**T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land, The burial of the dead, VV. 1-30 – Analysis.**

The Waste Land is a poem written by T. S. Eliot and it is arranged into five sections; the first one, from which is taken the extract I’m going to analyze is the introduction and it is entitled The Burial of the dead (1922).

The title of the poem makes the reader understand the atmosphere of the whole composition and then of the extract he is going to read: the adjective waste connotes the land as a bad one. It becomes negative and useless: a land of sterility. Eliot considered modern culture as a degraded mess, he thinks that the First World War had destroyed Europe and made it become a waste land, a land without any possibility of future life, of future glory, due to a loss of values men feel alone on the globe -waste of our civilization-. Nouns burial and dead contribute to create a gloomy atmosphere underlining what expressed previously by the poem’s title.

The poem presents a quotation from Petronius’s Satyricon: the Sibyl (a woman with prophetic powers) looks at the future and proclaims that she only wants to die. Putting such a quotation at the beginning of the work, Eliot creates a bound between the woman’s words and the land subject of the poem.

The extract includes the first thirty lines of The burial of the dead. The dull atmosphere continues in all the lines, which seem to have no logical connection, because of Ezra Pound revision of the poem (he suggested Eliot to remove all the narrative parts from the work). The extract could be organized into three sequences:

-          The first one covers the first seven lines and contains the introduction of the poems’ first part and its main-theme/message;

-          The second one, from line eight to line eighteen, reports the memories of a character that the reader initially does not know;

-          The last one is told by the initial speaking voice one and contains various quotations that permit him to think about the shadow of contemporary situation of man.

From the narrative level the poem has to move to the mythical level. Eliot's poetry is the result of the just-apposition of a series of scenes: they are kept together by the atmosphere and the ritual (myth as a cohesive element), nevertheless there is no coherence in connections. Along the whole extract the language consists in what writer wants to say. Lexical as well as semantic choices are essential to create the meaning since “*we produce ourselves in language*”*.*

The first section opens with a reference to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (intertextuality): April is the cruellest month, this is done on purpose in order to go back to the roots of culture when men had some original values to believe in. In this case April is not the happy month of pilgrimages; it is instead the time when the land should be regenerating after a long winter but regeneration is painful; it mixes memory and desire. The memories come in the narrators mind: the speaking voice remembers the great past of the nowadays waste land and suffers because he knows that past can’t be again. The roots (metonymy for land) are dull, they can no produce anything, the land is sterile; man can no more be great as the past and spring is cruel because it makes the narrator understand it. Doing so *we are not living, we are* surviving. Then the narrator chooses to make a paradoxical inversion. After April it comes immediately winter that “kept us warm”. Winter’s snow is forgetful: the dyeing nature does not remind the past glory of man. Snow covers nature, covers the natural life and men’s memories. Life is little, there is only a little possibility to live again for man. A second meaning for the expression is understandable putting it in relationship with men’s being finished, a little life is an image that recalls men’s short lives, the attention of the reader is again on the atmosphere of death. The tubers are dried: life is no more possible for man society.

The first line of the second section makes the atmosphere and the speaking voice change. The reader moves from spring to summer and the pronoun us makes him understand the introduction of a character that speaks about himself as someone part of a group of persons. The first element that connotes the second section is rain -it brings new life-: the gloomy atmosphere introduced by the title continues also in the second sequence. The past tense of the lines proves that the section is a remembering from the character that the reader does not know yet. The sentence of the new/second speaking voice are one juxtaposed to the other without any bound; the second one is written in German. The use of different languages at the same time, together with correlative objectives and fragmentation, is one of Eliot’s most important features. The identity of the speaking voice is specified firstly through the language he uses than through the specification of his nationality: no Russian, but Lithuanian and so German. The need to remark the character’s identity recalls the need for contemporary man to have an identity, which has been lost because of relativism and Freudian theories.

The memories of the character are that of a distant childhood (when we were children) and are also bad ones (and I was frightened). After half of the sequence the reader understands the gender and the name of the character: she is a woman and her name is Marie, her name recalls the Christian tradition (Maria Jesus’s mother). She remembers the mountain and this bound the second sequence to the previous one: the mountain and the sled recall the image of the forgetful snow. Memories and remembering are recalled also by her action of reading: to read is also to remember a better past, which could produce a coherent literary culture.

In all Eliot’s poem memory creates a confrontation of the past with the present, a juxtaposition that points out just how badly things have decayed; in this case Marie compares her present to her childhood feeling nostalgia for the second one.

The third section begins completely incoherently in respect to the previous. It begins with a question: what are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish? The name roots bound the last sequence to the first one as does the expression stony rubbish, another correlative objective to substitute the previous waste land. Dead returns the protagonist. The narrator of the first sequence speaks again and uses biblical words to underline men searching for protections and his impossibility to find it. Eliot’s lines use correlative objectives such as broken images, dead tree, dry stone and water to recall the biblical almond tree that blooms to bring death. In the following lines the narrator speaks directly to the reader (I will show you repeated at line 27 and then at the last line of the extract) highlighting once more the atmosphere of death introduced already by the title of the extract. In conclusion, the last three lines of the text evoke the themes introduced in its first section. The noun shadow stands for death and it covers all contemporary men’s life (striding behind you, in the past, and rising to meet you, in the future) and the noun dust recalls the burial of the title (calls to mind the phrase dust to dust and the custom of throwing a handful of earth on the coffin during the funeral).