

# **Collected Poems, 1909-1962 Study Guide**

**Collected Poems, 1909-1962 by T. S. Eliot**

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# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) -The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) -The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock Summary**

The narrator, J. Alfred Prufrock, embarks on a journey through city streets with a companion. He thinks of idle talk and restless lives. He thinks of how he must prepare his face to meet people, alluding to the fact that he hides his true self. He senses his dreams require revision to conform to the reality of his life. As he walks, he feels he played it safe too often. The opinions of others seem to matter to him as he ponders how people will remark on his thinning hair and weight loss. Prufrock wonders if he should do anything that will upset others. He does not want to upset the status quo.

To Prufrock, life flows swiftly. He sees how people judge others, seeing the facade as the real person. He knows people look at the exterior and never really see the inside. He talks of seeing lonely men leaning out of windows. This makes him wish he had a solitary peaceful life of obscurity. He also sees that his chance for greatness or accomplishment has gone and death is at his doorstep. He senses that his lack of decisive action made him live a life of mediocrity.

In the end, Prufrock knows he was a follower of men, not a leader. He speaks of being agreeable, polite, deferring to others. He exists like a supporting actor on the stage of life, never one who is part of the main action. His deep desires, both physical and emotional, are unmet. He knows he is not and will never be one whom others seek out for passionate adventure. He yearns for the attention of women in sensual terms, but knows his time is past. He concludes he will await his fate without a fight, enduring the monotonous days left to him.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) -The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock Analysis**

The reader senses an unfulfilled life in this poem. J. Alfred Prufrock is a man with strong yearnings, who did not have the courage to see them met. He is a man who took the safe route in all aspects of his life but now wishes risk-taking was a stronger element of his character. Now that he is older, he sees he performed as is expected of a decent member of society. He trampled over no one, did not deliberately offend anyone, and did not seek to change anyone's opinion of him. He put on different personas to suit the expectations of the different people in his life. Out of fear, he did not reach his dreams and now feels it is too late to achieve them. He wishes to "dare" but does not have the emotional, mental, or physical strength to do so. He will continue to live the life of a man on the outside looking in, at those who strive, risk, live, love, and attain.



Themes of lost loves, death, and regret dominate this poem. In addition, resignation is the closing feeling of the poem. Prufrock eases himself into the final chapters of his life knowing he could have made more of an effort at living instead of expending his energy worrying about living.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Portrait of a Lady**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Portrait of a Lady Summary**

Section I: The narrator, a man, visits a woman on a winter afternoon at her home. They meet in a dark room that is quiet and still. He feels that this meeting will be one of things said and not said and he will tiptoe around delicate topics. Music plays in the background and there is a hint that they have regrets. They do not expand on these regrets, instead returning to harmless conversation. The woman says she has everything she needs, but friends are most important. She says that life is nothing without friends who truly share with one another. He's uncomfortable with this talk.

Section II: The narrator is at the woman's home again in spring. She tells him that he does not know what life is even as he lives it. She says he is wasting time and that people do not remain young. April sunsets invigorate her and remind her of travel and her past. He is bored with her talking. She says while he has much to accomplish, all she can offer is her sympathy and friendship as she nears the end of her life. She says she is sure he understands her feelings, even though he keeps from getting close to her. He is uneasy and does not want to hear her talk anymore about his or her life.

Section III: He visits the woman once again, in October, although feeling ill at ease in doing so. She knows he is leaving the city and going abroad. She asks if he can write to her. He gets his back up over this but does not vocalize anything. He wants his freedom and does not want to be beholden to her. She continues to talk, wondering why they have never become friends. She says all their mutual friends thought they would be great for one another. She reiterates that he must write to her. He muses on what his thoughts will be if he learns of her death while he's away. He considers that she may have the advantage in death. She will be at peace—her loneliness and struggles over. He considers death and wonders if he should be smiling as he considers mortality.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Portrait of a Lady Analysis**

This poem hints at a possible relationship a younger man may have had with an older woman. How it may have been a physical relationship but never one where any friendship or love developed. Now the woman is older and the man is still in his prime - he is moving on in his life, even going abroad. She will stay in her home serving tea to friends who visit from time to time. Her days of youthful passion and adventure are over. There are themes of longing for love and friendship, lost opportunities for love and friendship, and the fleetingness of life. The narrator of the poem wants to remain an



independent man still on the move. He is bored with her talk. He senses her desire that they draw closer to one another. There is the sense that she is a decent "lady," who only desires true love and companionship- something he cannot offer her. He is restless and must continue his "pursuits" in life.





# Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Preludes

## Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Preludes Summary

Section I: The first part of this poem delights the senses. There is the smell of food cooking, the sound of the rain, and the brightness of lamps, related to the reader. The narrator takes us on a walk through city streets at suppertime. It is a view of a day winding down and the effect the elements have on the mood.

Section II: The second part of this poem muses about the mass of humanity that trudges to their daily toil each morning. The narrator alludes to the fact that time rolls on, even though we spend our time in activities to draw our attention away from that fact.

Section III: The narrator assumes a more personal tone in this section. He lies beside his wife at night and ponders her as she stares at the ceiling. She falls asleep again, and he imagines her watching all the ugly, dark secrets of her soul as if projected on the ceiling as a movie of her life. She awakens come morning, and he sees her taking the curlers from her hair and clasping the yellow soles of her feet.

The narrator talks of the soul that yearns, although often trampled over by the daily concerns of life. He hints at people wanting to achieve in life, and the impatience they feel when they do not realize their dreams as quickly as they hope. He thinks of those in society who are less fortunate, enduring their suffering quietly. The poem closes with the narrator's suggestion that humans should laugh and let life follow its course as the planets do.

## Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Preludes Analysis

This poem presents to the reader preludes to encourage deeper thought. Each section opens the door to a more in-depth understanding of life. The narrator challenges the reader to look beyond the surface details of life. He wants the reader to see what he sees—a humanity toiling daily to survive, while trying to maintain their dignity in their circumstances. Themes of suffering, perseverance, and the march of time are prominent. In addition, the narrator refers to our inner demons—how we often face them in the quiet of the night upon our beds. Eliot shows that quiet and solitude are often when we are at our most vulnerable.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Rhapsody on a Windy Night**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Rhapsody on a Windy Night Summary**

The narrator of this poem walks along a windy street at midnight in an eerie atmosphere. At this desolate hour, his memories come alive to haunt him. An hour and a half later, he continues walking the night streets and comes upon a house with a woman standing in a lighted doorway. She wears a dress that is torn and sand-stained. The sight of this woman conjures up more memories in him: a twisted branch on a beach and a broken, rusted spring in a factory yard.

Now it is two-thirty in the morning. The street lamp lights a cat lying flat out in a gutter, sticking out his tongue to capture a piece of food. This reminds the narrator of a small boy reaching out for a toy that runs along a quay. As he walks, he thinks of an old barnacled crab in a pool that latched onto a stick he held out. At three-thirty in the morning the walk progresses and he looks up at the moon. This brings to him reminisces of an aging woman, a paper rose, eau de Cologne, and nighttime smells. He further brings up memories of dry geraniums, chestnuts roasting, cigarettes in corridors, and cocktail bar aromas. He alludes to being with females in shuttered rooms. At four o'clock in the morning, the narrator reaches his home and all its familiarity. He sees his bed and his toothbrush. He takes his shoes off, puts them at his bedroom door, and readies himself to go to sleep. He states that he must prepare for life and its hardships.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Rhapsody on a Windy Night Analysis**

This poem is another one that deals with looking back on one's life while walking outdoors. The narrator seems to feel that the street-lamp sounds are humming out a beat, which marches him towards his final destiny. He senses memories awakening in him that he had kept covered for a long time. He ponders women in his walk, and the woman who appears in the doorway of a home as he walks past seems to cast an accusing eye his way. The sight of her makes him think of deserted things—things left behind that nobody wants. There is a sense in this poem of longing for the innocent days of childhood, as witnessed by his recollection of a boy playing with a toy on a seaside quay. The narrator also thinks of people who reach out to others in their infirmities and fears - as the old barnacled crab does as he grips the stick the narrator extends to it.

The narrator muses on the moon and likens it to an aging woman losing her memory and with a pock-marked face. The narrator thinks of cocktails, cigarettes, and women.

He muses on a life of drinking, carousing, and sensual pleasures in secluded rooms. However, there is emptiness in all that as he associates these memories with "dust in crevices" and "sunless dry geraniums." When he finally reaches home, we sense he lives an ordered existence now and feels he is just marking time in life.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Morning at the Window**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Morning at the Window Summary**

The narrator of this poem stares down at the street one morning. He hears the sounds of a community coming to life. He senses housemaids reporting for duty - almost robot-like - at the doors of homes in the area. He looks down and sees all the passersby, and one woman, who flashes a smile that seems to rise in the air and disappear. People here are pursuing their lives in a matter-of-fact way as they always have done. It is as if they are content and bored with their lives at the same time, and this comfort zone does not cause them to make changes in their life. Eliot seems to want to show his readers that they can enliven their lives and make their daily routine something of value, not something with which to just go through the motions.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Morning at the Window Analysis**

This short poem conveys, in few words, the regular progression of life as humanity crosses mornings of its calendar one by one. There is a sense, again, of the march of time in this poem. The poem relates the theme of people going about their daily lives, for whatever number of days allotted to them to walk the earth. The narrator sees people walking to work - almost without thinking and without acknowledging. Eliot shows people turned within themselves and, being creatures of habit, often do not try to break from their routine and explore new adventures in their days.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - The 'Boston Evening Transcript'**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - The 'Boston Evening Transcript' Summary**

Another short poem, it likens the readers of the Boston paper to a field of ripe corn. The poem speaks of how nightfall awakens in some a call to nightlife activities. To others, the end of the day is a time for solitude and reading the Boston newspaper. The narrator brings the newspaper to his Cousin Harriet. He is weary, and it appears this delivery to her is another mundane activity in his daily life. Eliot uses the newspaper as a symbol of stability in life. It is something to rely on and be comforted by.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - The 'Boston Evening Transcript' Analysis**

T. S. Eliot continues his familiar theme of the regular ordinary aspects of everyday life. He hints that the dependability of routine gives us comfort in a chaotic world. He speaks of how a common newspaper can be the solace and respite one seeks after a long day. However, he also hints that we often desire to have new experiences as evidenced by his comment that nighttime can awaken appetites. We see the narrator seek some variety and excitement in his life as he, like clockwork, delivers the newspaper to his cousin, while looking out down the street in search of something more in his life.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Aunt Helen**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Aunt Helen Summary**

The narrator talks about his aunt, now deceased, who lived in a home with four servants providing for her. He obviously held her in high esteem, as he believes there was silence in heaven upon her death. Her death touches him, but the undertaker is unfazed, as this is part of his daily work routine. Soon after the aunt's death, her pet parrot dies. The clock continues ticking in the house. One of the housemaids that served the aunt, and remains at the house, now has death visiting her as well.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Aunt Helen Analysis**

Death of a loved one is the theme of this poem. T.S. Eliot highlights the fact that the end of a life is only deeply significant to those who have an emotional attachment to the person. To others, it is the way things are. In death, the clock for those left behind keeps ticking; others continue with their lives until their turn comes. In this poem, Aunt Helen dies...the clock ticks away, the parrot dies...the clock ticks away, and soon the housemaid will die as well. The clock will continue to tick as lives come and go.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Cousin Nancy**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Cousin Nancy Summary**

The narrator's cousin lives an unorthodox lifestyle. She does not conform to the traditional. She smokes, dances, and acts very differently than her family is accustomed to in social situations. Her actions are not in concert with her religious upbringing. Her aunts want to instill their traditions and ways in her so she acts according to their desires and does not cause them embarrassment.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Cousin Nancy Analysis**

In this poem, we see a young woman who goes against the grain of acceptable behavior as dictated by her family and the religion of her ancestors. This shows that she, like many in post-war Europe, were breaking from convention and defining new identities for themselves. With war and technological advances in society creating a new order of things, many decided to test new norms of behavior. Eliot shows that times of geopolitical and social change can also bring about a change in personal beliefs and behavior.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Mr. Apollinax**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Mr. Apollinax Summary**

The Mr. Apollinax of this poem visits the United States and is a guest at a professor's home. He speaks his mind and acts a little irreverent for his host's tastes. They do not know what to make of the amiable, charming man, whose opinions and actions are different from theirs. He is a man of colorful persona in direct contrast to his hosts, who exhibit no personal flair.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Mr. Apollinax Analysis**

The reader sees in this poem that the main character is a man who doesn't care what others think of him. He speaks, laughs, and acts as he pleases in the company of others. He is a man of personality; this is the opposite of his hosts', who the reader sees, in the last two lines of the poem are nondescript and leave no lasting, strong impression on others. Eliot seeks to show the reader that many people worry too much about what others think of them, and hence, never reveal their true personality. He shows that those who open up and are honest in their opinions, are seen as unique individuals, even if everyone does not agree with them.





# **Analysis for Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Hysteria**

## **Analysis for Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Hysteria Summary**

A man engages in conversation with an animated woman in a restaurant. She charms him with her talk, laugh, and sensuality. She flaunts herself to the chagrin of the waiter, who tries to get them to take their tea in the garden. The man tries to get the woman to settle down so they can enjoy a quiet discourse.

## **Analysis for Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Hysteria Analysis**

This poem, like "Mr. Apollinax" before it, presents a person who unabashedly displays their personality without worrying about what others around them think. The poem highlights the fact that not all people are comfortable with public displays of emotion. Again, Eliot seeks to convey that people need to let their real personalities shine through, albeit not in an overbearing manner. However, we must not all act as if we are assembly-line products with no personality. Eliot shows that while it can be embarrassing for those on the receiving end, some people unabashedly live life and flaunt the fact that they do.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Conversation Galante**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Conversation Galante Summary**

A man talks with a woman. He makes an idle comment about the moon. She thinks he is not propelling their conversation forward to new topics. He says we use music to describe the moon and night and our own feelings of emptiness. He tells the woman she is indifferent and not given to moral absolutes. He suggests she takes things too lightly.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - Conversation Galante Analysis**

This poem finds the two participants on different wavelengths. The man seeks to ponder life and its meaning. The woman seeks to enjoy life and not let moral absolutes constrain her free-spirited way of thinking and living. Eliot gives us two people who represent extremes in life - those too serious and those not serious enough. He hints to the reader that we must strike a balance somewhere in between. The reader sees that living on the extremes of the moral landscape does not give one a balanced approach to life.



# **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - La Figlia Che Piange**

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - La Figlia Che Piange Summary**

In this poem, the narrator imagines a woman breaking up with a lover. He imagines her throwing flowers down and turning away from him in anger. The narrator relates that this is his own thought process and that this woman captivates him, and he cannot stop thinking of her. He imagines himself with her.

## **Prufrock and Other Observations (1917) - La Figlia Che Piange Analysis**

The theme of this poem is yearning for love. The narrator desires a certain woman and imagines the sunlight in her hair, and her breaking up with her lover and being with him. Eliot shows the reader that something as simple as the beauty of a woman can transform a man's thinking. It can cause a man to desire love in his life and take his mind off of other responsibilities in moments of passionate thought. The reader sees a man infatuated, and this infatuation starting thought processes, where the man thinks of his future with this woman.



# Poems (1920) - Gerontion

## Poems (1920) - Gerontion Summary

In this poem, Eliot gives us an aged man who looks back on his life and sees how he and Western society have departed from the moral center based on Christian teachings. He talks of modern society shutting out the words of Christ and going their own way into depravity. He says that throughout history, man has let his vanity guide him, often to his ruin. Eliot speaks of those who lose their passion for the truth and right behavior because of temptations in society that cause their values to become adulterated. This poem ends with words that convey a defeated man, in a morally bankrupt environment.

## Poems (1920) - Gerontion Analysis

This poem, peppered with vague references, is a treatise on man deciding for himself what is right and wrong, good, and evil, in modern society. Eliot shows that Western civilization's departure from its Christian roots has left him meandering among various philosophies and sensual pleasures in hopes of finding fulfillment. Eliot uses this poem to state his belief that Western society's rejection of Christ's teachings are his downfall. Throughout this collection, in many poems, Eliot does not shy away from espousing his views that mankind's quest must be one for spiritual truth and not physical for-the-moment pleasures.



# Poems (1920) - Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar

## Poems (1920) - Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar Summary

The narrator muses here on lives lived and energies spent. He talks of riches, luxury, and enjoying what life has to offer as being fleeting pleasures. Even relationships have beginnings and endings. There is a cycle to life and a flow to humankind's activities that they are often unaware of or choose to ignore. The river of Time continues to flow to its inexorable end.

## Poems (1920) - Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar Analysis

The theme of this poem is that earthly pleasures, while enjoyable and often magnificent, are only temporary. Time catches up to every person who walks the earth. Eliot shows the reader that we can try all of life's offerings. We can travel the world, eat the best foods, explore great art and music, think great thoughts and study great thinkers and be the better for it. However, he also shows that none of these things will stall the progression of time; those who do, or do not do these things all have the same destiny.



# Poems (1920) - Sweeney Erect

## Poems (1920) - Sweeney Erect Summary

This poem alludes to the harshness inherent in life as shown by the desolate shoreline and the waves and gales that bombard the shore. It deals with volatile male and female relationships. It portrays how people are often hurt emotionally and physically in their dealings with one another.

## Poems (1920) - Sweeney Erect Analysis

The theme of this poem is humankind's attempts to act civilized and subdue its brutal tendencies. It shows how we often let moral degradation creep into society without our even knowing it has done so. Eliot shows the reader that moral degradation is often blatant and horrific, and at other times, subtle and barely intrusive in our daily lives. Yet, it is there and has a cumulative effect, and we sometimes do not realize the depths to which society has sunk. This is evident in humanity's dealings with one another. People treat others in ways they would not treat an animal, and then wonder why people retaliate in kind.



# Poems (1920) - A Cooking Egg

## Poems (1920) - A Cooking Egg Summary

T.S. Eliot revisits his studies on the passage of time. The main character of the poem decides that, although he is attracted to the learned, cultured young woman he sits near, he does not want her. He feels she cannot provide him with true happiness. He decides that everything he desires will be in Heaven. He sees his daily life as a time of waiting for true reward, although he must deal with the disappointments life hands him now.

## Poems (1920) - A Cooking Egg Analysis

Themes of patience and hope permeate this poem. T.S. Eliot explores how a person does not always acquire all his or her dreams in this life. We don't always win our desires, for whatever reason. He suggests patience in waiting for rewards in another life are noble. The reader sees the poem's main character longing for true, lasting happiness that does not come from earthly pleasures of any kind, although they are enjoyable for a time. Eliot does not sugar-coat the fact that life has its trials. He does show that there will one day be an end to those trials, and true rest and reward will come.



## **Poems (1920) - Le Directeur, Melange Adultere de Tout, Lune de Miel**

### **Poems (1920) - Le Directeur, Melange Adultere de Tout, Lune de Miel Summary**

T.S. Eliot's French language poems.

### **Poems (1920) - Le Directeur, Melange Adultere de Tout, Lune de Miel Analysis**

T.S. Eliot's French language poems.





# Poems (1920) - The Hippopotamus

## Poems (1920) - The Hippopotamus Summary

T.S. Eliot talks of humankind striving through the centuries in its pursuit of material gains, while true riches are in being at one with God. He further talks of humankind's sin and the Blood of the Lamb—Jesus Christ's Blood—redeeming humankind. He ends the poem saying the True Church will never die.

## Poems (1920) - The Hippopotamus Analysis

The theme of this poem is forgiveness, redemption, and the True Christian Church's never-ending existence. Eliot's thoughts on God, Jesus and the Church are apparent here. The reader can see, with the reading of each poem that Eliot does not deal with trivialities in his works. He always attacks life's big questions head on and does not shy away from espousing his beliefs in a Church that will never die. The reader senses a battle between belief and unbelief in the world. Eliot concludes that the Church will always be there for those who remain faithful, and that the true Church is under God's control.



# Poems (1920) - Dans le Restaurant

## Poems (1920) - Dans le Restaurant Summary

T.S. Eliot's French language poem.

## Poems (1920) - Dans le Restaurant Analysis

T.S. Eliot's French language poem.



# Poems (1920) - Whispers of Immortality

## Poems (1920) - Whispers of Immortality Summary

Death and the passage of time are familiar themes in Eliot's work. In this poem, T.S. Eliot talks of how the great creative artists in life have pondered mortality. He alludes to the sensual pleasures and beauty in life that are our lot to enjoy while we have a chance to enjoy them. Eliot also shows that behind the beauty in life, there is the sense that it is not lasting.

## Poems (1920) - Whispers of Immortality Analysis

This poem deals with hoping for immortality while knowing we do not fully comprehend what awaits us after we die. He speaks of living and loving in this life while hoping for a better afterlife. There is a sense from Eliot that he desires to show his readers that great artistic works are only a shadow of the true joys. Eliot shows that some great artists and thinkers in all their creativity know that all comes to dust and ponder what is the purpose of life.



# Poems (1920) - Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service

## Poems (1920) - Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service Summary

Eliot portrays a religious service in this poem. The poem deals with the great issues of life and the great Truths being sermonized, while life continues in the background in the insect and plant world. The reader senses great questions in this poem. Why is humankind here? Why does this universe exist in its mathematical precision?

## Poems (1920) - Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service Analysis

T.S. Eliot discusses man's smallness in relation to the universe. He suggests that God is evident in the plant life, insects, and complexity of the world around him. The presbyters seek comfort and redemption in the church and its rituals. While churchgoers ponder the larger questions and issues in life inside the church, complex life systems in the micro-world go on around them outside the church windows. Eliot shows a world of intricate systems living alongside one another in harmony as part of an overall plan of God.



# Poems (1920) - Sweeney Among the Nightingales

## Poems (1920) - Sweeney Among the Nightingales Summary

T.S. Eliot conveys humanity's struggle for achievement and advancement while "Death and the Raven" are always present. The man in the poem represents those who resist temptation and try to live a life of good. The two women represent life situations where we can make our own choices, either for good or for bad, and how we must live with the results of our decisions and actions.

## Poems (1920) - Sweeney Among the Nightingales Analysis

The theme of this poem is freedom of choice. A person is a result of his choices in life. Humanity strives for enlightenment and progress but often lets wrong desires impede their growth. Eliot shows the reader that passionate living does not mean living a life of moral decay. He seeks to convey that we reap what we sow. Eliot sees people who try to live while holding to some kind of moral absolute, all the while fighting off temptations to give up and live for the moment, without regard for long-term consequences.



# The Waste Land (1922)

## The Waste Land (1922) Summary

I. The Burial of the Dead: T.S. Eliot presents his narrator, a woman, Marie. She discusses the seasons of a year and relates them to the seasons of her life. She tells us that beauty can come out of desolation and that there is a regeneration of things in spring. She discusses feeling free in the mountains and her penchant for reading. She talks of roots that clutch, a reference to the ties we have to loved ones, and how we strive to hang on to them with memory after they are gone. She says fear is in a handful of dust, referencing the idea that from dust we came and to dust we shall return. She alludes to the fact that fear has paralyzed her actions, and she has sought comfort in a clairvoyant. At the end of this section, she ponders Death and the loss of family.

II. A Game of Chess: Eliot shows us the discontented lives of women. He shows the reader, through women's eyes, how their lives, even with marriage and children, seem to lack purpose, as if they're yearning for stronger, deeper love. One woman relates how her friend looks old, even though she is only thirty-one. The tone of this section is lament for unfulfilled lives, and Eliot hints at sexual frustration and the temptation to infidelity in marriage.

III. The Fire Sermon: Here, the narrator, reminisces about youth and sensual pleasures long since departed. He seeks solace in the beauty of the Thames River, asking it to run softly until his days end. He continues to bring forth memories of his dead brother and father and others in his life now gone. The narrator looks back on past business dealings and on the nature of female-male relationships. He gives the reader the sense that humanity goes about their daily life in modern society and are often incapable of forming or enjoying deep love relationships. He shows lonely people, bored, in lonely apartments, who cannot let go and open up to others. The narrator considers life in England, the Church, a life lived with regrets, and how one can feel alone, yearning for past days of passionate living.

IV. Death by Water: Very simply and in a few lines, Eliot relates that life is fleeting. He tells the reader when we are dead, we no longer worry about all the things that consumed us while we were alive. He asks the reader to consider how those once young and strong did not live forever.

V. What the Thunder Said: Eliot describes a barren land without water. He dreams of water and its life-giving sustenance. There is a sense of humankind existing in a moral wasteland, without refreshing spiritual nourishment. Eliot talks of the great cities of the world and the mass of humanity that labors on the land. He shows people crying out in song for better lives. The poem suggests that one should be daring at least once in life and not letting years of prudent behavior hold one back. In the end, Eliot speaks of going with dignity to meet Death when it comes, likening it to a peaceful boat journey to another place.



## The Waste Land (1922) Analysis

This poem is an exploration of modern, post-World War I society in England, and by association, everywhere in the world. Eliot gives the reader glimpses into lives unfulfilled, where people age without the comfort of deep, loving relationships and without faith to guide them. Eliot portrays a world bereft of any spiritual growth in its inhabitants. Humanity toils, wars, seeks, strives, and yearns, continually seeking something to fill the emptiness they feel within their very being. Eliot portrays physical wastelands to the wasteland in man's heart and shows that the land needs physical water while the soul needs spiritual refreshing. To Eliot, modern society without a spiritual source for refreshing and enlightenment is in itself a wasteland. This poem shows how great advancements by man in many areas of life and society are no guarantee of happiness, and they are definitely no guarantee of eternal life and eternal reward. After all man's achievements, he will still die, and his accomplishments will cease. Eliot says to the reader that there is more than this frenzied modern existence of chasing unimportant things.



# The Hollow Men (1925)

## The Hollow Men (1925) Summary

Section I: Eliot gives a portrait of humankind as lost souls searching for life's meaning. The opening of the poem talks of people engaged in empty talk with empty thoughts; people paralyzed by indecisiveness and lack of purpose in their lives. Eliot speaks of those who die and receive a final reward and those who receive eternal punishment.

Section II: Eliot portrays the narrator of this poem as someone not wanting to see the eyes of those who will face eternal condemnation. The speaker in the poem does not want to face death and the final meeting with his fate.

Section III: Here, the narrator talks of false gods that humankind worships in hopes of either attaining eternal life, or escaping from thoughts of mortality.

Section IV: Eliot reiterates that men who have no hope and no faith will find that death is their only release from a life that is empty and without meaning.

Section V: In essence, Eliot summarizes that life is something that ends eventually, that all humankind's striving is for nothing, and that the world will one day end with a whimper, rather than a bang. Those who believe in an afterlife have some hope to hold onto; the rest have today as they live it and that is all.

## The Hollow Men (1925) Analysis

T. S. Eliot continues with his theme of the search for meaning in our daily existence. The reader can sense that Eliot is asking us to consider why we are here in the first place and what is the bigger purpose in life? Do we all just exist to march toward the inevitability of death, or is there something beyond our physical life on earth. Eliot refers to The Lord's Prayer and religious beliefs in this poem. If faith gives hope, what do those who have no faith have to look forward to when their physical life ends? In the end, Eliot sees humankind's goals, desires, and accomplishments as trivial pursuits of no eternal value, that they and the earth as we know it will end. In the end, Eliot shows the world, with all its bright lights, noise, and drama, will go quietly without fanfare.





# Ash-Wednesday (1930)

## Ash-Wednesday (1930) Summary

Section I: Eliot talks of deciding to curtail striving and worrying in life as he ages. He relates that there is a time to stop and enjoy living, without everything racing by in a blur. He says that a moment in time is only for that moment and passes, so we must fully experience each moment. Eliot says we must learn to sit still and care about the important things in life and not care about the unimportant distractions. He feels he needs God's mercy and hopes judgment is not too harsh.

Section II: Eliot relates his feelings to the reader that humanity is better off in the ground if they cannot learn to be good to one another. That at least there, as lifeless bone, they cannot harm one another. He says the grave is our inheritance and the desolation therein, the land that we go to in Death. He hints to the reader in this section that we may only live again if we have faith and believe.

Section III: Here we see Eliot thinking of the climb away from the struggles of life and the wrestling with temptation, to a life of bliss that waits in the afterlife.

Section IV: Eliot conveys the message that man is to redeem the time given to him. He refers to Mary and that we must seek the higher dream for humankind. Eliot talks of restoring of all of humankind's hopes and dreams so they are no longer just dreams but manifest as reality.

Section V: Eliot makes strong reference to humankind not heeding the Word - God in the person of Jesus Christ. He asks how can man, in his world of noise and distractions and vain pursuits, hear the Word sent from God. Eliot's thoughts on Christianity continue to dominate this poem.

Section VI: Eliot is less obscure in this final section of Ash Wednesday. He seeks God, finds comfort in Mary, and contemplates life on earth and life after death. He looks for peace in God's will and does not want separation from God.

## Ash-Wednesday (1930) Analysis

Eliot refers to Christianity with the Lenten "Ash Wednesday" title of the poem. He uses this poem to explore his themes of Redemption, Life, Death, and Mercy. In this poem, he talks of Mary, God, the Word, and finding peace in God. He speaks of how one can find fulfillment in the words, and the truth, of the Word. Like much of his work, Eliot gives the reader a deep sense of his struggle to reconcile his life on earth with what God expects of him and what his future will be if he holds to the Christian faith—and what it will be if he does not hold onto his faith. The reader sees Eliot's internal dialogue with himself as he strives to grow spiritually.



# Ariel Poems - Journey of the Magi

## Ariel Poems - Journey of the Magi Summary

This poem deals with one of the original Magi, recounting his journey to witness Christ's birth. Looking back, he recalls the trials and tribulations of the journey from the East to Bethlehem. He concludes that the journey was worth it as they witnessed the birth of the Savior, and that Christ's birth began the procession to Christ's death and humankind's hope. The Magi of the poem tells of how when he returned home to his own land, he saw that his people were still worshiping false gods. He says witnessing the birth of Christ makes him yearn for a death that is the gate into eternal life.

## Ariel Poems - Journey of the Magi Analysis

The theme of this poem is the faith that one holds dear to him or herself. In this case, the reader witnesses the Magi, now transformed by the birth and death of Jesus Christ. His witnessing of Christ's birth and recognition of his death and resurrection gives him a hope for his own future that not all his fellow citizens share with him. T.S. Eliot gives his readers a glimpse into his own soul with this poem. He shows the reader that Christ's birth is an event that changed lives and continues to do so, as it changed the life of the Magi.

# Ariel Poems - A Song for Simeon

## Ariel Poems - A Song for Simeon Summary

In this poem, an old man looks at the last years he has ahead and talks of waiting for death. This is a recurrent theme in T.S. Eliot's work. The old man considers what lies ahead for Israel, when their time of testing comes at the hands of foreign invaders. This man asks for consoling help from the Infant Jesus - not yet old enough to begin his work. It is obvious this man believes Jesus is the answer to Israel's woes. However, he acknowledges that those who follow Jesus will have joy, but also hardship, and will face martyrdom. He knows he will not face martyrdom but feels pain for those who will. He asks the Lord to take him, now, in his old age, as he believes in the salvation Christ offers.

## Ariel Poems - A Song for Simeon Analysis

The reader sees T.S. Eliot delving into the topic of religious belief in this poem, as is common in much of his work. The aged man of the poem looks back on a life lived and forward to what the future holds for his children and his grandchildren. The name Simeon suggests he is Jewish, maybe Simeon of the Old Testament himself, and Eliot shows how this man longs for Israel to embrace their Messiah. Repeatedly, Eliot shows his concern for man to reawaken his spiritual quest and seek salvation and a promising future. He shows this hope in the old man of the poem.



# Ariel Poems - Animula

## Ariel Poems - Animula Summary

T.S. Eliot uses this poem to show how animals, a cat in this case, go about their daily routine of living without worrying. This is in direct contrast to the struggle humanity goes through in their efforts to survive in an oftentimes cruel world. Eliot shows the reader an animal spending his day interacting with humans, playing and curling up for a sleep. He indicates their amusement at little things such as the twinkling lights of a Christmas tree. In the end, Eliot shows that human beings wish they could live life as such and not have great conflicts and tragedies in their lives.

## Ariel Poems - Animula Analysis

The theme of this poem is the struggle to maintain a dignified human existence. While animals go about their life matter-of-factly and according to their instinct, humans operate from a moral base. This moral base, or lack thereof, influences their thoughts and actions everyday. The result is many times achievement and joy, or destruction and despair. That man is to rise above basic animal instincts and act human and humanely is the overriding message of this poem.



# Ariel Poems - Marina

## Ariel Poems - Marina Summary

In this poem, a man looks back on his life. He reminisces about the work of his hands and a boat he built and the times spent on it. He thinks of his life and the years gone by, and through all of this, he thinks of his daughter and his love for her. The man realizes that toiling for gain is not the goal in life, as we cannot cheat death. He sees that there are things more important in life, such as the pure, simple love of a man for his daughter.

## Ariel Poems - Marina Analysis

Once again T.S. Eliot brings us back to his theme of aging and Death. He likens the aging boat of the poem to the aged man who built it. Both are weather-worn, tired, and do not possess the strength they once had. Their days of robust accomplishment are behind them, although they can still function and be useful in life. This man, as he looks back on his days, yearns for his daughter as a comfort in his old age. Eliot shows that the simple love of a daughter is often worth more than any other accomplishment to a man.



# Ariel Poems - The Cultivation of Christmas Trees

## Ariel Poems - The Cultivation of Christmas Trees Summary

In this poem, Eliot talks of memories of Christmas. He says that we should remember the joyous aspects of the season. We need not dwell on the commercialism and the festive carousing and drinking that is often part of the season. He speaks of the fatigue and boring routine of life that can come when we stop viewing life with the sense of adventure that a child does. Eliot places in this poem his references to faith. He talks of the first coming and the second coming, alluding to Christ's birth at Christmas and His Second Coming. This is a familiar topic in his poems as he seeks to relate the physical to the spiritual.

## Ariel Poems - The Cultivation of Christmas Trees Analysis

The theme of this poem is the innocence of youth. Eliot relates how we must retain our childlike awe when we look upon the world before us. It is too soon that we become disillusioned as we grow older and do not see the beauty and simple wonders in the world around us. Eliot shows that we can think young and maintain some youthful vitality, if only as a mindset, even when we are aged. Even when our physical abilities are limited, we can still try and maintain a youthful hope. This hope, Eliot senses, will always give a humans a purpose in life.



# **Unfinished Poems: Sweeney Agonistes - Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama**

## **Unfinished Poems: Sweeney Agonistes - Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama Summary**

Fragment of a Prologue: This introduces the reader to six characters, two women and four men. The women are playing a card game; whatever card they draw, they relate to life and the people in their life. As the women continue drawing cards, they worry over the meaning of each card: they see these cards as announcements of events to occur in their lives. They relate the two-of-spades to a coffin, another card to a man Snow and so on. When the four men arrive, they are of good nature and not as serious as the women and seem to live more for the moment without worrying. One of the women, Doris, frets over a man who pursues her, who is not one of the four men who visit. This man, Pereira, phones her; he is an aggressive suitor who she does not want as part of her life.

Fragment of an Agon: This section of the play-poem continues with a discussion and songs by the two women and now seven men. They sing about life, loving, and death. The gist of the discourse throughout this section is that existence consists of birth, lovemaking, and then death. The characters in the poem explore, through their conversation, the fears, trials, and worries of life. Eliot, through these players, tells us that we have to live and do all the things that everyday life demands until we die. Through it all, between birth and death, we must love and live life to the fullest.

## **Unfinished Poems: Sweeney Agonistes - Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama Analysis**

The two fragments of this unfinished poem deal with the themes of Life, Death, and male and female relationships. Eliot continues his investigation of humankind's purpose in life. This play-poem indicates it is wise to enjoy your daily life, for tomorrow we shall surely die. T.S. Eliot concludes that there is much loving to do, when we can do it, between birth and death, and though he talks of sexual love, he hints at loving life itself. He exhorts the readers to just living each day as it comes and living decently with our fellow humans.



# Coriolan

## Coriolan Summary

I. **Triumphal March:** This poem speaks about a march into a city celebrating victory in war. T.S. Eliot relates to the reader the cost of war, both in terms of economics and human waste. The poem shows how it is human nature to enjoy spectacle and power while ignoring the sordid details of what is behind what is on display. Here, in the triumphal march into the city, is an impressive array of humankind's destructive weapons on display. While the citizens of the city are in awe of this impressive display, Eliot shows that men and women die in war and become as ash under the feet of those who remain living.

II. **Difficulties of a Statesman:** This section of Coriolan discusses the endless talk and meetings and game playing that are part of geopolitical maneuvering. While men and woman die on battlefields, and those on the front lines do the dirty work and yearn for their families, politicians and bureaucrats hold endless discussions and meetings, accomplishing little. This is often true when it comes to their civic and national duties. However, Eliot strives to show that it is a losing battle that public officials often fight. T.S. Eliot points out that endless negotiations and committees do not always solve problems that originate in the darkest parts of peoples' hearts.

## Coriolan Analysis

T.S. Eliot looks at war and politics in this poem. The theme of war's futility, in spite of the macabre entertainment it can provide, is a topic that Eliot explores here. The reader senses that Eliot is critical of nations that display their military arsenals as objects of great pride. Processions showing off military hardware and killing machines are mindless exercises to him. He says that we must realize the hardware of war cause death and destruction and that they reduce things and people to dust. Leaders of nations strategize against each other, while still trying to run their countries, all being futile exercises in the end, when war can destroy any good works accomplished.





# Minor Poems- Eyes that last I saw in tears

## Minor Poems- Eyes that last I saw in tears Summary

This short poem talks of seeing the eyes of people but not their tears or feeling their suffering, therefore not truly helping them. Eliot talks of how we see a person's suffering, but hesitate, and are too late to act. Human beings worry too much about themselves and not enough about others.

## Minor Poems- Eyes that last I saw in tears Analysis

The theme of this poem is paralysis and indecision in life. Our complacency about the hardship of others causes us not to act to help them. Eliot conveys the message that we may look upon another's hardship and sense their pain, but because we are too self-absorbed, we do not really empathize with them enough to take immediate action to truly help them. We may look at someone's misfortune, but because we are distracted by our own problems, we turn away from their problems and go back to our own business.



# Minor Poems- The wind sprang up at four o'clock

## Minor Poems- The wind sprang up at four o'clock Summary

The narrator of this poem talks of facing his fears and personal demons in the middle of the night. He likens his fear of death to facing a jungle tribe holding spears. He speaks of looking across the river that separates life from death.

## Minor Poems- The wind sprang up at four o'clock Analysis

The theme of this poem, like so many of Eliot's, is facing Death and the fact of our own mortality when we are alone. There can be great peace found in quiet times of rest; however, it is at these times that our mind delves into long-buried memories and resurrects them. If the memories are painful ones, then we try to subdue them once again because we feel vulnerable, alone in the dark, and unable to confront the memories.



# Five-Finger Exercises

## Five-Finger Exercises Summary

I. Lines to a Persian Cat: In this first part, Eliot talks of joy being fleeting in life. The songbirds eventually move on - signifying youth - and we age and have aches and pains and work hard. He asks when an easier existence will come.

II. Lines to a Yorkshire Terrier: Eliot says all living creatures: cats, dogs, and even undertakers, will one day return to dust. No one can cheat death.

III. Lines to a Duck in the Park: Eliot talks of seeing life awaken in the park one morning. Religious imagery is prevalent in this section as he talks of a snake alluding to Satan and also writes of the Bread and Wine. He says to let the birds of the air have their due, and man, too, as one day the devouring worm will have us all.

IV. Lines to Ralph Hodgson Esq.: Eliot presents to us a man who is well off and who receives preferential treatment in public. There is a sarcastic tone to this telling, hinting at jealousy.

V. Lines for Cuscuscaraway and Mirza Murad Ali Beg: There's a comical tone to this section, uncommon in many of Eliot's poems. The narrator talks of how boring, dour, and staid T.S. Eliot is, in personality and appearance. The narrator says meeting him was unpleasant.

## Five-Finger Exercises Analysis

This poem covers all the bases in life. Eliot's themes are Youth, Death, Religion, Social Behavior, and Public Persona's. He reiterates that life is, in a sense, a short dramatic run upon a temporary stage. There is a beginning and an ending and an in between, and we act our parts, sometimes to the consternation of others. There's a sense from Eliot that he is summing up life in these short passages about youthful days to thoughts on faith and an afterlife.



# Landscapes

## Landscapes Summary

I. New Hampshire: Eliot gives the reader a glimpse of the State of New Hampshire in this poem. He talks of children playing in beautiful, natural settings. He shows how youth is fleeting, that before we know it twenty years are gone and we are no longer children or teens.

II. Virginia: Eliot uses a river in Virginia as a metaphor for life flowing unceasingly, running its course until it doesn't anymore. He hints that the Gate awaits each of us. He hints that we live, but decay and try to slow time down so we can live more.

III. Usk: In this poem T.S. Eliot relates to the reader that each person must simply pray and seek the spiritual in life, that that is what is important in the end.

IV. Rannoch, by Glencoe: Eliot portrays an old battlefield now covered over, and the memory of confrontation in this area. Eliot says in this section that Pride is the reason for much pain on earth and the cause of much death.

V. Cape Ann: Eliot talks of the seaside and of all the natural wild birds' beauty. He says that the area, however, belongs to the sea gull, that they are tough and the true owners of Cape Ann. Eliot alludes to the fact that in society, those with swagger often win out at the expense of those of a more delicate nature and persona.

VII: Eliot summarizes human history in this section. He shows how civilization, since creation, has sought truth and meaning in religion of any kind, whether worshiping God, the Devil, snakes, trees, or anything else. When Jesus Christ came, some followed him and some continue to do so. However, Eliot says that modern society now turns to the worship of other gods, those gods called Usury, Lust, and Power.

## Landscapes Analysis

In Landscapes, Eliot uses the natural environment as his backdrop for musings on life. He returns to themes of lost youth and the flow of time. He seeks to convey to the reader the idea that all things are temporal: land, sky, wildlife, water, and people. He shows that war is the ruination of beauty, and humankind's battles with one another solve nothing. Eliot keeps going back to his theme of the futility of striving for things, which will eventually decay. He shows the reader spiritual growth is what one should constantly seek.

# Lines for an Old Man

## Lines for an Old Man Summary

In this poem, the narrator is an old man, who says that age has not mellowed him, but has, in fact, made him more virulent and less tolerant. He even revels in this, not caring that in his old age he is a bitter man.

## Lines for an Old Man Analysis

Eliot's shows the reader that a person can mire himself in the quicksand of bitterness and contempt if he or she leaves wrong thoughts and emotions unchecked. He shows that the later years of one's life can be wasted with these negative emotions and rob a person of contemplative joy as he or she looks back on their life. Eliot wants to show the reader that bitterness is as wasting a disease as any physical one. It is one that harms the body and the mind and also causes harm to others who meet the person suffering from this disease of heart and soul.



# Choruses from 'The Rock'

## Choruses from 'The Rock' Summary

Section I: This is a treatise on humanity's abandonment of faith in their daily lives. Eliot speaks of civilization running back and forth, gaining knowledge, but never learning truths. He returns to his theme of humankind striving for physical gain at the expense of spiritual enlightenment. Eliot says that countrysides are for picnics, that people do not want the Church there, or in the suburbs and towns. The poem continues as a talk between Jesus Christ (The Rock) and humankind (The Workmen). The Rock tells everyone that life is about living righteously; we reap what we sow, so we must sow properly. He also relates that the universal struggle is the battle between Good and Evil. The Workmen answer Christ saying they will begin new, productive works and rebuild a better society with the true Church as its head. In reply to the Workmen, a group of Unemployed reveals that they are destitute and wanting and are unwelcome and forgotten in society. The Workmen reply that humans toil and must continue to build, with the true Church guiding them for the betterment of all society.

Section II: This is Eliot's rant against modern society. He describes people who have left their God or never recognized Him. He says that families do not spend time together, neighbors do not really know or bother with each other, and that people fritter away their lives with trivialities. He speaks of the Church built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the prophets, and the apostles. He laments how the true Christian faith is not the moral guide for humankind anymore.

Section III: Eliot continues the call for modern man to come to his senses and seek God. Eliot speaks of the Word of the Lord coming to him and saying that those with much are not using gifts from God wisely. Male voices reply that God's Word does not have a place in modern society and that humans spend their days in restless pursuits and frivolous games. Eliot continues by saying humans must build their lives on the solid foundation of the Church - which the "Stranger" of the poem built. In the end, Eliot says human beings can evade Life and living productively, but not Death and the Day of Reckoning.

Section IV: This short section deals with the ancient rebuilding of the destroyed temple at and city in Jerusalem. T.S. Eliot hints at this being a continuous process, and that the modern Church needs constant rebuilding to remain viable and strong.

Section V: Eliot talks of how a person should live humbly and do his daily duty so he can return to his home with peace of mind. He says that we should not engage in dealings with those of impure hearts. If purity is not in a person's heart, then it is not in the home, the city, or society as a whole.

Section VI: Eliot's concern for man to seek the moral high ground through faith in God, Christ, and the Church continues. He talks of Christian persecution; how one should not



believe that the battle against evil is over. He says Christian persecution will come to those who continue to build the Church.

Section VII: Eliot summarizes human history in this section. He shows how civilization from creation has sought truth and meaning in religion of any kind, whether worshipping God, the Devil, snakes, trees, or anything else. When Jesus Christ came, some followed him and some continue to do so. However, Eliot says that modern society now turns to the worship of other gods, those gods called Usury, Lust, and Power.

Section VIII: Eliot talks of listening to the words of God, how they can guide humankind. He relates the story of Peter the Apostle and that some listened to him, while others cast aside his teachings to pursue lives of moral corruption. He asks that people not forget the faith of those who followed a "wandering preacher." He ends the section by reiterating that anything is possible to those of faith and conviction because of Christ's death on the Cross.

Section IX: Eliot talks of spiritual matters on a deeper level. Eliot says human beings must devote their very existence and all that they think and do to God. He says humankind needs to repent and enjoy fruitful communion with those of the same faith. He continues with the thought that man must create, just as God created, and in creating, serve God. He says creating is not without hard work, but there is great reward in creative activity. He compares this to humankind's travails on the earth and believes that the great reward is one day seeing, what is now, Invisible Light.

Section X: Eliot talks of the battle between God and Satan. It is the age-old battle of Good versus Evil. Eliot speaks of the Church, how it is visible; he wonders if the Church should go into the world to continue to conquer evil or if the Church's work done. He continues to tell of humanity's work and struggles in life, how it wears them down. He gives thanks that people have the ability to create with their hands and minds. He ends by giving thanks to the Light for His great glory.

## **Choruses from 'The Rock' Analysis**

T.S. Eliot's beliefs about Christianity, Good, Evil, and humankind's purpose on earth are the main themes of this poem. The reader senses Eliot grappling with the great questions of life; questions humanity continues to ask. Eliot gives the reader his view that modern man has no place for God, and that even "gods" of any traditional sort are tossed to the side of the road in favor of new "gods," more exclusive to modern society - Usury, Lust, Greed. This changing of the gods pertains to industrial societies of the 20th century and beyond. Eliot's conclusion is that man has no hope if his physical life is not rooted in a deep spiritual life based on God and Christ. It is evident from this and many of his poems that he studied and sought to understand Christian teachings and relate them to modern society.



# Four Quartets - Burnt Norton

## Four Quartets - Burnt Norton Summary

### Section I

In this first section, Eliot describes Time: past, present, and future. He shows that past thought and action are manifest in the present and what we do today affects our future. Past, present, and future are interrelated. He says our thoughts of the past and future should cause us to live life now, as best we can. He also hints that we should go about our business, as we cannot handle too much reality if we always fret and worry.

### Section II

Eliot speaks here of the moving forward of Time and how our lives in the present are all with which we can concern ourselves. He says that stars, animals, and man follow their course, and in the present we understand our past and help shape our future. He ends by saying that only by using time properly now can a person conquer Time.

### Section III

Eliot continues his ponderings of Time. He says that sometimes one has to experience stillness and solitude to explore the deeper meaning of life. Eliot gives the reader his sense that only in contemplation and quiet, away from our distractions do we gain understanding of what life is and how we should live.

### Section IV

This very short section speaks of another day ending, another day in Time gone. Eliot asks, metaphorically, if there will be anyone to reach out to us for companionship at the end of our day.

### Section V

Eliot again ponders the movement of humans as Time moves. He relates how people live their lives always moving, as Time continually moves forward. He gives the reader the picture of people moving about in their daily lives, even though in living, people can only die. He talks of the cycle of beginnings and endings throughout humankind's history. Lives begin and lives end. New life begins, and it, too, ends; the cycle repeats itself. Through this all, people move about, living, loving, sowing and reaping.

## Four Quartets - Burnt Norton Analysis

Burnt Norton is Eliot's discourse on Time. His main point is that Time moves relentlessly forward and that we can only live in the present in order to have any control over time.





How a person uses his time each day is what is important. Eliot shows that a person can learn from the past and apply the lessons in his or her present life in hopes of having a better future. He concludes that even in living, we only affect a small portion of Time, and that all time prior to ours, and all time after we die, is a vast expanse. He hints at using our present time wisely and resisting temptation as the Word (Christ) did in the desert when tempted by Satan.



# Four Quartets - East Coker

## Four Quartets - East Coker Summary

### Section I

Eliot talks of the natural activities common to life in a town. He shows that people live, work, play, build, love, marry, and die and then the next generation comes along to do the same thing. He talks of how a person's birth starts the progression to death, this is the order of things, and we cannot change that.

### Section II

Eliot speaks of the limited value of knowledge that one gains from experience and many years of life. Despite all our work, thoughts, accomplishments and opinions, in the end, true wisdom comes from being humble, not proud or arrogant.

### Section III

Eliot continues to press his point that man, despite all his accomplishments and titles is heading to a dark place—death. He reiterates the same point established in section II, that humility and emptying ourselves of our preconceived ideas and opinions is the only way to find truth. He speaks of humankind letting go of false idols, whether physical or intangible, in order to follow the path to true wisdom.

### Section IV

Eliot speaks of Good Friday. He portrays the earth as a great hospital and humans as afflicted patients who will receive total healing because of Christ's sacrifice. Mortal suffering will end in healing because of Christ's sacrifice, and that we call this Friday "Good" because of what Christ's death signifies.

### Section V

Eliot gets very personal in this last section. He talks of the poet's art and how he is in his middle years and continues to work hard at his craft but he cannot possibly emulate the great masters. He can only write his best; others must judge his works. Old men must continue to be creative, useful and not quit living.

## Four Quartets - East Coker Analysis

Eliot speaks of the cycle of life in this poem, that people come and go and that in the end we must be full of humility in order to learn truth. He speaks of how our prejudices and pre-conceived ideas hinder us from unlearning error and gaining truth. He also dwells further on his common theme of redemption in Christ's death, as evidenced by

his talk of Good Friday and all it means. To Eliot, a humble man is a man of dignity, and one who can learn the truth about life because he is not bound to unproven ideas. This kind of man seeks to find real truth even if it means dispensing with previously held false teachings.



# Four Quartets - The Dry Salvages

## Four Quartets - The Dry Salvages Summary

### Section I

Eliot calls the river a brown god, which flows continuously, with might. He says its rhythms are evident in life itself. He relates the movement and pulse of the river to humanity's meanderings through space and time. Eliot talks of the interrelationship between the past, present, and future. Eliot also talks of the sea, how it tosses lost items upon the shore. He hints that this is like our mind, which stirs up old memories and presents them to us to reconsider.

### Section II

Eliot talks of human suffering in this section. Life goes on day by day, and there is much pain and agony in people's lives. While one goes about normal activities, others experience tragedy, trials, and hardship. He also speaks of aging and how one balks at losing youthful strength. Eliot says we look on our past, see events in retrospect, and gain a better understanding of ourselves. This can change our view of things. He says we look back on tragedies others went through and learn from them as well.

### Section III

Eliot discusses time present in relation to time past and time future. He says the future is unclear and the past is behind. We can only live in the present; we cannot say the future is before us because our time of death can be at any time. Eliot states it is man's lot to live in the present and not assume we have any other days ahead of us.

### Section IV

This section is a prayer to Mary to protect all seafarers, and fishermen, and the women who see them off to sea. It is a prayer to all those who died at sea.

### Section V

Eliot speaks here of people attempting to deal with their fears and concerns by consulting psychics, fortune-tellers, or using drugs. He says that in times of geopolitical or other turmoil, human beings consult the stars and anything else animate or inanimate to give them a hint of what will happen to them. Eliot says those who live a life of sacrifice, selflessness, prayer, and discipline, know what hope there is in life. Many people, he says, who do not engage in deeper thinking do not understand the past, or what the future holds, and instead are distracted by daily trivialities.

## Four Quartets - The Dry Salvages Analysis

Eliot continues his study of Time, Life, Death, and his faith. Eliot talks of aging and looking back on life, how we cannot change the past. We also cannot predict the future accurately; therefore, we must use the time given in the present to live properly. As this poem reaches its conclusion, he says the gift that is only half understood by humankind is the Incarnation. Eliot shows the reader that much of his poetry is an exploration of faith, and of reconciling his mortal existence with future spiritual rewards.



# Four Quartets - Little Gidding

## Four Quartets - Little Gidding Summary

### Section I

Eliot compares this spring season as an in between time. The weather is somewhere between polar and tropic climates. He compares this to one's spiritual zeal, where the temperature of one's internal faith is somewhere between melting and freezing. Eliot speaks of traveling England and having inside oneself the capacity for prayer as one traverses landscapes.

### Section II

Eliot speaks of the elements having their way with man and his creations. Wear and tear comes to man and the architecture of his creation. Fire, water, dust, and air decay and destroy all things showing that nothing is permanent. Human beings age and are brought down eventually as well. Eliot shows in this section that all are responsible for their actions to others and when looking back on one's life, the important thing is how a person dealt with his fellow man.

### Section III

Eliot considers man's quarrels with one another through the ages and the lives lost on both sides of the arguments. He shows that death, in the final analysis, silences all fighting, war, squabbles, and disagreements. Opposing parties have no fight with one another when eventually both lie buried.

### Section IV

Eliot alludes to the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and lighting the fire of faith in men. This biblical reference continues Eliot's investigation of religious beliefs and faith in God. In the final line of this section, Eliot speaks of a person's choices in life—whether he will choose the fire of the Holy Spirit or Hellfire.

### Section V

This section sees Eliot continue his discussion of Time and the cycle of life. He says endings are beginnings. He also says all of man's exploring and searching in life will bring him to the beginning once again. This beginning is knowledge of God and his purpose. When humankind draws on this Love and heeds the voice of this Calling, then humankind's search for truth will be satisfied.

## Four Quartets - Little Gidding Analysis

Repeatedly T.S. Eliot explores the themes of man's purpose in life and faith in God. Once again, he challenges the reader to consider this temporary physical life against the backdrop of a greater spiritual purpose. Eliot includes references to the Christian faith throughout the entire book, and in this poem, he asks the readers to ponder their own beliefs and spiritual health. To Eliot, self-examination of one's spiritual state, honestly done, with positive action taken, is a person's beginning on the road to a fulfilled life. If he or she chooses to make positive changes based on moral absolutes, Eliot believes they will find true joy and meaning in life.



# Occasional Verses

## Occasional Verses Summary

### Defense of the Islands

This short poem is to honor the soldiers who fought for England in World War II. Eliot conveys that these soldiers followed orders bestowed on them to defend freedom.

### A Note on War Poetry

This is another short poem, where Eliot shows that poetry written in war and based on intense personal experience by the writer, can become universal, speaking to the hearts of many. That is what "poetry" is, according to Eliot.

### To the Indians who Died in Africa

Eliot shows in this short piece that all soldiers no matter what soil they die on, now belong to that soil and deserve remembrance from their people back home. He says that all men desire to live in peace with their families, in their villages, no matter what side of a conflict they represent.

### To Walter de la Mare

Eliot's tribute to the English poet, Walter de la Mare. In this poem, he praises the poet and his ability to produce word art with a natural ease, as was his gift.

### A Dedication to my Wife

This is a very personal poem. He portrays a love where he and his wife are much attuned to each other's thoughts, words, and breathing, as if they are one.

## Occasional Verses Analysis

These are short poems of Eliot's, and deal with the themes of War, Death, Art, and Marriage. While significant, they do not have the range and depth of most of the poems in this collection. Instead, they are snapshots of each topic, giving an overview to the reader for further contemplation. Eliot shows the value of a wife to a man, the value of great artists to society, and the great sacrifice soldiers make in war for their fellow-man, no matter what side of the conflict on which they fight. These short poems deal with big issues but only scratch the surface and are templates for further discussion because of the thoughts they inspire.





# Characters

## J. Alfred Prufrock appears in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Prufrock is a man in the the later years of life. He is a decent, nondescript sort of man, and it's apparent he is past the vivacity of youth. He is thinner and losing his hair and he feels self-conscious about this. He is not the virile man he was in his youth when he was a pursuer of women. Now he feels he has no charms with which to interest a woman. He spends his days in repetitive monotony, and as he says, he measures his life in coffee spoons. He is a man of indecision, and this is a trait exhibited throughout his life. He never took the risks and chances he wished he did - whether in career or love. He yearns for the sensual, carefree days of youth and the desire of women. He knows he always deferred to others at the expense of his advancement in society and at the expense of his opinions. Now in old age, he regrets not being a decisive, strong-willed, proactive member of society. He wishes he could arouse passion in the opposite sex, that they would find him attractive once again and a person of action. He realizes he missed many opportunities in life and that there will not be any dramatic change in his life at this stage of his existence.

Eliot shows us, with Prufrock, what the costs are of not attacking life with boldness and zeal. He portrays Prufrock as a man who went along for the ride as a passenger in life and not the person planning, organizing, and navigating the road as a doer and initiator of action.

## The Lady appears in Portrait of a Lady

The Lady of this poem is a woman of means, who is getting older. She is respectable, dignified, and mannerly. She is a well-read and traveled woman. She has lived a life of varied experience and had attentions from men, but she still seems unfulfilled and lonely. The man in the poem, who visits her, is someone she desires to have a deeper relationship with, although his feelings are not the same. He does not want to pursue the relationship any further, to her dismay. The reader senses in her a yearning for love beyond just the physical. There are hints that he is younger than she is and that they have enjoyed a physical, but not a true loving, relationship. She is a woman of restraint, who will not push a conversation beyond the breaking point to where it erupts into an argument. She with poise, states her wishes politely. In her restraint, her deep desires come through even clearer, as the reader senses her bottled-up emotions.

The Lady exemplifies an upper-class society, where proper behavior is of paramount importance and any display of heart-rending emotion is best left for times alone. Decorum and etiquette control her discourse with the man so that she never really lets her true emotions and feelings out. In the end, her need for love is left unsatisfied, and she will resume her days entertaining friends with tea and polite conversation.



## **The Man appears in Portrait of a Lady**

The man of this poem is a man who, out of common decency and proper social etiquette, continues to visit an older woman of whom he has some sort of relationship. He is uncomfortable in her presence. The reader senses he may have had a physical relationship in the past with her and that she wants to further the relationship with him. He wants to pursue his own passions and does not really want to involve himself with her any longer. His visits are marked by strained, general conversation. When she tries to delve deeper into his psyche, he bristles and puts up barriers to further questioning. The reader sees a man ready to move on to greater conquests in life and hence his decision to go abroad, although the reader also senses that this may be his out to any further dealings with the woman.

Eliot portrays a man who is respectful of the Lady and her position in society, while at the same time is guarded as to her designs on him. We see a man who wants to pursue other adventures in life, whether personal, business, or academic. He does not want to be beholden to any woman of position, preferring to keep his options open.

## **Aunt Helen appears in Aunt Helen**

Aunt Helen, now deceased, is the central character of this poem. Her niece talks of her life, and the reader senses the great love and respect the niece had for this woman. This is signified by her statement that there was silence in heaven when her aunt died. We see that Aunt Helen was well off as she had servants who cared for her. We get even more of a sense of Aunt Helen's character from the housemaid sorrowing over her death. The reader can see that Aunt Helen was a woman of class and dignity, of whom people thought highly.

## **Miss Nancy Ellicott appears in Cousin Nancy**

In Cousin Nancy, we see a woman who goes against accepted norms of behavior. She's a smoker at a time when it wasn't common to see a woman smoke. She danced and lived a spirited life and all this to the dismay of her more stoic, reserved aunts.

## **Mr. Apollinax appears in Mr. Apollinax**

Mr. Apollinax is a man that lives life on his own terms. He laughs freely, speaks what is on his mind boldly, and generally is free-spirited in other people's company. He is such a colorful character that people remember him long after meeting him, while at the same time remembering little of others of more staid personality.



## **Old Man appears in Gerontion**

The man in this poem is one who ponders the great questions of life. He, in his old age, examines all he has said and done and concludes it is all futile without faith. He is a man capable of deep thought and now realizes he lost his passion for the truth. He also realizes that if he would have held to the truth he believed, he would have been too weak to uphold it and would have made compromises in his life out of fear of what others thought of him. We see that this man is capable of being very honest with himself about the reality of his life.

## **Sweeney appears in Fragment of an Agon**

Sweeney is a man who grasps life with a voracious sensual appetite for all it has to offer. He is a go-getter and one who believes you just live each day fully without undue worry. He loves Doris and wants to engage in a full, passionate life on all levels with her. He says life is birth, copulation, and death...and that is the gist of it all... to him you live life with vigor and let the chips fall where they may.

## **Doris appears in Fragment of a Prologue**

Doris is a woman who lives life based on signs that she feels are her directions and guideposts for life. She is a woman who is unable to give herself over to a life of unbridled enjoyment of things as she always resorts to fretting and worry. When a suitor tries to make contact with her by telephone, she does not have the courage to talk to him by herself, instead having a friend do her talking for her. She resorts to card reading to try to decipher what her future holds.

## **Dusty appears in Fragment of a Prologue**

She is Doris' friend and the woman Doris uses to talk to the suitor to whom she does not want to talk. Dusty is a person of the same ilk as Doris. They engage in idle banter and live their lives according to pre-conceived conclusions based on superstitions. They do not allow themselves the luxury of risk-taking.

## **Snow appears in Fragment of an Agon**

Friend of Sweeney, who accompanies him to visit Doris and Dusty.

## **Swart appears in Fragment of an Agon**

Friend of Sweeney, who accompanies him to visit Doris and Dusty.

## **The Rock appears in Choruses from**

The Rock of this poem is Jesus Christ.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Antwerpappears in Gerontion**

City in Belgium

### **Golder's Greenappears in A Cooking Egg**

Golders Green is an area in the London Borough of Barnet in London, England.

### **carbineappears in Coriolan - I. Triumphal March**

A firearm that is shorter and less powerful than a rifle

### **Juliet's tombappears in Portrait of a Lady**

Juliet's burial place - the Juliet of Romeo and Juliet.

### **cornetsappears in Portrait of a Lady**

A brass wind instrument, smaller than a trumpet.

### **eau de Cologneappears in Rhapsody on a Windy Night**

A fragrance or scent.

### **Boston Evening Transcriptappears in The**

A daily afternoon newspaper from Boston, Massachusetts - published 1830 to 1941.

### **macaroonappears in Mr. Apollinax**

A cookie or confection.

### **Cutlassappears in Gerontion**

A short, thick saber.



## **Cyclades appears in Sweeney Erect**

A Greek island group in the Aegean Sea.

## **Carthage appears in The Waste Land**

Ancient city in Tunisia

## **Himavant appears in The Waste Land**

The Himalayas : Himavant, Himachala or Himalaya

## **Gramophones appears in Fragment of an Agon**

Record player.

## **Citroen appears in Fragment of an Agon**

A French automobile

## **Bread and Wine appears in Five-Finger Exercises**

Communion meal in some Christian Churches.

## **Edom appears in Choruses from**

The name of the nation descended from Esau of the Bible.



# Themes

## CHRISTIANITY

Throughout this collection of poems, T.S. Eliot explores his faith and the faith of his characters. There is a constant search for what the great spiritual truths are and how they influence modern society. Eliot seeks to make a connection between man's moral decay and his lack of faith in God. Eliot believes that the erosion of a collective national faith in a country is its downfall. Throughout his works, he points to a symbiotic relationship between personal moral decay and national moral decay. To Eliot, as goes a person, so goes his or her family, and so goes the country. He desires, in many of these poems, to see his nation experience a spiritual renewal. Eliot speaks of humankind's great advancements, how they are empty achievements when the physical becomes a god, no matter what form. However, he goes beyond chastising humanity for forming gods of wood and stone and metal; he accuses his fellow citizens of worshiping the gods of Usury, Lust, and Power - great intangibles that can be the ruin of a person and a nation.

Eliot tries to show through his writings that human beings must seek the spiritual rewards, as this life is temporal. Through poems such as the Waste Land, Ash Wednesday, and The Hollow Men, he shows humanity grasping at straws for anything to fill the empty feeling they have inside. He believes that without God, people are merely hollow, lost, and ever searching, while never truly being satisfied. Eliot shows in much of his work that he believes the Word sent from God is humanity's hope for redemption.

## DEATH

In dealing with Christianity and the afterlife, T.S. Eliot deals with Death. Eliot, through his words, conveys the message that at our birth we begin the process that ends in our death. He seeks to reconcile his faith with the reality of man's mortality. To Eliot, the world is a hospital full of infirmed patients waiting a great healing. He does not minimize the wonderful joys that can be found and experienced in life. However, he seeks, in poem after poem, to show that living right and sowing good deeds and actions that show love to others is what life is all about. Death is often called the Great Leveler, and Eliot portrays this repeatedly in this collection. He shows how the great, brave, strong, and powerful become dust in the ground eventually, that youth and vitality are fleeting. In dealing with Death, Eliot deals with Life. He shows his characters in many contemplative situations, where they look back on their lives to try to find meaning in all they did. Eliot does not trivialize lives lived; he only desires to show that an enduring faith gives hope to one who wonders what life on earth is about. To Eliot, this earthly existence is a precursor to something greater. He speaks of the English society of his time abandoning talk of God, and ideas about the Word, or the Rock. He says the



distractions of modern society are to blame, that people seek to amuse and entertain themselves rather than face the reality of their own mortality.

## LIFE

Despite all the deep seriousness of Death, Eliot does speak of life and the joys inherent in a life well lived. He speaks of the joy of women and has a poem that honors his life with his wife in this collection. Throughout the book, Eliot does not shy away from mentioning sensual pleasures of all kinds—food, drink, lovemaking, travel, the literary arts, and music. Eliot tries to show that all the pleasures of life are enjoyable without any sort of faith, but the joy is temporal and that all good things do end. He strives to show that man must seek the heavenly to enjoy the earthly even more. He is not naive, though. Eliot knows modern English society does not make time for this sort of discourse, which he laments. It is telling that Sweeney, one of Eliot's characters speaks of life being birth, copulation, and death. Eliot hopes the reader sees beyond that view—that life is all that and then renewed life one day for eternity.

## AGING

While Death awaits all, Eliot also deals with the aging process that brings one to the final act in life. While his themes are deep and not sugarcoated, Eliot does offer hope to man for all his toil and tragedies faced. Throughout the book, aged characters look back on their lives and their loves. Eliot seeks to show that a life of decency and dignity and faith means one can face the aging process gracefully. He also shows that a morally bankrupt life, can, in one's last days come back to haunt him or her. This haunting is in the form of painful memories and regrets.





# Style

## Point of View

While there are many third-person omniscient poems in the collection, the majority of the poems are a first-person point of view. Eliot himself narrates very personal poems of his life in England and his thought processes about history and the culture in which he lived. When he does use a third person point of view, it's to give a broad overview of the actions of the characters that he places on his poetic stage. The first-person narratives give a sense to the reader of knowing the speaker intimately. This is definitely the case with Eliot's famous poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." The reader can feel Prufrock pouring his heart out to them, as if he needs to exorcise the demons inside his soul after many years of keeping them at bay. This first-person point of view lends great power to the poems, personalizing very deep and complex subjects. In "The Hollow Men," this first-person point of view is chilling as the narrator begins to breakdown and conveys different thought processes at the end of the poem. The reader can feel his pain, and sense his chaotic mind that causes him to ramble in distress. This point of view makes the ending of this poem that much more powerful.

## Setting

The setting of the novel is primarily London and other parts of England in the 20th century. Eliot does take readers on travels to other lands through his characters, such as Mr. Apollinax visiting the United States. However, locations mentioned are usually reminiscences by others of past travels, as they ponder their lives from their home base of England.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this collection of poems is finely-tuned English, with a peppering of slang and dialect. There are also poems written entirely in the French language. Sentences vary in length, and line breaks are not of one particular length and do not break at sentence ends or at the end of thought processes. The lines break wherever T.S. Eliot feels a need to emphasize words and phrases, or where he feels the need to jar or stop thought processes.

There is end-rhyme, internal rhyme and alliteration in these works. In some poems, the language flows as smoothly as the Thames River, in others there is more tension. Some poems have short quick lines that move down the page quickly. An example of this is The Hollow Men.

Eliot paints vivid word pictures; this is the sign of a poet who chooses words carefully for maximum effect. He also writes in broken-off thoughts that give a reader the sense of anxiety that the characters are feeling. The language in this collection is often obscure,



but not so much so that repeated readings do not give a reader the sense of finding hidden treasures. Particularly with *The Waste Land*, and its attendant notes, the reader feels a sense of joy when uncovering the meaning of a line and then tying it in with the whole theme of the poem. Eliot's style lends to repeated readings, which is why his poems are of enduring quality as they reward the reader upon multiple readings.

The meaning of the language is at once direct and subtle. Eliot plants verbal clues to the messages he tries to convey, but he also leaves lines open to a reader's personal interpretation. This allows a passage to have layers of meaning significant to each person who reads it.

## Structure

The novel has a structure based on poem sets.

The first section is poems from the period 1917 to 1920. There are twelve poems in this section. The second section is poems from 1920 to 1922. There are twelve poems in this section. The third section is *The Waste Land* from 1922 and the five parts of that poem.

The fourth section is *The Hollow Men* of 1925. The fifth section is *Ash Wednesday* from 1930 and its six parts. The next section is the *Ariel Poems* with five poems in this part of the book.

The seventh section is *Unfinished Poems* with two poems in this section, each with two parts. The eighth section is the *Minor Poems*, with five poems within. The next section is the *Choruses* from "*The Rock*" and there are 10 parts to this section.

Section ten, titled "*Four Quartets*" has four poems. The book ends with *Occasional Verses* and there are five poems in this section.



## Quotes

"Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;"  
(The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, pg.4)

"With the other masquerades  
That time resumes,  
One thinks of all the hands  
That are raising dingy shades  
In a thousand furnished rooms."  
(Preludes, pg.13)

"...The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,  
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life."  
The last twist of the knife.  
(Rhapsody on a Windy Night, pg.18)

"So he would have left  
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,"  
(La Figlia Che Piange, pg. 26)

"Here I am, an old man in a dry month,  
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain."  
(Gerontion, pg. 29)

"The hippopotamus's day  
Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts;  
God works in a mysterious way-  
The Church can sleep and feed at once."  
(The Hippopotamus, pg. 41)

"April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land,..."  
(The Waste Land, pg.53)

"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?"  
(The Waste Land, pg. 55)

"He who was living is now dead  
We who were living are now dying  
With a little patience"  
(The Waste Land, pg.66)



"We are the hollow men  
We are the stuffed men  
Leaning together  
Headpiece filled with straw"  
(The Hollow Men, pg. 79)

"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"  
(The Hollow Men, pg.82)

"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"  
(Ash Wednesday, pg. 85)

"Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood  
Teach us to care and not to care"  
(Ash Wednesday, pg. 94)

"We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death."  
(Journey of the Magi, pg. 100)

"Because the beginning shall remind us of the end  
And the first coming of the second coming."  
(The Cultivation of Christmas Trees, pg. 108)

"Birth, and copulation, and death.  
That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks:  
Birth, and copulation, and death."  
(Fragment of an Agon, pg. 121)

"For I know, and so should you  
That soon the enquiring worm shall try  
Our well-preserved complacency."  
(Five-Finger Exercise, pg.140)

"All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,"  
(Choruses from 'The Rock', pg. 151)



"O miserable cities of designing men,  
O wretched generation of enlightened men,  
Betrayed in the mazes of your ingenuities,  
Sold by the proceeds of your proper inventions:"  
(Choruses from 'The Rock', pg. 159)

"In my beginning is my end. In succession  
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,  
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place  
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass."  
(East Coker,pg. 184)



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the use of metaphor in the poems. Point out instances where it works especially well, giving greater meaning to the message of the poem.

Consider Eliot's contemplations on Redemption through Faith and how this compares to current thought on spiritual matters.

Discuss belief in God in the 21st century and compare the religious climate of Eliot's time to today's climate.

Discuss the relevance of poetry in a modern society - does it speak to the issues of our time - or is its focus too personal and narrow.

Compare England and its moral underpinnings immediately following World War I, to our time and our moral underpinnings, or lack thereof.

Discuss the way Eliot breaks his lines in his work. Where does this technique work best? Where does it hinder the reading of a passage, making a thought process difficult to grasp?

Discuss man's mortality and relate it to Eliot's musings on an afterlife where one is rewarded for their true faith.

Discuss the use of rhyme in Eliot's poems. In which poems does it work best? Where does it interfere in a poem by calling too much attention to itself.

Discuss Eliot's use of alliteration and where it moves sentences along smoothly. Also, consider where it may cause too much attention to itself, jarring the reader out of the poem.

Consider Eliot's discourses on Christianity's role in humankind's daily life in Western society. Have churches been the place of solace and direction that people need, or have they abandoned their original calling.