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# **Long Live the Kingdom:** Narrative Frequency in *The Waste Land*

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*iter, itineris* n. **1.** Percurso; caminho percorrido; *marcha*; viagem. **2.** Estrada; caminho; passagem. **3.** Fig. Via; meio; maneira. **4.** Direito de passagem. **5. Loc.: (...) ex itinere** “no trajecto, quando em marcha, *sem parar*, imediatamente, de improviso”

*iterare* tr. **1.** Repetir; dizer incessantemente; reiterar. **2. Recomendar, renovar;** retomar. **3. Narrar;** cantar; *celebrar*. (...)

Francisco Torrinha, *Dicionário Latino-Português*

## Abstract

Bleak, polemic and puzzling, *The Waste Land* occupies a central role in modernist literature, as well as in the poetry canon of the twentieth century. T. S. Eliot's 1922 poetic *tour de force* is celebrated for its fragmented myriad of styles, voices, images and even languages. But there is order in chaos: more than two thirds of the groundbreaking poem consist of narrative passages of varying complexity, ranging from simple, nostalgic childhood recollections to intricate embedded accounts of apocalyptic prophecies. This study approaches the seminal poem from the point of view of the field of Narratology, following its theory and terminology as defined by Gérard Genette (1980) and applied by Mieke Bal (1997), focusing on issues of narrative frequency in order to establish the poem's usage of singular and iterative frequency, as well as the relations between those instances and the greater semantic significance of the poem.

**Keywords:** Anglo-American poetry – T. S. Eliot – *The Waste Land* – narratology – narrative frequency

## Resumo

Sombrio, polêmico e labiríntico, *The Waste Land* ocupa uma posição central na literatura modernista, bem como no cânone da poesia do século XX. O *tour de force* poético de T. S. Eliot, publicado em 1922, é celebrado por sua miríade fragmentária de estilos, vozes, imagens e até mesmo línguas. Mas há ordem no caos: mais de dois terços do revolucionário poema constituem-se de passagens narrativas de complexidade variada, desde simples memórias nostálgicas de infância a intrincados relatos aninhados de profecias apocalípticas. Este estudo aborda o seminal poema a partir do ponto de vista do campo da Narratologia, seguindo sua teoria e terminologia conforme definidas por Gérard Genette (1980) e aplicadas por Mieke Bal (1997), enfocando questões de frequência narrativa, a fim de estabelecer os usos que o poema faz das frequências singular e iterativa, bem como as relações entre tais instâncias e a expressividade semântica maior da obra.

**Palavras-chave:** poesia Anglo-Americana – T. S. Eliot – *The Waste Land* – narratologia – frequência narrativa

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## 1 Introduction

This work is an analysis of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* – a poem – from the point of view of narratology – a literary theory primarily concerned with narrative prose. Such an apparently unlikely methodology entails the need for justification, if not outright defense, regarding pre-conceived notions and myths that often surround narrative studies.

One such notion is that the term “narration” corresponds to a corpus made exclusively of narrative prose texts, such as novels and short stories. That assumption could not possibly be further from the truth. Especially in the past three decades, the field of narratology has dramatically expanded its coverage, to the point that many, if not most, of the new research conducted within the field deals with visual narratives such as films and even paintings. Dutch narratologist Mieke Bal contends that it is “as impossible as it is undesirable to specify a fixed corpus” (Bal, 10) for narrative studies, and that the aim of narratology is not to issue definitive judgments on whether a text does or does not belong under the label of “narrative”, but to describe texts “*to the extent that they are narrative*” (Bal, 10). To that end, in her book entitled *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* she offers examples ranging from Dutch children's literature in verse to canonical films such as *Schindler's List* and *The Godfather*. Simply put, it might be said that narratology studies works of art that (perhaps among other effects) tell a story – *to the extent that they tell a story* – regardless of media. The blurred boundaries of the narrative corpus are a recurrent concern among other authors from the field as well. As early as the late Seventies new developments in narratology pointed, quite explicitly, to that direction, as attested by Seymour Chatman's 1978 book *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. The dilemma is hardly absent from the work of more celebrated authors such as Tzvetan Todorov and Roland Barthes, and even Gerard Genette, whose 1980 seminal classic *Narrative Discourse* deals exclusively with verbal narration, must make, for the sake of argumentation, the occasional foray into film (Genette, 193n, 237), or even music (Genette, 210), going so far as to introduce his first chapter with a film stud-

ies quote (Genette, 33). Furthermore, Genette finds similar complications without leaving the constraints of verbal narration, namely in the distinction between narrative and drama. As he points out, the problem dates back to the classical world, with Plato distinguishing “pure narrative” from mimesis (i.e., drama) (Genette, 163).

Another relevant distinction, recurrent in Bal’s work (Bal, 8, 31), is that works of art typically dubbed “narratives” are seldom “pure” in that classification. Most novels and short stories alternate between narrative and non-narrative passages, which she divides into *descriptive* and *argumentative* passages (Bal, 36, 32). Genette’s aforementioned work pays considerably less attention to non-narrative passages, nevertheless dividing them similarly into *diegetic* (*descriptive pauses* – descriptions that do not involve the passage of time in the events narrated) and *extra-diegetic* (*author’s intrusions* or *interventions*, which he describes as “commentarial excursions in the present tense” that are “not strictly speaking narrative”), before moving on to focus on the former (Genette, 94n). At any rate, it is clear from both works that pure narrativity is to be found neither in the corpus nor in any individual object of study of narrative theory. Therefore, it is only with the awareness that an objective, steadfast separation of narrative and non-narrative texts is both impossible and irrelevant that a research such as this can proceed.

Some elaboration may also be useful regarding Eliot’s poem. Few, if any, would classify *The Waste Land* as anything other than a poem. The label, however, is even more elusive than “narrative”. That traditional lyric discourse corresponding to a cathartic expression of powerful emotions is but one of the many discourses available to poetry, and not just for experimental enterprises like modernism: what are the epics of Homer, Dante and Milton other than non-lyric (or extra-lyric) poetry? The very term “epic” has become synonymous with narration throughout the history of literary studies, from early Poetics such as Boileau’s to modern scholars like Emil Staiger.

It is nonetheless true, of course, that the eclectic complexities of modernist poetry make it especially appropriate for unusual theoretical perspectives. And there could hardly be a better example of those complexities than *The Waste Land*, so superlatively and ubiquitously celebrated as the core achievement of modernist poetry. Dubbing the poem a “modern epic” has already become a trite cliché, though one that still resounds with the work’s extra-lyric qualities – which are, to a great extent, narrative. Narration, description and dialogue (all ultimately narrative, it might be argued) abound in its 434 lines, more than 300 of which display narrative traits. Which is to say, almost 70 percent of the full text. Two of the five parts into which the poem is divided (namely parts II and IV, *A Game of Chess* and *Death by Water*) constitute a narration from beginning to end<sup>1</sup>, and much of the remaining three parts is likewise made of narrative passages or interludes.

Those numbers are very concrete evidence of the narrative nature of the poem, therefore of the appropriateness of narratology as a theoretical framework to analyze it. It is important here to stress the issue of the theoretical framework being suited to the work – not the other way around. Narratology has often been accused of being an excessively formalist approach, producing semi-mathematical certainties too abstract to bear any relevance for studies concerned with literature’s cultural significance or reception. That is another pre-conceived notion bearing little truth, if any. Distorting a work of art with forced interpretations and generalizations to better “illustrate” a theoretical framework is an accusation that has, in fact, been made not only against narratology, but all theory (which, as John Ellis quite articulately argues, is not to blame<sup>2</sup>). It is theory that must be flexible enough to better suit the work of art, even if many such works (like

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<sup>1</sup> The last two lines of *Death by Water* are a second-person address, therefore of debatable “narrativeness”. But other than that, it is wholly concerned with the drowning of “Phlebas the Phoenician”. “A Game of Chess”, on the other hand, is from beginning to end a narration, or rather two, dealing with the married life of two couples. Dialogues between characters are of central significance to both narratives, structurally as well as thematically, as their respective analysis show.

<sup>2</sup> In chapter 8 of his book *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* (titled “Is Theory to Blame?”), John Ellis presents a thorough, yet objective overview of the debate on the excesses of theory and criticism in the humanities, particularly where the so-called “race-gender-class”, politically-correct academic approach is concerned.

*The Waste Land*) are flexible to the point of making sense from various theoretical points of view. And narratology is no exception. The issue is also one stressed over and over by Mieke Bal, who calls narratology a “heuristic tool” (Bal, xv), a “readerly device” (Bal, xv), an “instrument” (Bal, 3, 11) and, later, “a cultural attitude” (Bal, 222). When debating formalist approaches she repeatedly asks “what is the point?” (Bal, 14, 221, 223), and effectively recommends narratology for cultural analysis<sup>3</sup>. Blaming (or banning) systematic theories, then, for the excesses of some of its practitioners, is not unlike denying knives to cooks due to their misuse by criminals. A good summary, and perhaps even a rule of thumb, to the debate on excessive formalism is offered by the Dutch scholar on page 221: “Delimitation, classification, typology, it is all very nice as a remedy to chaos-anxiety, but what *insights* does it yield?” (emphasis added).

## 1.1 Narratology: a Brief Summary

As defined by Mieke Bal, in narratology the narrative content of literary works (and, with some methodology adjustments, non-literary ones as well) is considered from the perspective of three abstract, hypothetical layers: Fabula, Story and Text. The *Fabula* refers to the *events* of the narrative, considered in the chronological order that they happened and with attention to the *actors* that cause or experience them (e.g., “Cain murders Abel”). The *Story* level renders the events from the Fabula in an ordering, which may or may not coincide with their chronological sequence, or even omit events altogether. It also introduces the notion of *focalization* – the point of view from which the events are told (e.g., “I murdered Abel”, or “Cain murdered Abel”, for an external point of view). The *Text* level refers to the surface material of the work of art (in the case of literature, the words). This is the layer of non-narrative comments (i.e., *descriptive* and *argumentative* passages), and also of their speaker, the narrator (e.g., “Having concluded her first childbirth, Eve rested her sweaty brow on the soft, blood-stained grass, completely unaware that the helpless

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<sup>3</sup> In a whole section of *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, called “Theses on the Use of Narratology for Cultural Analysis” (220-224).



infant in her arms would forever be remembered not as the first man born of woman, but as the first murderer.”). A Text presents a version of a Story as a Story does to a Fabula, which is to say that many elements of one layer have corresponding counterparts in another. The people who cause or experience the situations of the narrative, for instance, are called *actors* in the level of Fabula, *characters* in the level of Story and *speakers* in the level of Text, with distinctions and complexities proper of each level. Likewise, the *levels of narration* that occur in the Text (either simple, with a single narrator, or with recurring frame narratives like “the snake said that Adam said that Cain murdered Abel”) correspond to *levels of focalization* from the Story (as in “the snake sees that Adam sees that Cain has murdered Abel”). It cannot be stressed enough that these three layers, their elements and distinctions are purely hypothetical, as argued by Bal:

These processes are not to be confused with the author’s activity – it is both impossible and useless to generalize about the latter. The principles of ordering which are described here have a hypothetical status only, and their purpose is to make possible *a description of the way content material comes across in the story*.

(Bal, 7, emphasis added. Notice how narratology, even in its essential levels and purpose, is concerned with reception.)

Every narratological analysis takes place within the limits of those three layers<sup>4</sup>. Substructures distinguished in each layer include, for instance, the aforementioned triad of *actor-character-speaker*, levels of narration and focalization, the distinction of *place* and *space* (belonging to the layers of Fabula and Story, respectively), as well as three aspects to describe the presentation of time in the Story layer: order, rhythm and frequency. The first, *order*, is of central significance to the Story layer, since it concerns the discrepancies between the order of the events in the Fabula and that of its Story presentation. The second, *rhythm*, draws relations between the duration of Fabula events and the time (or rather volume of text) taken to narrate them (i.e., condensation of longer periods in fewer words result in faster rhythms, while slower rhythms imply greater detail). Finally, *frequency* has to do with repetition – in other words, with how many times an event happens, and how many times it is told. The latter is the focus of this research.

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<sup>4</sup> The treatment of those layers, however, obviously varies from author to author. Genette, for instance, distinguishes the levels of story (*histoire*), narrating (*narration*) and narrative (*récit*), roughly equivalent to Bal’s (Genette, 25-27). In this and other issues of terminology, this research follows Bal, except where explicitly noted otherwise.

Concerning frequency, it is important to distinguish that “repetition” is itself an abstraction. It may be easily argued that there is no such thing as repetition, since every event, no matter how similar to a previous or future one, is ultimately a unique occurrence. The term refers, then, to different events that are perceived as too similar to be distinguished from each other, and are thus grouped. Regular or routine events, like sunrise or having breakfast, are naturally perceived as repetitions of the same event, even if they are not quite so. The key notion to observe here is *perception*, which is the most important trait of the Story layer: a narrating agent *perceives* a series of events as a repetition, and tells it accordingly.

On page 113, Bal classifies frequency in the following scheme, in which “F” and “S” stand, respectively, for the number of times an event takes place in the Fabula and the number of times it is presented in the Story layer:

<b>Fabula/Story Ratio</b>	<b>Type of Frequency</b>	<b>Description</b>
1F/1S	Singular	One event, one presentation
nF/nS	Plurisingular	Various events, various presentations
nF/mS	Varisingular	Various events, various presentations, unequal in number
1F/nS	Repetitive	One event, various presentations
nF/1S	Iterative	Various events, one presentation

Singular frequency is, naturally, the most common of the five. It is the normal frequency of simple narration, when no events are perceived as repetitions. It is also the predominant frequency of narration in *The Waste Land*. A considerable number of iterative narrations also occur in the poem, some of special significance, as the later analysis shows. The other three do not occur in the poem. Therefore, this study focuses on the occurrences of singular and iterative narrations, the relations between those occurrences and the greater semantic significance of frequency for the poem.

Concerning frequency, Genette’s *Narrative Discourse* is the essential theoretical reference. Bal’s approach is virtually identical to his, with few discrepancies of little consequence. The terms *iterative* and *singular* belong to both nomenclatures, though Genette for some reason prefers the

neologism “singulative” for the latter, admitting “singular” as a synonym. This study relies primarily on Bal’s simpler, more objective exposition, but nonetheless returns to Genette for the notion of *syllaptic formulation*, which refers to phrases and expressions that indicate iterative frequency – “every day”, “the whole week”, “every day of the week I went to bed early” (Genette, 116). The core of Bal’s and Genette’s approaches may be found in pages 111-114 and 113-117 of their respective books.

## 1.2 The Fabula of *The Waste Land*

In narratology as conceived by Bal, every work of art that has a Fabula can be analyzed. In the case of *The Waste Land*, there is no simple, straightforward “plot” to be followed; not only because the work is a poem, but also because of the modernist complexities mentioned before. If a work of art is fragmented, subjective and polysemic, it is only natural that any plot or plot-like structures it may include be equally so. A short summary of the poem’s fabula as conceived in this reading must be then presented here, with the understanding that it is in no way a final, definitive “deciphering” of the cryptic poem, but merely one of many possible readings from which to proceed to the analysis<sup>5</sup>.

In a nutshell, *The Waste Land* is a poem about the feeling of disillusionment with modern civilization, especially as manifested in Europe after the First World War<sup>6</sup>. With the Holy Grail

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<sup>5</sup> The following six footnotes include line number references to the passages of *The Waste Land* that support the interpretation used in this work. Most of the sources and background information to the more cryptic allusions in the poem are explained in Frank Kermode’s footnotes to the 2003 Penguin Classics Eliot collection entitled *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. This research follows that version, and much of the interpretation adopted here depends on its footnotes. It must be observed, however, that the Penguin edition contains inconsistencies in line numbering. Appendix 1 of this study contains the whole poem, with correct line numbers. It is to *that* numbering that all the references point to. The actual text of the poem, however, is identical to the one in the Penguin edition. My numbering, furthermore, coincides with Kermode’s until line 377. Another practical tool for the engaged reader in search of annotation for cryptic allusions is Rickard Parker’s website *Exploring “The Waste Land”*, a very convenient hypertext rendering of *The Waste Land* with comments, translations and sources easily accessible by clicking the poem’s text.

<sup>6</sup> This reading, though by no means exhaustive, has been recurrent among Eliot readers and scholars throughout the 20th century, and is perhaps the most widely recognized. It has been in print for practically as long as the poem itself (see, for instance, I. A. Richards’s “Background to Contemporary Poetry” in the July, 1925 issue of the Eliot-founded periodical *The Criterion*. On page 520, Richards labels it as “the expression of the disillusionment of the age.”). At any rate, it is surely canonical.

legends, Buddha's *Fire Sermon* and the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad from Vedic scripture as its main sources, the poem depicts a physically<sup>7</sup> and spiritually sterile and diseased land where debauchery, greed, war, abuse and oppression are fueled by widespread indifference. A few key allusions<sup>8</sup> confirm the ruler of the Waste Land to be the Fisher King of the Holy Grail myths, who, as described in Jessie Weston's 1920 anthropological treatise *From Ritual to Romance*, will remain wounded as long as his kingdom and vice-versa. A religious epiphany announces a savior who, like Parsifal, will heal the wounded monarch and, consequently, restore his land to fertility<sup>9</sup>. Wind and thunder announce death from the East, and drowning (or, as the poem puts it, "death by water") is also foretold as a source of risk to the expected savior<sup>10</sup>. After a series of apocalyptic visions ripe with biblical references and disturbing imagery, the wind and the thunder bring down fierce rain as the Waste Land and its king finally perish<sup>11</sup>. In his last words, the Fisher King acknowledges the thunderous teachings of Prajapati from the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad (*Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata* – roughly describable as generosity, compassion and self-restraint) and departs with the serene wisdom of the typical conclusion to the Vedic Upanishads: *Shantih shantih shantih* (which Eliot's notes correspond to "the Peace [of God] which passeth understanding", as described by St. Paul in the Bible in Philippians 4:7). More details will be added to this basic plot during the analysis proper. The subsequent readings of individual passages, it must be stressed, have likewise no greater claims to finality or exhaustion, and are often in fact quite open, and necessarily so; not only in regard to the polysemic nature of *The Waste Land*, but in adequacy to

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<sup>7</sup> By using sterile desert soil as a metaphor for moral decadence, Eliot's poem evokes two 19th century traditions of industrial deprecation: first, regarding Britain's natural resources, lamented both literally and allegorically by authors as diverse as Oliver Goldsmith and William Blake (and also by E. M. Forster in the following century); second, regarding the human condition, as rendered in great detail in Dickens's classic novels. Assuming those two influences, *The Waste Land* bridges the end of Britain's traditional rural order, as well as its shift of values and identity, into the so-called "lost generation" of the interwar period. The reading is, therefore, the one that gave the poem its current status in the Western canon.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, lines 189-192, 202 and 424-426. Eliot's own annotation to the Boni & Liveright New York edition of the poem (reproduced in the Penguin Classics edition) explicitly mention the Fisher King, Chapel Perilous and other elements of the Grail legend, and may also be of interest.

<sup>9</sup> Lines 35-42 and 202. The story of how Parsifal found the Grail and cured the King is told in Wolfram Von Eschenbach's 13<sup>th</sup> century epic *Parzival*, but also in Paul Verlaine's 1886 poem *Parsifal* and the homonymous 1882 opera by Richard Wagner, both direct sources of *The Waste Land*.

<sup>10</sup> *Wind and thunder*: lines 174-175, 327, 342; *death from the East*: lines 26-30, 367-377; *drowning*: lines 54-55, 319-321.

<sup>11</sup> *Biblical references*: lines 322-326, 360, 385; *very disturbing imagery*: lines 378-385; *the Fisher King's death*: line 426.

the cognitive nature of narratology. Rather than meanings, the theory looks at the structures from which meaning can be derived. As Bal argues, “it is only once we know how a text is structured that the reader’s share – and responsibility – can be clearly assessed” (Bal, 11).

The study that follows divides each of the poem’s five parts into other subparts, which may be further divided and so on, in order to identify distinct narrative blocks with their own themes, events and traits. Such divisions are necessarily subjective and imprecise, given the poem’s fragmented and polysemic nature. Not all lines of the poem are included: purely descriptive passages with no narrative content or form, for instance, are of little relevance to the study (narrative blocks with descriptive function, though, are not). Therefore, it is not a matter of elaborating a sharp and thorough hierarchical scheme of the poem’s “building blocks”, but rather of identifying relevant passages in the poem, grouping them with other passages of similar nature or effect. For the sake of precision as well as convenience, the narrative blocks identified have been given topic-and-subtopic coordinates (e.g., I.A.1) and titles (e.g., “Room Description”, “Entrance of the Wife”). Naturally, such titles have no claims to definitive authoritativeness, and are provided just for ease of reference. Though the main criteria in their coining was to be as faithful to the actual text as possible, avoiding superfluous information or unnecessary personal interpretations, they nonetheless serve the reading explained in the previous paragraph and are of little relevance outside the present analysis of the poem’s narrative frequency. For example, part I, “The Burial of the Dead”, is for the purposes of this research divided in four parts. The first of them (lines 1-18) is titled “Marie” (I.A), since the speaker common to all those lines identifies herself by that name. Within “Marie”, four relevant passages are highlighted, namely “Winter and Summer” (I.A.1), “Hofgarten” (I.A.2), “Sled” (I.A.3) and “I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter” (I.A.4). The first three of those subparts are titled so because they essentially narrate the coming of Winter and Summer (lines 5-9), an afternoon at the Hofgarten park in Munich (lines 9-11) and a childhood sled ride of Marie with her cousin (lines 13-16), respectively. The fourth subpart consists of a single line (18), and therefore is referred to without titling (but

nevertheless is given a coordinate, to establish its narrative function in the structure of subpart I.A). Notice how lines 1-4 and 17 are absent from the division, including the poem's memorable beginning, "April is the cruellest month (...)". That is because no narrative traits were observed in those lines, either in content or in form.

Appendix 1 consists of the full text of the poem, with indications of the narrative passages, their narrative frequency and embedding. Appendix 2 includes a table with a hierarchical disposition of the many parts and subparts, indicating for each the type of narration (singular or iterative), number of lines, non-narrative functions (descriptive or argumentative) and a number of other statistics. Further complexities of content and methodology will be presented along the analysis, as necessary.

## 2 Narrative Frequency in *The Waste Land*

The irregular discourse of *The Waste Land* introduces peculiar complications to the task of identifying its narrative passages. Famous for its unpredictable changes of style, voice and point of view, the poem likewise makes extensive use of several techniques to convey its narrative meanings, ranging from traditional narrative structures like descriptive introductions and dialogue markers (“he said”, “she said”) to entirely associative lists of words lacking phrasal syntax, which present readers with gaps to be actively filled in before any meaning can be inferred. Narrativity and narrative frequency, therefore, must be judged and assigned on an individual basis.

Nevertheless, some regular (or at least recurrent) narrative traits are identifiable throughout the text of the poem. One such key trait is verbal tense: singular narration tends to be voiced in the simple past, while simple present recurs as a common presentation of iterative narration. Concerning the latter, many sorts of sylleptic formulation are also present, from simple adverbs like “always” to more complex, illustrative periods.

As exemplified in the introduction, the five actual parts of the poem are here further divided into subparts, that may themselves be further subdivided and so on. A consequence of these divisions is a structure of levels, not unlike the aforementioned levels of narration or focalization. It is a rather simple notion. The five main parts constitute the first level, their immediate subparts the second, any parts these might have the third et cetera. The only complication that arises from this level structure is the notion of *embedding*. Prince defines the term as follows:

**embedding.** A combination of narrative sequences (recounted in the same narrating instance or in different ones) such that one sequence is embedded (set within) another one. A narrative like “Jane was happy, and Susan was unhappy; then Susan met Flora, and she became happy; then Jane met Peter, and she became unhappy” can be said to result from the embedding of “Susan was unhappy; then Susan met Flora, and she became happy” into “Jane was happy; then Jane met Peter, and she became unhappy.” Similarly, *Manon Lescaut* can be said to result from the embedding of Des Grieux’s narrative into the one recounted by M. de Renoncourt (...).

(Prince, 25)

Embedding does not automatically refer to every block that is considered part of another. In the sense that a subpart may belong to a greater part, it is important to distinguish, within the scope of this study, three modes of “belonging”: component, excerpt and embedding. *Components* of a certain whole are the sum total of its constituting parts, like bricks and mortar are to a wall or blade and handle are to a knife. *Excerpts* of a whole are abstract distinctions within a single object or an object normally understood as indivisible. The division, hence, does not reflect juxtaposition of individual pieces, but a criterion of perception based on variation (e.g., of width) or function. Possible examples are the sides of a coin or the edge of a blade. Finally, *embedding* refers to the complex process in which a single object is joined with another without any changes in the perception of the identity of either object. For instance, a precious stone may be attached to a ring, but neither will cease to be what they were before the joining was made: a stoneless ring and a ringless stone. Like with repetition (as described in the introduction), the point is once again one of perception; therefore, these distinctions are subjective. For the purposes of this study, it is of little consequence whether a narrative block is a component or merely an excerpt of another (even if both situations do occur) – the nature and function of components entail a degree of precision that, concerning the fragmented Fabula of *The Waste Land* and its variations in frequency, is beside the point. The distinction between excerpts and embeddings, however, is of great relevance. Consequently, this research sustains a distinction between embedded parts and non-embedded parts, giving special consideration to the former (which are exceptions) that is not necessary for the latter (which are the norm).



## 2.1 Classification of the Many Parts and Subparts

As mentioned above, the original five parts of the poem (*The Burial of the Dead*, *A Game of Chess*, *The Fire Sermon*, *Death by Water* and *What the Thunder Said*) constitute the divisions at the first level of this analysis. All other subparts belong to these five, either immediately (i.e., divisions in the second level) or as further subdivisions (third level, fourth level et cetera). The infinite possibilities of this structure may read like a Borges short-story, but there is no reason for panic: while the analysis does reach as far as the fifth level, most of the relevant subparts belong to the second and third.

Part I, *The Burial of the Dead* (lines 1-76), as a whole, has the obvious function of introducing the poem. It may therefore be considered an introduction at the first level. Its text is quite diverse, including narrations, descriptions and direct addresses to the reader. Though not explicitly prophetic, it does display an ominously foreboding tone, foreshadowing the destruction of the Waste Land by water (lines 48, 55-55). It also introduces the recurrent tropes of winter, war and desert passages. Its immediate subparts are titled *Marie*, *Son of Man*, *Madame Sosostris* and *Unreal City 1* (there is an *Unreal City 2* later on). They may, incidentally, all be considered components, since they are the sum total of part I and bear each distinct voices, themes and narrative effects.

Subpart I.A, *Marie* (lines 1-18), consists of the wistful recollections of its homonymous narrator. It is predominantly narrative, of singular frequency. *The Waste Land* begins with a look back to a better past, from which a depiction of a troubled present will gradually evolve.

Subpart I.A.1, *Winter and Summer* (lines 5-9), is the first narrative block of the poem. It recalls the effects of the two seasons on Marie and her companions. “Winter kept us warm”, says Marie. The apparent paradox is actually clarified by the notion of “forgetful snow”, establishing the winter cold (or winter “warmth”) as a metaphor for indifference, at least towards past wrongs. Summer surprised her with rain, foreshadowing the Deluge-like destruction to come. In

terms of form, it is striking how this small narrative of singular frequency, contrary to the expectation produced by mentions of the seasons, does *not* produce an introductory descriptive effect; that was, after all, achieved by the first four lines (“April is the cruellest month (...)”). The animistic attribution of agency to the seasons is an actual narration of events from Marie’s past. Setting the tone for the rest of the poem, all that glitters is not gold.

Subpart I.A.2, *Hofgarten* (lines 9-11), transfers agency from the seasons to Marie and her friends. The effects of the summer rain are revealed to have been apparently pleasant: Marie and her companions had coffee and talked in a sunny afternoon at the park – already, positive connotations are attributed to rain. Other than that shift of agency, it bears virtually the same formal traits as *Winter and Summer*, being a narration of singular frequency as well.

In Subpart I.A.3, *Sled* (lines 13-16), Marie addresses the comfort she once received from her cousin, the archduke. It is the climax of her recollections, and may be read both as her fondest memory and as a contrast to the dire present that is to be described ahead. Referring to a single event, it is a singular narrative. Its climatic position gives the passage special structural importance, being the semantic core of part I.A. It may therefore be said that, in the level structure presented here, it is a nuclear passage, or yet, a nucleus at the third level.

Subpart I.A.4 consists exclusively of line 18 – “I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.” Three traits make this verse important enough to be marked as a subpart in itself. First, it is a break in the frequency of subpart I.A, exclusively singular up to now. The change in verbal tense from simple past to simple present introduces the first iterative narration of the poem, describing the present habits of an aged Marie, who has left sunny afternoons behind and retreated to the solitary pleasures of old age. Second, it bridges Marie’s recollections with the present that will take up the bulk of the poem. Third, it is her last speech. Structurally, therefore, subpart I.A.4 is a conclusion in the third level to subpart I.A.

Exit Marie. The poem moves on to the unnamed speaker of subpart I.B, *Son of Man* (lines 19-30). The title does not refer to the speaker, but to the man addressed by him. Like a master of ceremony at a circus, the unnamed speaker briefly describes the arid landscape of the Waste Land and promises greater detail: “I will show you fear in a handful of dust” (line 30). As a whole, this subpart is not narrative, but argumentative – the speaker tells no story, only makes his point that nothing grows out of the “stony rubbish” (line 20) of his diseased land. Being the introduction proper to the poem (rendering *Marie* a prologue), *Son of Man* assumes the position of nucleus to part I, at the second level. With that, the poem already presents an unusual structural development, in which a non-narrative subpart becomes central to a predominantly narrative part.

There is, however, a further division to *Son of Man*. Subpart I.B.1, *Hyacinth Girl* (lines 35-41), may be termed a narrative interlude in subpart I.B, introducing a new speaker, the homonymous girl. Much like Saint Paul in the Bible, she recalls being blinded by the light coming from an unnamed companion who strode with her through a hyacinth garden. That flower is a common symbol of resurrection, giving messianic overtones to the short, singular narrative. Such nuances are confirmed, in fact, by the following verse, “*Oed’ und leer das Meer.*” The German quote comes from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* and means “waste and empty the sea”. It is spoken by the servant Hirt when he sees the boat of his master Tristan, whom he had thought lost, approaching the coast. The savior of the Waste Land is thus announced.

With the hyacinths left behind, it will take sometime before any hint of optimism is found in the poem. Subpart I.C, *Madame Sosostris* (lines 43-59), has the homonymous fortune-teller fire ominous predictions from her “wicked pack of cards”. The most relevant of those explicitly foreshadows part IV, *Death by Water*. Structurally, the passage is almost prose-like in its narrativity. An unnamed external narrator introduces the fortune-teller with a brief descriptive introduction before narrating her words in a typical prose shift: “Here, *said she*,/Is your card (...)”

(lines 46-47, emphasis added). That shift is here formalized as a separate subpart, titled *Sosostris Speaks* (I.C.1), which is, of course, the nucleus of I.C, at the third level, due to the centrality of its dialogue form to the traditional singular narrative nature of the fragment it belongs to.

The conclusion to *The Burial of the Dead* comes (at the second level) with subpart I.D, *Unreal City 1 (London Bridge)* (lines 60-76). A simple block (i.e., without further subdivisions), it introduces an unnamed first-person narrator who narrates his vision of a crowd of dead people roaming the streets of London. As observed in Kermode's annotation, lines 62-65 emulate different passages of *The Divine Comedy*, rendering London a modern Inferno and the narrator, consequently, as an alter ego of the author (which might very well be named "Eliot the Pilgrim", to emulate the classic distinction in Dantean critical fortune between the flesh-and-blood author and his corresponding fictional protagonist in his poem). Much like *Madame Sosostris*, this subpart is a quite straightforward singular narration, with an introduction to establish setting before moving on to a dialogue (this time, however, with a shift verb – "crying" – and quotation marks, strikingly absent from subpart I.C). The speech in question, delivered with bitter irony by Eliot the Pilgrim himself, hints at war ("ships at Mylae", line 70) and accuses its dead interlocutor, "Stetson" (an allusion to Australian soldiers, according to Kermode), of indifference towards the bloodshed. The concluding verse of his speech points the finger at the reader, effectively rendering the real, flesh-and-blood world of Eliot's public a part of the arid desert of his creation. Additionally, the trope of indifference is linked to the "forgetful snow" of Marie's warm winter (line 6) in line 61, which introduces the short Dantean passage by placing its action "Under the brown fog of a winter dawn".

With the unburied dead walking the streets of London, the poem adopts a more intimate focus for part II, *A Game of Chess*. Totalling 96 lines, it is entirely made of traditional narrative sentences in the simple past and dialogues, of which 25 have a primarily descriptive function. One may say, therefore, that the whole of part II is a traditional narrative. Or two, actually: there

is a clear break on line 139, which introduces a second scene, unrelated to the previous one. Both scenes, however, deal with estranged couples, depicting the unfulfilling marriages of the Waste Landers in concrete narrative detail. While the couple of the first scene is clearly upper class, the second scene, which takes place at a pub, deals with working class sexual and matrimonial tensions. Unsurprisingly, many themes are common to both, among which one may read distance, denial and the oppression of women.

Subpart II.A, which will here be titled *The Upper Class Couple* (lines 77-138), is remarkable in terms of form. Its structure is the only one in *The Waste Land* that reaches down to the fifth level, where it introduces the poem's first embedded passage. Despite that complexity, it is one of the simplest, most straightforward moments of the poem, with an immediately accessible narrative meaning that offers little difficulty for even the non-academic lay reader. Its contents are best explained in the breakdown of its subdivisions.

The first one, subpart II.A.1, may very practically and faithfully be called *Room Description* (lines 77-106), a title that defines the passage's content with thorough precision. Great detail is employed to describe the richly and expensively ornate setting of the upcoming dialogue, with precise listings of colors and materials, which include colored glass, marble, ivory and satin in the confection of exquisite jewels, perfume bottles, decorated walls and carved ceilings. The massive presence of the room decoration seems to either weigh down on the inhabitants of the house or to fill in the void of their relationships, as if the best compensation money could buy was largely insufficient to disguise the loud silence of human distance. The profusion of perfume odors "drown" the senses (89), in a passage suggestive of the emotional numbness narrated shortly afterwards. All the description is conveyed through singular narrative sentences with simple past verbs: glitters "poured" in rich profusion, glass surfaces "doubled" candle flames that "flung their smoke into the laquearia" while a carved dolphin "swam" (lines 85, 82, 92 and 96). The only exception is a short, iterative interlude.

Subpart II.A.1.A, *Stumps of Time* (lines 97-105), breaks the norm of iterative narration by conjugating its verbs in the simple past of the singular block it belongs to. Its nine lines describe a painting above the mantelpiece, eventually implying that “other withered stumps of time/Were told upon the walls” (104-105). Thus, the poem’s second instance of iteration replaces the simple present conjugation with a complex sylleptic formulation. Ironically enough, *Stumps of Time*, itself an excerpt of a singular narrative, contains itself an additional subpart, and a singular one it is.

Subpart II.A.1.A.1, *Philomel* (lines 99-103) is the first occurrence of embedding in the poem. It is one of the unnumbered “stumps of time” indicated by its parent passage, therefore complementing the structure of that iterative narration. But in itself it is the singular narration of the myth of Philomel, a classical tale of rape, cruelty and revenge. In his annotation to line 99, Parker summarizes the story in the following manner:

Philomela and Procne were sisters. Procne married King Tereus. Tereus raped Philomela and cut out her tongue to silence her. Philomela weaved her story into some cloth to tell her sister what happened. Procne fed their son to Tereus as punishment. The sisters fled, with Tereus in pursuit. The gods intervened, changing Philomela into a nightingale, Procne into a swallow, and Tereus into a hawk (some versions of the myth vary this.)

This myth yields many easily readable allegories pertaining to the tropes of oppression and subjugation in *The Waste Land*, and perhaps to others as well. The three married women of the poem (i.e., the upper and working class wives and the typist of part III.G) are in a way prisoners of bleak marriages that seem to give them little pleasure or fulfillment, but plenty of loneliness of varied sorts. While the rape motif is more immediately relatable to the story of the typist, who engages in tired, mechanical (almost contractual) sex with her husband, the way in which Philomel narrates her story in the medium of weaving bears a strong resemblance with all of *The Waste Land*, itself a fragmented account of great distress and anguish.

Narration proper follows description with subpart II.A.2, *Entrance of the Wife* (lines 107-110). A very short singular introduction to the dialogue that follows it, this passage is nevertheless remarkable for the clear focalization it indicates: the husband, initially alone in the living room he has so far been describing, sees his wife climb down the stairs, comb her hair and engage in con-

versation. Both her hair and her words seem to him “fiery”, but her silence proves to be equally disturbing when her hair (and she) becomes “savagely still”.

Naturally, subpart II.A.3, *Dialogue Between Husband and Wife* (lines 107-110) is the third-level nucleus of *The Upper Class Couple*. Continuing the focalization of its previous subparts, only the wife’s lines are enclosed in quotation marks. The text hints thus at the “manipulated” nature of its (largely unreliable) account, which may easily be read as the dialogue between an overbearing verbal wife who assaults her husband with endless questions about his thoughts, his feelings, his plans, and a cowering, monosyllabic husband who retreats into a cocoon of emotional autism. The bias of the husband (entirely in control of the narration, since he is at once focalizer and narrator) further transpires in the unlikely phrasing of the wife’s questions: “What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?” (113) “What shall we do tomorrow?/What shall we ever do?” (133-134). Their repetitive and schematic nature is less suggestive of her concrete utterances than of the way the husband remembers them. There is, however, contrary evidence that adds to the ambiguity of the passage. The husband has previously described his wife’s silence as “savagely still” (110), which suggests some yearning of his own. The text of *Philomel*, voiced by him, suggests in its turn some degree of awareness of women’s plight: Philomel was “by the barbarous king/so rudely forced”, then, as a nightingale, “filled all the *desert* with inviolable voice”; her cries fell on “dirty ears” – “and still the world *pursues*” (Lines 99-103. Emphasis added. Observe the change of tense to the simple present, which, together with the word “desert”, point to the Waste Land itself.). Additionally, in his concluding remarks at the end of the dialogue (135-138), the husband sounds equally displeased and oppressed by their marriage’s lukewarm routine, and waits for visitors with so much anticipation that his eyes are “lidless”.

If the scene of the first couple was as intricate and elaborately ornate as the living room it took place in, the scene pertaining to the second is a simple singular narration, with no additional divisions. Subpart II.B, *The Working Class Couple (Lil and Albert)* (lines 139-172), is in fact so

bare that half of the couple is absent – Albert, the husband, is only mentioned in the dialogue between the wife Lil and her unnamed friend. Much like the husband in the previous scene, here Lil’s friend is the narrator-focalizer, but she presents the dialogue without quotation marks to either character, relying on markers like “I said” and “she said” at the end of the sentences. The account is likewise economic in description: the only setting indications come from the line “HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME”, always capitalized and unpunctuated, which every now and then interrupts Lil’s friend’s speech. It is typically read as a bartender’s screams for patrons to leave, so that a pub can be closed (a reading shared by Kermode and Parker, for instance). Their conversation is casual and rather unremarkable, but nevertheless displays recurring motifs: Albert is said to be coming back home from the war after four years, echoing Stetson in subpart I.D, and perhaps two allusions to death in the upper class dialogue (115-116, 125-126); Lil is advised by her friend to make herself “a bit smart” because her returning husband will want “a good time”, and if his wife does not give it to him, “there’s others will” – once more matrimonial obligations bind a woman to a miserable life. The scene ends with a double “HURRY UP PLEASE IT’S TIME”, pressing Lil’s friend to start a series of good-byes in which she emulates Ophelia’s parting words in *Hamlet* – i.e., her last words before drowning herself. The quote is, of course, as relevant to the trope of women’s oppression than to the more general drowning motif of the poem. *A Game of Chess* ends, then, with a curious mirroring between its two component parts: two distant husbands (one emotionally and one physically as well), two men displeased with their wives, two desperate conclusions, all adding up to two marriage-prisons, to which a third one will soon be added.

Of the five immediate divisions of the poem, part III, *The Fire Sermon* (lines 173-311) is the longest and the most complex. It features a stronger alternation between the singular and iterative frequencies, with a wider range of effects. No less than four embedded passages are also included, and several narrative passages are found to have an argumentative function, regardless of form or frequency. There are many shifts in voice and perspective, and intertextual quotation



is also intense. It is also the center of intratextual references – all the poem’s motifs are present, and most relevant plot-wise passages of *The Waste Land* either refer to it or are referred to by it. Its core meanings and allusions are also central to the significance of the poem as a whole. Named after Buddha’s sermon against the pleasures of the flesh, its unifying concern is no other than sin, which resounds in very punctual religious references.

The first narrative passage is already an iteration. Subpart III.A, *Rattle of Bones* (lines 185-186), concludes a straightforward descriptive introduction, which depicts a clean Thames, free from “empty bottles”, “cigarette ends” and other evidences of sinful activity when “the nymphs” and “their friends (...) departed”. The placid, contemplative landscape prompts the unnamed speaker, like an epic poet in an invocation to a muse, to address the River in supplication: “Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song.” But he soon remembers “the rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear” of the River’s more sinful past moments. Marked by a simple present verb, it contextualizes and introduces the recollections that are to follow in the next twenty lines or so.

Subpart III.B, *Fishing in the Dull Canal* (lines 187-192), is also quite simple: a single sentence, displaying a traditional singular structure. Still, its content is distinctive. The “fishing” of the title is done by none other than the Fisher King, for the first time pinpointed with precision. He recalls having fished in winter, thinking of two kings who preceded him. The contemplation of his death foreshadows the conclusion of the poem, in which diseased king and kingdom meet their end under the showers of purifying rain. That the king should muse so during winter is significant, considering that the season has been established previously as one of comfortable forgetfulness. It could be an early symptom of change, or even a brief moment of health, perhaps caused by the contemplation of a clean, silent Thames. The Waste Land’s King, at any rate, is now neither forgetful, nor comfortable – a state allegorized by the slimy rat dragging its belly

nearby. The image courses through his memories and ties the passage to the recurrent motif of rats and rattling bones, also bridging subparts III.A and III.C, where this motif is so preeminent.

The following ten lines are exceptionally loaded with tropes, allegories, characters and references, and also quite sophisticated (and ambiguous) in their structure. Depending upon individual readings, different divisions may be made, resulting in different combinations of subparts, levels and embedding – even in the narratological view adhered to here. The reading and division presented in the next four paragraphs account for the succession of narrative frequencies in the simplest manner possible, intentionally avoiding additional dividing and classifying motivated by semantic issues of little consequence to narrative frequency. Excessive formalism is thus avoided, but no greater claim of authoritativeness is aimed at, even within the scope of the analysis of narrative frequency.

The poem then follows the steps of rats from *Rattle of Bones* to *Fishing in the Dull Canal* to subpart III.C, *Rats, Bones, Horns and Motors* (lines 193-198), moving along the Thames through the center of a Wasted London. Predominantly descriptive, this fragment insists on the image of bones rattled by rats, vividly depicting the stages of decomposition – colorless bodies on the damp ground that later become bones in dry wooden coffins. If taken together with the poem's ubiquitous allusions to war, these images lead on to the abundant sin of the Waste Land, in a subtle, but nevertheless lingering statement. The conjunction “but” (196) articulates that meaning, as if to say, “the bodies lie dead, but no good comes out of their sacrifice”. Not only conflicts like the First World War fail to introduce any change in the wicked ways of the desolate land, but it actually adds to the problem, as testified by the indifference of survivors with naked dead bodies covered with rats. The word “desolation” is thus evoked in all its meanings: destruction, sadness and barrenness. Regardless of punctuation, the iterative frequency is used in two distinct sentences. The first one, extending from line 193 to line 195, is extremely economic: juxtaposed images without a main verb, given temporal context by the sylleptic formulation “year to year”. The

other one (lines 196-198) returns to form with a simple present main verb, though now relying upon a sylleptic formulation as well (“from time to time I hear”). Their formal contrast is remarkable in the sense that clear iteration depends more heavily on adverbial sylleptic formulations than on verbs – the former can indicate repetition without the latter, but the latter is ambiguous when unaided by the former. Both, of course, bear the same effect to the passage, expressing the indifference of the Waste Landers towards death.

“The sound of horns and motors” from line 197 precedes yet another instance of embedding. Subpart III.C.1, *Sweeney and Mrs. Porter* (lines 197-198) not only embeds a singular future narrative (one of the few in the poem) into an otherwise simple descriptive iteration, but also “embeds” into *The Waste Land* the character of Sweeney, used to great effect in other works by Eliot (namely the poems “Sweeney Among the Nightingales”, “Sweeney Erect”, “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service” and the unfinished drama *Sweeney Agonistes*). Common readings of the character in Eliot criticism almost unanimously take him for a naturalistic portrait of proletarian men: drunken, rude, lewd, loud, uncouth and animalistic (being an Irish surname, it does in fact echo turn-of-the-century stereotypes of that people, on both sides of the Atlantic). Even if the reading is debatable<sup>12</sup>, it fits the passage seamlessly, as specified in the following two passages. Subparts III.D, *Mrs. Porter and Her Daughter* (lines 199-200), and III.E, *Soda Water* (201-202), elaborately suggest that both women are prostitutes – according to a bawdy soldier ballad, they perform their professional duties and wash more than their feet in soda water<sup>13</sup>. Subparts III.C.1, III.D and III.E are thus unified by a common thread of meaning, converging to a simple statement of sinfulness surrounded by indifference to tragedy. The breakdown of their lines into such small and seemingly inseparable units is nevertheless justifiable due to their structural peculiari-

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<sup>12</sup> To all the other poems he appears, for instance, Sweeney never adds meanings of debauchery and lewd behavior. On the contrary, the character’s meaning is derived from its surroundings, which are whorehouses on two of the poems (but a church in the third). Readers of *The Waste Land* (as well as of this study) are invited to peruse and confront all three “Sweeney poems” (as they are often collectively called) and confront them with this passage. All are included in the Penguin Classics edition.

<sup>13</sup> Identified by Kermodé, but with real-life correspondences observed by Parker.

ties, which not only set them apart (in form), but also bring them together in effect (in content): the first is an embedded singular narrative that makes the transition from modernity (the “horns and motors” of progress) to the decayed values of the Waste Land; the second, a simple singular narrative to introduce (in fact, establish the setting of) the two prostitutes; and the third, an iterative passage (signaled quite simply by the verbal shift from past to present) which introduces the routine of their trade and concludes with a quote from Verlaine’s “Parsifal”, whose meaning (children singing in a church) reinforce the motif of indifference to sin.

The poem moves on with subpart III.F, *Unreal City 2 (The Smyrna Merchant)* (lines 207-214). It is clearly a sequel to *Unreal City 1 (London Bridge)*: if that early scene took place “under the brown fog of a winter dawn”, this passage moves a couple of hours ahead. “Under the brown fog of a winter noon”, a Turkish merchant approaches Eliot the Pilgrim with unspecified business propositions. Whatever transaction the merchant has in mind, it must be of great scale and entail much persuasion – a simple “luncheon” is not enough, and he invites his prospective partner to a weekend at a luxury, out of town hotel (the famous Metropole in Brighton). The more immediate and concrete meanings of this simple singular narration are the reinforcement of the Dantean environment and the precise definition of the time span of the poem’s Fabula so far – between dawn and noon, crowds of dead sinners walked the streets of London, the upper class couple had their choice breakfast menu of quiet desperation, Lil and her friend discussed the return of her husband Albert<sup>14</sup> and the Fisher King reminisced about his decadent kingdom. Such a condensation of Fabula events into a relatively small period of time is what Bal calls a “crisis” (Bal, 2009), a term not only fit for the whole Fabula of *The Waste Land* as a whole, but of great thematic significance as well (issues of Fabula duration are addressed later on in this study). Concerning this point in

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<sup>14</sup> Consequently, at the end of subpart II.B, the pub closes around noon, not at night as modern audiences might expect. It is worth remembering that the current opening hours of pubs in London (normally from 10 or 11 in the morning to 11 PM or midnight) were introduced in the late 1990s. Throughout the twentieth century, British drinking hours varied greatly. From 1921 to 1988, for example, pubs were required by law to close in the afternoon during weekdays.

the plot, however, it is also relevant to observe the mercantile overtones of *Unreal City 2*, which fittingly introduces the third and last couple of the poem.

Subpart III.G, *Tiresias's Vision (The Typist and The Clerk)* (lines 215-256), is the longest and most significant iterative narration in *The Waste Land*. In Proustian fashion, it presents in detail one evening in the life of a couple, which stands for many evenings in their depressing life (and, in the greater scope of the poem, stands for many other couples of Waste Landers as well). The speaker who holds the focalization of the passage is Tiresias, the blind prophet of the Greek myths. The introduction to his account is of central meaning to the whole passage:

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*  
(Eliot, 2003, lines 215-219, emphasis added)

The first two lines establish the time of the narrative as the end of the workday, when the working class, the very cogs of progress, becomes idle. Tiresias goes to great lengths to make clear that his blindness does not prevent him from seeing the scene he is about to report, which is either a statement on his strong prophetic powers or on the pungency of the scene itself. His “two lives” are also of great significance. In the most widespread version of his myth, Tiresias separated two copulating snakes and was punished with a sex change. Seven years later, he repeated the feat, instantly changing back to his former self. As the myth goes, Zeus and Hera later asked him whether it was men or women who had more pleasure in sexual intercourse. When the mortal answered “women”, the goddess blinded him in rage (for revealing a female secret); Zeus would have given him the gift of prophecy in compensation. Being a major factor at the genesis of his prophetic status, Tiresias’s sex change is perhaps his most definitive trait. His hermaphroditic status in *The Waste Land*, as an “old man with wrinkled female breasts”, adds strong colors to his perspective of the proletarian couple, suggesting perhaps even a neutral point of view (one may even notice that Tiresias shares his blindness with none other than the goddess of Justice).

What the blind seer sees is a scene of lifeless, mechanical sex between a typist and “a small house agent's clerk”, her husband. Most of the narration is concentrated between lines 235 and 252:

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 unreprieved, 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.  
 (...)  
 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.”

The seer's account clearly assigns the roles of aggressor and victim to the clerk and the typist, respectively: he is “flushed and decided”, while she is numb and passive; his undesired caresses are described as a physical assault, and her indifference brings him both sexual gratification and a sense of self-importance. Vanity, furthermore, is the motivation for his “final patronising kiss” – the primitive man has conquered the target of his passions and rejoices in his atavistic feeling of victory. The denunciation of the oppression of women thus voiced is practically undeniable, especially if one's reading attributes justice and impartiality to the blind hermaphrodite Tiresias. But the passage also carries a wider, more naturalistic statement: in the decadent state reached by the Waste Land, men and women are reduced to inconsequent, beast-like brutes, indifferently succumbing to their basest instincts. Even the victims of the brutality are indifferent – the pugnacious caresses are “unreprieved” by the typist, who offers her assailant “no defence” and remains “hardly aware” of him after the deed is over.

With the predominant theme of part III being lust, Tiresias's lengthy narrative of the typist and the clerk is undoubtedly its nucleus (in the second level). Its iterative frequency is indi-

cated by the simple resource of present-tense verbs, with time indications (“violet hour”, “evening hour”) being the closest the passage has to sylleptic formulations. Simple form and powerful language collaborate in conveying clear meanings, in an uncharacteristically accessible fragment that bears strong contrast to a mostly cryptic poem. Not only the excerpt establishes the many instances of brutish sex regularly taking place in the lives of Waste Lander couples, but it displays an additional argumentative function, bordering protest. The entire passage’s importance to the meanings of the poem as a whole is quite central, given its themes and the candid, straightforward manner in which they are verbalized.

The only formal complexity of *Tiresias’s Vision* is a couple of embedded asides of singular frequency. Similar in form and content, both *Tiresias’s Expected Guest* (III.G.1, lines 228-230) and *Tiresias’s Foresuffering* (III.G.2, lines 243-246) reveal that Tiresias has experienced the typist’s misery first-hand. The short interludes add a sense of temporal indefiniteness to the prophet’s perception – Tiresias has “perceived the scene”, “foretold the rest” and “foresuffered all”, further emphasizing the recurrence of the events narrated (they too might be thus read as sylleptic formulations, albeit very loosely so).

Tiresias’s account ends with a generalizing (therefore equally iterative) observation about women distracting themselves from their “folly” by putting “a record on the gramophone” (253-256). The passage mimics one in Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Quite remarkably, Eliot makes his parody subtler than the original, eliminating the very blunt suggestion (a veritable advice) of suicide and introducing instead the theme of music as alienation. The theme is taken up by the following subpart, *Music Along the Strand* (III.H, lines 257-258), a short singular introduction to yet another iterative passage. Quoting from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (in which the air spirit Ariel enchants and manipulates Prince Ferdinand with music), the passage establishes the City of London as a place filled with similar alienating music. Subpart III.I, *Mandoline Whining* (lines 259-265), specifies the many sounds that routinely distract the Waste Landers from their

predicaments: “clatter”, “chatter” and “the pleasant whining of a mandoline”, all coming from the already familiar environment of the pub. This time, however, the poem adds a holy place to the surroundings of the sinfulness: the Church of St. Magnus Martyr, whose “inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold” lies side by side with the neighboring follies. A further statement on Church failure to address the ongoing sinfulness of the Waste Land is thus available, especially if one takes the “fishmen” who “loung[e] at noon” in the pubs nearby as a reference to Christianity’s original fisherman, Saint Peter, the first pope<sup>15</sup>.

Subpart III.J, *The Song of the Three Thames-Daughters* (lines 266-306) bears that name in much of *The Waste Land*’s critical fortune, following the name suggested by Eliot in his original annotation to the poem’s first book edition. Predominantly singular (with a descriptive introduction and a lyric conclusion), it continues the musical theme, emulating the three Rhine daughters from Wagner’s *Twilight of the Gods*. The song of the three Thames nymphs is a fragmented litany of abuse and regret, similar in tone to *The Typist and The Clerk*, though much more cryptic in tone.

Subpart III.J.1, *Elizabeth and Leicester* (lines 279-291), lists disconnected flashes from a scene of romance aboard a vessel on the Thames between Queen Elizabeth I and the Duke of Leicester, alluded to in contemporary correspondence (not of either aristocrat, though). It is a festive depiction of the early stages of passion, with flirting, luxury and apparent innocence. A queen’s love life, of course, can never be free of political implications, which removes any claims of innocence to even this most idealized scene of romantic aspirations. The passage is also rele-

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<sup>15</sup> It might be relevant to consider the issue of different Christian persuasions regarding the Church, churches and all similar mentions in *The Waste Land*, as well as other Eliot poems. On the one side, the seventeenth-century Church of St. Magnus Martyr, designed by the royal architect Christopher Wren, belongs to the Church of England, therefore bearing its allegiance not to the Vatican, but to the Archbishop of Canterbury and, ultimately, to the King. However, in the broad, generalizing tone of *The Waste Land*, it might be argued that such distinctions of faith are of little consequence, since no religious denomination demonstrates any success in reversing the trend of sin and indifference. More biographically-minded readers may also find Eliot’s controversial self-description as “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion” to be of relevance (the quote is from his preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*, his 1928 collection of essays). At any rate, a similar image is found in “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service”, one of the Sweeney poems, in which a church is also surrounded by sinful events and a debate on ecclesiastical authority is hinted at.



vant for its irregular and broken narrative, with simple past verbs scattered in little vignettes that do not form syntactically coherent sentences.

Subpart III.J.2, *Highbury (Supine on the Floor)* (lines 292-295), shifts focus from the Elizabethan glamour of yore to the modern times of “trams and dusty trees”. Mirroring a lamentation of uxoricide from *The Divine Comedy*, a woman laments the “death” of her honor (maidenhood, virtue et cetera) when she “raised [her] knees/supine on the floor of a narrow canoe”. A certain hint of comic relief may be read in the image (when one lies down on a narrow canoe and raises his knees, there are no decent places for a second passenger to stand on board), but the most noticeable trait in the small narrative passage is agency. Contrary to the Dantean passage, where a woman has been murdered by her husband, the death of the speaker’s honor is not so easily imputable to an assaulting clerk or other aggressor – the subject of the verb “raised” is none other than the speaker herself.

Subpart III.J.3, *Moorgate (A New Start)* (lines 296-299), is the last narrative passage in *The Song of the Three Thames-Daughters*. Of singular frequency like the previous two, it is a strongly elliptical account of regret. A man weeps “after the event”, then promises “a new start”. The speaker’s oblique comment, “What should I resent?”, may point at the unawareness of Waste Landers to their situation, much like the typist who was “hardly aware of her departed lover” (250). The speaker of the following lyrical passage claims she “can connect/Nothing with nothing” (301-302), which supports the reading from the general theme of indifference and unawareness.

The conclusion to *The Fire Sermon* comes with subpart III.K, *Carthage* (lines 307-311), a short, fragmented passage of relative simplicity which nevertheless features embedding. The subpart’s unnamed speaker emulates two passages of St. Augustine’s *Confession*. The first one refers to the cleric’s arrival at the pagan city of Carthage, to which the poem follows the repetition “burning burning burning burning”. It is grammatically ambiguous, in fact, just *who* is burning:

Carthage or the newly arrived visitor. The second Augustinian passage consists of the saint's gratitude for being rescued out of sin, reflected in the verses "O Lord Thou pluckest me out/O Lord Thou pluckest", an embedded subpart (III.K.1, *Plucked Out of Sin*, 309-310). Once again, frequency indications are very economic: III.K is rendered singular by the verb "came", while the archaic present of "pluckest" conveys the iterative nature of III.K.1. The dissociated fragments, therefore, alternate not only between the two frequencies, but between paganism and conversion, or sin and repentance. Readings are quite open, but it is quite significant that the last verse of *The Fire Sermon* simply reads "Burning".

Thus ends the poem's long, complex admonition against sin. The theme does surface in following passages, but treated much more subtly. Part IV of the poem, *Death by Water* (312-321), is a ten-line singular narrative interposed between *The Fire Sermon* and the work's apocalyptic conclusion, *What the Thunder Said*. Brief, but strongly alluded to, *Death by Water* has strong direct connections to many of the central tropes and recurring motifs of *The Waste Land*. All mentions of drowning, for instance (lines 48, 55, 125, 191 and 257), foreshadow part IV. The water imagery, thus concentrated in this part, stands in diametrical opposition to the dust and dry rock that abound in *Son of Man*, as well as in much of part V. Bones, recurrently rattled by rats elsewhere, here rest at the bottom of the ocean. And Phlebas the Phoenician sailor, sole character of the passage, forgot in his death "the profit and loss" that still entertains the Smyrna merchant and moves the wheels of the "human engine" (216). Part IV develops an additional argumentative function in its final three lines, where the unnamed speaker addresses the reader directly, pleading for consideration towards the forgotten dead and warning against the ephemerality of material gain. The sermon-like advice prefigures the regular biblical tone found in the following part, while the "drowning" theme, as well as the very title of "Death by Water", foreshadows the Waste Land's imminent destruction by rain.

Complex and cryptic, part V, *What the Thunder Said* (lines 322-434) is much more than a mere conclusion to *The Waste Land*. With it the poem's rhythm gains momentum, becoming a veritable crescendo. This part includes the destruction of the Waste Land by rain, which is the climax of the poem's Fabula, making it the narrative nucleus of the poem, in the first level. The meditative tone of previous calmer passages resurfaces after the cataclysmic event, resulting in an epilogue of enlightenment and newfound harmony. Singular narrative is almost constant: ten subparts out of thirteen. The remaining three iterative subparts display varying degrees of relevance, regardless of their smaller number. Embedding, likewise, is punctual but strongly significant, featuring important intertextual references in all three instances of it.

Subpart V.A, *Red Sullen Faces* (lines 344-345), is the first narrative passage in the part. Iterative in frequency, once more identified solely by its present tense verbs, it carries a descriptive function, reflecting the descriptive introduction into which it is circumscribed. In a biblical tone, the introduction as a whole elaborates on the image of a rocky desert landscape without water. The "red sullen faces" that "sneer and snarl" in subpart V.A stand out of that dusty whole not only in its narrative form, but also for being the first of the many apocalyptic images of part V, which led so many readers over the years to find echoes of Hieronymus Bosch's grotesque paintings in *The Waste Land*.

The biblical imagery continues with subpart V.B, *The Third Walker* (lines 360-366). It is the second and last mention of a savior (following I.B.1), this time more explicitly identified with the Christian messiah<sup>16</sup>. Whether the mysterious walker is Jesus or not is beside the point. The messianic tone is in itself sufficient for the reading of a savior. It is also remarkable that the

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<sup>16</sup> There are straightforward similarities between the disappearing figure and the early 1940s poem "Footprints in the Sand" by Mary Stevenson, but older similar accounts also exist. The 2005 website titled "Did C. H. Spurgeon inspire 'Footprints In the Sand?'" examines historical and textual connections between the famous poem (and its disputed authorship) and the sermons of British minister Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), who often uses the footprint metaphor to recommend that his flock "follow" the teachings of Jesus (some information on the disputed authorship of the poem is also supplied). Likewise, a disappearing messiah is found in the very New Testament, in Luke 24:13-16, which tells the story of how two followers of Jesus, upon finding his dead body absent from his sepulcher, walked to the village of Emmaus in the company of their invisible master. The Emmaus account is often associated to the third walker in the critical fortune of *The Waste Land*.

speaker of the passage cannot make out clearly whether the third walker is a man or a woman (365). The ambiguity not only enhances the inscrutability of the savior, but also carries an implicit statement on the emancipation of women, echoing similar sympathies found in the narratives of the couples (II.A, II.B, III.G). The repetition attributed to the encounters with the savior by the iterative form is also relevant, establishing one of the few optimistic moments in the routine of Waste Land life.

After a short, non- (or pseudo-) narrative interlude<sup>17</sup>, the apocalyptic tone of the poem reaches its peak with subpart V.C, *Bats With Baby Faces* (lines 378-382). The simple past singular narrative lists frightening images that announce the end of times, as in the Bible. Line 385 reinforces the biblical parallel with an allusion to John the Baptist's frantic screams echoing from Herod's prison-well (as told, for instance, in Matthew 14).

A short description introduces an empty chapel in the mountains, which has been traditionally read as Chapel Perilous from the Holy Grail legends (once more, the reading is endorsed by Eliot's original annotation). With that setting established, the poem's plot finally reaches its climax with the deluge-like destruction of the Waste Land by rain, in subpart V.D, *Rain* (lines 392-395). The narration of the excerpt is sparse and fragmented – a single past tense verb (“stood”) suggests singular frequency. In this plot analysis of *The Waste Land*, *Rain* assumes the centermost position among the many parts and subparts of its narrative structure, being the nucleus to *What the Thunder Said* – therefore doubly central (i.e., a second-level nucleus inside a first-level nucleus). Its Fabula significance is further confirmed by several references to rain (lines 4, 9, 136, 327 and 342, but also part IV and all its respective foreshadowing allusions), all foreshadowing to V.D. Likewise, it is further referenced in the following epilogue, especially in subpart V.F,

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<sup>17</sup> Honoring its reputation for fragmentation, the poem next presents an important Fabula event, the “hooded hordes” that swarm over the Waste Land, in the form of a dialogue-description (367-377). Lacking a narrative verbal structure, it is of secondary relevance to this analysis. Nevertheless, its exceptional nature is strongly characteristic of the poem's varied and versatile language, and deserves mention.

where the thunder that announced the purging rain as a “flash of lightning” (394) meditates on the event a posteriori.

Once more deriving great power from the economy of its fragmented language, the poem does not provide a single word of detail, comment or description to the destruction of its homonymous decadent realm. The last word in *The Waste Land's* climatic passage, “rain”, is immediately followed by a meditative (though still narrative, and singular) epilogue. Subpart V.E, *Ganga* (lines 396-399), reinstates the Eastern philosophy frame of *The Fire Sermon* as a sequel to the Western, biblical style of the four preceding narrative blocks of part V. By the River Ganges the jungle crouches in silence, waiting for the Thunder’s words of wisdom. A curious ambiguity presents itself in the very first line of the introductory passage: grammatically speaking, “Ganga was sunken” may indicate both that the river is below its normal level and that it is submerged in a flood.

“Then spoke the thunder.” Subpart V.F, *The Thunder's Words* (lines 400-423), exposes in a traditional singular narrative structure the teachings of the Thunder. The passage emulates one of the sacred texts of Vedic Hindu scripture, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. In section 5, passage 2 of that text, the creator figure of Hindu myths, Prajapati, answers the requests of his three classes of offspring (gods, men and demons) with the syllable “da”; each class interprets it differently, taking it to mean the words *Datta*, *Dayadhvam* and *Damyata*, respectively (according to annotators like Kermode and Parker, they may be roughly translated as “give”, “be compassionate” and “restrain yourselves”). In the poem’s reading, the syllable “da” becomes the sound of thunder, and the teachings borrowed from Hinduism become lessons to whatever will follow the vanishing of the Waste Land. The lessons, all quite cryptic, demand further reading and analysis.

Subpart V.F.1, *Datta (A Moment's Surrender)* (lines 401-410) opposes the images of “the awful daring of a moment's surrender” and of “an age of prudence”. The dichotomy self-indulgence/prudence points to the material gain already condemned in *Death by Water* and *The*

*Smyrna Merchant* (and less directly in other passages as well, such as the “human machine” of *The Typist and the Clerk* and the rich decorations of *The Upper Class Couple’s* living room). The line “by this, and this only, we have existed” extends the self-indulgence in time, despite the passage’s singular frequency. Some foreshadowing to subpart V.F.3 is also readable, with the self-indulgence of greed equally violating *Damyata*, the vow of self-restraint.

Subpart V.F.2, *Dayadhvam (Keys and Prisons)* (lines 411-417), is the only complex passage of the three teachings. The lesson of compassion is illustrated by an allusion to *The Divine Comedy (Inferno XXXIII.46)*, where the soul of a nobleman recounts his tragic death of starvation, locked in a tower, which led him to eat his own children. The Dantean story is the singular frame to an embedded iterative passage, *Coriolanus* (subpart V.F.2.A, lines 414-417), which generalizes the theme of keys and prisons with the pronoun “we”. To think of the key is to confirm the prison, according to the Thunder’s advice. “We”, therefore, must learn not to dwell on past grievances, especially the most painful ones. The Coriolanus reference (416-417) is one of the most cryptic passages of the whole poem. A Roman general who disliked his own people, was exiled from his homeland and later fought against it, his meaning in the poem is quite debatable. Since his resurrection is engendered by “aetherial rumours” and only lasts “a moment”, it could be a statement on the futility of taking arms against one’s people, further enhancing the message of acquiescence and non-resistance of Eastern philosophies. But it could equally be read as the opposite statement, *lamenting* that Coriolanus’s resurrection be such a frivolous night-time rumor. Later passages of the poem surely enable parallels between Coriolanus and the Fisher King, as will be explained shortly ahead.

Subpart V.F.3, *Damyata (Calm Sea)* (lines 418-423), is the simplest of the three thunderous teachings, both in form and content. A simple singular narration, it wholeheartedly embraces the passive ideal of wisdom from Eastern philosophies, with the image of a boat steered safely in a calm sea, by an “expert” hand. The message of passivity is not exclusive to the Asian creeds

immediately referred to, reflecting much of Christian ideology, as in the images of shepherds and flocks, and even in the sensibilities of the aforementioned “Footprints in the Sand” references. Such a convergence of Eastern and Western values is, in fact, a trait often observed about *The Waste Land*. The more sermonic streak of the poem reaches its peak with the inclusion of the reader – “your heart”, says the Thunder, would have responded in the same way as the boat did, had it but encountered expert, controlling hands.

*The Waste Land*'s final block, subpart V.G, *Fisher King Epilogue* (lines 424-434), is of great complexity by any account. A highly allusive and polysemic collage of quotes, themes and even languages, it nevertheless offers the reader a coherent narrative structure. The guiding reference here lies on line 426, “Shall I at least set my lands in order?” The allusion is to Isaiah 38:1, in which a very similar phrase is used by God to advise men to settle their affairs before they die. If the speaker of the passage be identified with the Fisher King, the reference only confirms what the Holy Grail legends already suggested: if the king's health reflects his kingdom's state, then the king of the Waste Land cannot survive its destruction by rain. Likewise, the moribund monarch acknowledges the “arid plain behind [him]” – i.e., left behind, in his past. The collage of quotations that follows in the following six verses is the “lands” he must set in order. Two of them fit the singular frequency of the passage's narrative structure, therefore meriting here embedded subparts of their own.

Subpart V.G.1, *Arnaut Daniel* (line 428), consists of the verse “*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*” (roughly translatable as “then he hides in the flame that sharpens him”, which may be understood both literally – as in the sharp teardrop shape of the flame – and figuratively – as in “the fire that sharpens his wits”). The Tuscan line belongs to Dante's narration of his short meeting with the poet Arnaut Daniel, in *Purgatorio* XXVI.148. The poet asks the pilgrim to remember and pray for him, then returns to his purgative flame. With the quote the Fisher King invests himself with the same predicament as the Provençal poet: having finished his message, he returns to his

silent afterlife. Together with line 431, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins”, *the quote establishes the Fisher King as the composer of The Waste Land himself*, in a powerful metafictional statement. The “fragments” he has shored against his ruins were the many quotes and references the poem is made of, and the Deluge that brings his realm and himself death by water is of his own design, as an extreme solution to end the plight of the Waste Land. His motivation to muse upon previous kings in subpart III.B (*Fishing in the Dull Canal*) is revealed. The poem’s “plot” is both story and conspiracy, and the diseased king and kingdom now lie out of the way of a new king, a new kingdom, and perhaps a new civilization, free from the plights of its predecessor.

Further confirmation of the metafictional plot comes in subpart V.G.2, *Hieronymo* (line 432): the line juxtaposes two quotes from Thomas Kyd’s 1592 play *The Spanish Tragedy*, in which Marshall Hieronymo of Spain avenges his son’s murder by feigning madness and exposing the crime in a play (similarities with *Hamlet* are no mere coincidence). The play in question is said to have been written by Hieronymo himself, in several languages, in yet another parallel with *The Waste Land* and its metafictional moribund author. Additionally, Hieronymo’s line “Why then Ile fit you” (modernizable as “why, then I’ll fit you”) is one of many puns in a conversation between the Marshall and the criminal, the Prince of Portugal, who asks him to provide a play for the Portuguese King’s entertainment. According to Kermode’s annotation, the two meanings of the line are “I’ll give you what you want” and “I’ll give you your due”. It is in those terms that the Fisher King exacts his revenge upon his *hypocrite lecteur*, accomplice of his plight: by promising to give him what he wants, but instead giving him what he deserves<sup>18</sup>. Having contrived the success of his scheme and the moral renewal of his succession, the monarch can confess his plot, leave the reader three words of advice and then rest in the peace of *Shantih shantih shantih*.

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<sup>18</sup> In a quite ironic rendering of Prajapati’s first commandment, *Datta*.



### 3 Conclusion – The Importance of Frequency in the Overall Reading of *The Waste Land*

That great reversal effected in the last lines of *The Waste Land* occurs in the narrative sphere. Even in its most fragmented and intertextual conclusion, the most significant quotes *are* narrative excerpts, organized within a narrative structure. Narration, focalization, plot, voice and character are essential to the effect of the Fisher King revealing himself as author of the poem. That frame of metafictional treason is in itself a Fabula, which appears in the poem as a narration of singular frequency – the revelation of the Fisher King’s scheme. In that sense, iterative frequency is relegated to a secondary position, one of introductions, setting descriptions and generalizations about the diseased kingdom that is later revealed to be a factor in its ruler’s conspiracy. Structurally speaking, the iterative passages belong to a lower level of narration, being the building blocks of the King’s façade, not of his unmasking. Before any such functions or roles are assigned, however, the whole poem, its narrative parts and effects need to be re-examined from a greater distance.

It is a truism that *The Waste Land* is an unpredictable poem. The conclusion follows from all the innovative and difficult traits celebrated and denounced by so many lingering clichés from its critical fortune. Not only is the poem unpredictable in poetic form and content, but also in narrative effect. In Bal’s terms, it is a good example of a “crisis” fabula: “a short span of time into which events have been compressed” (Bal, 209), as attested by the rich number and quality of events that take place between “the brown fog of a winter dawn” and “the brown fog of a winter noon” (lines 61 and 208 – almost a third of the poem, as it were). Nevertheless, it presents a gradual development of events: even if much reading must be done “in between the lines” and several gaps filled by active readers, in one’s final reading (certainly in the one of this study) the general meaning depends on the whole, with one idea leading to another, even if in non-linear fashion. Allusion, internal allegory, anaphoric reference and foreshadowing are constants of the

poem's text, which establishes it as made of myriads of associations, not of independent blocks, as one might expect from labels like "fragmented". In that sense, *The Waste Land* can hardly be defined as episodic: the chaos is only apparent, giving way to intricate order upon closer inspection. Many patterns emerge from the text, or even symmetries: parts II and IV, for instance, are predominantly narrative, while parts III and V are more complex, lengthy collages of texts of varying forms; Christian inspirations, likewise, find a surprising counterpart in Hinduism, with unexpected moral and semantic convergences. Like a pendulum, the poem oscillates between opposites, harmonically revealing how opposition is nothing but a straight line of connection. Those effects of harmony and balance depend, of course, on the most regular of structural traits: repetition (of themes, rhymes, structures, images, voices et cetera). And repetition is the core of iteration (in all possible levels). That is to say, the iterative principle of presentation reflects the poem's organization into patterns and recurrences.

Even if its last lines operate a jaw-dropping peripeteia, the "façade" plot engendered in the preceding passages is of great importance to determine any "identity claims" pertaining to the poem as a whole. They carry, after all, the semantic and structural function of most of the poem's parts. Claiming precedence to the highest metafictional level is, in a way, much like saying an Elizabethan house is made of wood just because its bricks and mortar substance is framed by wooden beams.

But even that point of view suggests singular precedence. Most of the poem's verses are, after all, narrative fragments of singular frequency. Such numeric considerations, however, can never be taken at face value. In a *structural* analysis, careful attention must be paid to *function* as well.

If *The Waste Land* be taken (in that distant and generalizing "identity claim" perspective, of course) as a depiction of a diseased land, and most of it be then seen as a characterization of the way things are usually done in it, then *the whole poem becomes predominantly iterative* in effect, even

if most passages are singular in form. For the sake of clarity, one may easily establish that such a reading would produce a Fabula similar to “a king describes its decadent kingdom in detail, then destroys it”. The destruction is the end of the tale; it must not be confused with the tale itself.

But Fabulas, one might argue, are better represented by the singular frequency of narration. They are, after all, nothing but a chronological succession of events, therefore necessarily episodic. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, “repetition” is an abstraction, an active cognitive grouping of distinct events, more representative of the viewer who witnesses them than of their actual, concrete nature. And the contention is perfectly true. Like the poem’s climax and conclusion, all other narratives, even the iterative ones, are events in a chronological timeline. That timeline, however, is hardly linear.

When considered in the cyclical manner in which the story of the Waste Land is presented, borrowing from the reincarnation philosophy of Buddhism and presenting destruction as making way for the new, the very existence of the Waste Land, from its beginnings to its decadence and ultimate downfall, assume the contours of a circular cycle of death and rebirth. Even in the most absolute notion of Fabula *The Waste Land* reveals itself, then, as repetition: rather than a self-contained account of the decay and undoing of a unique realm, it becomes a single instance – an *exempli gratia* – of a process that has happened before, and will most likely happen again. The Waste Land’s timeline, as well as the poem’s, becomes, in that sense, *ultimately iterative*. Likewise, the Holy Grail cycle, with its “diseased kingdom-diseased king” logics, imply a different meaning to the phrase “the king is dead; long live the king”: *the kingdom is dead – long live the kingdom*.

Iteration has occupied a secondary position for the greater part of the history of Western literature. When introducing iterative frequency in *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method*, Gérard Genette observes that

Like description, in the traditional novel the iterative narrative is *at the service* of the narrative “as such,” which is the singulative narrative. The first novelist who undertook to liberate the iterative from this functional dependence is clearly Flaubert in *Madame Bovary*, where pages like those narrating Emma’s life in the convent, her life at Tostes before and after the ball at La Vaubyessard, or her Thursdays at Rouen with León take on a wholly unusual fullness and autonomy. But no novelistic work, apparently, has ever put

the iterative to a use comparable – in textual scope, in thematic importance, in degree of technical elaboration – to Proust’s use of it in the *Recherche du temps perdu*.

(Genette, 117, emphasis in the original)

Bearing in mind the poem's allegories and recurrent themes, their plot-like articulation, the central function of iteration to their development and the landmark impact of *The Waste Land* to twentieth century literature, one cannot help but agree with Genette: no *novelistic* work has ever put “the iterative” to a use comparable to Proust’s novel.

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# Appendix 1 – Full Poem, With Indications of Narrative Frequency

NOTATION KEY:

A green highlight indicates a narrative of singular frequency

A gray highlight indicates a narrative of iterative frequency

**Bold type indicates an embedded narrative**  
(all other formatting is original of the poem)

## The Waste Land

by T. S. Eliot

Source: ELIOT, Thomas Stearns. *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Penguin, 2003.

*"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculus meus  
vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent:*

*Σιβυλλὰ τι θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω."*

For Ezra Pound

*il miglior fabbro.*

### I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

- 1 April is the cruellest month, breeding
- 2 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
- 3 Memory and desire, stirring
- 4 Dull roots with spring rain.
- 5 Winter kept us warm, covering
- 6 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
- 7 A little life with dried tubers.
- 8 Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
- 9 With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
- 10 And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
- 11 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
- 12 Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
- 13 And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
- 14 My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
- 15 And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
- 16 Marie, hold on tight. And down we went
- 17 In the mountains, there you feel free.
- 18 I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.
  
- 19 What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
- 20 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
- 21 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
- 22 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,

23 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
 24 And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
 25 There is shadow under this red rock,  
 26 (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
 27 And I will show you something different from either  
 28 Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
 29 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
 30 I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

31 *Frisch webt der Wind*

32 *Der Heimat zu.*

33 *Mein Irisch Kind,*

34 *Wo weilest du?*

35 "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;  
 36 "They called me the hyacinth girl."  
 37 Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,  
 38 Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
 39 Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
 40 Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
 41 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  
 42 *Oed' und leer das Meer.*

43 Madame Sosotris, famous clairvoyante,  
 44 Had a bad cold, nevertheless  
 45 Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,  
 46 With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,  
 47 Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,  
 48 (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)  
 49 Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,  
 50 The lady of situations,  
 51 Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel  
 52 And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,  
 53 Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,  
 54 Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find  
 55 The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.  
 56 I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.  
 57 Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,  
 58 Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:  
 59 One must be so careful these days.

60 Unreal City,  
 61 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
 62 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
 63 I had not thought death had undone so many.  
 64 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,  
 65 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.



66 Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,  
 67 To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours  
 68 With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.  
 69 There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying "Stetson!  
 70 "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!  
 71 "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
 72 "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?  
 73 "Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?  
 74 "Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,  
 75 "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!  
 76 "You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!"

## II. A GAME OF CHESS

77 The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,  
 78 Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
 79 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines  
 80 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out  
 81 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)  
 82 Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra  
 83 Reflecting light upon the table as  
 84 The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,  
 85 From satin cases poured in rich profusion.  
 86 In vials of ivory and coloured glass  
 87 Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,  
 88 Unguent, powdered, or liquid; troubled, confused  
 89 And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air  
 90 That freshened from the window, these ascended  
 91 In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,  
 92 Flung their smoke into the laquearia,  
 93 Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.  
 94 Huge sea-wood fed with copper  
 95 Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,  
 96 In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.  
 97 Above the antique mantel was displayed  
 98 As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene  
 99 **The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king**  
 100 **So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale**  
 101 **Filled all the desert with inviolable voice**  
 102 **And still she cried, and still the world pursues,**  
 103 **"Jug Jug" to dirty ears.**  
 104 And other withered stumps of time  
 105 Were told upon the walls; staring forms  
 106 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.

107 Footsteps shuffled on the stair.  
 108 Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair  
 109 Spread out in fiery points  
 110 Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

111 "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.  
 112 Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.  
 113 What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
 114 I never know what you are thinking. Think."

115 I think we are in rats' alley  
 116 Where the dead men lost their bones.

117 "What is that noise?"  
 118 The wind under the door.  
 119 "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"  
 120 Nothing again nothing.  
 121 "Do  
 122 You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember  
 123 "Nothing?"

124 I remember  
 125 Those are pearls that were his eyes,  
 126 "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"  
 127 But  
 128 O O O that Shakespcherian Rag--  
 129 It's so elegant  
 130 So intelligent  
 131 "What shall I do now? What shall I do?  
 132 I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street  
 133 With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?  
 134 What shall we ever do?"  
 135 The hot water at ten.  
 136 And if it rains, a closed car at four.  
 137 And we shall play a game of chess,  
 138 Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

139 When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said;  
 140 I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,  
 141 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME  
 142 Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.  
 143 He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you  
 144 To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.  
 145 You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set.  
 146 He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.

147 And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,  
 148 He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,  
 149 And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.  
 150 Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.  
 151 Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.  
 152 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME  
 153 If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.  
 154 Others can pick and choose if you can't.  
 155 But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.  
 156 You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.  
 157 (And her only thirty-one.)  
 158 I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,  
 159 It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.  
 160 (She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)  
 161 The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never been the same.  
 162 You *are* a proper fool, I said.  
 163 Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said.  
 164 What you get married for if you don't want children?  
 165 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME  
 166 Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,  
 167 And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot--  
 168 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME  
 169 HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME  
 170 Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight  
 171 Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.  
 172 Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

### III. THE FIRE SERMON

173 The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf  
 174 Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind  
 175 Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.  
 176 Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.  
 177 The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,  
 178 Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends  
 179 Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.  
 180 And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;  
 181 Departed, have left no addresses.  
 182 By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept...  
 183 Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,  
 184 Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.  
 185 But at my back in a cold blast I hear  
 186 The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

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

203 Twit twit twit  
 204 Jug jug jug jug jug jug  
 205 So rudely forc'd.  
 206 Tereu

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

215 At the violet hour, when the eyes and back  
 216 Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits  
 217 Like a taxi throbbing waiting,  
 218 I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,  
 219 Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see  
 220 At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives  
 221 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,  
 222 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights  
 223 Her stove, and lays out food in tins.  
 224 Out of the window perilously spread  
 225 Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,  
 226 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)  
 227 Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.  
 228 **I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs**

229 **Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest;**  
 230 **I too awaited the expected guest.**  
 231 He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,  
 232 A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,  
 233 One of the low on whom assurance sits  
 234 As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.  
 235 The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
 236 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,  
 237 Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
 238 Which still are unreproved, if undesired.  
 239 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
 240 Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
 241 His vanity requires no response,  
 242 And makes a welcome of indifference.  
 243 **(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all**  
 244 **Enacted on this same divan or bed;**  
 245 **I who have sat by Thebes below the wall**  
 246 **And walked among the lowest of the dead.)**  
 247 Bestows one final patronising kiss,  
 248 And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit...

249 She turns and looks a moment in the glass,  
 250 Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
 251 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:  
 252 "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."  
 253 When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
 254 Paces about her room again, alone,  
 255 She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
 256 And puts a record on the gramophone.

257 **"This music crept by me upon the waters"**  
 258 **And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.**  
 259 O City city, I can sometimes hear  
 260 Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,  
 261 The pleasant whining of a mandoline  
 262 And a clatter and a chatter from within  
 263 Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls  
 264 Of Magnus Martyr hold  
 265 Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

266           The river sweats  
 267           Oil and tar  
 268           The barges drift  
 269           With the turning tide  
 270           Red sails

271 Wide  
 272 To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.  
 273 The barges wash  
 274 Drifting logs  
 275 Down Greenwich reach  
 276 Past the Isle of Dogs.  
 277 Weialala leia  
 278 Wallala leialala

279 Elizabeth and Leicester  
 280 Beating oars  
 281 The stern was formed  
 282 A gilded shell  
 283 Red and gold  
 284 The brisk swell  
 285 Rippled both shores  
 286 Southwest wind  
 287 Carried down stream  
 288 The peal of bells  
 289 White towers  
 290 Weialala leia  
 291 Wallala leialala

292 "Trams and dusty trees,  
 293 Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew  
 294 Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees  
 295 Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

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

300 "On Margate Sands.  
 301 I can connect  
 302 Nothing with nothing.  
 303 The broken fingernails of dirty hands.  
 304 My people humble people who expect  
 305 Nothing."  
 306 la la

307 To Carthage then I came

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

310 **O Lord Thou pluckest**

311 **Burning**

#### IV. DEATH BY WATER

312 **Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,**

313 **Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep seas swell**

314 **And the profit and loss.**

315 **A current under sea**

316 **Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell**

317 **He passed the stages of his age and youth**

318 **Entering the whirlpool.**

319 Gentile or Jew

320 O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,

321 Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

#### V. WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

322 After the torchlight red on sweaty faces

323 After the frosty silence in the gardens

324 After the agony in stony places

325 The shouting and the crying

326 Prison and place and reverberation

327 Of thunder of spring over distant mountains

328 He who was living is now dead

329 We who were living are now dying

330 With a little patience

331 Here is no water but only rock

332 Rock and no water and the sandy road

333 The road winding above among the mountains

334 Which are mountains of rock without water

335 If there were only water amongst the rock

336 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think

337 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand

338 If there were only water amongst the rock

339 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit

340 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit

341 There is not even silence in the mountains

342 But dry sterile thunder without rain

343 There is not even solitude in the mountains

344 **But red sullen faces sneer and snarl**

345 From doors of mudcracked houses  
 346                                    If there were water  
 347    And no rock  
 348    If there were rock  
 349    And also water  
 350    And water  
 351    A spring  
 352    A pool among the rock  
 353    If there were the sound of water only  
 354    Not the cicada  
 355    And dry grass singing  
 356    But sound of water over a rock  
 357    Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees  
 358    Drip drop drip drop drop drop  
 359    But there is no water

360 Who is the third who walks always beside you?  
 361 When I count, there are only you and I together  
 362 But when I look ahead up the white road  
 363 There is always another one walking beside you  
 364 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded  
 365 I do not know whether a man or a woman  
 366 --But who is that on the other side of you?

367 What is that sound high in the air  
 368 Murmur of maternal lamentation  
 369 Who are those hooded hordes swarming  
 370 Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth  
 371 Ringed by the flat horizon only  
 372 What is the city over the mountains  
 373 Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
 374 Falling towers  
 375 Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
 376 Vienna London  
 377 Unreal

378 A woman drew her long black hair out tight  
 379 And fiddled whisper music on those strings  
 380 And bats with baby faces in the violet light  
 381 Whistled, and beat their wings  
 382 And crawled head downward down a blackened wall  
 383 And upside down in air were towers  
 384 Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours  
 385 And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.



386 In this decayed hole among the mountains  
 387 In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing  
 388 Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel  
 389 There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.  
 390 It has no windows, and the door swings,  
 391 Dry bones can harm no one.  
 392 Only a cock stood on the roof-tree  
 393 Co co rico co co rico  
 394 In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust  
 395 Bringing rain

396 Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves  
 397 Waited for rain, while the black clouds  
 398 Gathered far distant, over Himavant,  
 399 The jungle crouched, humped in silence.  
 400 Then spoke the thunder

401 DA  
 402 *Datta:* what have we given?  
 403 My friend, blood shaking my heart  
 404 The awful daring of a moment's surrender  
 405 Which an age of prudence can never retract  
 406 By this, and this only, we have existed  
 407 Which is not to be found in our obituaries  
 408 Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider  
 409 Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor  
 410 In our empty rooms

411 DA  
 412 *Dayadhrum:* I have heard the key  
 413 Turn in the door once and turn once only  
 414 We think of the key, each in his prison  
 415 Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison  
 416 Only at nightfall, aetherial rumours  
 417 Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

418 DA  
 419 *Damyata:* The boat responded  
 420 Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar  
 421 The sea was calm, your heart would have responded  
 422 Gaily, when invited, beating obedient  
 423 To controlling hands

- 424 I sat upon the shore
- 425 Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
- 426 Shall I at least set my lands in order?
- 427 London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
- 428 *Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*
- 429 *Quando fiam ceu chelidon*--O swallow swallow
- 430 *Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*
- 431 These fragments I have shored against my ruins
- 432 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
- 433 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
- 434 Shantih shantih shantih

# Appendix 2: Text Statistics

## Effects:

IP: Number of Immediate Sub-Parts  
 SP: Sum Total of Sub-Parts  
 I: Introduction  
 IS: Introduction to Singular  
 II: Introduction to Iterative  
 C: Conclusion  
 CS: Conclusion to Singular

## CI: Conclusion to Iterative

Ed: Embedded  
 Er: Embedder  
 ES: Embedded in Singular  
 EI: Embedded in Iterative  
 (numbers added to the acronyms above indicate the narrative level in which the effect takes place)

## Functions:

**Narrative, Singular Frequency**  
**Narrative, Iterative Frequency**  
*Embedded passage*  
**[D]** descriptive function  
**[A]** argumentative function

**[X>Y]** indicates that line/part X foreshadows line/part Y  
**[Y<X]** indicates that line/part X contains (an) anaphoric allusion(s) to line/part Y

TABLE 1

Passage	Textual Type	Lines	IP	SP	N	I	IS	II	C	CS	CI	Ed	Er	ES	EI	Speaker
<b>I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD (1-76)</b>																
I.A Marie (1-18)	Pred. Singular	76	4	10		I1	IS1									Marie
I.A.1 Winter and Summer (5-9) >V.D]	Singular	18	4	4												
I.A.2 Hofgarten (9-11)	Singular	5	-	-												
I.A.3 Sled (13-16)	Singular	3	-	-												
I.A.4 "I read, much of the night (...)" (18)	Iterative	4	-	-	N3											
I.B Son of Man (19-42) [A2]	Iterative	1	-	-					C3	CS3						Unmarked
I.B.1 Hyacinth Girl (35-41)	Singular	12	1	1	N2											H. Girl
I.C Madame Sosostris (43-59)	Pred. Singular	7	-	-												Unmarked
I.C.1 Sosostris Speaks (49-59) [48>IV]	Singular	17	1	1												
I.C.1 Sosostris Speaks (49-59) [48>IV]	Singular	11	-	-	N3											
I.D Unreal City 1 (London Bridge) (60-76) [I.A.1<61]	Pred. Singular	17	-	-					C2	CS3						Unmarked
<b>II. A GAME OF CHESS (77-172)</b>																
II.A The Upper Class Couple (77-138)	Pred. Singular	96	2	7												Husband
II.A.1 Room Description (77-106) [D3]	Pred. Singular	62	3	5	N2											
II.A.1.1 Philomel (99-103) [D5] >III.G]	Emb. Singular	30	1	2												
II.A.1.1 Philomel (99-103) [D5] >III.G]	Emb. Singular	9	1	1								Ed5			EI5	
II.A.2 Entrance of the Wife (107-110)	Singular	5	-	-												
II.A.2 Entrance of the Wife (107-110)	Singular	4	-	-		I3	IS3									
II.A.3 Dialogue Husband/Wife (111-138) >III.C] >IV]	Singular	7	-	-												
II.A.3 Dialogue Husband/Wife (111-138) >III.C] >IV]	Singular	4	-	-	N3											
II.B The Working Class Couple (Lil and Albert) (139-172)	Singular	34	-	-	N2											Lil's Friend
<b>III. THE FIRE SERMON (173-311)</b>																
III.A Rattle of Bones (185-186) >III.C]	Iterative	139	11	18												Unmarked
III.A Rattle of Bones (185-186) >III.C]	Iterative	2	-	-												Unmarked
III.B Fishing in the Dull Canal (187-192) >V.G]	Singular	6	-	-												Fisher King
III.C Rats, Bones, Horns and Motors (193-198)	Pred. Iterative	6	1	1									Er2			
III.C.1 Sweeney and Mrs. Porter (197-198)	Emb. Singular	2	-	-								Ed3			EI3	
III.C.1 Sweeney and Mrs. Porter (197-198)	Emb. Singular	2	-	-												
III.D Mrs. Porter and Her Daughter (199-200)	Singular	2	-	-		I2	II2									
III.E Soda Water (201-202) [A2]	Iterative	2	-	-												
III.E Soda Water (201-202) [A2]	Iterative	2	-	-												
III.F Unreal City 2 (Smyrna Merchant) (207-214) [I.A.1<208]	Pred. Singular	8	-	-												Unmarked
III.F Unreal City 2 (Smyrna Merchant) (207-214) [I.A.1<208]	Pred. Singular	8	-	-												Unmarked
III.G Tiresias's Vision (The Typist & The Clerk) (215-256) [A2]	Pred. Iterative	42	2	2	N2								Er2			Tiresias
III.G.1 Tiresias's Expected Guest (228-230) [A3]	Emb. Singular	3	-	-								Ed3			EI3	
III.G.1 Tiresias's Expected Guest (228-230) [A3]	Emb. Singular	3	-	-								Ed3			EI3	
III.G.2 Tiresias's Foresuffering (243-246) [A3]	Emb. Singular	4	-	-								Ed3			EI3	
III.G.2 Tiresias's Foresuffering (243-246) [A3]	Emb. Singular	4	-	-								Ed3			EI3	
III.H Music Along the Strand (257-258) >IV]	Singular	2	-	-		I2	II2									Unmarked
III.H Music Along the Strand (257-258) >IV]	Singular	2	-	-		I2	II2									Unmarked
III.I Mandoline Whining (259-265)	Iterative	7	-	-												
III.I Mandoline Whining (259-265)	Iterative	7	-	-												
III.J The Song of the Three Thames-Daughters (266-306)	Pred. Singular	41	3	3												T. Daughter
III.J.1 Elizabeth and Leicester (279-291)	Singular	13	-	-	N3											T. Daughter
III.J.1 Elizabeth and Leicester (279-291)	Singular	13	-	-	N3											T. Daughter
III.J.2 Highbury (Supine on the Floor) (292-295)	Singular	4	-	-	N3											T. Daughter
III.J.2 Highbury (Supine on the Floor) (292-295)	Singular	4	-	-	N3											T. Daughter
III.J.3 Moorgate (A New Start) (296-299)	Pred. Singular	4	-	-	N3											T. Daughter
III.J.3 Moorgate (A New Start) (296-299)	Pred. Singular	4	-	-	N3											T. Daughter
III.K Carthage (307-311)	Pred. Singular	5	1	1					C2	CS2			Er2			Unmarked
III.K.1 Plucked Out of Sin (309-310)	Emb. Iterative	2	-	-								Ed3		ES3		Unmarked
III.K.1 Plucked Out of Sin (309-310)	Emb. Iterative	2	-	-								Ed3		ES3		Unmarked
<b>IV. DEATH BY WATER (312-321) [A1] &gt;V.D]</b>																
IV. DEATH BY WATER (312-321) [A1] >V.D]	Pred. Singular	10	-	-		I1										Unmarked
<b>V. WHAT THE THUNDER SAID (322-434)</b>																
V.A Red Sullen Faces (344-345) [D2]	Iterative	113	7	13	N1											Unmarked
V.A Red Sullen Faces (344-345) [D2]	Iterative	2	-	-												Unmarked
V.B The Third Walker (360-366)	Iterative	7	-	-												
V.B The Third Walker (360-366)	Iterative	7	-	-												
V.C Bats With Baby Faces (378-382)	Pred. Singular	5	-	-												
V.C Bats With Baby Faces (378-382)	Pred. Singular	5	-	-												
V.D Rain (392-395) [Fabula Climax]	Singular	4	-	-	N2											
V.D Rain (392-395) [Fabula Climax]	Singular	4	-	-	N2											
V.E Ganga (396-399)	Singular	4	-	-		I2	IS2									
V.E Ganga (396-399)	Singular	4	-	-		I2	IS2									
V.F The Thunder's Words (400-423) [A2] [V.D<]	Pred. Singular	24	3	4												
V.F.1 Datta (A Moment's Surrender) (401-410) [A3]	Singular	10	-	-												
V.F.1 Datta (A Moment's Surrender) (401-410) [A3]	Singular	10	-	-												
V.F.2 Dayadhvam (Keys and Prisons) (411-417) [A3]	Pred. Singular	7	1	1									Er3			The Thunder
V.F.2 Dayadhvam (Keys and Prisons) (411-417) [A3]	Pred. Singular	7	1	1									Er3			The Thunder
V.F.2.A Coriolanus (414-417) [A4]	Emb. Iterative	4	-	-								Ed4		ES4		
V.F.2.A Coriolanus (414-417) [A4]	Emb. Iterative	4	-	-								Ed4		ES4		
V.F.3 Damyata (Calm Sea) (418-423) [A3]	Singular	6	-	-												
V.F.3 Damyata (Calm Sea) (418-423) [A3]	Singular	6	-	-												
V.G Fisher King Epilogue (424-434)	Pred. Singular	11	2	2									Er2			Fisher King
V.G Fisher King Epilogue (424-434)	Pred. Singular	11	2	2									Er2			Fisher King
V.G.1 Arnaut Daniel (428)	Emb. Singular	1	-	-								Ed3		ES3		
V.G.1 Arnaut Daniel (428)	Emb. Singular	1	-	-								Ed3		ES3		
V.G.2 Hieronymo (432)	Emb. Pred. Sing.	1	-	-	N3							Ed3		ES3		
V.G.2 Hieronymo (432)	Emb. Pred. Sing.	1	-	-	N3							Ed3		ES3		

TABLE 2

**Singular vs. Iterative:**

Which frequency claims the largest number of...

	Poem Total		I		II		III		IV		V	
	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It
...lines?	231	71	49	1	92	4	49	53	7	-	34	13
...parts?	37	11	8	1	6	1	12	6	1	-	10	3
...nuclear subparts?	1-	1	2	-	3	-	3	1	-	-	2	-
...introductions in it?	5	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	1	-	1	-
...introductions to nuclear subparts?	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
...introductions to <b>singular</b> subparts?	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
...introductions to iterative subparts?	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
...conclusions in it?	2	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
...conclusions to nuclear subparts?	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
...conclusions to <b>singular</b> subparts?	2	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
...conclusions to iterative subparts?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
...embedders?	3	3	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	-	2	-
...nuclear embedders?	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
...embedded subparts in it?	6	2	-	-	1	-	3	1	-	-	2	1
...nuclear embedded subparts in it?	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
...subparts with <b>argumentative</b> function?	6	3	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	4	1
...nuclear subparts with <b>argumentative</b> function?	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
...subparts with <b>descriptive</b> function?	1	2	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
...nuclear subparts with <b>descriptive</b> function?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Anaphors vs. Foreshadowing</b>	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F
Which side claims the largest number of...	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F	A	F
...allusions to other parts?	3	5	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	2
...allusions to nuclear subparts?	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
...allusions to <b>singular</b> subparts?	2	5	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
...allusions to iterative subparts?	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
...allusions to it from other parts?	3	4	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
...allusions to it from nuclear parts?	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
...allusions to it <b>from singular</b> subparts?	3	4	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
...allusions to it from iterative subparts?	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It	Sg	It
	Poem Total		I		II		III		IV		V	

**Long Live**

**THE KINGDOM:**

*narrative frequency in*

**THE WASTE LAND**

---

על תבואת

**T. S. Eliot**

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analysis by

Celso Lazaretti

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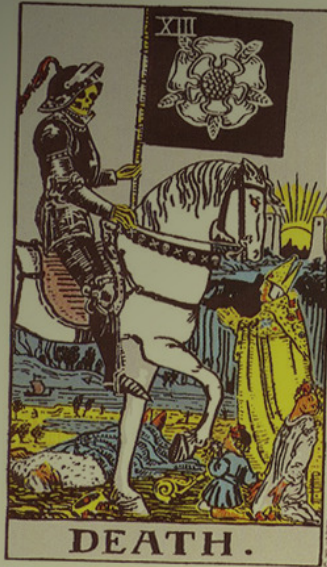
**ADVISED BY**

SANDRA MAGGIO

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**JULY, 2008**





DEATH.



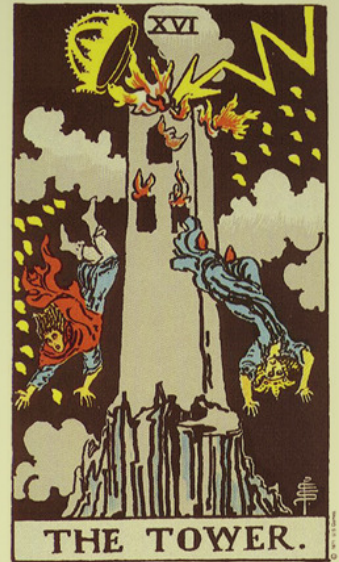
JUDGEMENT.



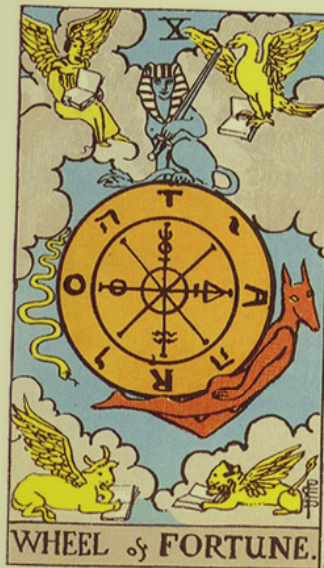
THE LOVERS.



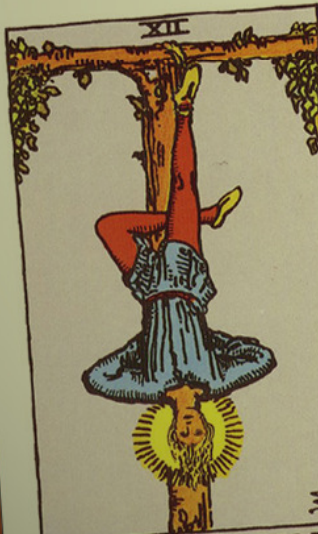
KING of CUPS.



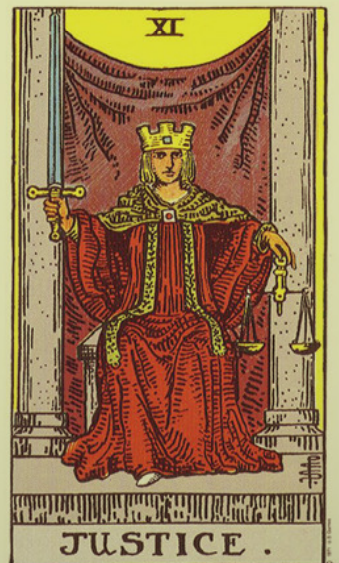
THE TOWER.



WHEEL of FORTUNE.



THE HANGED MAN.



JUSTICE.