

# Best Representative of Modernist Poetic Views: On T. S. Eliot's Literary Views and Poetic Practices

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## Abstract

T. S. Eliot is one of the greatest poet and the most important critic of the twentieth century in the English-speaking world. His poetic renovations have had a profound and enduring influence on a whole generation of poets, critics and intellectuals in the West. This thesis, on the basis of analyzing Eliot's literary views and his poetic practice, is a tentative endeavor to get the conclusion that Eliot's literary views and poetic practice embody the features of English and American modernist literature.

**Key words:** T. S. Eliot; Modernism; Literary views; Text analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

Thomas Sterns Eliot (1888-1965) is by far the greatest poet and the most important critic of the twentieth century in the English-speaking world. His contributions to the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature are complex, far-reaching, and perhaps more important than those of any other major figures of the period. His profound studies of the Western and Eastern philosophies, his genuine understanding of literature and culture of the past and present, his bold experiments at poetic expressions and his influence on the taste of his time have made him a most influential figure both inside and outside the 20<sup>th</sup> century literary world.

## 1. MODERNIST LITERATURE

### 1.1 Definition of Modernism

To give an explicit definition to modernism is very difficult. In order to set an explicit definition, one must have the background knowledge.

Firstly, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, various of philosophic thoughts influenced people's mind. Among them, Marx analyzed the external realm of social and economic process and laid bare the false consciousness by which the advantaged classes unwittingly rationalized their own condition. Freud investigated the inner realm of the psyche and showed how, through the processes of sublimation; consciousness might itself act as a sophisticated barrier to recognize the true nature of instinctual desire. And this is not just a personal problem to be diagnosed; it is the necessary basis of civilization. Meanwhile, Nietzsche diagnosed the whole tradition of western metaphysics from Socrates onwards as a subtle forth of falsehood reflecting an inner suppression and outer domination. Christianity in particular was a gigantic fraud perpetrated by the psyche on itself. In these cases it is not just that external appearances and the commonsensical or rational means of understanding them are limited and fallible. It is that such appearances and reasoning may be actively disguising contrary truths to which, by definition, there is no other access. The attempt of the European Enlightenment to bring about a rational and humane order not only suffered the dangers of rationalistic and utilitarian narrowness, to which romanticism was partly a reaction, but was tainted in itself. On the darkest interpretation, neither Enlightenment nor its alternatives were viable.

Secondly, about 1910, just as the automobile and airplane were beginning to accelerate the pace of human life, and Einsteins ideas were transforming our perception of the universe, there was an explosion of innovation and creative energy that shook every field of artistic endeavor. Artists from all over the world converged on

London, Paris, and other great cities of Europe to join in the ferment of new ideas and movements: cubism, constructivism, futurism, acmeism, and imagism were among the most influential banners under which the new artists grouped themselves. It was an era when major artists were fundamentally questioning and reinventing their art forms: Matisse and Picasso in painting, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein in literature, Isadora Duncan in dance, Igor Stravinsky in music, and Frank Lloyd Wright in architecture. The excitement, however, came to a terrible climax in 1914 with the start of the First World War, which wiped out a generation of young men in Europe, catapulted Russia into a catastrophic revolution, and sowed the seeds for even worse conflagrations in the decades to follow. By the end of WWI, the centuries-old European domination of the world had ended and the "American Century" had begun. For artists and many others in Europe, it was a time of profound disillusion with the values on which a whole civilization had been founded. But it was also a time when the avant-garde experiments that had preceded the war would, like the technological wonders of the airplane and the atom, inexorably establish a new dispensation. Among the most instrumental of all artists in effecting this change were a handful of American poets.

Throughout the nineteenth century natural science had been the paradigmatic form of truth statement; as was evident in the way the fiction of the period constantly modeled itself, whether literally or metaphorically, on science. But before the turn of the century science was losing some of its epistemological self-evidence and privileged status. Einstein's relativity theory was to catch the headlines and, like Heisenberg's "indeterminacy", it seemed to have an analogical application to other, nonscientific spheres.

In the middle of the nineteenth century physical science still seemed an irrefragably inductive structure built on the testable foundation of empirical observation. But as scientific inquiry addressed itself to astronomical and subatomic scales, the underlying notion of observation was increasingly problematic. It became evident that the universe at this level behaved in a different way from the commonsense world of everyday experience while the necessary questions could only be asked through highly speculative theory. The last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a running controversy as to whether the basic material of the universe behaved like waves or particles, a controversy for which there was no direct observation.

Thirdly, with the development of capitalism, industrialization brought human beings not only the booming of economy, but also constraint of human nature, especially the breakout of World War I. The catastrophe of WWI gave a much heavy blow to the capitalist world. WWI not only wasted large amounts of money, killed millions of people; more seriously, it ruined millions of people's mind. Long time war made people exhausted.

Disillusionment hovered in people's mind. More and more artists wanted to depict the states of human beings after WWI by certain kinds of art form.

To sum up, the ordered, stable and inherently meaningful worldview of the nineteenth century could not, wrote Eliot, accord with "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." (Ryan, 1991, p.294) In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there existed a kind of movement that rejected tradition and aimed at the radical transformation of human thought in relation to God, man, the world, and life, here and hereafter. That is modernist movement, a major cultural and artistic movement dominating the western world from approximately 1890 to 1940, depending on the country.

Modernism thus marks a distinctive break with Victorian bourgeois morality, rejecting nineteenth-century optimism. The modernist artists presented a profoundly pessimistic picture of a culture in disarray.

So, according to Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms (2000), modernism is "a general term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the literature and other arts of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including symbolism, futurism, expressionism, imagism, vorticism, dada and surrealism."

## 1.2 Characteristics of Modernist Literature

In literature, modernist movement rejected the traditional (Victorian and Edwardian) framework of narrative, description, and rational exposition in poetry and prose, in favor of a stream-of-consciousness presentation of personality, a dependence on the poetic image as the essential vehicle of aesthetic communication, and upon myth as a characteristic structural principle. Modernist literature is a literature of discontinuity, being based upon a sharp rejection of the procedures and values of the immediate past, to which it adopts an adversary stance, and aesthetically. Although so diverse in its manifestation, it was recognized as representing an abrupt break with all tradition. The aim of five centuries of European effort is openly abandoned. Modernist works may have to the unfamiliar reader a tendency to dissolve into chaos of sharp atomistic impressions, and some critics have deplored their drift towards what he describes as dehumanization, away from the human.

As to the characteristics of modernist literature, since it is an abrupt break with all tradition, the main characteristic is "to make it new". Modernist writers tend to see themselves as an avant-garde disengaged from bourgeois values, and disturb their readers by adopting complex and difficult new forms and styles, so to express new themes of their works.

### 1.2.1 New Themes of Modernist Literature.

It is generally accepted that to depict a suffering, even a morbid ego is the aim of almost all the modernist works. To express modern westerners' alienation,

anxiety and despair becomes the common feature of modernist literature. That's very different from the works of Victorian Age. Obviously, the appearance of these themes cannot be divided from the social environment of modernist writers. Several of crisis of western society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and harsh reality after WWI was the social environment in which modernist writers lived. In this turbulent era, the relationship between people was greatly broken, while human nature was seriously constrained and tortured. Under these circumstances, human being's self-esteem and self-confidence became less and less, while the feeling of despair and alienation became more and more serious. Living in this kind of social environment, human beings were suffering a lot in psyche. So, to explore the agony ego and to portray westerners' pessimistic mood and fragmentation became the main task of modernist writers. In a word, to depict the social reality by delineating the agony ego was the common theme of modernist literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

With the literature, modernist writers' emphasis turns from outside world to the inner world of human beings. So, to explore character's psyche and to study their inner world is the main task of modernist writers.

Often in presenting their themes, modernist writers create anti-heroes. An anti-hero is the person who is the main focus of the work as a hero should be. However, he is weak, ineffective, inapt, not like the romantic hero, who is strong, brave, courageous, and can rescue the fair maiden from the tower before the black knight kills her. The anti-hero achieves success through bungling, through not being as effective as he would think that he could be.

### 1.2.2 New Techniques of Modernist Literature

The distinctive feature of modernist literature is its strong and conscious break with traditional forms, perceptions, and techniques of expression, and its great concern with language and all aspects of its medium. It is persistently experimental. The modernists make great efforts to remake the language of literature, and they are interested in technique and craftsmanship. The conflict between dismantling narrative and plot continuity, and that between fracture and flow produce some distinctive literary forms in prose. Stream-of-consciousness, the use of myth as a structural principle, and the primary status give to the poetic image, all challenge traditional representation. Generally speaking, these new destine in craftsmanship and skills are the hallmarks of the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.3 T. S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, where his grandfather had helped to found the Washington University. Both of his parents were cultured people so that young Eliot received a good education, especially in classic literature. He went to Harvard in 1896 to study under such eminent scholars as George Santayana, Barrell Wendell, and Irving Babbitt, whose neo-humanism had a great influence on his intellectual growth. Eliot

read Dante, who was to become his most admired poet. He read Jules Laforgue, the French poet brilliant in portraying modern city-scope with his unusual wit and visual imagery, who endowed Eliot with a unique, fresh, and original tone. Eliot explored the poetry of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets like John Donne. His philosophical studies included intensive work in the English idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley, on whom he eventually wrote his Harvard dissertation. Bradley's emphasis on the private nature of individual experience had considerable influence on the private imagery of Eliot's poetry and on the view of the relation between the individual and other individuals reflected in much of his poetry. After he received his M.A. degree in Harvard and had studied in Paris and Oxford, he settled down in 1915 in England, teaching, working as a bank clerk, writing book reviews for publishers and all the while composing poetry. In 1915 he married an English writer, Vivienne Haigh-wood, but the marriage was not a success. She was highly neurotic and increasingly in bad health. The strain held on Eliot, too. In 1933 Eliot left his wife and she was eventually committed to a mental home where she died in 1947. Ten years later he married again and, for the 8 years that remained to him, at last knew happiness.

In 1910 when Eliot was still a student at Harvard University, he began to write his first famous poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. It first appeared in the magazine *Poetry* in Chicago in 1915 and was the titular poem of Eliot's first book of poetry published in England in 1917, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, in 1922. Eliot's second famous poem, *The Waste Land*, appeared first in the *Criterion* in October, 1922, then in *the Dial* (in America) in November, and finally in book form. *Poems 1909-1925* collected these earlier poems. Eliot's early poetry, until at least the middle 1920s, is mostly concerned in one way or another with the waste land, with aspects of the decay of culture in the modern western world which reads like the manifesto of the "Lost Generation" and established Eliot's position as the leader of new English and American poetry. On the other hand, Eliot's stylistic feature is unique. His early poems fall under the influence of the French symbolists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and of the English metaphysical poets of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but more immediately of the imagists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century American poetry. Here Eliot is partly following the aim of the Imagists to restore to poetry the precise use of visual images and to avoid all looseness of expression and sentiment, and is partly trying to convey the spontaneity of the ideas and feelings welling up in his mind, by resorting to the psychological principle of the association of ideas, and to the use more or less of the stream-of-consciousness technique. So in the poems there are no sequence of events, no thoughts and feelings of the speaker.

Eliot is also a most eminent critic in English literature. During his literary career, he wrote a large number

of essays, articles and book reviews that, apart from discussing significant and religious issues, introduced fresh ways of looking at literature, shed a new and bright light on specific writers and their works. He almost single-handedly brought about the reappraisal of the sixteenth and seventeenth century drama and metaphysical poetry; he demonstrated the necessity of reading American and English literature in relation to European and non-European traditions such as the ancient Greek and Roman world, the Renaissance, especially Dante. This not only bridges the gap between the past and the present, but also directs modern readers in what and how to understand literary texts. He reacted against Romanticism, helped to formulate a modern way of reading and writing that discarded romantic values and furthered an esthetic of "hard, dry" images and sentiments. These achievements, along with a critical revolution, revealed by his own poetry, mark Eliot as a modern critic of the first rank.

In an authoritative prose developed in his twenties, he wrote essays that helped to re-establish the premises upon which poetry was read and evaluated (and written), and in strange and impersonal-seeming poems written out of his own private torments, he did as much as anyone to redirect the course of twentieth-century poetry in English.

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## 2. ELIOT'S LITERARY VIEWS

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Eliot is a distinguished critic in the new poetry and criticism. With a sound training in philosophy and classic literature, his criticism possesses an air of reassurance. The basic themes of his criticism concern the relationship between tradition and individual talent, and between the past, the present and the future. It is no exaggeration to state that he is the most successful literary dictator in English and American history, one who wields the most decisive influence over literary development for a length of time. It is he who emphasizes the need to see the vitality of the literature of the past and to draw from literary traditions other than English literature. Collections of his critical essays include *The Scared Wood*, *Essays on Style and Order*; *Elizabethan Essays*, *Essays Ancient and Modern*, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism and After Strange Gods*. Eliot's criticism is in large measure an elaboration of and a guide to his own literary practice. The criticism and the poetry of Eliot always have an air of consummate maturity.

"Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." (Abrams, 1979, p.2219) This remark, from Eliot's essay on *The Metaphysical Poets* (1921), gives one clue to his poetic method from *Prufrock* through *The Waste Land*. In the attenuated romantic tradition of

the Georgian poets who were active when he settled in London, in their quietly meditative paternalism, faded exoticism, or self-consciously realistic descriptions of urban life, he saw an exhausted poetic mode being employed, with no verbal excitement or original craftsmanship. He sought to make poetry subtler, more suggestive, and at the same time more precise.

### 2.1 The Theory of "Unified Sensibility"

Ever since poetry has come into being, people who write poems and those who read them have been trying to figure out answers to the questions: What is poetry? Or what does it do or ought to do? Or of what use is it? The answers that have been attempted to make are various. Poets like Moliere or Racine in the seventeenth century believed that they wrote poems "for the entertainment of decent people." (Chenhong, 1996, p.8) And famous poets like Shelly were so confident of the function of poetry and their position as poets that they declared, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind." (ibid) The readers of Browning or Meredith believed that they draw religious aliment from their poems and regarded the poets as priests. Matthew Arnold, however, could not accept this idea, though he agreed that poetry was a capital substitute for religion, which it could give readers the sort of satisfaction of coffee without the harm of caffeine.

Needless to say, the use of poetry and people's realization of it are under the influence of the time, therefore it is almost impossible to give a definite answer once and for all. Eliot no doubt is aware of the difficulty in providing a universal truth about poetry, but he would certainly be happy to share his personal opinions about his beloved poetic work with anyone who was equally interested in it.

After the publication of his first poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, he came to write a number of critical essays on poetry, in which he definitely showed his admiration for the old literary traditions. In one of the essays *The Meta}physical Poets*, Eliot compares poets like John Anne, George Herbert, to whom he gives the title as that of the article, with John Milton, John Dryden and other later poets. The difference between the two groups, according to Eliot, is not that of literary ability, but one of greater essence. The former group is more mature and better than later poets like Tennyson or Browning in the way that they seem to have that "direct sensuous apprehension of thought or a creation of thought into feeling". To quote Eliot again, "Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thoughts as immediately as the odor of arose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary." (Abrams, 1979, p.2217) And this quality to unite thought and feeling and to put fragmented

experience into a new unity in poetry represents Eliot's ideal of poetic creation. As he phrases in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*: "I am struggling to attack the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul." (Abrams, 1979, p.2211) In the dissertation, he uses Bradley's "immediate experience", which precedes any division of subject and object and hence anything which is a personal state of mind, any personal emotion. But in his criticism Eliot avoids the term "immediate experience" and replaces it with "feeling" or "sensibility". The poet becomes the man who returns to this original immediate experience, to a unified sensibility by objectifying his feeling. Feeling and object cannot be distinguished, at least originally. In Eliot's dissertation this original state of immediate experience, which only later divides into subject and object, is a process applicable to all human beings. In Eliot's critical theory it becomes a description of the poetic process and most often of the ideal poetic process. The poet ought to have a unified sensibility; he ought to pass from feeling to object as if there were no distinction between them. The great poets achieve this and Eliot can construe a history of English poetry on the assumption that this unified sensibility split up, he considers, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and that he can devise a program for the restitution of this original unity.

According to Eliot, poets up to seventeenth century thought and felt and saw together but in the 17<sup>th</sup> century a fatal split occurred. After the triumph of scientific rationalism, poets only think (as they did in the eighteenth century), and, with the romantic reaction, they only feel. In the later nineteenth century there seem to be, in Eliot's scheme, a return to thinking, or rather a confusion (and not fusion) of thought and feeling which Eliot disparagingly calls "rumination". What is needed today is **reintegration**.

So, modernist poets should reunify intellect and emotion when creating poems. For the Imagists, the Wordsworthian style has become decadent-mushy, rhythmically inert, predictable in its imagery, and emotionally dishonest-it has turned poetry from something vital into something merely decorative. However passionate and innovative Wordsworth's own best poetry has been, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the tradition of meditative lyric had lost its vitality, degenerating into subjective posturing often wrapped in the cloudiness of nostalgia or dreams and presented in a flaccid language.

## 2.2 The Theory of "Impersonality"

In some essays, Eliot disserts that the work of art is located "somewhere between the writer and the reader; it has a reality which is not simply the reality of what the writer is trying to 'express', or of his experience of writing it, or of the experience of the reader or the writer as reader". The poem "in some sense, has its own life....The feeling, or emotion, or vision resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion

or vision in the mind of the poet." "The difference between art and the event is always absolute." (Eliot, 1950, p.32) A gulf between the individual experience and the poem is opened and it follows that the psychological process behind the poem cannot be a standard for the judging of poetry. "You cannot find a sure test for poetry, a test by which you may distinguish between poetry and mere good verse, by reference to its putative antecedents in the mind of the poet" (Eliot, 1950:34) The way in which poetry is written, Eliot recognizes, is not any clue to its value. Tracing the poem to its origin is discouraged since that "has no relation to the poem and throws no light upon it". Creation is "when something new has happened, something that cannot wholly be explained by anything that went before." Hence, poetry is not the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." (Eliot, 1950:38) It might be the representation of something quite remote from the poet's personal experiences. "Emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him." (ibid)

Thus Eliot arrives at his "impersonal theory of poetry". "Poetry is not", he says in an often quoted passage, "a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material". (Abrams, 1979, p.2212)

"The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." (Abrams, 1979, p.2209) These sayings are preceded in *Traditional and the Individual Talent* by the comparison of the poet's mind to a "shred of platinum" which serves to form sumptuous acid from two gases but is itself unaffected, remains "inert, neutral and unchanged".

Eliot defines poetry as an escape from emotion and personality-a definition that subsequent American poets have alternately embraced, argued with, and denounced in such a vigorous fashion that it may be useful to consider it as a linchpin of modernism.

True poetry, according to the poet and critic John Crowe Ransom, "only wants to see the world, to see it better." (Ransom, 2004) Poetry, he believed, is a superior form of knowledge, which gives us the fullness of human experience, not just the facts, and abstractions that suffice for knowledge in a scientific age. Ransom was the leading light of the Fugitives, a group of Southern Agrarian poets and critics formed at Vanderbilt University in the 1920's, who were distinctly at odds with northern industrialization and its glorification of science and progress. In a statement parallel to Eliot's famous declaration that he was "an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a classicist in literature, and a royalist in politics," Ransom proposed "program going something like this: in manners, aristocratic; in religion, ritualistic; in art, traditional." (ibid) Ransom's own poems

are marked by ceremony, both in style and subject—a slim body of perfect lyrics, which led his admirers to wish he had written more.

Eliot's own early poetry could only manage impersonality as an aspect of the dissociation of sensibility, so that rather than providing a cure it became the deepest symptom of the disease. For when the mind seeks such distance from the energies that put it into motion, it finds it almost impossible to escape the so-called the "pathos of reflective distance". There the intensity and clarity of Eliot's lines oddly isolate the speaking from the speaker, perhaps from any possibility of correlating an agent's investments in a particular life and particular body with the structure for reflection that persons must employ. Eliot seems fascinated by those moments in which the mind is paralyzed by its own lucid grasp of itself, so that it simultaneously has the last word and realizes that it has no word that can mediate the person's own specific investments in the very processes being enacted.

The discontinuous and "impersonal" Eliot of course provoked rebellion in some poets. John Berryman wrote, "Let's have narrative, and at least one dominant personality, and no fragmentation! In short, let us have something spectacularly NOT *The Waste Land*." (Lentricchia, 1994, p.322) But other younger poets disagreed. Charles Wright, after first reading the Four Quartets in the Army-base library in Verona, Italy, said, "I loved the music; I loved the investigation of the past," "The sound of it was so beautiful to me." (Lentricchia, 1994, p.330) The voice of the Quartets—meditative, grave, sorrowful, but also dry, experienced and harsh—has been important to poets from Wright to John Ashbery, because it allows the conversational tone of everyday life to enter into the discussion of the deepest subjects.

### 2.3 The Theory of "Objective Correlative"

In Eliot's opinion, the unified sensibility should end in an "objective correlative." Eliot looks the work of art as a describable object, a symbolic world which is amenable to analysis and judgment. He finds the term "objective correlative" for this symbolic world that he thinks of as continuous with the feeling of the poet, objectifying and patterning them. The term "objective correlative" is prominently used in the Hamlet essay of 1919. "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art", states Eliot in the Hamlet essay, "is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external acts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given the emotion is immediately evoked." (Eliot, 1950, p.111)

How concretely is this objective construct analyzable? Eliot in approaching a work of poetry thinks of it, first of all, as language. In all kinds of contexts, from his earlier writings to his late, Eliot repeats: "Literature must be

judged by language, it is the duty of the poet to develop language", "to preserve, and ever restore, the beauty of a Language". (Eliot, 1950, p.113) The language of poetry, Eliot asserts over and over again, must not "stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear". It should be "one's language as it is spoken at one's own time." (ibid) Thus praise is bestowed on the poets who restored poetry to an approximation of spoken language. Donne's language is called the "perfection of a common language", and Dryden "restored English verse to the condition of speech". (Eliot, 1950, p.62) But these widely quoted pronouncements must not again be taken too literally as a prescription of colloquialism. "We should", admits Eliot in an essay, "recognize that there should be, for every period, some standard of correct poetic diction, neither identical with, nor too remote from current speech." (Eliot, 1950, p.113)

All of Eliot's theories on poetry redirect the development of English poetry by breaking away from standardized Georgian poeticism and seeking in the cadences and idioms of contemporary life a current of vitality and tension equivalent to its moods and its mores. The juxtaposition, in imagery and rhythm, of rich fragments from the literary past with the living colloquial accents of the present provides both heady verbal ensembles and an apt medium for registering the condition of a disintegrating society.

Eliot's striking theories, along with his poems, make a tremendous impression on the public. It is enthusiastically received as a theory which has produced a complete severance between poetry and all previous beliefs and which expresses the disillusionment of a whole generation. The young revolution-minded poets who, purely technically, can learn more from Eliot than from anyone else and young intellectuals in general recognize in him their great spokesman.

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## 3. THEMES AND ANTI-HEROES OF ELIOT'S WORKS

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"What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre; not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike their own, an unreal world in which poetry can be spoken.... Then we should not be transported into an artificial world; on the contrary, our own sordid, dreary, daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured." (Kermode, 1975, p.141) This remark, from his essay *Poetry and Drama* (1951), illustrates Eliot's view on the use of poetry. In another essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, Eliot says, "It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarked or interesting.... The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in

working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all.” (Abrams, 1979, p.2211) Thus, he gets the conclusion of “impersonality”.

Most of Eliot’s poems depend on the assumption that the poet can enlarge his private consciousness to coincide with a collective consciousness. This assumption is so easily and persuasively sustained that it is easy to forget what an extraordinary arrogation of power it is. In most poems the reader is placed within everybody’s mind at once. An act of self-surrender has expanded the private mind of the poet into the universal sphere of the mind of Europe, into the whole generation after WWI. In fact, Eliot’s poetry can speak for and to modern Western civilization. His poetry articulates the woe that is in alienated neurotic egos; the atrophy and perversions of spirit in the crowd that flows over London Bridge; the pitifulness of its recreations, and the depressed resignation of humble people who expect nothing; the waste of living and partly living, of loving and partly loving; the scene of life turning to dust and ashes; the anxiety, and fear, and sick loathing; the consciousness impotence of rage at human folly, and the consequent self-contempt; and the death-wish.

The essential experience of Eliot’s poetry is the essential experience of an actual state of civilization, but in an extraordinarily refined and intelligent form. The interpretation he put upon it, and the cure he recommended, may seem out of touch with the common way of thinking. Yet by thus connecting the current form of the drive for the absolute and ideal with its relatively recent origins, and with a traditional form, he has rendered it the more intelligible. “He is the true voice of our western world.”(Moody, 1979:298)

### 3.1 Themes of Eliot’s Works

Eliot’s early poetry, until at least the middle 1920s, is mostly concerned in one way or another with the wasteland, with aspects of the decay of culture in the modern western world.

In his early poems, such as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Waste Land* and *Hollow Man* etc., by depicting different aspects of modern western people and their life, Eliot succeeds in reflecting modern western people’s alienation, anxiety and despair, thus demonstrating the decay of culture in the modern western world.

#### 3.1.1 Ugliness of Modern Life

In Eliot’s first poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, the focus of the writer’s attention could possibly be seen. Prufrock is a modern man, split, bewildered, tentative, half-seeing the spiritual desert in which he lives, half-conforming to its values. His name seems ridiculous: Proof and Rock suggest certainty; faith, stability; Pru and frock suggest prudence, prudery, femininity, conformism. This name suggests the theme: Love is ridiculous, modern mind does not have the ability to comprehend what love is. In the opening of the poem the evening is spread out “like a patient etherized upon a table”(Line 3): the image

proclaims the need for poetry to haul itself out of dreamy Romanticism, concern itself with twentieth-century realities, to be hard, precise, even unpleasant. The feeling of being under an anesthetic, of a sleep both unnatural and disturbed, follows all through the poem, particularly in the opening section, where the half-alive suburban streets seem designed to smother life, not nourish it:

... certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats.  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells...

(Line 3-6)

All these descriptions give readers an unpleasant feeling, illustrating the ugliness of modern western society.

In the whole poem, from the very beginning to the end, Prufrock is hesitating whether he should go to the party to meet with the lady whom he seems to love.

All the while he is asking himself the question, “Do I dare?” or “Would it have been worthwhile...?” And as an excuse for his delay in taking action, he says:

And indeed there will be time  
Time for you and time for me  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea,

(Line 23, 31-34)

Yet he says soon afterwards:

In a minute the day is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

(Line 47-48)

So what’s the use of ever trying to decide, since nothing is permanent and nobody is resolute to do anything. Actually as readers see it, love affair in this poem is not the writer’s only concern, nor Prufrock’s. In fact there is something more serious in the mind of Prufrock. Eliot presents the man as a representative of the intellectually-minded people in the modern world, who are constantly oppressed by the need to break out of the passionless reality in which their lives are wasted in talking nonsense as “shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?”(Line 122) or doing worthless things Like “I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.”(Line 51)

From Prufrock, the representative, we can find the numbness of modern western people. That’s the spiritual ugliness of modern western life.

In another famous poem, *The Waste Land*, Eliot also depicts ugliness of modern western life. *The Waste Land* is published 5 years after *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and wins its writer the great reputation in the field of English and American poetry for the first time. The poem is so well known that its name has become a tag for Eliot and the group of poets who have followed him. This group is commonly known as the “Waste Land

group.” In fact, *The Waste Land* makes Eliot at once the towering poet of modernism and its public face, the figure to those who care (and those who do not care) for modernism would need to pay attention, an awesome image, idolized and detested. Very quickly, *The Waste Land* ceases to be a poem to be read and becomes a phrase to be intoned, the essence of a perspective and an attitude, the signature of a lost generation: in other words, a cultural event that gets beyond Eliot's intention and control. The scandalous success of the poem, the reams of commentary it has spawned, its centrality for the teaching of modern literature, all have had the double effect of making Eliot a major force in world literature while obscuring the specific narrative of his life and poetry.

The symbolic wasteland comes from the Grail myth in many different civilizations. According to this ancient legend, the cup used by Christ at the last supper was brought to chapel where it brought life and fruitfulness to the land. A sacrilege was committed, however, and the grail vanished. Immediately the fruitful land became a barren wasteland. The greatest knights should then go on a quest to find the Grail, and their journey could only be fulfilled if they found the wounded fisher-king and asked him the right question. Eliot uses this medieval legend as a way to explore the modern spiritual condition: something holy is lost; as a result, we live in a spiritual wasteland.

First, the title gives readers a hint of the poem's theme. *The Waste Land* is a poem about spiritual dryness, about the kind of existence in which no regenerating belief gives significance and value to men's daily activities, sea brings no fruitfulness, and death heralds no resurrection.

At the beginning, Eliot wrote:

*April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful shoo; feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.*

(Line 1-7)

Under the pen of Eliot, on one hand, to the people in the land, spring brings them not the pleasing, inspiring emotion, but only agony lust “mixing”. On the other hand, winter snow covers the barren earth, and makes people forget it, thus “keeps us warm”. This tableau in which spring is cruel while winter is warm has a deep impression of ugly modern western society on readers' mind.

In this poem, the writer gives a deeper and more thorough exposure of the ugliness of western people's inner world than in his first poem. Here readers see sex without real love, marriage without loyalty and death without resurrection.

In the second part *A Game of Chess*, two women talk in London dialect about artificial teeth, pregnancy and abortion? One of the women says to the other whose husband is soon coming back from war.

*...and think of poor Albert,  
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time.  
And you don't give it him, there's other will, I said.  
Oh is there, she said. Something O'that, I said.  
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight  
look.*

(Line 147-151)

What a horrible absence of family responsibility and loyalty to love among these women! In the next part the readers are led by Tiresias, a hermaphrodite, to a young typist's apartment where she meets a house agent's clerk. After dinner, they make love, and then the man leaves. But how is the girl?

*She turns and looks a moments in the glass,  
Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass,  
“Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over,  
When lovely woman slops to folly and  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand  
And puts a record on the gramophone.*

(Line 149-156)

The lovelessness of casual sex between the girl and her lover is strong evidence of the ugliness of modern western people's inner world.

In the fourth part *Death by Water*, Phlebas the Phoenician, a representative of the commercially minded people whose only concern in the world is profit and loss, died and yet would never be resurrected. The tragedy of Phlebas also happens in the commercial city London in modern times.

*Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many  
I had not thought death had undone so many  
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,  
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.  
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street  
To adhere Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours,  
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.*

(Line 61-68)

In this place, Eliot compared the busy Londoners going to work over London Bridge to people going to hell over a bridge in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The implication is that people who have forgotten God in their earthly activities are eternally unable to achieve their desire of seeing God after death. The poet actually drew a series of sketches for the morally corrupted men in this poem. Besides those mentioned above, there are also the fortune-teller Madame Sosostirs, the woman on the marble chair, and Mrs. Porter and her daughter, etc. All these people make up a totally material world with no place at all for any traditional moral standards.

### 3.1.2 Spiritual Emptiness in the Modern Wasteland

Spiritual emptiness is the outstanding feature of modern western people. Many modernist writers manifest this theme in their works. There is no exception to Eliot.

In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Prufrock



seems an upper-class, modern man. While, as he walks through the streets, as he attends his tea-party, where the women trivialize greatness in their daily chatter about Michelangelo, as he talks with the woman who distracts him with faro suggestions of sexuality, he is tormented by modern, genteel man's self-consciousness, his inability to act spontaneously. He imagines the Eternal Footman, still grander version of his lofty equivalent on earth, holding his coat and snickering; if he says what is on his mind, the woman will say, "that is not what I meant at all./That is not it, at all" (Line 97-98), for indeed, he and she do not converse, but talk in parallel lines of self-obsession. And even as he endures the shabby triviality of his life, he cries out in desperation: "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (Line 5), and struggles to articulate his frustration, his need for something to give meaning to emptiness. He aches to "disturb the universe", to ask some "overwhelming question"-what it is he has not quite formulated, but it is something to do with the "lonely man in shirt-sleeves", smoking pipes in the windows of the streets he has gone through, each in his own comportment, shut-off, sterile.

And in the end, he will never ask it-afraid of his crushing, uncomprehending scorn of the lady, of the eyes that "fix you in a formulated phrase", so that he sees himself, like a living butterfly in a collection, "pinned and wriggling on the wall", —another of the cruel-scientific images that run through the poem. Prufrock, like so many twentieth century people, tries to define himself through literature, and though he would like to be Lazarus, risen from the dead, returned with eternal truths, he knows he is more likely to be a balding, ridiculous version of John the Baptist, his head served up at a middle-class feast. Though he would like to be Hamlet, he cannot even aspire to be Polonius, merely an attendant lord. And though he would like to be a modern beau, in white flannel trousers with turn-ups, parading the beach, listening to the mermaids, he knows that such contacts with mythic sensuality are not for him. In the evocative conclusion Eliot produces a picture of extraordinary romantic beauty and suggestiveness, only to deny its relevance, insist on its escapist nature:

*I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black  
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*

(Line 126-131)

It is not the sea that drowns him, it is the life he lives, the daily round of streets and tea-parties and coffee-spoons. Prufrock, in that sense, is already a drowned man.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot succeeds in depicting spiritual emptiness of modern western people. Eliot's view of the world, his wasteland derogation of possibilities, is exactly right for the period after WWI. He becomes

the spokesman in verse for that generation. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot overtly contrasts the glories of the past with the sordidness of the present.

In the second part *A Game of Chess*, a young man meets a lady in a luxurious hotel. Although the lady has applied powder and paint, and dresses "in vials of ivory and colored glass", she seems very senseless, even be on tenterhooks

*My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.  
'speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.  
'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'*

(Line 111-114)

However, the young man behaves cold and detached, dumbstruck. It makes the lady more nervous and anxious.

*'what shall I do now? What shall I do? '  
'I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street  
'With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow  
'What shall we ever do?'*

(Line 131-134)

Through this plot, modern western people's meaninglessness and senselessness is displayed clearly.

In the third part *The Fire Sermon*, the lovelessness of casual sex between the typist and her lover, "The young man carbuncular", is strong evidence of the spiritual emptiness of modern western people.

At the evening hour that strives homeward. Tiresias witnesses a scene of unholy union: the typist entertaining her young lover.

*The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
The meal is ended she is bored and tired,  
Endeavors to engage her in caresses  
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.  
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
Exploring hands encounter no defense;  
His vanity requires no response,  
And makes a welcome of indifference.*

(Line 235-242)

The form, a flawless quatrain in iambic pentameters, which has been perpetuated by many poets as a form of love poetry, is here depicting a relationship, which is loveless. In fact, the act is committed in such a feelingless manner that it amounts to the "waste feeling". This pair, the typist and her young man, has absolutely no knowledge of good and evil. Their meeting is neither romantic nor interesting.

The last part *What the Thunder Said* gives us a horrible image of the wasteland: people dying of thirst are crying for rain. But their cry is only responded by "reverberation of thunder of spring over distant mountains". And the mountains fall into chaos crated by the desperate people.

*Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit.  
There is not even silence in the mountains  
But dry sterile thunder without rain  
There is not even solitude in the mountains  
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl*

From doors of mud cracked houses

(Line 340-345)

The dryness of the land without water represents the spiritual emptiness of people without faith in God.

### 3.1.3 Loss of Humanity and Despair

The idea expressed in *The Hollow Man*, which was written after *The Waste Land*, is very profound, though it is much shorter than the previous poem. While *The Waste Land* describes the various phenomena in the corrupted modern world, *The Hollow Man* tolls the bell for the destruction of Man. Eliot got this title of his poem from the novel *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. Though it refers to a commercially-minded manager on a ship doing trade in Congo, it is actually the symbol of modern man in the eyes of Eliot. The poet here is declaring that as men become profit-oriented, they have gradually lost the qualities that make them human, and finally they would lose their hope in living and fall into the dark sea of despair.

The poem depicts the spiritually poor modern man as a “stuffed man” or a “scarecrow” that has no inner conviction but simply follows others.

*Our dried voices, when  
We whisper together  
Are quiet and meaningless  
As wind in dry grass  
Or rat's feet over- broken glass  
In our dry cellar*  
.....

(Line 5-10)

Let me also wear  
Such deliberate disguises  
Rat's coat, crow skin, crossed stages  
In a field  
Behaving as the wind behaves

(Line 31-35)

For men that show no better qualities than other creatures or machines, what result should be expected but “the shadow of Death”?

*Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the shadow*

(Line 72-76)

And the footsteps of the Shadow are echoed again and again in the last part of the poem, till in the end the poet points out plainly like a prophet the fate of human beings.

*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but with a whimper*

(Line 9.5-98)

The repetition of the first three sentences prepares the suspense before the final terrible prophecy. What Eliot is talking about here is the Big Bang Theory propagated by a

few physicists in his time who predicted that some comets would bump into the earth and destroy the whole planet, or the like. Nevertheless as Eliot looks at it, how the world would end externally is irrelevant because man's life has become so meaningless that all he could do is “whimper” in despair like a lost child for whom no body cares. Therefore the destruction of the world, if there is one, will be caused by man himself in his own self-degradation.

From the above analysis of Eliot's early poems we can see that the poet has successfully presented to his readers the serious problems existing in the modern world. *The Waste Land* is enthusiastically received as a work which has produced a complete severance between poetry and all beliefs and which has expressed the disillusionment of whole generation.

### 3.2 Anti-Heroes of Eliot's Works

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the development of industrialization and the breaking out of WWI, modern western people found their orderly life has been destroyed and their hope and convictions has been lost, they become aimless for they cannot understand the modern world. Eliot, a great thinker, looks into the true colors of the world and the modern western people's spiritual world. In his many poems, Eliot has portrayed anti-heroes who feel a sense of his own inadequacy and impotence, and who are painfully aware of the banality and futility of his own life as well as of life in general. The anti-heroes struggle against his situation, but they are predestined to fail, partially as a result of what they are, partially as a result of inadequate striving---a further sign of their inherent inadequacy. These figures become representatives of modernist literature, and have influenced other modernists a great deal.

#### 3.2.1 Prufrock

Prufrock is a middle-aged man who is bored with his ineffectual life and is faced with despair because he wishes but is unable to break away from his meaningless existence or to find the right answers to “the overwhelming questions” always occurring to him. He plans to visit his lover in one evening. As usual, when a man is going to meet with his lover, he will be pleasing to go without hesitation. But it is difficult for Prufrock. In the whole poem, he is thinking of the process of meeting with his lover, and asking himself to do it by his interior monologue.

Let us go then, you and I  
When the evening is spread out against the sky

(Line 1-2)

Here you/I polarity is the ego/id polarity of himself. “You” are the interior self of Prufrock. “I”, the outward self, want to go, but “You”, as if a mirror of “I”, are reluctant to go and always persuade “I” not to go. So “I” am hesitant all the time. In this way, Eliot succeeds in portraying a hesitant modern figure.

Prufrock is also very timid, unconfident and lack of courage that he dares not express his love to his lady. He is timid when he thinks about the women's "talking of Michelangelo" because he is afraid that he can't meet her demand. He is unconfident because:

With a bald spot in the middle of my hair-  
(They will say: "How his hair is glowing thin!")  
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin-  
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")  
(Line 40-44)

Although he knows the women, knows everything well, he still dares not show his feeling, then he has to ask himself again and again:

Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?  
.....  
So how should I presume?  
.....  
And how should I begin?  
(Line 45-46, 54, 69)

His hesitation and lack of self-confidence makes him do nothing but only regret:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws.  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.  
(Line 73-74)

But the desire to meet the lady is still in his mind. After "sleeps so peacefully", he still asks himself;

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices.  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?  
(Line 79-80)

In the end, "I", the id, can't persuade "you", the ego, to meet the lady. Prufrock has to accept the arrangement of fate:

I grow old ...I grow old...  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.  
(Line 120-121)

From this description, we know Prufrock lives in a seedy, raw world. He is the representative of modern man: split, bewildered, tentative, half-seeing the spiritual desert in which he lives, half-conforming to its values.

### 3.2.2 Gerontion

*Gerontion* is another Eliot's famous poem, written in 1920. Gerontion is an old man, living in a decayed house, sitting emotionless all day, waiting for rain. From his draughty windows, Gerontion looks up a barren hill, recalling his past, while

*I was neither at the hot gates  
Nor fought in the warm rain  
Nor knee deep in the salt-marsh, heaving a cutlass,  
Bitten by flies, fought.*  
(Line 3-6)

"The hot gates" refers to the battle of Thermopylae in ancient Greece; "the salt marsh" refers to a battle

in modern tropical warfare. In all his life, Gerontion has nothing serious or important to take pride in. He is so commonplace. It's very sad for him to recall this. Gerontion is lonely and hopeless in his world. Life without belief seems natural for most people. People have lost the mentality and are unable to understand the profoundest truth and their values on morality and religion. Seeing the evil people do hypocritical things, the tragedy of the Jew who has committed sexual disease..... facing this rotten world. Gerontion can't see any hope but becomes desperate, skeptical and passionless.

I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:  
How should I use them for your closer contact?  
(Line 59-60)

He is completely hopeless, sighing, "I have no ghosts," and sits in his decayed house, waiting for death.

### 3.2.3 Hollow Man

Hollow man is another figure that Eliot has created as a representative of modern man. But hollow man is different from Prufrock in which hollow man reflects modern men's spiritual emptiness and their insignificant life.

At the very beginning, through two allusions, readers are immediately included in this desecration that the hollow men are walking corpses, and their emptiness is the vacuity of pure mind detached from any reality. The hollow man lives in a world of desolation. It is a world of passionless folks who gather together in the modern wasteland. Then Eliot mentions the dead, calling them "Those who have crossed...to death's other kingdom." In their eyes, "we" are "not as lost/ violent souls, but only/ As the hollow men/ the stuffed men" (Line 76-78), that is, only flesh and blood, without souls.

At the same time, the hollow men dare not meet "eyes", symbols of some kind of belief with wisdom.

There, the eyes are  
Sunlight on a broken column  
(Line 22-23)

Because the hollow men are empty in spirit, they are afraid of those who have beliefs and wisdom. They prefer to keep their ridiculous life, to live in their "dead land", "cactus land" which is dry and lifeless.

Hollow men remain sightless in their hollow valley; they have lost their direction and don't know what they should do:

Here we go round the prickly pear  
Prickly pear, prickly pear  
Here we go round the prickly pear  
At five O'clock in the morning.  
(Line 68-71)

In this poem, based on a nursery rhyme, Eliot points out that the life of modern man is almost hopeless and worthless, characterized by activities centered on bodily and material satisfaction.

From the above analysis, we can find that Eliot has created some figures as representatives of modern people vividly. These figures, from different aspects, embody the



The underlined phrases or sentence are added notes to by Eliot himself, who must have known the unpopularity of all his stories and ideas and wants his readers to approach his poem a bit more easily.

In his poems, Eliot has an extensive use of literary allusions. References are constantly made to past literary works, obvious or not. In *Prufrock*, a more obvious allusion would be to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;" (Line 111). Because Eliot alludes to *Hamlet*, readers can arguably know what the overwhelming question in line actually is: to be or not to be? Apart from Shakespeare, Eliot also alludes to Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress" to have squeezed the universe into a ball. By making that allusion, Eliot is also confirming *Prufrock's* anxiety towards women and his sexual inadequacy because in Marvell's poem: a man's young mistress will not engage in sexual intercourse with him.

Eliot's use of these allusions makes his poems very difficult to understand. But one of his purposes of using allusions is to reflect the fragmentation of western people and western society.

## 4.2 Poetic Techniques of Eliot's Poems

Apart from themes and stylistic features of Eliot's poems, the techniques cannot be disregarded. As a modernist writer, in order to "make it new" in his poems, Eliot has applied many techniques, no matter in form, structure, or in the rhetorical devices. These techniques present a fresh new look to readers and have influenced other modernists a lot.

### 4.2.1 Dramatic Monologue

In his early poems, for the aim of expressing the fragmentary, isolated and desperate feeling of modern man, Eliot has created many images. But how can a collection of images add up to anything more than simply a list of images? What is going to unify a style, which assembles a series of fragments? Eliot solves this problem by making his poem dramatic monologue, spoken by an invented persona like *Prufrock* or *Tiresias*, so that the images, as we encounter them, are all linked, no matter how discrete they may appear, because they are expressions of a single personality. In fact, as early as 1933, in *The use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot has remarked that he considers the theater to be the ideal medium for poetry. In 1936, after the moderate success of *Murder in the Cathedral*, he generalized further by saying, in a radio talk, that he believed poetry to be "the natural and complete medium for drama." (Eliot, 1950:211) In terms of the language discussed already, the speaking personalities operate as an objective correlative, something apart and different from the poet, towards the clarification of which all the images in the poem contribute. The speaking persona, in other words, is a way of escaping the omnipresence of the poet's personality while at the same time linking the poem to a coordinating consciousness.

Thus, a key technique in reading Eliot is to stop looking for conventional means of coordinating a long poem (a story, a developing description, an argument) and to focus instead on what each apparently discontinuous part of the poem reveals about the consciousness of the speaking voice, for the definition of the consciousness is the main purpose of the poem. Readers may, for example, puzzle over what can possibly be the logical connection between, say, the fog, the women who come and go talking of Michelangelo, a crustacean, coffee, Lazarus, Hamlet, and the sea girls. The connection is clear enough; however, they are all expressions of and therefore images illuminating *Prufrock* himself.

In *The Waste Land*, the technique, although more complex, is essentially the same. *The Waste Land* constructed on the analogy of the string quartet (though with five movements instead of four), illustrates Eliot's tendency to imitate musical forms in poetry. The basic theme of this extremely difficult work is taken from the Holy Grail saga, interpreted here in the light of old fertility myths and customs. Quite heterogeneous themes from all periods of history succeed one another in a bewildering manner, from the most concrete to the most abstract, from the most intimate to the most remote, from the most brutal to the most transfigured. Allusions in several languages evoke a motley host of disparate thoughts and patterns from every field, including the philosophy and history of religion. Constant variations are rung on the dominant chord of the shabbiness of eroticism. This striking, mysterious poem made an immediate and tremendous impression on the public. The young revolution-minded poets who, purely technically, can learn more from Eliot than from anyone else and young intellectuals in general recognized in him their great spokesman. There have a multiplicity of voices, male and female, young and old, in a variety of languages and styles, and the shifts are unannounced, so that often we do not even know who is speaking, simply that it is someone who sounds different from the voice immediately before. But the unity of the poem emerges from the fact that these all merge into a single personality, something we might call the voice of the modern consciousness. The fact that this modern consciousness can not settle into a fixed perception of things or even into a consistent language helps to convey a good deal of the sense of the strain of modern life, an important point of the poem. In the poem, Eliot reminds readers of this in the only one of his notes to the poem which is of direct interpretative help to the reader:

*Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants melts into the Phoenician sailor; and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman*

and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is  
the substance of  
the poem.

(Note to line 218)

Readers need, therefore, in appreciating Eliot's style, attend to flow the images serve to illuminate a distinctive personality at a modern, fractured, multilingual, urban, and emotionally uncertain state. The personality is by no means unified; in fact, what emerges from Eliot's poems, especially his early poems, as a principal concern, is the inability of the modern consciousness either to see unity in the world outside or to bring to a disordered world any sense of inner integrity. What unity the poems possess comes from what is revealed to readers about this new conception of the modern self. The structure of the poem is totally modernistic: five unequal sections with no logical continuity, no unity, no rhyme scheme, a lot of length and rhythm in lines but not a totally free verse form. It can be seen as an amazing anthology of impressions and hallucinations as it describes the WWI seen from Eliot's point of view.

#### 4.2.2 Images

Eliot's many poems, especially his early poems, formulate on a wide range of images to depict a chaotic modern world. As the main member of imagist movement, Eliot strictly abides by its tenet. According to imagist movement, no matter what the poet has to communicate, he or she must do so in terms of objective images: clear, objective, precise, concentrated, and fresh symbols which capture, in the way they are presented, the emotional qualities under exploration.

According to Pound, the image is itself the speech. Poet should not be telling readers how they feel; they should be presenting readers with impersonal images which capture the feeling, so that readers can react to the images without the meddlesome interference of the poetical personality. Poems, in other words, should not be interpreting the experience for readers; they should provide the objective images by which readers can discover what matters. Now, taking *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land* as an example, we can analyze the images of Eliot's poems.

*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is basically in the form of a dramatic monologue where the speaker is talking to his alter ego. Prufrock, a man like his peers, feels isolated and incapable of decisive action to vocalize his thoughts. To reflect this theme, in the whole poem, Eliot uses many images. The evening is like "a patient etherized upon a table", an image proclaiming the need for poetry to haul itself out of dreamy romanticism, concern itself with twentieth-century realities, to be hard, precise, and even unpleasant.

During that time, Prufrock is walking through "half-deserted streets", with "the muttering retreats", "cheap hotels" and "sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells", all

the images used to show Prufrock's isolated, anxiety and depressed mood. In the following lines, we can see other images. "The yellow fog", as a cat, is used to illustrate Prufrock's sexual desire and hesitation. "To turn back and descend the stair" is to say that Prufrock is afraid to make further effort. "To measure out life with coffee spoon" symbolizes the meaninglessness and despair of upper class. "Sprawling on a pin" shows that Prufrock is struggling painfully. "Braceleted and white and bear arms" makes clear that there still exists love desire in Prufrock's mind, although he is hesitant and unconfident. In short, in a roundabout manner, the poem is not structured in any logical pattern of thoughts, but rather consists of a series of loosely associated ideas, images and symbols to reflect Prufrock's sensations, emotions and feelings.

The images in *The Waste Land* function the same. First, the title, "the waste land" is an image. On one hand, it refers to the barren western land after WWI; on the other hand, and even more important, it symbolizes the empty, meaningless and desperate spiritual world. Throughout the poem, many images of death and immortality are seen. Throughout *The Waste Land*, Eliot portrays death and immortality in a both positive and negative manor.

In section one, the title, *The Burial of The Dead*, clearly states examples to show readers that Eliot gives the image of death a negative connotation and a positive connotation at times throughout the poem. Eliot seems to incorporate the image of death throughout this poem and he seems to accept the idea of it because he speaks of it so freely. In the beginning of the poem he speaks of April being the cruelest month of the year. It seems that he favors winter, which represents death and darkness, as opposed to April, which is a season of rebirth and life. Then he speaks of Madame Sosostris, the famous clairvoyant, who tells the man to fear death by water. This particular statement gives death a negative connotation because drowning in water is looked upon in the poem as 'scat' and something to beware of.

#### 4.2.3 Stream-of-Consciousness and Montage

As a technique, stream-of-consciousness refers to the whole range of awareness and emotive-mental response of an individual, from the lowest pre-speech level to the highest fully articulated level of rational thought. The assumption is that in the mind of an individual at a given moment his or her stream of consciousness is a mixture of all the levels of awareness, an unending flow of sensations, thoughts, memories, associations, and reflections. In literature, if the exact content of the mind ('consciousness') is to be described at any moment, then these varied, disjointed, and illogical elements must find expressions in a flow of words, images and ideas similar to the unorganized flow of the mind. That is to say, it's a literary method of representing such a blending of mental processes in literary characters, usually in an unpunctuated or disjointed form of interior monologue.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock may be understood as a stream of consciousness passing through the mind of Prufrock. The “you and I” of line 1 may be different aspects of his personality. The words in the lines are those of speech or silent thought, and as does thought, Prufrock jumps from one subject to another without the transitions that are expected in literature. For example, the first stanza is the interior monologue of Prufrock, but the following two sentences are the thought in his mind about the lady. Between them, there exist no any logical connections or linking words. That’s the flow of one’s thought. From line 15 on, his thought comes back to reality. While in line 29, his thought skips from the present to the past. At the same time, the lady with whom he’ll meet is still in his mind. He even imagines what they will say.

Montage is another technique often used in Eliot’s poems. Originally, montage is a technical term of movie, referring to the choosing, cutting and joining of different pieces of film to indicate a passage of time, changes of place, etc. In literature, it is used to show different scenes putting together, without any connections. The best illustration is section II, *A Game of Chess*, of *The Waste Land*. In this section, the first scene is in a luxurious hotel, when the anxiety lady is insisting someone to speak with her. While the second scene is set in a pub, a monologue by a lower-class woman who gives an account of her advice to a friend about how to behave now that her husband is returning from the army. Intervening is the bartender’s customary announcement of closing time, symbolizing more than the closing of the pub: HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME.

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had become increasingly clear that the lyrical heritage of romanticism was exhausted and that what was needed was a completely fresh start, capable of evolution. Yet up to Eliot, all attempts to make a fresh start had proved abortive. Eliot is the first to accomplish successfully the decisive step forward. The revolutionary aspect of Prufrock and of Eliot’s other early poems appears first in their rhythmic element. Without completely giving up the traditional rules of versification learned at school, Eliot allows the infinitely varied rhythm of natural speech, for which he has an extremely sensitive ear, to establish its irrefutable prosodic authority. In doing so, he discovers, and demonstrates to others, how to write workable free rhythms in English, something that neither Southey, Whitman, W. E. Henley, nor any of their successors has been able to accomplish. Eliot arrives at free rhythms by a route quite different from the one German poetry had so successfully embarked upon a century and a half earlier. The one was, so to speak, an upward route through the imitation of classical verse forms; the other a downward route reached by capturing the cadences of common speech. As a result, English free rhythms, as introduced by Eliot, lack the solemnity and pathos of the German

ones. This revolutionary aspect of Eliot’s technique is paralleled by his handling of language, his avoidance of all current poeticisms and archaisms, his fight against the cliché, the unexpectedness of his metaphors. In his poems, Eliot mixes the techniques of free verse with snatches of extremely colloquial conversation, echoing his sense of kinship with the unlettered masses, and with juxtapositions of past and present time, reflecting both his philosophical concern with the concept of time and his belief in the past as significant in terms of meaningful ritual and tradition.

All these techniques used in Eliot’s works make an abrupt break with tradition, and make English poetry have greater expressive force.

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## CONCLUSION

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It is almost impossible to overstate Eliot’s influence or his importance to twentieth-century poetry. Through his essays and especially through his own poetic practices, he plays a major role in establishing the modernist conception of poetry: learned, culturally allusive, ironic, and impersonal in manner (but, in his case, packed with powerful reserves of private feeling), organized by associative rather than logical connections, and difficult at times to the point of obscurity. As an important poet and critic, Eliot’s influence on the taste of his time is most conspicuous; he has done more than anyone else to promote the shift of sensibility away from the taste of “Georgians” and to reevaluate the major periods and figures of the history of English poetry. He reacts most strongly against romanticism, he criticizes Milton and the Miltonic tradition, and he exalts Dante, and the metaphysical poets, Dryden and the French symbolists as “the tradition” of great poetry. At the same time; Eliot is equally important for his theory of poetry, which buttresses this new taste and which is much more coherent and systematic than most commentators. His concept of “impersonal poetry”, “unified sensibility” and “objective correlative” and his emphasis on “the perfection of common speech” as the language of poetry---all these are crucial critical matters for which Eliot found memorable formulas, if not always-convincing solutions.

As a great poet, Eliot’s impact exists in the poems, which give a fresh and completely different impression on readers. The themes, the anti-heroes, the stylistic features and techniques in his poems reject the traditional (Victorian and Edwardian) framework. In effect, by his poems, Eliot demonstrates that a poet’s business is not just reporting feeling, but extending feeling, and creating a shape to convey it.

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