

Meta Theater



2026 ON TOUR IN INDIA: JULY 24-26 KOLKATA
JULY 30-31, AUGUST 1-2 BANGALORE

Some aspects of T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'

by Dr Martina Taubenberger

'The Waste Land' is not a narrative text. It is condensed language, in the true sense of the word. The text lies before us like "*a heap of broken images*". Mirror shards are superimposed and constantly rearranged with literary quotations, mythological references, contemporary history and auto-biographical clues. 'The Waste Land' eludes any comprehensible approach. Reading it means to get into it, to let thoughts, images, characters, voices and dialogues pass by, to not hold on to them, but to contemplate, allowing them to dissolve. There are, however, basic chords that resonate beyond doubt. T.S. Eliot wrote this text under the impression of the First World War. Resignation and an exhaustion with the world are palpable. The alienation of man from nature, from himself, also society's alienation resulting in the isolation of man are central themes.

April is the cruellest month - Instead of leaving winter with a light and positive feeling, instead of exchanging rigidity for warmth, spring is depicted here as a violent act of nature, in which the plants have to struggle through the earth into the light. In contrast, winter seemed merciful: *Winter kept us warm, covering earth in forgetful snow.* Isolation becomes a place of refuge.

Eliot keeps playing with our expectations, turns seemingly familiar metaphors and subjects upside down. Images of innocence and lightness take a turn for something horrific and violent. Motifs of fertility and sexuality are stripped of all sensuality and meaning. It is about the satisfaction of instincts, about violence. Abortion, rape, infertility, drought are recurring themes.

The deepest gulfs lurk where dialogue seems to stall in banality and convention. We hardly notice the abyss at first hearing or reading. And it is through the breaks that the truth is perceived; where language seems to fail, another thread is spun.





The hyacinth girl, who in her silence tells of a rape; the fortune teller who, in the face of an ominous providence, hastily changes the subject; the exchange between two old acquaintances, like a conversation over the garden fence: *That corpse you planted last year in your garden. Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?*

Nothing is clear in 'The Waste Land', everything triggers several interpretations.

Water as the much needed rescue from the merciless drought (*If there were water / And no rock / If there were rock / And also water / And water / A spring / A pool among the rock / If there were the sound of water only*) immediately brings death for the drowning man (*Those are pearls that were his eyes*). And even the river itself - a geographical constant and a symbol of the passing of time - is dying, has lost its significance as a fertile lifeline (*The river's tent is broken ... The nymphs are departed*).

In all of this, Eliot's language shines and sparkles in all its brilliance. Beguiling us with beauty, it misleads us again and again, like in a fever dream. Eliot is a master of seduction and of deception. He imitates the voices of his protagonists, appropriating their stories, and even says so in the working title of the poem: *He Do the Police in Different Voices*. This polyphony ensures that the text is not confined to one layer of meaning, that it can be questioned again and again. Its artfully fragmented and unfinished, almost interchangeable quality makes 'The Waste Land' possibly the most poignant work about the zeitgeist of the early 20th century and concurrently an absolutely timeless human expression. Inconsistency and the unfinished become a survival strategy: *"these fragments I have shored against my ruins"*.

Eliot's dive into the maelstrom of ideas and images is finally resolved by an invocation in Sanskrit: "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih". The word means "peace", whether in resignation or in hope remains open.

Louis Panizza set designer

From the very beginning, I was fascinated by the archaeological aspect of the text, how layer by layer deeper narratives are uncovered. So I wanted to make it possible on stage to go on a search for clues, as it were, in a material that is as dense as possible, such as stone, metal and plaster. This is not a decoration here, but a real resistance that needs to be broken open.



Ardhi Engl

composer and musician

One starting point was to add simplicity and root to the text's worlds and references, times and places. With the help of sounds I aimed for something directly relating to the here and now, a feeling of something concrete, yet malleable. This can only fully bloom when the people who dedicate themselves to this cause actually meet and work, each with their own background. I wanted to give the sound plenty of space, without references and categories, but create a fluctuating atmosphere through the interaction of the people on stage. Building bridges for the actress opens a path into a musical dialogue.

"you are the music, while the music lasts" (T.S. Eliot)

The following instruments are used: trash kalimba, shuttlecock feathers, saz, stick-violin, stick-cello, PVC fujara, loops





Nicole Kleine
performer

...

Tracing the different moods and rapid changes in mood, feeling how profound and versatile, how timeless they are, with regard to world events and our dealings with each other and with nature. A memorial.

And never boring. There is always something to discover, be it because a context is revealed, or the origin, the meaning or because I relate it to my life situation.

Then the shared laughter in rehearsals, the stumbling over the language... Ardhi creates a wonderful tapestry of sound for me and invites me to sing.

I'm happy about our team, everyone is fully involved and I love the fluid boundaries, the set designer also pays attention to the expression of the acting, the camerawoman becomes an accomplice in whose presence I feel comfortable and free. The technician has a sensitive eye and ear on everything. With the heart of the whole thing, Axel and the Meta Theater, it's yet another fantastic collaboration.



Axel Tangerding

Director

The text is a condensed system of secret spheres, rich in images and allusions, mysterious, humorous, harrowing and panic-stricken. My idea for the production was to literally expose the numerous layers of the perceived reality. I was looking for a poetic and at the same time minimalist alternative to the currently widespread documentary theatre, to the much revered concept of authenticity. After decades of work with Japanese theatre, I feel at home with reduction and abstraction and was able to apply this, together with the team, to Eliot's 'bloody marvellous poem' (Simon Barnes).

Louis Panizza's empty space is accentuated by a few set pieces, steel plates, plaster and hanging elements that correspond to and contrast with the magical text and its hidden messages.

The multi-instrumentalist Ardhi Engl added microphones to the steel plates so that our dealing with the hard material, the archaeological uncovering, the splintering layers create a percussive sound space running parallel to Engl's instrumental sound world, accompanying and driving the actress during her journey.

Taking us with her through the text's turns and breaks, Nicole Kleine creates images and offers opportunities for associations. Her performance is a poetic approach towards a holistic perception of 'The Waste Land'.

The continuous physical process of scratching, scraping, beating and breaking with bare hands and primitive tools is the language of my character, Teiresias, which in the end only leaves behind a broken-up stage. This heap of rubble not only signifies depression and thoughts about the end times, but also allows to imagine some optimism, the courage to break open well-trodden paths of thinking. Eliot has created a work of art that encourages us to see things from our own perspective. So let us dare to tread the thin ice of the fragmentary.



A powerful piece

“...what we hear there is pure poetry, in the truest sense of the word, language unleashed like fireworks ... Nicole Kleine celebrates this with bravura.”

(Peter Kees, Münchner Merkur)

A heap of broken images

“Axel Tangerding brings ‘The Waste Land’ by T.S. Eliot to the stage with great acting skills, an intelligent set design and unusual music... fascinating, oscillating and haunting ...”

(Alexandra Leuthner, Süddeutsche Zeitung)

Cast

Nicole Kleine – performance

Ardhi Engl – music and composition

Axel Tangerding – staging

Louis Panizza – set design

Dr. Martina Taubenberger – dramaturgy

Michaela Seifert – camera

Sebastian Strauß – light and sound

Chantal Maquet – layout

Gabi Sabo – editing

photos

Peter Hinz-Rosin – p. 2, 4, 6, 7, 12, 14

Michaela Seifert – p. 1, 8, 12-13, 17, 19



Meta Theater Production, 2024

In cooperation with
Werksviertel-Mitte Kunst.

Munich Premiere March 21st, 2024

With the kind support of:



Published by:

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2024



2025

Gledališče Glej, Ljubljana,
Slovenia



2026

Meta Theater artistic program in Kolkata initiated,
coordinated and organized by
Monalisa Ghosh and her Odissi Gurukul Kalajyoti



Collaboration Partners in Kolkata:

Techno India University, Sayan Bhador

Anuchintan Arts Centre, Dr. Gaurav Das

Bibhaban Theatre Academy, Supriyo Samajdar



Collaboration Partner in Bangalore:

Jagriti Theatre, Rebecca Spurgeon, Bangalore



