## **Poems**

## T. S. (Thomas Stearns) Eliot

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## Poems

by T. S. [Thomas Stearns] Eliot

December, 1998 [Etext #1567] [Date last updated: February 22, 2004]

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**POEMS** 

by T. S. ELIOT

New York Alfred A. Knopf 1920

#### To Jean Verdenal 1889-1915

Certain of these poems first appeared in Poetry, Blast, Others, The Little Review, and Art and Letters.

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#### **POEMS**

#### Gerontion

Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.
My house is a decayed house,

And the jew squats on the window sill, the owner, Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp, Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London. The goat coughs at night in the field overhead; Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds. The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea, Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.

I an old man, A dull head among windy spaces.

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign": The word within a word, unable to speak a word, Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas, To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero With caressing hands, at Limoges Who walked all night in the next room; By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians; By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door. Vacant shuttles Weave the wind. I have no ghosts, An old man in a draughty house Under a windy knob.

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions, Guides us by vanities. Think now She gives when our attention is distracted And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late What's not believed in, or if still believed, In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes. These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last We have not reached conclusion, when I Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last I have not made this show purposelessly And it is not by any concitation Of the backward devils.

I would meet you upon this honestly.
I that was near your heart was removed therefrom To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it Since what is kept must be adulterated?
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:

How should I use it for your closer contact?

These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
With pungent sauces, multiply variety
In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil
Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn,
White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
And an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner.

Tenants of the house, Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar

Tra-la-la-la-la-la-lare--nil nisi divinum stabile est; caetera fumus--the gondola stopped, the old palace was there, how charming its grey and pink-goats and monkeys, with such hair too!--so the countess passed on until she came through the little park, where Niobe presented her with a cabinet, and so departed.

Burbank crossed a little bridge Descending at a small hotel; Princess Volupine arrived, They were together, and he fell.

Defunctive music under sea Passed seaward with the passing bell Slowly: the God Hercules Had left him, that had loved him well.

The horses, under the axletree
Beat up the dawn from Istria
With even feet. Her shuttered barge
Burned on the water all the day.

But this or such was Bleistein's way: A saggy bending of the knees And elbows, with the palms turned out, Chicago Semite Viennese.

A lustreless protrusive eye Stares from the protozoic slime At a perspective of Canaletto. The smoky candle end of time Declines. On the Rialto once. The rats are underneath the piles. The jew is underneath the lot. Money in furs. The boatman smiles,

Princess Volupine extends A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand To climb the waterstair. Lights, lights, She entertains Sir Ferdinand

Klein. Who clipped the lion's wings And flea'd his rump and pared his claws? Thought Burbank, meditating on Time's ruins, and the seven laws.

## Sweeney Erect

And the trees about me, Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks Groan with continual surges; and behind me Make all a desolation. Look, look, wenches!

Paint me a cavernous waste shore Cast in the unstilted Cyclades, Paint me the bold anfractuous rocks Faced by the snarled and yelping seas.

Display me Aeolus above Reviewing the insurgent gales Which tangle Ariadne's hair And swell with haste the perjured sails.

Morning stirs the feet and hands (Nausicaa and Polypheme), Gesture of orang-outang Rises from the sheets in steam.

This withered root of knots of hair Slitted below and gashed with eyes, This oval O cropped out with teeth: The sickle motion from the thighs

Jackknifes upward at the knees Then straightens out from heel to hip Pushing the framework of the bed And clawing at the pillow slip.

Sweeney addressed full length to shave Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base, Knows the female temperament And wipes the suds around his face.

(The lengthened shadow of a man Is history, said Emerson

Who had not seen the silhouette Of Sweeney straddled in the sun).

Tests the razor on his leg Waiting until the shriek subsides. The epileptic on the bed Curves backward, clutching at her sides.

The ladies of the corridor Find themselves involved, disgraced, Call witness to their principles And deprecate the lack of taste

Observing that hysteria Might easily be misunderstood; Mrs. Turner intimates It does the house no sort of good.

But Doris, towelled from the bath, Enters padding on broad feet, Bringing sal volatile And a glass of brandy neat.

## A Cooking Egg

En l'an trentiesme de mon aage Que toutes mes hontes j'ay beucs ...

Pipit sate upright in her chair Some distance from where I was sitting; Views of the Oxford Colleges Lay on the table, with the knitting.

Daguerreotypes and silhouettes, Her grandfather and great great aunts, Supported on the mantelpiece An Invitation to the Dance.

I shall not want Honour in Heaven For I shall meet Sir Philip Sidney And have talk with Coriolanus And other heroes of that kidney.

I shall not want Capital in Heaven For I shall meet Sir Alfred Mond: We two shall lie together, lapt In a five per cent Exchequer Bond.

I shall not want Society in Heaven, Lucretia Borgia shall be my Bride; Her anecdotes will be more amusing Than Pipit's experience could provide.

I shall not want Pipit in Heaven:

Madame Blavatsky will instruct me In the Seven Sacred Trances; Piccarda de Donati will conduct me ...

. . . . . .

But where is the penny world I bought To eat with Pipit behind the screen? The red-eyed scavengers are creeping From Kentish Town and Golder's Green;

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps. Over buttered scones and crumpets Weeping, weeping multitudes Droop in a hundred A.B.C.'s

["ABC's" signifes endemic teashops, found in all parts of London. The initials signify "Aerated Bread Company, Limited."--Project Gutenberg Editor's replacement of original footnote]

#### Le Directeur

Malheur ?la malheureuse Tamise!
Tamisel Qui coule si pres du Spectateur.
Le directeur
Conservateur
Du Spectateur
Empeste la brise.
Les actionnaires
R?actionnaires
Du Spectateur

Conservateur

Bras dessus bras dessous

Font des tours

A pas de loup.

Dans un ?gout

Une petite fille

En quenilles

Camarde

Regarde

Le directeur

Du Spectateur

Conservateur

Et cr?ve d'amour.

## M?ange adult?re de tout

En Amerique, professeur; En Angleterre, journaliste; C'est ?grands pas et en sueur Que vous suivrez ?peine ma piste. En Yorkshire, conferencier; A Londres, un peu banquier, Vous me paierez bien la t?e. C'est ?Paris que je me coiffe Casque noir de jemenfoutiste. En Allemagne, philosophe Surexcit? par Emporheben Au grand air de Bergsteigleben; J'erre toujours de-ci de-l? A divers coups de tra la la De Damas jusqu'? Omaha. Je celebrai mon jour de f?e Dans une oasis d'Afrique V?tu d'une peau de girafe.

On montrera mon c?notaphe Aux c?tes br?antes de Mozambique.

#### Lune de Miel

Ils ont vu les Pays-Bas, ils rentrent ?Terre Haute; Mais une nuit d'??, les voici ?Ravenne, A l'sur le dos ?cartant les genoux De quatre jambes molles tout gonfl?es de morsures. On rel?ve le drap pour mieux ?gratigner. Moins d'une lieue d'ici est Saint Apollinaire In Classe, basilique connue des amateurs De chapitaux d'acanthe que touraoie le vent.

Ils vont prendre le train de huit heures
Prolonger leurs mis?res de Padoue ?Milan
Ou se trouvent le C?ne, et un restaurant pas cher.
Lui pense aux pourboires, et redige son bilan.
Ils auront vu la Suisse et travers?la France.
Et Saint Apollinaire, raide et asc?tique,
Vieille usine d'saffect?e de Dieu, tient encore
Dans ses pierres ?croulantes la forme precise de Byzance.

#### The Hippopotamus

Similiter et omnes revereantur Diaconos, ut mandatum Jesu Christi; et Episcopum, ut Jesum Christum, existentem filium Patris; Presbyteros autem, ut concilium Dei et conjunctionem Apostolorum. Sine his Ecclesia non vocatur; de quibus suadeo vos sic habeo.

## S. IGNATII AD TRALLIANOS.

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.

The broad-backed hippopotamus Rests on his belly in the mud; Although he seems so firm to us He is merely flesh and blood.

Flesh-and-blood is weak and frail, Susceptible to nervous shock; While the True Church can never fail For it is based upon a rock.

The hippo's feeble steps may err In compassing material ends, While the True Church need never stir To gather in its dividends.

The 'potamus can never reach
The mango on the mango-tree;
But fruits of pomegranate and peach
Refresh the Church from over sea.

At mating time the hippo's voice Betrays inliexions hoarse and odd, But every week we hear rejoice The Church, at being one with God.

The hippopotamus's day Is passed in sleep; at night he hunts; God works in a mysterious way-The Church can sleep and feed at once.

I saw the 'potamus take wing Ascending from the damp savannas, And quiring angels round him sing The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the Lamb shall wash him clean And him shall heavenly arms enfold, Among the saints he shall be seen Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow, By all the martyr'd virgins kiss, While the True Church remains below Wrapt in the old miasmal mist.

#### Dans le Restaurant

Le garcon d?abr?qui n'a rien ?faire

Que de se gratter les doigts et se pencher sur mon ?paule:

"Dans mon pays il fera temps pluvieux,

Du vent, du grand soleil, et de la pluie;

C'est ce qu'on appelle le jour de lessive des gueux."

(Bavard, baveux, ?la croupe arrondie,

Je te prie, au moins, ne bave pas dans la soupe).

"Les saules tremp?s, et des bourgeons sur les ronces---

C'est I?, dans une averse, qu'on s'abrite.
J'avais septtans, elle ?tait plus petite.
Elle etait toute mouill?e, je lui ai donn? des primav?res."
Les t?ches de son gilet montent au chiffre de trente-huit.
"Je la chatouillais, pour la faire rire.
J'?prouvais un instant de puissance et de d?ire.

Mais alors, vieux lubrique, a cet 3ge ... "Monsieur, le fait est dur. Il est venu, nous peloter, un gros chien; Moi j'avais peur, je l'ai quittee a mi-chemin. C'est dommage."

Mais alors, tu as ton vautour!
Va t'en te d'crotter les rides du visage;
Tiens, ma fourchette, d'crasse-toi le cr?ne.
De quel droit payes-tu des exp?riences comme moi?
Tiens, voil?dix sous, pour la salle-de-bains.

Phl?bas, le Ph?nicien, pendant quinze jours noy?,
Oubliait les cris des mouettes et la houle de Cornouaille,
Et les profits et les pertes, et la cargaison d'etain:
Un courant de sous-mer l'emporta tres loin,
Le repassant aux ?tapes de sa vie ant?rieure.
Figurez-vous donc, c'etait un sort penible;
Cependant, ce fut jadis un bel homme, de haute taille.

## Whispers of Immortality

Webster was much possessed by death And saw the skull beneath the skin; And breastless creatures under ground Leaned backward with a lipless grin.

Daffodil bulbs instead of balls Stared from the sockets of the eyes! He knew that thought clings round dead limbs Tightening its lusts and luxuries.

Donne, I suppose, was such another Who found no substitute for sense; To seize and clutch and penetrate, Expert beyond experience,

He knew the anguish of the marrow The ague of the skeleton; No contact possible to flesh Allayed the fever of the bone.

Grishkin is nice: her
Russian eye is underlined for emphasis;
Uncorseted, her friendly bust
Gives promise of pneumatic bliss.

The couched Brazilian jaguar

Compels the scampering marmoset With subtle effluence of cat; Grishkin has a maisonette;

The sleek Brazilian jaguar Does not in its arboreal gloom Distil so rank a feline smell As Grishkin in a drawing-room.

And even the Abstract Entities Circumambulate her charm; But our lot crawls between dry ribs To keep our metaphysics warm.

Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service

Look, look, master, here comes two religions caterpillars.

The Jew of Malta.

Polyphiloprogenitive
The sapient sutlers of the Lord
Drift across the window-panes.
In the beginning was the Word.

In the beginning was the Word. Superfetation of [Greek text inserted here], And at the mensual turn of time Produced enervate Origen.

A painter of the Umbrian school Designed upon a gesso ground The nimbus of the Baptized God. The wilderness is cracked and browned

But through the water pale and thin Still shine the unoffending feet And there above the painter set The Father and the Paraclete.

The sable presbyters approach The avenue of penitence; The young are red and pustular Clutching piaculative pence.

Under the penitential gates Sustained by staring Seraphim Where the souls of the devout Burn invisible and dim.

Along the garden-wall the bees With hairy bellies pass between The staminate and pistilate, Blest office of the epicene. Sweeney shifts from ham to ham Stirring the water in his bath. The masters of the subtle schools Are controversial, polymath.

Sweeney Among the Nightingales

[Greek text inserted here]

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees Letting his arms hang down to laugh, The zebra stripes along his jaw Swelling to maculate giraffe.

The circles of the stormy moon Slide westward toward the River Plate, Death and the Raven drift above And Sweeney guards the horned gate.

Gloomy Orion and the Dog Are veiled; and hushed the shrunken seas; The person in the Spanish cape Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees

Slips and pulls the table cloth Overturns a coffee-cup, Reorganized upon the floor She yawns and draws a stocking up;

The silent man in mocha brown Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes; The waiter brings in oranges Bananas figs and hothouse grapes;

The silent vertebrate in brown Contracts and concentrates, withdraws; Rachel n?e Rabinovitch Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;

She and the lady in the cape Are suspect, thought to be in league; Therefore the man with heavy eyes Declines the gambit, shows fatigue,

Leaves the room and reappears Outside the window, leaning in, Branches of wisteria Circumscribe a golden grin;

The host with someone indistinct Converses at the door apart, The nightingales are singing near The Convent of the Sacred Heart. And sang within the bloody wood When Agamemnon cried aloud, And let their liquid droppings fall To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

## The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse A persona che mai tornasse al mondo, Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse. Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero, Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question....
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes, The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening, Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains, Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys, Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap, And seeing that it was a soft October night, Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go

## Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair-(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin-(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all: Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons, I have measured out my life with coffee spoons; I know the voices dying with a dying fall Beneath the music from a farther room. So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them allThe eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all-Arms that are braceleted and white and bare (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!) Is it perfume from a dress That makes me so digress?

Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.

And should I then presume?

And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?

I should have been a pair of ragged claws Scuttling across the doors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! Smoothed by long fingers, Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers.

Stretched on on the floor, here beside you and me.

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,

Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,

I am no prophet--and here's no great matter;

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,

And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"-If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor--

And this, and so much more?-It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,

That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be; Am an attendant lord, one that will do To swell a progress, start a scene or two, Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool, Deferential, glad to be of use, Politic, cautious, and meticulous; Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse; At times, indeed, almost ridiculous--Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ... I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach? I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves Combing the white hair of the waves blown back When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

## Portrait of a Lady

Thou hast committed-Fornication: but that was in another country
And besides, the wench is dead.
The Jew of Malta.

Ī

Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon You have the scene arrange itself--as it will seem to do--With "I have saved this afternoon for you"; And four wax candles in the darkened room. Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead. An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid. We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and finger-tips. "So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul Should be resurrected only among friends Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room." -- And so the conversation slips Among velleities and carefully caught regrets Through attenuated tones of violins Mingled with remote cornets And begins.

"You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends, And how, how rare and strange it is, to find In a life composed so much, so much of odds and ends, (For indeed I do not love it ... you knew? you are not blind! How keen you are!) To find a friend who has these qualities, Who has, and gives Those qualities upon which friendship lives. How much it means that I say this to you--Without these friendships--life, what cauchemar!" Among the windings of the violins And the ariettes Of cracked cornets Inside my brain a dull tom-tom begins Absurdly hammering a prelude of its own, Capricious monotone That is at least one definite "false note." --Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance, Admire the monuments Discuss the late events. Correct our watches by the public clocks. Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks.

Ш

Now that lilacs are in bloom She has a bowl of lilacs in her room And twists one in her fingers while she talks.

"Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know What life is, you should hold it in your hands";
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)

"You let it flow from you, you let it flow,
And youth is cruel, and has no remorse
And smiles at situations which it cannot see."
I smile, of course,
And go on drinking tea.

"Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,
I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world
To be wonderful and youthful, after all."

The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune Of a broken violin on an August afternoon: "I am always sure that you understand My feelings, always sure that you feel, Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand.

You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel. You will go on, and when you have prevailed You can say: at this point many a one has failed.

But what have I, but what have I, my friend, To give you, what can you receive from me? Only the friendship and the sympathy Of one about to reach her journey's end.

I shall sit here, serving tea to friends...."

I take my hat: how can I make a cowardly amends
For what she has said to me?
You will see me any morning in the park
Reading the comics and the sporting page.
Particularly I remark An English countess goes upon the stage.
A Greek was murdered at a Polish dance,
Another bank defaulter has confessed.
I keep my countenance, I remain self-possessed
Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired
Reiterates some worn-out common song
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden
Recalling things that other people have desired.
Are these ideas right or wrong?

## Ш

The October night comes down; returning as before Except for a slight sensation of being ill at ease I mount the stairs and turn the handle of the door And feel as if I had mounted on my hands and knees.

"And so you are going abroad; and when do you return? But that's a useless question.
You hardly know when you are coming back,
You will find so much to learn."
My smile falls heavily among the bric-?brac.

"Perhaps you can write to me."
My self-possession flares up for a second;
This is as I had reckoned.

"I have been wondering frequently of late (But our beginnings never know our ends!) Why we have not developed into friends." I feel like one who smiles, and turning shall remark Suddenly, his expression in a glass. My self-possession gutters; we are really in the dark.

"For everybody said so, all our friends,
They all were sure our feelings would relate
So closely! I myself can hardly understand.
We must leave it now to fate.
You will write, at any rate.
Perhaps it is not too late.
I shall sit here, serving tea to friends."

And I must borrow every changing shape To find expression ... dance, dance Like a dancing bear, Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape. Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance--Well! and what if she should die some afternoon, Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose; Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand With the smoke coming down above the housetops; Doubtful, for quite a while Not knowing what to feel or if I understand Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon ... Would she not have the advantage, after all? This music is successful with a "dying fall" Now that we talk of dving--And should I have the right to smile?

## **Preludes**

I

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
And then the lighting of the lamps.

The morning comes to consciousness Of faint stale smells of beer From the sawdust-trampled street With all its muddy feet that press To early coffee-stands.

With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

#### Ш

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
You lay upon your back, and waited;
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.
And when all the world came back
And the light crept up between the shutters,
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;
Sitting along the bed's edge, where
You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands.

#### IV

His soul stretched tight across the skies That fade behind a city block, Or trampled by insistent feet At four and five and six o'clock; And short square fingers stuffing pipes, And evening newspapers, and eyes Assured of certain certainties, The conscience of a blackened street Impatient to assume the world.

I am moved by fancies that are curled Around these images, and cling: The notion of some infinitely gentle Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh; The worlds revolve like ancient women Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

Rhapsody on a Windy Night

Twelve o'clock.
Along the reaches of the street
Held in a lunar synthesis,
Whispering lunar incantations
Disolve the floors of memory
And all its clear relations,
Its divisions and precisions,
Every street lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum,
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

Half-past one,
The street lamp sputtered,
The street lamp muttered,
The street lamp said,
"Regard that woman
Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
Which opens on her like a grin.
You see the border of her dress
Is torn and stained with sand,
And you see the corner of her eye
Twists like a crooked pin."

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things;
A twisted branch upon the beach
Eaten smooth, and polished
As if the world gave up
The secret of its skeleton,
Stiff and white.
A broken spring in a factory yard,
Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
Hard and curled and ready to snap.

Half-past two,
The street-lamp said,
"Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,
Slips out its tongue
And devours a morsel of rancid butter."
So the hand of the child, automatic,
Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.
I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
I have seen eyes in the street
Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
An old crab with barnacles on his back,
Gripped the end of a stick which I held him.

Half-past three, The lamp sputtered, The lamp muttered in the dark.

The lamp hummed: "Regard the moon,

La lune ne garde aucune rancune, She winks a feeble eye, She smiles into corners. She smooths the hair of the grass. The moon has lost her memory. A washed-out smallpox cracks her face. Her hand twists a paper rose, That smells of dust and old Cologne, She is alone With all the old nocturnal smells That cross and cross across her brain. The reminiscence comes Of sunless dry geraniums And dust in crevices, Smells of chestnuts in the streets And female smells in shuttered rooms And cigarettes in corridors And cocktail smells in bars."

The lamp said,
"Four o'clock,
Here is the number on the door.
Memory!
You have the key,
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair,
Mount.
The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life."

The last twist of the knife.

## Morning at the Window

They are rattling breakfast plates in basement kitchens, And along the trampled edges of the street I am aware of the damp souls of housemaids Sprouting despondently at area gates. The brown waves of fog toss up to me Twisted faces from the bottom of the street, And tear from a passer-by with muddy skirts An aimless smile that hovers in the air And vanishes along the level of the roofs.

## The Boston Evening Transcript

The readers of the Boston Evening Transcript
Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.
When evening quickens faintly in the street,
Wakening the appetites of life in some
And to others bringing the Boston Evening Transcript,
I mount the steps and ring the bell, turning
Wearily, as one would turn to nod good-bye to Rochefoucauld,
If the street were time and he at the end of the street,
And I say, "Cousin Harriet, here is the Boston Evening Transcript."

#### Aunt Helen

Miss Helen Slingsby was my maiden aunt,
And lived in a small house near a fashionable square
Cared for by servants to the number of four.
Now when she died there was silence in heaven
And silence at her end of the street.
The shutters were drawn and the undertaker wiped his feetHe was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before.
The dogs were handsomely provided for,
But shortly afterwards the parrot died too.
The Dresden clock continued ticking on the mantelpiece,
And the footman sat upon the dining-table
Holding the second housemaid on his knees-Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived.

## Cousin Nancy

Miss Nancy Ellicott Strode across the hills and broke them, Rode across the hills and broke them--The barren New England hills--Riding to hounds Over the cow-pasture.

Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked And danced all the modern dances; And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it, But they knew that it was modern.

Upon the glazen shelves kept watch Matthew and Waldo, guardians of the faith, The army of unalterable law.

## Mr. Apollinax

When Mr. Apollinax visited the United States
His laughter tinkled among the teacups.
I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch-trees,
And of Priapus in the shrubbery
Gaping at the lady in the swing.
In the palace of Mrs. Phlaccus, at Professor Channing-Cheetah's
He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.
Otis laughter was submarine and profound
Like the old man of the sea's
Hidden under coral islands
Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green silence,
Dropping from fingers of surf.
I looked for the head of Mr. Apollinax rolling under a chair
Or grinning over a screen
With seaweed in its hair.

I heard the beat of centaur's hoofs over the hard turf As his dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon. "He is a charming man"--"But after all what did he mean?"--"His pointed ears ... He must be unbalanced,"--"There was something he said that I might have challenged." Of dowager Mrs. Phlaccus, and Professor and Mrs. Cheetah I remember a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon.

### Hysteria

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. An elderly waiter with trembling hands was hurriedly spreading a pink and white checked cloth over the rusty green iron table, saying: "If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden, if the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden ..." I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end.

#### Conversation Galante

I observe: "Our sentimental friend the moon! Or possibly (fantastic, I confess) It may be Prester John's balloon Or an old battered lantern hung aloft To light poor travellers to their distress." She then: "How you digress!"

And I then: "Some one frames upon the keys That exquisite nocturne, with which we explain The night and moonshine; music which we seize To body forth our vacuity."

She then: "Does this refer to me?"

"Oh no, it is I who am inane."

"You, madam, are the eternal humorist,
The eternal enemy of the absolute,
Giving our vagrant moods the slightest twist!
With your aid indifferent and imperious
At a stroke our mad poetics to confute--"
And--"Are we then so serious?"

## O quam te memorem Virgo ...

Stand on the highest pavement of the stair--Lean on a garden urn--Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair--Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise--Fling them to the ground and turn With a fugitive resentment in your eyes: But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,
So I would have had her stand and grieve,
So he would have left
As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,
As the mind deserts the body it has used.
I should find
Some way incomparably light and deft,
Some way we both should understand,
Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather Compelled my imagination many days, Many days and many hours:
Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.
And I wonder how they should have been together! I should have lost a gesture and a pose.
Sometimes these cogitations still amaze The troubled midnight and the noon's repose.

End of The Project Gutenberg Etext of Poems, by T. S. Eliot

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