

## The Waste Land – T.S. Eliot

*The Waste Land* is a poem published by Thomas Stearns Eliot in 1922. The title of the opera, *The Waste Land* ("la terra sterile") represents the condition of the modern man: desolation and depression, the loss of all the values.

The poem is composed by five chapters:

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

### The Burial of the Dead

*April is the cruelest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.  
Summer surprised us, coming over the  
Starnbergersee  
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the  
colonnade,  
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,  
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.  
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt  
deutsch.  
And when we were children, staying at the arch-  
duke's,  
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,  
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,  
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.  
In the mountains, there you feel free.  
I read, much of the night, and go south in the  
winter.  
What are the roots that clutch, what branches  
grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no  
relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water.*

The work opens with a quotation from Petronius' *Satyricon* and with a dedication (in Italian) to Ezra Pound, called "il miglior fabbro".

The poem opens with the beginning of spring, in April. For Eliot, "April is the cruelest month" before the blossoming of nature modern man feels an even greater painful its inner sterility.

The next part is a flashback that takes us back to the climate of Mitteleuropa and Bavaria in the Belle Époque, before the First World War, followed by a clear reference to the Russian Revolution.

Later there are sentences in German: *Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.* - "I'm not Russian at all, I come from Lithuania, pure German."

The title is a metaphor: it represents the condition of the man of the Modern Age who lives a life without sense.