



# Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot.

**ZANICHELLI**

Only Connect... New Directions  
*Marina Spiazzi, Marina Tavella*  
2009

# 1. Life

- **1888**: he was born in St. Louis, Missouri.
- **1910**: he studied in Paris at the Sorbonne.
- **1915**: he married the British ballet dancer Vivienne Haigh-Wood.
- **1917**: he established himself as an important avant-garde poet.



Thomas Stearns Eliot.

# 1. Life

- **1922**: he edited *The Criterion*, an intellectual magazine. His professions included being a poet, a critic and an editor.
- **1925**: he became director for the publishers “Faber & Faber”.
- **1927**: he acquired British citizenship and converted to Anglicanism.



Thomas Stearns Eliot.

# 1. Life

- **1930**: for the next thirty years he was considered as “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.



Thomas Stearns Eliot.

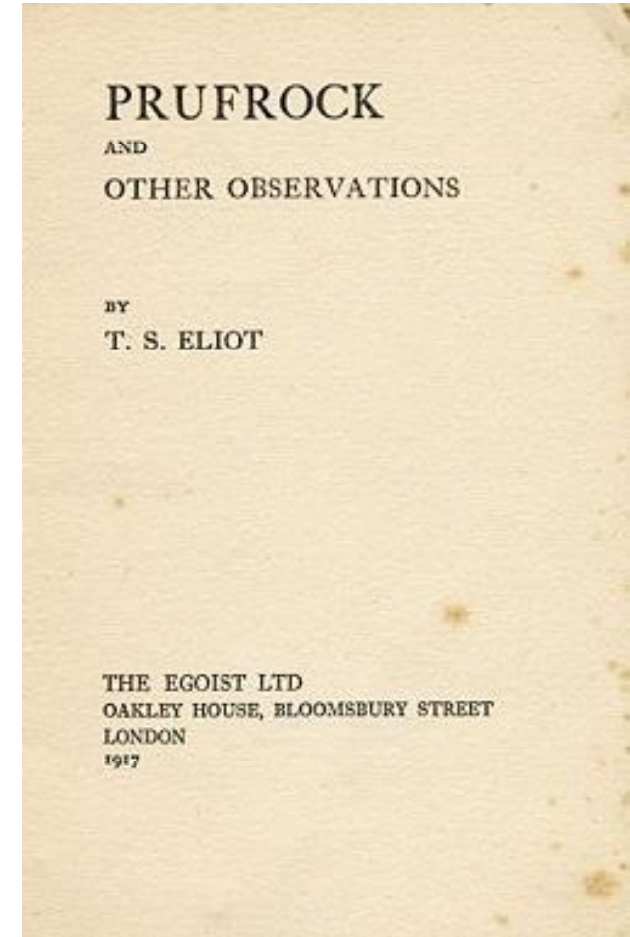
## 2. Works

### 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”.

1925: *The Hollow Men*.



Cover for the first edition of *Prufrock and other Observations*

## 2. Works

### After the conversion

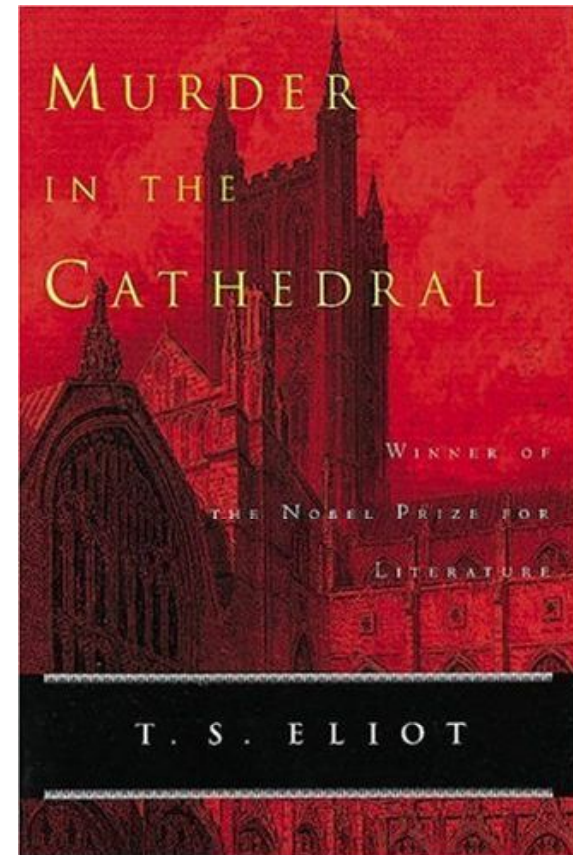
1927: *Ariel Poems*.

1930: *Ash-Wednesday*.

1935-1942: *Four Quartets*.

1935: *Murder in the Cathedral*.

1939: *Family Reunion*.



A contemporary edition of *Murder in the Cathedral*

### 3. T. S. Eliot's world and the 19th-century world

<b>Modern/T. S. Eliot's world</b>	<b>19th- century world</b>
<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>

## 4. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

**Poetic form:** a dramatic **monologue**.

**Content:** the protagonist's realization of **death within life**, the **lost opportunities** in his life and the **lack of any spiritual progress**.

**The speaker:** a middle-aged passive, aimless man.

He is linked to:

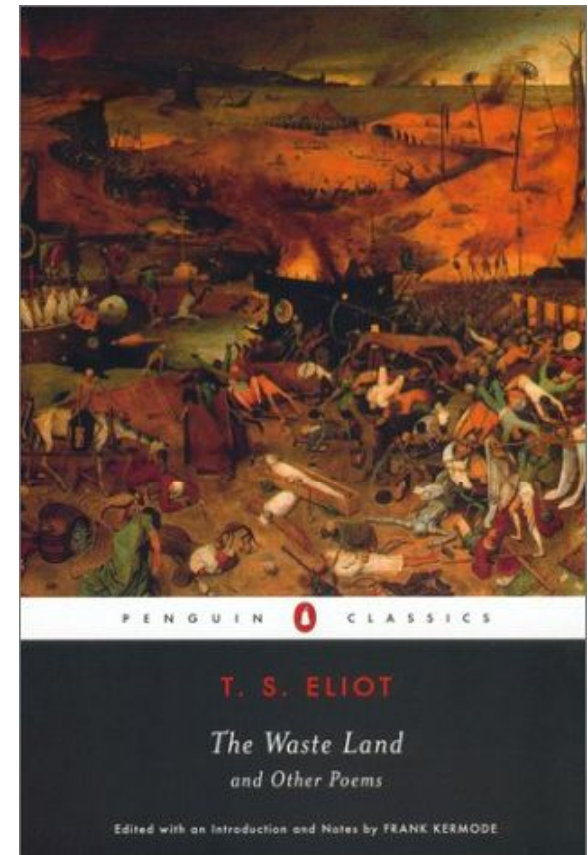
1. physical and intellectual **inertia**.
2. **inability to communicate** with his fellow-beings.

**Style:** juxtaposition of **poetic images** with **everyday phrases and images**; **objective correlative** instead of direct statements.



# 5. *The Waste Land*: content

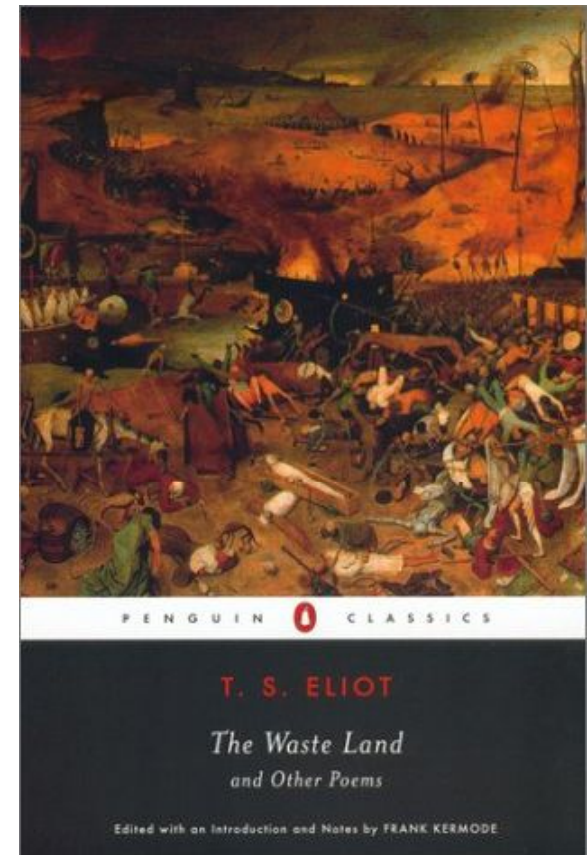
- It is an **autobiography** written in a moment of crisis in the life of the poet.
- It consists of **five sections**; it reflects the fragmented experience of the 20th-century sensibility of the great modern cities of the West.



A contemporary edition of *The Waste Land*.

## 5. *The Waste Land*: content

- It is an **anthology of indeterminate states** of the mind, hallucinations, impressions, personalities blended and superimposed beyond the boundaries of time and place.
- The **speaking voice** is **related to various personalities**: Tiresias, a knight from the Grail legend, the Fisher King.



A contemporary edition of *The Waste Land*.

## 6. *The Waste Land*: themes

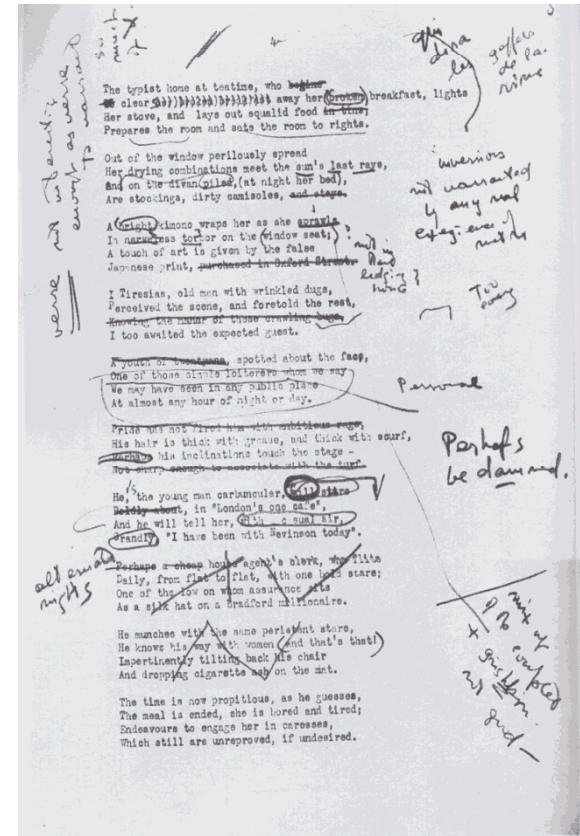
- The **disillusionment** and **disgust** of the period after World War I.
- Contrast between **past fertility** and **present sterility**.
- The mythical past linked to **a new concept of History** → **repetition of the same events**.
- **Spring Symbols**: different from Chaucer → **absence of rebirth**.

*April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.*

(I section)

# 7. *The Waste Land*: style

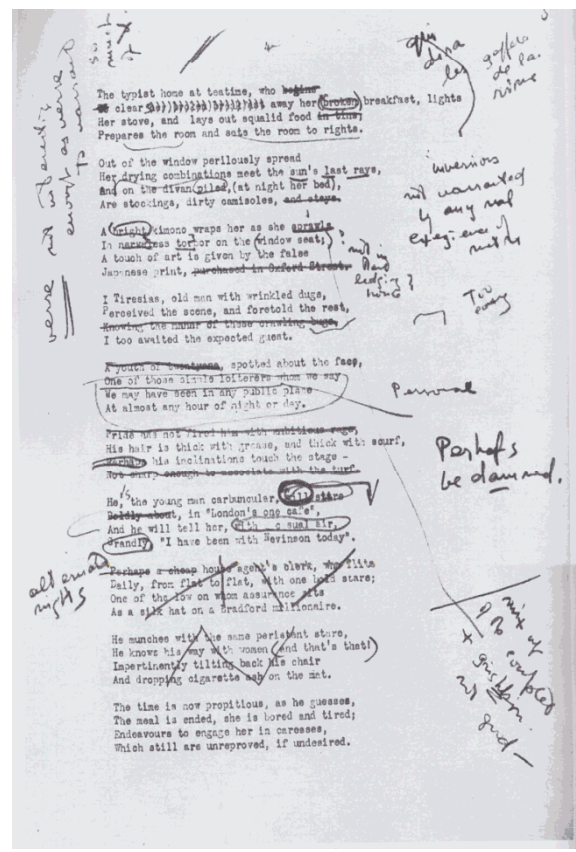
- **Association of ideas** → past and present are simultaneous.
- **Mythical method** → to give significance to present futility.
- **Subjective** experiences made **universal**.
- **Use of Juxtaposition.**



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

# 7. *The Waste Land*: style

- **Quotations** from different languages and literary works.
- **Fragmentation.**
- **Technique of implication:** the active participation of the reader is required.
- **Objective correlative.**
- **Repetition** of words, images and phrases.



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

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

For Eliot, the “**objective correlative**” is 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.

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

<i>What The Thunder said</i>	<i>Merigiare pallido e assorto</i> ("Ossi di Seppia")
<p><i>Here is no water but only rock Rock and no water and the sandy road The road winding above among the mountains Which are mountains of rock without water.</i></p>	<p><i>Merigiare pallido e assorto presso un rovente muro d'orto, ascoltare tra i pruni e gli sterpi schiocchi di merli, frusci di serpi.</i></p>

- **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.**

# 9. *The Hollow Men*

- Linked to *The Waste Land*.
- Main themes: **despair** and **desolation**.
- **No redemption** is possible because of the **lack of faith**.
- Parallel between **past** and **present**.



# 10. *Journey of the Magi* (*Ariel Poems*)

Written **after** his conversion to Christianity.

**Content:** the journey to the birthplace of Christ told by one of the Magi.



The Journey of the Magi fragment of a picture with the Adoration of the Magi, Sassetta, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

- **No celebration:** the journey is painful and meaningless.
- At first there is the **regret** of the previous life characterised by **alienation**.

# 10. *Journey of the Magi* (*Ariel Poems*)

Written **after** his conversion to Christianity.

**Content:** the journey to the birthplace of Christ told by one of the Magi.



The Journey of the Magi fragment of a picture with the Adoration of the Magi, Sassetta, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

- **End of paganism** in the last lines.
- The Magus cannot feel at home among “*an alien people clutching their gods*” (line 42). This captures the awkwardness felt by the **faithful** among **nonbelievers** and vice-versa.