

T.S. Eliot's Powerful Use of Fragmentation in The Waste Land

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T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is an elaborate and mysterious montage of lines from other works, fleeting observations, conversations, scenery, and even languages. Though this approach seems to render the poem needlessly oblique, this style allows the poem to achieve multi-layered significance impossible in a more straightforward poetic style. Eliot's use of fragmentation in *The Waste Land* operates on three levels: first, to parallel the broken society and relationships the poem portrays; second, to deconstruct the reader's familiar context, creating an individualized sense of disconnection; and third, to challenge the reader to seek meaning in mere fragments, in this enigmatic poem as well as in a fractious world. On the most superficial level, the verbal fragments in *The Waste Land* emphasize the fragmented condition of the world the poem describes. Partly because it was written in the aftermath of World War I, at a time when Europeans' sense of security as well as the land itself was in shambles, the poem conveys a sense of disillusionment, confusion, and even despair. The poem's disjointed structure expresses these emotions better than the rigidity and clarity of more orthodox writing. This is evinced by the following from the section "The Burial of the Dead":

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower

of rain; we stopped in the colonnadeAnd went on in the sunlight, into the Hofgarten,And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt Deutsch.And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,And I was frightened. He said, Marie,Marie, hol..... middle of paperze anything other than the awful finality of despair. The sense of healing and salvation at the end of The Waste Land indicates that there is hope for meaning, even in fractured worlds and obfuscated poems. But it is up to each of us to discover it.NOTES1. T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land, in Selected Poems (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962).2. In his preface to his notes on The Waste Land, Eliot writes, "Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail Legend: From Ritual to Romance (Cambridge). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it . . . to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble" (68).3. See Eliot's notes to The Waste Land.

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