

**T.S. Eliot's Mythical Method in the Masterpiece of  
'The Waste Land'**

**Inst. Adhwaa M. Salman (Ph.D.)**

**Ministry of Education/ General Directorate of  
Saladdin/ Department of Vocational Education/  
Al-Mutawakil Preparatory Commercial School**

[lightsalsamarria@gmail.com](mailto:lightsalsamarria@gmail.com)

**الطريقة الأسطورية لدى تي اس إليوت في رائعته  
أرض اليباب**

**م. د. أضواء محمد سلمان**

**وزارة التربية/ المديرية العامة لتربية صلاح الدين**

**قسم التعليم المهني/ اعدادية المتوكل التجارية**

## Abstract

This study in an attempt to shed light on *The Waste Land* by the great poet of the twentieth century, Thomas Stearne Eliot and his use of mythical method. This poem has reflected the social environment in the early 1920s in which Eliot manages to unite the prototype notions and modern reality. The poem depicts the decline of civilization and demonstrates an innate desire for restoration. To reinvent the primitive myth of death, and revival in the recent circumstances, Eliot uses the mythical method. The study has specific aims and pertinent questions that tries to answer.

**Keywords:** Myth, T.S. Eliot's Mythical Method, The Waste Land

## الخلاصة

الدراسة هذه هي محاولة لتسليط الضوء على الطريقة الأسطورية المتبعة من قبل شاعر القرن العشرين العظيم توماس ستيرن إليوت في رائعته "أرض اليباب". القصيدة هي انعكاس للمحيط الاجتماعي في بدايات العشرينات من القرن الماضي والتي استطاع فيه إليوت توحيد المفاهيم الأصلية والواقع المعاصر. القصيدة تصور الانحدار الحضاري وتظهر الرغبة الفطرية في النهضة. ولإعادة اكتشاف أساطير الموت البدائية والمواقف المعاصرة استخدم إليوت الطريقة الأسطورية. هناك أهداف محددة وأسئلة ذات صلة تحاول الدراسة الإجابة عنها.

## Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Illustrating the origin of the myth in literature.
2. Identifying the correlation between Eliot's using of mythical method and the scholars'.
3. Finding out the importance of mythical method in Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*.

## Research Questions:

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is the origin of the myth ?
2. What does the mythical method refer to ?
3. Why does Eliot use the mythical method in *The Waste Land* ?
4. In Eliot's masterpiece *The Waste Land* what does the mythical method add ?

## The Origin of Myth

Many of those who have written on Indo-European mythology, religion and poetics have tended to initiate in a rather naivety way, ignoring geographical and historical coordination. And when they discover a parallel between two members traditions, as between Indian and Greek myth they immediately claim it as a reflection of 'Indo-European' without any consideration either to the communities of the Indo-European details or the probabilities of horizontal transmission (West, 2007: 19).

Comparing of the world's creation myths exposes fundamental creation types. Commentators on myths have classified them in various ways from different perspectives. Accordingly, anthropologist have long classified such predominant cultural motifs as emergence creations, creation from nothing and earth-diver creations. While psychologists recognize myth as reflections of universal psychological realities. The Jungian scholar Marie Louise von Franz looks as creation myth as "preconscious processes concerning the origins of human conscious" (Leeming, 2010: 1).

Among the explication of myths and their meaning the view which argues that myths are invented by wise men to illustrate and recall towards a truth, but then they are taken literally. To some theologians, myths and because of their close connection with religious beliefs and ritualistic are merely deterioration of scripture or earlier religious truths. This is in opposition to social myths that try to teach ethical or moral beliefs with regard to the reasonable religious dogma. However, religious myths have tended to reflect something of the nature of mankind's connection to nature and the transcendental or powerful (Van Ove, 1980: 6-7).

## The Concept of Myth

According to *The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* myth can be defined as a story from ancient times, in particular that is told to illustrate natural events or to prescribe the premature history of people. Whereas, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* affirms that myth is a symbolic narrative usually of anonymous origin and particularly traditional that apparently indicates actual events and that is particularly connected with religious belief (Sperens, 2013: 4). Those definitions identify myth a narrative of a story and confirm that myth is old by the words *ancient* and particularly traditional. So a myth is an illustrative narrative associated with religious and ancient connotations.

Myth constitute a main mode of personification in the majority of poetry. Cudden (1999: 596) asserts that myth is a story that not true and consists of a rule supernatural being or in any way supernatural being or in any way superhuman being. So myth is the characteristic in comprehending and evaluating T.S. Eliot's works. One of the major features of mythic method is that it submits a basis for comparative, serving to the ironic aspect of the new works. Regarding their subject matter, cynical irony is the most recurrent attitude of the significant authors of the modernist period. They have been mainly employed with the target of avoiding the authorial teary passion of realistic 19<sup>th</sup> century literature (Nasi, 2012: 3).

### Eliot's Mythical Method

Thomas Stearne Eliot stands as a prominent poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His discussion of city life, its abandonment, awkward activities, immoral attitude of the city people, sex perversities, and waste of faith in religious traditions, arrogant and spiritual sterility, all those aspects make him regard as a rebel poet. He has used both traditional and personal symbols. He is a mysteriously symbolist that an ordinary readers never easily grasp his symbols (Khan et al., 2015: 615). In his New Reading book introduction, Calder (1987: 6) points out that Eliot's poetry is bifocal which can be read with regard to 20<sup>th</sup> century history. This declaration of fact is applicable to all writers who have the capacity to write without some types of sign, influence or reversal of their life, time, place, experience and what they have. These are the essential buildings in the creativity of a man writing of letters in any time since Homer up to Eliot till the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whether in poetry, philosophy, drama or criticism Eliot's writings are read and quoted on a massive scale. His writings have shown to the intellectual and to a minimum degree among the average readers that they assist grasping our social world and knowledge of its conditions. As he is a poet, critic a , dramatist and above all a modern intellectual. Eliot's innovative art has acquired a position among literary circle especially his treatment of mythology in his amazing works such as *The Waste Land*. To avoid directness, Eliot schemes myth on reality (Ziater, 2018: 1147).

The mythic method provides unnecessary elaboration. Instead of isolated symbols, mythic method has provided the mechanism of symbol systems, that largely more supported and contributed as much to meaning as they have done to structure. A combination addressing is one of Eliot's main concerns, that of unity (Eliot, 1933: 269). As much as they do between themselves, Eliot's myths interact with the poems present. But, they perform similar significant function, as Joyce's Odyssean elements (Nasi, 2012: 4). The radical impact of Eliot's complication is the feeling of ambiguity which is considered as one of the pivotal emotions described in *The Waste Land*. Joyce chooses to characterize the human situation by clarifying it with well-defined characters while, Eliot's character are more segmented, instrumental and circumstantial. The other main variance is that in Joyce's state, the parallelism is submitted through allusion, whereas in more than one case, Eliot uses mythical characters directly, together with contexts from the fundamental sources. The pivotal mythical research is not so far from Joyce's Odyssey with the radical variance of it even more inclusive nature (Ibid).

T.S. Eliot attempts to conceal this essential literary method by breaking off dramatic passage, by mixing languages and by classifying the poem into sections with titles. Thus, what actually keeps the poem moving is its rhetoric, its shift from characterization to exclamation to question to expletive and sometime very perfectly (Shapiro, 1960: 54). Using a mythical method instead of a narrative method in Joyce's Ulysses as Eliot claims is a way of writing that offer a more structured system. Both Joyce's Ulysses and Eliot's *The Waste Land* describe the modern society. Thus, permanent parallel between ancient and modern time is both part of Eliot's view of structure and a main characteristic of the mythical method (Eliot, 1975: 177).

Eliot determines Joyce's method as equivalent to his own. Besides the chronological depth, one of the remarkable mission of the mythical method is to supply order by organizing the diverse elements if the literary works without using the strict rules constant and solid structure, the redundant clarifications of the narratives method and all its connection constrains (Jeffrey, 1993: 143).

### The Waste Land Mythical Method

One of the most remarkable poem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is *The Waste Land*. The one that causing the most argument and is considered to be the most culminative of the modern mythic style according to critics opinions. The poem according to Eliot's confession is a synergy with Pound who has edited it and eliminated a third or two thirds of it. Thus, the 'continuity', the work of Pound who hates continuity in his own most aspirational poetry which is lacking in unity is apparent. So any part of Eliot's *The Waste Land* can be changed with any other part without switching the sense of the poem (Shapiro, 1960: 53).

*The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot is so long poem consisting of four hundred thirty four lines of five parts as follow: *Burial of the Dead*; *A game of Chess*; *The Five Sermon* which is the longest part; *Death by Water* which is the shortest part and *What the Thunder Said*. The first line of the poem beholds to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales Prologue*. Eliot starts his poem with actual illustration of seasons, London Bridge Then, he depends on Tiresias as the blind, the mythological character and thereafter he gets back to reality – London Bridge (Zaiter, 2018: 1148). *The Waste Land* is a strongly sophisticated poem structured on the standard of a five parts symphony opening with an attractive epigraph that acts as a 'leitmotiv' to the whole poem. This epigraph submit the immemorial oracle, the *Sibly of Cumae* with her deathly reflection of a death desire. The prophesy has established the tone of *The Waste Land* as a poem which highlights extremely on the deadness and definite unfaithfulness, of modern civilization (Ahmed, 2005: 126).

Weldmann (2009: 99-100) refers to Cleanth Brooks' essay "Critique of Myth" in which he concludes that *The Waste Land* is based on the contradiction between two types of life and two types of death. In his opinion the underlying notion of *The Waste Land* poem is a paradox. Life freed from meaning is death and Eezes the sacrificed death may be life – giving, a wake-up call for life. *The Waste Land* has been published in 1922, acquired a globally reputation as a poet of an incredible standard. War is usually associated with devastation of life, of properties and principally the trust. It is noteworthy that war has also thenceforth brought after it a long period of peace and changed man's thinking and awareness making him value charm of nature and also appreciate life. This ironical side of ware gets more discernible regarding literature, man in the aftermath has related some very great literature, definitive of originality amongst the animals of this land (Deshmukh, 2015: 315). The modern city in *The Waste Land* has been described as hopeless, and glory, lacking any affection and distinguished by lifelessness. By his desolate depiction of the modern day man, T.S. Eliot is capable of expressing his emotion of revulsion towards the modern world. He feels astracized from this world where the living dead roam and communication is slaughtered, gender identity is lost, and the sensual human has come to truth (Deshmakh, 2015: 316). The whole poem of *The Waste Land* is written in the prototype of a collage, providing "a heap of broken image". In accordance therewith part I there are consistent image of a dry, a dead land with dead trees, barren rocks, stony rubbish, dull root and dry tubers. Over the two opining parts of *Tiresias*, these images are dotted. Elsewhere there is the images of the unreal city in part I, III and V which runs sporadically through the poem (Ahmed, 2005: 126).

In his effect to give further coherence to structure, Eliot has borrowed a device from James and presented a device from *Tiresins*, the prophet who has 'foresuffered all as a major observer who actually sees the substansive of the poem. As a whole *The Waste Land* may not succeed, but it may exist as a series of dramatic lyrics. It has managed to treat on the same planed modern London and the primitive world myth and explored consequently the summit of cultural corruption. In determining imaginative possibilities in using myth Eliot is at one with the leading wonderful mints of age. He knows that he has found a way of ordering, controlling, of giving a shape an importance to the enormous panorama of frivolity and anarchy which is contemporary history (Matthiessen, 1963: 1342). *The Waste Land* is the most argumentative and prominent poem in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that are due to the great extend of controversy dispute. It has raised among critics, students and researchers of literature alike. *The Waste Land* is one of the main features of European modernism that represent a central breakthrough in Eliot's career (Sultan & Abu Shihab, 2011: 92).

On more than one level, *The Waste Land* operates and is strongly evocative. It creates in beneficiary mind a host of responses and sense simultaneously. Some anthropological and cultural implications involving the concept of the Apocatyposes are aroused from the title. The rational climate prevealing in the poem enhances the view that thus poem is after all 'a war poem' though there is no specific or direct sign to war in the whole poem (Hynes, 1972: 23). Both Payan and Christian myth has been used by Eliot who has borrowed fertility ritualistic myth. While Christian myth is about wrongdoing of man and anguish of Christ in expectation of man's guilt and resurrection (Bhagawati, 2012: 337-8). Using myth in Eliot's poetry has originally been more advanced from his historical sense that he enhance with connection to his notions of tradition. Eliot fosters an exceptional interest in myth as an idiom of expressions which is able to provide him with possibilities to bridge the gap separating the past from the present. Consequently, myth appears to retrieve the past human experience that provides new meaning for the recent world by way of contrast, comparison or direct reference (Alkhafaji & Marzoog, 2018: 74-75). *The Waste Land* is most sophisticated and sustained use of mythical method among Eliot's works taking as its implicit manner, the great myth as explicated by Sir James Frazer, Jessie Western and others, weaving the theme of barren dissolution and death and seeking for life and resurrection that he has found in these anthropological provenance with Buddhist story and with Christine

and other oriental analogies and impersonating into the poem both paradigms and symbols of the defeat of moral misery, modern civilization and social vacuum which are symbolically and mythically associated with religious and anthropological themes. Eliot pursues to resolve a complete view of human history and failure, civilization and of sustained seeking for salvation (Bhagawati, 2012: 337).

Eliot's knowledge of myth has been acquired from different sources of all traditions, oriental and occidental, pagan and Christian. So his awareness of myth grows in parallel with the development of the historical sense which is directed towards the rebound of tradition. Eliot's poetry requires a mix of myths which shows contribution not only to the content of his poems, but also to their poetical form. When he is a pupil at *Smith Academy*, Eliot takes his first step to temple of mythology. Supported by his study of Greek and Latin, the original language of the classics like the *Aeneid* of Virgil and *Iliad* of Homer and many others (Eliot, 1966: 14). *The Waste Land* are not made happy by returning of spring fructification to the soil, they prefer the aridity of winter or the dead season. When the absence of water is felt, it presumes a positive characters, whereas for the most part it is a negative or something to be scared. This is a rational consequence of Eliot's reflection of the vegetation myth which makes the residents of *The Waste Land* dread of the return of life. This reflection enables him to explain the theme of religious disappointment in terms of the myth that subsumes many myth (Williamson, 1953: 130).

*The Waste Land* narrates a mythical narrative. Its symbolism creates in myth and romance, merging the two genres. Frye states that myth and romance both belong in the common category of mythopoetic literature (Frye, 1976: 188). The actions and the states characterized in the poem miss tangible provisioned and spatial reference. The protagonist's journey is introduced as universal and timeless, made so by its resemblance to other mythical narratives. Frye further affirms that myth operates at the peak level of human will (Frye, 1963: 136). After *The Waste Land*, Eliot has never used the mythical method again it has served him well there to explicit his feeling that religion and sex are in all its complexity interwoven for the Holy Great and the knight's lance of the Great legends are transparency sexual symbols and his increasing conviction that myth is a kind of knowing, but that it could be found the only potential answer to the negations of scientific naturalism. Only a very smart technician in verse could have thought of depicting the typist's 'love affair' in invisible disintegrating sonnets (Waggsner, 1968: 422-424).

Myth to Eliot includes an awareness not only of the pastness of the past, but also of its existence the historical feeling forces a man to write not just with his own generation in his bonds, but with a sense the whole literature of his country has contemporaneous order (Eliot, 1966: 14).

### Conclusion

*The Waste Land* because its great crucial reputation, is one of the most curiosities of English literature. Eliot has merged various mythical streams to constitute multi-pronged traditional background in order to illustrate the nature and standardize the depth of the incorporeal *Waste Land* which contemporaries history.

Beyond any doubt, the current study has concluded that Eliot's mythical method in *The Waste Land* is not fulfilled spontaneously or without prior project, but it has carefully planned accomplished. By employing and adapting typologies, Eliot has based his mythical method on attaching ancient time with that of contemporary world.

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