

T.S. Eliot

Text analysis - The Waste Land

The burial of the dead is an extract taken from the first part of the poem *The Waste Land*: the focus is on the opposition between fertility and sterility, life and death.

The 'Unreal city' the author is mentioning, referring to Baudelaire, is London: in fact Eliot describes a crowd which flows over London Bridge, the bridge that links the southern part of London to the City, the economical area of London. This is also the symbol materialism and consumerism. The city is made unreal by the 'brown fog of a winter dawn'.

The dwellers are joined in a crowd, which means that they lost their own identity, they're subject to homologation and alienation: they fixed their eyes before his feet, just like robots.

We can find other references to London: King William Street and Saint Mary Woolnoth, the church that keeps the hours with a dead sound.

We know that the poet really heard the strokes of the church and the dark, gloomy sound that they produced; the church announces that it's nine o'clock, the time the clerks get to work.

Eliot sees the situation as one which is not only typical of the London of 1922 but which goes beyond to the present.

In this passage, the poet considers the routine nature of modern life as a form of living repetition whose surviving ritual aspects have become another part of its meaningless workday.

The church's function here is to mark the hours of the death.

In this context, even the ritual of the burial, with its former religious implication of resurrection, seems reduced to the level of domestic gardening, and the conversation between the poet and his friend Stetson has a despairingly ironic tone.

Eliot style is highly citatory. We can find references to Dante's *Inferno*, Baudelaire's Parisian poems and *Les fleurs du mal*, and John Webster's *The white devil*.

This citational nature makes the text very complex, but at the same time gives it the authority brought by the authors quoted.

The rhythm is irregular; the poem rejects any element of traditional form of verse.