

Verifica 27 aprile

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William Butler Yeats

He was born in Dublin in **1865** into an anglo irish protestant family, when he was a child his family moved to London but he used to spend many holidays in Sligo, a town in Western Ireland that he loved and wrote about.

He grew up feeling as much Irish as English and in Sligo he developed a passion for the Celtic past and also an interest in the occult and the mystical.

In **1880** his family moved back to Dublin where he studied art but he soon realised that his real passion was poetry. He abandoned art as a profession in favour of literature.

In **1889** he met Maud Gonne, she was a beautiful actress and she was his first love, he deeply fell in love with her but his love was not returned, she admired his poetry but she refused his offers of marriage. She came to represent for Yeats the ideal of beauty.

In the **1890s** he became involved in the **Irish nationalist movement**, he met Lady Gregory, an Irish nationalist and playwright, they became close friend and together they founded the **Abbey Theatre** in Dublin in 1904 which became the most important cultural centre of the Irish literary renaissance.

In addition to his poetry he devoted significant energy to writing plays, but his theatrical production lacked dramatic values, the essential qualifications of a dramatist.

In **1917** he got married with Georgie Hyde Lees, she was a medium who shared his interest in the occult and soon after their wedding she developed the power of automatic writing. She began to utter strange phrases and she thought that these phrases were dictated by spirits from another world.

Yeats copied down these fragments and he incorporated them in his prose work *A Vision* in 1925. In this work he also exposed his complex system of ideas.

Between 1922 and 1928 he became a senator in the Parliament of the recently established Free State.

In 1923 his greatness received international recognition with the **Nobel Price for literature**. He died in France in 1939 just before the outbreak of World War II.

We can divide his literary production into 3 periods:

1. **Early Period** (1886-1900): influence of Romanticism, Aestheticism and French Symbolism, they are also pervaded by a Celtic mysticism, he looked for his themes in Irish

legends, interested in the simple impulses of men. The best remedy for the emptiness of the present seem to lie in a return to the simplicity of the past.

2. **Middle Period** (1900-1916): his poems became more and more rooted in reality, in particular in the political situation of Ireland, which was under the British rule. It is in this phase that he becomes a true modern poet, his poetry is no longer concerned with the representation of a personal suggestive dreamlike world. His poetry became concerned with the search for truth. He confronted reality and imperfection, his poetry showed a gradual movement away from Escapism of his previous works. He shows a growing carriage in considering the modern problems.
3. **Late Period** (1917-1939): it is his maturity. His poems became more introspective, meditating on memory, old age and death. Symbolic interpretation of history and man's destiny. He was a symbolist and his poet is not simple, he adopted a complex system. This was developed from his study on mystic ancient philosophy, esoteric, astrology and magic. After his marriage he started to experiment automatic writing, they used to sit together for writing sessions during which they believed to be guided by a spiritual world. He wanted to resolve the contradictions of the modern world.

Themes

He deals with a wide variety of themes, one of the reasons for his greatness is that we can identify many different aspects in this author. He is a multidimensional poet, not characterised by a single approach to poetry.

The faith in beauty and eternity of art

This was developed under the influence of the Romantic poets Keats and pre-Raphaelites.

Relationship between the poet and Irish people and tradition

This developed from a very early age, he felt a deep connection to Ireland, with a strong interest in Irish mythologies.

Age

Yeats was almost obsessed with age.

His preoccupation with old age is based on the contrast between the failing body and the willing heart.

Death

It's another key theme. Yeats view was that unlike the animals, that dies once and forever, man dies many times before his real death.

Every defeat, as well as every victory, represents a series of death and rebirth, prefiguring the end of life.

This continuous cycle of Death and Rebirth is promoted by an incessant and endless process of change and renewal

Idea of the heroic individual

Loneliness is a feature of his hero; he has superior qualities, that distinguish him from the common men.

Yeats develop the image of the solitary soul.

Polarity between opposites concepts

such as the physical and the spiritual, the real and the imagined.

Deep fascination for occultism

Yeats was a believer in magic and similar arts, he was a visionary, he was religious by temperament but he was unable to believe in christian orthodoxy

All his life he tried to compensate his lost sense of religion, and this search led him to various kind of mysticism and spiritualism, neoplatonism, and also to **theosophy**.

In London he joined the Theosophical society, whose mysticism appealed to Yeats; this mysticism was based on a form of imaginative life.

Theosophy is the belief in a deeper spiritual reality.

According to Yeats people can come in contact with this deeper reality through

- intuition
- meditation
- revelation
- use of symbols

Yeats develop its own symbolic system, which is exposed in his book *A Vision*. This book represents the full exposition of his philosophy and his ideas. It is still a very obscure book, and in fact it led to describe Yeats as one of the most difficult among the modern poets.

Yeats distinguish between two kind of symbols: emotional and intellectual;

- **emotional symbols** evoke emotions
- **intellectual symbols** evoke ideas

Symbols are to primary importance to Yeats, since they contribute to the definition of a collective consciousness.

In this regards Yeats develop the concept of the great memory, that is a concept that is strongly connected to the Jung's concept of the Collective unconscious.

They both believe that we interact with the world through a system of archetypes, which express a set of human truth, that are passed on from generation to generation

The reader's difficulties in reading Yeats arrive mainly from Yeats's use of the same symbol to represent a variety of things.

One of his main theme is the falcon which represents a violent break from any form of control but it also represent grace

Another important symbol is the swan. On one hand it represents a perfect unchanging ideal while, on the other hand, it becomes a symbol of destructive power.

The tower is another famous symbol . The tower can be an intellectual shelter but sometimes it becomes a vision of the dark future of humanity

Style

His style is characterized by a great variety of forms, rhythms and tone.

Stylistically Yeats is at the same time a traditionalist and an innovator: he worked with traditional genres, but he disrupted conventions by breaking the coherence of this more traditional form.

Also stylistically Yeats tries to convey a tension between opposite concepts, by making a large use of antithesis, oximoron and paradoxes.

T: *Easter 1916*

- p. 198

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From **counter** or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
5 I have passed with a **nod** of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have **lingered** awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done¹
10 Of a mocking tale² or a **gibe**
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But³ lived where **motley** is worn:
15 All changed, changed **utterly**:
A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument⁴
20 Until her voice grew **shrill**.
What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to **harriers**?
This man had kept a school
25 And rode our wingèd⁵ horse;
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
30 So **daring** and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vainglorious lout⁶.
He had done most bitter wrong⁷
To some who are near my heart,
35 Yet I number him in the song;

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice¹⁷?
60 That is Heaven's part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild¹⁸.
65 What is it but nightfall?
No; no, not night but death;
Was it needless¹⁹ death after all?
For England may keep faith²⁰

He, too, has **resigned** his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn⁸,
Transformed utterly:
40 A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted⁹ to a stone
To trouble the living stream¹⁰.
45 The horse that comes from the road,
The rider, the birds that range¹¹
From cloud to tumbling¹² cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
50 Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim¹³,
And a horse plashes¹⁴ within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive¹⁵,
And hens to moor-cocks¹⁶ call;
55 Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.

For all that is done and said.
70 We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them²¹ till they died?
I write it out in a verse –
75 MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn²²,
Are changed, changed utterly:
80 A terrible beauty is born.

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- 1 **before I had done**. Prima di andarmene (*lett.*: prima di finire).
 - 2 **a mocking tale**. Un racconto beffardo.
 - 3 **But**. Solamente.
 - 4 **argument**. Discussione.
 - 5 **wingèd**. Alato (riferimento a Pegaso, il cavallo alato nato dal sangue di Medusa dopo la sua morte).
 - 6 **A drunken, vainglorious lout**. Uno zoticone alcolizzato e vanaglorioso.
 - 7 **most bitter wrong**. Il torto più doloroso.
 - 8 **in his turn**. A sua volta.
 - 9 **Enchanted**. Incantati, ammaliati.
 - 10 **stream**. Flusso, corrente.
 - 11 **range**. Si muovono liberamente, vagano.
 - 12 **tumbling**. Che si agita.
 - 13 **A horse-hoof ... brim**. Lo zoccolo di un cavallo scivola sulla sponda.
 - 14 **plashes**. Sguazza.
 - 15 **moor-hens dive**. Le gallinelle d'acqua si tuffano.
 - 16 **moor-cocks**. Galli di brughiera.

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- 17 **suffice**. Bastare.
 - 18 **On limbs ... wild**. Su membra che hanno corso all'impazzata.
 - 19 **needless**. Inutile.
 - 20 **faith**. La parola.
 - 21 **Bewildered them**. Li ha disorientati.
 - 22 **Wherever green is worn**. Ovunque il verde sia indossato (il verde è il colore nazionale dell'Irlanda).

This poem was written after the Easter Rising, an insurrection which took place in Ireland in 1916.

During the Easter week in 1916 some rebels decided to seize Dublin strategic point while the British were fighting in WWI

But the British troops were able to intervene and to repress these protests. Some were executed and many citizens were arrested. This rebellion didn't directly lead Ireland to reach independence but it represented an important step in order to reach it.

After the execution carried out by the British the Irish became increasingly hostile towards the British Rule and so they started to further promote the cause of their independence.

In the election of 1918 the Sinn Féin party won the largest proportion of the Irish seats in the British Parliament. This Party decided to form its own government, with the help of IRA. This was led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, that marked the birth of the Irish Free State.

This poem expresses the poet's contrasted feelings respect the uprising which took place in Dublin in 1916.

The themes are

- heroism
- bravery
- public sacrifice
- death
- mourning

Yeats uses a chain of multiple unanswered questions to express his difficulty in finding the appropriate response to this historical event.

The **first stanza** is based on a series of contrasts:

1. between two different subject's pronoun: "*I*" (**line 1**) refers to Yeats, he was a witness [testimone] to the Easter Rising; "*them*" (**line 1**) refers to the Irish insurgence, that Yeats used to meet at the end of the day
2. between the insurgence *vivid faces* (**line 2**) and the *grey Eighteenth-century houses* (**line 3-4**)
3. there is a contrast between these people and the poet, because the *vivid faces* of these people might have easily revealed some internal agitation, but when meeting them, the poet proved unable to take their passion seriously, he didn't feel close to their internal agitation: he just acknowledge them with a nod, or he exchange some meaningless small talk, just to be polite; sometimes he even mocked them with his friends; for Yeats all these people were just living their normal life, but then something happen, and everything change

In the **second stanza** the poet became more specific about the people he used to meet, he provides us with some details and personal information about some of the rebels.

The **third stanza** opens with a reference to the hearts that have only one aim, referring to the rebels and to their single-minded dedication. Yeats is suggesting that those people who totally devote themselves to some unchanging goals, may finally lose their ordinary human feelings, to the point that their heart is like a stone travelling the *living stream*.

This *living stream* (**line 44**) stands for the flowing of life while the hearts with one purpose refers to the rebels, who dedicate all their energy to one single goal.

This *stone* (**lines 43-47**) might also be read as an allusion to the anglo-irish conflict. Yeats is developing the idea that everything changes in nature, in order to adapt to the situation, whereas stones simply exist to the same state on a endless basis.

People who devote themselves to unchanging goals might finally end up in being like stones, because they lose their most peculiar human feature, that is the ability to change and to adapt for their own survival.

In the **fourth stanza** the poet wonders whether the rebels sacrifice was useful and worthwhile.

Maybe it is possible that England, would have granted Ireland its independence without this violent rebellion.

Many people were killed.

Yeats affirms that it is not up to him to establish this. It's God who has to answer this question, and our duty is just to honor the rebels memory, and remember the rebels with respect.

To emphasize the respect that people should owe to the rebels, Yeats uses a symbolic image. He says that our attitude towards the death rebels should be the same attitude of a mother when taking care of her sleeping child, looks at him and says name, with the utmost love and utmost seriousness.

Yeats is also making an association with this symbol, establishing a link between death and sleep, which reveals a comforting idea of death, and which has christian implication.

Then Yeats immediately rejects this idea, because the rebels are truly dead, and this is not something temporary, so it is not the case to soften the harshness of the reality.

At **line 74** Yeats states the act he is performing. He wrote this line to celebrate the rebels who sacrificed their lives to a dream.

This line bridges the poet, the heroes and the readers.

At **line 75-76** he mentions some of the insurgence, and by directly naming them, we see how, through the poem, these insurgence have gone through a radical process of transformation to the eyes of the poet.

From the idea of ordinary people, they ended up as heroes to be honoured at the end of the poem, because they nobly die for their cause, and they deserve being remembered.

The poem ends with a line which is repeated at the end of the first and the second stanza. These lines contain an oxymoron (*terrible // beauty*). This line is a sort of refrain [ritornello] that clearly conveys the feelings of the poet about the sacrifice implied in the change. Yeats' attitude oscillates between a feeling of admiration for their bravery and a feeling of conflict for the cost of their commitment.

In the end he cannot say if the rebels' sacrifice was worth the cost.

His attitude is ambivalent and characterised by approval and disapproval at the same time. This line perfectly registers the contrast between the nobility of the rebels' cause and the devastating price they paid for it. This line also perfectly registers the poet's uncertainty about how to make sense of what happened.

Yeats was a symbolist, and in this poem he proves his ability as a symbolist, by recurring to some symbols that convey powerful meanings, sometimes contrasting each other:

- the **stone**: it may stand for the Anglo-Irish conflict, it may stand for the rebel's heart: this association can have both negative and positive connotations
 - the positive connotations refer to the idea of strength that a stone implies
 - the negative connotations refer to the static nature of stones: the steady focus on the cause for independence, although it is actually a noble dream, has made the rebel's heart stone-like; their fixation ended up bringing violence and destruction;
- the **stone** might also symbolize both the admiration and the criticism for the rebels by Yeats
- the **sleeping child**: this image is used to refer to the death of rebels; sleep is a common metaphor for death in poetry, and the image of child implies an idea of innocence; just like children can sometimes unintentionally produce some harm, so the rebels are not guilty, because they didn't intend to cause any harm for fighting for their independence
- the **mother**: it can be read as a symbol for Ireland itself; according to this interpretation, the rebels can be imagined as Ireland's children

T: *The Second Coming*

- p. 200

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
5 The blood-dimmed tide¹ is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
10 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
15 A gaze blank and pitiless² as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
20 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle³,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards⁴ Bethlehem to be born?

1 The blood-dimmed tide. La marea velata dal sangue.
2 A gaze blank and pitiless. Uno sguardo vuoto e spietato.
3 rocking cradle. Culla a dondolo.
4 Slouches towards. Avanza pigramente verso.

This is one of Yeats' most famous poem, belonging to the last period of his career.

It was written in 1919, and it was published after a series of bloodshed:

- two years after the Russian revolution
- the end of WWI
- the conflict between Irish patriots and English government was at its pick

Its conclusion also seems to predict the rise of Hitler and the nazi party.

Portraying a world on the edge of catastrophe, this poem is deeply pessimistic about the new phase that the world is entering.

To fully understand this poem, it is useful to look at Yeats' view of history. He is influenced by the cyclical theory of the Italian philosopher Gian Battista Vico.

Yeats always professes to see the world as in a state of perpetuale flux: in this regard, his idea of history was based on what he called **gyres**.

A gyre is a geometric figure composed of two cones, rotating in opposite directions.

According to Yeats history is made of different historical phases, which he calls gyres, usually contrasting with each other.

Each historical phase is followed by an other one which has contrasting elements, in comparison to the previous one. Each dominant historical phase always contains its antithesis.

The title of this poem evokes the second coming of Christ, predicted by Matthew in the Bible. According to it Jesus Christ is supposed to return, and save those who deserve being saved, the true believers, bringing them to heaven.

The second coming described by Yeats is not referred to Christ: he perceives that some rough beast, which he cannot name, is waiting to be born. This image of the **rough beast** clearly suggest that this second coming will not be that of Christ, but that of an Anti-Christ.

The **first stanza** describes a world characterized by anarchy and blood. The picture introduced is one of violence and change.

- **line 3:** *Things fall apart*: chaotic world
- **line 3:** *the centre cannot hold*: society lacks of foundations
- **lines 4-5:** idea of blood, physical pain and violence, idea of mass destruction
- **line 6:** humanity supposed arc of progress as being a pure illusion
- **line 7:** *The best lack all conviction*: best people are not motivated
- **lines 7-8:** *while the worst Are full of passionate intensity*: worsts are eager to act; the worsts are those who react with passionate physical intensity and not with careful intellectual study

These two lines suggests a dissociation between best people (intellectual) and the crowd

The lines of this stanza can be read almost as a commentary on the times. The first stanza expresses the disintegration of our civilization. To describe this disintegration Yeats uses a series of images

- **the falcon** *turning and turning in the widening gyre* represents the cycle of history that is disintegrating
- **the falcon** who *cannot hear the falconer* stands for lack of communication

The **second stanza** describes a nightmarish picture connected to the second coming. It predicts the beginning of a new age, a sort of anti-christian age, characterized by violence, lack of values and lack of communication.

- **lines 9-10** are rich in repetitions.

All these repetitions create a sort of onomatopoeic effect, that suggest the repetitive movement of the gyre.

The poet is sure that there will be soon some revelation, the **second coming**, a new cycle in history

The poet has a vision, an image coming from the *Spiritus Mundi* emerges in the poet's mind. This *Spiritus Mundi* it's the soul of the universe to which men are connected through the great memory: it's a sort of universal subconscious, were the memories of the human race are preserved: it's similar to Jung's idea of the Collective Unconscious.

The main symbol we find here is the **rough beast**. Many critics remark that this poem is deeply concerned with the drama of modern war.

Yeats himself described his poem as a reaction to the growing murderousness of the world. This concern with war marks this poem as a modern work.

- **lines 13-17:** describes a creature which is half human and half lion (it's a vision of the poet); it has the body of a Lion and the head of a man. This creature appears in the desert, and in the poet's eyes it has a blank and pityless look.

The rough beast that has the intellect of a man and the fierce emotion of a beast.

Some critics have also connected this **rough beast** with the figure of Hitler, and it is prophetic, since it predicts the rise of Nazism. Perhaps connecting this image to a single historical figure or event is reductive, because for Yeats this rough beast is fearful image which arises out of the collapse of the existing order.

This creature arises from the fact the *Things fall apart and the centre cannot hold* (**line 3**).

Yeats's vision offers a more general vision of evil.

- **line 18:** poet's vision ends and the poet starts thinking again
- **line 19:** it refers to the christian age: the poem is about the disintegration of the christian age
- **line 20:** it's a puzzling line because the "rocking cradle" suggests the manger where Jesus was laid
- **lines 21-22:** the poem ends with the image of the rough beast going to Bethlehem to be born; the creature is going to desecrate the holy play where Jesus was born.

This poem is an apocalyptic vision of the future of mankind.

The poem is meter irregular, and it doesn't have a fixed rhyme scheme. Describing a world of chaos, anarchy and confusion, it make sense that the poem doesn't follow a standard scheme or fixed rhyme pattern, which would convey an idea of order, balance and linearity

Thomas Stearns Eliot

He is one of the most significant figure of the 20th century, he is one of the great innovator of the 20th century: he was a **poet**, a **playwright**, but also a **literary critic**.

He wrote almost nothing negligible.

He was born in Missouri, in **1888**. He study at Harvard and at the Sorbonne in Paris and at Oxford: those giving a cosmopolitan bent to his education.

At the outbreak of WWI he settled in London where he started to work first as a teacher and then as a Bank Clerk.

In **1914** he met the american poet **Ezra Pound**, with whom he would work closely on several major poems.

In **1915** he married Viven Haigh-Wood: she was a British ballad dancer, but the marriage was not a success since she suffered from mental instability.

In **1917** he published his first collection of poems *Prufrock and Other Observations*, which establish Eliot as an important avant-garde poet, with its vocal fragmentation and allusiveness, with its precision of imagery, its condemnation of the modern world, together with the ricorrence to a dry selfconscious wit, this poem establish Eliot as a modernist poet.

In **1922** he founded the influential literary journal *The Criterion*, which he also edited during the 17 years of its publication.

In **1925** he became director of the publishing house *Faber and Faber*.

After the publication of its first collection of poems, unhappily married, Eliot suffered from a nervous breakdown, and he spends some time in a sanatorium in Switzerland, where he underwent psychological treatment.

During this period poetry became officially its only shelter, as well as the tool to transcend his personal situation and to represent the general crisis of western culture.

In Switzerland he completed his famous poem *The Waste Land* which was published in the first issue of *The Criterion* after Ezra Pound revision and cuts. Eliot later dedicated this poem to his friend Ezra Pound.

This poem explored the disintegration of values in the modern world. It was highly innovative and it confirmed Elliot as a major poet and also as a significant spokesman for his generation.

In **1925** he published *The Hollow Man*. This poem can be read as a sequel to the despair expressed in *The Waste Land*.

In **1927** Elliot became a British citizen and it was about this time that he entered the Anglican

Church finally finding the answer to his own uncertainties and to the despair of the modern world's lack of faith and religion. (Eliot is American from birth)

The major works of this period expressed Eliot's search for religious certainties and they include *Ash-Wednesday* published in 1939 and the *Four Quartets* published in 1943.

Ash-Wednesday is a poem with a penitential and questioning mood whereas the *Four Quartets* deals with the relation between time and eternity.

When his wife's mental instability got worse Eliot placed her into a mental asylum where she later died provoking a strong sense of guilt in Eliot.

Ten years later he was happily remarried to his secretary.

During the 30's Eliot also devoted himself to writing verse drama which he also continued writing during the 40's and the 50's. He isn't only a poet, he is also a playwright and a literary critic.

All his plays mainly address directly or indirectly religious themes.

During his life Eliot proved to be an extremely prolific writer. He even wrote a book of poems for children which is called *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* in 1939. This book was later transformed into the highly successful musical *Cats*.

During his life Eliot also wrote several works of criticism. He was an influential **literary critic** and in his critical essays he shared with the modern novelist **James Joyce** the view about the importance for the artist to be impersonal and to separate the man who suffers from the mind which creates.

He believed that the artist had to separate the man who suffers from the mind which he creates.

The characters of his works are often archetypes of human beings who turn their own subjective experience into a universal form which anyone can identify with.

His idea was that impersonality must prevail over personality.

In 1948 he was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Literature** and he was internationally recognised as one of the most important poets of the century.

He died in London in 1965.

Works

Eliot wrote in a period when new techniques were needed to express the complex realities of the so-called **Age of Anxiety**.

Even though a definitive interpretation of his work is not possible we can roughly divide his literary production into 2 periods: before and after his conversion to the Anglican Church.

Before his conversion to the anglican church

The works of the first period show a pessimistic vision of the world and the main works belonging to this first phase are *Prufrock and Other Observations*, *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Man*.

All these poems expressed a certain nihilism (existence is useless) and reflects the sense of spiritual dryness of modern man.

After his conversion to the anglican church

The works of the second period show a more optimistic vision. After entering the anglican Church his religious faith gave him an optimistic vision of the world and so from a mood of desolation Eliot turned into an ardent believer in Christian faith.

The main works belonging to this second phase are *The four quartets*, *Ash-Wednesday* and his verse poems.

With his works Eliot represented the complexity of modern civilization. For Eliot this complexity resulted from the fragmentation of Western tradition which was the result of the Modern processes of industrialization, mass production and consumerism.

Alienated modern man no longer experiences a coherent sense of moral and religious community with his fellow man. His actions are no longer governed by a shared ethical code. The modern man is morally and spiritually empty.

Eliot sees his poetic mission as that of piecing together these broken worlds and finding redemption by creating a new symbolic system but inevitably such missions lead to a very difficult poetry.

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 poem, and it is one of the most recognizable 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.

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 Eliot he diagnosed the collapse of values that followed the bloodshed of WWI; it is characterised by shifting scenarios, multiple voices and changes in form.

The *Waste Land* is a very long poem, structured in five different sections:

1. The Burial of the Dead
2. A Game of Chess
3. The Fire Sermon
4. Death by Water
5. What the Thunder Said

The first one (**The Burial of the Dead**), dealing with the coming of spring, in a sterile land, is centered on the basic opposition between **sterility** and **fertility**, **life** and **death**.

The second section (**A Game of Chess**) is based on the juxtaposition of present squalor, and past ambiguous splendor.

The Fire Sermon reinforces the theme of squalor, and it introduces Tiresias, which is considered by Eliot the most important character in the poem.

Death by Water is based on the idea of purification by water.

What the Thunder Said conveys the image of the disintegration of western civilization and it suggest it possible salvation.

A possible solution is found in a sort of sympathy with other human beings, but anyway this solution does not modify the general atmosphere of desolation.

In addition to these five section, *The Waste Land* also includes Eliot own notes, which explain some of his metaphors, allusions, quotations and half quotations.

Eliot uses several myths, legends and symbols, but he was acutely aware of the difficulty: including some notes aimed explaining his references.

Eliot drew inspiration from a wide range of sources:

- *The Bible*
- Dante's *Divina Commedia*
- Shakespeare
- French Symbolists
- Metaphysical poets, and John Donne
- Homer's *Odyssey*
- Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

- *The Upanishads*, an Hindu sacred text.

In this regard Eliot openly declares that immature poets borrow, and major poets steal. He was firmly convinced that past and present must coexist in poetry, and for this reason we are fully entitled to consider him at the same time as the most influential poet, but also as the most influent poet.

According to Eliot a poet should write universal poetry, drawing inspiration from everywhere: from the past, from the present, and from other countries.

Style

The style of this poem is fragmentary: this stylistic fragmentation is evidente, first of all, 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 cannot easily follow the story. There is the lack of an explicit link between the episodes described, and the reader cannot easily follow the poem.

Secondly, it is fragmentary because of the mixture of different poetic style, 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 his use of language: its vocabulary is made up of words from several different languages: not only english, but even french, latin, german, sanskrit.

An other 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 prefers to use metaphor, similis and symbols to evoke emotions.

To this purpose, Eliot adopted what he called the **objective correlative**, which is the attempt at conveying and 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 uses the objective correlative of symbolic meaningful imagery, which forces the reader to contribute to the poem, by bringing its own connotation to the gaps and by bringing its own meaning to the unstated.

T: *The Burial of Dead*

- p. 206

A funeral service in the Anglican rite is called "The Order of the Burial of the Dead". The title of the first section of *The Waste Land* refers to it, since it is a metaphor for the condition of modern man, whose life is meaningless, empty, alienating and quite similar to death. In the passage that follows, traditional myths and symbols are used in an original way and acquire different and sometimes difficult connotations. This is why the poet himself added some notes to the edition in which the poem appeared.

April is the cruellest month, breeding¹
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring²
Dull roots³ with spring rain.
5 Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers. [...]
Unreal City⁴,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
10 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many⁵.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled⁶,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street⁷,
15 To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine⁸.
There I saw one I knew⁹, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson!
'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae¹⁰!
'That corpse¹¹ you planted last year in your garden,
20 'Has it begun to sprout¹²? Will it bloom this year?
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
'O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men¹³,
'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
'You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère¹⁴!

- 1 breeding. Che genera.
- 2 stirring. Che stimola.
- 3 Dull roots. Sopite radici.
- 4 Unreal City. Città irreale (citazione dal poeta francese Baudelaire).
- 5 I had ... so many. "Ch'io non avrei mai creduto / che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta" (citazione dal Canto III dell'*Inferno*, vv. 56-57).
- 6 Sighs ... exhaled. Sospiri, corti e rari, ne esalavano (*Inferno*, IV, vv. 25-27).
- 7 King William Street. Una strada della City.
- 8 nine. L'ora d'inizio del lavoro nella City.
- 9 There ... knew. Là vidi uno che conoscevo (il poeta riconosce amici tra la folla, come Dante nell'*Inferno*).
- 10 Mylae. Battaglia navale nella Prima guerra punica (260 a.C.).
- 11 corpse. Cadavere (allusione alla mitologia egizia, secondo la quale

- il corpo del dio Osiride, dopo il suo assassinio, fu tagliato in pezzi che furono poi sepolti in diverse parti del Paese. Sua moglie Iside trasformò queste tombe in luoghi sacri sui quali veniva piantato del grano, che germogliava e cresceva ogni anno. Tale mito fornì a Eliot un gruppo di immagini legate alla morte e al suo progresso verso la rinascita).
- 12 Has ... sprout. Ha cominciato a germogliare.
- 13 keep ... men. "Tien lontano di qui il cane, che è amico dell'uomo" (citazione da *The White Devil*, 1612, di John Webster, drammaturgo elisabettiano).
- 14 You! ... frère. "Tu! Lettore ipocrita! – mio simile – mio fratello!" (citazione dalla prefazione di *Les Fleurs du mal* di Baudelaire che ricorda come tutti siamo ugualmente immersi nella stupidità, nel peccato e nella noia).

This extract contains the beginning of the poem (**lines 1-7**) and the end of the poem's first section (**lines 8-24**)

The Waste Land is a poem with an extraordinary symbolic and rhythmic complexity, which breaks into many directions, from its very beginning.

It starts with a reference to April, as the "cruellest month", while the reader usually associates April to a month of renewal.

Then he breaks again with the common view by saying that Winter, generally associated with cold temperatures, keeps human beings warm, it turns to be positive.

In the second section is focused on the opposition between fertility and sterility, life and death. It contains one of the most surreal episodes of the whole poem: the speaker in fact walks through London, which is mentioned with the expression "unreal city" a reference to Baudelaire who used a similar expression to refer to Paris in one of his poems; London is the

symbol of materialism, consumerism, because inhabited by creatures that look like walking ghosts, that stare and sight only in front of their feet. This is an idea of people who are totally absorbed by work that have lost the ability to communicate to each other. This image conveys an idea

of death within life and lack of communication

There is a sensation of unreality, due to:

- presence of people who look like walking ghosts
- presence of a brown fog at dawn which conveys an idea of unreal darkness
- the sound of the clock bell, which is a dead sound; the church bell no longer signifies a call to prayer, but it signifies a call to work; in the modern world, work has replaced the function of pray;

The speaker recognizes someone he knows among the crowd: he calls him Stetson. This is the name of an American large hat, which is usually worn by cowboys, and for this reason some critics see in this name a valid reference to Eliot's friend Ezra Pound (he used to wear this kind of hat). Eliot actually denied this connection.

The speaker connects his encounter to a memory of the Punic Wars. The two men fought together in the first Punic War (between Rome and Carthage).

This reference to the past world is meant to reproduce the present clashes of WWI.

It is difficult to analyze Eliot's poem, because there are so many references.

The speaker asks Stetson about the fate of a corpse planted in his garden: he asks if the buried corpse has already begun to sprout; it is an ironic and comic description of the burial rite, as a form of gardening.

The section ends with a direct address to the reader:

'You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!'

This is a quotation from the preface of *Le fleur du mal* of Baudelaire.

This final line connects the poet to the reader, since they both share a condition of spiritual emptiness and desolation.

The **style** is highly citatory: in this passage we find references to

- Dante's Inferno (when he describes the crowd of walking ghosts)
- Baudelaire's Parisian poems (at line 8 *unreal city*)
- Baudelaire's preface to *Le fleur du male* (last line)
- at line 22 we have a reference to a minor 17th century dramatist's tragedy, John Webster's *The white devil*. Webster wrote

O Keep the Wolf far hence, that's fought to man

All these quotations make the text very complex, since there can be different levels of reading, according to how many references the reader is able to notice and appreciate.

Eliot makes use of free verse: lines are not of the same length, there is neither a regular scheme nor a traditional meter, and there isn't

T: *The Fire Sermon*

- p. 208

Unreal City

Under the brown fog of a winter noon

Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant

Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants

5 C.i.f. **London**¹: documents at sight,

Asked me in demotic French²

To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel

Followed by a weekend at the Metropole³.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back

10 Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits

Like a taxi throbbing⁴ waiting,

I Tiresias⁵, though blind, throbbing between two lives⁶,

Old man with wrinkled female breasts⁷, can see

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives⁸

15 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,

The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights

Her stove, and lays out food in tins.

Out of the window perilously spread

Her drying combinations⁹ touched by the sun's last rays,

20 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)

Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays¹⁰.

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs

Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest¹¹ –

I too awaited the expected guest.

25 He, the young man carbuncular¹², arrives,

A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare¹³,

One of the low on whom assurance sits

As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire¹⁴.

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,

30 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,

Endeavours¹⁵ to engage her in caresses

Which still are unreprieved¹⁶, if undesired.

Flushed¹⁷ and decided, he assaults at once;

Exploring hands encounter no defence;

35 His vanity requires no response,

And makes a welcome of indifference.

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all

Enacted on this same divan or bed;

I who have sat by Thebes¹⁸ below the wall

40 And walked among the lowest of the dead¹⁹.)

Bestows²⁰ one final patronising kiss²¹,

And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit²²...

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,

Hardly aware of her departed lover;

45 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:

'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'

When lovely woman stoops to folly and

Paces about her room again, alone,

She smooths her hair²³ with automatic hand,

50 And puts a record on the gramophone.

This passage introduces a key figure in the poem, **Tiresias**: he is the Theban prophet who was punished with blindness because he had seen Athen, the goddess of knowledge, bathing naked.

He became blind but he was able to see into the future: he was a seer.

This is divided into two section: the **first** (1-8) and the **second** (9-40)

Highlighted words:

- highlighted in **yellow**: description of the city of London, the external setting
- highlighted in **green**: description of the time
- highlighted in **light blue**: Mr Eugenides
- highlighted in **orange**: refers to the typist
- highlighted in **pink**: expression referred to Tiresias
- highlighted in **grey**: expression referred to the typist lover
- **pink** words: refers to the man's action and attitude
- **blue** words: typist's emotions and mood

First section

In the first section Tiresias is in London, which is the external setting; he is with Mr Eugenides: he is a merchant, whose name means "well born", someone of noble origin.

Now he is unkempt (trasandato), and he speaks vulgar french.

In this first section Mr Eugenides invites the narrator Tiresias to have lunch together and then he invites him to go to a hotel in Brighton, the Metropole, known for its sexual activity.

This scene evoke past and present time. Smyrna is a very ancient town, located in present Turkey, and so this is the image of an ancient merchant, but also there is the reference to the modern time, from the Hotel.

- **line 9**: *violet hour*: the sunset
- **line 12**: *I Tiresias*: it's the only explicit identification of the speaker

Second section

Tiresias assists to a squalid sexual encounter.

The setting in place changes: now the setting is a squalid untidied bedsitter, when we find a typist, who is waiting for her lover.

The setting in time: there is a mixture of past, present and future; Tiresias is a figure who comes from the past, and he has already experienced the events that he is now assisting to.

He is assisting to the squalid sexual encounter, in the present, and at the same time he is able to foretell the future.

Yet he cannot do anything to modify the future, he can only predict it.

Tiresias is an ermafrodite, because he was a man, and then he become a woman, and then he returned a man, so he posses the knowledge of both sexes.

He represents the supreme metamorphosis that brings the two sexes together.
He's qualified to summarize the whole human experience, He's qualified to assist to this sexual encounter.

The typist stands for the liberated woman of the early 1920s. She is independent and free, but this didn't bring her any happiness: she lives alone, in an untidy one room flat, full of uninteresting everyday objects; she lives an highly monotonous life. In this extract she is compared to a human engine, that act with automatic hand

The typist lover is a young man, carbuncular: carbuncle is an infection.

The typist is both morally and emotionally indifferent, bored and tired, but the man is not worried: he is only interested in his own satisfaction, he is only pleased with himself.

When he leaves her, he is satisfied. He is not able to grab the squalor he lived in.

Love is reduced to the fulfilment of mere instincts and physical desire: it's something practical and meaningless.

The typist's reaction to the young man is of pleasure for the end of the sexual encounter.

- **lines 49-50:** Reinforces the impression of dullness, monotony and sterility. Their relationship is no more than a parody.

The themes developed are:

Spiritual sterility and lack of communication:

Eliot wants to underline how impossible communication through love is in the wasteland; love has been reduced to mere lust. Eliot deals with this theme through the **objective correlative**: he describes this sexual encounter with a language that evokes the scene, and he doesn't describe it directly

Negativity of city life:

city life is only linked to commercial transactions, and this is evident from some metaphors and symbols that Eliot adopts here:

- **line 5:** *C.i.f.*: it stands for "cost insurance and freight", this is a typical term of commercial transactions.
- the **typist**, who is the symbol of the liberated woman of the '20s

Antithesis between past and present:

this is evident through the juxtaposition of images belonging to the past and images belonging to the present