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# The Wasteland.

## T.S. Eliot.



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## About the author



Thomas Stearns Eliot (September 26, 1888 - January 4, 1965), was an Anglo-American poet, dramatist, and literary critic.

Eliot was born into a prominent Unitarian Saint Louis, Missouri family; his fifth cousin, Tom Eliot, was Chancellor of Washington University, and his grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, was the school's founder. Eliot's major work shows few signs of St. Louis, but there was, in his youth, a Prufrock furniture store in town.

Following his graduation from Harvard University in 1909, T.S. Eliot made his life and literary career in Britain, following the curtailment of a tour of Germany by the outbreak of World War I. After the War, in the 1920s, he would spend time with other great artists in the Montparnasse Quarter in Paris, France where he would be photographed by Man Ray. He dabbled in Buddhism and studied Sanskrit and was a student of G. I. Gurdjieff.

Through the influence of Ezra Pound he came to prominence with the publication of a poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, in 1915. His style was very fresh and modernist.

In 1922 came the publication of Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land*. Composed during a period of enormous personal difficulty for Eliot—his ill-fated marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood was already foundering, and both he and Vivien suffered from precarious health—*The Waste Land* offered a bleak portrait of post-World War I Europe, sometimes laced with disgust, but also hesitantly gesturing towards the possibility of (religious?) redemption. Despite the

famous difficulty of the poem—its slippage between satire and prophecy, its abrupt and unannounced changes of speaker, location and time, its elegaic but intimidating summoning up of a vast and dissonant range of cultures and literatures—the poem has nonetheless become a familiar touchstone of modern literature. Here are some of its perhaps most famous phrases: “April is the cruellest month”; “I will show you fear in a handful of dust”; “Shantih shantih shantih.” Ezra Pound contributed greatly to the poem with his editorial advice (the facsimile edition of the original manuscript with Pound's queries and corrections, published in 1971, is essential reading for admirers of the poem); in acknowledgement, Eliot later dedicated the poem to him: “For Ezra Pound, ‘Il miglior fabbro’” (the better craftsman).

Eliot's later work, following his conversion to Anglicanism on June 29, 1927, is often but by no means exclusively religious in nature. This includes such works as *The Hollow Men*, *Ash-Wednesday*, *The Journey of the Magi*, and *Four Quartets*. Eliot considered *Four Quartets* to be his masterpiece, as it draws upon his vast knowledge of mysticism and philosophy. It consists of four poems, “Burnt Norton,” “The Dry Salvages,” “East Coker,” and “Little Gidding.” Each of these runs to several hundred lines total and is broken into five sections. Although they resist easy characterization, they have many things in common: each begins with a rumination on the geographical location of its title, and each meditates on the nature of time in some important respect— theological, historical, physical, and on its relation to the human condition. A reflective early reading suggests an inexact systematicity among them; they approach the same ideas in varying but overlapping ways, although they do not necessarily exhaust their questions.

“Burnt Norton” asks what it means to consider things that aren't



the case but might have been. We see the shell of an abandoned house, and Eliot toys with the idea that all these “merely possible” realities are present together, but invisible to us: All the possible ways people might walk across a courtyard add up to a vast dance we can’t see; Children who aren’t there are hiding in the bushes.

Eliot’s plays, mostly in verse, include *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958).

*Murder in the Cathedral* is a frankly religious piece about the death of St Thomas Becket. He confessed to being influenced by, among others, the works of 17th century preacher, Lancelot Andrewes. Later, he was appointed to the committee formed to produce the “New English” translation of the Bible. In 1939 he published a book of poetry for children, *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*, which after his death became the basis of the hit West End and Broadway musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Cats*.

On November 4, 1948, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

After his death, his body was cremated and, according to Eliot’s wishes, the ashes taken to St Michael’s Church in East Coker, the village from which Eliot’s ancestors emigrated to America. A simple plaque commemorates him.

As a note of trivia, late in his life, Eliot became somewhat of a penpal with comedian Groucho Marx. Eliot even requested a portrait of the comedian, which he then proudly displayed in his home.

“The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock” is a greatly quoted and referenced piece. References have appeared in *Hill Street Blues* and *The Long Goodbye* by private-eye novelist Raymond Chandler.

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# *The Wasteland.*

“Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis  
vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent:  
Sibylla ti theleis; respondebat illa: apothanein thelo.”

1.

*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.

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And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,  
 My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,  
 And I was frightened. He said, Marie,  
 Marie, hold on tight. 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.  
 Od' 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 frere!"



## 2.

### *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 carved 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 to-night. 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 to-morrow?

"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 ITS 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 ITS 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 alright, 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 ITS 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 ITS TIME  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.  
 Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.  
 Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good  
 night.



## 3.

*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 de-  
 parted.  
 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 smooths 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



*A.*

*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.

## 5.

*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, aetherial 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 ceu chelidon - O swallow swallow  
 Le Prince d'Aquitaine a 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



## NOTES ON "THE WASTE LAND"

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*. Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies.

















