

### Jacobean writers

**'Lamion' (1596)**  
The final line of each of this marriage song's ten stanzas. In *The Waste Land* 'green hair and flowers — images of fertility — 'are departed' and the river flows

**'Joy Mistress'**  
The grim and witty *carpe diem* poem of the mid-seventeenth century, about a transient mistress with thoughts of death, the grave and violating worms.

**'The Fisherman and His Wife'**  
The second part of *The Waste Land*, 'A Game of Chess', which opens with the former's story and ends with the latter's pathetic farewell, the last words we hear from her on stage. *The Tempest* about the supposed drowning of Ferdinand's father Alonso also haunts *The Waste Land* with the fertility god thrown in the sea and the Fisher King.

**'The Death of Beowulf' (1612)**  
The poem 'mortality', 'Webster saw the skull beneath the skin'. In *The Waste Land* he draws on the story of Beowulf — a dug-up grave and cobweb-shrouded epitaphs.

**'The Tragedy' (late 1500s)**  
The poem 'Tragedy', a reference to the terrible grief and revenge of Hieronymo, driven by the failure to find justice.

**'The Fisherman Beware Women' (early 1620s) and A Game At Chess (1624)**

### Myth and legend

**Ovid, *Metamorphoses***  
After Philomela's rape and mutilation by her brother-in-law Tereus, her sister Procne kills her own and Tereus' son and serves him as a meal to his father. In escaping from him Procne is transformed into a swallow and Philomela into a nightingale. Their song is heard in 'The Fire Sermon' and referred to in 'What the Thunder Said'. The depiction of Tiresias, the blind seer who has been both man and woman, described by Eliot as the poem's 'most important personage', is taken in part from Ovid, but also from Homer's *Odyssey* and the plays of Sophocles.

**Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde* (1865)**  
Quoted twice by Eliot in 'The Burial of the Dead'. This story of tragic adulterous passion, with its drive towards night and death, became associated with Arthurian legend; the Rhine-Maidens of *Die Götterdämmerung* merge with Spenser's nymphs in 'The Fire Sermon' to sing a lament in the Thames.

**Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1906–15)**

**Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (1920)**

### Religious texts

**The Bible and Book of Common Prayer**  
Eliot's borrowings from the Old Testament allude to old age, exile, decline and death, while the New Testament is drawn on for the agony of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. The title of *The Waste Land*'s first section, 'The Burial of the Dead', is from the Anglican BCP.

**Hinduism and Buddhism**  
A lesson from the Upanishads (a collection of Sanskrit philosophical texts that form the basis of Hinduism) found in 'What the Thunder Said' teaches the need for self-control, giving and compassion. *The Waste Land*'s final word 'Shantih' (peace) is the traditional ending to an Upanishad.

Buddha's 'Fire Sermon' preached against the fires of lust, anger, envy, and other passions that consume human beings. It provides the title of the third part of *The Waste Land*.

**Dante Alighieri, *Inferno***  
The *Inferno* (early fourteenth century) describes Dante's journey through hell. Eliot's description of the crowd of workers crossing London Bridge alludes to Dante's unhappy spirits who in life had neither rebelled against nor been unfaithful to God, but had cared only about themselves.

### Regrettable notes

Eliot, perhaps playfully or ironically, footnoted his own poem, sometimes expansively, often with no more than a terse citation. Later he expressed regret for having sent 'so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail'.

Eliot's conscious use of literary allusion should make it simple to trace his sources, but he might have added that 'poets aren't always entirely honest'. Not all his sources are acknowledged even in the 'Notes', and literary influence can be as significant if less conspicuous than allusion.

**'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal'**

T. S. Eliot

# The Waste Land (1922)

TheEnglishReviewOnline  
Go online (see back cover) for a printable PDF of this 'Only connect' that you can display as a poster, plus notes on the sources and descendants of some of Eliot's other works.

**'Les Morts du Mal' (1857)**  
This is an erotic and consciously decadent collection of poems. Six of them describe the dweller's experience of beggars and prostitutes, with the last one about 'ennui' (boredom). Celebrates the evil lurking inside the self. It closes *The Waste Land*'s 'The Burial of the Dead'.

**'The Fisherman and His Wife' (1886)**  
The poem is linked both to Weston's Grail Quest and to the story of the Grail in the latter's *Parsifal*. It concerns the Arthurian knight's quest and cure of the wounded king of the Grail knights.

*The Waste Land* is dedicated (and himself influenced by Eliot), to the poem in manuscript to make it the one that we should read. The poem to *The Waste Land* was taken from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* 'The horror! The horror!' Pound persuaded Eliot to alter it.

'A Game of Chess' is drawn from a popular song of 1912, which was also used in vaudeville music in *Sweeney Agonistes*.

Some of Tennyson and other Victorian poets, *The Waste Land*'s

**William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (1923)**

Response to *The Waste Land* challenging its view of spring, especially in 'By the road to the contagious hospital'.

**Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* (1934)**

This book's title, taken from *The Waste Land*, was used to foreground its darker aspects, including infidelity. The full line is 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust'. Waugh's novel *Brideshead Revisited* also contains allusions to Eliot.

**Wendy Cope, 'Waste Land Limericks' (1986)**

From her collection *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis*, Cope's limericks are wicked parodies of

### Digital technology

In 2011 *The Waste Land* app, which contains audio and video readings, line annotations, interviews, a photo gallery and expert analysis, became astonishingly successful, getting rave reviews from academics and technology experts alike and earning back its production costs in only six weeks.

### Other cultural references

**Dorian Lynskey, 'Why pop music loves TS Eliot' (May 2012, *Guardian* article, [www.tinyurl.com/6nse6ho](http://www.tinyurl.com/6nse6ho))**  
**Francis Ford Coppola, *Apocalypse Now* (1975, film)**  
**Doctor Who: 'The Lazarus Experiment' and 'The Hollow Men' episodes.**  
**Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, *Cats* (1981, musical)**

### Detective fiction

A number of writers of detective fiction have found Eliot's work to be fertile ground when naming their work:  
**Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (1953)**  
**P. D. James, *The Skull Beneath the Skin* (1982)**  
**Val McDermid, *The Mermaids Singing* (1995) and *The Wire in the Blood* (1997)**  
**Martin Rowson, *The Waste Land* (1999)**

### Apocalyptic fiction and teen novels

**Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (1957)**  
**Louise Lawrence, *Children of the Dust* (1985)**  
**Meg Rosoff, *Just In Case* (2006)**  
**Rami Garcia and Margaret Stohl, *Beautiful Creatures* (2009)**

### The Age of Eliot

The influence of Eliot's poetry (as well as his literary criticism and his work as an editor at Faber and Faber) was so pervasive that much of the twentieth century has been dubbed 'The Age of Eliot'. Critic Northrop Frye wrote that:  
*'A thorough knowledge of Eliot is compulsory for anyone interested in contemporary literature. Whether he is liked or*