

The Waste Land as a Social document [Theme]/ Allusive Technique

The technique of "The Waste Land" is closely linked with its structure, which is circular rather than linear. The poem's shape continually connects past and present, fertility and barrenness, life and death. The journeys or quests undertaken by the characters in "The Waste Land" do not grow in linear directions: in fact no real end is in sight. Whereas Ulysses' Journey in Homer's "Odyssey" is full of the hope of reaching his destination of the achievement and joy of arrival at Ithaca, the scenes and situations in "The Waste Land" express the frustrations of the protagonist's journeys, and the failures of his vision. Eliot develops here a new technique which, in the words of Edmund Wilson, is 'at once laconic, quick and precise, for representing the transmutations of thought'. To achieve the synthesis of perception and reflection which he wanted the poem to offer, Eliot uses what may be termed the technique of multi-dimensional allusiveness.

The allusive technique helps the poet in distancing himself from his creation. Eliot's term 'objective Correlative' fittingly brings out his advocacy of impersonality in art. Tiresias the silent. protagonist, observes with dismay the coming of April and its effect upon the desiccated citizens of 'The Waste Land'. Ordinarily, April is the harbinger of rain, sun, 'sweet showers' as in Chaucer's Prologue

and life-giving waters which will fertilize the land and produce a rich harvest. But to the people of 'The Waste Land' April is unwelcome because they are incapable of participating in the process of the renewal of the earth. They prefer the cold of winter to the warmth of summer because they cannot endure the pangs of rebirth and fear the possibility of resurrection. Winter, the symbol of spiritual decay is contrasted with April, the symbol of regeneration, mixing memory with desire and past with future. The linking of April with 'memory and desire', a curious combination may derive from Freud's ideas in 'Totem and Taboo'. The desire of mankind for Christ's resurrection is balanced by the memory of its share in His Death. The protagonist sinks back into his speculative and pessimistic mood. He asks about the roots that clutch about the branches that grow out of stony rubbish. He replies, 'Son of man ...'. This response reminds the reader of the kind of wasteland Ezekiel came across. Then the protagonist has the vision of London crowd going to work at nine. He is surprised to find that death had not undone so many because all of them represent death in life. He asks Stetson whether dead god buried in the garden has begun to sprout. The burden of his mysterious question is that Jesus and his message were forgotten during the war. He wants to know whether there