

## The Allusions in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

*The Waste Land* is an important poem. It has something important to say and it should have an important effect on the reader. But it is not easy.

In Eliot's own words:

"We can say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into its meaning."

"Tradition cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour."

Eliot is dealing with the loss of meaning and significance of many things, and so he continually contrasts the present with the past, often using literary allusions to help to arouse in the reader the response he wants. For this reason he gives some of these allusions in a set of notes. However, he merely says where they come from or gives them in the original Italian or French or German.

These notes give the actual allusions, translated into English where necessary, and printed in such a way that the reader can see the allusion and the relevant passage in the poem at the same time. For instance, a passage from the poem is on page 3 and the allusions to it are on page 2.

The notes have also amplified Eliot's notes in some cases, with valuable help from three excellent books:

Stephen Coote: *The Waste Land* in Penguin Master Studies 1985

B C Southam: *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T S Eliot*  
Faber and Faber, 1968

George Williamson: *A reader's Guide to T S Eliot*  
Thames and Hudson, Second Edition, 1967

It is a pleasure to thank Sheila Davies for her translation of Baudelaire's *Au Lecteur*

Allusion are numbered and you will seldom have to scroll down more than a page to find the comment on the allusion

The comments on the allusions are in frames.

## The Waste Land

"Nam sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σιβυλλα τι θελεισ; respondebat illa: A  
"αποθαιν θελω."

For Ezra Pound  
il miglior fabro B

A For I once saw with my own eyes the Sybil at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her "What do you want?" she answered, "I want to die."

B 'il miglior fabro' means 'the better craftsman', a well-deserved tribute to Ezra Pound. Eliot sent the original manuscript of *The Waste Land* to Pound, and as Eliot said 'the sprawling, chaotic poem left Pound's hands reduced to about half its size and in the process it was changed from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem,'  
Photo-copies of the manuscript, with the changes made by Pound, are available in book form, and fully support Eliot's acknowledgment of his debt to Pound.

### I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

April is the cruelest month, breeding 1  
Lilac out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth with forgetful snow, feeding  
Life with dried tubers. 7

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee 8  
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. 12  
And when we were children, staying at the archduke's ,  
My cousin's , he took me out on a sled,  
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,  
Marie, hold on tight. Ands down we went.  
In the mountains, there you feel free.  
I read much of the night, and go south in the winter. 18

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man 21  
You cannot say, or guess , for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, 23  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, 24  
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only

There is shadow under this red rock, 26  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),

And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

1 to 7 Critics usually contrast the description of spring with the opening of the general *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*. To regard April, the harbinger of spring, as 'the cruelest month' is natural for the dwellers in the waste land, who are afraid of life, who are 'living and partly living'.

What the general *Prologue* says more clearly but with less charm than Chaucer in modern English is

When that April with its sweet showers  
Has pierced the drought of March down to the root  
And filled each plant with so much moisture  
As made it burgeon forth in flowers

8 to 18 are a reverie.

12 I am not a Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a true German. This is the strained, neurotic reaction of a dispossessed person at a time when only German nationality or protection could ward off the threat of danger. This line anticipates the vision of anarchy, of fleeing refugees, in lines 367 to 377.

21 Son of man Ezekiel 2:3 "And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me even unto this very day."

23 broken images Ezekiel 6:3 "Behold I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken; and I will cast your slain men before your idols."

24 the cricket no relief

"the cricket no relief" is an echo from Ecclesiastes 12:5, where the preacher describes the desolation of old age: "Also they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets."

26 There is shadow under this red rock

Isaiah 32:1, 2 describes the blessing of Christ's kingdom:

"Behold a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and as a covert from the tempest; As rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Frisch weht der Wind 31	Fresh blows the wind
Der Heimat zu	Towards my homeland
Mein Irisch Kind,	My Irish child
Wo weilest du	Where do you linger?

"You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;

They called me the hyacinth girl."  
 – Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,  
 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
 Speak, and my eyes failed, and I was neither  
 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  
*Oed' und leer das Meer*                      Desolate and empty the sea 42

31 Frisch weht der Wind

This is a song of innocent and naïve love from *Tristan and Isolde*, which is a work of passionate love. A young sailor, feeling the wind blowing toward his homeland, sings of the girl he loves.

42 Oed' und leer das Meer

The dying Tristan is waiting for Isolde's ship, but the lookout reports that the sea is desolate and empty.

Between these two scene there is, by way of contrast, a modern love affair, beautiful but ultimately meaningless.

Even in love she is neither living nor dead.

Madame Sosostriis, famous clairvoyante,    43  
 Had a bad cold, nevertheless  
 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,  
 With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,  
 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,  
 (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)    48  
 Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,  
 The lady of situations.  
 Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,  
 And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,  
 Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,  
 Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find  
 The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.  
 I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.  
 Thank you. If you see dear Mrs Equitone,  
 Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:  
 One must be so careful these days.

43 Madame Sosostriis

Madame Sosostriis and the Taro cards represent ancient magic and ritual, here reduced to the insignificance of vulgar fortune telling. Eliot says of this passage: "I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: Because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part v.

The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the 'crowds of people' and Death by Water is executed in part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself."

48 Those are pearls that were his eyes  
The Tempest, Act 1 ii , 394

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;

Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.

Unreal city, 60  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many. 63  
Sighs, short and infrequent were exhaled, 64  
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.  
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,  
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours  
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine. 68

60 Unreal city  
Baudelaire: "O teeming city, city full of illusions,  
Where ghosts accost the passerby in broad daylight."

63 I had not thought death had undone so many  
Inferno, Canto 3: "And behind it came so long a train of people, that I should never have believed death had undone do many."  
(In this canto Dante describes the : "dreary souls who lived without blame and without praise . . . who were not rebellious, nor were faithful to God, but were for themselves."  
Dante also call them "these wretches that never were alive."

64 Sighs, short and infrequent were exhaled  
Inferno, Canto 4: "Here as mine ear could note, no plaint was heard, except of sighs, that made the eternal air to tremble, not caused by torture but from grief felt by those multitudes, many and vast."

This canto deals with people - like Socrates - who lived virtuously but never knew the Gospel. So two kinds of people live in the modern Waste Land: those who are secularised and those who have no knowledge of the faith.

68 With a dead sound at the final stroke of nine.  
Eliot says that he often noticed this when the clock of St Mary Woolnoth struck nine.

In lines 60 to 68 Eliot is dealing with man's spiritual bankruptcy. He does this by recreating life about him by using the language and ideas of the past.

In the modern Waste Land where people are living and partly living, they have no standards of right and wrong, of virtue and sin, that individuals or society accept or live by. Eliot uses the reminders to Dante to contrast this with another, more aware time. The people in Dante's Hell

were people who had sinned to various degrees and were punished in different circles of hell. Like the people James Thomson spoke of, who were gratified to gain that positive eternity of pain Instead of this insufferable inane.

There I saw one I knew; and stopped him, crying: "Stetson! 69  
"You who were with me in the ships at Mylae! 70  
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden 71,  
"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?  
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?  
"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's foe to men 74  
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!  
"You! Hypocrite lecteur! Mon semblable, mon frère!" 76

69 Stetson is the representative commuter

70 Mylae was one of the battles in the Punic war, a sordid trade war. By choosing this war rather than the similar and more topical 1914 - 1918 war, Eliot is making the point that all wars are similar.

71 The corpse you planted in your garden  
In ancient fertility rites, images of the gods were buried in the fields.

74 Oh keep the Dog far hence  
Dirge sung by Cornelia in *THE WHITE DEVIL* by John Webster  
Act 5, Scene 4:

Call for the robin redbreast and the wren,  
Since o'er the shady groves they hover  
And with leaves and flowers do cover  
The friendless bodies of unburied men.

Call unto his funeral dole  
The ant, the fieldmouse and the mole  
To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm.  
But keep the wolf far hence, that's foe to man  
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again.

It is not such an odd step from wolf to dog. In the old testament the dog is not a friend to man, but even sometimes feeds on corpses. And Psalm 22 verse 20 has "Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog."

76 "You! Hypocrite lecteur..."

This is the last line of *Au Lecteur* (To the reader), the poem that is the preface to *Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil) which is Charles Baudelaire's manifesto. It is addressed to the reader and means: "You, hypocrite reader, my image, my brother."

Translation of *Au Lecteur* by Sheila Davies

Stupidity, indiscretion, sin and meanness  
Take over our minds and wear away our bodies,  
And, full of remorse, we affectionately nurture our wrongdoings  
In the same way that beggars feed titbits to vermin.

Our sins are strong-willed, our repentance cowardly;  
Making gushing confession becomes a habit.  
We walk with gay abandon along fouled-up pathways,  
Believing that our cheap tears will wash away the stains of filth.

It is Satan of the three-pronged fork who,  
On the pillow of evil, gently rocks our entranced spirit,  
And the precious metal of our free will  
Is all vaporised by this cunning alchemist.

It is the devil who grasps the cords that entangle us.  
In whatever is repugnant we find charm.  
Each day we take one step nearer down to Hell,  
Blind to its horrors as we cross the stinking gloom.

Just like a penniless lecher who kisses and nibbles  
The shriveled up breast of an old tart,  
We filch from life's journey our furtive pleasures  
Which we squeeze as we would an old orange.

Holding on fast, writhing around like a million worms,  
A race of Demons holds an orgy in our brains,  
And, when we breathe, Death floods our lungs,  
An invisible river of stifled groans.

If rape, poison, murder or fire  
Have not yet embroidered their pretty designs  
On the insignificant canvas of our pitiful destinies,  
It is because our souls, alas, are not taut enough.

But of all the jackals, panthers, lice,  
Apes, scorpions, vultures and serpents,  
The yelping, howling, snarling, creeping monsters  
Of the loathsome menagerie of our depravity,

There is one that is even uglier, more wretched, more vile  
than all the rest;  
Though he utters no savage cries nor thrashes about in a frenzy,  
He would gladly reduce the world to a heap of débris,  
And with one great yawn swallow up the earth.

He is Ennui! - his eye brimming over with an ineffectual tear,

He dreams up scaffolds while he smokes his opium.  
You know him, reader, this insidious monster,  
Hypocrite reader, - my kinsman - my brother!

I

### I A GAME OF CHESS

The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne, 78  
Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
Held up the standards wrought with fruited vines  
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out  
(Another hid his eyes behind his wings)  
Doubled the flames of seven branched candelabra  
Reflecting light upon the table as  
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,  
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;  
In vials of ivory and colored glass  
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,  
Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused  
And drowned the sense in odors; stirred by the air  
That freshened from the window, these ascended  
In fattening the prolonged candle flames,  
Flung their smoke into the laquearia, 93  
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling. 94  
Huge sea-wood fed with copper  
Burned green and orange, framed by the colored stone,  
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.  
Above the antique mantel was displayed  
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene 99  
The change in Philomel, by the barbarous king 100  
.So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale  
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice  
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,  
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears.  
And other withered stumps of time  
Were told upon these walls; staring forms  
Leaned out, leaning, hushing, hushing the room enclosed.  
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.  
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair  
Spread out in fiery points  
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

### III A GAME OF CHESS

This section of the poem deals with sex without love, especially within marriage, just as Fire Sermon deals with sex outside marriage.

The title refers to a game of chess in *Women Beware Of Women*, a play by Thomas Middleton 1580 - 1627. While the duke is seducing Bianca in the gallery in view of the audience, his confederate is distracting her mother-in-law's attention with a game of chess.

78 The chair she sat in, like a burnished throne

An empty, rich woman is sitting at her dressing table. The reference is to *Antony And Cleopatra*, Act I, Sc 2, line 194, in which Enobarbus describes Cleopatra at her first meeting with Anthony.

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,  
Burn'd on the waters, the poop was beaten gold,  
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
The winds were love-sick with them

And later in line 239: Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety; other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies.

The allusion to Antony and Cleopatra contrasts voluptuous femininity and romantic love, and the artificial and sterile personal relationships in the waste land.

93 laquearia A paneled lacquered ceiling

In his notes Eliot refers us to *The Aeneid*, Book 1 line 726

The chandeliers that hung from the gold fretted ceiling  
Were lit, and cressets of torches subdued the night with flames  
Translation by Cecil Day Lewis

94 coffered Decorated with sunken panels

99 sylvan scene Eliot's note refers us to *Paradise Lost* Book 4, line 140, describing the scene before Satan when he first arrives at the borders of Eden.

and overhead up-grew  
Insuperable height of loftiest shade,  
Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm,  
A sylvan scene, and, as the ranks ascend,  
Shade above shade, a woody theatre  
Of stateliest view.

Framed by this sylvan scene we see a reminder of Philomela.

100 The change in Philomel

Tereus, king of Thrace married Procne, a girl from Athens. She missed her sister, Philomela, and sent Tereus to fetch her. Tereus fell in love with Philomela and raped her. He then cut out her tongue to prevent her from telling Procne, but she still found out. The sisters revenged themselves on Tereus by killing his son, Itylus, and setting his flesh before Tereus at a banquet. The gods took pity on these people and changed them into various birds: Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a swallow and Philomela into a nightingale.

Swinburne also uses this myth in *The huntsman's chorus in Atalanta In Calydon*:

And the brown bright nightingale amorous  
Is half assuaged for Itylus  
And the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,  
The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Eliot uses the nightingale as a symbol of beauty born out of suffering, but in the waste land it only sings "Jug, jug" to dirty ears. In Elizabethan poetry, "jug, jug" was a conventional way of representing birdsong, but it was also a crude, joking way of referring to the sex act.

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. stay with me. 111  
"Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.  
":What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
"I never know what you are thinking. Think".

I think we are in rat's alley  
Where the dead men lost their bones

"What is that noise?"

The wind under the door.

"Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing?"

"Do you remember nothing?"

I remember those are pearls that were his eyes. up to here

"Are you alive or not? Is there nothing in your head?"

But O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag -  
It's so elegant  
So intelligent

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"

"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

"With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?"

"What shall we ever do?"

The hot water at ten.  
And if it rains, a closed car at four.  
And we shall play a game of chess  
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

"When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said -

"I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,"

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

"Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.

"He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you

To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.

'You have them all out Lil, and get a nice set'

He said, 'I swear I can't bear to look at you.'

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert

He's been in the army four years he wants a good time

And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.

A conversation starts at line 111. The woman in quotation marks, her husband not. The woman is sharp, shrill, irritable, the man detached and melancholy. Eliot puts his words in quotation marks, probably to imply that he does not answer at all, but merely says those words to himself.

Oh is there, she said, Something o'that I said  
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look."

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

"If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.

Others can pick and choose if you can't.

But if Albert takes off, it won't be for lack of telling.

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.

The chemist said it would be all right but I've never been the same.

You *are* a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said.

What you get married for if you don't want children?"

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

"Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,

And they asked me to dinner to get the beauty of it hot -"

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

Goonight Bill, Goonight Lou, Goonight May, Goonight. Ta ta, Goonight  
Good night, ladies, goodnight, sweet ladies, good night, good night. 172

172 Good night, ladies

Ophelia's last words before she drowns herself, driven mad by Hamlet's pretended love for her and then his feigned indifference.

Hamlet, Act 4, scene 5, line 55

What does Eliot achieve with the allusions in A Game of Chess?

The emotions aroused by the physical beauty and charm of Cleopatra, the passions in the rape and revenge of Philomela, the intensity of feeling and hurt that drove Ophelia to suicide, have no place in the lives of the rich or the poor, "living and partly living" in the waste land.

### III THE FIRE SERMON

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf 173

Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind

Crosses the brown land unheard. The nymphs are departed 175

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song. 176

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends

Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.

And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;

Departed, have left no addresses.

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . . 182

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.

Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long

But at my back, in a cold blast I hear 185

The rattle of bones and the chuckle spread from ear to ear.

The Fire Sermon was preached by the Buddha against the fires of lust, anger, envy and other passions that consumed men.

However, the trouble with any sermon is that, as Prospero said,  
"the strongest oaths are straw to the fire in the blood."

173 The river's tent is broken

The river's tent evokes the image of the shelter provided in summer by the leafy boughs of trees overhanging a river, a shelter now lost through the loss of leaves at the end of summer. But 'the river's tent is broken' suggests a deeper and more solemn meaning. Perhaps the loss of some sacred or mystic quality. In the Old Testament, a tent can be a tabernacle or holy place because the wandering tribes of Israel used a tent as a portable tabernacle. In Isaiah 33: 20 we have a

reminder of the time when the tabernacle was a tent: "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be moved, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken." And in Isaiah 33:21 the statement that a river gives power and safety: "But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ships pass thereby."

175 The nymphs are departed

Edmund Spenser celebrates the beauty and joy of marriage in his beautiful lyric, *Prothalamion*, using the Thames as a perfect pastoral setting. The nymphs that Eliot refers to are probably those described in the lines

There in a Meadow, by the river's side,  
A flocke of Nymphs I chauncéd to espy  
All lovely daughters of the flood thereby.

176 'Sweete Themmes runne softely till I end my Song'

is the refrain from *Prothalamion*. (Prothalamion is a song or poem in celebration of a forthcoming wedding.)

182 By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept

Psalm 137 is the lamentation of the Israelites exiled to Babylon, yearning for their homeland. It starts: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."

'Leman' means an unlawful lover, so the phrase 'the waters of Leman' is associated with lust. Lac Leman is the French name for Lake Geneva. Eliot worked on *The Waste Land* at Lausanne, a town near Lake Geneva. in 1922.

185 But at my back, in a cold blast I hear

Andrew Marvel in *TO HIS COY MISTRESS*:

Had we but world enough and time  
This coyness, Lady, were no crime, . . .  
But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.

192 And on the king my father's death before him  
Eliot's note refers to *The Tempest*, Act 1, scene 2, line 390. Ferdinand has just heard Ariel singing "Come unto these yellow sands"  
and says

Sitting on a bank  
Weeping again the king my father's wreck,  
This music crept by me upon the waters,  
Allaying both their fury and my passion  
With its sweet air

193 White bodies naked on the low damp ground  
The drowned Phoenician sailor of Line 47 is a kind of fertility god whose image is thrown into the sea each spring to symbolize the death of summer, without which death there could be no

resurrection of the new year. Southam claims that 'the white bodies' here refer to the image of the fertility god taken out of the water to symbolize the god's resurrection.

197 The sound of horns and motors  
John Day in *THE PARLIAMENT OF BEES*:

When of a sudden, listening, you shall hear,  
The noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring  
Actaeon to Diana in the Spring  
Where all shall see her naked skin.

199 O the moon shine bright on Mrs Porter  
The words come from a ballad popular with the Australian troops in world War 1. Mrs Porter was a legendary brothel keeper in Cairo.

202 *Et O ces voix d'enfants chantant dans la coupole!*  
"And O those voices of children singing in the copula!"  
Paul Verlaine in *Parsifal*.

Southam claims that Verlaine is referring to Wagner's *Parsifal* and its music. In the Grail Legend, the children's choir sings at the ceremonial foot washing before the knight Parsifal restores the wounded Anfortas, the Fisher King, and so lifts the curse from the waste land.

Line 205 So rudely forced refers again to the rape of Philomela by Tereus. 'Tereu' is the Latin vocative form of Tereus.

This interpretation of the nightingale's song is found in *ALEXANDER AND CAMPASPE* BY John Lyly:

'Oh, tis the ravished nightingale  
Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu! she cries.'

'Tereu', being the vocative, implies that she is addressing Tereus.

Line 211 C.i.f. London is the price, including cost, insurance, freight to London.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back 215

Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits  
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,  
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives, 218  
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see  
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives 220  
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea, 221  
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast lights  
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.  
Out of the window perilously spread  
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,  
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)  
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.  
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled female dug  
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest -  
He, the young man carbuncular. arrives,

A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare  
One of low on whom assurance sits  
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire. 234  
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
The meal is over, she is bored and tired,  
Endeavors to engage her in caresses  
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.  
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
Exploring hands encounter no defense;  
His vanity requires no response,  
And makes a welcome of indifference.  
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall 245  
And walked among the lowest of the dead.) 246  
Bestows one final patronizing kiss,  
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit.

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,  
Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:  
"Well now that's done: and I am glad it's over"  
When lovely woman stoops to folly and 253  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand

And puts a record on the gramophone.

215 At the violet hour

This refers to Dante's *PURGATORY*, Canto 8.

It was the hour when a sailor's thoughts,  
the first day out, turn homeward, and his heart  
yearns for the loved ones he has left behind,  
the hour when the novice pilgrim aches

with love: the far off tolling of a bell  
now seems to him to mourn the dying day.

Translation by Frank Musa.

(A pity I did not have Musa's translations of *Inferno* and *Paradiso*.)

## 218 I Tiresias

In lines 218 to 220, Eliot refers to the prophetic powers of Tiresias and the fact that he was bisexual, quoting Ovid's *METAMORPHOSES* in Latin. But we can settle for a free translation: Tiresias saw snakes mating in the forest. He hit them with his staff and was changed into a woman. Seven years later he saw the same two snakes and hit them again. As he had hoped, he was turned back into a man. Because he had experience as both a man and a woman, Jove called him in as an expert witness in a quarrel with his wife, Juno. He was arguing that in love the woman enjoys the greater pleasure; she argued that the man did. Tiresias supported Jove. Juno then blinded him out of spite. To make up for this, Jove gave him long life and the power of prophesy. Eliot also points out how the point-of-view in *The Waste Land* changes: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand, Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem."

220 the evening hour that strives

Eliot refers us to Sappho's prayer to the Evening Star:

Oh, Evening Star that brings back all  
That shining Dawn has scattered far and wide,  
You bring back the sheep, the goat,  
And the child back to its mother.

221 and brings the sailor home from sea

Eliot says he meant the longshore fisherman who returns at nightfall.

234 Silk hat upon a Bradford millionaire

The manufacturing town of Bradford produced many new-rich millionaires during the first World War

245 I who have sat by Thebes below the wall

Tiresias is a key figure in *King Oedipus* by Sophocles because he knew that the pollution in Thebes came from Oedipus himself, and it is to prove him wrong that Oedipus embarks on his searching inquiries. Note that in Thebes the people, the soil and the animals were all made infertile.

246 And walked among the lowest of the dead

*The Odyssey* Book 10, lines 488 to 495 has the first reference to Tiresias in literature. Circe speaks:

Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,  
You shall no longer stay in my house when none of you wish to;  
but first there is another journey you must accomplish  
and reach the house of Hades and revered Persephone,  
there to consult with the soul of Teiresias the Theban,  
the blind prophet, whose senses stay unshaken within him,

to whom alone Persephone has granted intelligence  
even after death, but the rest of them are fluttering shadows.

Translation by Richmond Lattimore

253 When lovely woman stoops to folly

In *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith, Olivia returns to the place where she was  
seduced and sings:

When lovely woman stoops to folly	The only art her guilt to cover'
And finds too late that men betray,	To hide her shame from every eye,
What charm can soothe her melancholy,	To get repentance from her lover,
What art can wash her guilt away?	And wring his bosom, is to die.
	And wring his bosom, is to die

"This music crept by me upon the waters" 257

And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street,

O City city, I can sometimes hear

Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street

The pleasant whining of mandolin

And a clatter and a chatter from within

Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls 263

Of Magnus Martyr hold 264

Inexplicable splendor of Ionian white and gold.

The river sweats 266

Oil and tar

The barges drift 268

With the turning tide

Red sails

Wide to leeward, swing on the heavy spar.

The barges wash

Drifting logs

Down Greenwich reach

Past the isle of dogs.

Weialala leia 277

Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester 279

Beating oars

The stern was formed

A gilded shell

Red and gold

The brisk swell

Rippled both shores

Southwest wind

Carried down stream

The peal of bells

White towers  
     Weialala leia  
     Wallala leialala  
 "Trams and dusty trees  
 Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew 293  
 Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees 294  
 Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."  
 "My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart  
 Under my feet. After the event  
 He wept. Promised 'a new start'  
 I made no comment. What should I resent?"  
 "On Margate Sands. 301  
 I can connect  
 Nothing with nothing  
 The broken fingernails of dirty hands.  
 My people, humble people who expect  
 Nothing."  
     la la  
 To Carthage then I came 308  
     Burning burning burning 309  
 O Lord Thou pluckest me out 310  
 O Lord Thou pluckest  
 Burning 312

257 "This music crept by me upon the waters" See line 192

263 Fishmen are workers at nearby Billingsgate market.

264 Eliot says he regards the interior of Magnus Martyr as one of the finest of Christopher Wren's interiors

266 The river is the Thames. The song of the three Thames daughters starts here . From 292 to 306 they speak in turn.

268 The barges drift Some of this scene is based on the description of the river at the start of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

277 Weialala leia The lament of the Rhine-maidens because the beauty of the river has been lost with the theft of the river's gold. As in the Grail legend, the theft has brought a curse.

279 Elizabeth and Leicester were thought to be lovers. In Froude's *Elizabeth* (Vol I chapter 4) there is a letter about a trip they took on the Thames.

293, 294 Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew undid me. Eliot refers us to Canto 5 in Dante's *Purgatory*, which deals with those who died a violent death. At its end a woman from Sienna whose husband had suspected her of adultery and had her pushed out of a window in Maremma, speaks to the Pilgrim:

Oh please, when you are in the world again  
 and are quite rested from your journey here,  
 Oh please remember me! I am called Pia  
 Sienna gave me life, Maremma death,  
 as he knows who began it when he put  
 his gem upon my finger, pledging faith.

Mark Musa comments on how this short speech reveals her gentle and considerate



O you who turn the wheel and turn to windward,  
Consider Phlebas, who was once as handsome and tall as you.

Helen Gardner described *Death by water* as "a passage of ineffable peace in which the stain of living is washed away."

Southam points out that "This section is a close adaptation of the last seven lines of a French poem *Dans le Restaurant* written by Elliot in 1916 - 1917."

Here is a translation by Southam:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight drowned,  
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the swell of the Cornish sea  
and the profit and the loss, and the cargo of tin.  
An undersea current carried him far,  
Took him back through the ages of his past.  
Imagine it - a terrible end for man once so handsome and tall.

315 and 316 A current under the sea

This is again on the theme of sea change of Line 48: Those are pearls that were his eyes

319 Gentile or Jew That is, all mankind.

(The Jews in this case mean the faithful and the gentiles those who rejected God.)

#### ~~V WHAT THE THUNDER SAID~~

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces 322  
After the frosty silence in the gardens  
After the agony in stony places  
The shouting and the crying

Prison and palace and reverberation 326  
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains 327  
He who was living is now dead

~~And we who were living are now dying~~  
With a little patience

Here is no water, but only rock 331  
Rock and no water and the sandy road  
The road winding above among the mountains  
Which are mountains of rock without water  
If there were water we should stop and drink  
Amongst the rock one cannot stop and think  
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand  
If there were only water amongst the rock  
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit  
Here one cannot neither stand nor lie nor sit  
There is not even silence in the mountains  
But dry sterile thunder without rain  
There is not even solitude in the mountain  
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl  
From doors of mudcracked houses  
If there were water  
And no rock  
If there were rock

And also water  
A spring  
A pool among the rock  
If there were the sound of water only  
No the cicada and dry grass singing  
But the sound of water over a rock  
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees  
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop  
But there is no water 359

Who is the third who walks always beside you? 360  
When I count there is only you and I together  
But when I look ahead up the white road  
There is always another one walking beside you  
Wrapped in a brown mantle, hooded  
I do not know whether a man or a woman

– But who is that on the other side of you? 366

What is the sound high in the air 367  
Murmur of maternal lamentation  
Who are those hooded hordes swarming  
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth  
Ringed by the flat horizon only  
What is the city over the mountains  
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
Falling towers  
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
Vienna London  
Unreal 377

A woman drew her long black hair out tight 378  
And fiddled whisper music on those strings  
And bats with baby faces in the violet light  
Whistled, and beat their wings  
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall  
And upside down in air were towers  
Tolling reminiscent bells, that tolled the hours  
~~And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells 385~~

What the thunder said

Eliot says in his notes: "In the first part of Part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous, (see Miss Weston's book) and the present decay of eastern Europe." (The book is Miss Jessie L Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* on the Grail legend. He says it "will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do.")

322 to 330 refer to the events from the betrayal and arrest of Jesus until his death, as described in John 18.

322 torchlight on sweaty faces John 18: 3 "Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh hither with lanterns and torches and weapons."

326 Prison and palace and reverberation: Jesus was taken under arrest to the palace of the high priest, where he was publicly interrogated and then taken to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate in the hall of judgment

327 Reverberation of thunder: Matthew 27: 50, 51 "Jesus, then when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent."

331 Here is no water, but only rock: The God, as represented here by Jesus has been killed, and this is followed by spiritual death, the image of which is a barren, mountainous world of rock and sand. This is a place of

physical and emotional purgatory. The search in WHAT THE THUNDER SAID is for water, for the sacred river and its wisdom. But there is no water.

353 to 355 are an echo of lines 23 to 25.

360 to 367: Even when man's savior has arisen, man cannot recognize him.

Luke 24, 13 to 21 describes the journey to Emmaus. Christ has arisen, but his disciples think that he is gone from them forever. He meets two of them on the road to Emmaus, but they do not recognize him. Eliot says that lines 360 to 365 were stimulated by an

account by Shackleton of an Antarctic exhibition on which the exhausted explorers were haunted by the delusion that there was one more person with them than could be counted.

367 to 377: Eliot quotes Herman Hesse: *Blick ins Chaos*: "Already half of Europe, already at least half of eastern Europe, is reeling towards the abyss in a state of drunken illusion, and as she reels sings a drunken hymn, as Dimitri Karamasoff sang. The insulted masses laugh these songs to scorn, the saint and the seer hear them with tears."

Eliot was deeply concerned about the decay of Eastern Europe.

Coote: "With the collapse of spiritual values, with moral and financial ruin after the First World War and, further, the massive rises in population, there was at this time a widespread fear of revolution. The example had already been set by Russia, and what Eliot pictured here is a swarming, mindless anarchy reared on the 'endless plains of eastern Europe which, with their 'cracked earth' and 'flat horizon' correspond to the Waste Land itself."

378 to 385: The Chapel Perilous was filled with horrors to test a knight's courage; nightmare visions, including bats with baby faces, assail him on his approach. Eliot says that some of the details of this part of the poem were inspired by a painting of the school of Hieronymus Bosch, some of whose works are grotesque and horrifying visions of Hell.

385: empty cisterns and exhausted wells In the Old Testament these signify drying up of faith and the worship of false gods.

In this decayed hole among the mountains 386  
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing  
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.  
It has no windows, and the door swings,  
Dry bones can harm no one.  
Only a cock stood on the rooftree  
Co co rico co co rico  
In a flash of lighting. Then a damp gust  
Bringing rain 395

Ganga has sunken, and the limp leaves 396  
Waited for rain, while black clouds  
Gathered far distant over Himavant. 398  
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.  
Then spoke the thunder  
DA 401  
Datta: what have we given?  
My friend, blood shaking my heart  
The awful daring of a moment's surrender  
Which an age of prudence can never retract  
By this and this only, we have existed  
Which is not to be found in our obituaries  
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider 409  
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor  
In our empty rooms.

386 to 395: For this quester the Chapel Perilous has become a decayed hole among the mountains. The chapel is empty, the symbols have lost their meaning. Coote: "There is only the wind's home. The seeker has pushed himself to the absolute and found nothing. The traditions are dead. It is at this moment that there comes a glimpse of partial salvation

Only a cock stood on the rooftree  
Co co rico co co rico  
In a flash of lighting. Then a damp gust  
Bringing rain

This clarion call announces a new stage symbolized by the possibility of rain. For the moment it is 'far distant'. But the thunder is no longer sterile. The flash of lightning, the flash of spiritual as well as actual illumination prepares us for the voice of God and his command to creatures to 'give, sympathize, control', to free themselves from the world of selfish desire."

396 Ganga is the Ganges, the sacred river of India. It is the home of the early vegetation myths

398: Himavant is a holy mountain in the Himalayan range.

401: DA Here is the fable of the meaning of the thunder given in the Upanishads, the sacred writings of Hinduism:

1. The threefold descendants of Prajapati, gods, men and evil spirits, dwelt as students with their father, Prajapati. Having finished their studentship, the gods said: "Tell us something, Sir". He told them the syllable da. Then he said: "Did you understand?"  
They said: we did understand. You told us 'Damyatta', Be subdued."  
"Yes" he said, you have understood.
2. Then the men said unto him: "Tell us something, Sir". He told them the same syllable da. Then he said: "Did you understand?"

They said: we did understand. You told us 'Datta, Give.'

"Yes" he said, you have understood.

3. Then the men said unto him: "Tell us something, Sir". He told them the same syllable da.

Then he said: "Did you understand?"

They said: we did understand. You told us 'Dayadvam, Be merciful.'

"Yes" he said, you have understood.

The divine voice of thunder repeats the same Da da da, that is

Be subdued, Give, Be merciful.

Therefore let this triad be taught. Subduing, Giving and Mercy.

402 to 410 Giving, here means giving yourself in love, losing yourself in love of others, beyond the neurotic love of *A Game of Chess*.

407 Memories draped by the beneficent spider Eliot refers us to John Webster's *The White Devil* where Flamineo warns against the inconstancy of women.

they'll remarry

ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider

Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs.

DA

Dayadvam: I have heard the key 412

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

Only at nightfall, ethereal rumors

Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus. 417

DA

Damyata: The boat responded 419

Gaily to the hand expert with sail and oar

The sea was calm, your heart would have responded

Gaily, when invited, beating obedient

To controlling hands. 423

412: I have heard the key

Eliot refers us to *Inferno*, Canto 33, line 46:

Ugolino: I heard the key below the door

of the dreadful tower being locked, and I looked

at the faces of my sons without a word.

I did not weep, I had so turned to stone within me.

They wept . . .

Dante is now in that part of Hell where traitors are punished and sees Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggiero. In the struggle between the Ghibelline and Guelph factions that split Italy, Ugolino, a Ghibelline, conspired with Giovanni Visconti to raise the Guelphs to power. Three years later he plotted with Ruggiero, the head of the Ghibellines to rid Pisa of the Visconti. Ruggiero had other plans, and imprisoned Ugolino, together with his sons in a tower where they were left to starve to death. When the door was locked, the key was thrown in the river.

Coote: "The cold-blooded traitor seeking his own advantage is the most anti-social of sinners, the destroyer of social order which - at least in its ideal form - was for Dante the work of God. To abuse it was a deadly offence. There is no sympathy here, no working for the common weal. One

form of spiritual death, Eliot is saying, is total and sterile selfishness. In political terms, this means the self-seeking of Ugolino and Coriolanus."

417 Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

Another example of tragic selfishness. Coriolanus was so obsessed with his own honour and dignity that he went over to the enemies of Rome. All that was available to him there was self-destructive violence. He is "broken" because his selfishness led to his death.

411 to 417 On the subject of our isolation from others, our lack of sympathy and hence our need to feel sympathy for others, Eliot quotes from F H Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*:

"My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts and feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar to that soul."

419 to 423 Damyata implies self-control, a restraint that you put upon desire. Coote: "Eliot's interpretation is somewhat different. He takes a moment of one-ness while sailing and compares it to the wished-for unity of lover and beloved. Contented human passion is again the value most to be prized, but here control becomes not self-constraint but the feeling of order derived from a rightly conceived unity with one's beloved and the elements - the prosperous world of water and returned affection.

"However, the moment of revelation and of possible potency is not complete and, as we shall see, is not final either. What the thunder urges on man is love, the free surrendering of self and the

consequent spiritual and psychological health of the private and universal Waste Land redeemed. But such loss of self can neither be complete nor permanent. Mankind is obliged to return to his own closed circle of perception. The best he can hope for is a remembered glimpse of what has been or could have been experienced, and the Narrator is forced to recall this in isolation."

I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me  
Shall I at least set my lands in order?  
London bridge is falling down falling down falling down  
*Poi s'aspose nel foco che gli affina* 428  
*Quando fiam uti chelidon* - o swallow swallow 429  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie* 430  
These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe. 432  
Datta. Dayadvam. Damyata  
Shanti shanti shanti 434

424 to 434 It is with this isolation that the poem ends.

The protagonist has gone in search of the water of life and ends up fishing with the arid plains behind him. Williamson: "Having traveled the Grail road to no avail, he ends in the knowing but helpless state of the Fisher King. Now that the Thunder has spoken he is the Man with Three Staves - with three cardinal virtues that could be supports, that would ensure the rain. But awareness is not will, and so he thinks of preparing for death, with a question that recalls Isaiah 38:1: 'Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.' This preparation involves some account of his fishing for life, of the fragments or 'broken images' which he has shored against his ruins. This defines not only his predicament and state of mind, but the discoveries that are indicated in the poem. As partial quotations they are in fact 'fragments' that have their full

meaning in other contexts; they summarise the 'broken images' of truths left in the Waste Land. Even nursery rhymes may contain or hide terrible truths; so 'London Bridge' presents an image of modern disintegration, of sinking into the river."

428 *Poi s'aspose nel foco che gli afina*

Purgatory, Canto 26: 142 to 148:

Dante is here in the circle of the lustful who repented, and speaks to his old poetic mentor Guinizelli. Then he sees Arnaut Daniel, 'il miglior fabbro' a better craftsman than Guinizelli, who says:

I am Arnaut, singing now through my tears  
regretfully recalling my past follies,  
and joyfully anticipating joy.

I beg you in the name of that great power  
guiding you to the summit of the stairs:  
remember, in the good time, my suffering here.'

Then in the purifying flames he hid.

Translated by Frank Musa

(The last line is the one quoted in *The Waste Land*)

Eliot says of these lines: "The souls in Purgatory suffer because they wish to suffer, for in purgation through suffering is their hope."

429 *Quando fiam uti chelidon* When shall I be like the swallow?

From the anonymous Latin poem *Pervigilium Veneris* (The Vigil of Venus) which, according to George Steiner, "was written in a darkening time, amid the breakdown of classical literacy." The poet who knows that the Muses can perish by silence (*perdidi musam tacendo*), laments that his song is unheard and asks when spring will give it a voice, so that it can return like the swallow.

430 *Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie* The Prince of Aquitaine has a ruined castle From the sonnet *El Desdichado* (The Disinherited) by Gerard de Nerval. Southam: "The poet refers to himself in this sonnet as the disinherited prince, heir to the tradition of the French troubadour poets of Aquitaine in Southern France. One of the cards in the Tarot pack is the tower struck by lightning, symbolizing a lost tradition."

432 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

*The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd is sub-titled *Hieronymo's mad againe*.

Southam: Hieronymo is driven mad by the murder of his son. When he is asked to write a court entertainment, he replies. 'Why then Ile fit you! meaning 'Why then I'll produce something fitting for you!' He arranges that his son's murderers are themselves killed in his little play, which was made up of poetry in 'sundry languages', exactly as in *The Waste Land*.

434 Shanti shanti shanti

In his notes Eliot says that this is the formal ending to an Upanishad.

The equivalent in the Anglican faith would be as in Phillipians 4, verse 7:  
And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds  
through Christ Jesus.