



# Thomas Stearns Eliot

(1888-1965)

Compact Performer - Culture & Literature  
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**ZANICHELLI**



T.S. Eliot

# 1. Life



1888

He was born in St Louis, Missouri.

1910

He studied in Paris at the Sorbonne (but also at Harvard and Oxford)

1915

He married the British ballet dancer Vivienne Haigh-Wood, but his unhappy marriage led him to a nervous breakdown

1917

He established himself as an important avant-garde poet.

1922

He published *The Waste Land*.



T.S. Eliot

# 1. Life



**1925**

He became a director for the publishers Faber & Faber, London.

**1927**

He acquired British citizenship and converted to Anglicanism. Faith gave him the answer to his own uncertainties.

**1930**

For the next thirty years he was considered 'the most dominant figure in poetry and literary criticism in the English-speaking world'.

**1948**

He received the Nobel Prize for literature.

**1965**

He died in London.



T.S. Eliot

## 2. Works

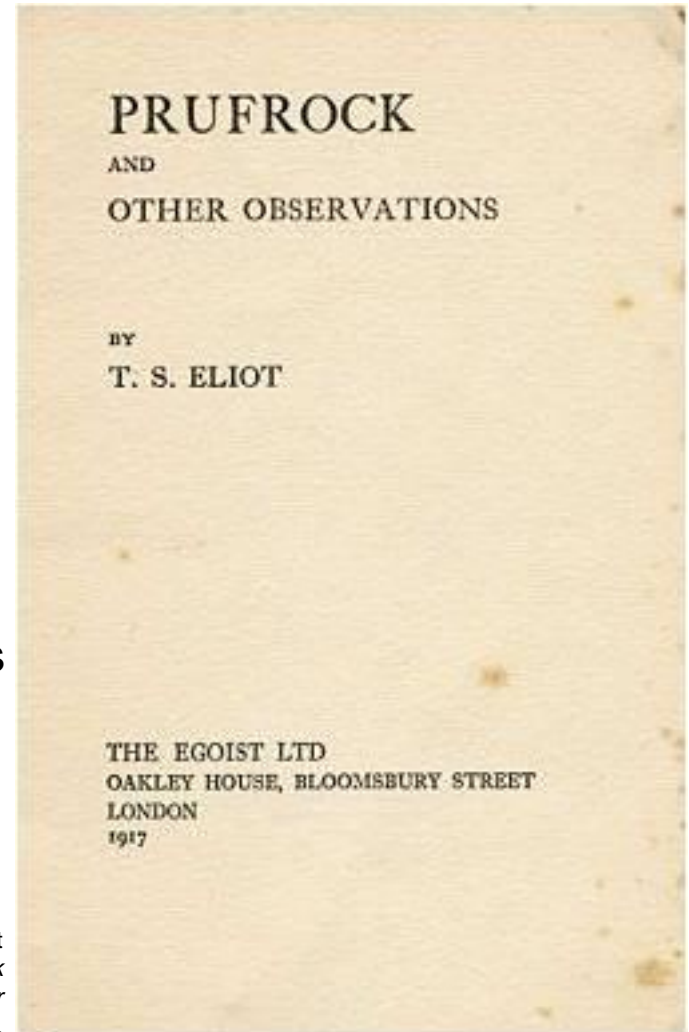
Before the conversion

1917 → *Prufrock and Other Observations*.

1922 → *The Waste Land*. It is said to be ‘the single most influential poetic work of the twentieth century’. (He wrote it while he was recovering in a sanatorium in Switzerland)

1925 → *The Hollow Men*. (a sequel)

Cover for the first edition of *Prufrock and Other Observations*.





T.S. Eliot

## 2. Works

After the conversion

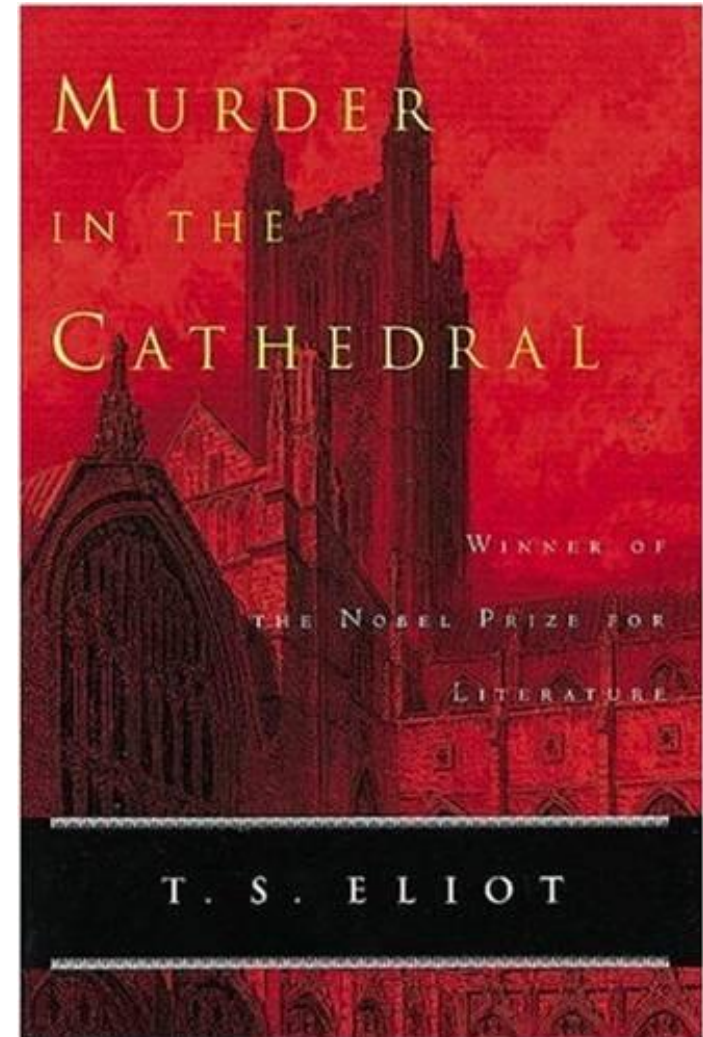
1930 → *Ash-Wednesday*.

1935-1942 → *Four Quartets*.

1935 → *Murder in the Cathedral*, a drama in verse.

1939 → *Family Reunion*.

Besides, he was an influential literary critic and wrote important essays.



A contemporary edition of *Murder in the Cathedral*.



T.S. Eliot

### 3. T.S. Eliot's world and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century world

Modern/T.S. Eliot's world	19 <sup>th</sup> -century world
<b>Chaotic</b>	<b>Ordered</b>
<b>Futile</b>	<b>Meaningful</b>
<b>Pessimistic</b>	<b>Optimistic</b>
<b>Unstable</b>	<b>Stable</b>
<b>Loss of faith</b>	<b>Faith</b>
<b>Collapse of moral values</b>	<b>Morality/Values</b>
<b>Confused sense of identity</b>	<b>Clear sense of identity</b>

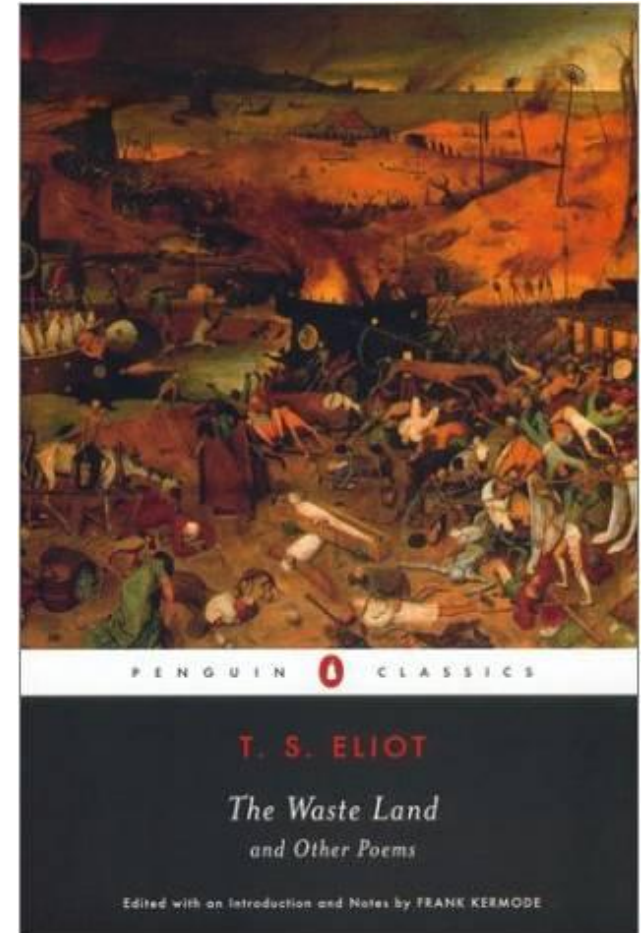




T.S. Eliot

## 4. *The Waste Land*: content

- It is an autobiography written in a moment of crisis in the poet's life.
- The main theme is the contrast between **past fertility** and **present sterility**.
- It consists of **five sections**; it reflects the fragmented experience of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century sensibility of the great modern cities of the West and it emphasizes the lack of values in the modern world.

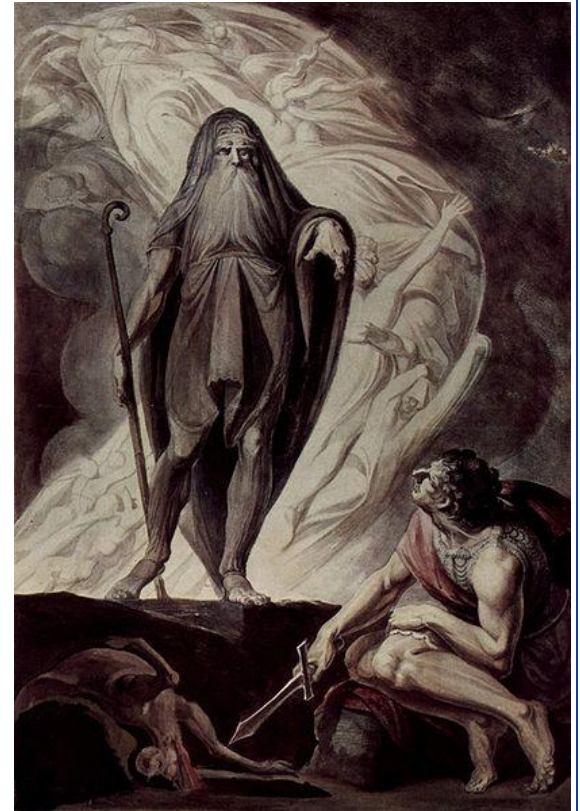




T.S. Eliot

## 4. *The Waste Land*: content

- There are a lot of references to historical narratives (the Bible, Dante, Shakespeare). He uses a technique of **fragmentation and reassembly** of these historical narratives.
- **Quotations** from literary works belonging to different traditions and cultures.
- The mythical past linked to **a new concept of history repetition of the same events**. Thus the present and past exist simultaneously in the *Waste Land* (continuous shifts in time and space, reflecting free associations of the mind).



The blind soothsayer and prophet of ancient Greek literature.





T.S. Eliot

## 5. *The Waste Land*: themes

- The **breakdown of a historical, social and cultural order** destroyed by World War I.
- He contrasts the meaningless of modern life to a mythical past.
- **Spring Symbols**: different from Chaucer → **absence of rebirth**.

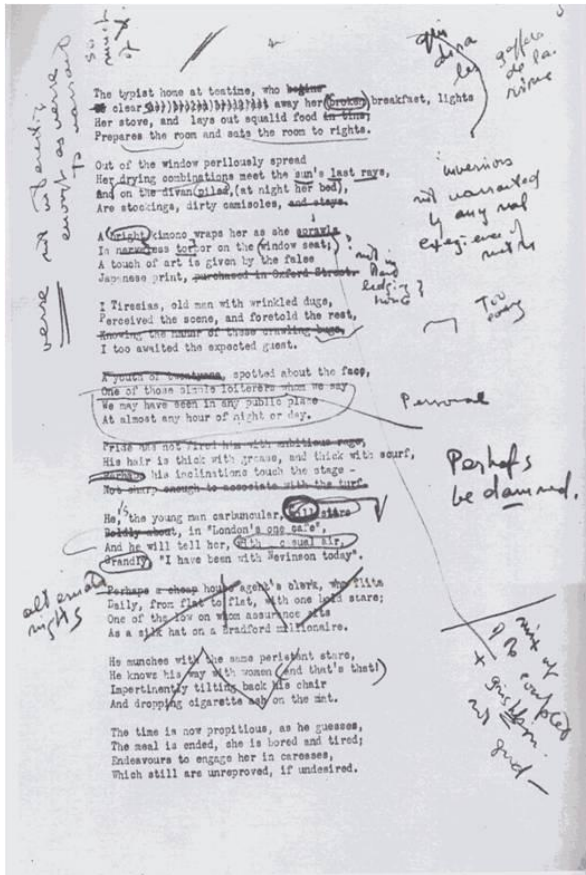


A detail of *The Triumph of Death* by Pieter Bruegel (the Elder), ca 1562. Oil on panel.



T.S. Eliot

# 6. *The Waste Land*: style



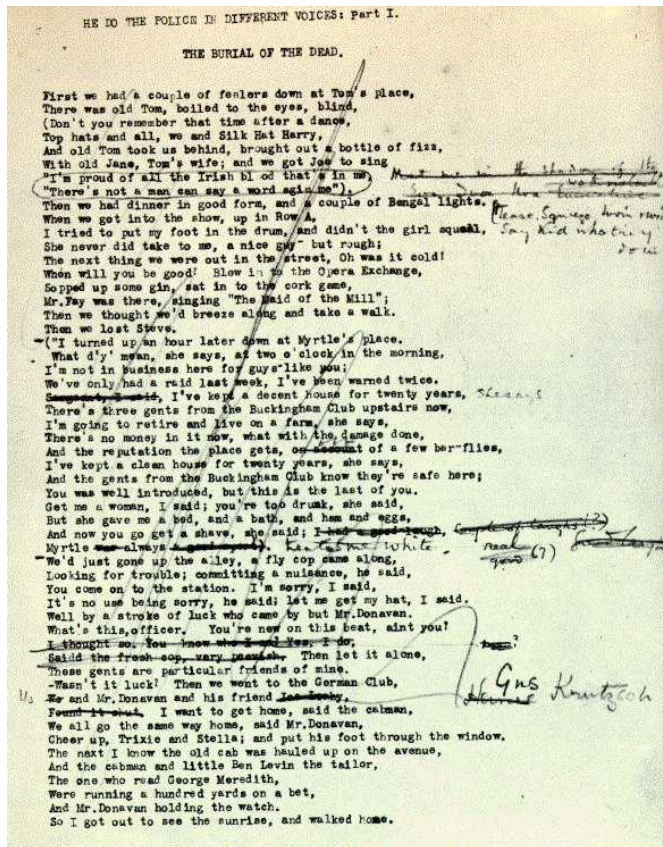
First draft of *The Waste Land*, third section.

- **Mixture of different poetic styles.**
- **Association of ideas** → past and present are simultaneous.
- **Mythical method** → to give significance to present futility (old myths have lost their deep meaning).
- **Subjective** experiences made **universal**.



T.S. Eliot

# 6. *The Waste Land*: style



First draft of *The Waste Land*, first section.

- **Quotations** from different languages and literary works.
- **Technique of implication**: the active participation of the reader is required.
- Use of the **objective correlative**.
- **Repetition** of words, images and phrases used to increase musicality.



T.S. Eliot

## 9. The objective correlative: T.S. Eliot and Montale

For Eliot, the ‘**objective correlative**’ →  
a **pattern** of objects, events, actions, or a  
situation that can serve effectively to awaken in  
the reader **an emotional response** without  
being **a direct statement** of that subjective  
emotion.



*Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road*

.....  
*If there were only water amongst the rock  
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit  
There is not even solitude in the mountains  
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl  
From doors of mudcracked houses  
If there were water  
And no rock  
If there were rock  
And also water  
And water  
A spring  
A pool among the rock  
If there were the sound of water only  
Not the cicada  
And dry grass singing  
But sound of water over a rock  
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees  
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop  
But there is no water*

**(from *The Waste Land* by TS Eliot)**

Merigiare pallido e assorto  
presso un rovente muro d'orto,  
ascoltare tra i pruni e gli sterpi  
schiocchi di merli, frusci di serpi.  
Nelle crepe dei suolo o su la vecchia  
spiar le file di rosse formiche  
ch'ora si rompono ed ora s'intrecciano  
a sommo di minuscole biche.  
Osservare tra frondi il palpitare  
lontano di scaglie di mare  
mentre si levano tremuli scricchi  
di cicale dai calvi picchi.  
E andando nel sole che abbaglia  
sentire con triste meraviglia  
com'è tutta la vita e il suo travaglio  
in questo seguitare una muraglia  
che ha in cima cocci aguzzi di bottiglia.

**(Eugenio Montale: *Merigiare pallido  
e assorto*)**





T.S. Eliot

## 9. The objective correlative: T.S. Eliot and Montale

<i>The Waste Land</i>	<i>Meriggiare pallido e assorto</i>
The American desert	A hot summer afternoon in Liguria
A desolate landscape: the cracked earth, the scorching sun, no water, only rocks. The desire of water gradually vanishes Unfriendly presence ( <i>red sullen faces</i> ) Sound of cicada singing Solitude	Hot, desolate landscape, but domestic. Unfriendly presence ( <i>file di rosse formiche</i> ) Sound of cicada Solitude
Use of onomatopoeia ( <i>drip drop...</i> ) Use of alliteration Use of repetition of keywords	Use of onomatopoeia ( <i>schiocchi, frusci, scricchi</i> ) Use of rhymes and assonances

- Both Eliot and Montale depict a desolate landscape.
- They both refer to a waste land of the spirit.
- This landscape is cosmopolitan in Eliot.
- It is a domestic landscape in Montale.