

THE WASTE LAND

The main theme is the opposition between the sterility of the modern world and the fertility of the past.

The Waste Land is a complex, erudite, cryptic, spiritually earnest, occasionally lyrical and it is one of the most recognisable poems of Modern poetry.

This poem was first published in 1922 and it was dedicated to Ezra Pound who also played an important role in the editing of the poem.

When it came out this poem was acclaimed as the beginning of a new type of poetry capable of expressing the post war sense of depression and futility .

With this poem he diagnosed the collapse of values that followed the bloodshed of WWI.

Characterised by shifting-scenario, multiple voices and changes in form "the Waste Land" is a very long poem structured in 5 different sections:

1. **The Burial of the Dead** : dealing with the coming of spring in a sterile land, it is centered on the basic opposition between sterility and fertility, life and death.
2. **A Game of Chess**: it is based on the contrast between present squalor and past ambiguous splendor. the present is associated to an idea of squalor whereas the past is ambiguous
3. **The Fire Sermon**: it reinforces the theme of squalor and it also introduces Tiresias that is considered by Eliot the blind spectator and the most important character in the poem.
4. **Death by Water**: it is focused on the idea of purification by water.
5. **What the Thunder Said**: it conveys the image of the disintegration of Western civilization and it suggests his possible salvation. A possible solution is found in a sort of sympathy with other human beings but this solution does not modify the general atmosphere of utter desolation.

In addition to these 5 sections "The Waste Land" also includes **Eliot's own notes** in which he explains some of his metaphors, allusions, quotations and half-quotations. Eliot used several myths, legends and symbols but he was aware of the difficulty of them.

He took inspiration from many different cultural fragments from a wide range of sources like The Bible, Dante's divina Commedia, Shakespeare, french symbolist like Baudelaire, metaphysical poet such as John Donne, Homer's Odyssey, Ovid's Metamorphoses and then the main important text of hinduism that is The Upanishads.

Eliot openly declared that **immature poets borrow and mature poets steal**.

He was convinced that present and past must coexist in poetry and for this reason we are fully entitled to consider him at the same time as the most influential poets but also as the most influenced poet. He is the most modern poet but also the most traditional poet.

According to Eliot, a poet should write universal poetry drawing inspiration from everywhere.

STYLE OF "THE WASTE LAND"

The style is fragmentary and this stylistically fragmentation is evident from the structure of the poem itself because although being a very long poem "the Waste Land" doesn't show the typical narrative structure of long poems. It seems more to be made up of a series of disjointed verse paragraphs and the reader in fact cannot easily follow the story.

Secondly "The Waste Land" is fragmentary because of the mixture of different poetic styles which are meant to reproduce the chaos of modern civilization.

The poet creates sharp juxtaposition of different registers of speech.

The Waste Land is also highly innovative in its use of language because its vocabulary is made up of words from several different languages like French, German, Latin and Sanskrit.

Another peculiarity of Eliot's style is that it requires the active participation of the reader through the **technique of implication**. Rather than using direct statements, Eliot preferred to use metaphor, similes and symbols to evoke emotions. Eliot adopted what he called the "Objective Correlative" which is the attempt at conveying an emotion without a direct explicit statement. His style is **evocative**. Eliot rejected an idea of poetry based on the poet's own personality and he used the "Objective Correlative" of symbolic imagery which forces the reader to contribute to the poem by bringing his own connotation to the gaps and by bringing his own meaning to the unstated.

THE BURIAL OF THE DEATH

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This extract is taken from the 1st section of the "Waste Land" and it is made up of 2 different parts:

The first seven lines are taken from the beginning of the poem whereas the second part corresponds to the end of the poem's first section.

1 SECTION (1-7)

The waste Land is a poem with an extraordinary symbolic complexity which breaks into many directions from its very beginning. Infact "The Waste Land" starts with a reference to April as the cruelest month when the reader typically associated April as the month of renewal.

Then it breaks again by saying that winter, which is generally associated with cold temperature, is a positive element.

2 SECTION (1-7)

The second section is based on the opposition between fertility and sterility, life and death and it contains one of the most surreal episodes of the whole poem. The speaker walks through London (which is mentioned with the expression "Unreal city" - it is a reference to Baudelaire who uses a similar expression to refer to Paris in one of his poems). London may be seen as the symbol of materialism, consumerism because it is inhabited by creatures that look like walking ghosts that sigh and stare only in front of their feet. (si fissano i piedi) =death and lack of communications.