

In Me, Past, Present, Future Meet:
A Poetic Exploration by Siegfried Sassoon

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01

About the Poet



1. About the Poet

- **Role:** One of the most influential English war poets of the 20th century
 - **Known for:** Realistic, often anti-war poetry
 - **Style:** A Blend of lyrical beauty and harsh reality
- *Sassoon's war experiences deeply influenced his poetry, but this poem reflects his inner psychological landscape beyond war.*



Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

■ Notable works:

- *The Old Huntsman*: pastoral, nostalgia
- *Counter-Attack*: satire, anti-war
- *The Heart's Journey*: inner peace, paradox

- 《老猎人》是萨松首部战争诗集，以田园与战场交织的笔触展现战前生活的宁静与战争的残酷。
- 《反攻》以尖锐讽刺的现实主义笔调，呈现一战壕沟战场的恐怖与荒谬。
- 《心之旅》是战后创作的诗集，在内心探索中融合古典意象，书写人性中对立力量的共存与和解。收录了包括《于我，过去，现在以及未来》在内的名篇，其中诗句“心有猛虎，细嗅蔷薇”广为流传。





2. Historical & Literary Context

- **Time of writing:** 1920s (post-WWI)
 - **Era:** Modernist period in literature
 - **Key themes of the time:** Fragmentation of self, disillusionment, psychological introspection
 - **Sassoon's context:** After public anti-war protest, he was hospitalized, where he met **Wilfred Owen**.
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- 欧文与萨松1917年相识于爱丁堡战争医院，萨松深刻影响了欧文的诗歌创作。
 - 欧文于一战停战协定签署前一周在法国战场阵亡，年仅25岁。
 - 萨松在欧文去世后整理出版了他的诗集。两人都被视为20世纪最具影响力的英国战争诗人。



Wilfred Owen(1893-1918)



Modernist Themes in Post-WWI Literature

Fragmentation of self	一战后的普遍情绪	现代主义核心特征（如艾略特《荒原》）
Disillusionment	对战争、文明、 传统的幻灭	现代主义文学的重要主题
Psychological introspection	弗洛伊德心理学 的影响	现代主义文学的重要手法（意识流等）



02

Poem Text



In me, past, present, future meet

In me, past, present, future meet
To hold long chiding conference.
My lusts usurp the present tense
And strangle Reason in his seat.
My loves leap through the future's fence
To dance with dream-enfranchised feet.

In me the cave-man clasps the seer,
And garlanded Apollo goes
Chanting to Abraham's deaf ear.

In me the tiger sniffs the rose.

Look in my heart, kind friends, and tremble,
Since there your elements assemble.

于我，过去、现在和未来

于我，过去、现在和未来
商讨聚会各执一词 纷扰不息。
林林总总的欲望，掠取着我的现在
把“理性”扼杀于它的宝座
我的爱越过未来的藩篱
梦想解放出它们的双脚，舞蹈不停。

于我，穴居人攫取了先知
佩戴花环的阿波罗神
向亚伯拉罕的聋耳唱叹歌吟。

心有猛虎，细嗅蔷薇。

审视我的内心吧，亲爱的朋友，你应颤栗
因为那才是你本来的面目。



3. Language Points

1) chiding (adj./n.) 责备、斥责

- Definition: scolding; expressing disapproval or blame in a mild but persistent way
- In the poem: *The past, present, and future are personified as holding a quarrelsome or scolding meeting inside the speaker.*

2) conference (n.) 会议、商讨

- Definition: a formal meeting for discussion
- In the poem: *The three times gather like people in a debate, arguing within the speaker.*

3) lusts (n., plural) 强烈的欲望

- Definition: strong desires or appetites (often but not always sexual)
- In the poem: *Refers to uncontrolled, greedy desires that try to take over the present moment.*

4) usurp (v.) 篡夺、夺取（本不属于自己的权力或地位）

- Definition: to take power or position illegally or by force
- In the poem: *Desire forcibly seizes the present tense from reason.*



5) strangle (v.) 扼死、勒死

- Definition: to kill by squeezing the throat; to suppress violently
- In the poem: *Desire violently kills Reason, who sits on a throne.*

6) leap (v.) 跳跃、跃过

- Definition: to jump high or far
- In the poem: *Love jumps over the fence of the future – it refuses to be limited by time.*

7) fence (n.) 栅栏、篱笆、围墙

- Definition: a barrier or boundary (often made of wood or wire)
- In the poem: *Symbolizes the limits of the future that love can cross.*

8) enfranchised (adj., in “dream-enfranchised”) 被赋予自由的、获得权利的（源自 enfranchise, 指给予投票权等公民权利）

- Definition: given freedom or rights (originally the right to vote).
- In the poem: *Feet are freed by dreams so they can dance. The speaker creates this compound word.*





9) cave-man (n.) 穴居人、原始人

- Definition: a prehistoric human who lived in caves; a primitive, rough person.
- In the poem: *Represents the brutal, irrational, primitive side of human nature*

10) clasps (v.) 紧握、抱住、扣住

- Definition: holds tightly; grips firmly.
- In the poem: *The cave-man grips the seer tightly – brute force controls wisdom.*

11) seer (n.) 先知、预言家

- Definition: a prophet; someone who can see the future.
- In the poem: *Symbolizes wisdom and foresight, but here it is powerless, held by the cave-man.*

12) garlanded (adj.) 戴着花环的

- Definition: decorated with a wreath of flowers or leaves.
- In the poem: *Apollo (god of reason) wears a garland of ivy (symbol of Dionysus, god of passion) – reason is mixed with emotion.*





13) Apollo (proper n.) 阿波罗，古希腊神话中的太阳神

- Definition: Greek god of the sun, reason, order, music, and prophecy.
- In the poem: *Represents rationality, light, and order. Here he is garlanded – reason has been softened by passion.*

14) chanting (v. present participle) 吟唱、反复诵唱（尤指宗教或仪式性的）

- Definition: singing or reciting in a repetitive, rhythmic way (often religious).
- In the poem: *Apollo sings repeatedly to Abraham, but Abraham cannot hear.*

15) Abraham (proper n.) 亚伯拉罕，《圣经·旧约》人物，犹太人的始祖

- Definition: the biblical patriarch, father of the Jewish people.
- In the poem: *Represents religious origin and humanity's covenant with God. He is deaf to Apollo – religion cannot hear reason.*

16) sniffs (v.) （用鼻子）嗅、闻

- Definition: breathes in through the nose to smell something.
- In the poem: *The tiger gently smells the rose – violence and tenderness coexist peacefully. This is the gentlest verb in the poem.*



17) tremble (v.) 颤抖、战栗、发抖

- Definition: to shake slightly, usually from fear, cold, or strong emotion.
- In the poem: *The speaker tells his friend: “Look into my heart and tremble” – not from terror, but from recognition of shared human complexity.*

18) elements (n., plural) 元素、成分、组成部分

- Definition: basic parts or ingredients that something is made of.
- In the poem: *The opposite qualities inside a person – desire/reason, violence/tenderness, etc. The friend’s heart has the same elements.*

19) assemble (v.) 聚集、集合、组装

Definition: to gather or come together.

- In the poem: *These elements gather together inside a person to form their true nature.*



4. Close Reading

In me, past, present, future meet

To hold long chiding conference.

- The speaker declares that the three time dimensions coexist within him, and they are not at peace—they argue and blame one another in a prolonged, conflicted conference.

My lusts usurp the present tense

And strangle Reason in his seat.

- Raw desires seize total control of the present moment, violently strangling Reason, who sits helplessly in his own seat of authority.

My loves leap through the future's fence

To dance with dream-enfranchised feet.

- Love and idealism leap over the barrier of the future, dancing freely in a realm liberated by dreams, unbound by present reality.



*In me the cave-man clasps the seer,
And garlanded Apollo goes
Chanting to Abraham's deaf ear.*



- Primitive instinct and higher vision embrace each other within him. Apollo sings beautifully, but Abraham—representing obedient faith—cannot hear him, showing how different spiritual traditions coexist without truly understanding one another.

In me the tiger sniffs the rose.

- The ferocious tiger gently smells the delicate rose—violence and beauty, strength and fragility meet not in conflict but in quiet coexistence.



*Look in my heart, kind friends, and tremble,
Since there your elements assemble.*

- The poet invites us to look into his heart—not as a spectacle, but as a mirror. We should tremble because we will see our own conflicting primal forces gathered chaotically in the same space.



5. Poetic Form

12-line poem, irregular rhyme scheme (ABABCCB
DEDE FF)

- **Rhyme pattern:**

- *First stanza:* meet / conference / tense / seat / fence / feet → **ABABCCB**
- *Second stanza:* seer / goes / ear / rose → **DEDE**
- *Final couplet:* tremble / assemble → **FF**

- **Meter:** **Iambic tetrameter** with variations

- **Tone:** **introspective, paradoxical, dramatic**

(内省性、矛盾性、戏剧性)





03

Key Devices



6. Poetic Techniques in Focus

- **Personification:**

- Reason is “strangled” – intellectual control is overpowered
- Lusts “usurp the present” – desires dominate

- **Metaphor:**

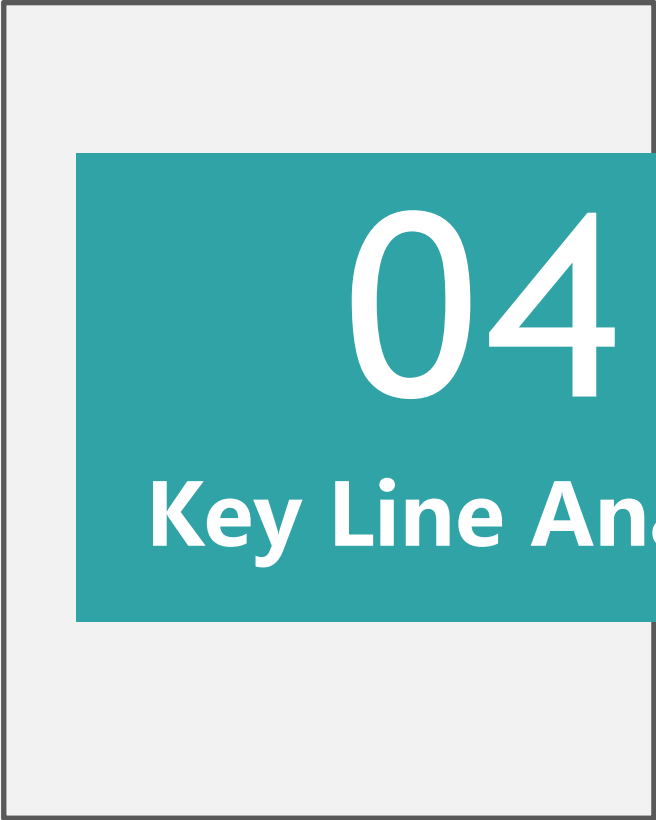
- “My loves leap through the future’s fence” – hope transcends boundaries

- **Allusion:**

- Apollo: god of art, order, civilization
- Abraham: patriarch of faith, tradition
- Cave-man: primal instinct

- **Juxtaposition:**

- Primitive vs. civilized, instinct vs. intellect, past vs. future



04

Key Line Analysis



In me the tiger sniffs the rose “心有猛虎，细嗅蔷薇”

● Metaphors:

- **Tiger:** primal power, danger, instinct
- **Rose:** beauty, fragility, civilization, love
- **“Sniffs”** – gentle curiosity, not attack

● Analysis:

- The animalistic and the aesthetic coexist within one self
- Violence and tenderness are not mutually exclusive
- A moment of harmony between opposing forces





7.Yin-Yang in Chinese Culture

● 【北宋】苏轼

➤ “大江东去，浪淘尽，千古风流人物。”（《念奴娇·赤壁古》）

——雄浑豪放，气象万千

➤ “笑渐不闻声渐悄，多情却被无情恼。”（《蝶恋花·春景》）

——细腻婉约，柔情似水

■ 这两首风格截然不同的词，竟出自同一年（苏轼谪居黄州时期）。

● 【南宋】陆游 《诉衷情》

当年万里觅封侯，匹马戍梁州。

关河梦断何处？尘暗旧貂裘。

胡未灭，鬓先秋，泪空流。

此生谁料，心在天山，身老沧洲。

■ 通过强烈的今昔对比，展现了陆游一生的悲剧性张力——“心在天山”的壮志与“身老沧洲”的现实之间的巨大落差，以及至死不忘报国的情怀。

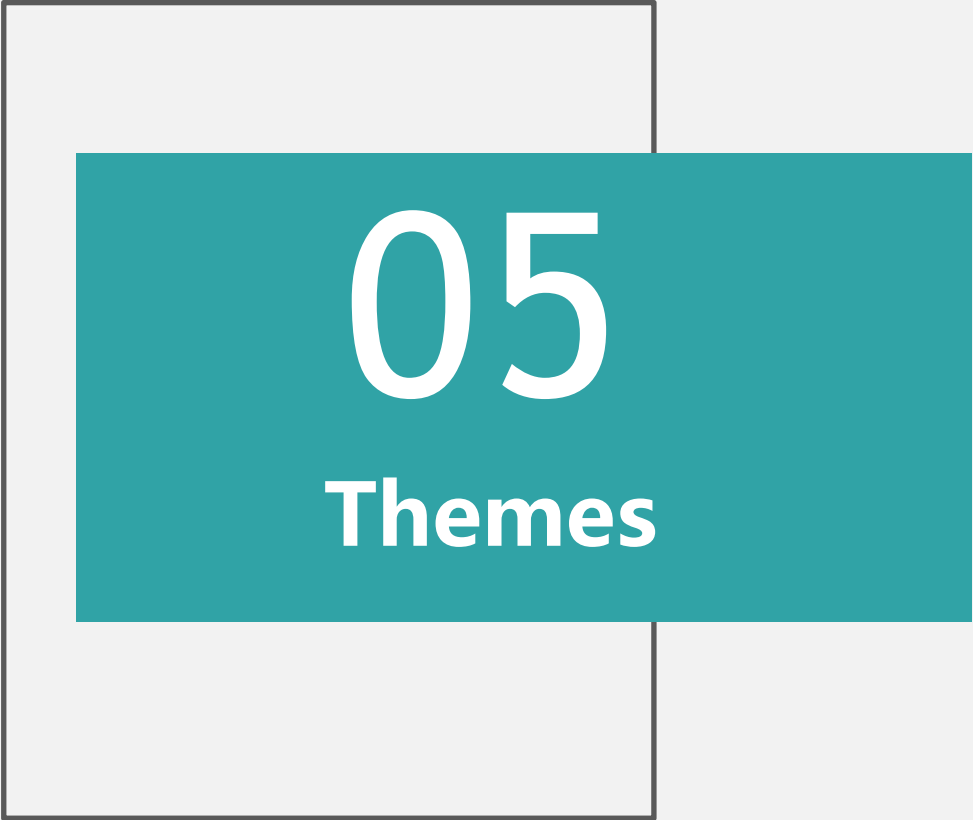


● 哲学层面的呼应：《周易》的刚柔相济

中国古代思想中“刚柔并济”的观念源远流长：

- 《周易》：“一阴一阳之谓道”——宇宙万物的根本规律在于阴阳（刚柔）的平衡与转化
- 这与萨松诗句的内核基本一致：人性如天地，既有阳刚的猛虎，也有阴柔的蔷薇；真正的完整，是两者的共存与平衡





05

Themes



- **Theme 1 – The Multiplicity of Self** (The self contains contradictory forces.)
 - Past (instinct, memory), present (desire, reason), future (hope, aspiration) coexist.
 - Internal “conference” suggests conflict, but also coexistence.
 - **Sassoon presents identity not as unified, but as a site of tension.**

- **Theme 2 – The Conflict Between Instinct and Reason**
 - “My lusts usurp the present tense / And strangle Reason in his seat”
 - Instinct (lusts) overpowers Reason in the present moment.
 - Loves (higher aspirations) leap into the future.
 - **This tension reflects the human struggle between base desires and higher ideals.**

- **Theme 3 – The Union of Opposites**
 - “In me the cave-man clasps the seer” – primitive man and prophet embrace
 - **The poem suggests that opposites are not just in conflict, but are intimately connected.**