The Waste Land

POEM TEXT

FOR EZRA POUND
IL MIGLIOR FABBRO

I. The Burial of the Dead

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
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.
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(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.
Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?
"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, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
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!)
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.

Unreal City,
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.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
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.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: "Stetson!
"You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
"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 friend to men,
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

II. A Game of Chess

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched 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 coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carvéd dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
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 the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, 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.

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"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 rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.
"Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"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.
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 makes 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 in 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. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

III. The Fire Sermon

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
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 . . .
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
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
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 dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits

As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
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
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising 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'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

"This music crept by me upon the waters"
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 a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
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
Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester
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
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised a 'new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?"

"On Margate Sands.
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

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

IV. Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell

And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. What the Thunder Said

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
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 or 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 can 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 mountains
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
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But 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

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt 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?

What is that sound high in the air
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

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
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 kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
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 lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves

Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder
DA
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
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms
DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
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, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
DA
Damyata: The boat responded
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

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'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

SUMMARY

Dedicated to the poet Ezra Pound, "the better craftsman."

Section I: The Burial of the Dead

April is the most mean-spirited of all the months, with all those lilacs blooming out of the lifeless soil as reminder of memory and love, while spring rain stirs up the painful past. Winter seemed warmer because the snow covered up the ground (and those memories), and life was like dried-up bulbs under the earth: sheltered, suppressed. Summer came all of a sudden, crossing Lake Starnbergersee in the rain. We sat in the sunny park, drinking coffee and talking. "I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a real German." When we were children, I stayed with my cousin the archduke, and he took me sledding, and I was scared. He said to me, "Marie, hold on tight," and down the hill we went. You feel a sense of freedom up there in the mountains. I read all night long, and I travel south when winter comes.

Can any roots or branches grow out of this stony, barren soil? As a human being, you cannot tell me, or even guess, because all you know are the broken symbols of modern life: a waste land where the sun is harsh and dead trees offer no shade, crickets no longer sing, and water does not run. But there is shade under this red rock (come stand in the shade under this red rock), and I will show you something other than your shadow cast behind you in the morning, or in front of you in the evening; I will show you how to fear the shadow of death. *Fresh blows the wind to the homeland; my Irish child, where are you waiting?* "You first expressed your love with a bouquet of hyacinths a year ago; people called me the hyacinth girl." And yet when we returned late from the garden, your arms full of flowers and your hair wet, I was speechless, I could hardly look at you, I felt empty, neither alive nor dead. I looked into your good heart, and saw only silence. *Desolate and empty is the sea*.

Madame Sosostris, the famous fortune-teller, has a bad cold like any ordinary person, but is somehow still known as the wisest woman in Europe with her evil deck of tarot cards. "Here is your card," she said, "The drowned Phoenician Sailor, with his dead eyes like pearls, look!" She carried on, "Here is Belladonna, the beautiful and poisonous lady, the Madonna of the Rocks, that complex lady. Here is the man with three staffs, and here is the Wheel of Fortune, and here is the merchant looking sideways at us, and this blank card represents the burdens the merchant carries, which I am not allowed to see. I cannot find The Hanged Man card. You should be afraid of death by water. I see crowds of people in your future, walking aimlessly in circles. Thank you, the reading is over. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone, let her know I'll come by with her horoscope myself; you can never be too careful these days."

In this unreal city, covered by the brown fog of winter mornings, a crowd of people streamed across the London Bridge. There were so many people; I did not realize just how many people were isolated, alienated, beyond reach. They sighed every now and then, and every man walked with his eyes cast down at his feet. They walked up the hill and down King William Street, to where the church bells at Saint Mary Woolnoth kept time, striking nine o'clock with a heavy sound. That's where I spotted someone I knew, and stopped him,

calling out, "Stetson! You and I fought together at the battle of Mylae! That dead body you planted last year in your garden, is it growing yet? Will it bloom this year? Or did the sudden frost get to it? Keep out the dog, man's best friend, or he'll dig it right back up! You!—yes, you, hypocritical reader—my likeness, my twin—my brother!"

Section II: A Game of Chess

She sat in a chair that was like a shining throne, its glow reflected on the marble floor. A mirror, decorated with wrought-iron vines and a golden Cupid statue (and another statue who covered his eyes with one of his wings) reflected and doubled the flames of the seven-branched candelabra. The candlelight shone onto the table and caught the glitter of her jewels, which poured richly out of their satin cases. Her odd, fake perfumes were skulking around in uncorked vials made of ivory and of colorful glass. The perfumes were grease, powder, or liquid—and all of them were troubling and confusing. They overwhelmed the senses with their smells, which were stirred up by the fresh air that came in through the window, and fed the flames, whose smoke rose toward the ceiling and made the pattern look like it was moving. A huge piece of driftwood lined with copper and framed by colored stone seemed to glow green and orange, shedding sad light on a dolphin statue. Above the antique fireplace hung a painting of a forest scene depicting the transformation of Philomel, who was raped by a brutal king; but as a nightingale, she filled the desert with her unbreakable voice. Yet still she cried out, and was chased by the world, "Jug jug," a nightingale's song, which fell on deaf and ruined ears. And other old relics and their worn out stories hung on the walls; statues stared, leaned, stifling the close quarters of the room. Footsteps shuffled on the stairs. In the firelight, as she brushed her hair, the strands came to red fiery points, just like her words, which then led to savage silence.

"My anxiety is bad tonight. Yes, it is bad. Stay with me. Talk to me. Why don't you ever talk? Say something. What are you thinking about? Are you thinking? What? I never know what's going on in your head. Think."

I think we are in a broken dismal world, where men feel dead and lose their form and purpose.

"What's that sound?" It's just the wind blowing in under the door. "What's that other sound? What is the wind doing?" Nothing, again, the wind is doing nothing. "Do you know anything? Do you see anything? Do you remember anything?"

I remember the drowned man's eyes like pearls, in the tarot card. "Are you alive or not? Is there anything going on in your head?"

But oooooh, that ragtime song—it's so sophisticated, so smart! "What should I do now? What should I do? I'm going to rush outside just like this and walk the street with my hair down, like so. What should we do tomorrow? What on earth should we do?" The same thing we always do: heat the water for tea at ten, and if it rains, a car will come pick us up at four. And we will play chess, rub our eyes that cannot look away, and wait for someone to knock on the door and disturb this tired routine.

When Lil's husband got discharged from the army, I said—I spoke bluntly, saying to her myself—"HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME FOR THE PUB TO CLOSE."—"Now that Albert has come home from the war, dress yourself up. He'll want to know what you did with the money he gave you to fix your teeth. He did so give you money for your teeth, I know because I was there. Have them removed, Lil, and get a nice set of dentures; I remember, Albert said he couldn't bear to look at you like that, and neither can I," I said. "And think of your poor husband, he's been in the army four years and now he just wants to have a good time, and if you don't give it to him, others will be happy to," I said. "Oh, is that so?" she said. "Something like that," I said. "Well, if he does stray, I'll know who's to blame," she said, and gave me a pointed look. —"HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME FOR THE PUB TO CLOSE."—"If you don't like the way things are, then move on," I said. "Others will be happy to scoop him up if you don't want him. But if Albert leaves you, don't say I didn't warn you why. You should be embarrassed," I said, "to look so old and haggard." (She's only thirty-one, for goodness' sake.) "I can't help it," she said, with a sad expression, "it's because of the pills I took for the abortion." (She has five kids already, and nearly died giving birth to baby George.) "The pharmacist said it would be all right, but I haven't been the same since." "You are a true fool," I said. "Well, if Albert won't stop sleeping with you, that's that," I said. "What did you get married for if you don't want children?"—"HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME FOR THE PUB TO CLOSE."—Well, that Sunday Albert came home, they had a hot ham, and they asked me over for dinner, to enjoy that rare hot meal—"HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME FOR THE PUB TO CLOSE. HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME FOR THE PUB TO CLOSE."—"Good night Bill. Good night Lou. Good night May. Good night. Ta ta. Good night. Good night. Good night, ladies, good night, lovely ladies, good night, good night."

Section III: The Fire Sermon

The trees over the river are dormant: the last of their leaves cling and sink into the wet bank. The wind crosses the barren land without anyone around to hear it. The nymphs are all gone. Sweet river Thames, flow softly, until I my poem is over. There are no empty bottles, sandwich papers, silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette butts and other trash floating along the river, all that evidence of people hanging out there on summer nights. The nymphs are all gone. And they have been replaced by so-called elites, who pollute the river anyway; they're gone now too, though, and they left no way to contact them. By the waters of Lake Leman I sat down and cried... Sweet Thames, flow softly until my poem is over. Sweet Thames, flow softly, because I only have a few short, quiet things to say. But behind me, in a strong cold wind, I hear the deathly rattle of bones, and a cold laugh that spreads from ear

to ear.

A rat gently crawled through the grasses, dragging its slimy belly on the riverbank, as I was fishing in the polluted canal on a winter evening behind the slums, thinking about the shipwreck of my brother, the king, and about the death of my father, the king before that. I was thinking about their pale corpses lying naked on the low damp ground and their bones left in a little low dry attic, disturbed only by rats, year after year. But behind me from time to time I hear the sound of horns and motors of cars, which will bring Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring. Oh, the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter, and on her daughter. They wash their feet in soda water. And, oh, those children's voices, singing in the dome!

Tweet tweet tweet, chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp chirp, chirp, she was raped,by Tereus, whose name sounds like birdsong.

In this unreal city, covered by the brown fog of a winter afternoon, Mr. Eugenides, the unshaven merchant from Smyrna, with a pocket full of currants paid for the cost, insurance, and freight to London: documents at the ready. He asked me in colloquial French to lunch at the Cannon Street Hotel, and then invited me to spend the weekend together at the Metropole Hotel.

At dusk, when the body finally gets up from the desk, when the modern human waits, like a taxi waits, humming like an engine, I, Tiresias, though blind, caught between two genders, an elderly man with wrinkled female breasts, can see at dusk, the evening hour that leads toward home, and brings the sailor home from sea, the typist, who comes home in the afternoon at teatime, washes her breakfast dishes, lights her stove, and lays out canned food. Hanging on a laundry line out the window, her drying undergarments receive the last of the sun's rays. On the sofa (which serves as her bed at night) are piled stockings, slippers, slips, and corsets. I Tiresias, the old man with wrinkled breasts, saw the scene, and predicted the rest—I too was waiting for the expected guest. He, the young man with acne, arrives. He is a small-time clerk, with a bold stare, one of the low-born who wears confidence like a Bradford millionaire wears a silk hat. The time is advantageous, he guesses: the meal is over, and she has nothing else to do. He attempts to get her in the mood, which she does not resist, though she does not desire it. Flushed and determined, he makes his move; his wandering hands receive no resistance; he is so vain he does not care that she does not respond to his advances with enthusiasm, and even welcomes her indifference. (And I Tiresias have already suffered all the ills that took place on this same sofabed; I who have sat by the city of Thebes below the walls and walked among the worst of the dead.) The young man gives her one last condescending kiss, and fumbles his way out, onto the darkened stairs...

She turns and looks for a moment in the mirror, hardly aware of her departed lover; her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass: "Well, now that's done, and I'm glad it's over." A lovely woman who has lowered herself to do a foolish thing, and now can only pace around her room alone, she smooths her hair with a robotic hand, and puts a record on the gramophone.

"This music crept by me upon the waters" and along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street. Oh City, city, I can sometimes hear, when I am near a pub on Lower Thames Street, the pleasant sounds of a mandoline, and the busyness and chatter from inside, where fishermen hang out at noon. Down where the walls of the church St. Magnus Martyr preserve the unexplainable splendor of ancient Roman white and gold columns.

The river exudes oil and tar, the barges drift down the water with the changing tide, their red sails open wide, downwind, swinging on the heavy masts. The barges wash away down the river like drifting logs, down past Greenwich, reaching past the Isle of Dogs. Weialala leia... Wallala leialala...

Queen Elizabeth I and her lover Robert Leicester: the beating oars of their boat, whose stern was a gilded shell of red and gold. The same swift waters rippled the shore in their time and ours, a southwest wind carrying the peal of bells from the white towers downstream. Weialala leia... Wallala leialala...

"Trolleys and dusty trees. I was born in Highbury. I was ruined in Richmond and Kew. In Richmond, I lost my virginity, laid out on the floor of a narrow canoe."

"My feet pointed pointed toward Moorgate, and I was on my back, my heart below my feet. After we had sex, he wept. He promised a 'new start.' I said nothing. What do I have to resent?"

"At Margate Sands. I can't make connections between anything. The broken fingernails of dirty hands. My people are humble people who expect nothing." La la

To the ancient city of Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning, O Lord do away with me, O Lord do away

burning

Section IV: Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, who's been dead these last two weeks, has forgotten the cry of the seagulls, and the waves of the sea, and the profit and loss of his shipping business. A current under the sea picks at his bones bit by bit. As he rose and fell with the waves he saw his life pass before his eyes and entered the stormy whirlpool. No matter who you are, Gentile or Jew, oh, you who navigate your own life and look to the future, remember Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. What the Thunder Said

After the torchlight shone red on sweaty faces, after the gardens went cold and lifeless, after the agony in rocky places, after the shouting and the crying, in the prison and the palace alike, after the echoes of spring thunder over distant

mountains, he who was alive is now dead. We who were alive are now dying, slowly.

There is no water here, only rock; only rock, no water, and the sandy road; the road winding up through the mountains, which are mountains made of rocks with no water. If there were water we would stop and drink. Among the rocks one cannot stop or think. Our sweat has gone dry and our feet are in the sand. If there were only water among the rocks. This is a dead mountain, like a mouth with decaying teeth that can no longer spit. This is a place where people cannot stand, lie down, nor sit. There isn't even silence in the mountains, only dry barren thunder that does not bring rain. You're not even alone in the mountains; instead red pouting faces sneer and snarl from the doorways of their dry mud houses. If there was water and no rock, if there was rock and also water, and water, a spring, a pool among the rocks, if there were only the sound of water, not the cicadas' hum and dry grass blowing, but the sound of water running over a rock, where the hermit-bird sings in the pine trees, drip drop drip drop drop drop drop... but again there isn't any water.

Who is the third person always walking next to you? When I count, there is just you and me, side by side, but when I look ahead up the white road, there is always someone walking next to you. Gliding, wrapped in a brown cloak and hood. I do not know whether they are a man or a woman—but who is that, next to you?

What is that high-pitched sound in the air, motherly wails? Who are those hooded masses swarming over endless plains, stumbling over the cracked ground, surrounded only by the endless horizon? What is the city on the other side of the mountains? There are cracks and repairs and explosions in the dusk. Towers are falling. Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London. All of them are unreal.

A woman pulled her long black hair tight, and played ominous music like a fiddle on those strings. Bats with the faces of babies whistled at dusk, and beat their wings, and crawled heads-downward down a burnt wall. And upside down in the air hung towers, ringing familiar bells that kept the time. And voices sang out of empty reservoirs and dry wells.

In this decrepit hole, in the middle of the mountains, in the weak moonlight, the wind whistles through the grass, past fallen graves, around the chapel. There is the chapel, home only to the wind. It has no windows, and the door swings open and shut. Old bones can't hurt anyone. Only a rooster stood on the roof, saying cock-a-doodle-doo. There's a flash of lightning. Then, a damp gust, bringing rain.

The Ganges River was dry, and limp leaves waited for rain, while storm clouds gathered distantly over the snowy Himalayas. The jungle waited expectantly in silence. Then spoke the thunder: BOOM, or DA, like *Datta*, to give: what have we done? My friend, my heartbeat pounded with the awful bravery required to surrender to a moment of lust, which even our era of cautiousness cannot take back. These lustful acts, and these only, mark our existence, though they won't be found in our obituaries, or in memories cobwebbed with generosity, or in our wills unsealed by our lawyers. In our empty rooms: BOOM, or DA, like *Dayadhvam*, sympathize: I have heard the key turning in the lock, just once. We think of the key, each of us in prisons of our own making. As we think of the key, each of our prisons of the self are affirmed. Only at nightfall, vague rumors give momentary life to the broken man locked within himself. BOOM, or DA, like *Damyata*, control: the boat responded happily under expert hands. The water was quiet; your heart would also have responded happily, obediently, when invited by controlling hands.

I sat upon the shore fishing, with the barren plain behind me. Should I at least restore order to my kindgom? London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down. He hid himself in the fire which refines him. When shall I be like the swallow?—Oh, swallow, swallow. The Prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower. These fragments, I have used as support against the ruins of my life. Why then I will accommodate you. Hieronymo's crazy again. Give. Sympathize. Control. Peace, peace, peace.

THEMES

THE BROKENNESS AND ISOLATION OF MODERN LIFE

"The Waste Land" can be thought of as a poem about the alienation and brokenness of modern life. Written shortly after World War I, the poem reflects the generational trauma caused by the war, both on the battlefield and the home front. The "waste land" the poem portrays represents modern society itself, which Eliot depicts as shallow and isolating, lacking both the spiritual guidance and the cultural abundance of the past.

Though the people of "The Waste Land" are simply going about their ordinary lives, their inability to connect or communicate is indicative of the broken society in which they all live. In the poem's first section, for instance, a crowd of people stream across London Bridge like zombies, suggesting the alienating and deadening effects of the modern world. When the speaker sees a fellow former soldier in the crowd ("Stetson") and calls out to him, the man's reply (if there is one) goes unmentioned. The speaker and Stetson both represent the disillusioned survivors of World War I, and are unable to communicate except in reference to their shared, traumatic past.

Likewise, in this disconnected modern world, intimacy and love have been reduced to mere physicality. In the poem's third section, "The Fire Sermon," a typist tidies her apartment before the arrival of her lover, but their sex scene is anything but romantic. It stops short of rape, but the woman clearly dislikes

the man; once he leaves, she is glad he is gone. This scene again illustrates the poem's broader point that modern life alienates people from one another.

This is further emphasized by the stanza that follows, in which Eliot substitutes his own words in the place of lyrics from a well-known opera, a juxtaposition that feels empty and shallow. Modern life, the poem suggests, lacks culture and class, and this descent into vulgarity is part of what drives people apart.

Importantly, the inability to communicate or connect is true at all levels of society. In Section II, a wealthy anxious woman pleads with the speaker to talk to her, but the speaker does not reply. Instead, he thinks unhappily to himself about their mundane everyday routine, which does not bring him comfort. This suggests that the surface-level niceties of modern life—the daily routine of "hot water at ten / and if it rains, a closed car at four"—offer no real relief from its underlying despair and sense of isolation.

Likewise, two working-class women chatting in a pub at the end of Section II are also dealing with despair and isolation. A woman named Lil's husband is back from the war, and the other woman lectures Lil about fixing her teeth in order to appeal to him. Lil, however, needed the money for an abortion. Here, the poem captures two different kinds of modern brokenness. The direct discussion of abortion suggests that social norms have lost spiritual grounding, but the poem also depicts Lil's friend, the speaker, as terribly unkind, again implying that a broken society prevents genuine human connection.

In the poem's final section, however, Eliot pivots away from scenes of everyday life. Instead, he uses imagery and metaphor to portray the modern world as a literal waste land: a rocky barren place without water or sustenance, where even connecting with God is a struggle. This, the poem suggests, is the ultimate alienation from which all modern people suffer, and the source of modern life's brokenness.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Before Line 1
- Lines 1-7
- Lines 19-30
- Lines 37-41
- Lines 60-68
- Line 69
- Lines 69-76
- Lines 111-126
- Lines 132-139
- Lines 140-152
- Line 153
- Lines 154-165
- Lines 166-173
- Between Lines 173-174
- Lines 174-187
- Lines 188-203
- Lines 208-257
- Lines 258-307
- Lines 308-312
- Lines 313-315
- Lines 321-322
- Lines 323-394
- Lines 397-400
- Lines 404-411
- Lines 415-418
- Lines 425-428

DEATH AND REBIRTH

Death is everywhere in the "The Waste Land," both literally and metaphorically. Corpses litter the poem, while endings of all sorts represent death of a different kind throughout. Even the people of the poem resemble the walking dead, living lonely, unhappy lives. Nevertheless, though the majority of "The Waste Land" is preoccupied with death—something it presents as inevitable and inescapable—the poem is not entirely without hope. Indeed, the poem ultimately suggests that death, however devastating, is a necessary stage on the way to rebirth and renewal. Only from the wreckage of a waste land is a new beginning made possible.

One could fill many pages chronicling and making sense of all the things that die or come to an end in this poem. To name just a few: a woman Marie mourns the end of her childhood, the fortune-teller Madame Sosostris issues warnings about death by water, a corpse "planted last year in your garden / has … begun to sprout," marriages and romances fail, women discuss abortion, girls lose their virginity, nymphs have "departed" from the Thames, landscapes are ravaged by drought, a pub reaches closing time, and a sailor literally drowns. Even the poem's allusions are primarily associated with death, such as the repeated references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* (which involves a journey through Hell).

Altogether, this barrage of endings in the poem suggests that the experience of death is universal (especially because the poem suggests that death need not be understood literally; the end of a romance, for example, feels like death).

The universality of this experience is made most explicit in Section IV, the poem's shortest section, titled "Death by Water." Its brevity draws attention to the poem's central message: that the fate of Phlebas, the drowned sailor "who was once handsome and tall as you" awaits *everyone*. This is certainly true in the literal sense, since all people die, but is also true metaphorically, because life is full of endings, as seen throughout the poem.

However, the poem also suggests that each of these deaths and

endings is a necessary pit-stop on the road to rebirth. This idea is first hinted at through multiple allusions to the Greek myth of the rape of Philomela. After being brutalized by a king, who cuts out her tongue, Philomela nevertheless keeps singing, because she transforms into a nightingale. This transformation out of desperate circumstances into new life indicates that rebirth is possible, but only after experiencing a brutal end of some kind.

Fittingly, the poem itself undergoes a journey similar to Philomela's. Though the first four sections are consumed by death and endings, the final section looks toward rebirth. It opens in an agonizing, apocalyptic landscape, before "a damp gust" brings rain and the speaker's tone shifts. The speaker proceeds to talk about on Eastern spiritual philosophies, and describes the "arid plain"—infertile land standing in for death—as "behind" him. Now, he can "set [his] lands in order," a kind of renewal or restoration. This closing section, complex and rich with allusions, ultimately affirms the possibility of rebirth—but only, the poem suggests, after surrendering to the inevitability of death in all forms.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Before Line 1
- Lines 1-7
- Lines 8-11
- Lines 12-13
- Lines 13-18
- Lines 19-24
- Line 30
- Lines 46-48
- Line 55
- Lines 62-65
- Lines 70-75
- Line 81
- Lines 99-103
- Line 104
- Lines 115-116
- Lines 122-123
- Line 125
- Line 126
- Line 142
- Line 153
- Lines 160-162
- Line 166
- Lines 169-170
- Line 173
- Lines 174-187
- Lines 188-198
- Lines 204-207
- Lines 229-243
- Lines 250-257
- Lines 293-306
- Lines 308-312
- Between Lines 312-313
- Lines 313-322
- Between Lines 322-323
- Lines 323-435

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND NIHILISM

"The Waste Land" is a poem so rich with allusions to other works and ideas that Eliot himself included footnotes to help his readers understand them all. In particular, allusions to religion and spirituality play a vital role in the poem, as do depictions of nihilism (which, simply put, is the rejection of religious or moral principles, or the belief that life is meaningless). Throughout the poem, Eliot draws on both Western and Eastern religious traditions, particularly Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Ultimately, the poem suggests that a spiritual crisis is in part responsible for people's isolation and despair in modern society. Thus, resolving that spiritual crisis—finding faith—could help restore modern civilization.

The poem's presents modern society as of a world without the spiritual guidance that the speaker thinks is essential for a moral life. Life without faith, the poem suggests, is a life of meaningless drudgery—with nothing but "The hot water at ten / And if it rains, a closed car at four." This spiritual crisis is what has led to the modern waste land, to a "burial of the dead" (as the first section is titled) among people who are in fact still living.

The speaker himself is part of this wretched population. This remains the trend throughout the poem, even as the speaker's identity shifts and changes. Whether seeking advice from a fortune-teller, despairing over modern life, witnessing lust and vulgarity, or drowning at sea, the speaker remains distant from spiritual touchstones—from places like a chapel, a Hindu mantra, fertile soil, the nymphs of the Thames, a burial service—that might offer some relief.

Adding to this sense of distance and disconnect are Eliot's constant allusions to religious and spiritual writings and ideas. Paradoxically, the poem uses these allusions in order to paint its picture of a deeply nihilistic world—a world *without* meaning. The juxtaposition of speakers who know enough to *reference* faith traditions, but not how to *practice* them and improve their lives, helps to hammer home the impact of the absence of faith on modern life.

Though the poem spares no detail in its depiction of nihilism, it also presents the possibility of redemption. To do so, Eliot alludes heavily to Buddhist and Hindu traditions, especially those that emphasize self-control, sacrifice, and compassion for others. The poem links these philosophies with the possibility of renewal (and rain) amidst the blighted waste land. In particular, the closing section expounds on the mantra "Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyatta." Each word is linked with

metaphorical glimpses of what finding faith might feel like, from turning a key in the lock of spiritual imprisonment to sailing on a calm sea.

Similarly, the poem returns several times to the allegory of the Fisher King, comparing the journey from nihilism to redemption to the Christian tradition of an impotent Fisher King made powerful again through the Holy Grail—the blood of Christ.

Ultimately, by referring to multiple spiritual traditions throughout the poem, Eliot makes clear that it does not matter which faith a person or society follows. Instead, the poem suggests that any spiritual tradition is better than the nihilism that dominates modern life. Only then can people and society reach "Shantih"—the poem's final word, which Eliot translated in his own footnote as "the peace which passeth understanding."

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Line 2
- Lines 5-7
- Lines 19-30
- Lines 38-41
- Lines 43-59
- Lines 60-76
- Lines 115-116
- Line 118
- Line 120
- Lines 122-126
- Lines 136-139
- Line 160
- Between Lines 173-174
- Lines 174-176
- Lines 177-180
- Lines 180-182
- Lines 183-187
- Lines 188-189
- Line 190
- Lines 191-197
- Lines 208-215
- Lines 216-257
- Lines 293-300
- Lines 301-312
- Lines 320-322
- Lines 323-331
- Lines 332-343
- Lines 361-367
- Lines 368-378
- Lines 385-386
- Lines 387-394
- Lines 395-396
- Lines 397-401
- Lines 402-403
- Lines 412-413
- Lines 419-420
- Lines 425-427
- Line 429
- Lines 434-435

SEX, LUST, AND IMPOTENCE

Sex in "The Waste Land" is a dirty, sinful affair that serves as a marker for the decay of modern society. The poem presents lust and casual attitudes towards sex as a mark of moral depravity. In modern times, the poem implies, genuine love and connection are almost impossible to find; sex has thus become immoral and impotent—leading to waste, emptiness, and decay. Even the "thunder" that echoes over the wasteland is "sterile," unable to bring the water that would nourish the land and create the environment necessary for new life to grow.

The poem further links sex and lust with the legend of the Fisher King, the final guardian of the Holy Grail (a vessel that contains drops of Christ's blood). There are many stories of the Fisher King, but all describe a king who lies mortally wounded in his thigh or groin—with the implication being that he can't fulfill his duty to father more children and continue his line, until a knight completes the quest to find the Holy Grail and heals the king. Tellingly, while the king's body wastes away, so does his land; this is, in fact, where the poem's title "The Waste Land" comes from! Finding the Grail is thus necessary to revive not just the *king* but also the *kingdom*.

Importantly, though now linked with Christianity, the legend's roots are in pagan traditions associated with fertility. In this way, Eliot's allusions to the Fisher King tie into the poem's broader ideas about sex, love, and power. The modern world is barren, wasting away just like the Fisher King's kingdom. The many speakers, including one who literally sits fishing by the polluted Thames river, all experience powerlessness, or impotence, just like the mythical king experienced.

And, the poem argues, one of the metaphorical wounds responsible for this impotence and resulting waste land is the lack of romantic love and meaningful connection. The weight of lost love, failed romance, and unhappy marriage hangs over the poem, evoking the barrenness of the Fisher King's kingdom. For example, in the second section, especially, allusions to doomed women like Shakespeare's Ophelia, who drowns herself when she loses Hamlet's affections, or Cleopatra, who commits suicide after her lover Antony is killed, convey the sheer hopelessness of any attempts at romance.

Thus deprived of love, people have seemingly turned to lust, which the poem portrays as immoral and fruitless. This is particularly clear in Section III, "The Fire Sermon"—ironically named after a speech from the Buddha about the importance of freeing oneself from earthly desires, which is exactly the

opposite of what happens in this section of the poem. In particular, the scene between a typist and her lover conveys the poem's disgust with meaningless sex. It's relayed to readers through the spying eyes of Tiresias, a blind prophet from Greek myth. The many layers of ugliness (including Tiresias's "wrinkled dugs," or breasts; the young man "carbuncular" with acne; and the sex itself, which is "undesired" but happens anyway) emphasize the poem's portrayal of lustful sex as something dirty and repugnant, a clear sign of moral decay.

In keeping with the mythos of the Fisher King and Holy Grail, however, the poem also points towards the possibility of a healed waste land, as symbolized by restored romantic intimacy and fertility. For starters, in Section V, the rain returns—a symbol of fertile land. Also, this section explores a series of images that reflect stages of lust, loneliness, and love, and ultimately end on a heart responding "gaily" to the confines of marriage.

Most tellingly, the poem closes with the speaker "upon the shore / Fishing" and considering "set[ting his] lands in order." This clear reference to the Fisher King suggests that the impotence that the speaker has felt throughout the poem in the face of the waste land has been cured. As a result, restoration of the waste land is possible.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 35-42
- Lines 77-81
- Lines 87-93
- Lines 97-103
- Lines 104-110
- Lines 111-126
- Lines 132-139
- Lines 143-150
- Lines 154-157
- Lines 159-162
- Lines 164-165
- Line 173
- Lines 174-187
- Lines 188-193
- Lines 204-207
- Lines 229-257
- Line 280
- Lines 293-300
- Lines 308-312
- Lines 329-330
- Lines 332-343
- Lines 390-392
- Lines 395-401
- Lines 425-427
- Line 432
- Line 435

MEMORY AND THE PAST

"The Waste Land" is full of historical references. Some of these allude to real and significant historical events or figures, while others are merely personal memories tied to different speakers and characters in the poem. In many ways, the poem is an elegy for the past, mourning the decline of culture and society. But even as it mourns forgotten history, the poem itself helps to keep those memories alive by piling a dizzying number of historical allusions on top of each other. In doing so, the poem ultimately suggests that the present is simply a continuation of that past.

The poem opens with a woman, Marie, reflecting on her childhood nostalgically and with a tinge of sadness. This sets the tone for the poem's treatment of the past as something both out of reach and impossible to forget. As the poem continues and the speakers begin to shift and change, so too do the references to the past. Eventually, past and present simply blur together. For instance, in line 70, the speaker refers to World War I by calling it "Mylae," a battle from an ancient Roman war. This blurring speaks to the universality of war across time and place, past and present.

Similar blurring of time occurs again and again throughout the poem. The Renaissance poet, Dante, is alluded to at the modern London Bridge; the implication is that his canonical work on the many circles of hell continue to apply to the zombie-like people of present-day London. In line 197, "The sound of horns and motors" replace a "winged chariot" in an allusive line directly pulled from a seventeenth-century Marvell poem. The words of ancient St. Augustine—"To Carthage then I came"—ring through a modern subway station. And of course the ancient Greek figure of Tiresias appears amidst modern life, peeping in on moral decay.

What to make of these substitutions and allusions? The poem appears to be arguing that the past is never past—that the more things change, the more they stay the same. "The Waste Land" is certainly a response to and indictment of the unprecedented horrors of World War I. However, by consistently riffing on the past in order to talk about the present, the poem also argues that such horror has always been a part of human history.

The poem itself goes a long way toward remedying the very problem it identifies. By drawing on a rich variety of historical and literary references, the poem demands that readers become familiar with the histories that help make the poem make sense, and therefore keep alive the memories that the poem has already begun to mourn, but refuses to forget.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 5-7

- Lines 8-18
- Lines 35-42
- Lines 60-68
- Line 70
- Lines 97-103
- Lines 104-105
- Lines 122-125
- Lines 174-187
- Lines 188-203
- Lines 219-220
- Lines 229-230
- Lines 244-247
- Lines 258-266
- Lines 267-312
- Lines 387-392
- Lines 404-411
- Lines 413-418
- Lines 425-427
- Line 431
- Line 433

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

BEFORE LINE 1, LINES 1-7

FOR EZRA POUND
IL MIGLIOR FABBRO

I. The Burial of the Dead
April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

The poem begins with a dedication to the poet Ezra Pound, whom Eliot deems here "the better craftsman." This praise is actually an allusion to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the famous 14th-century poem about the poet's epic journey through purgatory, hell, and paradise. In this earlier poem, Dante refers to the poet Arnault Daniel, whom he meets in Hell, using the same compliment. Pound helped edit "The Waste Land," so on one level this is simply an expression of gratitude on Eliot's part. However, it also places the poem within an epic context, suggesting it, too, may be a story of heaven, hell, and humanity itself. The first section is then ominously titled "The Burial of the Dead," which suggests the dark tale to come.

Finally, readers get to the actual first line of the poem. The opening of "The Waste Land" is one of the most well-known lines in poetry, and for good reason. An unknown speaker begins by making an unusual assertion: "April is the cruellest month."

Given that April is usually associated with the return of spring, this assertion is startling, but the speaker goes on to explain why it feels that way. The lilacs are blooming out of the "dead land"—the lifeless winter soil—"mixing memory and desire, stirring dull roots with spring rain." This language can all be read metaphorically. In other words, the return of spring has brought back painful memories for the speaker, including memories that have to do with "desire," or love. Though spring is usually a welcome event, in the speaker's case, these "dull roots" might have been better left untouched by the change in seasons. That is, the speaker wishes those memories and feelings could remain distant and dull, buried beneath the ground.

That's why, in the next line, the speaker wishes it were still winter, when the land was covered in "forgetful snow," which kept all this pain at bay (metaphorically keeping the speaker "warm" in a blanket of denial and ignorance). Winter may have meant living "a little life with dried tubers"—in other words, settling for emotions gone cold and numb like a plant bulb beneath the soil in winter—but that still felt "warm" compared to the cruelty of spring, when the speaker must confront no longer dormant "memory and desire." The alliteration of "winter" and "warm" reflects the connection between these concepts in the speaker's mind.

This section is overflowing with alliteration and consonance, in fact. Notice the intensity of /l/, /m/, /d/, /f/, /k/, /s/, /r/, /t/, /p/, and /ng/ sounds:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

The sounds of the poem are inescapable and overwhelming, perhaps reflecting the intense blossoming of life (and memory/desire) that accompanies the spring. In the absence of meter or rhyme (the poem is written in free verse), these shared sounds add a sense of lyricism and continuity to the poem.

At the same time, the poem's use of enjambment in nearly every line makes things seem decidedly off-kilter. Each line, apart from lines 4 and 7, ends on an incomplete thought, urging readers on to the next in order to fully understand what's going on. This captures the unsettled mindset of the speaker, so that the very form of the poem mirrors what the speaker has to say. It also establishes one of the poem's primary concerns: that the traditional forms of art that were celebrated in the past are no longer meaningful in the modern age.

Indeed, these lines introduce a number of the poem's major

themes. The brokenness and alienation of modern life are central to "The Waste Land," and are introduced here via the speaker's numbness and resistance to revisiting memories of a better time. The metaphors of spring and winter hint at the poem's ideas surrounding death (symbolized by winter) and rebirth (symbolized by spring); the section title here of course mentions death directly. The mention of "desire" introduces the undercurrent of sex, love, lust, and impotence that flows throughout the poem. And, of course, the mention of "memory" explicitly invokes the past, and lays the foundation for the poem's mournful treatment of memory and the past.

LINES 8-18

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

Line 8 introduces one of "The Waste Land's" signature moves: an abrupt switch to a new speaker. The poem does not announce or signal this transition in any way. In fact, it is not until line 15, when the speaker quotes somebody by addressing her directly ("He said, Marie, / Marie, hold on tight") that readers discover that a change in speaker has occurred and that the new speaker is a woman named Marie.

Nevertheless, close readers can track the beginning of Marie's dramatic monologue back to line 8, in which she begins to nostalgically reflect on her youth. Her memories include the sudden arrival of a summer rain shower ("Summer surprised us") while crossing Lake Starnberg in Germany; drinking coffee in the Hofgarten, a public garden in Munich; and talking with her cousin, who is quoted in German as saying, "I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a true German."

Beginning in line 13 ("And when we were children..."), Marie looks even further back, to her childhood winters, when she stayed at her cousin's house. She remembers how he coaxed her into going sledding even though she was scared. "In the mountains, there you feel free," Marie reflects, remembering her discovery of the freeing sensation of flying downhill. To this day, she concludes, "I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter."

These lines continue the first stanza's emphasis on the changing seasons, since Marie's memories take place in both summer and winter. They also contain some of the poem's earliest allusions: Lake Starnberg (or "the Starnbergersee") is a real lake in Germany, and indeed Marie is likely an allusion to a real woman, the Countess Marie Larisch, whom Eliot once met. She was a second cousin of the Bavarian king Ludwig II, who drowned in Lake Starnberg under mysterious circumstances. Likewise, in the poem, Marie mentions that her cousin is royalty; she describes him as an arch-duke in line 13.

Similar to the poem's opening, lines 8-18 rely on alliteration, consonance, and assonance. In this case, a flurry of /s/, /st/, /w/, and /m/ sounds, plus /uh/, /ee/, and /ow/ sounds help unify Marie's memories and mark them as a distinct section of the poem. Here are some examples:

> Summer surprised us, coming over the
> Starnbergersee
> With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
> ...
> Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
> In the mountains, there you feel free.
> I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

These lines also slyly introduce one of the poem's primary motifs, the recurring image of a drowned man. This is a very subtle reference, since it relies on readers unpacking Eliot's allusions and understanding that the cousin about whom Marie is reminiscing eventually meets his death by drowning in Lake Starnberg.

Nevertheless, it is key to understanding this section, since it complicates the poem's inclusion of Marie's memories. At first, it may seem like Marie is merely reminiscing about the good old days, but it turns out there is a dark side to her memories as well—which reinforces the poem's mournful view of the past, and introduces death as a central theme.

LINES 19-30

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

Line 19 introduces yet *another* new speaker to the poem, a prophetic voice who immediately begins referencing the Bible by addressing the reader as "Son of man" in line 20. This is an allusion to the Book of Ezekiel, when God demands that the "son of man," or human being, Ezekiel, "stand upon [his] feet" in order to be addressed by God, the higher power.

The speaker of the poem is also a higher power of sorts, issuing

challenges and condemnations. "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / out of this stony rubbish?" the speaker demands. This line provides readers' first glimpse of the waste land as a literal physical place, where tree roots "clutch" the parched ground but find no sustenance, and branches are unable to grow. "Rubbish" is a commonly-used British word for trash or waste; here, the speaker explicitly condemns the soil and land by describing it as such.

The speaker does not give the reader an opportunity to answer, but instead barrels on. "You cannot say, or guess, for you know only a heap of broken images," the speaker asserts. In other words, the speaker believes that humans can't explain how this waste land came to be, because all they know are "a heap of broken images"—a metaphor for modern life, which has become fragmented and superficial, a broken society stripped of meaning.

The speaker goes on to describe the physical manifestation of this society: a waste land "where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief / And the dry stone no sound of water," alluding here to the Book of Ecclesiastes' depiction of desolation. In short, the waste land is a hot, dry, barren place where nothing can grow, thrive, or make shade. The use of metaphor here is masterful, since the waste land is made strikingly literal, even as the poem also depends on readers' understanding that it represents something else—modern life.

Importantly, there is no water in the waste land. Water is a central symbol of the poem, and here its absence signifies drought, a metaphor for the modern world's lack of spirituality. Indeed, much of this stanza (unsurprisingly, given its Biblical allusions) is an indictment of modern society's detachment from religious tradition, which the poem sees as providing the spiritual grounding that allows a society to flourish. The only solace in the waste land is "shadow under this red rock" (an allusion to the Book of Isaiah) which is not particularly comfortable or comforting.

Even so, the speaker ushers readers in under the shadow of the red rock and promises to "show you something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you." This is a startling proposition, since there aren't many ways for a person's shadow to present itself—but is immediately made clearer through metaphor. "I will show you fear in a handful of dust," the speaker proclaims, indicating that the shadow the speaker is *really* interested in is the shadow of death. This is signified by the "handful of dust," which is reminiscent of the well-known line "ashes to ashes, dust to dust" from the Church of England's funeral service, after which this section of the poem is titled.

In sum, the speaker is telling readers to fear death, the natural endpoint of living in a waste land. This is what modern society has come to.

This stanza is one of the poem's most prominent examples of the dramatic monologue, since readers are explicitly addressed by the speaker. It serves an important purpose, not only establishing the poem's vision of the waste land but also its metaphorical significance. Like the stanza preceding it, it uses alliteration, consonance, and assonance, repeating /s/, /b/, /ch/, /ee/, and /o/ sounds, which create a rhythmic effect reminiscent of a sermon or a prophecy:

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

Finally, the stanza's repeated direct address to readers ("Son of man, you cannot say ... I will show you something different ... I will show fear in a handful of dust") is a reminder that "The Waste Land" is an indictment of the world in which readers live.

LINES 31-42

> *Frisch weht der Wind*
>
> *Der Heimat zu*
>
> *Mein Irisch Kind,*
>
> *Wo weilest du?*
> *"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, I was neither*
> *Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,*
> *Looking into the heart of light, the silence.*
> *Oed' und leer das Meer*
> .

In line 31, the poem switches speakers yet again, to a man who may or may not be the same speaker from the poem's opening. This time, however, the change is marked by an allusion. Eliot quotes directly from a well-known opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, by the German composer Richard Wagner. Translated from the German, lines 31-34 read, "Fresh blows the wind to the homeland; my Irish child, where are you waiting?" In the original opera, these lines are sung by a sailor who is thinking about a girl he has left behind.

Fittingly, "The Waste Land" also turns to themes of lost love at this point. Lines 35-42 are dedicated to the speaker's memories of a girl from his past. In particular, they capture the moment when their relationship came to an end, due to his

inability to connect with her. Lines 35-36 are in this girl's voice, as she reminds the speaker of his public declaration of love: "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago; / They called me the hyacinth girl."

The hyacinth flower gets its name from a Greek myth about doomed love, and its presence here symbolizes the unhappy end of their romance. Lines 37-42 describe how the speaker realized his feelings for the hyacinth girl had faded: "When we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden ... I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing."

In other words, the speaker found himself speechless, unable to even look at the girl. He describes himself as emotionally absent, like a person in-between life and death, detached even from the heartbreak of this moment. Even though the speaker understood that the hyacinth girl loved him, when he "look[ed] into the heart of light," he found only "silence." Their relationship was over. The closing line of the stanza quotes again from *Tristan und Isolde*, underscoring the speaker's loss and isolation: "Desolate and empty is the sea."

Significantly, this story of lost love is recounted in retrospect. It therefore serves as another example of the "memory and desire" stirred up by the changing seasons, and contributes to the poem's mournful treatment of the past. Moreover, by focusing on lost love in particular, this section of the poem introduces the recurring themes of love and failed romance. It introduces "The Waste Land's" depiction of a modern world in which meaningful human connection has become impossible, thus dooming any real opportunity for love or romance.

LINES 43-59

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
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!)
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.

The fourth stanza of "The Waste Land" introduces Madame Sosostris, a "famous clairvoyante," or fortune-teller, whom the poem immediately sets up as untrustworthy. She has a bad cold, which the speaker notes suspiciously, as though it were a sign of her ordinariness, and the stanza closes with her issuing instructions about delivering a message to another customer. Still, she's got the reputation of "the wisest woman in Europe," thanks to her "wicked" pack of Tarot cards, which she proceeds to read from.

The speaker is the recipient of Madame Sosostris's reading, and because the poem quotes her directly, readers find themselves in the speaker's shoes, having their fortune told as well. She begins by asserting that "the drowned Phoenician Sailor" is the speaker's special card, with drowned eyes that have turned hard and unseeing like pearls as they lie at the bottom of the sea. The cards that follow include "the Lady of the Rocks," "the man with three staves," "the Wheel," "the one-eyed merchant," and a blank card that Madame Sosostris is "forbidden" to read or interpret. She is unable to find "The Hanged Man" card.

Alliteration is the primary device unifying this section of the poem, with repetition of /f/, /s/, /w/, /l/, /h/, and /r/ sounds. For example, note the clear alliteration and consonance of "the wisest woman in Europe, / With a wicked pack of cards." This section also includes one of the poem's major examples of anaphora, creating momentum through the repetition of the word "Here," as Madame Sosostris unspools her prophecy:

> 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,

Interestingly, though several of these are actual cards found in the Tarot deck, quite a few are made up, invented for the poem. Nevertheless, all of them resurface as symbols throughout the rest of "The Waste Land," especially the drowned Phoenician Sailor (a made-up card) whose pearly eyes are referenced in Section II and who is at the center of the brief Section IV. Belladonna, though not a real Tarot card, is a word with a dual meaning, symbolizing both the Virgin Mary and a poisonous flower; it hints at the doomed romances to come in Section II. Two real Tarot cards include "The Wheel" of Fortune, a symbol of the cycle of death and rebirth, and the "man with three staves," better known as the 3 of Wands, a card that promises exploration of the self and the world. The "one-eyed merchant" reappears later as Mr. Eugenides in Section III. The mysterious blank card, "something he carries on his back," hints that there are yet more burdens to come, which even Madame Sosostris cannot predict.

Ultimately, Madame Sosostris's reading functions as a fairly accurate prophecy, despite the speaker's initial suspicions, and can be thought of as a kind of symbolic road map for the rest of the poem. For example, she accurately predicts that the speaker should "Fear death by water." Indeed, quite a few

people drown or suffer from drought and thirst throughout the poem, and water itself takes on significant symbolic resonance, linked with impotence, spirituality, rebirth, death, and history.

The fact that Madame Sosostris can't find The Hanged Man hints that its meaning—suspension, waiting, changed perspective, eventual rebirth—is not yet available to the speaker this early in the poem. However, it does come true later on, as the possibility of redemption and restoration of the waste land comes into view at the poem's conclusion.

Likewise, her comment that she "see[s] crowds of people, walking round in a ring," is immediately confirmed in the following stanza, when the speaker realizes the people crossing London Bridge are directionless, zombie-like, just as she described. This immediate affirmation of Madame Sosostris's fortune-telling skills hints that readers should take all of her other predictions seriously, as well.

Lastly, the poem's use of Tarot as a major metaphor is important, since Tarot cards themselves rely on imagery, metaphor, and allusion to make meaning. By pointing to the cards as a source of real interpretative power, "The Waste Land" indicates that its own use of imagery, metaphor, and allusion is just as powerful and insightful.

LINES 60-76

Unreal City,
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.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
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.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: "Stetson!
"You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
"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 friend to men,
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

The final stanza of Section I marks the poem's first description of an "Unreal City," in this case London, in which the speaker fully reckons with the brokenness and isolation of modern life. (Note that this phrase—"Unreal City"—will come back towards the end of the poem, and will be broadened to implicitly include societies throughout the world and throughout history.)

The speaker stands watching a crowd of people flowing over London Bridge like zombies, sighing, with their eyes fixed on their feet. "I had not thought death had undone so many," the speaker reflects, which is both a metaphor (since these people are not literally dead, but rather dead inside, or soulless) and an allusion to Dante's *Inferno*, which contains a similar line and describes the many circles of hell.

In sum, the poem is comparing living in modern society to living in hell, and these people on the bridge are prime examples of that reality. The waste land, the poem implies, is right here, right now, in the middle of London—"Saint Mary Woolnoth" and "King William Street" are in fact real London landmarks.

The speaker then realizes that he recognizes one of these passersby, and hails him, calling out, "Stetson! You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!" This line tells readers a few things, first and foremost that both the speaker and Stetson were soldiers, and served together. Secondly, the speaker refers to their shared battle as "Mylae," which is the name of a battle from 260 B.C.E., during the first Punic War.

Obviously, it's not possible for the speaker and Stetson to be alive in 1920s London and also to have lived in ancient Rome; thus, Mylae is a metaphor for the battles of World War I, which occurred right before "The Waste Land" was published. This metaphor, linking the Punic Wars with World War I, emphasizes the futility and horror of war, and in particular wars such as these: both were chiefly fought over economics, and resulted in the deaths of thousands of ordinary people to the benefit of others' greed.

The speaker affirms this reading by inquiring after "that corpse" Stetson planted in his garden last year. It makes no sense for a corpse to be planted like a seed, but in keeping with the poem's thematic concerns of death and rebirth, brokenness and alienation, this image suggests that the experience of war leaves behind permanent scars that crop up year after year, blooming like the lilacs in the first stanza, every spring, and bringing back painful memories.

The stanza closes with the speaker addressing either Stetson, or the reader, or both, in French, with a line from a Baudelaire poem (another allusion). "You! Hypocritical reader," he shouts. "My likeness, my twin, my brother!" Here, the speaker links himself to Stetson and the reader, calling them brothers-in-arms, and aligning them all as part of a shared experience: broken, deadening modern life.

This alignment is achieved on a language level as well. The stanza is rife with alliteration and consonance, particularly the repetition of the prefix "un" and recurring /n/, /s/ and /t/ sounds. Take a look at lines 60-63 as an example of the first of these sounds:

> Unreal City,
> 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.

Even as the imagery becomes increasingly complex, the poem retains its momentum through the rhythm and musicality of the

language. Repetition again plays a role in the poem here as well. The epistrophe of "so many" above, for example, emphasizes the sheer number of people deadened by the hollowness of modern life.

BETWEEN LINES 76-77, LINES 77-96

II. A Game of Chess
The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched 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 coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carvéd dolphin swam.

The second section of "The Waste Land" is titled "A Game of Chess." This is an allusion to two plays by Thomas Middleton, a 16th-century English playwright, called *A Game at Chess* and *Women Beware Women*, in which a mother-in-law is distracted by a game of chess while her daughter-in-law is seduced.

Like Middleton's plays, this section of "The Waste Land" revolves around themes of failed romance and doomed women. It opens with the description of one such woman—or rather, with the description of her parlor, which is an overwhelmingly luxurious space. Marble, mirrors, gold, satin, and glittery jewels abound. The chair in which the woman sits is compared to a "burnished throne," perhaps an allusion to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, hinting that this woman may share Cleopatra's tragic fate.

Indeed, the imagery throughout these lines is deeply ominous: the woman's perfumes "drown the sense in odours," smoke fills the room, a Cupid statue covers his eyes with his wings, and "sad light" shines on the sculpture of a dolphin. This imagery makes clear that, however luxurious, in the speaker's eyes, this room is not a pleasant or hopeful place to be.

It is worth noting, as well, that this stanza opens in blank verse, a traditional poetic form that uses unrhymed iambic pentameter. On the whole, "The Waste Land" is a poem marked by metrical irregularity, which is often interpreted as a sign of the decay of modern life. Thus, the metrical *regularity* present at the beginning of this stanza serves a symbolic purpose as well. It links this wealthy woman and her chamber full of ancient artifacts to bygone traditions, and hints that they, too, like the poem's meter, which grows increasingly irregular as the stanza goes on, are fated to meet a tragic end.

LINES 97-105

Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
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 the walls;

Lines 97-110 continue Section II's theme of doomed romance. This is perhaps best embodied by the symbol of Philomela, whose story first appears here, in an allusion to the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Having just described an opulent room, the speaker turns to a painting "above the antique mantel" which reminds the speaker of "a window." It allows the speaker, metaphorically-speaking, to look into another world: a "sylvan" (or pleasantly pastoral) "scene" where Philomela, a figure from Greek myth, is "rudely forced" (in other words, raped) by a "barbarous king." Afterwards, the king cuts Philomela's tongue out, but she eventually is transformed into a nightingale, and regains her voice through birdsong. This is "the change of Philomel" to which the poem refers in line 99, going on to describe her transformation as the thing that enables Philomela to "fill ... all the desert with inviolable voice."

The speaker clearly finds Philomela's story moving, since the speaker dedicates more time to this one painting than the many other decorations in this room. In particular, the speaker is frustrated that though Philomela's voice remains "inviolable"—unbroken, despite her traumatic experience, and perhaps even in response to it—her birdsong, the onomatopoeia of "Jug, jug," falls on "dirty ears."

The implication here is that Philomela's song is an example of the kind of classical, high art which was commonplace in the past. In modern times, however, this art is no longer studied or respected, as suggested in line 104, which groups Philomela's painting and story with "other withered stumps of time." And because modern society cannot hear or understand Philomela's song, they cannot learn from her story—which represents the idea that even out of trauma and ruin, transformation and rebirth are possible.

This is a powerful theme in the poem. Though the speaker moves on in line 105 from Philomela's painting, her song crops back up later in the poem, and again at the poem's conclusion.

She is a key symbol for rebirth in "The Waste Land."

LINES 104-116

And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, 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.
"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"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 rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

In line 104, the speaker moves on from studying the painting of Philomela, noting that other artifacts testifying to a bygone age ("withered stumps of time") dot the room as well. These include "staring forms," or statues, which "enclose" the room, evoking a sense of claustrophobia, as does the sound of footsteps "shuffl[ing]" on the stairs. Fittingly, line 108 ("Under the firelight ...") then narrows the speaker's focus, back to the woman whose room he has been describing. She is brushing her hair by the fireplace, and the poem metaphorically compares the glowing strands of her to her fiery words, which are followed by "savage" silence.

Lines 111-114 ("My nerves are bad ... Think.") then give readers a glimpse of what those words are: the anxious pleas of a woman desperate to be closer to the speaker. "My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me," she begs. "Speak to me. Why do you never speak ... I never know what you are thinking."

These lines are surrounded by quotation marks in the poem, but the speaker's response—"I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones"—is *not*, indicating that he refuses to express his thoughts to the woman, despite her pleas (that is, the speaker is not saying these thoughts aloud). These thoughts, it should be noted, are rather grim, again conveying the speaker's and the poem's obsession with death and decline. In this "rats' alley," the "dead men" have "lost their bones"—suggesting that the dead are without body, structure, or form.

Likewise, the meter of this section, which opened in blank verse, starts to become irregular in lines 111-116, mirroring not only the inability of the speaker and the woman to communicate but also those same themes of death and decline.

LINES 117-139

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.
"Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"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.

In line 117 ("What is that noise?"), the stanza, which began in blank verse, abandons its metrical regularity. From here, the meter and form of this section become wildly irregular, perhaps best seen in the indentation of lines 118, 120, 127, and 135. This echoes the disintegrating conversation between the speaker and this wealthy, anxious woman.

"What is that noise?" the woman frets. "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?" Again, indicated by a lack of quotation marks, the speaker does not reply to her out loud, but his internal retorts are scathing: "Nothing again nothing." He apparently has no patience for her anxiety, especially since it serves only to remind him of the emptiness of modern life, in which nothing really matters. Indeed, all the speaker can think about is death, as symbolized by his memory of the "pearls that were his eyes" (a reference to the drowned Phoenician Sailor from Madame Sosostris's Tarot reading in Section I).

The speaker and the woman's inability to connect or communicate is central to the poem's portrayal of the isolation and alienation of modern society, despite its distractions and amenities. The source of this broken society is captured in lines 128-130, which quote from a well-known song from 1912: "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag / It's so elegant / so intelligent." The speaker clearly finds this music shallow, which is about as far from Shakespeare, elegance, and intelligence as one can get.

What's more, the speaker immediately links this low pop culture allusion with the woman's dithering in lines 131-132, "What shall I do now? What shall I do?" To the speaker, it's obvious what they shall do, and that is exactly the problem: "The hot water at ten. / And if it rains, a closed car at four." These routines of modern life—making tea, etc.—may seem pleasant, but they offer no real relief from its underlying despair and isolation. The speaker's only respite, for which he "wait[s]," is the occasional interruption of "a knock upon the

door."

LINES 140-173

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.
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 makes 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 in 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. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

The conclusion of Section II marks the arrival of a new speaker, this time a working-class woman who goes unnamed. She is sitting in a pub with her friend "Lil" at closing time, and they are discussing Lil's husband and her marriage.

Coming on the heels of the previous speaker's despair over the meaninglessness of modern life, this stanza stands out for a few reasons. It demonstrates a marked shift in tone, as the language shifts into a Cockney-esque (or lower class) accent. It is also a prime example of the poem's use of stream of consciousness.

These lines flow in and out of the speaker's thoughts and dialogue, as she lectures Lil about "mak[ing her]self a bit smart," or prettier, now that her husband Albert is coming home from the war. "He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time," the speaker asserts; if Lil's not able to give that to him, she warns, "there's others [who] will."

The implication, of course, is that the speaker herself is angling after Albert. Lil picks up on this right away—"Oh is there ... then I'll know who to thank"—but she seems too tired or beaten down to make much of a fuss. Her friend continues to berate her, but Lil "can't help" how badly she looks and feels. She has five kids and the birth of the youngest almost killed her, so she spent Albert's money, which he'd meant for her to use to fix her teeth, on an abortion.

Abortion was an illegal procedure in the 1920s, and rarely overseen by medical professionals. Lil admits that she has "never been the same" since. Rather than being sympathetic, however, the speaker shrugs off Lil's words. If Albert still wants to have sex, well, that's his prerogative, no matter what Lil wants. (Birth control was also illegal at the time, it should be noted!) "What you get married for if you don't want children?" the speaker snaps.

First and foremost, this stanza epitomizes the poem's understanding of sex and love as a fundamentally broken thing. Like the speaker and the anxious woman in the first half of this section of the poem, Albert and Lil's relationship is clearly on the rocks. The war has taken its toll on their marriage. Abortion (of which Eliot, a religious man, likely did not approve) is treated like no big deal by both women—an indication of societal decline. Even the supposed friendship between Lil and the speaker is fractured.

Furthermore, the use of two working-class women to express these ideas makes clear that the hopelessness and despair described elsewhere in the section and the poem apply to *all* rungs of society. No matter who you are, rich or poor, male or female, the brokenness and alienation of modern life has beaten you down, too.

This is emphasized by the repeated interruptions of "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME," a common phrase used by bartenders in England to signify last call and the closing of the pubs. It's time for Lil and the speaker to wrap up their conversation, but the ominous refrain also suggests that they're running out of time in other ways, too. Death approaches, both literally and figuratively. Unsurprisingly, then, the stanza closes with the women saying goodnight—another allusion, this time to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Specifically, these lines recall the moment when lovelorn Ophelia bids everyone goodnight, then leaves to drown herself.

It's a grim image to end a grim conversation. The poem never returns to Lil or this particular speaker, and in many ways these two characters are anomalous, not represented in Madame

Sosostris's reading or tied to other symbols, like water or fire, apart from the brief final allusion to Ophelia. But their conversation captures just how widespread the metaphorical waste land really is, afflicting all parts and people of modern society. It also shores up the poem's understanding of love and romance as hopeless endeavors.

BETWEEN LINES 173-174, LINES 174-187

III. The Fire Sermon
The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
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 . . .
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
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

Section III, "The Fire Sermon," opens by the Thames River, which runs through London. The speaker sits there singing, "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song," an allusion to the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser, whose poem "Prothalamion" features a riverside wedding of two noblewomen by the Thames. In that poem, the speaker asks the river to remain quiet and gentle as the speaker celebrates the newlyweds. It is a lovely day, and the nymphs—in mythology, beautiful nature spirits—have gathered baskets full of flowers for decorations.

The speaker of "The Waste Land" is not celebrating, however. The speaker instead seems almost to be pleading with the river to bear with him and his pain, and is mourning the departure of "the nymphs" who represented the magic and beauty of the river. Now they are gone. In fact, the speaker repeats "The nymphs are departed" twice in this stanza, leaving no doubt that the beautiful natural world of "Prothalamion" is no more. This creates yet another metaphor for the waste land of modern life. The river around which London revolves has been polluted, and there is seemingly no way to reverse the damage.

These "nymphs" might also be a veiled reference to sex workers, which would make the mention of "their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors," make more sense. This refers to the privileged elites who pollute the river with their revelries over the summer—leaving garbage as "testimony of summer nights" (which is possible a reference to contraception). This debauchery juxtaposes sharply against the scene depicted in Spenser's earlier poem, and suggests the corruption of the "heirs" to modern society—those descendants of the nobility from generations past. With the summer over, now even *they* seem to have "departed," though, and have left no way to reach them, leaving an empty, isolated world in their wake.

The speaker next explicitly alludes to the exile of the Biblical Hebrews from their homeland when he says, "By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept ..." He, too, feels like an exile—though the river is still there, it has been ruined. What's more, the speaker senses "at [his] back in a cold blast ... the rattle of bones." Death is nigh; indeed, it has already come for the Thames. The leaves of summer already "Clutch and sink into the wet bank," having fallen from the "tent" of trees that formed over the river in the height of summer.

As the opening to a section focused on the degradation of modern life, this stanza plays a key role in setting the scene. In keeping with a central theme of the poem, memory and the past, the vivid imagery and allusions work together here to conjure up memories of what the Thames used to be like, and then contrast that joyful river with its current ruined state.

Note the intensity of repeated /r/, /b/, /m/, /p/, /t/, /k/, and /s/ sounds in the description of garbage and decrepitude. Many of these sounds are harsh in combination (especially the /k/, /p/, /t/, and /s/), and the consonance makes it feel like the speaker is spitting out these descriptions in disgust:

> 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.

The title of this section is also symbolically significant. "The Fire Sermon" was a sermon delivered by the Buddha, a spiritual leader and the founder of Buddhism, who preached on how people might free themselves from pain and degradation by detaching themselves from passion and lust. By titling this section after that sermon, Eliot alludes to the same ideas, especially the decline of modern society, which he views as having become polluted and degraded, just like the Thames.

LINES 188-203

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.

But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

In the second stanza of Section III, the speaker continues to describe the decay of the Thames river, using a dizzying mix of allusions to high art, popular culture, ancient myth, and French poetry. Altogether, however, they largely add up into one main message: that the vulgarity of modern life—epitomized by meaningless sex, drinking, and pollution—is responsible for society's moral decline, and thus linked with death and destruction.

The speaker begins by describing the rats that have overtaken the Thames River as he sits "fishing in the dull canal" and "musing upon ... the king my brother's wreck" and "the king my father's death." This a double allusion. First, by playing on the word "fish," these lines invoke the legend of the Fisher King, whose wound (or death) lays waste to his kingdom. The speaker has inherited this waste land from his father and brother before him, and is just as powerless to restore it as they were.

"My brother's wreck" also refers to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and the storm Prospero conjures in order to wreck his brother's ship. It again emphasizes the idea that the rulers of the kingdom have been wrecked or destroyed, and so has their land.

The speaker then turns to more signs of modern decay, which become increasingly blurred together as he mourns the way things used to be. For instance, lines 196-197 ("But at my back ... shall bring") allude to a line from the 17th-century poem "To His Coy Mistress" by Andrew Marvell:

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;

Eliot replaces Marvell's "winged chariot" with "the sound of horns and motors." Thus even the allusion to classical poetry has been polluted with the noise and frenzy of modern life, in the same way the Thames has been polluted. The imagery of lines 193-195 describes "white bodies naked on the low damp ground" and "bones ... rattled by the rat's foot only," which may literally refer to bodies rotting besides the Thames, but are also reminiscent of the horrific trenches of World War I.

Likewise, lines 198-201 ("Sweeney ... water") are also allusions, but this time to an Australian drinking song that was popular during the war. Meanwhile, "Sweeney" is a character from another one of Eliot's poems, "Sweeney among the Nightingales," in which he represents a brute, Neanderthal-like man. "Mrs. Porter," meanwhile, likely represents a brothel owner. All together, then, the stanza closes on the image of modern "horns and motors, which shall bring" a brutish man to a brothel where women wash their dirty feet before satisfying his basest needs.

In line 202, this condemnation of the moral decay of modern life is concluded by yet another allusion. The line translates from the French as "And, oh, those children's voices, singing in the dome!" It comes directly from the poem "Parsifal" by Paul Verlaine. "Parcival" tells the story of a knight questing for the Holy Grail in order to cure the Fisher King. Thus, line 202 brings the stanza full circle, back to the origins of the waste land.

However, it appears that neither the knight nor the speaker can complete their quest and restore the waste land, since they are both distracted by music. In the knight's case, that music is the lovely voices of children singing. For the speaker, it's the same shallow pop music from before, which he sees as a modern plague that only makes the waste land worse.

LINES 204-215

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu
Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

Lines 203-206 mark the return of the symbol of Philomela, who, according to Greek myth, transforms into a nightingale after being raped. Using onomatopoeia, the lines mimic her birdsong, including the cooing sound "Tereu," which is reminiscent of the name of her rapist, Tereus. Following the image of Mrs. Porter the brothel owner in the preceding stanza (and as part of Section III, "The Fire Sermon," which denounces passion and lust) this reminder of Philomela's rape serves to shore up the poem's argument that modern life is awash in sexual depravity.

This idea continues into the next stanza, in which "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant" essentially propositions the speaker, inviting him first to lunch and then for a "weekend at the Metropole" hotel. Homosexuality was nowhere near as accepted in the 1920s as it is today, and the implication that a man would solicit another man for sex is yet another sign of the degradation of social and sexual norms in modern society.

Lines 207-209 also serve as callbacks to earlier moments in the poem, in particular through the repetition of "Unreal City," which first prefaced the speaker's despair upon witnessing the

zombie-like crowds crossing London Bridge in Section I. The fact that Mr. Eugenides is described as a merchant, with his "pocket full of currants" (playing on the word "currency") and shipping documents ("C.i.f. London" stands for "carriage and insurance free to London" or "cargo, insurance, and freight") also hints that he may be the same person as the one-eyed merchant from Madame Sosostris's Tarot card reading in Section I.

LINES 216-231

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
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 dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.

This stanza opens with yet another image of the alienation of modern life. The "violet hour," or dusk, marks the end of the workday, when "the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk." The poem describes this action of clocking out and heading home as involuntary, comparing modern workers to "human engine[s]" or robots, who wait all day "like a taxi throbbing waiting" for their release. But they are not the only ones waiting—so is Tiresias, the poem's latest speaker, who explicitly identifies himself in line 218.

Tiresias is a blind prophet who (like Philomela) appears in the Roman poet Ovid's masterwork *The Metamorphoses*, and is one of the poem's most important allusions. In myth and poetry, Tiresias lived as both man and woman, and bore witness to many epic tragedies. Despite his lack of sight, "The Waste Land" portrays him as all-seeing thanks to his prophetic powers, which stretch even into this modern age.

Indeed, at this moment—which the poem metaphorically compares the sunset to the moment when a sailor returns home from sea—Tiresias is spying on a young woman. He describes her as a "typist home at teatime," a lower-class individual who tidies her apartment and lays out "food in tins." Lines 222-227 ("The typist ... stays.") capture the meager setting of her home, where there is hardly enough space to hang her laundry dry, and her "divan," or sofa, must serve as a bed at night. These images strongly suggest the loneliness and isolation of modern life.

Immediately after setting the scene, Tiresias hints ominously that something significant is about to unfold there: the arrival of an "expected guest." He also hints at the vulgar nature of what he is about to witness by again emphasizing his age and grotesque body, describing himself as an "old man with wrinkled dugs," or breasts.

At the time of "The Waste Land's" publication, this juxtaposition of a classic figure from ancient poetry and mythology with the mundane trappings of modern life was shocking. Eliot himself emphasizes this contrast through his use of rhyme, adopting the end rhymes of more traditional poetic forms in "see" and "sea," "spread" and "bed," "rays" and "stays," "guest" and "rest," and the eye rhyme of "lives and strives," even as he uses those rhymes to depict a decidedly lower-class scene.

LINES 232-257

He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
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
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising 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'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

Eliot himself described these lines as the heart of the poem. Witnessed through the blind eyes of the prophet Tiresias, the scene in lines 231-248 ("He, the young man ... finding the stairs unlit") is a brutal one. The guest for whom the typist has been tidying up has arrived; Tiresias describes him as a "young man carbuncular," meaning he has acne, and as a "small house agent's clerk" with the (undeserved) cockiness of a millionaire.

As soon as their meal is over, this young man "endeavours to engage [the typist] in caresses"—in other words, immediately

makes a sexual move on the typist even though "she is bored and tired." Her lack of resistance—these caresses go "unreproved," or without reprimand, even though they are also "undesired"—is all the young man needs to forge ahead. "He assaults at once," and though the typist clearly is not enthusiastic about having sex with him, his "exploring hands encounter no defence," or obstacle. In other words, she does not put up a fight, so they have sex anyway. Just as quickly as the encounter began, it is over, and the clerk gives the typist "one final patronising kiss" in line 247 before heading out the door. The fact that he "gropes" his way in the dark stairwell contrasts sharply with Tiresias's all-seeing wisdom. (It also serves as a play on words, given what has just occurred with the typist.)

In the next stanza, the typist does her best to recover. She pauses and looks in the mirror. Tiresias describes her as "hardly aware of her departed lover." Indeed, "Her brain allows" only "one half-formed thought to pass: / 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over,'" before she distracts herself from the bad experience by putting a record on.

This scene is perhaps the poem's strongest indictment of the ills of modern society. The sex is ugly, not quite rape but certainly far short of romantic, a purely lust-driven affair. The woman is described as having "stoop[ed] to folly" by engaging in this sexual act with the ugly, cocky young man, yet in response she simply puts on some music.

This casual attitude towards sex is made more striking when considering that the poem here is alluding to a novel called *The Vicar of Wakefield* by 18th-century Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith. In the novel, a young woman is seduced by a womanizing man and later sings the following song in her sadness:

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

In the novel, then, the fallen woman deems that the "only" thing to "soothe her melancholy ... is to die." This, of course, is a very different response from that of the typist in Eliot's poem. Eliot quotes Goldsmith's work here to again condemn what he sees as modern decadence and moral failing.

What's more, it's all witnessed by another person, Tiresias, who serves as a kind of peeping tom, peering in on the vulgar scene and relaying it back to readers of the poem. He himself reminds readers that he once "sat by Thebes below the wall" and witnessed all kinds of epic tragedy and drama, including Odysseus's journey to the Underworld and Dante's visit to Hell. In comparison, the modern age has bestowed upon his gift of foresight an example of ordinary ugliness, which epitomizes the waste land's lust and degradation, where the people are numb to meaningful human connection.

LINES 258-266

> *"This music crept by me upon the waters"*
> *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 a mandoline*
> *And a clatter and a chatter from within*
> *Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls*
> *Of Magnus Martyr hold*
> *Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.*

"The Fire Sermon" closes with a cacophonous medley of images, allusions, and metaphors. The speaker is still Tiresias, the blind prophet who can see through time and history, introduced in the previous stanzas. This time, his vision encompasses all of London's history, as embodied by scenes, memories, and monologues along the Thames.

In the first of these stanzas, starting in line 257, Tiresias sets off along the Thames, listening to music. As he wanders the streets (including "the Strand," which is a real street by the river and which was once dotted with mansions), he confesses that he can "sometimes hear ... the pleasant whining of a mandoline" being played in a pub where fishermen spend time. The word "sometimes" implies that this may be a memory from the good old days before the waste land, not a present-day event. This mourning of a bygone era is emphasized by Tiresias's note that the pub is located near St. Magnus Martyr, a centuries-old church whose "Ionian" columns remind him of its history, and also of the religious traditions that have now been abandoned by modern society ("Ionian" is a reference to the style of columns used in the classical architecture of ancient Greece; here are some images of such columns).

Indeed, line 257 is yet another allusion to Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (referenced earlier in line 191 with "the king my brother's wreck"). "This music crept by me upon the waters" is a line spoken by the character Ferdinand in Shakespeare's play, in reference to a music he hears while "weeping" about his father's death. *The Tempest* takes place on an enchanted island, and this music's "sweet air" sets Ferdinand at ease, "Allaying," or reducing, his "passion" as well as the "fury" of those aforementioned waters.

This music seems to mix with the music the typist puts on in the previous line, and transports the poem to "the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street" where the music then mixes with the "whining of a mandoline." This is not Shakespeare's magical island, but rather the same dull and soulless modern Britain that the poem, has been condemning all along. Again music is

linked to water (now, the Thames), but the music here thus doesn't put the speaker similarly at ease. Instead, it reminds him again of a better bygone era. The magic of Shakespeare's play—indeed, of Shakespeare's time—are, like the "splendour" of the ancient world, gone.

LINES 267-292

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
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
Wallala leialala
Elizabeth and Leicester
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

In lines 266-291 (The river sweats ... Wallala leialala"), Tiresias continues his stroll along the Thames. These lines are set to the tune of Wagner's "Rhine-Maidens," a song from his opera *Götterdämmerung* that celebrates the Rhine river's beauty. (That's made clear through the inclusion of "Weialala leia / Wallala leialala," the original chorus.)

Here, though, the poem turns that celebration on its head by substituting new lyrics, which describe the polluted Thames, a river that "sweats / oil and tar." The Thames is so full of the pollution of modern industry that it seems to seep out of the water itself. These fragmented images of a "turning tide" and "drifting logs" serve as a reminder of just how long barges have been sailing down the Thames, "down Greenwich ... past the Isle of Dogs." The enjambment throughout these two stanzas, with their very short lines sprawling down the page, visually lengthen this chunk of the poem, in effect acting out the sense of slow, endless drifting being described.

In fact, Tiresias reminds readers, even Queen Elizabeth I and her alleged lover Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, once sailed down this very river many years before. Not coincidentally, Elizabeth I never married and was known as the "Virgin Queen"—and thus stands in contrast to all the sexual indiscretion present in the poem so far (from the typist's liason, to Lil's abortion, to the nymphs on the river and the brother of Mrs. Porter).

The poem can't resist lingering over what has been lost since past eras of glory and grandeur. "A gilded shell / red and gold / the brisk swell ... Southwest wind," Tiresias sings. But these images, especially "the peal of bells / white towers," are reminders of what has been lost to history. Bells and towers encountered elsewhere in the poem are described as "tolling" mournfully and on the verge of collapse. In modern times, the Thames is not a source of glory, but yet another wrecked landscape that can no longer make history, art, or meaning. These stanzas, then, are among the most prominent contributions to the poem's elegy for the past.

LINES 293-312

"Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."
"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised a 'new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?"
"On Margate Sands.
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
Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest
burning

The poem continues its condemnation of modern sexuality. In lines 292-305, the poem emphasizes the river's fallen state by quoting the voices of three different women. These are presumably the Thames river nymphs who "departed" earlier in Section III; they mirror the Rhine-maidens who sing this song in Wagner's opera to which this section alludes.

Unlike the happy Rhine-maidens, these nymphs have nothing good to report. The first describes "rais[ing her] knees," or losing her virginity, "on the floor of a narrow canoe." The second also describes having sex ("my heart under my feet" is a roundabout way of saying "lying down"), near the subway station at Moorgate. Afterwards, her lover "wept," apparently more horrified by their vulgarity than she seems to be: "What

should I resent?" The last nymph simply says that she "can connect / Nothing with nothing." Her perspective epitomizes the bleakness of the waste land, a place of "humble people" with "broken fingernails [and] dirty hands," where human connection is impossible.

Abruptly, in line 307, the section pivots into a fiery burst, as though the speaker (who now seems to be someone other than Tiresias) cannot take any more misery. "To Carthage then I came," the speaker cries, an allusion to St. Augustine's *Confessions*—the autobiographical writings detailing St. Augustine's sinful, lustful youth and conversion to Christianity, written around 400 CE. The full line explicitly cites "unholy love" as a torment.

This moment also brings readers back to the First Punic War between Carthage and Rome—mentioned way back in Section 1, when the speaker saw a solder he fought with at "Mylae," a famous naval battle that Rome won. Remember that this poem is in part a response to the horrors of World War I; here, the poem again reiterates the seeming endlessness of war, which appears throughout human history.

Then the speaker exclaims that he is "Burning burning burning burning," an excellent example of epizeuxis, and a particularly painful moment in the poem. He begs the Lord to "pluckest" him out. Fittingly, this is where Section III, "The Fire Sermon," ends. Burning with shame, the speaker essentially begs for death, which he sees as the only respite in the face of this lustful, degraded world.

BETWEEN LINES 312-313, LINES 313-322

IV. Death by Water
Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

Section IV, "Death by Water," is the shortest of "The Waste Land's" sections by far. At just 10 lines long, it recounts one story: that of "Phlebas the Phoenician," who has been dead for two weeks ("a fortnight"), drowned beneath the ocean waves.

This section is an excellent example of repetition in the poem, vividly recalling Madame Sosostris's prophecy from Section I, "Fear death by water," and her Tarot card of the drowned Phoenician sailor. He is now given a name, Phlebas, and a job: he used to work in shipping, as indicated by the mention of "profit and loss" in line 314. (He therefore may also be Mr. Eugenides, "the Smyrna merchant," from Section III.)

None of that matters now, however, since the ocean currents are "pick[ing] his bones in whispers." Indeed, Phlebas saw his life flash before his eyes as he "enter[ed] the whirlpool," and the poem implies that he may have regretted what he saw there. Unlike other dead or dying things in "The Waste Land," Phlebas does not come back to life. There is no chance of renewal, no second opportunity to make more meaning out of his life than a balance sheet can offer.

The speaker here is unidentified, but addresses readers directly. "Gentile or Jew," the speaker proclaims (in other words, no matter who you are) "consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you." The message is clear: you may believe that you "turn the wheel" of your own life, that by "look[ing] to windward" you chart your course and direct your fate—but Phlebas's body tells another story. Death comes for everyone, even those in the prime of their youth.

Phlebas's fate links together a number of the poem's themes—death, the hollowness of modern life, memory and the past, and even religion and spirituality. This section of the poem feels a bit like a parable, a Bible story meant to teach a lesson. It features neat end rhymes, like "swell" and "fell," "Jew" and "you," plus plenty of clear consonance and alliteration that make it sound almost like a nursery rhyme. Note, for example, the clear /f/, /d/, and /s/ sounds here:

> Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
> Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
> And the profit and loss.

There's plenty of assonance too, again adding to that sing-song sound that suggests a parable of sorts. Take the short /ih/, long /ay/, and /oo/ sounds here:

> Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
> He passed the stages of his age and youth
> Entering the whirlpool.
> Gentile or Jew
> O you ...

Like the Tarot card it references from earlier in the poem, this section's imagery ultimately issues a warning—a fitting interlude before the apocalyptic vision of Section V.

BETWEEN LINES 322-323, LINES 323-331

V. What the Thunder Said
After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

In Section V, "What the Thunder Said," Eliot ceases to use the waste land merely as a metaphor for modern society, and instead depicts it as a literal physical place. Gone are the opulent parlors and cramped apartments of modern London; gone are the city streets and rivers. Instead, readers are taken to an apocalyptic landscape struck by disaster and destruction.

First, however, in the section's first stanza, readers are treated to harrowing account of how the waste land has come to be. It's told after the fact, as the speaker looks back on a series of cataclysmic events: "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places ..."

Each of these lines are allusions to the Christian tradition, specifically the moment in time between when Jesus Christ was crucified ("agony in stony places") and his rebirth on Easter Sunday. But he is not yet reborn by this point in the poem, which dwells on the feeling of spiritual devastation Christ's death has caused, experienced by people both high and low: "The shouting and the crying / Prison and palace..." Distantly, thunder "reverberat[es]" over the mountains, but offers little respite from the terrifying truth that "He who was living is now dead" and as a result, "We who were living are now dying." This first stanza, and this section as a whole, are among the poem's most explicitly religious, comparing modern-day society's lack of spirituality to the devastation that followed Christ's crucifixion.

However, as the title of this section makes clear, Christianity is not the only religious tradition being referenced in Section V (or throughout the poem). "What the Thunder Said" is an allusion to Hinduism's holy texts, *The Upanishads*, which contain a fable or parable about "what the thunder says," which resurfaces later in this section.

Lines 328-329 ("He who was ... now dying") also recall the theme of death and rebirth. The blurring of the boundary between life and death is particularly reminiscent of Section I, in which many of the speakers believe themselves to be in limbo between life and death, and witness many other modern people who appear to be similarly isolated and alienated from the world, experiencing life as shallow, empty, and meaningless.

LINES 332-360

Here is no water but only rock
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 or 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 can 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 mountains
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
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But 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

If the first stanza of Section V is all about how the waste land came to be, then the second and third stanzas are dedicated to describing the waste land itself. "Here is no water but only rock," the speaker says. "Rock and no water and the sandy road ... winding above among the mountains / Which are mountains of rock without water / If there were water we should stop and drink."

A powerful example of stream-of-consciousness, these lines capture the desperate mindset of a parched speaker thirsting for water amid an apocalyptic landscape. Water is associated throughout the poem with purification, rebirth, and life, Over and over, the speaker repeats that there is no water to be found. The speaker is wasting away from thirst.

Like the other versions of the waste land readers have encountered earlier in the poem, physical pain is hardly the only challenge. "Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think," the speaker moans, suggesting that the mental degradation of the waste land is equally harrowing. The speaker gives way to almost hallucinatory repetition and nonsensical onomatopoeia: "If there were water / And no rock / If there were rock / And also water .... Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop drop."

Alliteration, consonance, and assonance play key roles in these stanzas, through the repetition of /w/, /r/, /o/, /t/, /k/, and /m/ sounds, as well as the proximity of "there" and "were" and "drink" and "think." The speaker, and the poem itself, is totally breaking down now, going in circles and unable to form coherent thoughts. The language itself echoes the speaker's experience of single-minded suffering. Note in just this one chunk how the speaker keeps repeating "rock," "water," and "mountain" (and when not repeating directly, painting an image of a dry, sandy, barren world):

Here is no water but only rock
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 or 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

Elsewhere, hissing sibilance evokes the harsh, dry, cracking landscape. For example, take "sullen faces sneer and snarl" in line 344 and "Not the cicada / And dry grass singing" in lines 354-355.

Lastly, as lines 343-345 demonstrate, human connection is even more impossible in this literal waste land than it was in the waste land's other, more metaphorical variations: "Red sullen faces sneer and snarl / From doors of mudcracked houses." As the famous line goes, other people are hell.

The speaker can't simply tune out the world and relax either; "one can neither stand nor lie nor sit," the speaker says (with the polysyndeton emphasizing how many things are impossible in this waste land). There isn't any quiet space to think, since the "thunder" still rumbles but doesn't bring with it any nourishing rain; it is "sterile," without the ability to bring life. This echoes the poem's talk of impotence and infertility throughout—its references to abortion, loveless sex, and the impotent Fisher King. The only thing the speaker can do in the face of this catastrophe is try to survive alone.

LINES 361-367

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt 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?

Lines 360-366 suggest that the speaker may not be as alone as it appears. Addressing a fellow traveler (but also readers, as though they too are making this journey), the speaker asks about the third person on the road. "When I count, there are only you and I together," the speaker explains, baffled, "But when I look ahead up the white road / There is always another one walking beside you."

In one of his footnotes, Eliot noted that this scene comes from a story he read about Sir Ernest Shackleton's journey to Antarctica, in which the freezing explorers hallucinated that an additional person had joined their group. But it has also been interpreted as an allusion to the Bible's Book of Luke, in which Jesus Christ walks alongside his disciples, but goes unrecognized, even by them.

This reading contributes to the poem's view of religious tradition as sorely lacking in the waste land. Modern people, the poem implies, lack the spiritual guidance to even see the presence of God (or Christ) in their lives. Indeed, the mysterious figure's "brown mantle, hooded" evokes Christian imagery of hooded monks or priests. The fact that the speaker cannot determine the figure's gender only further emphasizes the spiritual ignorance or blindness from which he (and other inhabitants of the waste land) suffer.

LINES 368-386

What is that sound high in the air
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
A woman drew her long black hair out tight
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 kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

Line 367 returns readers to the poem's apocalyptic vision of the waste land as a real, physical place. The speaker describes wailing mothers, with clear consonance evoking "that sound high in the air," i.e., the "Murmer of maternal lamentation." There are also ominous hordes of people advancing on the speaker, "cracked earth" reflecting the drought, and an unreachable horizon. The surroundings are so terrifying that the speaker struggles even to name them, phrasing the entire stanza (lines 367-377) in the form of a question: "What is that sound ... Who are those hooded hordes ... What is the city ..."?

But though the speaker can hardly believe his own eyes, there is no denying the presence of a "city over the mountains" whose destruction the speaker witnesses. The speaker describes explosive "bursts in the violet air" and falling towers, but is unable to determine which city it is. Instead, the speaker offers a list of potential places—"Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London"—all of which the speaker sums up as "Unreal." These lines suggest that in this modern age, *all* cities suffer in the same way as the "unreal city" of London throughout the poem. In other words, the isolation, alienation, brokenness,

death, and despair that have haunted London throughout the poem plague them *all*. And here in Section V these horrors become literally destructive, causing the cities to collapse.

The following stanza is full of haunting imagery: a woman uses her hair as strings upon which to play "whisper music"; "bats with baby faces" crawl the wrong way down a "blackened wall"; and upside-down towers hover in the air. The sounds of the poem add to the intensity of the imagery of these lines which are thick with alliteration, assonance, consonance, and repetition. Note the /b/ and /ay/ of "bats with baby faces," for example, or the way the woman's "black hair" is echoed by the "blackened wall" down which these bats crawl. The repetition of "down"/"downward" insists upon the direction of this movement, as if the world is plummeting and unstable:

> And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
> And upside down in air were towers

Meanwhile, sibilance adds a sinister hiss to the "voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells." These images all contribute to the ongoing portrayal of the waste land as a terrifying, unholy place (and serve as an important lead-up to the following stanza, in which the speaker reaches a chapel).

In particular, line 385, "voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells," brings back the symbol of water, again drawing a connection between drought and despair, especially through the personification of "exhausted" wells. Likewise, the personification of "tolling reminiscent bells" is not only a reminder of the bells encountered earlier, in Section III upon the Thames, but also reiterate the poem's concern with memory, nostalgia, and the past.

LINES 387-396

In this decayed hole among the mountains
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 lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

Lines 386-395 are crucial to "The Waste Land." They include the return of the motif of the Fisher King and Holy Grail, and mark the poem's pivot from themes of death and destruction to potential redemption and rebirth.

This stanza opens with the speaker stumbling upon an "empty chapel" in a "decayed hole among the mountains" that make up the waste land. In keeping with traditional stories of the Holy Grail, at first this chapel appears barren and empty, home only to the wind and "tumbled graves." The sounds of these lines—with their soft /s/ and /w/ consonance, humming /m/ sounds, and open long /o/ assonance—evokes the gentle, eerie whooshing and moaning of the wind through this place:

> In this decayed hole among the mountains
> 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.

It's worth noting here that, unlike other areas of the waste land, this is a far less terrifying place—"dry bones can harm no one," the speaker notes, a very different view of death than has come before. Nevertheless, the chapel does not seem to offer the speaker much hope, much like the religious symbols that have appeared earlier in the poem.

However, this turns out to be a final test for the speaker (and readers) to overcome, just like the legends of the Holy Grail. In those stories, a knight is only able to complete the quest to find the Holy Grail after entering the seemingly-empty Chapel Perilous and confronting the possibility that God does not exist. Only then, the stories say, will the Holy Grail reveal itself, enabling the healing of the Fisher King and the restoration of the waste land.

Line 394, therefore, is an allusion to this moment. Ever since the beginning of "The Waste Land," rain has been metaphorically associated with rebirth. When in line 394, "a flash of lightning" finally occurs, it heralds the arrival of "a damp gust / bringing rain."

This is a sharp contrast to the "dry sterile thunder without rain" that appears earlier in Section V (not to mention all the imagery of thirst and drought) and indicates that the waste land is on the cusp of restoration and healing, just like the Fisher King and kingdom of legend.

LINES 397-424

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder
DA
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
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor

In our empty rooms
DA
Dayadhvam:
I have heard the key
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, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
DA
Damyata:
The boat responded
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

The arrival of rain in line 395 triggers the entirety of the complex but important stanza that runs from lines 396-423 ("Ganga ... To controlling hands"). It opens with another river, the Ganges, sacred to Hindus, which has been "wait[ing] for rain," just like the Thames and other symbols of the waste land from earlier in the poem. Now, however, the thunder has arrived, bringing "black clouds" that promise rain, and with that rain, redemption, renewal, and rebirth. First, however, in keeping with the section title, the thunder has to have a few words with the speaker (and with readers).

"DA" is the onomatopoeia that the poem uses to capture the boom of the thunder. It's also the first syllable of three Sanskrit words: datta, dayadhvam, and damyata. In Eliot's original footnote, he cites the *Upanishads*, a holy Hindu text, as the source of this mantra, from a story in which a Hindu god explains to gods, humans, and demons how to live a good life. Eliot translates each word as "give, sympathize, control," respectively. But just in case readers don't read the footnotes, he also provides some metaphorical imagery to bring those meanings to life.

The first occurs over lines 402-408. "*Datta*: what have we given?" the speaker frets, speaking not just for himself but for readers, too. Nothing good, alas. "The awful daring of a moment's surrender / which an age of prudence can never retract" is a roundabout way of referring to lustful sex, a surrender that the speaker regrets but can unfortunately never take back.

Nevertheless, though these sins are "not to be found in our obituaries" or in others' memories, which gloss over the bad parts like a "beneficent" (or charitable, benevolent) "spider," or even in people's wills studied by "the lean solicitor" (or lawyer), they have left a permanent mark on humanity. "By this, and this only, we have existed," the speaker insists.

But the thunder speaks again in lines 411 and 412, offering another avenue for relief: "DA / Dayadhvam." Now, the image is a key, "turn[ing] in the door once and turn[ing] once only," offering one opportunity out of "prison." This is not a literal jail, however, but a metaphorical prison of the self, a prison of one's own making; indeed, the speaker tells readers that each person is "in his [own] prison / thinking of the key." Eliot translates "dayadhvam" as compassion, and here he urges readers to push past the prison of the individual ego and embrace compassion for others—unlike, say, Coriolanus, the Shakespearean character he alludes to in line 417.

Lastly, the thunder booms one final time: "DA / Damyata." This word translates as control, but in the *Upanishads* it's more of a self-control, a willingness to give over to a higher power. This metaphor is brought to life through the image of a boat "respond[ing] / Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar" as well as a "heart" which also "would have responded / Gaily," if it had ever been invited "to controlling hands." In other words, it takes an expert sailor to steer a ship—an expert sailor like God, for instance. Similarly, love and marriage can only succeed, these lines imply, when a heart is obedient to its husband's control.

That last image is more than a little sexist, but it's a definite improvement on the unhappy marriages that have preceded it in the poem. Likewise, the person who trusts in God (symbolized by a boat trusting an expert sailor) is more successful than poor drowned Phlebas who cared only for money, decomposing beneath the waves.

Ultimately, this section of the poem offers the possibility of renewal and redemption, as heralded by the thunder and symbolized by the arrival of rain, but only if the speaker and readers are wise enough to give up the bad behavior (like loveless sex) that marks modern society, and return to the spiritual traditions and cultural norms that guided the past.

LINES 425-435

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'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon
—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

The poem's final stanza wraps up its many symbols and allusions. For starters, the Fisher King is back. Once again, the speaker sits "upon the shore / Fishing," but this time, instead of gazing on a polluted Thames, "the arid plain [is] behind" him. The rain has come, and healed the speaker and his dominion, the waste land. "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" he wonders—the first hopeful question he has posed in the entire

poem!

The answer, presumably, is yes, because in the very next line, "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down," which evokes the innocence of the classic nursery rhyme, and literally dismantles the bridge upon which the poem first presented its view of modern society as dead and zombie-like.

"Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina," the poem continues, or, translated from Dante's Italian, "He hid himself in the fire which refines him." In other words, it may have been a painful process to burn and die, but it was also "refin[ing]," or purifying, enabling the speaker to be reborn and rise from the ashes.

Similarly, Philomela found new life in her transformation into a nightingale. Line 429, however, quotes from a Roman poem about Philomela in the moments before her transformation. Like this point in "The Waste Land," with the speaker sitting on the shore wondering if now is the time to set his lands in order, at that point in the poem, Philomela sits on the cusp of spring, renewal, and change, and looks hopefully ahead; the line translates from Latin as, "When shall I be as the swallow?"

As soon as the tower crumbles, line 430 seems to reply; as soon as the waste land comes to an end. This line translates from the French as "The Prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower," and is an allusion to the Tarot card that symbolizes apocalypse—but also rebirth, since catastrophe is necessary to start anew. Skipping ahead, line 432 also suggests the purifying power of revenge and destruction, alluding to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, an Elizabethan play in which a mad, bereaved father gets revenge against his son's murderers.

Amid all these allusions, the speaker interjects, "These fragments have I shored against my ruins." It's an explicit allusion to the many allusions that have come before—to the dizzying array of fragmented images, scenes, and quotations that Eliot and his many speakers have "shored" up, or amassed, in order to create a barrier between themselves and the ruinous modern world. Classical music, fine art, literary masterpieces, and the highlights of history need not be forgotten. If readers, like the poem's speakers, can remember them, then all hope is not lost.

The final two lines of the poem suggest that this strategy is effective. Once again, the speaker utters the mantra that signified rebirth and renewal. He then closes on three parting words: "Shantih shantih shantih." Eliot translated this Sanskrit term as "the peace that passeth understanding"—a peace so powerful and all-encompassing that it may even be beyond human understanding. Nevertheless, these lines suggest, if humans can find the wherewithal to turn back toward faith, tradition, and culture, then they might come closer to finding this meaningful peace.

SYMBOLS

WATER

Water is a consistent and recurrent symbol throughout "The Waste Land." The waste land suffers from lack of water, and water promises new life and rebirth. Water can douse the fires of lust and earthly passions, which the poem implies are a big factor in the moral depravity of modern life. At the same time, Madame Sosostris and the drowned sailor also serve as warnings about the *dangers* of water. All in all, water seems to represent the spiritual nourishment that the modern world so sorely needs, as well as purification and renewal—things the poem implies can be painful, and can come at a cost.

Let's break down the different kinds of watery symbolism that appears in the poem. First, there's rain, which is linked to both fertility and pain:

- "Spring rain" brings new life to the landscape but also results in the unwanted return of memory and desire. So bad is modern life that April showers bring about only more drudgery and pain, the poem suggests, as they stir up repressed feelings that the speaker would rather keep buried and "dried." Perhaps the speaker does not yet want to face the dull reality of modern life.
- Marie's childhood memories are likewise sprinkled with "a shower of rain," and in lines 37-40 the speaker remembers a lost love with her arms full of flowers and wet hair—but these are fleeting recollections of a time that has passed. The potential for new life—for genuine love and coupling—is gone in the modern waste land.

Madame Sosostris's tarot card reading then complicates water's symbolism, suggesting that *too much* water is also dangerous:

- She links the speaker to "the drowned Phoenician sailor," comparing his dead eyes to pearls from the bottom of the sea, and then instructs the speaker to "Fear death by water." Clearly, water also has ominous, threatening potential, which resurfaces in Section IV, "Death By Water."
- Here, the drowned sailor, now given a name, Phlebas, is meant to remind readers that everyone is subject to death—yes, even those "handsome and tall as you."
- Water is thus presented as something more powerful than human beings, and which doesn't care about "the profit and loss"—about anyone's financial success—nor about whether they are

"Gentile or Jew."

Then again, "death by water" can also mean death by *lack* of water—which is clearly what's happening in the present-day waste land:

- This is a place marked by drought and despair, where "the dry stone [offers] no sound of water." Nothing can grow or flourish in the waste land, except for death.
- Fittingly, this section lingers long over the absence of water, evoking the speaker's desperation in the face of such drought: "Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water ... there is no water." The lack of water implies a lack of vitality, faith, and morality.

The River Thames also plays a key role as a watery symbol:

- Remember that the poem loosely follows the legend of the Fisher King, whose own impotence results in the barrenness of his land. The Thames in the poem is also marked by barrenness and ruin, and takes on the same significance as the Fisher King's kingdom.
- For starters, the river is described as a literal waste land, a land full of trash: "the nymphs are departed," rats have overrun the riverbanks, and the trees that overhang the river have all lost their leaves. When privileged, frivolous elites— "the loitering heirs of city directors"—hang out there in the summer, they leave a bunch of waste behind—"empty bottles, sandwich papers, silk handkerchiefs," and so on. Water represents the *potential* for spiritual nourishment, yet there it has been polluted and tarnished by modern immorality. People have stomped all over their symbolic chance for redemption.
- As he sits by the Thames, the speaker describes himself as weeping "by the waters of Leman," in an echo of the Biblical moment when the exiled Hebrews sit beside the waters of Babylon and weep for their lost homeland, making an implicit connection between the Thames and the speaker's sense of loss and impotence.
- While he lingers there, "fishing in the dull canal," the speaker also muses over the "wreck" of his brother and his father's death, again recalling death by drowning (a shipwreck) and the metaphorical wreck of the Fisher King whose wound (or death) lays waste to his kingdom. All these references to shipwrecks (and allusions to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a play about a shipwreck) reiterate water's immense power over human life.
- Later, towards the end of Section III, the speaker returns to the Thames, which continues to symbolize the essence of this modern waste land: a place once visited by powerful, historical (though lovelorn) figures like Elizabeth and Leicester, but now the site of meaningless, vulgar sex among low-born people, "supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

Clearly, water accrues multiple meanings over the course of the poem, each new appearance adding another layer to the symbol. The poem's ending helps consolidate these many meanings, by introducing another suffering river:

- In line 396, the Ganges is described as "sunken," with "limp leaves" waiting for rain just like the barren trees by the Thames. But "then spoke the thunder" and a "damp gust bringing rain" moves down from the mountains and over the waste land.
- Here, the poem weaves in a Hindu mantra, comparing it to the sound of the storm's thunder and evoking rebirth as rain restores the river and the landscape. This suggests that the absence of water should be understood not only in the literal sense of drought, but also as a spiritual drought or absence.
- The return of the rain also marks the return of spirituality—which lines up with the legend of the Fisher King as well, when the Holy Grail, a cup that contains Christ's blood, is used to cure the impotent king. (The Holy Grail is also associated with Cups, the water-element suit in the Tarot, hearkening back to Madame Sosostris.) In both Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, then, water symbolizes renewal.

Fittingly, the poem's final stanza finds the speaker back on the riverbank, presumably of the Thames, where he last "sat upon the shore / Fishing." But now, the waste land is behind him, and he wonders, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" Like the Fisher King, the speaker has been restored by the rain's return, which means he can now look to the restoration of his land—the watery River Thames. London Bridge, which earlier represented isolation and alienation, is "falling down"; and the speaker, at last, finds "shantih," or peace.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "stirring / Dull roots with spring rain."
- **Line 9:** "With a shower of rain"
- **Lines 19-20:** "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?"
- **Line 24:** "And the dry stone no sound of water. "
- **Line 38:** "Your arms full, and your hair wet,"
- **Lines 46-48:** "Here, said she, / Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor, / (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)"
- **Line 55:** "Fear death by water."

- **Line 62:** "A crowd flowed over London Bridge"
- **Lines 174-175:** " The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank. "
- **Lines 175-176:** "The wind / Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed."
- **Line 177:** "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song."
- **Lines 178-180:** "The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed."
- **Lines 181-182:** "And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors; / Departed, have left no addresses."
- **Lines 183-185:** "By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . . / Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song, / Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long."
- **Lines 188-190:** "A rat crept softly through the vegetation / Dragging its slimy belly on the bank / While I was fishing in the dull canal"
- **Lines 191-193:** "On a winter evening round behind the gashouse / Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / And on the king my father's death before him."
- **Line 221:** "At the violet hour, "
- **Lines 221-222:** "the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,"
- **Line 258:** ""This music crept by me upon the waters""
- **Lines 267-279:** "The river sweats / Oil and tar / The barges drift / 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 / Wallala leialala"
- **Lines 280-292:** "Elizabeth and Leicester / 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"
- **Lines 295-296:** "By Richmond I raised my knees / Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.""
- **Between Lines 312-313:** "IV. Death by Water"
- **Lines 313-322:** "Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead, / Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss. / A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his age and youth / Entering the whirlpool. / Gentile or Jew / O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you."
- **Lines 332-360:** "Here is no water but only rock / 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 or 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 can 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 mountains / 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 / And water / A spring / A pool among the rock / If there were the sound of water only / Not the cicada / And dry grass singing / But 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"
- **Line 386:** "And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells."
- **Lines 395-396:** "In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain"
- **Lines 397-399:** "Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves / Waited for rain, while the black clouds / Gathered far distant, over Himavant."
- **Line 401:** "Then spoke the thunder"
- **Lines 420-424:** "The boat responded / 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"
- **Lines 425-427:** "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?"
- **Line 428:** "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down"

FIRE

Fire is another symbol in "The Waste Land" that holds multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings. Fire in the poem comes to represents dangerous lust and the torment of earthly desires, but also purification. Fire is most strongly represented in Section III, aptly titled "The Fire Sermon":

- This is named after a sermon the Buddha gave preaching against the fires of lust and other passions that destroy people and prevent their rebirth or renewal. Ironically, the section lingers on such "fires" in order to convey the hellish experience of living in the broken modern world. Its main scene involves a typist and her lover having meaningless sex that borders on rape, all of which is witnessed by a prophet of Greek myth who spies on them like a peeping tom.
- The section ends with an allusion to St. Augustine's

Confessions: "To Carthage then I came" which in the original source continues, "where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears." These unholy loves, depicted throughout the section, leave the speaker "Burning burning burning burning" and begging the Lord to "pluckest [him] out," or end his life. His sins, and those of the grotesque modern world around him, are clearly tormenting him.

This torment is exacerbated in Section V, where "torchlight red on sweaty faces" evokes the fires of hell.

- Fire expands as a symbol in this section, encompassing not just literal flames but all kinds of heat and agony. The horrific drought in the mountains suggests heat and burning; it causes "red sullen faces [to] sneer and snarl" in agony and results in "dry grass" and "cracked earth."
- Lines 373-377 evokes the apocalypse, with all its "cracks and reforms and bursts," suggesting the burning agonies of explosive fire striking a number of fallen cities.

Fire also appears in Section II, where it does not yet represent pure hellfire. Candles light the room of a wealthy, anxious woman who frustrates the speaker with her neediness.

- Her hair "spread[s] out in fiery points" as she brushes it in the firelight, and her words alternate between "glowing" and being "savagely still," both of which add to the fire's brutal and painful symbolism.
- Clearly their relationship is broken beyond repair, and the "candle-flames [flinging] their smoke into the laqueria" and reflecting the room's ominous opulence only add to the claustrophobia of the scene, and the sense that their marriage or romance is like a burning house, falling apart while they are still trapped inside.

But at the very end of the poem, fire takes on a new meaning.

- Quoting from Dante's *Purgatorio* in the original Italian, line 428 translates to "He hid himself in the fire which refines them."
- In other words, fire burns, but in that burning, contains the possibility of *purification*. Like a wildfire that razes a forest but leaves behind the room and rich ash needed for new growth, the fires of hell also contain the potential for rebirth and renewal.
- Though the waste land suffers from fires both metaphorical and literal—burning passion and burning drought—they set the stage for starting anew.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 21-23:** " you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter"
- **Line 51:** "Here is the man with three staves"
- **Line 77:** "burnished throne"
- **Lines 82-84:** "the flames of sevenbranched candelabra / Reflecting light upon the table as / The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,"
- **Lines 91-93:** "In fattening the prolonged candle-flames, / Flung their smoke into the laquearia, / Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling."
- **Lines 108-110:** "Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still."
- **Between Lines 173-174:** " / III. The Fire Sermon"
- **Line 206:** "So rudely forc'd."
- **Lines 210-215:** "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant / Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants / C.i.f. London: documents at sight, / Asked me in demotic French / To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel / Followed by a weekend at the Metropole."
- **Lines 238-243:** "Endeavours to engage her in caresses / Which still are unreproved, if undesired. / Flushed and decided, he assaults at once; / Exploring hands encounter no defence; / His vanity requires no response, / And makes a welcome of indifference."
- **Lines 293-300:** ""Trams and dusty trees. / Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees / Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe." / "My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart / Under my feet. After the event / He wept. He promised a 'new start.' / I made no comment. What should I resent?""
- **Line 308:** "To Carthage then I came"
- **Lines 309-312:** "Burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest / burning"
- **Line 323:** "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces"
- **Lines 345-346:** "But red sullen faces sneer and snarl / From doors of mudcracked houses"
- **Lines 374-378:** "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal"
- **Line 429:** "Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina"

TAROT CARDS

Tarot cards appear throughout "The Waste Land," most prominently in the first section, when the speaker has his cards read by the fortune-teller Madame Sosostris. Her "wicked pack of cards" foretell a number of the people and events that pop up throughout the poem. Tarot reading is a real fortune-telling practice that dates back to the

1400s, in which every card is associated with various allegorical images and meanings, which are then interpreted within the context of the reading recipient's life. This is not to say that the poem treats Tarot or prophecy as guaranteed messengers of truth; in fact, its cynical tone hints that Madame Sosostris might be a fraud.

Nevertheless, the poem clearly finds value and meaning in the imagery offered by the Tarot deck.

- "The Wheel" card represents the dizzying wheel of fortune, which fits the poem's obsession with the ups and downs of human life.
- Likewise, "the man with three staves," or the Three of Wands of card, which depicts a man setting out on an adventure, echoes the poem's interest in exploring spirituality, memory, history, and even death as adventures that add meaning and purpose to life.
- Later, at the very end of the poem, there is an allusion to The Tower card, in which "The Prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower" represents cataclysmic destruction, and the change that follows.

Interestingly, the cards the poem describes are a mix of real Tarot cards and invented ones.

- Most notably, "the drowned Phoenician Sailor," which Madame Sosostris declares to be the speaker's card, does not exist in the real Tarot deck. Neither does Belladonna, The Lady of the Rocks, nor the one-eyed merchant and the blank card that represents "something he carries on his back."
- Instead, these cards seem to resurface within the poem itself: the drowned sailor is Phlebas of Section IV, and the one-eyed merchant recalls Mr. Eugenides, the "Smyrna merchant" who propositions the speaker. Belladonna, whose name suggests both a type of poisonous flower as well as the Virgin Mary, likely refers to the woman in Section II who represents both romance and its doom.

But the card with perhaps the most symbolic resonance is "The Hanged Man," which is a real Tarot card, and which Madame Sosostris is unable to find when giving the speaker his reading.

- In Tarot, the Hanged Man hangs not by his neck but upside-down by his foot; he represents waiting, a period of suspension, as well as the idea of seeing things from a new angle or perspective. Like the speaker, the Hanged Man can observe the (broken, alienated) world around him, but is powerless to do anything about it.
- He is also linked with the Fisher King, into whose shoes the speaker often slips. The Fisher King is another figure in suspension, waiting to be cured so his land can be restored; it is his absence, suggested by the missing Tarot card, which results in the barrenness and ruin of the waste land.
- Lastly, the poem's suggestion that renewed spirituality is needed to restore the waste land also reflects the Tarot card's emphasis on seeing the world from new perspectives.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 43-59:** "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante, / 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!) / 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."
- **Lines 108-110:** "Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still."
- **Lines 124-125:** " I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes."
- **Lines 210-215:** "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant / Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants / C.i.f. London: documents at sight, / Asked me in demotic French / To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel / Followed by a weekend at the Metropole."
- **Between Lines 312-313:** "IV. Death by Water"
- **Lines 313-322:** "Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead, / Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss. / A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his age and youth / Entering the whirlpool. / Gentile or Jew / O you who turn the wheel and look to windward, / Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you."
- **Line 375:** "Falling ," "towers"
- **Line 431:** "Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie"

MUSIC AND SINGING

Music and singing appear throughout "The Waste Land" in various forms. Fundamentally, the poem differentiates between classical music that represents the truly meaningful art of a bygone era, and popular music that

symbolizes the shallowness and meaningless of modern mass culture.

Music first appears in Section I in the form of lyrics from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*:

> *Frisch weht der Wind*
> *Der Heimat zu*
> *Mein Irisch Kind,*
> *Wo weilest du?*

These lyrics (which translate to: "Fresh blows the wind / For home; / My Irish child, / Where are you waiting?") evoke the theme of lost love and introduce the speaker's recollection of his own lost love, "the hyacinth girl." The lines are left in their original German in order to signify the kind of classical, elite art that achieves real depth of feeling—albeit feelings of sadness and loss. These emotions nevertheless remain out of the speaker's reach ("I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing" he says) but only because he lives in the waste land of modern society, rather than in the past when such art was the norm.

By contrast, Section II introduces popular music, using a line from a well-known pop song from Eliot's own era: "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag." The lines that follow—"It's so elegant / so intelligent," with their neat rhyme scheme and silly aspirations of grandeur—are pure sarcasm, and speak directly to the poem's representation of pop culture as shallow.

This is true of the next pop music reference as well, in Section III, when lyrics from a popular World War I ballad suddenly interrupt the speaker while he sits musing by the River Thames:

> O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
> And on her daughter
> They wash their feet in soda water

These lyrics don't make much sense, but that's the point. The way the song suddenly and pointlessly ruptures the speaker's train of thought symbolizes the way the noise of modern life distracts from deeper thought, which in turn prevents people from recognizing that they are living in a broken, alienated society.

In fact, a typist in Section III decides to turn on some music after having just endured an unwanted sexual encounter for precisely that reason. "Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass: / 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over" before she "smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone." By turning on the gramophone, the typist purposefully prevents her brain from forming any other unwanted thoughts, including a closer examination of the bad sexual experience she's just had.

In the lines that follow, Eliot alludes to yet another Wagner opera, the *Götterdämmerung*. This time, however, he substitutes his own lyrics, polluting the classical form (though he does keep "Weialala leia / Wallala leialala," the chorus from the song "The Rhine-Maidens"). These lines are all about how history and fine art have been degraded by the vulgarity of modern life. The inclusion of actual singing evokes the sunny experience of singing along to a song, even as it is contrasted against references to how much the world has changed for the worse.

This is perhaps symbolized most clearly by lines 292 to 306, which are the songs of "departed river nymphs," or Wagner's three river maidens, all of whom tell stories of lust and degradation. Once again, music literally symbolizes defilement of modern society, with Eliot proving the point by deliberately laying waste to Wagner's opera.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 31-34:** " Frisch weht der Wind / / Der Heimat zu / / Mein Irisch Kind, / / Wo weilest du?"
- **Lines 42-42:** "Oed' und leer das Meer / ."
- **Lines 99-103:** "The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / 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."
- **Lines 129-131:** "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag— / It's so elegant / So intelligent"
- **Lines 200-203:** "O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter / And on her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water / Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!"
- **Lines 204-207:** "Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd. / Tereu"
- **Lines 250-257:** "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'm glad it's over." / When lovely woman stoops to folly and / Paces about her room again, alone, / She smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone."
- **Lines 258-262:** ""This music crept by me upon the waters" / 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 a mandoline"
- **Lines 267-292:** "The river sweats / Oil and tar / The barges drift / 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 / Wallala leialala / Elizabeth and Leicester / 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"

- **Lines 293-307:** ""Trams and dusty trees. / Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees / Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe." / "My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart / Under my feet. After the event / He wept. He promised a 'new start.' / I made no comment. What should I resent?" / "On Margate Sands. / I can connect / Nothing with nothing. / The broken fingernails of dirty hands. / My people humble people who expect / Nothing." / la la"
- **Lines 393-394:** "Only a cock stood on the rooftree / Co co rico co co rico"
- **Lines 430-430:** "Quando fiam uti chelidon / —O swallow swallow"

THE CHANGE OF PHILOMEL

"The Waste Land" shines a spotlight on the figure of Philomela, a girl from Greek myth. In the original myth, which lines in Section II allude to, she is raped by a "barbarous king" who cuts out her tongue, before the god Apollo transforms her into a nightingale. The poem introduces Philomela's story through a painting hanging on a wall in Section II, which transfixes the speaker so much that he refers back to her several times throughout the poem.

When he does, it is by quoting Philomela's birdsong, usually represented as "Jug, jug." This refrain reoccurs throughout the poem as a symbol of the "inviolable" (or unchangeable, unbreakable) "voice" of someone who has undergone transformation in response to horror—though, as in section II, it often falls on deaf ears, since modern society is so ill-equipped to recognize true art or culture.

One version of Philomela's myth can be found in the Roman poet Ovid's collection *The Metamorphoses*. The poem's frequent allusions to Philomela hints, therefore, at its interest in rebirth and renewal, acts of transformation that take place after death has put an end to the old ways. That Philomela is first stripped of her voice speaks to the poem's concerns about modern-day society losing its way through forces beyond its control. That she is able to sing again, albeit in a new form, hints at hope for the waste land as well.

It's fitting, then, that the final stanza of the poem includes a line from another classic Latin poem about Philomel, in which she wonders (pre-transformation) when spring will come, because when it does, she can "cease to be silent." In this sense, Philomel serves as both an allusion and an extended metaphor for the same transformation the waste land must undergo in order to be restored.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 99-103:** "The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / 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."
- **Lines 204-207:** "Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd. / Tereu"
- **Lines 430-430:** "Quando fiam uti chelidon / —O swallow swallow"

POETIC DEVICES

ALLUSION

"The Waste Land" is jam-packed with allusions—so many, in fact, that Eliot included footnotes to help readers understand some of them! These references include other literary works, but also music, history, and art. The poem's allusions add depth, richness, and complexity to its themes, which include death and rebirth, the brokenness of modern life, and spirituality and religion.

Literary allusions are foremost among Eliot's references. He quotes from the poet Charles Baudelaire (for example, "You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!" in line 76); references Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*; alludes to works by the playwrights John Webster, Thomas Kyd, and Thomas Middleton, including naming Section II after Middleton's play *A Game at Chess*; and of course references William Shakespeare throughout, including his plays *The Tempest*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, and *Coriolanus*.

The Roman poet Ovid's famous collection *The Metamorphoses* receives quite a lot of attention through repeated allusions to its poem the "Rape of Philomel" in Sections II, III, and IV and the appearance in Section III of Tiresias, the blind prophet, who is a character from Ovid. Aldous Huxley, Edmund Spenser, Andrew Marvell, John Day, Paul Verlaine, Oliver Goldsmith, Herman Hesse, John Milton, and Virgil are among the other poets, playwrights, and essayists Eliot alludes to. All of these literary references are used to enrich the poem's vision of a hellish, broken modern world.

Throughout the text, Eliot also alludes to many portions of the Bible, including the books of Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and Psalms. He also alludes to the *Upanishads*, holy Hindu texts, and to The Fire Sermon (the title of Section II) which was preached by the Buddha. A brief quote from Saint Augustine's *Confessions* appears in lines 307 and 309. These allusions are particularly vital for making Eliot's point that the modern world has lost touch with spiritual guidance. There are also many references to the Christian tradition of the Fisher King and the Holy Grail. In particular, the poem's title is likely an allusion to

Jessie L. Weston's 1920 book *From Ritual to Romance*, which was a history of ancient fertility myths and included an entire chapter on the British myth of The Fisher King.

Operas by the composer Richard Wagner are alluded to twice in "The Waste Land." First, in Section I, Eliot quotes five lines directly from *Tristan und Isolde*, underscoring the theme of lost love. Then, in Section III, the poem alludes to the "Rhine-maidens" song from the *Götterdämmerung* but replaces all of the lyrics with Eliot's own words, except for the chorus, "Weialalala leia." In contrast, Eliot also references pop music, including "The Mysterious Rag," in lines 128-130, a hit from the popular turn-of-the-century show, Ziegfield's Follies. There also an allusion to the nursery rhyme "London Bridge Is Falling Down" at the end of the poem.

In addition, "The Waste Land" is littered with references to history and physical places. The battle of Mylae referenced in line 70 took place during the Punic Wars in 260 B.C.E., but is used as a stand-in for World War I, which also looms large over the poem. Both wars come to represent the perils of greed and destruction. The Ionic columns of the St. Magnus Martyr Church (which is a real place) in line 265 hearken back to England's ancient past, as do the allusions in the lines that follow to Queen Elizabeth I and her alleged lover Robert Leicester; the River Thames; the neighborhoods of Highbury, Richmond, and Kew; the subway station Moorgate; and the seaside town of Margate. Other locations mentioned in the poem include the real-life Cannon Street and Metropole Hotels, various streets throughout London, cities named in lines 375-376, and of course London Bridge itself.

Last but not least, the poem alludes to the fortune-telling practice, Tarot, including many individual Tarot cards like The Wheel of Fortune and The Hanged Man. The practice of reading Tarot is also heavily dependent on allusions and allegory, in which fortune-tellers interpret the cards' imagery as metaphors for life, so in some ways this allusion is self-referential, pointing the poem's own habit of using others' lines, images, ideas, and concepts to interpret the modern world.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "Starnbergersee"
- **Line 20:** "Son of man,"
- **Lines 22-23:** "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,"
- **Line 25:** "There is shadow under this red rock,"
- **Lines 31-34:** " Frisch weht der Wind / / Der Heimat zu / / Mein Irisch Kind, / / Wo weilest du?"
- **Line 35:** "hyacinths "
- **Lines 42-42:** "Oed' und leer das Meer / ."
- **Line 43:** "Sosostris"
- **Line 49:** "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,"
- **Line 51:** "Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,"
- **Line 55:** "The Hanged Man"
- **Lines 63-64:** "I had not thought death had undone so many. / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,"
- **Line 70:** "Mylae"
- **Lines 74-76:** ""Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again! / "You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!""
- **Between Lines 76-77:** " / II. A Game of Chess"
- **Line 77:** "like a burnished throne"
- **Line 92:** "laquearia"
- **Lines 99-100:** "The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced;"
- **Line 115:** "in rats' alley"
- **Line 118:** " The wind under the door."
- **Line 125:** "Those are pearls that were his eyes."
- **Lines 129-131:** "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag— / It's so elegant / So intelligent"
- **Line 138:** "a game of chess,"
- **Line 173:** "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night."
- **Between Lines 173-174:** " / III. The Fire Sermon"
- **Lines 176-177:** "The nymphs are departed. / Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song."
- **Line 183:** "By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . ."
- **Line 186:** "But at my back in a cold blast I hear"
- **Line 190:** "I was fishing in the dull canal"
- **Lines 192-193:** "Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / And on the king my father's death before him."
- **Lines 197-198:** "But at my back from time to time I hear / The sound of horns and motors"
- **Lines 198-199:** "which shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring."
- **Lines 200-202:** "O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter / And on her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water"
- **Line 203:** "Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!"
- **Lines 204-207:** "Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd. / Tereu"
- **Line 214:** "Cannon Street Hotel"
- **Line 215:** "the Metropole."
- **Lines 221-222:** "the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,"
- **Lines 229-230:** "I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—"
- **Line 235:** "Bradford millionaire"
- **Lines 244-247:** "And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed; / I who have sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of

the dead"
- **Line 254:** "When lovely woman stoops to folly"
- **Line 258:** ""This music crept by me upon the waters""
- **Lines 267-292:** " The river sweats / Oil and tar / The barges drift / 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 / Wallala leialala / Elizabeth and Leicester / 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"
- **Line 294:** "Highbury ," "Richmond and Kew"
- **Line 297:** "Moorgate"
- **Line 301:** "Margate Sands"
- **Line 308:** "To Carthage then I came"
- **Lines 309-312:** "Burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest / burning"
- **Between Lines 322-323:** " / V. What the Thunder Said"
- **Lines 323-329:** "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places / The shouting and the crying / Prison and palace and reverberation / Of thunder of spring over distant mountains / He who was living is now dead"
- **Line 355:** " Not the cicada"
- **Line 361:** "Who is the third who walks always beside you?"
- **Line 368:** "What is that sound high in the air"
- **Line 390:** "There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home."
- **Line 394:** "Co co rico co co rico"
- **Line 397:** "Ganga "
- **Line 399:** "Himavant"
- **Lines 401-403:** "Then spoke the thunder / DA / Datta: / what have we given?"
- **Line 409:** "Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider"
- **Lines 412-413:** "DA / Dayadhvam: / I have heard the key"
- **Line 418:** "Coriolanus"
- **Lines 419-420:** "DA / Damyata: / The boat responded"
- **Lines 425-426:** "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me"
- **Line 427:** "Shall I at least set my lands in order?"
- **Lines 428-431:** "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down / Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina / Quando fiam uti chelidon / —O swallow swallow / Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie"
- **Lines 433-435:** "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe. / Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration occurs frequently throughout the poem. Often this draws connections between words and phrases. For instance, the poem's Sanskrit words "Datta, dayadhvam, damyata" (which Eliot translates as "give, sympathize, control") use the alliteration of the hard /d/ sound to link these three concepts—each of which, the poem implies, is required to live a good life. Likewise, the intense alliteration in the poem's first stanza sonically connects all the concepts being presented:

> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.
> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers.

The /l/ sound connects the flowers ("lilacs") to the "dead land" and a "little life"; "memory and desire" connect sonically with "dull roots," which in turn connect with "spring rain"; "winter" is linked to "warmth"; etc. As these lines show, alliteration weaves through the poem's lines, creating a sense of cohesiveness as it does so.

Alliteration also is used to reflect the poem's tone and content itself. For example, when Section IV repeats the words "rock and water" over and over again through the stanza, the /r/ and /w/ sounds become overwhelming in their alliteration, much like the speaker's thirst. The mixture of /s/, /k/, and /t/ sounds here (which also reappear within broader consonance) create a hissing, spitting sound that suggests the speaker's hoarseness without water and his disgust at this landscape. The repetition of sounds in general in this entire section of the poem emphasizes the speaker's inability to think of anything beyond the desire for water; the speaker circles around the same sounds obsessively, because he can't think about anything else. Take lines 339-344:

> Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
> Here one can 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 mountains
> But red sullen faces sneer and snarl

A similar thing happens in Section IV, which is so full of

alliteration (and assonance and consonance) that it sounds almost like a nursery rhyme or parable—which is part of the point! Take even the /f/ of the first lines here:

> Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
> Forgot ...

Moments like lines 45-46's description of Madame Sosostris as the "wisest woman in Europe / with a wicked pack of cards" use alliteration to create consistency and flow in a poem that is otherwise marked by inconsistency, given that the speakers, locations, subjects, and themes change frequently and without warning. (The /w/ sounds here also make the phrase feel ever so slightly silly or tongue-in-cheek, which makes sense given the speaker's seeming distrust towards Madame Sosostris.)

Similarly, in Section III, note the repeated /en/ and short /eh/ sounds of "The meal is ended ... endeavours to engage her ... exploring hands encounter ..." in the scene between the typist and her lover, as well as the alliteration of "unreproved, if undesired." The use of this poetic device unifies the scene, and grounds readers in the moment for as long as it lasts.

The same can be said throughout the poem, though the alliterative sounds and syllables vary widely. Just about every stanza uses alliteration for cohesion, lending the poem a musical quality even as it jars in a number of other ways.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “Lilacs,” “dead,” “land,” “mixing”
- **Line 3:** “Memory ,” “desire,” “stirring”
- **Line 4:** “Dull,” “roots ,” “spring,” “rain”
- **Line 5:** “Winter ,” “kept,” “warm,” “covering”
- **Line 6:** “forgetful ,” “snow,” “feeding”
- **Line 7:** “little life”
- **Line 8:** “Summer ,” “surprised,” “Starnbergersee”
- **Line 9:** “stopped ”
- **Line 10:** “sunlight”
- **Line 13:** “when we were”
- **Line 16:** “we went”
- **Line 19:** “roots ,” “branches ”
- **Line 20:** “stony ,” “rubbish,” “Son ”
- **Line 21:** “say”
- **Line 22:** “broken ,” “sun ,” “beats”
- **Line 23:** “dead ”
- **Line 24:** “dry ,” “stone ,” “sound”
- **Line 25:** “shadow,” “red rock”
- **Line 26:** “shadow,” “red rock”
- **Line 27:** “show”
- **Line 28:** “shadow ”
- **Line 29:** “shadow ”
- **Line 39:** “neither”
- **Line 40:** “nor,” “knew nothing”
- **Line 41:** “Looking,” “light”
- **Line 42:** “leer”
- **Line 45:** “wisest woman”
- **Line 46:** “With ,” “wicked ”
- **Line 53:** “blank,” “back”
- **Line 54:** “forbidden ,” “find”
- **Line 55:** “Fear ”
- **Line 60:** “Unreal”
- **Line 61:** “Under,” “fog ,” “winter ”
- **Line 62:** “flowed ”
- **Line 64:** “were ”
- **Line 65:** “fixed ,” “feet”
- **Line 66:** “Flowed ,” “William”
- **Line 67:** “where”
- **Line 68:** “With ,” “final ”
- **Line 73:** “frost ,” “disturbed ”
- **Line 74:** “Dog ,” “friend ”
- **Line 75:** “dig ”
- **Line 76:** “frère”
- **Line 78:** “Glowed ,” “glass”
- **Line 80:** “golden ”
- **Line 85:** “poured ,” “profusion”
- **Line 87:** “strange ,” “synthetic ,” “perfumes”
- **Line 89:** “sense ,” “stirred ”
- **Line 90:** “freshened”
- **Line 91:** “fattening,” “candle,” “flames”
- **Line 92:** “Flung ”
- **Line 93:** “coffered”
- **Line 94:** “fed ,” “copper”
- **Line 95:** “framed,” “coloured ”
- **Line 96:** “sad ,” “swam”
- **Line 98:** “sylvan scene”
- **Line 100:** “So ”
- **Line 103:** “Jug Jug”
- **Line 104:** “withered ,” “stumps ,” “time”
- **Line 105:** “Were ,” “told,” “walls,” “staring ”
- **Line 106:** “Leaned,” “leaning”
- **Line 107:** “Footsteps ,” “stair”
- **Line 108:** “firelight”
- **Line 109:** “Spread ,” “fiery ”
- **Line 110:** “words,” “would ,” “savagely ,” “still”
- **Line 111:** “Stay ”
- **Line 112:** “Speak ,” “speak,” “Speak”
- **Line 113:** “What ,” “thinking ,” “thinking,” “What”
- **Line 114:** “what ,” “Think”
- **Line 117:** “What”
- **Line 118:** “wind ”
- **Line 119:** “What ,” “noise ,” “now,” “What ,” “wind ”
- **Line 120:** “Nothing ,” “nothing”
- **Line 122:** “know ,” “nothing,” “nothing”
- **Line 123:** “Nothing”
- **Line 126:** “not,” “nothing ”
- **Line 132:** “What,” “What ”
- **Line 133:** “walk ”

- **Line 134:** “With ,” “What ,” “shall ”
- **Line 135:** “What shall we”
- **Line 136:** “water ”
- **Line 137:** “closed car”
- **Line 139:** “waiting ”
- **Line 141:** “mince my,” “myself”
- **Line 146:** “set”
- **Line 147:** “said,” “swear”
- **Line 171:** “Goonight ,” “Goonight,” “Goonight ,” “Goonight”
- **Line 172:** “Ta ta,” “Goonight,” “Goonight”
- **Line 173:** “Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.”
- **Line 174:** “broken,” “last ,” “leaf”
- **Line 175:** “Clutch ,” “sink ,” “wet,” “bank,” “wind”
- **Line 176:** “Crosses ,” “brown ,” “nymphs ,” “departed”
- **Line 177:** “Sweet ,” “Thames,” “softly,” “till ,” “song”
- **Line 178:** “bears ,” “bottles,” “sandwich”
- **Line 179:** “Silk ,” “boxes,” “cigarette ”
- **Line 180:** “testimony ,” “summer,” “nights,” “nymphs ,” “departed”
- **Line 181:** “directors”
- **Line 182:** “Departed,” “left”
- **Line 183:** “waters ,” “Leman,” “wept ”
- **Line 184:** “Sweet ,” “Thames,” “softly ,” “till ,” “song”
- **Line 185:** “Sweet ,” “Thames,” “softly,” “speak ,” “loud,” “long”
- **Line 186:** “But ,” “back ,” “blast ”
- **Line 187:** “bones,” “spread ,” “ear ,” “ear”
- **Line 189:** “Dragging,” “belly ,” “bank”
- **Line 190:** “dull,” “canal”
- **Line 191:** “behind ”
- **Line 192:** “king ,” “brother’s ”
- **Line 193:** “king,” “death,” “before ”
- **Line 194:** “bodies ,” “low ,” “damp ,” “ground”
- **Line 195:** “bones ,” “little,” “low,” “dry garret,”
- **Line 196:** “Rattled,” “rat’s,” “year ,” “year”
- **Line 197:** “But ,” “back ,” “time ,” “time ,” “hear”
- **Line 198:** “sound ,” “horns ,” “bring”
- **Line 199:** “Sweeney,” “spring”
- **Line 202:** “wash,” “water”
- **Lines 204-205:** “Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug”
- **Line 212:** “documents”
- **Line 213:** “demotic ”
- **Line 216:** “when ,” “back”
- **Line 217:** “when,” “waits”
- **Line 218:** “taxi ,” “throbbing ,” “waiting”
- **Line 219:** “Tiresias,” “though ,” “blind,” “throbbing ,” “between ,” “two ”
- **Line 220:** “breasts,” “see”
- **Line 221:** “strives”
- **Line 222:** “brings ,” “sailor ,” “sea”
- **Line 223:** “typist ,” “teatime,” “lights”
- **Line 224:** “lays”
- **Line 228:** “Stockings,” “slippers,” “stays”
- **Line 233:** “small,” “stare”
- **Line 234:** “sits”
- **Line 235:** “silk”
- **Line 237:** “ended”
- **Line 238:** “Endeavours ,” “engage ”
- **Line 239:** “unreproved,” “undesired”
- **Line 240:** “assaults ”
- **Line 241:** “Exploring ,” “encounter ”
- **Line 245:** “bed”
- **Line 246:** “below ,” “wall”
- **Line 247:** “walked”
- **Line 248:** “Bestows ”
- **Line 250:** “looks ”
- **Line 251:** “Hardly ,” “aware ,” “lover”
- **Line 252:** “Her,” “allows ,” “half”
- **Line 254:** “lovely ”
- **Line 255:** “again,” “alone”
- **Line 256:** “hair ,” “automatic ,” “hand”
- **Line 258:** “waters”
- **Line 259:** “Strand,” “Street”
- **Line 260:** “City ,” “city,” “sometimes”
- **Line 263:** “within”
- **Line 264:** “Where,” “where ,” “walls”
- **Line 265:** “Magnus Martyr”
- **Line 270:** “turning tide”
- **Line 273:** “swing,” “spar”
- **Line 275:** “Drifting ”
- **Line 276:** “Down ”
- **Line 277:** “Dogs”
- **Lines 278-279:** “Weialala leia / Wallala leialala”
- **Line 282:** “stern ”
- **Line 283:** “shell”
- **Line 284:** “Red”
- **Line 286:** “Rippled ,” “shores”
- **Line 287:** “wind”
- **Line 288:** “stream”
- **Line 290:** “White ”
- **Line 293:** “Trams,” “trees”
- **Line 294:** “Richmond ”
- **Line 295:** “Richmond ,” “raised ,” “knees”
- **Line 296:** “narrow”
- **Line 297:** “feet ,” “Moorgate”
- **Line 298:** “feet”
- **Line 301:** “Margate ”
- **Line 302:** “can connect”
- **Line 303:** “Nothing ,” “nothing”
- **Line 305:** “people ,” “people ”
- **Line 306:** “Nothing”
- **Line 308:** “Carthage ,” “came”
- **Line 309:** “Burning burning burning burning”

- **Line 310:** “O Lord Thou pluckest”
- **Line 311:** “O Lord Thou pluckest”
- **Line 312:** “burning”
- **Line 313:** “Phlebas,” “Phoenician,” “fortnight ”
- **Line 314:** “Forgot ,” “sea ”
- **Line 315:** “profit”
- **Line 316:** “sea”
- **Line 317:** “Picked ,” “whispers,” “fell”
- **Line 318:** “passed ”
- **Line 319:** “whirlpool”
- **Line 321:** “turn ,” “wheel ,” “to ,” “windward”
- **Line 322:** “who was once,” “tall ”
- **Line 323:** “sweaty”
- **Line 324:** “silence”
- **Line 325:** “stony,” “places”
- **Line 327:** “Prison ,” “palace”
- **Line 328:** “spring”
- **Line 329:** “who was”
- **Line 330:** “We who were”
- **Line 331:** “With ,” “patience”
- **Line 332:** “water ,” “rock”
- **Line 333:** “Rock,” “water ,” “road”
- **Line 334:** “road,” “winding ,” “above ,” “among ,” “mountains”
- **Line 335:** “Which ,” “mountains,” “rock without water”
- **Line 336:** “were water we,” “stop ”
- **Line 337:** “Amongst ,” “rock ,” “cannot ,” “stop ”
- **Line 338:** “Sweat,” “sand”
- **Line 339:** “were ,” “water,” “amongst ,” “rock”
- **Line 340:** “mountain mouth,” “carious ,” “cannot ”
- **Line 341:** “stand ,” “sit”
- **Line 342:** “silence ,” “mountains”
- **Line 343:** “sterile ”
- **Line 344:** “solitude ,” “mountains”
- **Line 345:** “sullen ,” “sneer ,” “snarl”
- **Line 347:** “were water”
- **Line 348:** “And ,” “rock”
- **Line 349:** “were rock”
- **Line 350:** “And ,” “also”
- **Line 351:** “And ,” “water”
- **Line 352:** “ A”
- **Line 353:** “ A,” “among ,” “rock”
- **Line 354:** “were ,” “sound ,” “water ”
- **Line 355:** “cicada”
- **Line 356:** “And ,” “singing”
- **Line 357:** “sound ,” “water ,” “a ,” “rock”
- **Line 358:** “Where ,” “sings ”
- **Line 359:** “Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop”
- **Line 360:** “water”
- **Line 361:** “Who ,” “who walks,” “always ,” “beside,” “you”
- **Line 362:** “When ,” “you ”
- **Line 363:** “when ,” “ahead,” “white ”
- **Line 364:** “always another,” “walking ,” “beside ”
- **Line 365:** “brown ,” “mantle”
- **Line 366:** “whether ,” “man”
- **Line 367:** “who ,” “on,” “other ”
- **Line 368:** “What ,” “air”
- **Line 369:** “Murmur,” “maternal ”
- **Line 370:** “hooded hordes”
- **Line 376:** “Athens Alexandria”
- **Line 379:** “woman ,” “black ”
- **Line 380:** “whisper ”
- **Line 381:** “bats,” “baby”
- **Line 382:** “Whistled,” “beat,” “wings”
- **Line 383:** “downward down,” “blackened ”
- **Line 384:** “down”
- **Lines 384-385:** “ towers / Tolling”
- **Line 385:** “bells”
- **Line 386:** “singing ,” “empty ,” “cisterns ,” “exhausted ”
- **Line 387:** “mountains”
- **Line 388:** “moonlight,” “grass ”
- **Line 389:** “graves”
- **Line 390:** “wind’s ”
- **Line 391:** “windows,” “door ”
- **Line 392:** “Dry ”
- **Line 393:** “cock ”
- **Line 394:** “Co co,” “co co”
- **Line 395:** “gust”
- **Line 397:** “Ganga ,” “limp leaves”
- **Line 398:** “Waited ,” “while ”
- **Line 399:** “Gathered ”
- **Line 402:** “DA”
- **Line 403:** “what ,” “we”
- **Line 407:** “By ,” “this,” “this ”
- **Line 408:** “obituaries”
- **Line 409:** “Or ,” “by ,” “beneficent ”
- **Line 410:** “broken ”
- **Line 412:** “DA”
- **Line 413:** “have heard”
- **Line 415:** “key,” “prison”
- **Line 416:** “key,” “prison”
- **Line 417:** “rumours”
- **Line 418:** “Revive ,” “Coriolanus”
- **Line 419:** “DA”
- **Line 420:** “Damyata”
- **Line 421:** “sail”
- **Line 422:** “sea”
- **Line 427:** “least ,” “lands”
- **Line 428:** “London ,” “ falling down falling down falling down”
- **Line 429:** “foco”
- **Line 430:** “fiam,” “swallow swallow”
- **Line 431:** “à ,” “abolie”
- **Lines 434-435:** “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih”

ANACHRONISM

Anachronism in "The Waste Land" is one of the poem's key techniques for comparing the past and present (with the present coming across as sorely lacking). The jarring sensation of an out-of-place, or anachronistic, historical reference in the middle of the poem's modern-day setting serves as a reminder that the bleak and hellish present pales in comparison to the more glorious past. At times, however, this device also serves to remind readers that while much has changed, much remains the same.

Perhaps the foremost example of anachronism in the poem is its reference to the battle of Mylae in line 70:

> There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying:
> "Stetson!
> "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!

This battle took place thousands of years before the poem, during the first Punic War between Rome and Carthage. In "The Waste Land" it is also meant to evoke to World War I, in which the modern-day speaker and his old companion, Stetson, served as soldiers. Superimposing an ancient war on top of a modern one—famous for introducing horrific new horrors like mustard gas and other chemical weapons—is a reminder that every age has its share of gruesome wartime folly. The Punic Wars, for instance, involved marching elephants across the Alps, which (as one might expect) did not work out well.

Anachronism is also prominent in the close of Section III, in which Eliot mixes and mingles references to the River Thames of bygone days and the present. Queen Elizabeth I, by then long dead, sails down the river with her alleged lover, and Eliot alludes to a 17th-century poem ("Prothalamion") about a wedding by the river. The virtuous "nymphs" from that poem are now "friends" with "the loitering heirs of city directors"—the implication being that they are prostitutes. Along the riverbanks is also the "Inexplicable splendor of Ionian white and gold"—a reference to a style of column from the ancient world.

Frequently, the poem employs anachronisms in tandem with allusions, like the moment when the speaker overhears "the sound of horns and motors" in line 197, a modern-day reference that takes the place of a 17th-century poem's reference to a "winged chariot." The prophet from Greek myth, Tiresias, appearing in modern-day London is another excellent example of anachronism; the sight of this figure acting like a modern-day peeping tom is meant to be shocking, and to again underscore the depravity of modern life.

Where Anachronism appears in the poem:

- **Lines 63-64:** "I had not thought death had undone so many. / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,"
- **Lines 69-70:** ""Stetson! / "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!"
- **Lines 97-103:** "Above the antique mantel was displayed / As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene / The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / 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."
- **Lines 129-131:** "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag— / It's so elegant / So intelligent"
- **Line 176:** "The nymphs are departed."
- **Line 177:** "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song."
- **Lines 197-198:** "But at my back from time to time I hear / The sound of horns and motors,"
- **Lines 219-223:** "I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives, / Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see / At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea, / The typist home at teatime,"
- **Lines 244-247:** "(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed; / I who have sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead.)"
- **Lines 258-264:** ""This music crept by me upon the waters" / 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 a mandoline / And a clatter and a chatter from within / Where fishmen lounge at noon: "
- **Lines 264-266:** "where the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold."
- **Lines 267-279:** " The river sweats / Oil and tar / The barges drift / 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 / Wallala leialala"
- **Line 280:** "Elizabeth and Leicester"
- **Lines 281-292:** " 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"
- **Line 308:** "To Carthage then I came"
- **Lines 374-377:** "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London"
- **Line 410:** "seals broken by the lean solicitor"
- **Line 428:** "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down"
- **Lines 429-430:** "Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina /

Quando fiam uti chelidon"
- **Line 431:** "Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie"
- **Line 433:** "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe."

ANAPHORA

Anaphora appears a handful of times in "The Waste Land" to powerful effect. Most notably, the opening to Section III, "The Fire Sermon," contains several lines which open with the phrase, "Sweet Thames," as the speaker directly address the river, which, in his eyes, has lost its meaning and magic. (Note that this is also an explicit allusion to a 17th-century poem called "Prothalamion," which was written to celebrate a wedding of two upper class women and presents the Thames as a pristine, beautiful place.) Mourning the disappearance of the river nymphs, the speaker repeatedly pleads with the "Sweet Thames" to "run softly" and hear him out as he sings his sad song. The anaphora helps create an elegiac tone, and deepens readers' understanding of this particular speaker, who is reminiscent of the Fisher King: a man stripped of his power, mourning his lost kingdom.

Later, Section V uses anaphora at its opening as well. The first three lines all open with "After the," again setting the tone—this time, a fierce drumbeat of rage and agony:

> After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
> After the frosty silence in the gardens
> After the agony in stony places

Each "after" introduces a description of different catastrophes that have been visited upon the world, turning it into a waste land. The lines that follow omit the word "after" (a subtle example of asyndeton) but they are also part of this list of disaster, and the anaphora is so strong at the opening that readers can't help but conjure that same rhythmic drumbeat as they read on. This section also uses the repetition of the word "And" at the beginning of several lines to achieve the same effect:

> And no rock
> If there were rock
> And also water
> And water

Overall, anaphora adds a sense of rhythm and insistence each time it appears. It's also just one of many forms of repetition in this highly repetitive poem, which allow the speaker to create a sense of cohesion despite the poem's free flowing form.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 23:** "And the"
- **Line 24:** "And the"
- **Line 27:** "And I will show you"
- **Line 30:** "I will show you"
- **Line 46:** "Here"
- **Line 49:** "Here is"
- **Line 51:** "Here is," "here "
- **Line 52:** "here is"
- **Line 113:** "What," "What ," "What"
- **Line 117:** "What is that noise?"
- **Line 119:** "What is that noise," "What is"
- **Line 122:** "Do you ," "Do you"
- **Line 132:** "What shall I do," "What shall I do"
- **Line 134:** "What shall we"
- **Line 135:** "What shall we"
- **Line 177:** "Sweet Thames," ", run softly,"
- **Line 184:** "Sweet Thames, run softly"
- **Line 185:** "Sweet Thames, run softly,"
- **Line 310:** "O Lord Thou"
- **Line 311:** "O Lord Thou"
- **Line 323:** "After "
- **Line 324:** "After "
- **Line 325:** "After "
- **Line 332:** "Here "
- **Line 336:** "If there were"
- **Line 339:** "If there were"
- **Line 341:** "Here"
- **Line 348:** "And "
- **Line 350:** "And "
- **Line 351:** "And "
- **Line 356:** "And "
- **Line 380:** "And "
- **Line 381:** "And "
- **Line 383:** "And"
- **Line 384:** "And "
- **Line 386:** "And "

ASSONANCE

Assonance occurs throughout "The Waste Land." Just about every stanza of the poem contains assonance to greater or lesser degree, in fact, and the musical quality this assonance lends to the language creates a pleasurable reading experience out of a poem that can be otherwise quite difficult to comprehend. Assonance simultaneously slows and speeds up the reading process, encouraging readers to sally forth into the poem's complex web of images and allusions, even as it also requires readers to slow down and savor Eliot's unusual word choices and turns of phrase. We've highlighted a few especially evocative instances of assonance here.

For example, the first half of the second stanza is filled with long, lonely /oh/ vowels. These open vowel sounds add to the sense of despair in these lines, while also more generally

creating a sense of forward momentum as the sounds echo throughout. This momentum is bolstered by assonance of the short /eh/ and long /ee/ sounds as well, overall lending these lines a woeful musicality. Take lines 19-25:

> ... what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
> There is shadow under this red rock,

These lines are also filled with alliteration, consonance, and sibilance, as is the case with much of the poem—which, as noted previously in this guide, is intensely musical despite not having a clear, predictable form. Sad /oh/ sounds pop up again in lines 389-391; combined with the /w/ consonance, these lines similarly feel full of eerie despair:

> ... only the wind's home.
> It has no windows, and the door swings,
> Dry bones can harm no one.

Because assonance contributes to rhyme sounds, it can occasionally create a sort of sing-song tone in the poem that is suggestive of the speaker being sarcastic or dismissive of the subject at hand. Take the short /eh/ sounds of lines 74-75, when the speaker is describing the disturbing image of a dog digging up a dead body:

> "Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
> "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

The assonance makes the lines sound deceptively light, which reflects the poem's idea that society has grown numb to the many horrors and moral depravities of war and modern life in general. As previously discussed in this guide's entry on alliteration, Section IV, Death by Water, uses strong assonance in the story of Phlebas the Phoenician to make the tale sound like a classic fable or parable with a clear moral message.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 17:** "feel"
- **Line 19:** "grow"
- **Line 20:** "stony"
- **Line 21:** "know," "only"
- **Line 22:** "heap," "broken," "beats"
- **Line 23:** "dead," "tree," "no," "shelter," "no," "relief"
- **Line 24:** "stone," "no," "Only"
- **Line 25:** "shadow"
- **Line 74:** "hence," "friend," "men"
- **Line 75:** "again"
- **Line 313:** "Phlebas," "Phoenician"
- **Line 314:** "deep sea"
- **Line 317:** "Picked his," "bones," "whispers," "rose"
- **Line 318:** "stages," "age," "youth"
- **Line 319:** "whirlpool"
- **Line 320:** "Jew"
- **Line 321:** "you who"
- **Line 390:** "only," "home"
- **Line 391:** "no"
- **Line 392:** "bones," "no"

CONSONANCE

Like alliteration and assonance, consonance is a frequently-used poetic device in "The Waste Land." Consonance encourages readers to slow down and appreciate the language even as it moves them easily from one word to the next. Consonance can also help make words more memorable, which in the case of poetry can help vivid imagery and unique turns of phrase linger even longer for readers. Take the rich tapestry of sounds at the start of Section III, where the consonance here helps make the image of death and decay along the riverbank all the more striking.

> The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
> Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
> Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.

The fifth stanza offers more excellent examples. Many of the words include or end on an /n/ sound: "Unreal," "under," "winter," "dawn," "London," "many," "undone," "infrequent," "man," "down," "sound," "nine," "in," "planted, "garden," "sudden," "hence," "friend," "again," "mon," and even "Saint Mary Woolnoth," a church's name, and "Stetson," the passerby whom the speaker recognizes. And that's not all! A tittering /t/ sound recurs too, in "thought," "short," "feet," "street," "kept," "Stetson,""planted," "sprout," "it," "frost," "disturbed," "its," "that's," "to," and "hypocrite lecteur." There are also recurring /m/ sounds, /l/ sounds, and /p/ sounds. On first read, it may not be obvious that so many of words in this one stanza share common consonants. The effect is a subtle but powerful one, giving each line musicality and rhythm, and giving the stanza as a whole cohesion.

Sibilance is a specific form of consonance that often appears in the poem as well—particularly in the final section. The many hissing /s/ sounds here evoke the barrenness of the waste land—the rustling sounds of the hot wind over dry grasses, sand, and cracked earth. Take lines 336-340:

Amongst the rock one cannot stop or 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 can neither stand nor lie nor sit

And lines 354-355:

Not the cicada
And dry grass singing

Sibilance also suggests a quiet, and perhaps sinister, atmosphere—evoking the hissing of snakes and so forth. This is clear earlier in the poem too, where it combines with consonance on the hard /k/ sounds, plosive /b/, /d/, and /p/ sounds, and tittering /t/ sounds to enhance the speaker's vivid description of trash along the Thames:

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights.

Overall, then, consonance serves to make the poem's language all the more vivid and striking for the reader.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 60:** "Unreal "
- **Line 61:** "Under ," "winter ," "dawn"
- **Line 62:** "London ," "many"
- **Line 63:** "undone ," "many"
- **Line 64:** "and ," "infrequent"
- **Line 65:** "man "
- **Line 66:** "down "
- **Line 67:** "Saint ," "Woolnoth "
- **Line 68:** "sound ," "final ," "nine"
- **Line 69:** "one ," "knew"
- **Line 70:** "in "
- **Line 71:** "planted ," "garden"
- **Line 73:** "sudden "
- **Line 74:** "hence," "friend ," "men"
- **Line 75:** "again"
- **Line 76:** "mon ," "mon "
- **Line 174:** "river's tent," "broken," "last fingers," "leaf"
- **Line 175:** "Clutch and sink into," "wet bank"
- **Lines 175-176:** "wind / Crosses"
- **Line 176:** "brown land," "unheard," "nymphs," " are departed"
- **Line 178:** "bears," "empty bottles," "sandwich papers"
- **Line 179:** "Silk handkerchiefs," "cardboard boxes," "cigarette ends"
- **Line 180:** "testimony," "summer nights"
- **Line 337:** "Amongst," "stop"
- **Line 338:** "Sweat," "sand"
- **Line 339:** "amongst"
- **Line 340:** "carious," "spit"
- **Line 341:** "stand," "sit"
- **Line 355:** "cicada"
- **Line 356:** "grass singing"

EXTENDED METAPHOR

If an extended metaphor is a metaphor that unfolds across multiple lines or even stanzas of a poem, then one can argue that this *entire* poem is an example of one. After all, the poem is called "The Waste Land," and this very concept of a waste land is the main metaphor that runs through the poem from beginning to end. Though Eliot complicates the metaphor by transforming and reshaping it in every section, each time presenting different variations on what a waste land looks or feels like, there's no doubt about the poem's central idea: at heart, the poem is arguing that modern society is like a waste land—a broken, barren place.

Indeed, the very fact that the metaphor of the waste land grows and deepens throughout the poem shores up readers' understanding of it as an extended metaphor. In the first section, the waste land is introduced merely as some light spring rain that stirs up distant, painful memories. By the poem's conclusion, however, the waste land is a rocky mountain where no water runs and refugees flee apocalyptic cities in search of sustenance. In between, the waste land becomes a luxurious living room that holds two unhappy people, a painting where a rape takes place, a pub bearing witness to a fractured friendship, a lonely river, a small apartment in which a near-rape takes place, and a shipwreck.

Though strikingly different from one another, each of these settings embody the idea that modern society has become a brutal place that no longer sustains life. They are separate metaphors made literal in the poem's imagery, but also part of the same extended metaphor of the waste land as well.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

IMAGERY

"The Waste Land" is filled with imagery. Throughout the poem, Eliot appeals to all of his readers' senses by vividly describing the poem's scenes, characters, and emotions. Indeed, imagery might be the glue that holds the poem together, a consistent device that remains central to every part of the poem regardless of the shifting speaker, location, or subject.

For example, note how the poem paints a dismal picture of modern London, an "Unreal City" covered by "brown fog" in the early winter morning, with a seemingly endless crowd of

zombie-like figures walking across London Bridge with their gaze upon their feet. This striking image reflects the poem's bleak take on modern society, which the speaker believes has dulled and deadened its inhabitants.

In another clear example of imagery, the opening of Section II devotes 33 lines to conjuring up a luxurious room full of art, candlelight, fine furniture, and "unstoppered ... strange synthetic perfumes" which are further described as "unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubl[ing], confus[ing] / And drown[ing] the sense in odours."

Later, Eliot conjures an air of death and decay around the once-beautiful River Thames by focusing on images of sinking and rot. The leaves of surrounding trees have sunk "into the wet bank," the land is "brown," and the water itself is "dull." Adding to the disgust is the image of a rat "Dragging its slimy belly" along the riverside. All in all, the river comes across like a garbage dump.

Imagery is not necessarily dependent on the amount of time or space it takes up in a poem, but Eliot's willingness to linger long over minute details and descriptions helps demonstrate the poem's central concerns. From an opening dedicated to evocatively describing the arrival of spring, to a conclusion that uses visual details to unpack complex metaphors and allusions that refer to the waste land's potential renewal, Eliot spares no detail in bringing his vision of a modern-day waste land to life. In turn, this imagery helps readers situate themselves within his depiction of that world and its concerns.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 5-7
- Lines 8-11
- Lines 19-30
- Lines 37-38
- Lines 43-46
- Lines 60-68
- Lines 71-73
- Lines 77-110
- Lines 115-116
- Line 125
- Lines 136-139
- Lines 174-187
- Lines 188-199
- Lines 209-215
- Lines 216-257
- Lines 259-266
- Lines 267-277
- Lines 280-290
- Lines 293-296
- Line 304
- Lines 313-322
- Lines 323-328
- Lines 332-360
- Lines 363-366
- Lines 368-375
- Lines 379-386
- Lines 387-396
- Lines 397-402
- Lines 404-411
- Lines 413-418
- Lines 420-424
- Lines 425-426
- Line 428

IRONY

There's more than a touch of irony present in "The Waste Land." Indeed, the very first line, in which April is described as "the cruelest month," is an excellent example of irony. After all, April in England, where the poem is set, is actually quite a pleasant month, given the arrival of spring; but because it brings back cruel memories, Eliot flips this expectation on its head by describing it as cruel—in fact, the cruelest month of all.

This kind of ironic subversion occurs again and again throughout the poem. For a few examples:

- Madame Sosostris is portrayed as a potential charlatan (she may be a fortune-teller, but she couldn't stave off a "bad cold"!)— but ironically her predictions mostly come true.
- Dead bodies don't generally grow in gardens, but the speaker ironically inquires after Stetson's recently-planted corpse. Perhaps this body is that of someone Stetson killed in battle, the violence and horror of war ironically distilled into mere potting soil. The tone is eerily light-hearted as the speaker warns Stetson not to let the dog go sniffing around body either.
- Even the mocking tone with which the poem alludes to "that Shakespeherian Rag," a pop song from the era, contains some irony. Though the following lines describe the tune as "so elegant / So intelligent," there's no missing the ironic, tongue-in-cheek tone that indicates the speaker actually finds the song anything *but* elegant or intelligent.

As a device, irony is used to indicate that how things *seem* to be is in fact very different from how they actually *are*. Marriage can be loveless and fickle; "handsome" and "tall" men are as subject to death as everyone else; the supposedly empowering freedoms of modern life have given rise to what the speaker considers moral depravity. Given the poem's central thesis is that the modern-day world may *seem* to be doing fine, but is in fact full of alienated people and deadening situations, irony is a key device for conveying "The Waste Land's" principal themes

and concerns, drawing attention to the gap between readers' expectations and the reality that the poet believes in.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** " April is the cruellest month"
- **Lines 27-30:** "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."
- **Lines 43-44:** "Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante, / Had a bad cold"
- **Lines 62-65:** "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many. / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, / And each man fixed his eyes before his feet."
- **Lines 71-73:** ""That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? / "Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?"
- **Lines 74-75:** ""Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!"
- **Lines 80-81:** "a golden Cupidon peeped out / (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)"
- **Line 96:** "sad light a carvéd dolphin swam."
- **Lines 129-131:** "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag— / It's so elegant / So intelligent"
- **Lines 150-152:** "And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said. / 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."
- **Lines 160-162:** "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."
- **Lines 164-165:** "Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said, / What you get married for if you don't want children?"
- **Lines 167-168:** "Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon, / And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—"
- **Lines 197-202:** "But at my back from time to time I hear / The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring / Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring. / O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter / And on her daughter / They wash their feet in soda water"
- **Lines 210-215:** "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant / Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants / C.i.f. London: documents at sight, / Asked me in demotic French / To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel / Followed by a weekend at the Metropole."
- **Lines 217-218:** "the human engine waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting,"
- **Lines 219-220:** "I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives, / Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see"
- **Lines 232-235:** "He, the young man carbuncular, arrives, / A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare, / One of the low on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire."
- **Lines 237-239:** "she is bored and tired, / Endeavours to engage her in caresses / Which still are unreproved, if undesired."
- **Lines 242-243:** "His vanity requires no response, / And makes a welcome of indifference."
- **Line 248:** "Bestows one final patronising kiss,"
- **Lines 250-257:** "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'm glad it's over." / When lovely woman stoops to folly and / Paces about her room again, alone, / She smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone."
- **Lines 301-306:** ""On Margate Sands. / I can connect / Nothing with nothing. / The broken fingernails of dirty hands. / My people humble people who expect / Nothing.""
- **Lines 317-319:** " As he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his age and youth / Entering the whirlpool."
- **Line 322:** "Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you."
- **Lines 329-330:** "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying"

METAPHOR

Metaphors are everywhere in this poem. For starters, the very concept of "The Waste Land" is itself an extended metaphor. The poem makes meaning *beyond* the literal meaning of a waste land (a dry, barren place) by comparing a number of other places to a waste land, like London Bridge, the River Thames, and a typist's apartment, to name just a few.

But though this is the central extended metaphor that runs through the poem, there are a number of other metaphors present in the poem as well. In particular, water in all different forms—rivers, oceans, rain—takes on metaphorical significance as symbols of both death and rebirth, of purification and spiritual nourishment—or the lack thereof (for more on this, see this guide's Symbols section). Fire also comes to symbolize passion and lust, and the dangers of those fiery emotions. Religious metaphors are also common throughout the poem, such as the "handful of dust" that represents death in the first section (in that, people are reduced to dust upon death—playing on the familiar phrase "dust to dust").

Much of the poem can be interpreted figuratively, in fact, with nearly everything possible a symbol or stand in for something else. This happens on levels both big and small; "A Game of Chess," for instance, should not be understood *literally*, but rather as a metaphor for seduction and doomed romance. On a

narrower, more recognizably metaphorical level, the "good time" in line 148 refers to the sex that Lil's husband expects upon returning from war, and the departed nymphs in Section III might actually be the speaker's way of talking about sex workers.

Less weighty metaphors are present throughout the poem as well. For example, in line 138 the speaker presses his fingers against his "lidless eyes." This image should obviously not be understood as a description of eyeballs which literally lack eyelids; instead, the metaphor suggests that the speaker is all-seeing, unable to shut his eyes or look away from his despair. The "sterile thunder" of line 342 is a storm "without rain"—without the potential for nourishment or the creation of new life.

Other examples include:

- Rhe start of Section III, which opens by describing trees beside a riverbank as "the river's tent." Meanwhile, the leaves have "fingers," which have lost their grasp on the tree branches and cling instead to the riverbank below.
- The human body is compared to a humming engine in line 216, suggesting that modern technology and automation is itself dehumanizing.
- Twice, "whispers" appear in the poem not as literal whispering, but as metaphors for malevolence—first, they help drown Phlebas the sailor, and second, they emanate from the hair-strings upon which a demonic woman makes music.
- In line 373, "cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air" can be understood multiple ways, as literal cracks, reformations, and explosions of a physical mountaintop, or the conflicts, necessary reforms, and explosive revolutions of a system of living or society.

In short, just about every line in this poem uses figurative language, in particular metaphor, to add layers of meaning and complexity to its imagery, transforming several of them into major motifs and symbols.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-7:** " April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain. / Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow, feeding / A little life with dried tubers."
- **Line 8:** "Summer surprised us"
- **Lines 19-24:** "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water."
- **Line 41:** "Looking into the heart of light, the silence."
- **Lines 42-42:** "Oed' und leer das Meer / ."
- **Line 60:** "Unreal City"
- **Lines 62-63:** "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many."
- **Between Lines 76-77:** " / II. A Game of Chess"
- **Lines 80-81:** "a golden Cupidon peeped out / (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)"
- **Lines 100-101:** "yet there the nightingale / Filled all the desert with inviolable voice"
- **Lines 102-103:** "And still she cried, and still the world pursues, / "Jug Jug" to dirty ears."
- **Lines 104-105:** "And other withered stumps of time / Were told upon the walls; "
- **Lines 105-106:** "staring forms / Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed."
- **Line 108:** "Under the firelight, under the brush, "
- **Lines 108-110:** "her hair / Spread out in fiery points / Glowed into words, then would be savagely still."
- **Lines 115-116:** "we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones."
- **Line 125:** "Those are pearls that were his eyes."
- **Line 139:** " lidless eyes"
- **Line 149:** "he wants a good time"
- **Lines 174-175:** "The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank."
- **Lines 175-176:** "The wind / Crosses the brown land, unheard."
- **Line 176:** "The nymphs are departed."
- **Line 180:** "The nymphs are departed."
- **Line 208:** "Unreal City"
- **Line 216:** "the violet hour"
- **Line 217:** "when the human engine waits"
- **Lines 221-222:** "the violet hour, the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,"
- **Lines 233-234:** "A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare, / One of the low on whom assurance sits"
- **Line 256:** "automatic hand"
- **Line 258:** ""This music crept by me upon the waters""
- **Lines 267-268:** "The river sweats / Oil and tar"
- **Lines 316-317:** "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers."
- **Lines 317-319:** "As he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his age and youth / Entering the whirlpool."
- **Line 321:** "you who turn the wheel and look to windward"
- **Lines 329-330:** "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying"
- **Line 340:** "Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit"

- **Line 343:** "dry sterile thunder without rain"
- **Line 356:** "dry grass singing"
- **Lines 388-389:** "the grass is singing / Over the tumbled graves"
- **Line 390:** "There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home."
- **Line 392:** "Dry bones can harm no one."
- **Lines 397-402:** "Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves / Waited for rain, while the black clouds / Gathered far distant, over Himavant. / The jungle crouched, humped in silence. / Then spoke the thunder / DA"
- **Line 404:** "blood shaking my heart"
- **Line 409:** "memories draped by the beneficent spider"
- **Line 432:** "These fragments I have shored against my ruins"

ONOMATOPOEIA

"The Waste Land" relies a great deal on sound in order to make meaning. Indeed, most poems do! But this is especially true in this poem, given its wide range of subjects, characters, locations, tones, and speakers. For instance, repetition of certain phrases and the inclusion of dialogue draw attention to the aural and tonal qualities of the poem's language. The many quotations from other works left in their original languages add to the poem's feeling of jumbled disorder. And onomatopoeia plays an important role, too, bringing to life a couple key symbols and allusions central to "The Waste Land's" concerns.

The first example is the song of Philomela. Once transformed into a nightingale, she sings "Jug, jug" and later "Twit, twit, twit," just like a bird. The decision to include this birdsong speaks to the poem's interest in capturing her "inviolable voice." The poem does not merely refer to Philomela's voice, but literally lets it take up space within the poem.

It also uses onomatopoeia to make a play on words; "Tereu" sounds quite a bit like the cooing of a bird, but it's also a shortened version of the name of the man who raped Philomela, Tereus. In this way, the poem quite explicitly shows us that even in her nightingale form, Philomela speaks out against her attacker. And similarly, the moments in the poem when songs are alluded to or quoted contain onomatopoeia. "O O O O" replicates a crooning voice in the popular "Shakespeherian Rag" the speaker mocks, while "Wallala leialala" sounds like an operatic trill (which makes sense, given that it is an allusion to an actual Wagner opera).

Arguably the most important example of onomatopoeia is the poem's use of the syllable DA. Much like the word "boom," the poem uses this sound to evoke the boom or clash of thunder. In "The Waste Land," thunder heralds the arrival of rain, which represents renewal and restoration of the waste land. This is an important moment in the poem, and so, like Philomela's song, rather than just referring to thunder as a concept, the poem goes the extra mile to include the sound it makes. This onomatopoeia jumps out at readers in the same way a clap of thunder might startle someone in real life.

Importantly, Eliot chose the sound DA over, say, BOOM, because it also represents the first syllable of the three words *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, and *Damyata*, which make up the mantra that helps guide the speaker through his vision for how the waste land might be restored. In this way, the onomatopoeia does double-duty, as both the sound of thunder and the sound of a voice speaking those words.

Where Onomatopoeia appears in the poem:

- **Line 103:** "Jug Jug"
- **Line 129:** "O O O O "
- **Lines 204-205:** "Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug"
- **Line 207:** "Tereu"
- **Lines 278-279:** "Weialala leia / Wallala leialala"
- **Lines 291-292:** " Weialala leia / Wallala leialala"
- **Line 307:** "la la"
- **Line 359:** " Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop"
- **Line 394:** "Co co rico co co rico"
- **Line 402:** "DA"
- **Line 412:** "DA"
- **Line 419:** "DA"

PERSONIFICATION

Famously, the first line of "The Waste Land" describes the month of April as "cruel," setting the stage for a poem full of personification. In fact, much of the natural world in the poem is personified. This is fitting, since the poem's main metaphor rests on the image of a ruined landscape as a symbol for the brokenness of modern society. Personification is crucial to layering human emotion and nuance into what might otherwise simply feel like a mere description of the natural world, from the "forgetful snow" in line 6 and the "Sweet Thames" in line 176, to the "sweat[ing]" river in line 266 and the "grass singing" eerily in line 387.

Importantly, throughout the poem, this personification of nature is often contrasted with the cold, isolating forces of modern life. For example, in lines 215 to 225, the human body is compared to the engine of a car, and then swiftly contrasted against the warm personification of "the evening hour that strives / homeward" and the "sun's last rays" reaching out to "touch" the typist's drying laundry. Personification here suggests that all is not lost, even in the waste land. The potential for redemption and connection lies latent in the landscape itself.

In this vein, several of the section titles lean into personification in order to add nuance to their meaning. "The Fire Sermon,"

"Death by Water," and "What the Thunder Said" all imply that these natural elements of fire, water, and thunder, contain a human, emotional side that affects the world.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "April is the cruellest month"
- **Line 4:** "Dull roots"
- **Line 5:** "Winter kept us warm"
- **Line 6:** "forgetful snow"
- **Line 8:** "Summer surprised us"
- **Line 19:** " roots that clutch"
- **Line 30:** "fear in a handful of dust"
- **Line 68:** "dead sound"
- **Lines 71-73:** ""That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? / "Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?"
- **Line 80:** "a golden Cupidon peeped out"
- **Line 96:** "a carvéd dolphin swam"
- **Lines 100-101:** "the nightingale / Filled all the desert with inviolable voice"
- **Between Lines 173-174:** " / III. The Fire Sermon"
- **Lines 174-175:** "The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank."
- **Lines 175-176:** "The wind / Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed."
- **Line 177:** "Sweet Thames, run softly,"
- **Line 180:** "The nymphs are departed."
- **Line 184:** "Sweet Thames, run softly "
- **Line 185:** "Sweet Thames, run softly,"
- **Lines 221-222:** " the evening hour that strives / Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,"
- **Line 226:** "touched by the sun's last rays"
- **Line 262:** "The pleasant whining of a mandoline"
- **Lines 267-268:** "The river sweats / Oil and tar"
- **Lines 294-295:** "Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me."
- **Between Lines 312-313:** " / IV. Death by Water"
- **Lines 316-317:** "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers."
- **Between Lines 322-323:** " / V. What the Thunder Said"
- **Line 340:** "Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit"
- **Line 343:** "dry sterile thunder"
- **Line 356:** "dry grass singing"
- **Line 385:** "Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours"
- **Line 388:** "the grass is singing"
- **Line 390:** "only the wind's home."
- **Lines 397-398:** " the limp leaves / Waited for rain"
- **Line 400:** "The jungle crouched, humped in silence."
- **Line 401:** "Then spoke the thunder"
- **Line 404:** "blood shaking my heart"
- **Line 409:** "the beneficent spider"
- **Lines 417-418:** "aethereal rumours / Revive for a moment"
- **Lines 420-421:** "The boat responded / Gaily"
- **Lines 422-423:** "your heart would have responded / Gaily"

REPETITION

Repetition is a powerful tool in "The Waste Land," deployed in different ways. For starters, because this is such a long poem, repetition is used in part to remind the reader of certain themes, ideas, and images, which resurface at different points throughout the poem. For example, line 24's reference to "dry stone no sound of water" comes back in a major way in lines 331 ("Here is no water but only rock") to 359 ("But there is no water"), which are consumed by images of "no water but only rock," bringing the poem full circle as the prophet's vision of a world defined by barrenness at the poem's beginning is proven correct by its end.

The same can be said of many symbols, images, and places in the poem, like "death by water," "Unreal City," or the London Bridge, which crop up again and again. Each time, their new context adds fresh meaning, even as the return of these familiar touchstones also invokes all the meanings they have accrued earlier in the poem. For example, when "Unreal City" first appears it is being used in reference to London; by the time it comes back in the end of the poem, it refers additionally to:

> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna ...

The poem has expanded its scope, with the implication being that all the waste and horror of London described throughout the poem is part of every major city, throughout the world and throughout history.

"The Waste Land" also uses repetition in closer proximity. For example, Section II closes with the repeated barrage of the phrase "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME," a reference to last call at the pub in which the scene is set. Though the conversation within that scene carries on despite these interruptions, the constant repetition of the bartender's cries lends a frantic quality to the discussion at hand. Both the women speaking and readers of the poem can't help but understand their conversations through these repeated exhortations to hurry up, hurry up, since time is running out—not just at the pub, but in life as well.

Later, in Section III, repeated references to "the violet hour" begin to take on deeper meaning as well. The first instance seems like a poetic way to refer to the arrival of dusk, but as the phrase repeats, readers can't help but pay more attention to it, perhaps noticing the similarity between "violet" and "violent," as well as the violence in the poem taking place during this time.

(Violet then returns yet again in Section V, again linked to images of horror and pain—to "bursts in the violet air" and to "bats with baby faces in the violet light").

Similarly, the repetition of "softly" in the anaphora of "Sweet Thames, run softly" in the first stanza of Section III pops up again in the next stanza, as a "rat crept softly" along the riverbank. The repetition here is meant to shock the reader, to create a contrast between the lovely, gentle river of the past and the trash-filled, rat-infested Thames of the modern day (recall that "Sweet Thames, run softly" is an allusion to an earlier British poem called "Prothalamion," which celebrates the marriage of two highborn women along the Thames, which is presented as idyllic).

Epizeuxis also occurs in the poem, most notably in line 308, when the speaker cries, "Burning burning burning burning" in quick succession. The pile-up of these four repeated words helps convey the extremity of the speaker's emotions—the inability to do much more than cry out with pain and despair underscores just how wretched the waste land truly is. A similar effect is achieved in line 358 when "drip drop drip drop drop drop drop" is repeated, reinforcing the barrenness of the waste land and the speaker's thirst.

Likewise, the final line of the poem—"Shantih shantih shantih"—uses epizeuxis to emphasize the feeling of peace passing over the speaker, as well as (with those curious extra spaces between the words) to mimic the sensation of drawing deep and peaceful breaths.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "spring ," "rain"
- **Line 9:** "a shower of ," "rain"
- **Lines 15-16:** "Marie, / Marie"
- **Line 24:** "the dry stone no sound of water."
- **Line 35:** "hyacinths "
- **Line 36:** "hyacinth "
- **Line 37:** "Hyacinth"
- **Line 38:** "your hair wet"
- **Line 46:** "a wicked pack of cards."
- **Lines 47-48:** " the drowned Phoenician Sailor, / (Those are pearls that were his eyes."
- **Line 52:** "the one-eyed merchant"
- **Line 55:** "Fear death by water."
- **Line 56:** "I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring."
- **Line 60:** " Unreal City,"
- **Line 62:** "London Bridge"
- **Line 67:** "kept the hours"
- **Line 68:** "a dead sound on the final stroke of nine."
- **Lines 99-103:** "The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / 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."
- **Line 108:** "firelight"
- **Line 109:** "fiery"
- **Line 110:** "Glowed "
- **Lines 111-114:** ""My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me. / "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.""
- **Line 115:** " rats' alley"
- **Line 117:** " "What is that noise?""
- **Lines 118-123:** "The wind under the door. / "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?" / Nothing again nothing. / "Do / "You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / "Nothing?""
- **Line 125:** "Those are pearls that were his eyes."
- **Line 126:** "Is there nothing in your head?" "
- **Lines 132-135:** "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?""
- **Line 136:** "water "
- **Line 137:** "rains"
- **Line 142:** "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME"
- **Line 153:** "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME"
- **Line 166:** "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME"
- **Lines 169-170:** "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME / HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME"
- **Lines 171-173:** "Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight. / Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight. / Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night."
- **Lines 174-187:** "The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind / Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed. / Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song. / 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 . . . / 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 / The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear."
- **Line 188:** "A rat crept softly"
- **Line 190:** "fishing "
- **Lines 192-196:** "Musing upon the king my brother's wreck / And on the king my father's death before him. / White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And / cast in a little low dry garret, / Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year."
- **Line 195:** "bones"
- **Line 197:** "But at my back from time to time I hear"
- **Line 202:** "water"

- **Lines 204-206:** "Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd."
- **Line 208:** "Unreal City"
- **Line 210:** "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant"
- **Line 216:** "At the violet hour"
- **Line 217:** "waits"
- **Line 218:** "throbbing ," "waiting"
- **Line 219:** "I ," "Tiresias," "throbbing "
- **Line 221:** "At the violet hour"
- **Line 229:** "I Tiresias"
- **Line 244:** " I Tiresias"
- **Line 246:** "I who have sat by Thebes"
- **Line 258:** "waters"
- **Line 260:** "O City city"
- **Line 267:** "The river"
- **Lines 278-279:** "Weialala leia / Wallala leialala"
- **Line 289:** " The peal of bells"
- **Line 290:** " White towers"
- **Lines 291-292:** " Weialala leia / Wallala leialala"
- **Line 307:** " la la"
- **Line 309:** "Burning burning burning burning"
- **Lines 310-311:** "O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest"
- **Line 312:** "burning"
- **Between Lines 312-313:** " / IV. Death by Water"
- **Line 313:** "Phlebas the Phoenician"
- **Lines 313-315:** ", a fortnight dead, / Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss."
- **Lines 316-319:** "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell / He passed the stages of his age and youth / Entering the whirlpool."
- **Lines 323-325:** "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens / After the agony in stony places"
- **Line 328:** "thunder of spring"
- **Lines 329-330:** "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying"
- **Lines 332-360:** "Here is no water but only rock / 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 or 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 can 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 mountains / 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 / And water / A spring / A pool among the rock / If there were the sound of water only / Not the cicada / And dry grass singing / But 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"
- **Line 361:** "Who is the third who walks always beside you?"
- **Line 367:** "But who is that on the other side of you?"
- **Line 371:** "endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth"
- **Line 373:** "the city over the mountains"
- **Line 374:** "violet "
- **Line 375:** "Falling towers"
- **Line 377:** "London"
- **Line 378:** "Unreal"
- **Line 379:** "black"
- **Line 381:** "violet "
- **Line 383:** "downward down," "blackened"
- **Line 384:** "down"
- **Line 385:** "Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours"
- **Line 386:** "voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells."
- **Lines 387-389:** "In this decayed hole among the mountains / In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing / Over the tumbled graves,"
- **Lines 389-390:** " about the chapel / There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home."
- **Lines 395-399:** "In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain / Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves / Waited for rain, while the black clouds / Gathered far distant, over Himavant."
- **Line 401:** "Then spoke the thunder"
- **Line 402:** "DA"
- **Line 403:** "Datta"
- **Line 412:** "DA"
- **Line 413:** "Dayadhvam"
- **Line 419:** "DA"
- **Line 420:** "Damyata"
- **Lines 421-422:** "to the hand expert with sail and oar / The sea was calm"
- **Line 425:** "sat upon the shore"
- **Line 426:** "Fishing," "the arid plain"
- **Line 428:** "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down"
- **Line 434:** "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata."
- **Line 435:** " Shantih shantih shantih"

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

"The Waste Land" is an excellent example of stream of consciousness, which is a poetic device associated with the early 20th-century Modernist movement. The lack of regular rhyme, meter, or form creates the sensation of reading the natural flow of the speaker's thoughts. So too do the poem's sensory descriptions of the world, its often incompletely-

expressed ideas, its unusual syntax, and its occasionally rough grammar.

In fact, the poem's stream-of-consciousness can sometimes feel overwhelming. It inundates readers with a million different thoughts and ideas a minute, jumping in the first section alone from the speaker's own response to spring, the memories of a woman named Marie, the doomsday warnings of a prophet, song lyrics, another memory of the speaker's (this time of the hyacinth girl), a tarot reading with Madame Sosostris, and a stroll across London Bridge which leads to an encounter with an old friend, Stetson. Importantly, though the use of stream of consciousness is consistent throughout this section, the speaker's identity is not—which only adds to the muddle and confusion, since it's not always immediately clear who is actually talking in the poem.

As the poem free-associates it way from idea to idea, image to image, the unending stream-of-consciousness helps underscore just how jumbled, broken, and painful modern life has become. Form quite literally mimics content. War and disconnection have turned the modern world upside down, and just as spiritual traditions and cultural norms have fallen by the wayside, so too have the formal structures and guidelines of past poetic techniques. Thus the use of stream of consciousness is vital to understanding "The Waste Land." The term originated in psychology, and indeed it can be seen as an imitation of the "shell-shock" that survivors of World War I suffered from. At the time of the poem's publication, in 1922, this style was still so new and wildly different from what had come before that the poem was seen as shocking, even vulgar. Today, its considered a Modernist masterpiece for this very reason.

Where Stream of Consciousness appears in the poem:

VOCABULARY

Tubers (Line 7) - A short, fleshy, usually underground stem able to produce a new plant.

Starnbergersee (Line 8) - A lake southwest of Munich, in southern Bavaria, West Germany.

Colonnade (Line 9) - A series of columns set at regular intervals and usually supporting the base of a roof structure.

Hofgarten (Line 10) - A garden in the center of Munich, Germany.

Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch (Line 12) - German for "I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a real German."

Rubbish (Line 20) - Useless waste or trash.

Striding (Line 28) - Moving with long steps

Frisch weht der Wind/ Der Heimat zu/ Mein Irisch Kind,/ Wo weilest du? (Lines 31-34) - A line from the opera *Tristan und Isolde*. German for "Fresh blows the wind to the homeland; my Irish child, where are you waiting?"

Hyacinth (Line 35, Line 36, Line 37) - Spring-flowering bulbs with long, purple narrow leaves.

Oed' und leer das Meer (Lines 42-42) - A line from the opera *Tristan und Isolde*. German for "Desolate and empty is the sea."

Madame Sosostris (Line 43) - A mock Egyptian name suggested to Eliot by "Sesostris," the sorceress of Ecbatana in Aldous Huxley's novel *Chrome Yellow*.

Clairvoyante (Line 43) - A medium or fortune-teller.

The drowned Phoenician Sailor (Line 47) - An invented Tarot card, which suggests two characters later in the poem, the Smyrna merchant Mr. Eugenides and the drowned sailor Phlebas.

Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks (Line 49) - Italian for "beautiful lady." Also suggests the Madonna or Virgin Mary, especially Da Vinci's painting "The Madonna of the Rocks."

The Hanged Man (Line 55) - A Tarot card of a man hanging upside by his foot, signifying suspension, waiting, and new perspectives.

Mylae (Line 70) - The naval battle of Mylae in the First Punic War (260 BCE), in which Rome defeated Carthage. The war resembled World War I in that it was fought largely for economic reasons.

Hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère (Line 76) - A line from Baudelaire. French for "hypocritical reader—my likeness—my brother!"

Burnished (Line 77) - Shiny or lustrous.

Wrought (Line 79) - Worked into shape by artistry or effort. Usually applied to things made of metal.

Cupidon (Line 80) - A statue of Cupid, the god of love.

Profusion (Line 85) - Great quantity; a lavish display or supply.

Unguent (Line 88) - Greasy, thick, like a salve.

Laquearia (Line 92) - A paneled ceiling.

Sylvan (Line 98) - Relating to the woods or forest; pleasantly pastoral.

Philomel (Line 99) - A minor figure in Greek mythology who transformed into a nightingale after being raped.

Barbarous (Line 99) - Uncivilized, mercilessly harsh or cruel.

Inviolable (Line 101) - Never to be broken, infringed, or trespassed against.

Jug (Line 103, Line 205) - Eliot uses this to imitate the sound that a nightingale makes when it sings.

Withered (Line 104) - Dry, shriveled.

Enclosed (Line 106) - Closed in or fenced off.

Shakespeherian Rag (Line 129) - The chorus of an American ragtime song, a hit from Ziegfield's Follies in 1912.

Demobbed (Line 140) - Slang for demobilized, or sent home from war.

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME (Line 142, Line 153, Line 166, Lines 169-170) - Common phrase used for last call, or to announce that the bar is closing, at British pubs.

Smart (Line 143) - British slang for stylish.

To bring it off (Line 160) - This is an implicit reference to having an abortion.

Chemist (Line 162) - British word for pharmacist.

Hot gammon (Line 167) - A warm meal of ham or bacon.

Nymphs (Line 176, Line 180) - Mythological spirits of nature, frequently tied to particular trees, rivers, and other natural landmarks.

Thames (Line 177, Line 184, Line 185) - The river that runs through London.

By the waters of Leman (Line 183) - Lake Leman is another name for Lake Geneva in Switzerland. "By the waters of Leman" also alludes to a line from the Bible: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept, when we remembered Zion."

Garret (Line 195) - A room or unfinished part of a house just under the roof.

Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole! (Line 203) - A line from "Parsifal," a poem about the Holy Grail by the poet Paul Verlaine. French for "And, oh, those children's voices, singing in the dome!"

Forc'd (Line 206) - Forced, abbreviated. Euphemism for rape.

Tereu (Line 207) - A bird sound. Also an abbreviation of Tereus, the king who raped Philomel.

Demotic (Line 213) - Colloquial, common or popular.

C.i.f. London (Line 212) - Shipping industry abbreviation for "carriage and insurance free to London" or "cost, insurance, and freight."

Tiresias (Line 219, Line 229, Line 244) - A blind prophet from Greek myth who is said to have lived as both man and woman.

Perilously (Line 225) - Dangerously.

Combinations (Line 226) - A garment combining a chemise and drawers in one; underwear.

Divan (Line 227) - a large couch usually without back or arms often designed for use as a bed.

Camisoles, and stays (Line 228) - Slips and corsets; undergarments.

Dugs (Line 229) - Breasts or teats.

Carbuncular (Line 232) - Covered with acne.

Bradford millionaire (Line 235) - A reference to either Bradford, England or Bradford, Pennsylvania, a wool factory town and oil industry town respectively, where many fortunes were made.

Propitious (Line 236) - In favor, auspicious or advantageous.

Endeavours (Line 238) - Tries or attempts.

Caresses (Line 238) - light stroking, rubbing, or patting.

Unreproved (Line 239) - Unrebuffed, not scolded or rebuked.

Indifference (Line 243) - Not caring, absence of interest in one thing over another.

Foresuffered (Line 244) - An invented word, suggesting having previously suffered or foreseen suffering.

Thebes (Line 246) - A city in ancient Greece where Tiresias is said to have witnessed the tragic fates of Oedipus and Creon.

Patronising (Line 248) - Condescending.

Gropes (Line 249) - Feel about blindly, feel one's way.

Folly (Line 254) - Foolishness, stupidity.

Gramophone (Line 257) - An old-fashioned music player.

"This music crept by me upon the waters" (Line 258) - A line from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, from Ferdinand's speech after he weeps over his father the king's shipwreck.

Mandoline (Line 262) - A stringed instrument.

Magnus Martyr (Line 265) - A church in London, parts of which date back to the 11th century.

Inexplicable (Line 266) - Unexplainable, beyond interpretation.

Ionian (Line 266) - One of the three orders of classical architecture dating back to ancient Greece.

Leeward (Line 273) - Facing the direction toward which the wind is blowing.

Spar (Line 273) - A pole used in the rigging of a sailing vessel to carry or support its sail.

Greenwich / Isle of Dogs (Lines 276-277) - Greenwich is a borough in London on the south side of the Thames river; on the other side is the Isle of Dogs (really, a peninsula).

Weialala leia / Wallala leialala (Lines 278-279, Lines 291-292) - From "The Rhine-maidens," a song in the opera *Götterdämmerung*.

Elizabeth and Leicester (Line 280) - Queen Elizabeth I, considered one of England's greatest rulers, who never married and was known as the "Virgin Queen"; and Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, a longtime courtier and companion rumored to have been her lover.

Highbury, Richmond, and Kew (Line 294) - Pleasant suburbs and neighborhoods of London.

Moorgate (Line 297) - A subway station on the London Underground.

Margate (Line 301) - A popular seaside resort on the Thames estuary.

To Carthage then I came (Lines 308-308, Line 308) - An allusion to St. Augustine's *Confessions*. The full line reads, "To Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears."

Pluckest (Line 310, Line 311) - Pluck, pull, remove.

Fortnight (Line 313) - Two weeks.

Gulls (Line 314) - Seagulls.

Gentile (Line 320) - Someone who isn't Jewish.

Reverberation (Line 327) - Prolongation of a sound; resonance.

Carious (Line 340) - Decayed, specific to bones or teeth.

Sterile (Line 343) - Not able to produce children or young; totally clean, barren, empty.

Sullen (Line 345) - Gloomy, resentful.

Sneer (Line 345) - A smile that nevertheless expresses scorn or contempt.

Snarl (Line 345) - Surly, angry growl.

Wrapt (Line 365) - Wrapped; possibly also a play on "rapt," or transfixed.

Mantle (Line 365) - A cloak, often signifying authority.

Lamentation (Line 369) - Expression of sorrow, mourning, or regret; wails and cries.

Hordes (Line 370) - Large, disorderly crowds or groups.

Tolling (Line 385) - Ringing, usually solemnly.

Reminiscent (Line 385) - Recalling to mind something old or forgotten.

Cisterns (Line 386) - Reservoirs.

Cock (Line 393) - Rooster.

Ganga (Line 397) - The Ganges River, which flows through India and Bangladesh and is sacred to Hindus.

Himavant (Line 399) - In Sanskrit, "snowy mountains," usually used to describe the Himalayas.

Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyatta (Line 403, Line 413, Line 420, Line 434) - Sanskrit words that translate loosely to "give, sympathize, control." From an Indian fable in the *Upanishads*, an ancient holy Hindu text, in which the god Prajapati utters the syllable "DA," which is then interpreted in three different ways by lesser gods, humans, and demons.

Beneficent (Line 409) - Charitable, kindly, benevolent.

Solicitor (Line 410) - British term for a lawyer.

Aethereal (Line 417) - Celestial, heavenly, extremely delicate and light and beyond the earthly realm.

Coriolanus (Line 418) - The title character of a Shakespearean tragedy, who exemplifies a man locked within the prison of his own self. Shakespeare's Coriolanus is based on a legendary Roman general.

Arid (Line 426) - Dry, desert-like.

Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina (Line 429) - A line from Dante's *Purgatorio*. In Italian: "He hid himself in the fire which refines him."

Quando fiam uti chelidon (Line 430) - From a Roman poem about the change of Philomel. In Latin: "When shall I be like the swallow?" Followed by lines in which Philomel yearns for spring and to cease being silent, like a swallow or bird.

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie (Line 431) - From a sonnet by Gerard de Nerval. French for "The Prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower." A reference to the Tower tarot card, which represents cataclysm or catastrophe.

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe. (Line 433) - Lines from *The Spanish Tragedy*, by Thomas Kyd, an Elizabethan revenge play in which the character Hieronymo avenges his sons' murders by staging a play in the murderers are killed in turn.

Shantih (Line 435) - A formal ending or closing used in the Upanishads, a holy Hindu text. Translated from the Sanskrit by Eliot as "the peace which passeth understanding."

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Waste Land" doesn't follow a traditional form; its line and stanza lengths vary dramatically throughout. This lack of a predictable form is in keeping with the poem's broader ideas about the waywardness of modern life, and the failure of the forms of the past.

That said, one literary form that the poem takes cues from is the dramatic monologue—a direct address between the speaker and the reader. However, what sets "The Waste Land" apart from most other dramatic monologues is that its speaker *changes* constantly throughout the poem, shifting identities, cultures, and locations abruptly and with little indication that a new voice is taking over. Because of this, the poem can feel fragmented and jarring, but it also provides a diverse perspective on the waste land at the center of the poem.

One consistent aspect of the poem's form, however, is its reliance on refrains and repetitions to create a sense of cohesion even as the lines tumble all over the place. The refrain of "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" lends structure to the end of Section II, in the same way that the repetition of Philomel's "Jug jug" throughout the poem provides a kind of through-line to its messy form. The use of Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyata to structure the end of Section IV is similarly bolstering, giving

the conclusion of the poem a clearer shape as well as a sense of progression.

Thought the poem does not have a strict form, it is still structured by being broken up into five sections, each of which is given a title. These sections all focus on different expressions of the poem's thematic ideas.

- The first section, "The Burial of the Dead," focuses on the drudgery of the modern world. It alludes specifically to the horrors of war and the dull pain and numbness that the speaker sees as characterizing post-war life. Spring rain just reminds people of their despair and loneliness. City dwellers are zombie-like, unable to connect with one another as they stream across "London Bridge" in a haze of "brown fog." A fortune-teller gives ominous messages about fearing death by water, which will come back later in the poem. Simply put, modern society seems like a living hell.
- The second section, "A Game of Chess," can broadly be thought of as being about seduction, failed romance, and doomed women. It references abortion, the mythological rape of Philomela, and the tragic fate of Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The poem also mocks the shallowness of pop culture and laments the inability for people to appreciate the beauty and lessons of the past.
- Next, the third section is titled "The Fire Sermon," an ironic reference to a sermon given by the Buddha warning against the dangerous fires of lust and earthly passions. The section, the longest in the poem, then gives explicit and grotesque descriptions of modern relationships, which the speaker see as immoral and impotent. It closes with the speaker "burning" with the shame of all this lust and depravity.
- The fourth and shortest section is then "Death by Water"—a dousing of these flames and a kind of parable. The section reminds the reader that death comes for everyone, always (and as such maybe folks want to take stock of all the horrors the poem has lain out thus far and try to do better).
- The fifth and final section, "What the Thunder Said," describes the waste land as a literal, physical place; it is a harsh, barren, nightmarish world where the speaker obsessively longs for water. Eventually the skies crack open and nourishing rain does come, and with it the speaker's musing on the kind of spiritual teachings that can perhaps remedy the ills of modern life.

METER

For the most part, "The Waste Land" does not conform to any consistent meter and instead is written in sprawling free verse.

Though it occasionally veers into blank verse (a classic English meter), as in the opening of Section II, these moments are fleeting and quickly fall apart, just like the waste land itself is in a state of decay. In that sense, the meter of the poem can be said to reflect its content, as erratic and unpredictable as the broken modern world.

The moments when the poem mixes in song lyrics also provide another form of structured meter. However, the majority of these moments are made up of popular song lyrics, which in the poem's eyes represent a degraded art form. Keeping time with popular music is a poor substitute for classical poetic meter, and the poem does not stick with any one song's meter for very long.

RHYME SCHEME

"The Waste Land" does rhyme at times, but it does not have any clear or predictable rhyme scheme. Like its lack of structured form and meter, the poem's lack of consistent rhyme scheme reflects its message about the decay of the modern world, and the loss of higher culture and art, which in the case of poetry relied heavily on rhyme.

Again, though, rhyme does pop up from time to time. Take lines 65 and 66:

> And each man fixed his eyes before his **feet**
> Flowed up the hill and down King William **Street**

Here and in other spots, the rhymes pair together images or ideas that shore up the poem's vision of an isolated, alienated world. This is especially the case in Section III, when a number of rhymes appear while describing the terrible sex scene between the typist and her lover. Look at lines 224-230 for an example:

> 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*.
> ...
> Perceived the scene, and foretold the **rest**—
> I too awaited the expected **guest**.

The rhymes are fleeting, suggesting yet another broken connection in this poem, grasped at but never carried through all the way. The next stanza then features a neat and tidy ABABCDCD rhyme pattern:

> She turns and looks a moment in the **glass**, A
> Hardly aware of her departed *lover*; B
> Her brain allows one half-formed thought to **pass**: A
> "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's *over*." B

When lovely woman stoops to folly and C
Paces about her room again, *alone*, D
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand, C
And puts a record on the *gramophone*. D

The steady rhyme scheme suggests how ho-hum this experience has been for the typist—that, for all the speaker's disgust, such a grotesque scene is expected and normal in the modern world. Such rhyme can sometimes lend the poem a mocking, sing-song feel that makes it sound almost like a nursery rhyme. This is clear, for example, in the two rhyming quatrains in which the poem describes sex on the Thames, after the speaker has lamented that the beauty and purity of the river is no more. These not coincidentally feature the same ABABCDCD pattern as the stanza quoted above:

"Trams and dusty trees. A
Highbury bore me. Richmond and *Kew* B
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees A
Supine on the floor of a narrow *canoe*." B
My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart C
Under my feet. After the *event* D
He wept. He promised a 'new start.' C
I made no comment. What should I *resent*?" D

Finally, as with meter, rhyme sometimes appears in the poem incidentally as a result of its allusion to and imitation of music and song, especially at the end of Section III.

SPEAKER

Unusually, "The Waste Land" does not have just one speaker. Instead, it presents a number of different voices. Even more unusually (and adding to the poem's complexity), the poem rarely indicates when the speaker has switched, leaving readers to play a game of catch-up, constantly reassessing who is saying what!

In the opening stanza, the first speaker appears somewhat close to the poet's voice—it is, at least, a person describing the month of April from a poetic, mournful perspective. But by line 8, it quickly shifts to the voice of a woman named Marie, who is looking back on her childhood memories. Line 19 abruptly shifts again, to the voice of a doomsday prophet:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,

But then the song interlude at lines 31-34 marks the return of the first speaker, who now seems to be dwelling on his own long-lost memories. This appears to be the same speaker who then visits Madame Sosostris and bumps into Stetson on the London Bridge in Section I; refuses to speak with a nervous woman in Section II; sits by the River Thames mourning the departed nymphs and is propositioned by Mr. Eugenides in Section III; and ends up once more by the River Thames in Section IV.

The other major speakers include a woman chatting with her friend Lil at the pub in Section II, and of course Tiresias, the blind prophet of Greek myth, through whose eyes readers experience most of Section III. Because Tiresias is a visionary from ancient times, he's a good fit for a section that jumps through time and place.

The speakers of Sections IV and V are harder to identify, but the first is a witness is to Phlebas's drowning, and the second a person walking through the cataclysmic waste land. This is to say nothing of the many quotations and allusions in the poem, some of which seem dropped into various speakers' section without much context or link to that voice.

The reason the speaker is so fragmented and hard to follow is similar to the reason the poem is written in a stream of consciousness style. It echoes the fragmentation of society experienced by the survivors of World War I, and the destruction of traditional norms and values. Essentially, the speakers are a metaphor for the waste land—for the broken, hellish modern world in which all of them coexist and are struggling to make meaning. Not only do they experience failure to connect with other people, they can barely hang on to their own dramatic monologues before somebody else takes over.

SETTING

Strictly speaking, there is just one setting in "The Waste Land," and it's right there in the title. This poem is set in a waste land, a broken and barren place where nothing can grow or flourish. This is especially true in Section V, which dedicates its opening to describing the hellishness of this literal physical landscape.

But of course, the waste land itself is also a metaphor for the modern world, and there are many other settings contained within it, like Marie's childhood memories in the Swiss Alps, London Bridge, a luxuriously decorated parlor, a pub in London, the banks of the River Thames, and a typist's cramped apartment, to name just a few. (The vast majority of these, it should be noted, are all set within the city of London.)

But perhaps the best way to understand the setting is to take a step back and remember what the waste land is a metaphor *for*: modern life at the turn of the 20th-century. In some sense, the poem itself is set within an *idea*, trying to express what it's like to live in a "place" that is as much defined by time and the effects of history as by its physical attributes.

Similarly, the stream of consciousness style of the poem emphasizes that modern life takes place within the mind, as well. The tumble and claustrophobia of the many different

speakers' thoughts as they try to express what it's like to live in a modern-day waste land helps capture the setting as much as any imagery dedicated to describing "the arid plain" itself.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Waste Land" is considered a landmark in 20th-century English literary history. Published in 1922, it shocked many contemporary critics with its irregular metrical and rhyme patterns, sometimes disturbing subject, and depiction of the alienating conditions of modern life.

In this sense, "The Waste Land" represents a decisive break with Victorian poets and writers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and John Ruskin, as well as with the literary modes that dominated the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Eliot's poem rejects the rigid meter and sometimes sing-song rhymes of Victorian poetry, opting instead for a collage of different dramatic monologues rendered in a stream of consciousness style.

This is not to say, however, that Eliot *entirely* rejects all prior poetic models. On the contrary, from Dante to Shakespeare, Eliot frequently and explicitly alludes to many of the grand masters of literature, sometimes even quoting directly from other works and citing them in the footnotes. Indeed, throughout "The Waste Land," Eliot appears to be actively mourning the loss of an earlier artistic era, whose norms and meaning-making he sees as having been shattered by the wreckage of World War I and 20th-century modern life.

Ironically, "The Waste Land" is now considered a canonical work in its own right. It is a leading example of Modernist poetry (if not *the* leading example), and was heavily influenced by another major Modernist work, James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, which Eliot read the same year that he was writing "The Waste Land." Modernism was a literary movement of the early 20th century that emphasized a sense of large-scale social and aesthetic change in the wake of significant disruptions to European life (namely, World War I). With its damning depiction of the alienation and isolation of modern life, and its rich evocation of the confusion and disorder of post-World War I society, "The Waste Land" is a prime example of the Modernist movement.

It is also worth noting that "The Waste Land" was heavily influenced by the poet Ezra Pound, another Modernist, who served as an editor for T.S. Eliot and cut "The Waste Land" nearly in half. The poem is dedicated to him, with a note in Italian that translates to "the better craftsman."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The Waste Land" is considered one of the defining texts of Modernism because it speaks to many of the social and historical conditions that characterized that era in English literary history. It was published shortly after World War I, then known as "The Great War," which left permanent scars on British and American society, and in many ways finalized the break-down of traditional social divisions and ways of life that had begun at the turn of the century. Many young men were killed and the survivors were left terribly wounded, many of them diagnosed with something called "shell shock," a new diagnosis at the time which we recognize today as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

At the same time, civilian life was also undergoing dramatic changes in both Britain and the United States. The turn of the century marked a wave of movement from the country to the city, and a peak in affluence and consumer culture now remembered as the Roaring Twenties. The world was moving and changing quickly and traditional social norms and mores were in rapid decline. Doctors were also increasingly diagnosing people with something they called neurasthenia—essentially, anxiety and depression, marked by headaches, irritability, bouts of sadness and weariness, and dissatisfaction—in response to these overwhelming times.

The influence of this historical context can be seen throughout "The Waste Land." Many of the characters seem to suffer from shell shock or neurasthenia, and the setting of the poem is marked by damage and disorder, or is even explicitly apocalyptic. The poem also serves as something of a call to action, as Eliot sets about first capturing and diagnosing this broken modern world, and then prescribing a cure to redeem and restore it.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "The Waste Land," With Footnotes — This hyperlinked version of "The Waste Land" includes Eliot's original footnotes, as well as additional material unpacking the poem's many (many, many) allusions. (https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/waste-land)
- Eliot's Life Story — An in-depth biography and analysis of this groundbreaking poet and his career. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/t-s-eliot)
- T.S. Eliot's Reading — Listen to a recording of T.S. Eliot reading "The Waste Land" out loud. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqvhMeZ2PlY)
- The Fisher King and "The Waste Land" — Learn more about the connection between "The Waste Land" and the legends of the Fisher King and Holy Grail. (http://eliotandthegrailquest.weebly.com/parallels-and-purposes.html)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER T. S. ELIOT POEMS

- Journey of the Magi
- Preludes
- Rhapsody on a Windy Night
- The Hollow Men
- The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

HOW TO CITE

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