

## ***The Waste Land Revisited: An Alchemical Journey through Jungian Perspective***

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***Sajal Suneja and Gunja Patni***

The rise of modern science has reduced myths to outdated folklore. Contemporary scientists, such as Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* (2006) and Sam Harris in *The Moral Landscape* (2010), maintain a sharp distinction between ‘Myth’ and ‘Reality’, denying any room for pragmatic overlap between the two. The interplay between “Myth” and “Reality” has fascinated humanity for centuries. These terms, fundamentally rooted in the collective psyche, raise profound questions about truth, perception, and the essence of human existence. Myth “is essentially a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together. This understanding may be religious or secular” (Pattanaik 7). In contrast, “Reality” encompasses the empirical, sensed world governed by reason and science. The interplay between these concepts underscores the malleable nature of human cognition and its influence on our comprehension of existence.

Contemporary scientists believe that “no indigenous myths from anywhere in the world, no matter how poetic or hauntingly beautiful, belong in science classes. Science classes are emphatically not the right place to teach scientific falsehoods alongside true science. Creationism is still bollocks even if it is indigenous bollocks” (Dawkins 2).

In defense of mythology, John Vaervaeke and Leo Ferraro (2013) in their article entitled “Relevance, Meaning and the Cognitive Science of Wisdom” emphasize the necessity of myth through the central feature of relevance realization, which is the ability to usefully ignore information in a contextually sensitive manner so as to enable our actions. This is

achieved by being able to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information and to ignore most of the irrelevant information.

The concept of relevance realization takes its cue from Carl Jung's theory of archetypes. Archetypes are universal, primordial symbols and images that reside in the collective unconscious of all human beings. "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content is altered by becoming conscious and being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (Jung 5). According to Carl Jung, these archetypes manifest in myths, dreams, and art, represent fundamental human motifs. These universal prototypes shape human experiences and behaviours, providing a framework for understanding the psyche's structure and dynamics.

This paper attempts to analyse T.S. Eliot's (1888-1965) magnum opus, *The Wasteland* (1922) hereafter, *TWL*, wherein he draws on a wide range of myths from different cultures, including Greek, Roman, Hindu, Christian, and others representing cultural archetypes, universal human experiences, emotions, and struggles.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, one of the most influential poets of the 20th century, stands as a pivotal figure in the realm of modernist literature. He lived through the aftermath of World War I, a time marked by disillusionment and a deep sense of loss. His works resonate with the existential concerns and anxieties of his era. Lesley Wheeler in her journal article titled "Undead Eliot: How 'The Waste Land' Sounds Now", acknowledges that T.S. Eliot has had a profound and lasting impact on Anglo-American poetry to the extent that he has influenced poets like Craig Raine, Wendy Cope, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney.

While employing Jungian perspectives, the aim will be to explore the transformative potential of ancient myths in the modern world; to gain new insights into the fundamental questions of truth, perception, and human existence; contribute to the ongoing conversation between myth and reality and offer fresh perspectives on our ever-evolving understanding of the world.

This research paper aims to explore how T.S. Eliot's use of mythology in *TWL* serves as a necessity for a pragmatic human perception, based on John Vaervaeke's hypothesis that mythology plays a critical role in our perception of reality. By examining Eliot's integration of mythology through the perspective of Jungian archetypes, the paper will offer insights into the poem's profound meanings and its connection to the human psyche. Eliot's use of myth not only revives the human situation and proposes treatments for moral bankruptcy but also provides order and coherence in the midst of chaos. The aim will be to explore the transformative potential of ancient myths in the modern world; to gain new insights into the fundamental questions of truth, perception, and human existence; contribute to the ongoing conversation between myth and reality and offer fresh perspectives on our ever-evolving understanding of the world. Thus, this analysis will be helpful in better understanding how Eliot's mythological references contribute to the poem's thematic richness and psychological depth, enhancing our overall understanding of its enduring impact.

### **Jungian Landscape**

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, is well-known for his significant contributions to the understanding of the human mind. Jung established a comprehensive body of work that probed into the depths of the unconscious mind during his illustrious career, spanning the early to mid-twentieth century, resulting in his ground-breaking theory of archetypes. Ferva Aslam, et. al (2023) in their paper titled "Self-Actualization, Individuation and Self-Realization to Search the True Self: A Comparative Study of Siddhartha and a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" asserts that these inborn patterns influence our motivations and behaviours. Jung believed that understanding these archetypes, not through conscious reasoning but through intuition and introspection, is essential for self-discovery, a process he called individuation. In this process, all other archetypal influences ultimately serve to support the development of a strong sense of self.

Carl Jung's concept of the Collective Unconscious refers to a part of the unconscious mind shared by all humans, which contains universal archetypes and myths. According to him collective unconscious "has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a supra-personal nature which is present in every one of us" (Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious* 4).

Just as the single biological form may be treated as the manifestation of implicate order, so symbols, particularly those that endure, are seen by Jungians as the visual manifestation of archetypes, processed through the unconscious mind of the individual, into the conscious mind, and then represented in visual form in the world. Hence symbols, according to Jung, are the manifestation of the collective unconscious, the implicate order of human existence. The greater the appeal and attraction of such symbols, and the longer that attraction endures, the more likely it is that they are connected to the deepest levels of the collective unconscious (Westley and Folke 4).

Jung stretches beyond the conventional boundaries of society by introducing the concept of 'Anima' and 'Animus' in his book *Collected Works of C.G Jung*. He says,

The complementary character of the anima also affects the sexual character, as I have proved to myself beyond a doubt. A very feminine woman has a masculine soul, and a very masculine man has a feminine soul. This contrast is due to the fact that a man is not in all things wholly masculine, but also has certain feminine traits. The more masculine his outer attitude is, the more his feminine traits are obliterated: instead, they appear in his unconscious (646).

Furthermore, the process of Individuation, which involves a quest for personal meaning and a journey through various states of consciousness, is defined by Carl Jung as "becoming an 'in-dividual,' and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable unique-

ness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization'" (Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* 238).

## Critical Contentions

*TWL* is filled with mythological references. Louis Menand notes that the poem is a tapestry of references, quotes, echoes, appropriations, pastiches, imitations, and acts of ventriloquism. It incorporates seven different languages, including Sanskrit, and concludes with several pages of notes that parody academic citations.

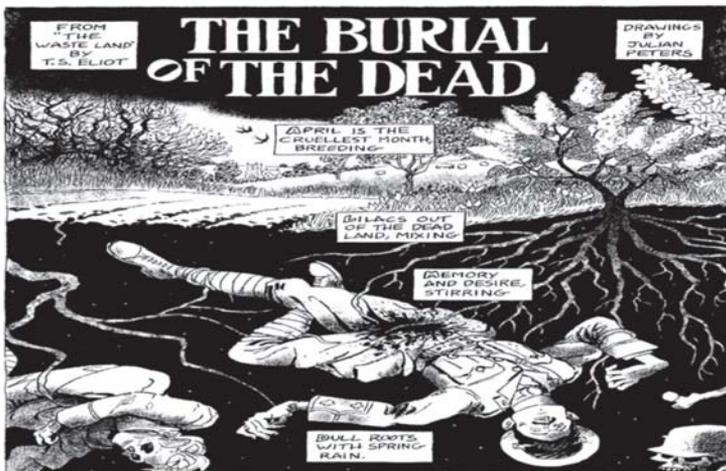
The epigraph of the poem references the poet Petronius and his book *Satyricon*, specifically the figure of the 'Sibyl of Cumae.' Sibyl was suspended in a container and when asked what she desired, she replied "I want to die." The inclusion of Sibyl in the poem is important for a feminist interpretation of the work, as her desire to die can be seen as a commentary on the pointlessness of life in a world that is falling apart. Her words can be interpreted as a rejection of the world and a desire to escape its decay and corruption.

Eliot's division of *TWL* into five parts echoes the structure of ancient myths and epics. Transformation is a recurring motif in mythic narratives. Many legends and epics follow the hero's journey, typically unfolding through distinct stages or trials. In *TWL*, each section represents a stage of transformation and trials akin to the hero's journey, as the poem explores themes of disillusionment, death, desire, and rebirth.

Sanchez (1999) in his thesis "The Public Dream: A Jungian Interpretation of 'The Waste Land'" argues that the repeated use of the number four as a motif, coupled with the poem's division into five sections, implies that the speaker is approaching self-realization but has not yet fully attained it. This unresolved state contributes to the surreal, dreamlike atmosphere that pervades the poem. Consequently, through the act of composing this poetic exploration of 'the stages of his age and youth,' the speaker progresses one step nearer to the metaphorical grail – that elusive part of himself that remains unfound because it exists within his psyche. Sanchez opines that,

The Jungian archetypes of the shadow, the anima, and the Self are especially prominent in *The Waste Land*. Furthermore, the sequence and arrangement of these archetypes and their related imagery associatively correlate with the Jungian process of individuation. Moreover, each successive segment of the poem reflects a stage in the pattern of psychic growth delineated by Jung in the individuation process (7).

One of the central archetypes in ‘The Burial of the Dead’ is ‘Death’ and ‘Rebirth’. This is explicit from the title, which refers to the Anglican burial service. In this context, death is not only bodily but also spiritual and cultural. The eradication of old values and ways of life can be seen as a necessary prelude to the rebirth of new ones. This is an all-encompassing literary archetype that represents transformation and the cyclical nature of life. The natural cycle of death and rebirth traditionally associated with the month of April appears tragic to Eliot’s speaker when he says, “April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain” (lines 1-4). The use of images and allusions in literary works was in trend in the twentieth century which is beautifully captured by a comic artist in the below picture:



(Peter 2024)

In tandem with other mythical allusions, the myth of the Fisher King symbolizes the morally barren society. This infertility is partly due to a crime: the assault of maidens within the King's court. The land only becomes fertile again when a pure-hearted stranger arrives, such as Perceval, Gawain, or Galahad in various versions of the Arthurian legends. In this section, the archetype of the journey or quest is also introduced. The character in question describes a journey through a desert landscape, which is a prevalent literary symbol for spiritual trials and tribulations. The whole process can be perceived as a quest for spiritual enlightenment or redemption in the face of the modern world's spiritual desolation. Eliot captures this journey with lines such as:

What are the roots that 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 (lines 19-24).

Eliot's use of the Tristan and Isolde myth to explore themes of love, desire, and the human condition is beautifully elucidated in the second episode. Tristan and Isolde are eternal lovers united by a love that defies societal norms and moral boundaries. Their love is both destructive and transformative, as it ultimately leads to their demise while also serving as a symbol of the power of love to overcome obstacles and challenge the status quo. The archetypal significance of Tristan and Isolde can also be seen in their connection to the oppositions of the forest and the sea.

. . . an unnamed character visits a fortune-teller, and the cards of the Tarot pack that she uses serve to introduce the important characters of the poem—the Phoenician Sailor, who is drowned in Part IV of the poem; the man with three staves, who corresponds to the Fisher King; and the one-eyed merchant, who appears in Part III. There is also “Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, The lady of situations,” who seems not to appear again in the poem except as a presiding deity (unless she is represented by the typist

in Part III), but who is destined to appear, transformed, in much of Eliot's later work. The fourth episode shows us the crowd moving over London Bridge, a crowd of the living dead. Among them, the poet spies an acquaintance, a man whose name is Stetson, but whose relation to the author is timeless (Foster 571).

In Section II titled 'A Game of Chess', the archetype of the lover is portrayed through the interactions between the two women and their respective male partners. However, these interactions are devoid of love and filled with disappointment, mirroring the overarching themes of the poem. In the first section of the poem, a woman waits for her lover in a lavish setting. The lover, who appears to be linked to the narrator of the poem, is preoccupied with drowning and rats among the bones of deceased men, indicating a sense of despair and disillusionment in their relationship. The woman is likened to Philomela, a character from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) who is violated by her brother-in-law, highlighting the relationship's themes of lifelessness and violation.

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king  
 So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale  
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice  
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,  
 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears (lines 99-103).

Warwood in his thesis titled *Wasted Women: Modern Oppression in T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'* examines how the parallel narratives of a high-society woman and Philomel expose the modern world's tragedy of apathy through the lens of female disempowerment. Both characters experience a loss of agency due to male dominance. Tereus silences Philomel by brutalizing her, while the woman's partner confines her to a superficial world. Philomel becomes a symbol of rebellion against such oppression, demanding her identity back. In contrast, the woman in 'A Game of Chess' seemingly succumbs to the patriarchal system, perhaps due to its pervasiveness and the perceived futility of resistance.

The title of the next section alludes to a famous sermon delivered by Buddha known as the Fire Sermon. Interestingly, this significant sermon

given by Buddha parallels the Christian Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, within *TWL*, we see the pervasive cross-cultural connections of myth come to light. This sermon is recorded in the Buddhist scriptures and is regarded as one of Buddha's most important teachings. In this sermon, Buddha warns about the perils of sensual cravings and emphasizes the importance of disengaging from them to attain spiritual awakening. "Burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou pluckest me out / Burning" (lines 308-310). This could be seen as an archetype of spiritual enlightenment or liberation. Here, much like in Buddha's sermon, everything is engulfed in flames. The speaker implores God to rescue him from this fiery torment, akin to how Joshua was saved in the book of Zechariah, another Biblical reference. This allusion aptly critiques the moral decay of European society, possibly driven by burning hatred and misguided passion.

The typist scene can be defined as an archetype of the 'Everyman' or 'Everywoman,' a character who reflects the common man or woman and their experiences. The typist's mundane routine and lack of fulfillment or purpose in her work reflect the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Her repetitive actions, described as 'mechanical' and compared to a 'machine,' showcase the ways in which human individuality and creativity are suppressed by the demands of industry "The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights / Her stove, and lays out food in tins" (lines 222-223).

The narrative also introduces the archetype of the 'Trickster' embodied by the character of the young man, who exploits the typist's apathy and passivity. The Trickster is known for upsetting the established order and defying norms and conventions, frequently through dishonesty or mischievous behaviour.

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 (lines 231-234).

Furthermore, the typewriter scene embodies the ‘Underworld’ archetype. The Underworld is a symbol of death, decay, and spiritual emptiness in mythology and literature, and it is frequently used as a metaphor for despair or hopelessness. Eliot’s depiction of the typist’s dreary life, as well as the illicit details of her encounter with the young man, evokes a sense of moral and spiritual decay. This is reminiscent of the desolation associated with the Underworld. The lines read “She smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone” (lines 255-256).

*TWL* incorporates a panoply of myths and allusions; another in the series is the figure of ‘Tiresias’ introduced in this section who serves as a prophetic figure and a unifying thread in the fragmented narrative of the poem. Eliot described Tiresias as ‘the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest’ in his notes to *TWL*. Tiresias’s unique experience of having lived as both a man and a woman gives him a comprehensive perspective, allowing him to observe and comment on the sordid sexual encounter in ‘The Fire Sermon’ with a detached, almost clinical gaze. His blindness also serves as a symbol of spiritual and moral blindness, a recurring theme in the poem. To illustrate the pervasive sense of disconnection and meaninglessness in modern life, Eliot writes,

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,  
 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,  
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights  
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins (lines 218-223).

Genevieve W. Foster in this regard contends that,

. . . What Tiresias sees, in fact, “the bored, meaningless encounter between the typist and the clerk, is the substance of the poem.” For the modern intellectual, feeling is what Jung designates the “inferior function,” the undervalued, often repressed function the conscious development of which is an essential to psychological wholeness. As a social document the poem suggests the same unbalance in our

civilization-fact and logic have a high valuation while feeling-judgments are too often dismissed as irrelevant (575).

As a character who has lived as both a man and a woman, Tiresias embodies the duality and integration of these archetypal forces within the human psyche. According to Jung, the Anima represents the feminine aspects within a man's unconscious, while the Animus represents the masculine aspects within a woman's unconscious. Tiresias's androgynous nature and his ability to perceive experiences from both gender perspectives align with Jung's idea of achieving psychological wholeness through the reconciliation of these inner opposites.

Interestingly, when Eliot chooses to blur the lines of male/female, the meeting of the two sexes in Tiresias is similar to the dual genders of the hermaphrodite, for which Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* uses the term intersex. As an intersex individual, Eliot's Tiresias appears neither fully male nor female, but is a male with a physical reminder of his time as a woman (Sergi 15).

Mebuke in his paper titled "T.S. Eliot's Way Out of 'The Waste Land'" notes that Eliot uses the image of Phlebas, a drowned Phoenician sailor, to depict the loss of identity and purpose in death. Phlebas, having been dead for two weeks, has forgotten everything that defined his life – the sounds of the sea, the thrill of profit and loss. He is adrift in oblivion, his bones tossed by the current, symbolizing the passage of time and the decay of the physical body. The cyclical movement through the whirlpool hints at a potential for memory, but ultimately, Phlebas serves as a cautionary tale, reminding the reader of mortality and the importance of cherishing life's purpose. The lines read as:

A current under sea  
 Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell  
 He passed the stages of his age and youth  
 Entering the whirlpool (lines 315-318).

An influential key archetype of the Fisher King is introduced in the section 'What the Thunder Said.' His character is a reference to the wounded king in Arthurian legend, who is unable to perform his

duties and whose kingdom suffers as a result. The only activity he can undertake is fishing, hence his name.

Halley in her paper titled “T. S. Eliot and the Holy Grail” notes that the Fisher King – a figure of spiritual barrenness – symbolizes the modern world’s emptiness. The poem subtly references the Fisher King through allusions, such as the ‘tedious’ fisherman in ‘The Fire Sermon’, unable to catch fish in a ‘torrid’ river, reflecting the widespread spiritual drought. Even the seemingly unrelated image of the ‘man with three staves’ in the first section can be interpreted as the Fisher King, highlighting the pervasiveness of this motif. Eliot writes “Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order” (lines 424-425).

One of the most prominent archetypes in Eliot’s poem is the Fisher King – a figure from Arthurian legend – who is wounded and whose kingdom becomes a barren wasteland. This archetype represents the connection between the vitality of the king and the fertility of the land. Eliot uses this motif to comment on the spiritual and cultural desolation of the modern world, suggesting a need for renewal and healing.

Another significant archetype is ‘The thunder’, which is drawn from the *Upanishads*. In the *Upanishads*, the divine proclamation of thunder is conveyed by Prajapati, the deity of creation, to three distinct entities: deities, mortals, and evil spirits. Each of these groups sought wisdom from Prajapati, who responded to each with the identical monosyllabic utterance, ‘DA.’ The deities interpreted this as ‘Damyata’ (restrain yourself), humans perceived it as ‘Datta’ (be generous), and the evil spirits comprehended it as ‘Dayadhvam’ (be merciful). Prajapati affirmed that all three groups had genuinely grasped his communication.

DA

Datta: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of a moment’s surrender

Which an age of prudence can never retract

By this, and this only, we have existed

Which is not to be found in our obituaries

Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider  
 Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor  
 In our empty rooms (lines 402-410).

The symbol of thunder is in harmony with yogic philosophy, symbolizing a spiritual transformation from suffering and ignorance towards a state of inner peace and enlightenment. This transformative journey is portrayed through the five sections of the poem, reaching its culmination in the concluding section ‘What the Thunder Said’, which offers an extensive contemplation on the path to attaining everyday tranquillity.

The concluding line “Shantih shantih shantih,” (line 433), a term from Sanskrit meaning peace, encapsulates the poem’s aspiration for spiritual serenity. This invocation of tranquility contrasts sharply with the preceding tumult and fragmentation depicted throughout the poem. It symbolizes a yearning for resolution and harmony amidst the prevailing chaos and cultural disintegration. Thus, through *TWL*, Eliot expresses his worries about society’s fragmented and decaying moral fabric, calling for its renewal. By reintroducing myth into literature – as Homer did in *Ulysses* – he provides a path for societal revival, looking back to the roots of myth for solutions to contemporary issues. It is imperative to quote Joyce Leavell assertion that:

The assumption of the mythical method is that our culture and language once had a pervasive meaningfulness which has been lost in our increasingly rational and discontinuous society, but that by recovering the lost myth from within our culture, poets can restore mythic unity to literature (Haas 31).

Besides several Greek mythical and Biblical allusions, the poem also reveals a specific indebtedness to Indian religious and philosophical thoughts, specifically certain *shlokas* (stanzas) of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The poem thus, depicts a broken society, with Eliot illustrating a Europe urgently seeking spiritual guidance to restore order after the devastation of war.

Eliot’s writing style in the poem is characterized by his modernist approach, employing a fragmented structure that mirrors the chaos and

disillusionment of post-war Europe. The poem incorporates a wide array of literary allusions and references, blending mythology, religion, and various cultural texts to underscore its themes. Eliot utilizes shifting perspectives and voices, creating a collage of different experiences and viewpoints. His use of free verse, intricate symbolism, and rich imagery further adds to the complexity and depth of the work, challenging readers to piece together meaning from the disjointed narrative.

## Conclusion

Mythological structures play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of reality. As humans, we are inherently drawn to narratives as a means of making sense of the world around us. These narratives, when shared and repeated across cultures, evolve into meta-myths that transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. The characters within these meta-myths embody archetypal figures, which serve as universal symbols that resonate with our collective unconscious. Eliot, in his poem, utilized these archetypes to explore the fragmented and disillusioned state of the modern world.

Rooted in Logos, in language and order, myth is born of humanity and through its common denominator offers unity for humanity as for individual societies. In each character, in each classic novel or myth, some certain human qualities emerge. Somehow, they all speak of that human condition from within (*Ibid* 32).

In conclusion, mythological structures and archetypes are essential components of the human experience, providing a framework through which we can interpret and navigate the complexities of reality. By engaging with these timeless narratives, we are able to connect with our shared human heritage and gain a deeper understanding of the world and our place within it.

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