



Figurative Language in Poetry

Poetry 1
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Definition

- a way to deliver meaning other than the literal meaning of the words
- a kind of language which employs various figures of speech

Purpose of using figurative language:

- to captivate readers' interest
- deliver our idea and imagination in more entertaining way

Some types of Figurative Language

Simile

- a figure of speech in which two things are compared using 'as', 'as when', 'like', 'than', or other equivalent constructions
- asserts similarity

Example:

"My love is like a red, red rose" (Robert Burns)

" He looked like a Russian priest

with imperial bearing

and a black ransacked raincoat" (Robert Hass)

Metaphor

- a figure of speech which directly compares one thing to another
- it is used when a writer feels that two terms are identical instead of merely similar
- an analogy between two objects
- generally, it is formed through the use of some form of the verb “to be”

Example:

“All the world’s a stage” (Shakespeare)..

“The language that is lace” (Eavan Bolan)

Personification

- human characteristics are attributed to nonhuman objects, abstractions, or ideas
- the poet describes them as if they were real people

Example:

"The Night was creeping on the ground! She crept and did not make a sound" (James Stephens)

Hyperbole

- exaggeration is used to emphasize a statement in an extreme way and to produce a very dramatic effect

Example: “In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,

For they in thee a thousand errors note,”

(Shakespeare)

Irony

- used to convey the opposite of their literal meaning
- a kind of result from the contrast between the actual meaning of a statement and the suggestion of another meaning
- a mockery of what is literally being stated
- can be light and playful
- a heavier version of irony is sarcasm, where harsh words are usually used

Example:

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink. (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

“Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey,
Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthy;”
Don Juan: Canto the First by Lord Byron

Apostrophe

- a limited form of personification
- occurs when a poet or one of his characters addresses a speech to a person, animal, idea, or object

Example:

“To you, my purse, and to non other wight

Complayne I, for ye be my lady dere!”

(Geoffrey Chaucer)

Euphemism

- Substitution of obvious and explicit words with the less direct ones
- this figurative language catches the readers' attention more than the blunt and unappealing words

Example:

the sun “blossomed out of the horizon” → means the sun “rose”

...When Nature is calling, plain speaking is out

Metonymy

- replacing the word that is actually meant with something associated with an object or idea
- one word is substituted with another word which is closely associated.

Example:

the Americans speak of the government as the “White House”

“As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling” (Robert Frost)

Synecdoche

- a condition where a part of something is used to represent / indicate the whole thing

Example:

“She wept with waking eyes” (George Meredith)

“We spoke all night in tongues,
in fingertips, in teeth” (Robert Hass)

Some more important terms related to Figurative Language

- Antithesis
- Archetype
- Atmosphere
- Connotation
- Denotation
- Diction
- Imagery
- Mood
- Paradox
- Theme

Antithesis

- a condition where a pair or more of strongly contrasting ideas or terms are presented together
- produces an effect of tension caused by the contradiction of the words

Example:

“In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;

In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;”

(Alexander Pope)

Archetype

- Latin → a copy, mold, a template
- the original pattern from which the copies are made
- an image that appears so frequently which makes it an established part of our mental vocabulary
- represents universal understanding of the same kind of thing

Example:

the scene of Adam and Eve, which pattern is used to illustrate the loss of innocence in all other scenes.

“ My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree / Toward heaven still,” (Robert Frost)

Atmosphere

- a certain mood of a work of art
- words may establish a certain atmosphere

Example:

When a poet describes about a large waves or churning sea, he obviously creates an atmosphere of storminess. Besides, it creates an atmosphere of hatred.

Mood

- the creation of a certain atmosphere through the words.

Example:

When the poet speaks about his or her sadness, then the atmosphere will be dominated by the mood of sadness.

Atmosphere Vs. Mood Vs. Tone

Atmosphere	descriptive of the state of the surroundings in the poem	calm, chaotic, etc
Mood	descriptive of the emotions conveyed overall feeling of the poem the feeling poem creates in the reader	happy, sad, etc.
Tone	descriptive of the voice of the narrator the creation of attitude in poem how the poem is read	serious, comic, etc

Those three are created through

- the diction
- the imagery used
- the rhyme and rhythm patterns established
- the sound effects created through features such as alliteration and onomatopoeia
- the context or situation the poem describes

Can you catch the tone in these lines?

“the maiden should have lovely face,
And be of genteel mien;
If not, within thy dwelling place,
There may be vestige of disgrace,
Not much admired-when seen.”

(Cornelius Whur)

Diction

- the selection of the words → to deliver the poet's intended meaning.

Connotation

- the possible meaning of the word → suggested by the ideas associated with the word
- a poet directs the reader's attention by using certain words which have certain feelings and associations

Denotation

- the dictionary meaning of a word
- the essential meaning of a word.

Paradox

- a kind of statement that is true in some sense, although it appears self-contradictory and absurd at first.
- the primary purpose is to attract attention and produce dramatic effect.

Example:

"Freedom is slavery."

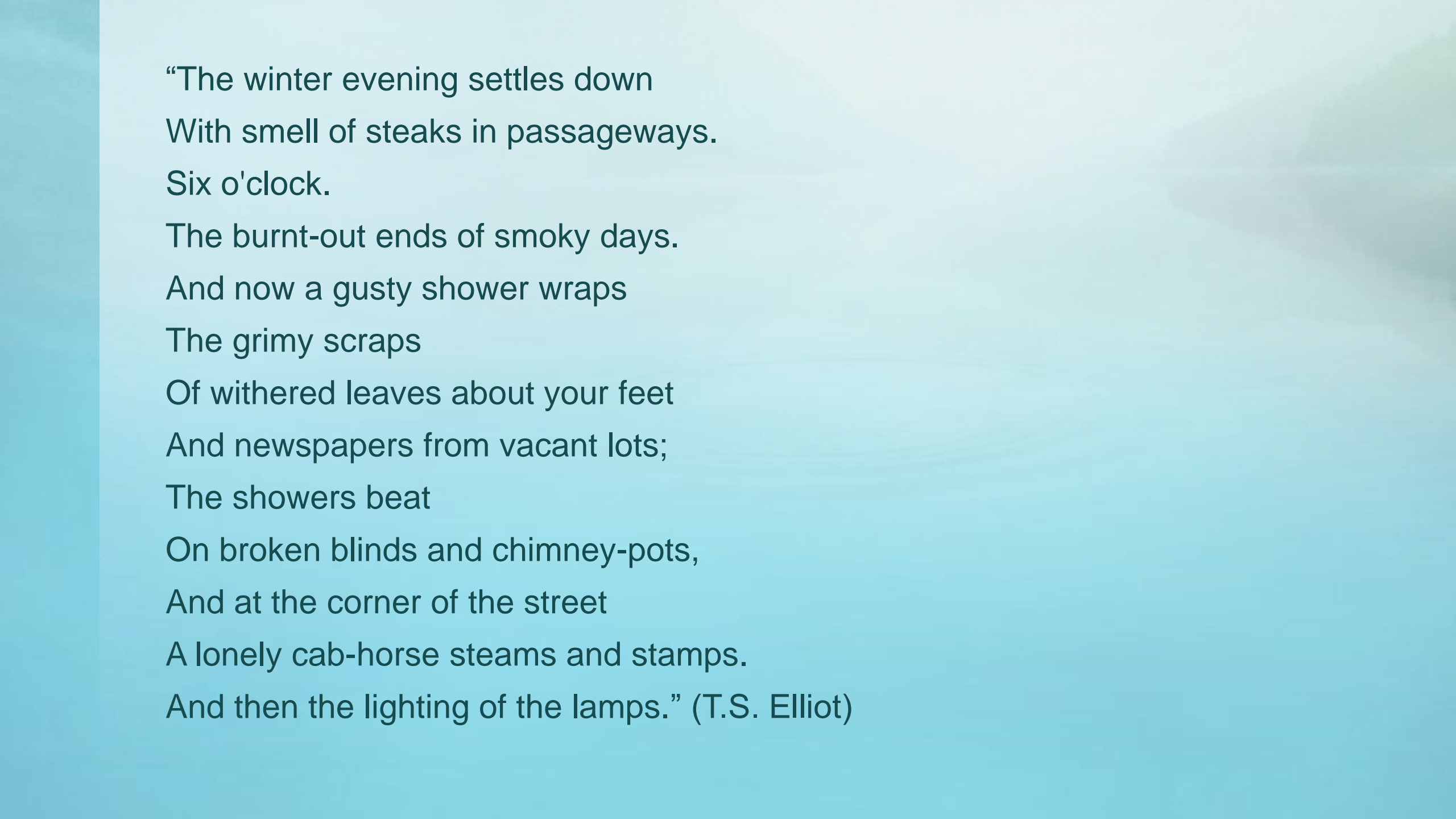
"Ignorance is strength." (George Orwell, 1984)

Theme

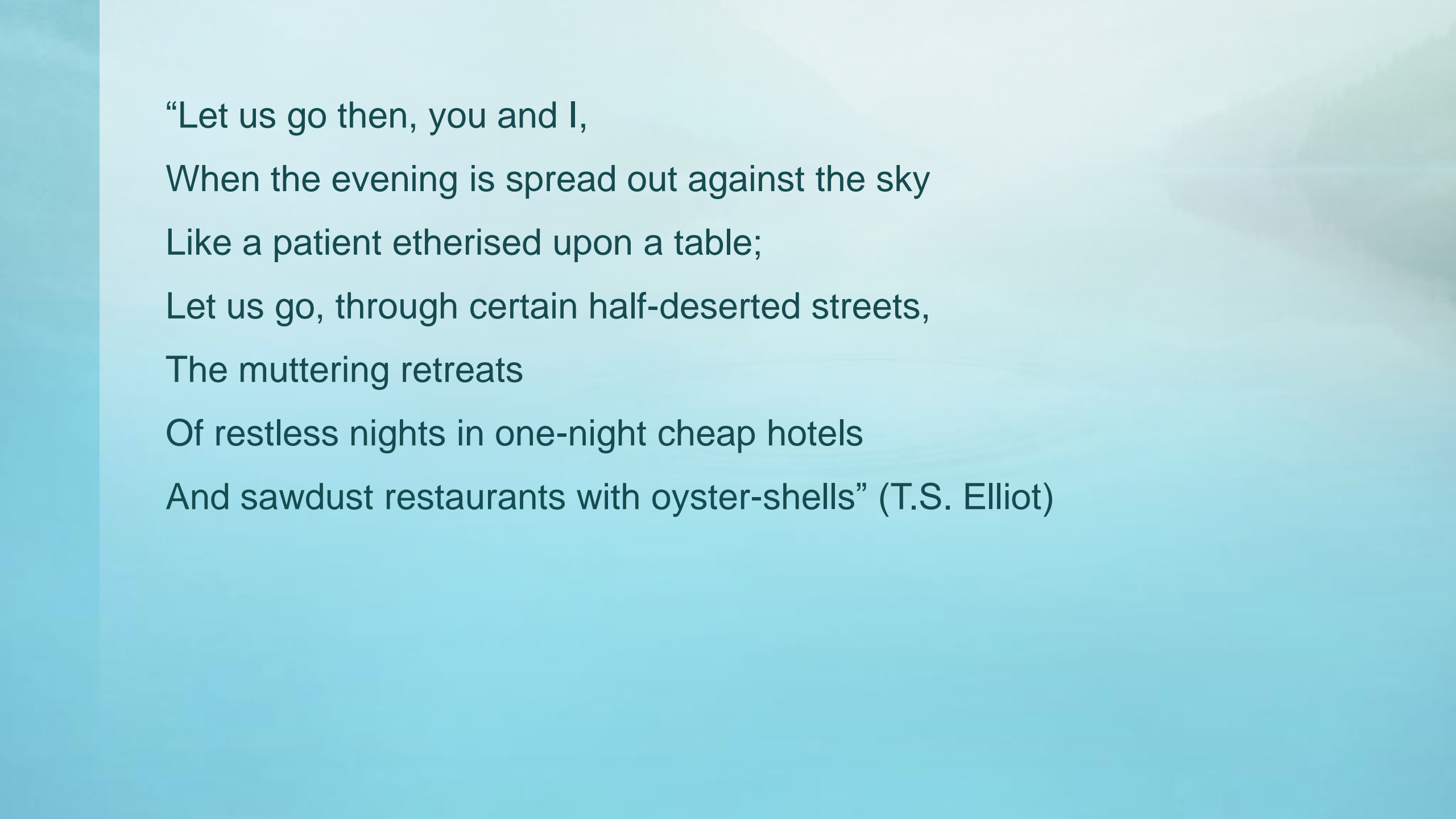
- the basic idea developed in a poem
- the reason for a poet to write a poem in the first place
- an abstract concept which is presented by the words

Imagery

- words used to describe images, pictures, sensory content, or other material appearances which we find in a poem
- those words evoke the audience's memories of a certain objects or events
- the poet has to carefully select certain words to deliver the meaning clearly.
- Types:
 - Sight → visual images
 - Sound → auditory images
 - Smell → olfactory images
 - Taste → gustatory images
 - Touch → tactile images
 - Motion and activity → kinetic (general movement), kinesthetic (human or animal movement)

A misty, blue-toned landscape with mountains and a body of water. The scene is hazy and atmospheric, with a soft light filtering through the mist. The mountains in the background are partially obscured by the fog, and the water in the foreground reflects the light. The overall mood is serene and quiet.

“The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
And then the lighting of the lamps.” (T.S. Elliot)



“Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells” (T.S. Elliot)