

The hippopotamus

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



The Hippopotamus" Eliot uses the comparison of the hippo and The Church to make a mocking tone against religion. There are two main symbols in this poem, the hippo and The Church. Through out the poem, the stanzas are broken up between the two symbols, describing the hippo in the beginning of the stanza and The Church in the end.

In the third stanza it says, " the hippo's feeble steps may err", meaning the hippo can walk astray (9). This shows how the hippo is a symbol that represents the weakness of the flesh, even in the strongest of creatures. Even though the hippo may seem to be strong and thick skinned animal, the comparison to The Church proves it to be weak against the " power of religion. The Church represents two different things in this poem, depending on the interpretation.

In the beginning of the poem, it represents the strength and eternal life of God in comparison to the weakness of the flesh, as it reads in the 7th line in the second stanza, " while the True Church can never fail For it is based upon a rock. " (7). But as the poem reads on, the comparison between the hippo and The Church merge, causing a mocking tone to arise. The hippo dies and is carried up to heaven with angels singing and " hard as of gold" playing, leaving the church " below Wrap in the old miasmal mist" (32, 36) In reading this, The

Church morphs from a strong symbol of God, into a weak and hypocritical institution that is wasting its strength to save on saving an animal. The two tones then combine in the end to make Eliot's opinion on The Church and religion known; hypocritical, inflated, and egotistical. Knowing

that Elite's work in his early years was that of a cynical tone, and know Wing that this poem was one of the first he wrote, we can assume that this is a Poem of mocking tone.