

# Then Spoke *The Waste Land*: Songs and Fragments



**34<sup>TH</sup> EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR AMERICAN STUDIES CONFERENCE**

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**SONGS:** Antonio Ballesteros (voice & guitar), Eva Estebas (voice), Mabel Fernández (flute), Jorge Maletá (guitar), José Manuel Maletá (guitar)

**FRAGMENTS:** Antonio Ballesteros, María García Lorenzo, Dídac Llorens, Beatriz Pérez Cabello de Alba, Ana Zamorano

## I) Prologue / Overture

Our recital opens with the song “Twentieth-Century Blues,” which Noël Coward wrote for the American musical film *Cavalcade* (Frank Lloyd, 1931). Its lyrics (“Why is it that civilized humanity / Can make the world so wrong?”) resonate with the historical context in which *The Waste Land* appeared – and sadly, with our own. Although Eliot initially thought of Coward’s plays as mere entertainment, he came to appreciate them as he wrote his own drawing-comedies in the 1950s. Curiously, the protagonist of Eliot’s *The Confidential Clerk*, Colby, was born, like Coward, in Teddington.

## II) Spring and Love

The song “It Was a Lover and His Lass” (from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*) evokes the spring as the ideal setting for the fulfilment of love. The opening lines of *The Waste Land* negate traditional spring openings and, in subsequent scenes, we find examples of thwarted love. The melancholy frustration of the hyacinth garden lovers is associated with the sailor’s song in Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (“Frisch weht der Wind”). The so-called “neurotic woman” and her aloof partner, on the other hand, seem painfully unable to communicate.

## III) The City

*The Waste Land* is a markedly urban poem. Eliot’s Unreal City can be identified with London and with Dante’s Inferno, where “death had undone so many”. The poetic speaker, like a flâneur, walks its streets, visits its landmarks, and talks to its people – Mr. Eugenides or Stetson, who performs a frustrated fertility rite. The Unreal City is also the setting for the encounter between the typist and the “young man carbuncular,” witnessed by the prophet Tiresias. The musical background for this section is the Flanagan and Allen song “Underneath the Arches,” which comically evokes the squalor of modern cities.

## IV) Here is Belladonna

The song “When I Take my Morning Promenade,” with its teasing lyrics on the changes in women’s fashion, was made famous by Marie Lloyd, the “Queen” of London music-hall. In 1922 (the year of publication of *The Waste Land*), Eliot wrote an obituary essay on Lloyd and the popular vitality of the music-hall, which he always admired. With this song we introduce various female voices / portraits in *The Waste Land*: Madame Sosostriis, “famous clairvoyant,” the so-called “neurotic woman,” Lil and her friend chatting at the pub, the typist at home “at the violet hour,” and finally Ophelia.

## V) Dry Desolation

In *The Waste Land*, the Thames “runs softly,” but carries debris and waste. As one would expect, the poem is rich in images of natural decay and draught. “The nymphs are departed,” although we can hear the singing of the Rhine maidens from Wagner’s *The Twilight of the Gods* (“Weialala”). As an ironic contrast to hopeless desolation, “Thanks to This Lonesome Vales” (an air from Henry Purcell’s opera *Dido and Aeneas*), evokes an idyllic pastoral setting, where “Diana’s self might resort” – Dido, Aeneas and Diana are indirectly alluded to in the poem.

## VI) Death by Water

Early in the poem, Madame Sosostriis sees “death by water” on her tarot cards. Phlebas the Phoenician has drowned. It is uncertain whether his body will metamorphose “into something rich and strange,” as Ariel sings to Ferdinand (who believes his father dead after the shipwreck) in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Viewing Phlebas’ death as an absolute end or as a promise of resurrection is probably the key

to interpreting *The Waste Land*. Ezra Pound, who reduced the original “Death by Water” to only ten lines, considered this section the heart of the poem.

## VII) Distant Spirituality

Eliot became interested in Hinduism as a student at Harvard. He took the parable of the voice of thunder from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (the Upanishads are foundational texts of Hinduist theology). The thunder’s message (*data, dayadhvam, damyata*) is to “give, be compassionate, and control yourself”. Despite the final pandemonium of quotes in different languages, *The Waste Land* closes with a benediction in Sanskrit: “Shantih shantih shantih”. Because of its spiritual longing and Hinduist background, George Harrison’s “My Sweet Lord” (1970) seems an apt musical background for this section.

### I) Prologue / Overture

*Twentieth century blues*

“Then in 1914 . . .”

Noel Coward (*Cavalcade*)

T.S. Eliot (*Letters of TSE*, vol. 1)

### II) Spring and Love

“April is the cruellest month...”

*It was a lover and his lass*

“You gave me hyacinths first a year ago...”

*Frisch weht der Wind*

“My nerves are bad tonight...”

T. Morley & W. Shakespeare (*As you like it*)

R. Wagner (*Tristan und Isolde*)

### III) The City

“For having lived in Westminster...”

*Underneath the arches*

“Unreal city... winter dawn”

“Unreal city... winter noon”

“At the violet hour...”

“This music crept by me upon the waters...”

Virginia Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway*)

B. Flannagan & C. Allen

### IV) Here is Belladonna

“Perhaps not even you can imagine...”

*When I Take My Morning Promenade*

“Here is Belladonna...”

“In vials of ivory and coloured glass...”

“When Lil’s husband got demobbed...”

“The typist home at teatime...”

Vivien Haigh-Wood (*Letters of TSE*, vol. 1)

A. J. Mills & B. Scott

“Good night, ladies, good night...”

*Ophelia’s song*

Anonymous & W. Shakespeare (*Hamlet*)

“His poem is as good in its way as Ulysses...”

Ezra Pound (*Letters of TSE*, vol. 1)

## V) Dry Desolation

*Thanks to these lonesome vales*

H. Purcell (*Dido and Aeneas*)

“What are the roots that clutch...”

“The river’s tent is broken...”

“A rat crept softly through the vegetation...”

“The river sweats...”

*Weialala leia*

R. Wagner (*Das Rheingold*)

“Here is no water but only rock...”

“Then out of the blue...”

W. C. Williams (*Autobiography*)

## VI) Death by Water

*Full fathom five*

R. Johnson & W. Shakespeare (*The Tempest*)

“Here, said she...”

“I remember...”

“Phlebas the Phoenician...”

“Various critics have done me the honour...”

T.S. Eliot (*The Waste Land. Facsimile & Transcript*)

## VII) Distant Spirituality

*My Sweet Lord*

George Harrison

“Ganga was sunken...”

“DA *Datta*: what have we given?...”

“DA *Dayadhvam*: I have heard the key...”

“DA *Damyata*: The boat responded...”

“I sat upon the shore...”

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