**Dr. S. CHOUCHANE**

**3rd Year Literature Module**

**Academic Year: 2024/2025**

## T.S Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922)

**Author’s biography**

T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1888. He published his first poetic masterpiece, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in 1915. In 1921, he wrote the poem "The Waste Land" while recovering from exhaustion. The dense, allusion-heavy poem went on to redefine the genre and become one of the most talked about poems in literary history. For his lifetime of poetic innovation, Eliot won the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948. Part of the ex-pat community of the 1920s, he spent most of his life in Europe, dying in London, England, in 1965.

**Title Meaning**

* "The Waste Land" refers to the spiritual and intellectual decay of the modern world.
* 20th-century culture is just a barren, desert-like world. Most importantly, the waste land is infertile, and therefore incapable of letting anything grow.
* Eliot writes: “Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by **Miss Jessie L. Weston’s** book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge).”
* In it Weston uses such terms as “**Fisher King**” and “**Waste Land**,” and also delves into the importance of the **Tarot pack** –- which Eliot uses as a prop in the Madame Sosostris episode. Most important to Weston‟s book is the Grail itself: the famed cup from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper, and which was used to collect his blood after the crucifixion.

**Genre**

Epic poem (5 main parts with 434 line). Epic poems are generally lengthy narrative poems.

Ezra Pound defines the epic poem as “poem including history”

We can say that the waste land contains both modern and ancient history.

**Major Themes**

* **Death and Rebirth:** death means rebirth
* **Wheel of time:** seasons, life is mechanical, repetitive, nothingness, emptiness
* **Sexuality:** rape, homosexuality, brief sexual relationships (sometimes with unknown persons)
* **Love:** no true eternal love
* **Water:** both promises rebirth and death (like the Phoenician sailor)

It is both life-giving (when there is balance) and life-taking (when there is lack of or over abundance)