/Spread out in fiery points" refers to Demeter's wild rage while she had been searching

for her loving daughter throughout the world for many days. Demeter waits for her daughter to come to her. Similarly, this woman is seen waiting for her lover to come but the reader is not sure whether he turns up or not.

Inside the well furnished room of this high class woman, there is-

Above the antique marvel was displayed
As through a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
“Jug Jug” to dirty ears.

This is a direct reference to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* – the story of Philomela. Eliot again here presents a comparison to Philomela through the small picture located over the “antique marvel”. Philomela, according to Ovid is the sister-in-law to King Tereus who was married to Procne. Philomela was raped by the King. After the rape, he cuts off her tongue to prevent her from telling the story. One main concern that Eliot presents in this passage through Philomela’s rape is the inability of one to tell the story, the inability of one to provide meaning or the inability of one to reach out to others in the chaotic world we live in.

In a situation where there is a multiplicity of voices tumbling over one another, it is hard to tell one’s story- to reach out to the masses. “The change in Philomel” refers to the change of Philomela by the Gods. She was transformed into a nightingale. In the form of the nightingale and her song, Philomela is able to tell her story. But alas! No one could understand her. She is thus “filling the desert with inviolable voice” but it is ultimately meaningless. The change of Philomela to a bird and her cries refers to the inability of one to reach out to the others. As mentioned earlier, though we are surrounded by people around us, yet we are isolated from every one.

Love cannot suffice the present day Londoners or the waste landers in general. The women in the *Waste Land* either cannot communicate or reach out to their lovers as is the case with the second woman mentioned in ‘A Game of Chess’. Stillness in marriage can be savage- a death blow to the unity in marriage. The woman is seen speaking to her husband-

“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”

There is no peace in her. She is restless and pleads her husband to speak. Because she thinks he has no prospect to understand her. He does not respond to her. The husband then answers that they are in rats alley (an image of mortality). The wife then asks “What is that noise” to which the husband replies “The wind under the door.”

Similar is the case with present day women as Eliot draws. Throughout the *Waste Land* many women are seen awaiting for their lovers or are betrayed by them. Love in the waste land is seen as a degenerating force. In ‘The Fire Sermon’ Eliot comments about the nymphs, referring to the ladies of London by the side of river Thames.

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.

The broken river tents refers to the over arching trees over the Thames during the fall. It provided a shade to the lovers who wants to enjoy by the side of the river. But now, the tent is broken. What once sufficed now can no longer hold. Thus, “The nymphs are now departed” refers to the ladies are left out by their lovers. Once again, the same betrayal is seen here. Thus, throughout mythology as well as contemporary times, we see how women are betrayed by men. Eliot juxtaposes these images only to draw our attention to the fact that women are seen as an object of play-thing.

The third section of the poem ‘The Fire Sermon’ also deals with major mythical allusions. The first instance in section III deals with the image of Sweeney and Mrs. Porter. Here, the variety of sources for the intertextual references foregrounds the heteroglot nature of the poem and clearly suggests the correspondence between the literary past and our present. We find passages from John Day's ‘A Parliament of Bees’ where he states-

A noise of Horns and hunting

which shall bring Actaeon to Diana in the spring.

Eliot also subverts some well known myths of purity and chastity to describe the present scenario of impurity in the waste land that we live in. The myth of Diana and Actaeon can be found within Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The tale recounts the unfortunate fate of a young hunter named Actaeon and his encounter with chaste Diana, goddess of the hunt. The latter is nude and enjoying a bath in a spring with help from her escort of nymphs when the mortal man unwittingly stumbles upon the scene. The nymphs scream in surprise and attempt to cover Diana, who, in a fit of embarrassed fury transforms him into a deer with a dappled hide and long antlers, robbed of his ability to speak, and thereafter promptly flees in fear. It is not long, however, before his own hounds track him down and kill him, failing to recognize their master.

Eliot draws upon this myth of chastity to bring in a contrast of the past and the present. The myth of Actaeon and Diana shows how women preserved their chaste. But in the present day waste land this is lost. By comparing the past with the present, Eliot states how the present suffers. It is actually degraded. Since there is no proper love, there is only love for sex and animalistic tendencies all around. Thus we have the image of Sweeney and Mrs. Porter. The lines from John Day's poem is juxtaposed by Eliot. It runs as-

The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring

Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.

Man has already lost their faith in God and religion and instead of going to churches, they prefer visiting brothels. Mrs. Porter is a prostitute. Sweeney is a man who is a rake and not a gentleman. He is sexually deviant, disrespectful for sexual morals and standards. Mrs. Porter also has a daughter.

O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter

And her daughter

They wash their feet in soda water.

This is an illicit love affair. It only has sexual intercourse and no fertility, nothing else can result out of it. This stands beyond the proper boundaries of love. Thus, the image of Diana being a chaste is subverted by Eliot by presenting the image of Mrs. Porter and the illicit sexual affair with Sweeney. Eliot then moves on to say- "Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!" which translated as "And O those children's voices singing in the dome." This is a quotation taken directly from Verlaine's 'Parsifal' where the Arthurian Knight Parsifal comes with a cure to restore the Fisher King's land to health. Thus fertility is restored. But the sexual act of Sweeney and Porter, as mentioned above, has no fertility.

This sound of the children singing in the dome is contrasted by Eliot in the next lines where he says-

Twit twit twit

Jug jug jug jug jug jug

So rudely forc'd

Tereu.

This recalls the rape of Philomela. Thus the voice of innocence is contrasted with the malignant act of raping Philomela by the King.

The poem is a plethora of voices that runs over one another. It can be studied from Bakhtin's theory of 'Heteroglossia' which states about the coexistence of different varieties within a single language. From the study of these voices, belonging to different classes and societies,

across ages, we can understand the situation of this wasted land as a whole. There is also another instance of an unidentified female voice in section III which Eliot sets against the chaste nature of Diana.

“Trams and dusty trees.

Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew

Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees

Sunpine on the floor of a narrow canoe.”

Eliot here projects the frank and candid view of sex where the woman is engaged in. she has several sexual encounters with men all over ‘Trams’, ‘dusty trees’, ‘Highbury’, ‘Richmond’, ‘Kew’, etc. This is an unregretting description of sex that the woman encounters. Love has no role to play in her life. The expression in the next line “...my heart under my feet”, is an evidence of this. It is only a matter of survival and nothing beyond it.

Then we come to the interesting figure from mythology and history- Tiresias. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Tiresias was a blind prophet of Thebes. Tiresias is seen to hold the entire poem together. He is a ghost packed with history of the past. Eliot presents Tiresias in the poem to describe that the poem and its events are not fragmentary. Like the Sybil, Tiresias also lived on for a long time. They are a vision to the long chain of events in history. Tiresias is the “Old man with wrinkled female breasts” has encountered the incestuous love of Oedipus and the blinding of himself after the act. And now, he still witnesses what happens in the present day.

We are turned to the “violet hour, when the eyes and back

Turn upward from the desk”

It is evening time and Eliot presents us a view through the eyes of Tiresias. It is the scene which describes the unsatisfactory love of a typist and a clerk. Eliot again stresses on the fact that in this waste land, no real intimacy is ever possible. The typist-

...home at tea time, clears her breakfast, lights

Her stove, and lays out food tins.

Here Tiresias works as the narrator to the events that are about to take place. He is about to narrate a degraded love scene between a typist and a clerk. Tiresias expects a wonderful homecoming of the typist. What appears to be a beautiful homecoming, a beautiful uniting, Tiresias is able to see beyond that, beyond the truth that can be manipulative.

I, Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs

Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest-

I too awaited the expected guest.

For a reader familiar with the character of Tiresias, there is no doubt that Tiresias has perceived the scene which he is describing, which is the episode between the typist and the clerk. The word 'perceived' is likely being used in the sense that Tiresias has witnessed and has already known the future events regarding all those involved in the scene. One could well assume that Tiresias is using the scene of the typist and the clerk to get at a bigger idea, a message or prophesy that could reveal a secret of the poem. Eliot seems to hint that Tiresias could be housing secrets essential to getting at the meaning of the poem. For instance, Eliot writes in the footnotes to *The Waste Land*: "What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem." He is thus a connecting link of the past with the present course of events.

The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,

Endeavours to engage her in caresses

Which still are unreproved, if undesired.

Tiresias here prophesizes a fate that is common to everyone in the waste land. Though Tiresias is blind to the physical details but he can see much beyond. His prophetic view is very significant. He foretells what love is reduced to. The 'guest' he describes in the scene is no grand knight but a mere "Young carbuncular...a small house agent's clerk" who has the false airs of a "Bradford millionaire." Though they have sexual encounter but it seems undesired in the part of the typist. They are not reproved. She does nothing. She does not want his caresses but also does not stop him either.

Flushed and decided, he assault at once.

Like the rape of Philomela, he assaults her. "His vanity requires no response." He is not looking for a requited love. He gets what he desires and uses her as a mere object. The scene between the typist and the clerk merely embodies a motif of the poem: sexual degradation and shattered morals. Tiresias is the appropriate narrator because he can empathize with the situation. One who is foretelling the rest has fore suffered all. Therefore, the scene Tiresias sees does not hold the answer to understanding Tiresias' role in the piece. Instead of the scene, one should understand that Tiresias has the ability to see. Of all the voices in the poem, Tiresias is the only voice that has a sense of awareness, a sense of awareness both of himself and of the events that surround him. The other voices of the piece lack this kind of insight; they tend to be self-centered, focused only on what they experience in the present moment. They do not reflect upon themselves at all, or comment on the environment in which they are held.

Later, after the scene is over, the clerk leaves the place. The typist "turns and looks a moment in the glass/ Hardly aware of her departed lover." She detaches herself from the horrible act. Thus says;

"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."

Through this short but important scene, we experience two significant and vital sense of the poem. Firstly, Tiresias and his ability to “foretell the rest” because he has suffered them all. And, secondly, that sexuality, the fundamental aspect of human experience has shattered. We have seen how women have been abducted in the past and how they protested. And now we see how this woman engages herself in unwanted sex but does not voice out any protest.

Thus, Eliot’s mythical method rests on connecting antiquity with the contemporary world. Eliot achieves this by employing and adapting archetypes. His central archetypal images are fall of civilization, rebirth, journey, and sacrifice. These are all integral components of mythical narratives around the world. The poem presents archetypal imagery still current and effective in the collective human psyche. The design of *The Waste Land* is shaped around primal ideas and myths across cultures. Eliot modifies these universally shared concepts to present his own individual vision of global culture. He narrates the myth of its collapse and potential resurrection by placing archetypes in immediate contexts.

On analyzing from Harold Bloom’s point of view for looking at poem, one can find that Eliot in *The Waste Land* executes the theories of ‘tessera’ and ‘kenosis’ while dealing with the past events and combing them to the future. Here, the old stories are repeated but it sometimes challenges and alters the story context. It stands as a mosaic work. These stories from the past gives a strand for the modern day events.

The Waste Land is altogether a quest for poetic patterns following the Grail story. Nothing is resolved. There is a waste land without a questing Knight or a Grail. But Eliot’s goal is not to reflect on the disillusionment of contemporary life. His goal is to uncover the pre-logical mentality and poetry’s ritual element. Given a fragmented world with fragmented human emotions, Eliot presents a pastiche of ideas from the past and combines them to the present. Thus, *The Waste Land* is actually a quest for poetic pattern, a quest for form and a quest for salvation for humans. This is a desire that has no guarantee whether it can be fulfilled or not. Although Eliot draws from the orient cultures about the final salvation-

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih Shantih Shantih.

Yet the final solution is a Christian solution which he puts forward in the opening section of the ‘Burial of the Dead’-

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.

Memory and desire intermingles in the whole poem. Past is a memory one cannot go back to. The future is a desire which one desires yet is unknown. And not guaranteed. What stands between memory and desire is a handful of dust. There are no roots to hold on to in this waste land. The present that we live is barren. This is the fear that is spoken in the above lines.

Conclusion:

Thus, Eliot wants to relate the present to the past, in order to convey some didactic purpose from the past incidents. Through these allusions, myths and symbols he forecasts the future of

modern man and modern civilization. Therefore, Eliot has intertwined many mythical strands in order to form a complex traditional background to explain the nature and measure the depth of the spiritual waste land which is 'contemporary history'.

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