CHAPTER V
"A Heap of Broken Images": The Waste Land

More than any other poem, The Waste Land reflects the state of modern civilization and dwells upon its degradation, horror and ugliness. Though it appeared in 1922, it does not reveal the bloodshed and devastation caused by the World War. It grippingly reveals the state of decay in the modern civilization. In a way, the conditions in the contemporary world are similar to those of a waste land or a desert. In the waste land, life is barren and unproductive. Similar spiritual bankruptcy haunts modern life. In the past, life was full of vitality and hope. Now, we see only the state of dying, degradation and decay. This is realised through powerful images in the poem.

Eliot has its source from Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance which throws light on the loss of age-old identity. In the words of B.C. Southam,

The theme of The Waste Land, the salvation of the Waste Land, not as certainty but, a possibility: of emotional, spiritual and intellectual vitality to be regained. Eliot develops this theme drawing upon related patterns nature, myth and religion: the cycle of the seasons, the ancient fertility myths of Egypt, India and Greece, in which the God must die to be reborn to bring fertility to the soil and
potency to the people; a pattern known to us again in life, death and resurrection of Christ.¹

The theme of loss of fertility, leads to the theme of loss of one's own identity. The question of identity is related to the state of consciousness or awareness and its opposite blindness. Elizabeth Drew rightly observes:

Vital relationship with the language of symbols and in general with the human heritage of tradition ... the truth of experience is eternally present and that living of it plunges the whole man into a process of disintegration and conflict.²

These lines show that the sense of loss of identity in a person creates certain psychological complexes in him. Many events develop a sense of guilt and fear over one's impotence. So fear again becomes the main theme of the opening section. Fear is generated in a person who is not confident of his powers.

In The Burial of the Dead, the fear is as a result of the change from the dullness of winter to the freshness and activity of spring time. Fear destroys man's identity. The poet lays stress on the lack of life in the modern world and the


identity of the people because they have lost faith in religious values. Through powerful imagery the poet brings this out.

Generally, April is the month of joy and vitality. It also means the coming of a new life. Unfortunately the people in the modern world do not have faith in anything. So the poet laments:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain (1-4)

These lines show that there isn't any life in the modern world. The civilization is in decay. Suddenly the poet recalls the past life where there was summer beauty and happiness.

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. (8-17)
Through the fusion of the past and the present, the poet presents the scene of joy and agony. The Starnbergersee near the city of Munich takes the poet to a particular event in his Youth.

In the next stanza, we see the image of an arid desert which takes us back to the idea of barrenness.

What are the roots 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 cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. (19-24)

This vision of barrenness is intensified by the contrasting visual image of the hyacinth. The hyacinth image throws light on the loss of rituals and in turn the loss of religious identity of the modern man. The hyacinth is associated with vegetation. The title of the first section takes us back to the festival Asris and Adonis who fell victims to conspiracy. Their festivals signify their resurrection which implies the coming of fresh vegetation and new harvest. So the hyacinth imagery suggests a joyful resurrection. Unfortunately, the protagonist is surrounded by the stony rubbish, 'The dead tree,' 'the dry stone' and 'a heap of broken - images.' So he has no desire to celebrate the resurrection of hyacinth of corn Gods referred to in the lines:

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?
O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men.

(71-74)

The protagonist derives the cynical pleasure from his doom
Belief has died out in him and he must die in utter rigidness.
To this is added the dog imagery. The dog becomes the sign of
raising of the waters and is friendly to growth. He may also
involve Anubis, Guardian of the dead, who helped to embalm the
broken Osiris. The dog may also represent evil. Grover Smith
rightly observes,

And the dog ... is whatever wrenches forth
the buried disgrace of the past instead of
telling it send up springs of life. The
symbols, with the levels of reference, are
mixed; as the corpse is the God, its brutal
disinterment would correspond to an act of
sacrilege; as it is Tiresias, its exposure
would respect his incapacity in the Hyacinth
garden. The Dog connotes his terror, his
shame and even, perhaps the lusts that later
sections of the poem suggest may have abused
him. In the Tarrot, a God accompanies the
fool.³

The reference to Madam Sosostris and her wicked pack of cards suggests another aspect of modern waste land. In her hands the higher value of the ancient pack has been lost originally. The cards were used to foretell the future and also to predict the rise and fall of waters. But now they correspond to the sexual symbols. This identity with the spiritual values has disappeared.

The images of 'the dead tree,' 'the dry stone,' 'no sound of water,' 'the rain-drop' suggest the theme that modern civilization is caught in international conspiracies that are akin to the infernal pits. Thus in the first section, the images take us to the world which is like a Limbo. Moreover, it takes us to the World of horror and ugliness and nervous break down of contemporary civilization. This is reinforced in the next section, "A Game of Chess."

In Section II, "A Game of Chess," the poet provides a deeper insight into the failure of love. It revolves around perverted nature. The inner reality of things is suppressed by the external facade of splendour, glory and magnificence of the Elizabethan times.

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
   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.

(71-93)

In the next part we see the image of the decay in modern civilization. The people do not have any faith in ancient rituals. The vitality of the contemporary women in the dramatic glimpses that follow as that of queen's on a chess board compared with that on the burnished throne of Egypt. The Games of Women with men are only an empty pastime. There is sex without love. Marriage is a tedious bondage. Having lost the hyacinth girl the quester finds himself joined with a neurotic woman of fashion who is probably Belladonna, the lady of situations.
In the modern world, it appears as if all women are perverted opposing the powers of love and fertility. Elizabeth Drew says:

Belladonna, the lady of the Rocks, presumably symbolises the quality of all the women in the poem. Like the Woman in the Gerontion, they are all the anti-thesis of the idea of fertility. Her name suggests poison and numbing of sensibility, coupled with the aridity of rocks and a preference for 'situations instead of fruitful union'.

Belladonna or the lady of situations is contrasted with Shakespeare's Cleopatra. The purpose of the poet is to point out the artificiality and insignificance of the present state of life. The word 'synthetic' signifies what is denatured. The 'nightingale image' reminds us of Tiresias' crime or misdeed of raping his wife's sister. This in turn, takes us back in to the present world where the physical and temporal is transcended by the spiritual and eternal. Her song gave meaning to her mortal pain but she does not sing in the desert places of the present. Here lust still triumphs over love. Her voice is vulgarised and sustained sweetness collapses into the tired disgust of 'jug - jug' to dirty ears. So there is a meaningless picture because the

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fresh sylvan scene is turned into 'withered stumps of time.'
The vision of an opening window and the stony rubbish of the
Waste land being filled with eternal song is darkened and
silenced. The rigid observance of formalities has rendered
modern life monotonous and even mechanical. Everyone seems to
be looking for 'good time.' So the poet satirises:

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said --
I didn't mince my words, I said to her
myself,
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a
bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that
money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was
there. (139-144)

Through Albert and Lil the poet gives us a picture of
the spiritual malice of modern man who thinks of enjoyment only.
Helen Gardner rightly observes:

It is Lil that matters, however, Lil, whose
husband can't bear to look at her who looks
'so antique' at thirty-one, and who appears
to have spent the money Albert gave her for
a set of teeth on pills at the chemists .... It
is the common tragedy of the working-class
girl, who turns into the prematurely old wife
and mother .... The first half of the
movement shows us a relation that has ceased
to enchant; the second a marriage that has
collapsed, with an angry baffled husband on
one side, and on the other a sullen worn-out life. The common theme is sterility of, -- to use the metaphor from chess-stalemate.\textsuperscript{5}

The poet refers to the theme of loss of fertility by his use of Fisher-king image. Eliot refers to the myth of Fisher king who was inflicted a sexual wound and consequently his land was blithed with a curse. In the Waste land the crops do not grow and animals cannot reproduce. The plight of the land is linked with the plight of the lord of the land the Fisher - king who has been rendered impotent by maiming or sickness.

Section III, "Fire Sermon" suggests the theme of the burning of the world by lust. The poet uses the Buddhist philosophical ideas. Grover Smith dwells at length, on the symbolism of fire.

Both Buddha and St. Augustine characterize the lust of flesh as the burning fire. When Augustine came to Carthage, he found there a coudron of unholy leaves. The Buddha, in his "The Fire Sermon" described all things as burning, the only refused being such an aversion for life that one becomes free of desire and knows the rebirth is exhausted. That is to say, the goal of the Buddhist

\textsuperscript{5} Helen Gardner, \textit{The Art of T.S. Eliot} (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 93.
ascetic is 'Nirvana.' Augusteine, too, exhorted his readers to shun the avenues of sense that lead the flesh to sin. Later in the 'Confessions' he singled out in his chapter on visual temptations, the eves as fetters to evil doing and rejoiced that God would pluck him from the snare they spread. 6

The poet employs the imagery of the broken river which intensifies the description of the modern waste land.

The river's tent is broken; the last fingers
of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank (173-174)

The imagery of 'the broken tent' suggests the theme of modern man's loss of faith and 'trees having no leaves' suggests that man cannot take rest under the tree for the tree casts no shadow. B.C. Southam rightly observes:

The immediate visual image is of the shelter provided in summer by the leafy boughs of the trees overhanging the river, a shelter now broken by the loss of the leaves at the close of the year. But the rhetorical ring of the first half line suggests more solemn overtones of meaning: perhaps the loss is of some sacred or mystic quality. In the Old Testament, 'tent' can mean tabernacle or holy

place, arising from the use of a tent as portable tabernacle by the wandering tribes of Israel in the wilderness.

The poet says again,

By the Waters of Leman I sat down and wept ... The phrase 'By the Water of Leman' is associated with the fire of lust and the meaning of Leman may be a mistress or prostitute and the lines

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 (97-101)
suggest the image of the modern mechanical life which reveals a fragile materialistic civilization. The poet says:

Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea, (219-221)

The poet gives the image of the Theben soothsayer to present the theme of decay and repulsive symptoms. He sees

the region of hell where inviolable darkness prevails. The following lines evoke the infernal images of the dark river which illustrates man's suffering and groaning.

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, Swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Drown Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs
    Weialala leia
    Wallala leialala (266-278)

Here the poet with his vision sees the past and the present at a stretch. Tiresias can connect the past with the present and hint at the cause of sterility. He also suggests possible integration of spirit of man. The following lines suggest the sterile sexual indulgence:

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays, 
On the divan are piled (at night her bed) 
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays. 
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs 
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest --  
I too awaited the expected guest. 
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives, 
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare, 
One of the low on whom assurance sits 
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire. (220-234)

The idea the poet repeats here is that sex is not merely a biological necessity but also a cultural and religious necessity and no culture can appear or develop except in relation to a religion.  

The identity of people is lost because culture, sex and religion operate in isolation. When these three impulses operate together, the lost identity can be recovered.

Even in the typist imagery, the poet conveys the themes of meaningless sexual experience and abuse of the powers that signify fertility. These themes and imagery reflect that the protagonists have lost their ideals and their sense of

identity and the presence of a goal in their lives are missing. The line "To Carthage then I came" refers to the 'Confession' made by St. Augustine who confesses the sensual temptation by which he was assailed in his youth. The line, "Burning burning burning burning" takes us back to the "Fire Sermon" of Buddha. B.C. Southam says:

In the Fire Sermon, the Buddha tells his followers that everything is on fire: forms are on fire, impressions received by the eye are on fire and whatever sensation, pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent, originates in the dependence on impressions received by the eye that also is on fire. And with what are these on fire. And with the fire of passion, says, I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation.9

The Buddhist and the Augustine references throw light on the theme of lust. They refer to the fire of passion, the fire of hatred and the fire of infatuation. This theme of lust recurs even in the next section "Death By Water."

This part suggests the theme of the attainable victory over passion and lust and the possibility of the protagonist rediscovering his true identity. George Williamson says:

This part describes the usual way of becoming free from the fire of passion, not the way of self discipline. Here, the sailor is deprived of his lust for the outward beauties' and the profit and loss. Sea currents pick the lust from his bones, and he reverses the course of his life as he enters the vortex. 

The image of death suggests the possibility of resurrection and restoration of the lost identity of the modern man. According to Jessie Weston, each year at Alexandria an effigy of the head of the god was thrown into the sea as a symbol of the death of the powers of nature. The head was carried by the currents to Byblos. It was then retrieved and worshipped as a symbol of god reborn. Another powerful tradition of a life bringing Death-by-water is contained in the Christian sacrament of Baptism, so many of us were baptised into his death. Therefore, we are baptised by him by baptism into death.

This section suggests the theme of the need for renouncing the worldly temptations and the lust of sex which destroy one's progress towards the realisation of the sex. Burned by sensual fire, Augustine cried "Oh Lord! Thou pluckest me out." If one has the desire to be plucked out of this world

of lust and passion, one has to suffer the way Christ suffered. After the agony of the protagonist, we come to the scenes dealing with suffering and salvation. This is very elaborately dealt with in "What the Thunder said."

Part V, "What the Thunder Said" evokes the feeling of suffering that characterises the life of the people of the modern times. The poem begins thus.

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 (322-328)

The sufferings of Jesus Christ are depicted here. Christ was taken after arrest to the place of the high priest. He was interrogated there by pirates. They inflicted many torments on Christ because he loved men. When Christ died the earth shook. This image suggests the cruelty of mankind which has no normal identity. Here the poet reminds the reader of the needs for restoring moral quality to the sterile life of men. The echoes of the destruction caused by the war and hordes of soldiers marching on the war front still ring in the ears reminding one of the human degradation that had occurred.
What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air (366-372)

Here the hooded hordes are partly barbarians and partly Tibetan tribesmen. The nightmare of civilization in chaos mingles with a view of falling changes in unreal city. The Grail chapel falls as the religious and cultural capitals are falling the cities of the plain.

Again the line. "And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells" reveals the loss of faith. B.C. Southam rightly observes:

In the language of the Old Testament, empty wells and cisterns would signify the drying up of faith and the worship of false gods, of the words of God to his prophet Jeremiah: For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of the living water and carved themselves out cisterns that can hold no water.11

Towards the end of the poem, the poet seeks the healing waters for the wastelanders who are in hell and waiting for purgation. In life, discipline is necessary and it comes from faith which is the healing water for the men of the wasteland. At this point, Eliot draws himself a clue from the Brihadaranyaka upanishad. Three Groups -- Gods, demons, Men -- approach Prajapathi, the creator and each in turn, asks him to speak. To each group he answers "Da." Each group interpretes the reply differently. The Gods had understood that they were asked to practise self-control. Men understood that they should practise charity. The Demons had understood that they should practice compassion. Eliot's references to the Hindu Sacred book are suitable to our practical conduct in life. The priviliged men in contemporary society must learn self-control. Otherwise, they might do acts of unkindness. Those who are at the lower level must learn to be charitable so that they can love their fellow beings. Those who are capable of doing infinite harm need to learn to be compassionate. The auditory images - 'Da', 'Datta', 'Dayadhavam' and 'Damyata' -- point in the direction which men must follow to restore their lost identity. The poet wants to show how the waste land can be reclaimed. The poet seems to suggest that the lost identity can be gained by following the path suggested by the sacred book of the Hindus.
Through certain images, the poem also shows a ray of hope to the modern world which would be bereft of any civilization. In the second passage of "The Buriel of the Dead," there is the image of 'the red rock.' The colour 'red' here suggests the fear of death and the fear of facing reality. Fear is the key-note in the following lines:

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.

(28-30)

There is no relief nor shelter from the scorching heat of the Sun, except under the shade of a red rock. The red rock here, symbolises the Christian church. The only hope of humanity as Eliot suggests, lies in seeking its shelter, i.e. accepting the message of Christ. Faith in God can bring salvation.

There is also an image of 'drowned Phoenician Sailor' in Madam Sosotris's the Tarot Pack of cards. He symbolises the fertility God whose effigy or image was thrown into the Sea every year to symbolise the end of the Summer. Drowning in the water is a process of transformation and so his eyes had been transfigured into pearls. The image emphasises the transforming and regenerating function of water.

The poet wants us to know the defects in our life. According to him, ours is a lost civilization because people have
lost belief in the higher values of life. He successfully portrays the condition of this civilization and suggests that it can still recover its lost identity at religious level. Faith in spiritual life can restore this lost identity. Eliot believes that without faith, experience is incomplete and human soul is reduced to the level of insects having a routine mechanical existence. He almost tunes with T.E. Hulmes:

Man is an extra-ordinary, fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him.  

Faith in religious life implies faith in tradition and the church. Only this faith brings out harmony. Thus, the poet dwells upon the theme of identity crisis through 'a heap of broken images.'

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