**Dr. S. CHOUCHANE**

**3rd Year Literature Module**

**Academic Year: 2023/2024**

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

## Summary

## Part 1: The Burial of the Dead

## The poem's speaker talks about how spring is an awful time of year, stirring up memories of bygone days and unfulfilled desires.

## Then the poem shifts into specific childhood memories of a woman named Marie. This is followed by a description of tangled, dead trees and land that isn't great for growing stuff.

## Suddenly, you're in a room with a "clairvoyant" or spiritual medium named Madame Sosostris, who reads you your fortune. And if that weren't enough, you then watch a crowd of people "flow[ing] over London Bridge" like zombies (62). Moving right along…

## Part 2: A Game of Chess

You are transported to the glittery room of a lavish woman, and you notice that hanging from the wall is an image of "the change of [Philomel](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/philomela.html)," a woman from Greek myth who was raped by [King Tereus](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/tereus.html) and then changed into a nightingale.

Some anxious person says that their nerves are bad, and asks you to stay the night. This is followed by a couple of fragments vaguely asking you what you know and remember.

The section finishes with a scene of two women chatting and trying to sneak in a few more drinks before closing time at the bar.

## Part 3: The Fire Sermon

Section three opens with a speaker who's hanging out beside London's [River Thames](http://www.visitthames.co.uk/) and feeling bad about the fact that there's no magic left in the world. The focus swoops back to the story of [Philomel](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/p/philomela.html) for a second, then another speaker talks about how he might have been asked for weekend of sex by a "Smyrna merchant" (209).

Next, you're hearing from [Tiresias](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/tiresias.html), a blind prophet from myth who was turned into a woman for seven years by the goddess [Hera](http://www.shmoop.com/hera-juno/). You hear about a scene where a modern young man and woman—both not much to look at—are having this really awful, loveless sex.

Finally, you overhear someone singing a popular song, which in the context of this poem just sounds depressing.

## Part 4: Death by Water

In a brief scene, you watch as a dead sailor named Phlebas decays at the bottom of the ocean, and the poem tells you to think of this young man whenever you start feeling too proud.

## Part 5: What the Thunder Said

Section five takes you to a stony landscape with no water. There are two people walking, and one notices in his peripheral vision that a third person is with them.

When he looks over, though, this other person disappears (it's like one of those squiggly lines that dance in the corner of your eye).

In a dramatic moment, thunder cracks over the scene, and its noise seems to say three words in Sanskrit: Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyata, which command you to "Give," "Sympathize," and "Control."

This is followed by a repetition of the word Shantih, which means "the peace that passeth all understanding." After all that slogging, T.S. maybe gives us a little hope with this final word. Then again, maybe not.

**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)

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**Modernist Aspects in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart* *of Darkness* (1899)**

1. **Narrator**: use of subjective narrators (he rejected the narrative omniscience), 1st person narrators.

Narrator is introspective and uncertain about the meaning of his narrative (e.g. Marlow's 1st-person participant narration presents a limited point-of-view: Marlow does not know, and does not pretend to know, all the answers in his increasingly uncertain and demoralized world).

Framed Narrative

* 1. Narrator begins
  2. Marlow takes over
  3. Narrator breaks in occasionally

1. **Fragmentation**

* Narrative structure is untraditional, discontinuous and fragmented
* Memory of the past (flashbacks), the present, and the future (flash-forwards), rather than a traditional linear (i.e. chronological beginning-middle-end) logic narrative.

1. **Stream of consciousness and interior monologue**
2. **Pessimism**
3. **Open ending**: The absence of resolution for a complex character
4. **Irony**: the ending
5. **Reader**: the novella’s ambiguity and fascinating complexity opens new sides for reader while reading

Ex: **Different interpretations (contradiction)**

* Some feel the novel is an attack on colonialist ideology, others feel the novel celebrates and defends colonization and racism.
* Some see Kurtz as the embodiment of all the evil and horror of capitalist society.

Others view it as a portrayal of one man’s journey into the primitive unconscious where one must confront one’s own inner darkness.

* Still others see it as a modern journey quest, perhaps with an anti-hero rather than a hero.

Deals with issues of the day, including

1. **Psychology**: Familiar with Freudian theories, Conrad voices his interest in the problems of the Empire and imperialism as a starting point for his investigation of the nature of man’s relation to himself and to the other.
2. **Form:** it has such a great **complexity of organization** and is perceived as a philosophical novel that gives an opportunity to directly opposite and mutually exclusive readings.
3. **Meanings of imagery and symbolism are often untraditional** and individual to the literary work, and patterns must be worked out by the reader (e.g. traditional meanings of  light and dark, white and black are reversed in *Heart of Darkness*)
4. Conrad’s Heart of Darkness raises a number of issues relating to the advent of the new era, characterized by relativity, instability, lack of a shared sense of public value.

* Horrors of WWI
* Massive loss of life
* Loss of faith
* Expanding technology and science

**Analysis**

The novel presents the story of the narrator Charlie Marlow about his journey into the depths of the equatorial Africa, to the trading station of the European company to pick up the accumulated goods there – ivory – and take out the sick agent of the company, Mr. Kurtz.

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| --- |
| * Narrator/author suggests and evokes, but does not explain * Emphasis is placed not on the story’s plot, but on the narrator's perceptions * Theme and meaning are often conveyed indirectly--e.g. by imagery and symbolism--rather than by direct, explicit explanation (especially by an uncertain narrator who cannot access the meaning of his narration logically and directly, but only through a-rational, unconscious means)   **Joseph Conrad’s Biography (1857-1924)**   * Born in Poland occupied by Russia, Prussia and Austria * Forced exile to Russia * Parents died early and he was brought up by an uncle * he went to sea on French merchant ships * In 1878 he joined an English ship to the Far East and Australia * In 1890 he was sent to Africa (Congo Diary) * mental breakdown * he devoted himself to writing   **The horror! The horror!**  This phrase is found in Joseph Conrad’s *“Heart of Darkness.”* This is the final judgment of Kurtz on his own life, actions, and generally on humankind and imperialism. (what monster he has become)   * Generally, it implies the horror Kurtz witnesses in Africa, though the horror could be the exploitation of Africa, evil practices of humans, his crumbling sanity, or an illusion of understanding and hope. Simply, **it conveys what the West did during colonization in the name of progress, and under the guise of civilizing the natives.** Darkness prevails when he dies, symbolizing that his actions were evil. Thus, it is Kurtz’s realization of the bitter and absolute truth of his life. * Contrast between professional duties v/s personal feelings   **Characters**: solitary heroes viewed externally through their actions  **Structure:** a series of stories narrated by Marlow (an observer –narrator) on board   * Minor characters also tell their own stories and views of Kurtz * Continuous shifts backwards and forwards * Suspense * Psychological realism   **Language**: Conrad made use of an amazing variety of adjectives and complex structures. His  dialogues are characterized by idiomatic expressions, questions and exclamations, dashes and  interjections  **Symbolism:** The novel is rich in imagery   * Parallels (Thames & Congo, Marlow & Kurtz) * Symbols (traditional meanings are subverted) * Oppositions (light and dark, white and black)   **Interpretation:** a quest for the self, a mythical journey  **KURTZ once taken beyond the limits of his heart, suffered madness & died MARLOW did not transgress his limits, he resisted in spite of the heart of darkness fascination and came back without fully understanding his experience**  **Civilization**   * Jungle drives white men crazy * There is only death- the death of goodness and civility * The expedition Marlowe arranged to bring Kurtz back to civilization   **Time**: end of the 19th century  **Dr. S. CHOUCHANE**  **3rd Year Literature Module**  **Academic Year: 2023/2024**  **Modernist Aspects in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)**  Many aspects of modernism depicted in this novel had a great influence upon the development of the modernist movement itself and turned Joyce into a prominent modernist writer.  The novel is one of the most significant examples of a Kunstlerroman (an artist‘s Bildungsroman) in English literature in which we see the development of an artist in his questioning and rebellion against the Catholic and Irish conventions of his upbringing.   1. **Fragmentariness** (non-linear narratives): The chronological order of the events being sometimes rearranged to follow the inner life of the characters. (bildungsoram, kuntleroman) 2. **Form vs. Content:** James Joyce favors form over content and stresses the all importance of form and style. The novel needs close reading due to the complexity of both language and style.(for elite)  * The style evolves throughout all its five chapters. The complexity of language gradually increases in all these stages of evolution. * He breaks down the barriers between senses: Ex: the smell of evening, the soft grey silence. * He brilliantly violates the rules of the **language** and combines nouns and adjectives to create new words. example: jeweleyed (sexually aggressive)  1. **Many Climaxes: No end to the text**, no problem solved. 2. **Hero**: reflects his own experience of life not life itself.  * following Stephen‘s unrestrained conscious thought. This is an essential technique of modernism as it creates a psychic reality which has little to do with the true reality. * He is withdrawn, reflexive, ineffectual, introverted, and eccentric. * He is not resourceful, industrious.  1. **Stream of consciousness + interior monologue:** The text explores the character’s inner state of consciousness. 2. **Epiphany**: (the moment in which a character suddenly sees the transcendent truth of a situation): the text is known with its different epiphanies. 3. **The Role of the Reader:**  * The reader’s task is to discover the potential **meanings** **of the epiphanic moments**. * The final pages of the novel represent Stephen‘s diary for the period before leaving to Paris and it is the **reader who decides whether Stephen will succeed or not**. Like Icarus, the son of Daedalus, he may fall into the sea with melted wings. * “Blanks” or “gaps” that the reader fills by discovering potential meanings. It is especially instructive for readers of *A Portrait,* seeking clues to that book (Aesthetic blanks)  1. **Narration**: 3rd person omniscient. In the end, there is a close identification between the narrator and Stephen (1st person) (author and hero and no omniscient narrator to comment on the action) 2. **The use of Myth**: the myth of Daedalus, the name of the hero in Greek mythology, is an architect and inventor becoming trapped in a labyrinth of his own construction. He creates wings of feathers and wax for his son (Icarus) and for himself, in order to escape. They fly away but Icarus tries to fly higher and finally, as he flies too close to the sun, the wax melts and he falls into the sea 3. **Irony and Imagery** |

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**Modernist Aspects in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953)**

1. **The use of Myths**
   1. Myth of Sisyphus (who was a king/ Albert Camus essay 1942), he exposed the secrets of the gods.

* The gods were extremely unhappy with Sisyphus and sentenced him to a life of misery.
* His punishment was to push a rock up a hill, only for it to fall back down as soon as it reached the top
* Just like Sisyphus, Vlademir and Estragon are in **an endless task**. They are stuck waiting for a man named Godot to arrive, but they don’t know if he will come.
* If they leave they may miss his arrival, but if they stay he may never come, just like Sisyphus had to keep rolling the stone (no victory, no change, everything is static)
  1. Samuel Beckett may have denied the use of Christian mythology in Waiting for Godot, but the character of Lucky proves otherwise.  We can read Lucky as a symbolic figure of Christ, and, as such, his actions in the play carry a criticism of Christianity, suggesting that the merits of Christianity have decreased to the point where they no longer help man at all.
* The parallels between Christ and Lucky are strong. Lucky, chained with a rope, is the humiliated prisoner, much like Jesus was the prisoner of the Romans after Judas turned him in.  Estragon beats, curses, and spits on Lucky exactly as the Roman treated Jesus when preparing him for crucifixion.  Lucky carries the burden of Pozzo's bags like a perpetual cross, and he is being led to a public fair where he will be mocked and sold; the Romans paraded Jesus on the hill where for public scorn.  As Jesus fell three times under the weight of his burden, Lucky falls many times with the weight of the luggage, stool, coat, and picnic basket.  Furthermore, Estragon wipes Lucky's eyes—like Veronica wiped Jesus' face—so he will "feel less forsaken" (p. 21b), which alludes directly to Jesus' cry from the cross: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" [My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?] (Mark 15:34).  Lucky slowly chokes as the rope cuts into his neck; crucifixion suffocated Jesus.

1. **Existentialism**

* The term "existentialism" refers to **a literary movement of the 20th century** which holds that **man has complete freedom to determine his own fate. The actions he chooses in fact determine his existence**. Rejection of authority, the only authority which any person has is himself (autonomy)
* Vladimir and Estrogen are just waiting for Godot, the savior. They are passive (no rejection of authority). They do not know whether they shall wait or leave. They decise to leave but they do not move

1. **Fragmentation**: broken and fragmented dialogues and characters. No real story, no actions since all actions are insignificant.
2. **Stream of Consciousness**

This can be found in moments such as Lucky’s speech, when a stream of consciousness takes the characters away from their monotonous lives for a moment. Unordinary consciousness can also be seen in Vladimir’s memory of events that stir no recollection for Estragon.

1. **Epiphany**

* There is a real change in Vladimir’s understanding of his experience (he learns precisely what "nothing to be done" means). Vladimir has his epiphany while Estragon sleeps.
* He thinks about the meaning of life and how can he end the suffering (waiting or death)
* Then, he realizes that he will never possess his deeds or know himself

1. **The role of the reader** (give meaning to the different ambiguities)
2. **No climax, no plot and no ending**
3. **Alienation and Pessimism** (no God, no hope/ waiting seems to show hope for the characters but, in fact, it is not)
4. **Imagery:**  tree, waiting … etc
5. **Irony:** leave but wait, repetitions, lack of memory, Lucky’s name … etc

**The Theatre of the Absurd**

Reaction to 2nd world war (post 2nd world war, late 50s)

Based on the idea of existentialism (philosophical movement of late 19th and 20th century)

A form of drama in which normal conventions and dramatic structure are ignored or modified in order to present life as meaningless. It emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed, repetitious and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations and plots that lack logical development.

**Characteristics:**

* Dialogue that is comically familiar and yet disturbingly unfamiliar, simultaneously ordinary and frightening. (lack of communication)
* Contradictory and ambiguous characterizations.
* Comic yet menacing mood characteristic of mod 20th century English tragicomedy.
* Plot featuring reversals and surprises that can be both funny and emotionally moving.
* Vagueness about time, place
* The value of language is reduced; in fact, what happens on the stage transcends, and often contradicts, the words spoken by the characters.
* Extensive use of pauses and silences
* Unconventional ending that leaves at least some questions unresolved.

Samuel Becket’s *Waiting for Godot* as an Absurdist Play

Samuel Becket is a famous writer who introduced the concept of absurdity, nothingness, nihilism and meaninglessness of life. He represented the absurdity in the life of the people. He believed that life is in a circular form, from where it starts, at the same point it ends. There is no concept of religion no moral values, no concept of time and space in absurdity. Absurdity is a word that can be explained by reasoning however the fault is a familiar world that in the universe that is suddenly deprived of illusion, end of light, man feels as stranger. He is in an irradiate exile because he is deprived of memories of lost homeland as much a he lacks the hope of Promised Land to come. This diversity between man and his life, actor and his sating truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. It is very clear from the very word "Absurd" that it means nonsensical, opposed to reason, something silly, foolish, senseless, ridiculous and disorderly. Actually the 'Absurd Theatre' believes that humanity's plight is purposeless in an existence, which is out of harmony with its surroundings.

*Waiting for Godot* is an absurd play for not only its plot is loose but its characters are also just mechanical puppets with their incoherent discussion. And above than all, its theme is unexplained. It is an absurd play for it is devoid of characterization and motivation along with the no result. Though characters are present but are not recognizable for whatever they do and whatever they present is purposeless. So far as its dialogue technique is concerned, it is purely absurd as there is no witty repartee and pointed dialogue. What a reader or spectator hears is simply the incoherent babbling which does not have any clear and meaningful ideas. So far as the action and theme is concerned, it kisses the level of Absurd Theatre. After the study of this play, we come to know that nothing special happens in the play and we observe no significant change in setting. Though a change occurs but it is only that now the tree has sprouted out four or five leaves. We can get an idea from the following statement—

*“Nothing happens, nobody comes ... nobody goes, it's awful!”*

The beginning, middle and end of the play do not rise up to the level of a good play, so absurd. Though its theme is logical and rational yet it lies in umbrage.

Moreover, *Waiting for Godot* can also be regarded as an absurd play because it is different from "poetic theatre". Neither it makes a considerable use of dream and fantasy nor does it employ conscious poetic language. The situation almost remains unchanged and an enigmatic vein runs throughout the play. The mixture of comedy and near tragedy proves baffling. In Act I, we are not sure as to what attitude we should adopt towards the different phases of its non-action. The ways, of which the two tramps pass their time, seems as if they were passing their lives in a transparent deception. Godot remains a mystery and curiosity still holds a sway. Here we know that their endless waiting seems to be aimless.