

Eliot's achievement and methods as a dramatic poet

Literature



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Through the first, third, and fifth poems of the *Wasteland* in Eliot's collection, Eliot is able to create and achieve immense dramatic images and scenes that provide us with the vivid thoughts and images that were going through Eliot's mind at the time he wrote these poems, these images mainly relate to his nervous breakdown during this time and represent the way in which a mind thinks during these times of mental breakdown.

His usage of mythical allusions also highlight the sterility and loneliness "the age demanded an image" (Moody) which were also privately created by the town Margate; "I can connect nothing with nothing" (Eliot). The shattering of his persona and characters in the *Wasteland* also create a dramatic effect as it takes us through a journey which brings an immense sense of hopelessness and a nihilistic image causing us the reader to maybe finish reading the *Wasteland* on a negative note and pessimistic view.

The title of the first poem in the *Wasteland* 'The burial of the dead', which was meant to be named "The Horror the horror" in Eliot's opinion, which comes from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; immediately reflects the image of buried memories, or Christian burial ritual, however it also creates an image of the dead coming to life again as they are used as the main idea for this poem.

The poem begins in the present participle yet by the eighth line it suddenly moves from one voice to many already creating an effect of instability in the poem the "dead and dried" and also "lilacs and little life" all connect to the image of fertility in the poem, giving the dramatic effect of sterility and barren wasteland.

Time is also personified in this poem as a cycle pulsating the life that depends on it " Covering, stirring... this could also link personally to Eliot as this cycle is suggested to be happening at that precise moment in the poem, Eliot tries to show that it isn't just symbolising an image for this first section, but what is going on in his head at that time. The German verse is copied from Wagner's tragic opera Tristan and Iseult, offering a theatrical and dramatic effect, indicating the almost operatic quality that the poem has. The Hyacinth girl also offers a lot of drama to this poem and is a parataxis with the use of Wagner's Tristan and Iseult.

The Hyacinth girl has many important roles sexually she could suggest something of the more profound " Young man carbuncular". An idea that is also contributed throughout the poem is that the past is continuously there " Memory" and the idea of mixing the past and future shows the inability to relate to the present. This is one of many images of the lack of escape from the wasteland and also could relate to Eliot's own feelings with the inability to escape from his mental breakdown.

The mountains in this poem relate to the need for escape and freedom from the past and memory, " I am no Russian, I come from Lithuania therefore I'm a true German". The people in the burial of the dead are also displaced and disparate who are often guided by false hopes and prophets such as Madame Sosostris, and her eternal life and wisdom that is ruined by her continuous ageing, " all the women are one woman".

This image of an ageing yet knowledgeable woman, creates an image that is disturbing as its yet another negative image portrayed throughout the poem,

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giving a feeling of no hope and decaying of life. Her falsity as a prophet " Having a bad cold" shows that the spiritual experience created in the poem is undermined by illness, some critics believe this is because she is the wet Hyacinth girl. The theme of drowning with the water and wet imagery associates with the questor and sailor from the 'Fisher King' myth. " Those are pearls that were his eyes".

This allusion of the Tempest creates a horrifying image yet ironically adds a sense of hopefulness for the poem as the image which is portrayed is that through water being seen as death it brings new life and escape from the dry land of the wasteland. The continuous image of death however is still continued throughout this poem with the linkage of love and death (The hyacinth girl and the allusion of Wagner) also the hangman spin, and wheel of fortune which leads to a journey into the underworld all create a dramatic feeling to the poem as we are pulled into the journey of the characters in the poem and begin to feel and see their pain.

Eliot's use of drama in the Burial of the Dead has an important link to the third and fifth poems in the Wasteland as these images are continued throughout these poems. The key ideas in the Fire Sermon the third poem in the Wasteland are the feelings of a spiritual barrenness in a contemporary world and also the pointlessness of sex is also concentrated on in this poem. Again Eliot uses the usages of mythical prophets in this poem.

The idea of no hope and death are again used but this time with the image of a city (London) " the last fingers of the leaf clutch and sink into the wet bank" the image of clutching for life and hope of survival are emphasised in <https://assignbuster.com/eliots-achievement-and-methods-as-a-dramatic-poet/>

this poem, also emptiness and sterility of the city create images that cause us to see the city as an urban wasteland that has little importance to the real world.

Eliot makes this first section of the poem very dramatic by using vivid yet quite disturbing imagery of city life " A rat crept softly through the vegetation dragging its slimy belly on the bank. " The image of prostitution is also used in this poem creating the reader to see how the women actually feel once they have been on the job feeling abandoned and used by the men that they grow to be fond of after having sexual relations with them " Departed have left no addresses.

By the waters of Lemane I sat down and wept... The imagery of the old and new river Thames are also an allusion to Wagner's 'Twilight of the Gods' " Wallala, leilala" but also relate to the stories of Queen Elizabeth I and her lover Leicester, although this is not dramatic in the sense of shocking imagery etc. It is merely a mellow dramatic feature in this poem. The enjambment of the river flowing quickly shows that there is little time in the Wasteland again an image of no hope for the characters and the hypocritical reader who becomes a part of the poem.

The depressing feeling of the Rhine Maidens being merely used as sexual objects shows the lack of respect that exists in the wasteland for the women " Undid me" " Modern Nymphs". The victims have no self-respect either which also makes this section more depressing because it is clear that the women do not want to be river maidens " I raised my knees". Eliot's voice also creeps in near the end of the poem " Margate sands" showing the

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fragmental images in the poem which relate to his breakdown, however it also has an odd biblical sense to it as the poem ends with the image of Buddha, and St.

Augustine's Fire Sermon, which is the image of being burnt up, which is an ironic, but violent parataxis with the sexual sterility and collation of the eastern and western asceticism. " Multiply a wilderness of mirrors" (Raine)
The fifth poem, which is the conclusion to the Wasteland mainly refers to the death of Christ in its first section. This again is a dramatic device used by Eliot as it is the image of a tragic death of an innocent and harmless man. The thunder in the poem is again the sense of no hope as it is continuously in the background of the poem.

The poem also begins with a few positive thoughts such as life is purgatory and we are all waiting to go to heaven for eternal peace, the poem becomes we rather than being in a singular tense meaning that we all become characters of the wasteland (or reader) " hypocrite lecteur". However the immediate return of the dry wasteland image, shows that there is no escape from other people in the poem, psychoanalytically this could link to Eliot's own search for solitude in his life. The angry imagery offer a tense emotional feel to the poem " Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit".

There is also an instability of voice in the poem which mirrors the wasteland meaning no redemption for the water as hope is continuously deceptive with the image of the hermit thrush " Drop drop drop" the teasing by the thrush creates more drama for the reader one could become very caught up in the poem and want the water to come to the wasteland. The journey that we are

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taken through by Eliot throughout the poems is also brought to an end " who is the third that walks away beside you? the exhaustion of this journey relates to the dramatic scene that occurs in the story of Christ when he is not recognised by his own disciples.

The lack of spirituality on the wasteland and especially in this poem shows how the prophets mentioned in all of the poems are actually not recognised, meaning the lack of redemption. " Breaking down of order and apocalypse of all the city's" (Bertrand Russell) " Hooded hordes swarming" politically relates to the dramatic events, which took place in Russia during this period with the Bolshevik revolution and assassination of the Royal family.

Eliot cleverly adds real life tragedy and drama to his poem so that the reader can be heavily affected by this image and still relates it to the day's events. The image of the woman pulling her hair tight also links to the woman in a Game of Chess, this terrible and scary image creates a lot of dramatic tension in this poem; this creates a sense of blackness and doom over the poem, giving a gothic image of the loss of the Holy Grail that is often mentioned in the poem and also the failed journey of the Fisher King leaves a negative feel on the poem.

The animal calls for water which are also not answered create a larger dramatic effect when linked to the failure of the Fisher King and Gothic images. What the Thunder said ends on an anti climax from big ideas of Indian and Hindu religion, which looks to be the saviour of the Wasteland to the thoughts of a single person. This image is directly linked to the fisher king myth so could mean hope or doom for the poem and the wasteland,
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because the questor has either become the fisher king, or has succeeded in their journey.

Eliot is able to create a immense dramatic journey throughout the wasteland however, the poems the burial of the dead, the fire sermon and what the thunder said are all examples of how Eliot is able to create such a huge feeling for the need to survive in the wasteland by using vivid and sometimes violent parataxis imagery. He achieves this by trying to get the reader involved with the poems.

Without these three poems in the wasteland the drama that is created in this selection would not exist because they are the foundations of the whole journey through the mind of Eliot during his mental breakdown and also through the mind of the questor in the wasteland who is searching for a life of hope rather than a life of damnation and stasis. The critics Cedric Watts and Hugh Kenner both have this view on Eliot's ability to create such drama in his poems and it is clear that these three poems from the wasteland are the best examples of how to show the techniques in which Eliot uses to create such amazing works of poetry.