Policy Research Journal
ISSN (E): 3006-7030 ISSN (P) : 3006-7022 Volume 3, Issue 9, 2025

COGNITIVE LIMINALITY: A CONCEPTUAL BLENDING ANALYSIS OF T. S. ELIOT'S 'THE HOLLOW MEN' AND 'ASH WEDNESDAY'

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DOI:https://doi.org/ 10.5281/zenodo.17159336

Keywords

Article History
Received: 21 June 2025
Accepted: 31 August 2025
Published: 19 September 2025

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Abstract

This research article examines the concept of cognitive liminality in T.S. Eliot's poems "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday" through the theoretical framework of conceptual blending theory. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilising textual analysis and cognitive poetic approaches to investigate how Eliot's poetic language creates liminal cognitive spaces that challenge readers' conceptual frameworks. The findings reveal that Eliot's masterful use of conceptual blending techniques, particularly in his deployment of religious imagery, fragmented narratives, and intertextual references, creates a persistent cognitive liminality that mirrors the spiritual and existential crises of the modern era. The research contributes to both literary studies and cognitive linguistics by demonstrating how conceptual blending theory can illuminate the complex cognitive processes involved in reading modernist poetry.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of modernist poetry represents one of the most radical departures from traditional literary forms in the history of English literature (Childs, 2008). Among the architects of this transformation, T.S. Eliot stands as a towering figure whose works continue to challenge readers and scholars alike (Ricks, 2015). His poems "The Hollow Men" (1925) and "Ash Wednesday" (1930) exemplify the modernist preoccupation with fragmentation, spiritual desolation, and the search for meaning in a

post-war world (North, 2007). These works, composed during a pivotal period in Eliot's career, demonstrate his evolving poetic technique and deepening engagement with religious themes (Schuchard, 2014).

The concept of liminality, originally developed by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960) and later expanded by Victor Turner (1967), refers to a transitional state or threshold space where established categories and boundaries become blurred. In the context of cognitive studies, liminality can be understood as a mental space where conventional conceptual frameworks are suspended, allowing for the emergence of new meanings and perspectives (Freeman, 2010). This cognitive phenomenon is particularly relevant to the study of modernist literature, which frequently seeks to disrupt conventional modes of perception and understanding (Thormählen, 2013).

Conceptual blending theory, developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), provides a robust framework for analyzing how meaning is constructed through the integration of multiple mental spaces. This theory has been increasingly applied to literary studies, offering valuable insights into how readers process complex poetic texts (Oakley, 2015). The application of conceptual blending theory to Eliot's work represents a promising avenue for understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying his poetic technique and the profound impact of his poetry on readers (Semino, 2017).

The relationship between Eliot's poetry and cognitive processes has received limited scholarly attention, despite the evident complexity of his conceptual structures (Gavins, 2007). Previous studies have examined Eliot's use of imagery, allusion, and religious symbolism, but few have systematically investigated the cognitive liminality created by his poetic language (Scofield, 2013). This gap in the literature is particularly significant given the growing interest in cognitive approaches to literature and the potential for such approaches to illuminate the distinctive qualities of modernist poetry (Brannigan, 2014).

The objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of cognitive liminality in "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday" through the lens of conceptual blending theory. By examining how Eliot's poetic language creates and manipulates mental spaces, this study aims to elucidate the cognitive processes that underlie the reading experience of these complex texts (Cruse, 2011). The research seeks to answer the following questions: How does Eliot's use of conceptual blending create cognitive liminality in these poems? What specific linguistic and poetic devices contribute to this effect? How does the cognitive liminality in these poems reflect broader modernist concerns with fragmentation and spiritual crisis?

The significance of this study extends beyond the specific analysis of Eliot's work. By applying conceptual blending theory to modernist poetry, this research contributes to the growing field of cognitive literary studies and demonstrates the value of cognitive approaches to understanding complex literary texts (Tsur, 2012). Furthermore, the examination of cognitive liminality in Eliot's poetry offers insights into the relationship between literary form and cognitive experience, with implications for both literary theory and cognitive science (Zunshine, 2015).

The methodological approach of this study combines textual analysis with cognitive poetic theory, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the cognitive structures of Eliot's poetry (Stockwell, 2009). The analysis focuses on identifying and mapping the conceptual blends that create liminal spaces in the poems, examining how these blends operate at various levels of the text (Herman, 2013). This approach allows for a systematic investigation of the cognitive processes involved in reading Eliot's poetry while remaining sensitive to the aesthetic and thematic dimensions of the works (Burke, 2011).

The structure of this research article proceeds as follows: a comprehensive literature review examining previous studies of Eliot's poetry, conceptual blending theory, and cognitive approaches to literature; a detailed methodology section outlining the theoretical framework and analytical procedures; a results section presenting the findings of the conceptual blending analysis; a discussion section interpreting the significance of these findings in relation to broader literary and cognitive concerns; and a conclusion summarizing

the contributions of the research and suggesting directions for future study.

Literature Review

T.S. Eliot's Poetic Vision and Modernist Context

T.S. Eliot's contribution to modernist literature has been extensively documented by scholars across decades of literary criticism. Rainey (2005) argues that Eliot's work represents a fundamental reimagining of poetic form and function, reflecting the profound cultural and intellectual upheavals of the early twentieth century. This reimagining is particularly evident in "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday," which mark a transitional period in Eliot's career between the disillusionment of "The Waste Land" and the eventual spiritual affirmation of "Four Quartets" (Materer, 2014). The poems demonstrate Eliot's evolving poetic technique and his deepening engagement with religious themes, which would ultimately culminate in his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927 (Julius, 2012).

Critics have long recognised the fragmented nature of Eliot's poetic vision, which mirrors the fractured consciousness of the modern world (Kenner, 2016). Moody (2019) suggests that Eliot's fragmentation serves not merely as a reflection of modernity's disintegration but as a deliberate artistic strategy that forces readers to actively participate in the construction of meaning. This participatory dimension of Eliot's poetry has significant implications for cognitive approaches to his work, as it suggests a dynamic interaction between text and reader that involves complex cognitive processes (Gish, 2018).

The religious dimension of Eliot's poetry has been a subject of particular scholarly interest. Asher (2014) examines the development of Eliot's religious sensibility, tracing its evolution from the implicit spirituality of his early work to the explicit Christian framework of his later poetry. This development is crucial for understanding "Ash Wednesday," which represents Eliot's first major poem after his conversion and embodies his struggle to reconcile artistic modernism with religious tradition (Scofield, 2013). The poem's complex interweaving of doubt and faith, despair and hope, creates a distinctive cognitive landscape that challenges readers' conceptual frameworks (Atkins, 2014).

Conceptual Blending Theory and Literary Analysis

Conceptual blending theory, developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), has emerged as a powerful framework for understanding how meaning is constructed through the integration of multiple mental spaces. The theory posits that human thought and language involve the constant blending of conceptual elements from different domains to create new, emergent meanings (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008). This process involves four mental spaces: two input spaces containing distinct conceptual structures, a generic space that abstracts common elements from the inputs, and a blended space that integrates elements from the other spaces while developing its own emergent structure (Coulson, 2001).

The application of conceptual blending theory to literary studies has yielded significant insights into how readers process complex texts. Oakley (2015) demonstrates how the theory can illuminate the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphor, symbolism, and narrative structure in literary works. Similarly, Semino (2017) shows how conceptual blending can account for the rich interpretive possibilities of poetic language, which often involves the integration of disparate conceptual domains. These applications suggest that conceptual blending theory is particularly well-suited to the analysis of modernist poetry, which frequently employs complex metaphorical structures and intertextual references (Brannigan, 2014).

Several scholars have applied conceptual blending theory specifically to the study of poetry. Freeman (2010) uses the framework to analyse the cognitive structures of Emily Dickinson's poetry, showing how her compressed, metaphorical language creates complex blends that challenge readers' conceptual categories. Tsur (2012) extends this approach to examine the cognitive effects of poetic rhythm and sound patterns, arguing that these elements contribute to the creation of blended mental spaces. These studies provide valuable methodological precedents for the application of conceptual blending theory to Eliot's work, which similarly employs dense metaphorical structures and intricate sound patterns (Gavins, 2007).

Cognitive Approaches to Modernist Literature

The intersection of cognitive studies and modernist literature represents a growing field of scholarly inquiry. Zunshine (2015) argues that modernist literature, with its emphasis on subjective experience and consciousness, is particularly amenable to cognitive approaches, which seek to understand the mental processes underlying literary experience. This perspective is supported by Burke (2011), who demonstrates how cognitive theory can illuminate the distinctive qualities of modernist narrative techniques, including stream of consciousness and temporal fragmentation. These approaches suggest that modernist literature engages readers in unique cognitive processes that reflect and challenge conventional modes of perception and understanding (Herman, 2013).

Several scholars have specifically examined the cognitive dimensions of Eliot's poetry. Stockwell (2009) applies cognitive poetics to analyse the texture of Eli's language, showing how his distinctive use of imagery and allusion creates complex cognitive effects. Similarly, Cruse (2011) investigates the cognitive mechanisms involved in processing Eliot's intertextual references, arguing that these references activate networks of cultural and literary knowledge that shape readers' interpretations. These studies provide valuable foundations for the present research, which extends cognitive approaches to Eliot's work through the specific lens of conceptual blending theory and cognitive liminality (Semino, 2017).

The concept of cognitive liminality, while not extensively theorized in the existing literature, draws on both anthropological and cognitive traditions. Turner's (1967) work on liminality in ritual contexts provides a sociocultural framework for understanding transitional states, while Freeman (2010) offers a cognitive perspective on how literary language can create liminal mental spaces. The integration of these perspectives offers a promising approach to understanding the distinctive cognitive effects of Eliot's poetry, which frequently occupies threshold spaces between contradictory states—despair and hope, fragmentation and wholeness, doubt and faith (Thormählen, 2013).

Methodological Approaches to Cognitive Literary Analysis

The methodological landscape of cognitive literary studies encompasses a range of approaches, from empirical research on reading processes to theoretical analysis of textual structures (Alm-Arvius, 2016). For the present study, which focuses on the conceptual structures of Eliot's poetry, a qualitative approach combining textual analysis with cognitive poetic theory is most appropriate (Gavins, 2007). This approach allows for a detailed examination of the linguistic and poetic devices that create conceptual blends while remaining sensitive to the broader thematic and aesthetic dimensions of the poems (Oakley, 2015).

Several methodological precedents inform the approach of this study. Herman (2013) outlines a framework for cognitive narrative analysis that can be adapted to poetic texts, emphasising the importance of identifying textual cues that trigger specific cognitive processes. Similarly, Stockwell (2009) demonstrates how cognitive poetics can be applied to the analysis of poetic language, providing methodological tools for examining the cognitive effects of specific linguistic features. These approaches are complemented by the work of Semino (2017), who shows how corpus linguistic methods can be used to identify patterns in conceptual blending across literary texts.

The integration of these methodological approaches provides a robust framework for analysing cognitive liminality in Eliot's poetry. By combining close textual reading with cognitive poetic theory, the present study aims to elucidate the complex conceptual structures that create liminal mental spaces in "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday." This approach not only contributes to the understanding of Eliot's work but also demonstrates the value of cognitive approaches to the analysis of modernist literature more broadly (Zunshine, 2015).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrated textual analysis with cognitive poetic theory to investigate cognitive liminality in T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday." The research was guided by the theoretical

framework of conceptual blending theory, which provides a systematic approach to analyzing how meaning is constructed through the integration of multiple mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). This framework was particularly well-suited to the study of Eliot's poetry, which is characterised by complex metaphorical structures, intertextual references, and thematic ambiguities (Semino, 2017).

The research design involved multiple stages of analysis, beginning with a comprehensive examination of the poems' linguistic and poetic features and progressing to the identification and mapping of conceptual blends (Oakley, 2015). This multi-stage approach allowed for a systematic investigation of the cognitive processes involved in reading Eliot's poetry while remaining sensitive to the aesthetic and thematic dimensions of the works (Stockwell, 2009). The design also incorporated elements of comparative analysis, examining similarities and differences in the conceptual structures of the two poems (Brannigan, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was primarily based on conceptual blending theory, as developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). According to this theory, conceptual integration involves the construction of four interconnected mental spaces: two input spaces containing distinct conceptual structures, a generic space that abstracts common elements from the inputs, and a blended space that integrates elements from the other spaces while developing its own emergent structure (Coulson, 2001). The theory posits that meaning emerges through the dynamic interaction of these spaces, with the blended space often producing new insights that are not present in the original inputs (Fauconnier & Turner, 2008).

For this study, conceptual blending theory was complemented by the concept of cognitive liminality, which draws on anthropological theories of liminality (van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1967) and cognitive approaches to literary experience (Freeman, 2010). Cognitive liminality refers to a transitional mental state where established conceptual categories are suspended, allowing for the emergence of new meanings and perspectives (Thormählen, 2013). This concept provided a valuable lens for understanding how Eliot's poetry creates threshold spaces that challenge readers' conventional frameworks of understanding (Zunshine, 2015).

Data Collection

The primary data for this study consisted of the texts of "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday" by T.S. Eliot. These poems were analysed in their original published versions, with attention to their linguistic features, poetic structures, and intertextual references (Eliot, 1925; Eliot, 1930). The analysis also drew on secondary sources, including Eliot's own critical writings and letters, which provide insights into his poetic intentions and intellectual influences (Eliot, 1951; Eliot, 2014).

To facilitate the systematic analysis of conceptual blends, the poems were digitised and annotated using NVivo 12 software, which allowed for the coding and categorization of linguistic and poetic features (QSR International, 2018). This software enabled the researchers to identify patterns in the poems' language and structure that contribute to the creation of conceptual blends and cognitive liminality (Silver & Lewins, 2014). The annotation process focused on specific elements such as metaphorical expressions, religious imagery, fragmented syntax, and intertextual references, which were identified as potential triggers for conceptual blending (Semino, 2017).

Data Analysis

The data analysis proceeded in several stages, each building on the previous to develop a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual structures of the poems. The first stage involved a close reading of the poems to identify key linguistic and poetic features that contribute to the creation of conceptual blends (Stockwell, 2009). This reading was guided by the principles of cognitive poetics, which emphasise the relationship between textual features and cognitive processes (Gavins, 2007).

The second stage of analysis focused on mapping the conceptual blends identified in the poems. This process involved identifying the input spaces, generic space, and blended space for each significant

conceptual integration (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The mapping was visualised using conceptual integration networks, which diagram the relationships between the different mental spaces involved in the blending process (Coulson, 2001). These diagrams were created using MindManager software, which allowed for the visual representation of complex conceptual relationships (MindJet, 2019).

The third stage of analysis examined the emergent structure of the blended spaces, focusing on how they create cognitive liminality by challenging readers' conventional conceptual frameworks (Freeman, 2010). This analysis involved identifying the specific mechanisms by which the blends produce liminal effects, such as the juxtaposition of contradictory elements, the fragmentation of narrative structure, and the evocation of threshold states (Thormählen, 2013). The analysis also considered the thematic significance of these liminal effects in relation to broader modernist concerns with spiritual crisis and the search for meaning (North, 2007).

The fourth stage of analysis involved a comparative examination of the conceptual structures of the two poems, identifying similarities and differences in their use of blending techniques and their creation of cognitive liminality (Brannigan, 2014). This comparison was facilitated by the use of tables that summarised the key features of each poem's conceptual blends, allowing for systematic comparison across the texts (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Results

Conceptual Blending in "The Hollow Men"

The analysis of "The Hollow Men" revealed a complex network of conceptual blends that create cognitive liminality through the integration of disparate mental spaces. The poem's opening lines, "We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men," immediately establish a central conceptual blend that integrates the input spaces of emptiness and fullness (Eliot, 1925, lines 1-2). This blend creates a paradoxical mental space that challenges conventional categories of being and non-being, establishing the theme of cognitive liminality that permeates the poem.

Table 1 presents a summary of the major conceptual blends identified in "The Hollow Men," along with their constituent input spaces and emergent meanings.

Table 1
Major Conceptual Blends in *"The Hollow Men"*

Blend	Input Space 1	Input Space 2	Emergent Meaning
Hollow / Stuffed	Emptiness	Fullness	Paradoxical existence; spiritual vacuity
Shape without Form	Physical presence	Absence of substance	Incomplete being; ontological uncertainty
Shadow between Idea & Reality	Conception	Perception	Liminal state of potentiality
Dried Voices	Sound	Silence	Ineffective communication; spiritual impotence
Kingdom of Death	Physical death	Spiritual death	Existential limbo; perpetual transition

The analysis revealed that these blends operate at multiple levels of the poem, from individual metaphors to overarching thematic structures. For instance, the blend of "hollow" and "stuffed" recurs throughout the poem in various manifestations, creating a persistent cognitive dissonance that mirrors the spiritual crisis of the modern world (Eliot, 1925). This dissonance is further amplified by the poem's fragmented structure, which disrupts conventional narrative progression and creates a sense of perpetual transition between states of being.

One of the most significant blends identified in the poem is the integration of the Kingdom of Death with the concept of spiritual death, which creates a liminal space that is neither fully alive nor

completely dead. This blend is most evident in the poem's famous concluding lines:

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 a whimper. (Eliot, 1925, lines 97-100)

These lines create a conceptual blend that integrates the input spaces of apocalyptic conclusion and anti-climactic fading, producing an emergent meaning that challenges conventional notions of endings and transitions. The repetition of "This is the way the world ends" creates a ritualistic quality that reinforces the liminal nature of the conceptual space, while the contrast between "bang" and "whimper" epitomises the poem's persistent theme of unresolved tension between opposites.

Conceptual Blending in "Ash Wednesday"

The analysis of "Ash Wednesday" revealed a different pattern of conceptual blending, reflecting the poem's engagement with religious tradition and spiritual transformation. Unlike "The Hollow Men," which primarily creates liminality through the integration of opposites, "Ash Wednesday" employs blending techniques that suggest movement toward spiritual resolution, even as it maintains elements of cognitive uncertainty (Eliot, 1930).

Table 2 summarises the major conceptual blends identified in "Ash Wednesday," along with their constituent input spaces and emergent meanings.

Table 2
Major Conceptual Blends in *"Ash Wednesday"*

Blend	Input Space 1	Input Space 2	Emergent Meaning
Lady of Silences	Divine feminine	Human beloved	Mediator between human and divine
Silent Sister	Spiritual guide	Earthly companion	Liminal figure of transition
Garden / Desert	Fertility	Barrenness	Spiritual purification through renunciation
Word in the Desert	Divine revelation	Human speech	Incarnation of spiritual truth
Bones / Stone	Mortality	Permanence	Transfiguration through faith

The analysis revealed that these blends create a more dynamic conceptual landscape than those in "The Hollow Men," suggesting movement and transformation rather than stasis. For instance, the blend of "garden" and "desert" creates a liminal space that is neither fully fertile nor completely barren, but rather a site of potential spiritual renewal:

Because I know that time is always time
And place is always and only place
And what is actual is actual only for one time
And only for one place
I rejoice that things are as they are and
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice
Because I cannot hope to turn again
Consequently, I rejoice, having to construct something
Upon which to rejoice (Eliot, 1930, section I)

This passage creates a complex conceptual blend that integrates the input spaces of temporal limitation and spiritual transcendence, producing an emergent meaning that suggests the possibility of finding meaning within the constraints of human existence. The repetition of "time" and "place" emphasises the limitations of human experience, while the declaration "I rejoice" introduces a note of spiritual affirmation that complicates the poem's conceptual landscape.

One of the most significant blends in the poem is the integration of the "Lady of silences" with both divine and human attributes, creating a liminal figure who mediates between earthly and spiritual realms. This blend is particularly evident in the following lines:

Lady of silences
Calm and distressed

Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single state
Is that which neither is nor has been (Eliot, 1930, section II)

These lines create a conceptual blend that integrates contradictory qualities—calm and distress, torn and whole, exhausted and life-giving—producing an emergent meaning that transcends conventional oppositions. The final statement, "The single state / Is that which neither is nor has been," explicitly articulates the liminal nature of the conceptual space, suggesting a spiritual reality that exists beyond conventional categories of being and time.

Comparative Analysis of Conceptual Blending

The comparative analysis of the two poems revealed significant differences in their use of conceptual blending techniques, reflecting their different thematic concerns and their positions in Eliot's poetic development. While both poems create cognitive liminality through the integration of disparate mental spaces, they do so in distinct ways that correspond to their different spiritual orientations.

Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of the conceptual blending techniques in the two poems, highlighting their similarities and differences.

Table 3 Comparative Analysis of Conceptual Blending in "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday"

Aspect	"The Hollow Men"	"Ash Wednesday"
Primary Blending Strategy	Integration of opposites	Integration of transitional states
Temporal Orientation	Static, cyclical	Dynamic, progressive
Spiritual Orientation	Despair, absence	Hope, presence
Narrative Structure	Fragmented, discontinuous	Structured, yet fluid
Conceptual Resolution	Unresolved tension	Movement toward resolution
Liminal Quality	Paralysis, stasis	Transformation, potentiality

The analysis revealed that "The Hollow Men" primarily creates cognitive liminality through the integration of opposites, resulting in a conceptual landscape characterised by paralysis and stasis. In contrast, "Ash Wednesday" employs blending techniques that suggest movement and transformation, creating liminal spaces that function as sites of potential spiritual renewal. This difference is reflected in the temporal orientation of the poems, with "The Hollow Men" presenting a cyclical, repetitive conception of time and "Ash Wednesday" suggesting a more linear, progressive temporality.

The spiritual orientation of the poems also differs significantly, with "The Hollow Men" emphasising absence and despair and "Ash Wednesday" suggesting the possibility of presence and hope. This difference is particularly evident in their treatment of religious imagery, with "The Hollow Men" employing fragmented allusions to Christian prayer in a context of spiritual desolation, while "Ash Wednesday" engages more directly with religious tradition, particularly the liturgy of Ash Wednesday and the symbolism of the desert as a place of spiritual purification.

Cognitive Liminality in the Poems

The analysis of cognitive liminality in the two poems revealed that both create threshold spaces that challenge readers' conventional conceptual frameworks, but they do so in ways that reflect their different thematic concerns. Cognitive liminality in "The Hollow Men" is characterised by conceptual dissonance and unresolved tension, creating a reading experience that mirrors the spiritual crisis of the modern world. In contrast, cognitive liminality in "Ash Wednesday" is characterised by conceptual fluidity and potential transformation, creating a

reading experience that suggests the possibility of spiritual renewal.

Table 4 summarizes the key features of cognitive liminality in each poem, as identified through the analysis of conceptual blending.

Table 4
Cognitive Liminality in *"The Hollow Men"* and *"Ash Wednesday"*

Feature	"The Hollow Men"	"Ash Wednesday"
Conceptual Quality	Dissonance, tension	Fluidity, potentiality
Reader Experience	Disorientation, paralysis	Uncertainty, anticipation
Temporal Effect	Cyclical, repetitive	Progressive, transformative
Spiritual Implication	Absence, emptiness	Presence, potential fulfilment
Narrative Function	Reinforces fragmentation	Facilitates transformation
Thematic Resonance	Modernist despair	Post-conversion hope

The analysis revealed that cognitive liminality in both poems serves to reinforce their thematic concerns, with the conceptual structure of each poem mirroring its spiritual orientation. In "The Hollow Men," the persistent dissonance of the conceptual blends creates a reading experience that embodies the modernist condition of spiritual desolation. In "Ash Wednesday," the fluidity of the conceptual blends creates a reading experience that suggests the possibility of moving beyond this condition toward spiritual renewal.

The analysis also revealed that the narrative function of cognitive liminality differs between the two poems. In "The Hollow Men," liminality reinforces the poem's fragmented structure, creating a sense of perpetual transition without resolution. In "Ash Wednesday," liminality facilitates the poem's transformative arc, creating conceptual spaces that allow for the emergence of new spiritual understanding. This difference reflects the poems' different positions in Eliot's poetic development, with "The Hollow Men" representing the culmination of his early modernist despair and "Ash Wednesday" pointing toward the spiritual affirmation of his later work.

Discussion

Interpretation of Conceptual Blending in "The Hollow Men"

The analysis of conceptual blending in "The Hollow Men" reveals a poetic strategy that systematically creates cognitive liminality through the integration of opposites. This finding aligns with Kenner's (2016) observation that Eliot's early work is characterised by a "logic of paradox" that challenges conventional modes of understanding. The persistent integration of emptiness and fullness, presence and absence, sound and silence creates a conceptual landscape that mirrors the spiritual crisis of the modern world, as described by North (2007) in his analysis of modernist literature's engagement with cultural fragmentation.

The most significant conceptual blend identified in the poem—the integration of the Kingdom of Death with spiritual death—creates a liminal space that resonates with Turner's (1967) anthropological concept of liminality as a state of being "betwixt and between" conventional categories. This blend suggests a state of perpetual transition that is neither fully alive nor completely dead, reflecting the modernist preoccupation with existential uncertainty (Brannigan, 2014). The poem's famous conclusion, with its contrast between "bang" and "whimper," epitomises this liminal state, suggesting an ending that is not really an ending but rather a continuation of the transitional condition that characterises the entire poem (Eliot, 1925).

The cognitive effects of these conceptual blends are significant, as they create a reading experience that embodies the spiritual desolation described in the poem. As Freeman (2010) notes, literary language that creates liminal mental spaces can produce a profound disorientation in readers, forcing them to question their conventional conceptual frameworks. This disorientation is particularly appropriate for

"The Hollow Men," which seeks to convey the spiritual vacuum of the modern world (Ricks, 2015). The poem's fragmented structure, with its abrupt transitions and unresolved tensions, reinforces this cognitive effect, creating a sense of perpetual liminality that mirrors the thematic content (Scofield, 2013).

Interpretation of Conceptual Blending in "Ash Wednesday"

The analysis of conceptual blending in "Ash Wednesday" reveals a different poetic strategy, one that creates cognitive liminality through the integration of transitional states rather than static opposites. This finding supports Asher's (2014) argument that Eliot's post-conversion poetry represents a significant shift in his poetic technique, moving from the fragmentation of his early work toward a more integrated vision that still retains elements of modernist complexity. The conceptual blends in "Ash Wednesday" suggest movement and transformation, creating a dynamic cognitive landscape that reflects the poem's engagement with spiritual renewal (Materer, 2014).

The blend of the "Lady of silences" with both divine and human attributes creates a particularly significant liminal space that functions as a mediator between earthly and spiritual realms. This blend resonates with Eliot's developing interest in the medieval concept of the via negativa, the spiritual path that emphasises the limitations of human language and understanding in approaching the divine (Schuchard, 2014). The contradictory qualities attributed to the Lady—"Calm and distressed / Torn and most whole"—create a conceptual paradox that transcends conventional oppositions, suggesting a spiritual reality that exists beyond the limitations of human categorisation (Eliot, 1930).

The cognitive effects of these conceptual blends differ significantly from those in "The Hollow Men." While the earlier poem creates disorientation and paralysis, "Ash Wednesday" produces a sense of uncertain anticipation, suggesting the possibility of spiritual transformation without fully realising it (Julius, 2012). This cognitive effect aligns with the poem's position in Eliot's career, representing a transitional state between the despair of his early work and the affirmation of his later poetry (Moody, 2019). The poem's more structured yet fluid narrative form reinforces this effect, creating a sense of movement through liminal spaces toward a spiritual resolution that remains just beyond reach (Gish, 2018).

Comparative Implications of Conceptual Blending

The comparative analysis of conceptual blending in the two poems reveals significant differences that reflect their different positions in Eliot's poetic development and their different spiritual orientations. These findings extend the work of critics such as Atkins (2014) and Scofield (2013), who have noted the shift in Eliot's poetic technique following his conversion but have not systematically analysed the cognitive mechanisms underlying this shift.

The primary difference in blending strategy—the integration of opposites versus the integration of transitional states—has significant implications for how readers experience the poems. As Zunshine (2015) notes, different conceptual structures produce different cognitive effects, shaping readers' engagement with the text in distinctive ways. The static, cyclical conceptual landscape of "The Hollow Men" creates a reading experience of entrapment and despair, while the dynamic, progressive conceptual landscape of "Ash Wednesday" creates a reading experience of potential transformation (Thormählen, 2013). These differences in cognitive experience correspond to the poems' different thematic concerns, with "The Hollow Men" embodying modernist despair and "Ash Wednesday" suggesting the possibility of moving beyond this condition (North, 2007).

The temporal orientation of the conceptual blends also differs significantly between the poems, reflecting their different conceptions of spiritual possibility. "The Hollow Men" presents a cyclical, repetitive conception of time that reinforces the sense of spiritual paralysis, while "Ash Wednesday" suggests a more linear, progressive temporality that allows for the possibility of spiritual development (Materer, 2014). This difference in temporal orientation has significant cognitive effects, as readers' experience of time is a fundamental aspect of their engagement with literary texts (Herman, 2013). The cyclical time of "The Hollow Men"

creates a sense of inevitability and hopelessness, while the progressive time of "Ash Wednesday" creates a sense of possibility and anticipation (Brannigan, 2014).

Theoretical Implications for Cognitive Literary Studies

The findings of this study have significant implications for cognitive literary studies, particularly for the application of conceptual blending theory to modernist poetry. The analysis demonstrates how conceptual blending theory can illuminate the complex cognitive structures of modernist texts, providing a systematic framework for understanding how these texts create meaning through the integration of disparate mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). This extends the work of scholars such as Oakley (2015) and Semino (2017), who have applied conceptual blending theory to literary texts but have not focused specifically on modernist poetry.

The concept of cognitive liminality, as developed in this study, represents a valuable contribution to cognitive literary studies. By integrating anthropological theories of liminality with cognitive approaches to literary experience, this concept provides a framework for understanding how literary texts can create threshold spaces that challenge readers' conventional conceptual frameworks (Freeman, 2010). The analysis of Eliot's poems demonstrates how cognitive liminality can function as both a thematic concern and a formal principle, with the conceptual structure of the poems mirroring their thematic content (Thormählen, 2013). This finding supports the broader argument of cognitive literary studies that literary form and content are integrally related at the level of cognitive processing (Zunshine, 2015).

The methodological approach of this study, which combines textual analysis with cognitive poetic theory, also has implications for future research in cognitive literary studies. The systematic identification and mapping of conceptual blends, facilitated by digital tools such as NVivo and MindManager, provides a replicable method for analysing the cognitive structures of literary texts (QSR International, 2018; MindJet, 2019). This approach extends the work of scholars such as Stockwell (2009) and Gavins (2007), who have developed cognitive poetic approaches to literary analysis but have not fully integrated digital tools into their methodology.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, the analysis focused exclusively on two poems by T.S. Eliot, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could extend this approach to a broader range of modernist poets, such as Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and Wallace Stevens, to determine whether the conceptual blending techniques identified in Eliot's work are characteristic of modernist poetry more broadly (Childs, 2008).

Second, the study relied primarily on textual analysis rather than empirical research on readers' cognitive processes. While the analysis of textual cues provides valuable insights into the potential cognitive effects of the poems, it cannot fully capture the experience of readers (Semino, 2017). Future research could complement textual analysis with empirical methods such as think-aloud protocols, eye-tracking, or neuroimaging to investigate how readers actually process the conceptual blends identified in the poems (Burke, 2011).

Third, the study focused primarily on the cognitive dimensions of the poems, with less attention to their historical and cultural contexts. While cognitive approaches offer valuable insights into the poems' conceptual structures, these structures are also shaped by the historical and cultural conditions in which the poems were produced (Rainey, 2005). Future research could integrate cognitive analysis with historical and cultural approaches to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Eliot's poetry (North, 2007).

Finally, the study's application of conceptual blending theory could be extended to incorporate other cognitive theories, such as schema theory, conceptual metaphor theory, or narrative theory (Oakley, 2015). Such an integrated approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cognitive processes involved in reading modernist poetry, complementing the insights gained from conceptual blending theory alone (Tsur, 2012).

Conclusion

This research has examined the concept of cognitive liminality in T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and "Ash Wednesday" through the theoretical framework of conceptual blending theory. The analysis has revealed how Eliot's poetic language creates liminal cognitive spaces that challenge readers' conceptual frameworks, mirroring the spiritual and existential crises of the modern era. The findings demonstrate that Eliot's masterful use of conceptual blending techniques, particularly in his deployment of religious imagery, fragmented narratives, and intertextual references, produces distinctive cognitive effects that correspond to the poems' thematic concerns.

The study has shown that "The Hollow Men" primarily creates cognitive liminality through the integration of opposites, resulting in a conceptual landscape characterised by paralysis and stasis. In contrast, "Ash Wednesday" employs blending techniques that suggest movement and transformation, creating liminal spaces that function as sites of potential spiritual renewal. These differences reflect the poems' different positions in Eliot's poetic development, with "The Hollow Men" representing the culmination of his early modernist despair and "Ash Wednesday" pointing toward the spiritual affirmation of his later work.

The theoretical contributions of this research are significant for both literary studies and cognitive linguistics. By applying conceptual blending theory to modernist poetry, the study has demonstrated the value of cognitive approaches to understanding complex literary texts. The concept of cognitive liminality, as developed in this study, provides a framework for understanding how literary texts can create threshold spaces that challenge readers' conventional conceptual frameworks. This concept integrates anthropological theories of liminality with cognitive approaches to literary experience, offering a new perspective on the relationship between literary form and cognitive processing.

The methodological approach of this study, which combines textual analysis with cognitive poetic theory and digital tools, provides a replicable method for analyzing the cognitive structures of literary texts. The systematic identification and mapping of conceptual blends, facilitated by digital tools such as NVivo and MindManager, offers a model for future research in cognitive literary studies. This approach demonstrates how digital humanities methods can complement traditional literary analysis to provide new insights into complex literary texts.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that suggest directions for future research. The analysis focused exclusively on two poems by T.S. Eliot, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could extend this approach to a broader range of modernist poets to determine whether the conceptual blending techniques identified in Eliot's work are characteristic of modernist poetry more broadly. Additionally, the study relied primarily on textual analysis rather than empirical research on readers' cognitive processes. Future research could complement textual analysis with empirical methods to investigate how readers actually process the conceptual blends identified in the poems.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the value of conceptual blending theory for understanding the cognitive dimensions of modernist poetry. By analyzing how Eliot's poetic language creates liminal cognitive spaces, the study has provided new insights into the complex relationship between literary form and cognitive experience. The findings contribute to both literary studies and cognitive linguistics, offering a framework for understanding how modernist poetry challenges readers' conventional conceptual frameworks and creates new possibilities for meaning and understanding.

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