THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD – ANALYSIS

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The Waste Land was written by T.S. Eliot and was published in 1922. Taking the title into consideration, the adjective "waste", it conveys the idea of something desert, arid, desolate and sterile. It is associated with the name land, so the waste land is Europe, after a period of strife and death, devastated by the First World War. The Waste Land consists of five sections:

* The Burial Of The Dead
* A Game Of Chess
* The Fire Sermon
* Death by Water

The poem starts with a quotation taken form Petronius' s Satyricon,  in Latin and Greek. Eliot addressed this poem to his friend and compatriot, Ezra Pound, who helped him edit and publish The Waste Land. The second line is in the Italian vernacular used by Dante in his Divine Comedy .

The first section starts with *"April is the cruellest month".* It sounds paradoxical because spring is generally associated with life and love. The idea is taken from G. Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, in which the poet says April was the sweetest month; Eliot makes the change in order to upset the traditional view.

Winter is connoted in a positive way, people can find protection in it. The winter sleep is disturbed by the arrival of the spring with the revival of memory and desire.

After that the time shifts from spring to summer, *"summer surprised us".*

*"Coming over the Starnbergersee"* makes the location of the memory more specific, because [Starnbergersee](http://www.schloesser.bayern.de/englisch/lakes/objects/starnber.htm) is the name of a lake that's just a couple miles south of [Munich, Germany](http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-191501749-munich_vacations-i).

Eliot describes more specific memories: a rain shower by the Starnbergsee and the coffee into the Hofgarten, a small public park in Munich.

It follows a sentence in German, which translated is *"I'm not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a true German".*

It leads into a scene in the speaking voice's childhood, where children tried to have fun on a sled in winter.

Probably Eliot alludes to a real, historical figure named Marie Louise Elizabeth Mendel, a Bavarian woman who was born into a family with royal roots, and became Countess Larish when she was nineteen.

Then he return to the tone of the incipit, describing a land of the *"stony rubbish",* a waste land; it is a biblical reference because Eliot quotes Ezekiel 2.1 and Ecclesiastes 12.5, using biblical language to construct a sort of dialogue between the narrator and a higher power.

The "*heap of broken images*" recalls the idea of fragmentation typical of modernism and it underlines modern's man disorientation and loss of values.

At line 31 there is a quotation from Wagner's operatic version of Tristan und Isolde, an Arthurian tale of adultery and loss. In Wagner’s opera, Isolde, on her way to Ireland, overhears a sailor singing this song, which brings with it ruminations of love promised and of a future of possibilities. Some lines later Eliot returns to Wagner’s opera with the line *“Oed’ und leer das Meer”: “Desolate and empty is the sea.* . In these lines to a watchman tells the dying Tristan that Isolde’s ship is nowhere to be seen on the horizon.

At line 43 an other sudden change of scene is present and Madame Sosostris is introduced, *"a famous clairvoyante".* This fortune-teller is known across Europe for her skills with Tarot cards. The narrator remembers meeting her when she had *“a bad cold”.*

At that meeting she displayed to him the card of the drowned Phoenician Sailor: *“Here, said she, is your card.”* Next comes *“Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks”,* and then *“the man with three staves”, “the Wheel”, and “the one-eyed merchant”.*

Finally, Sosostris encounters a blank card representing something the one-eyed merchant is carrying on his back – something she is apparently *“forbidden to see”.* She is likewise unable to find the Hanged Man among the cards she displays; from this she concludes that the narrator should *“fear death by water.”* Sosostris also sees a vision of a mass of people *“walking round in a ring”.* Her meeting with the narrator concludes with a hasty bit of business: she asks him to tell Mrs. Equitone, that Sosostris will bring the horoscope herself.

The final stanza begins with the image of an “*Unreal City*” echoing Baudelaire’s “fourmillante cite”, in which a crowd of people flows over London Bridge while a *“brown fog”* hangs like a wintry cloud over the proceedings.

Eliot twice quotes Dante in describing this scene:

* *“I had not thought death had undone so many” (from Canto 3 of the Inferno);*
* *“Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled” (from Canto 4).*

The first quote refers to the area just inside the Gates of Hell; the second refers to Limbo, the first circle of Hell.

Each member of the crowd keeps his eyes on his feet; the mass of men flow up a hill and down King William Street, in the financial district of London, winding up beside the Church of Saint Mary Woolnoth.

The narrator sees a man: he recognizes him: *“Stetson!”.* He cries out to him, and it appears that the two men fought together in a war; the narrator refers to Mylae, a battle that took place during the First Punic War. He then asks Stetson whether the corpse he planted last year in his garden has begun to sprout.

Finally, there is an address to Stetson in French: *“Hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!”*