

[Article]

A Reading of *The Waste Land*

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4. “Death by Water”

When Brooker reads “Death by Water”, she repeatedly refers to the impossibility of interpretation : “Interpretation can never lead to absolute truth or definitive conclusions, ...”(158) or ““Death by Water’ ...forces the reader to interpret but fails in the end to permit the reader to grasp any satisfactory meaning”(164). This assertion seizes a point, because a revolution has occurred in contemporary taste in poetry. The revolution, according to S. Sontag, represents a turning away from content in poetry in the old sense, an impatience with what made modern poetry prey to the zeal of interpreters.¹ Not looking to the hermeneutical discussion for help, so far distinction between content and form or between reality and appearance in art as well as in philosophy has dissolved. Sontag maintains that our task is not to find the maximum of content in a work of art but to cut back it. In other words, the function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is, even that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means* (*ibid.*, 14). One dictum in M. Arnold’s criticism once disclaimed by Eliot here comes back again: “to see things as they are”.

We should not forget it is not easy work to read *The Waste Land*, because it is a deliberate assemblage, an in-gathering of a cultural past felt to be in danger of dissolution.²

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
 Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall
 as you.

This part of the poem is very short: the earlier version was nearly ten times as long as the present one because it contained the parts of the present “What the Thunder said”. Nevertheless, it builds on the vast treasure house of the literature of the past from the myth of Adonis to Eliot’s own poem “Dans Le Restaurant”. Thus, “Death by Water”, as Brooker says, is a major moment in *The Waste Land* (160). Moreover, Phlebas, as Pound pointed out, is an integral part of the poem, because the drowned man motif brings together many figures, episodes, and themes.³

First, Phlebas, Phoenician sailor and merchant, recalls the drowned god of the fertility cults, especially Adonis. His origin has been already mentioned in the chapter “The Burial of the Dead”, when we read the phrase, “the drowned Phoenician Sailor” (*A Norton*, 200). So here is a good place to focus on the relationship between Adonis and Phlebas, noticing that this part of the original *Waste Land* was more imbued with mythical elements than the present one. According to Brooker, “Death by Water” closes itself, but it does not close the poem of which it is a part (159). One of the reasons for Brooker’s argument is that a common theme runs between “Death by Water” and “What the Thunder said”, as I shall later mention.

Now, chanting Phlebas can be regarded a kind of deformed dirge for him, because it can be supposed that the cry of gulls plays the same part as the tolling of a bell in *The Tempest*. This view would not be extraneous, since Eliot has clearly taken an interest in the ceremony of dirge, judging from the fact that the section of “Dirge” was already contained in the earlier version of *The Waste Land*. Dirge is well expounded in Frazer’s study of the cult of Adonis. At the festivals, which were held in Western Asia and Greek lands, the death of the god was annually mourned with a bitter wailing, chiefly by women; images of him, dressed to resemble corpses, were carried out as to burial and then thrown into the sea or into springs (*Golden Bough*, 389-90). A striking feature in the Adonis cult, Jessie Weston notices, is the presence of water, either sea, or river, the effigy of the dead god being, not buried in the earth, but thrown into the water (*From Ritual To Romance*, 51). Of course, we should read this part, calling to mind shipwreck victims in *The Tempest* as a background.

To follow Frazer’s account of the myth of Adonis, whose name originally derives from the Semite word *adon* “lord”, the oriental deity originally appears as a comely youth beloved by Aphrodite (the Roman counterpart is Venus). In his infancy the goddess hid him in a chest, which she gave in

charge to Persephone, queen of the nether world. But when Persephone opened the chest and beheld the beauty of the babe, she refused to give him back to Aphrodite, though the goddess of love went down herself to hell to ransom her dear one from the power of the grave. The dispute between the two goddesses of love and death were settled by Zeus, who decreed that Adonis should abide with Persephone in the underworld for one part of the year, and with Aphrodite in the upper world for another part. At last the fair youth was killed in hunting by a wild boar, or by the jealous Ares, who turned himself into the likeness of a boar in order to compass the death of his rival. Bitterly did Aphrodite lament her loved and lost Adonis (Frazer, 380).

According to Frazer, the competition between Aphrodite and Persephone for the possession of Adonis clearly reflects the struggle between Ishtar (the great mother goddess as the embodiment of reproductive energies of nature) and Allatu in the land of the dead, while the decision of Zeus is a Greek version of the annual disappearance and reappearance of Tammuz (Adonis). In this story Adonis is described as the handsome and beautiful young man, with whom we can associate Phlebas. Some commentators suggest that Phlebas is concocted from the Greek word *phleps* or *phlebos* signifying “vein” and “phallus” (Brooker, 167). Then the phallus, according to Lacan’s and Žižek’s psychology, is not a sexual organ but a signifier standing for the overflow of meaning or for *jouissance* as the kernel of the Real (*Sublime*, 170).

Freud in *Totem and Taboo* classifies Attis, Adonis, and Tammuz as youthful divinities enjoying the favours of mother goddesses and committing incest with their mother in defiance of their father. Moreover, Freud regards the death of Adonis as his punishment by emasculation or by the wrath of the father in the form of an animal.⁴ This argument no doubt makes explicit a property of Phlebas who, always seeking the traumatic Thing *jouissance*, can never catch *jouissance*, that notorious *heimliche* which is simultaneously the most *unheimliche*, always-already here and, precisely as such, always-already lost (Žižek, *Plague*, 49).

Moreover, Frazer presumes that the Easter celebration of the dead and risen Christ was grafted upon a similar celebration of the dead and risen Adonis (401). And for Jessie Weston also, the Adonis cult is that which can be held to be the classic form of the cult (*From Ritual to Romance*, 144). This is tantamount to set the myth of Adonis at the center of Western mind. According to Weston, the order of the ritual in Alexandria, though it is the matter that Southam also points out, is that “a Head (an effigy in Cyprus), of Papyrus, representing the god, was, with every show of mourning, committed to the waves, and borne within seven days by a current (always to be counted upon at that season of the year) to Byblos”(47). The duration of the feast varied from two days to seven or eight. But in

“Death by Water” a fortnight has past since Phlebas died. It makes an allusion to an account that the duration of time is too late to bury and to resurrect Phlebas. In a sense, a fortnight is “an eternity”, which is akin to Marlow’s sense of time in *Heart of Darkness*: “I had to wait in the station for ten days — an eternity”(21).

To return to Frazer, he sees in several Babylonian hymns the fact that the dirges were chanted over an effigy of the dead god and incense was burned to wake him from the sleep of death(379). The most noticeable feature of the ritual, for Weston, was the prominence assigned to women: it is the women who weep for Adonis and accompany him to his tomb (*ibid.*, 47). Therefore, in the line “Forgot the cry of the gulls”, the gulls may be an analogy of “the girls”, because of the similarity of the sounds. The women’s (or girls’) lamentation for Phlebas’s death cannot reach him because of his *amnesia*, though to remember the past is to be set free from it. In conclusion, the scene indicates that the women’s lamentations are ineffective and that the possibility of resurrection of Phlebas is completely lost.

Another noticeable point of the image of the Phoenicians is the historical fact that they were dominant sea traders in the Mediterranean from 1200BC to 539BC and that they paved the way for the rise of the Greeks, Romans and Western civilization, e.g. their phonetic alphabet is generally believed to be the ancestor of almost all modern alphabets, and trade with them could have provided the necessary papyrus.⁵ In this regard, Freud, following Edward Meyer, supposes that the Phoenicians are the Jews and adopts a view that early Israelites, the scribes of Moses, had a hand in the invention of the first alphabet.⁶

In addition, Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* serves for us to conceive the relationship between the Egyptian religion of Aton, the Mosaic one of Adon (ai), and the Greek of Adonis. Along with this line, we can infer that Phlebas also exemplifies Europe, its past and present. Hence, we can suppose that as Europe’s offspring, Phlebas would be given a role to enact the logic of its expansionist and acquisitive drive.⁷ Therefore, his death implicates the death of Europe. Moreover, Southam says that the name Phlebas, together with some of his attributes, may have been suggested to Eliot by Plato’s major dialogue on pleasure, *Philebus* (134). Needless to say, Plato and Freud are deeply involved with the issue of pleasure. In this regard, Freud and Eliot are heirs to the Platonic tradition of Western thought. In what follows, this will be revealed.

First, we can take from Socrates’ argument in Plato’s *Philebus* itself a hint how to consider the name of Philebus. Here the One-Many problem of Plato is applicable. Phlebas and Philebus are not real persons. In other words, Phlebas the Phoenician can be a proper name and at the same time

a common name. A proper name can be changed by abstraction into a common name. This is an apparatus to answer the question how one thing can be also many things. In short, the name suggests that Phlebas could be any man in any time of European history. Further to this, he is a pattern imposed on anonymous countless lives of the world. This is what Brooker claims that “the drowned man is Everyman”(168). The name of Philebus also is the embodiment of an irrational dogmatic hedonism we, more or less, share.⁸

Secondly, there is the issue of the difference between Socrates’ and Philebus’ view. In *Philebus*, Philebus sides with Aphrodite, whose name comes from Pleasure, though Socrates not always believes Philebus’ identification of her name and nature. In addition, Philebus in the dialogue appears as a character who refuses all compromise and believes that pleasure is victorious, whatever happens. At once, Philebus is described as a beautiful model of the then young people, Philebus’ boys, who live on the principle of enjoyment and pleasure and delight. The common conception between them is that pleasure is an “unlimited” thing. Meanwhile Socrates’ refutation of it, roughly speaking, is centered on two points: that all things are a mixture of limit and unlimitedness and that pleasure should be considered in the cooperation of reason or intelligence.

Socrates argues, “For that goddess of ours (Harmonia?), fair Philebus, must have observed the lawlessness and utter wickedness of mankind due to an absence of limit in men’s pleasures and appetites, and therefore established amongst them a law and order that are marked by limit” (*Philebus*, 48). If we consider this in accordance with Lacan’s triad Imaginary-Real-Symbolic, Philebus stands up for the Real as limitless pleasure. But for Plato’s Socrates, Philebus’ stand is only an illusory product or a feat impossible of achievement. Behind this argument, there is a Plato-Socrates’ belief that the intensest pleasures disturb the souls with frenzy. For Socrates, Reality already was a precarious and puzzling concept — “Reality: for a thing with which we don’t mean to mix reality will never really come into being, and if it ever did it wouldn’t continue in being”(135). Even in Lacan’s “triad”, three dimensions can neither be conceived simultaneously nor can only one of them be done because one is always forced to choose one pair at a time. Thus, the bare Real can never conceived, just as, in Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*, “human kind/Cannot bear much reality” (for this argument I follow Bradley who does not distinguish Reality from the Real). In any case, all these bear witness that the question how to manage pleasure has remained a crux in the tradition of Western thought from Plato through Freud to Eliot.

Next, let’s notice the following part of *Philebus* in which Socrates makes mention of the elements: “We see that the elements which enter into the nature of the bodies of all animals, fire,

water, air, and, as the storm-tossed sailor cries, ‘land’ [i.e. earth], reappear in the constitution of the world” (19). In the idea of four elements Empedocles, Socrates’ antecedent, also used, the vital matter is their interaction, health as their balance, illness as their imbalance. And the idea of four elements also bears on the structure of *The Waste Land*. Hence, it can be said that “the Fire Sermon” is concerned with the universal fire upon which our fire depends, and “Death by Water” with water. The shift from fire to water corresponds with that of Dante’s *Inferno*, xxvi: from the scene “Ulysses and Diomedes are also here united in punishment. The former, speaking through the Flame, relates the manner and place of his death” to the scene “Three times it made her whirl round with all the waters; at the fourth, made the poop rise up and prow go down, as pleased Another, till the sea was closed above us.” There Dante designed an account that Ulysses’ death is of being involved in a whirlpool (Reeves also points out that the image of whirlpool in “Death by Water” comes from *Inferno*).

This scene was very impressive for Eliot because the Ulysses episode by Dante gave him “the quality of *surprise* (Italics are of Eliot’s own) which Poe declared to be essential to poetry” (*Essays*, 213). After remarking on the difference between Homer’s and Dante’s Ulysses, Reeves remarks that Dante’s, with his insatiable and heroic hunger for knowledge and experience, abjures the nostalgic comforts of home and is damned for pride (81). To proceed further along this line, if the eventful voyage of Ulysses (Odyssey) from Troy to Ithaca, as Theodor Adorno lays down, is the way taken by the self through the myths to the process of enlightenment, Dante’s episode comes out to implicate that Ulysses’ enterprise wrecked on the way despite having defended against “the excessive *jouis-sance* of the Sirens’ song” (Žižek’s terms).⁹ Thus, Dante’s Ulysses unexpectedly comes to predict the self-destruction of later Europe which Eliot called suicide (*Essays*, 387) or that of the Enlightenment which Horkheimer and Adorno conceived in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

After all, Phlebas is a collective personality obliquely built up of such ancestral traits as the literature of the past realized (In addition, Manganiello sees behind Phlebas erratic voyagers, Prufrock and Gerontion)¹⁰. And in a figure of Phlebas, we can see the same method as Joyce’s: “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (*Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, 177). He is both a figure who encloses unseen figures and a mythical one who is abstracted to such an extent that his personality was all but lost. From this perspective, the meaning of Phlebas consists, rather than in himself, in relations between him and us as its beholders. Namely, its meaning occurs in the mind of the reader. In this point, he, on a smaller scale, partakes the function of Tiresias. Therefore, in the death of Phle-

bas, Tiresias could see his own death as an abject.

Next, Eliot's above appreciation of Poe helps us associate the image of "whirlpool" of "Death by Water" with that of Poe's *A Descent into the Maelström*.¹¹ For Eliot, Poe is a kind of displaced European in the sense that he has "the provinciality of the person who is not at home where he belongs, but cannot get to anywhere else" (*To Criticize the Critic*, 29). This, as mentioned in "The Burial of the Dead", is something essential to Eliot himself, too. Also, Poe, for Eliot, is the most important person when we consider three French poets, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry. In Poe, we find the germs of their *art poétique*: "a poem should have nothing in view but itself" and "the composition of a poem should be as conscious and deliberate as possible" (*ibid.*,40). Brought to its culmination by Valéry, the advance of self-consciousness, the extreme awareness of and concern for language which we find in Valéry, is something which must ultimately break down, owing to an increasing strain against which the human mind and nerves will rebel (42). They conjoin to tackle the motif of the necessary limitations of the human word. Eliot further continues, "just as, it may be maintained, the indefinite elaboration of scientific discovery and invention, and of political and social machinery, may reach a point at which there will be an irresistible revulsion of humanity and a readiness to accept the most primitive hardships rather than carry any longer the burden of modern civilization" (42). Here is where the most primitive hardships and modern civilization vehemently collide. Exactly this theme is embodied in *A Descent into the Maelström*.

To recaptulate the horror story of *A Descent into the Maelström*, it goes as follows: The event that the old fisher man experienced was such that "it took less than a single day to change his hairs from a jetty black to white" (177). One day in July, the old man and his two brothers, at just seven o'clock p.m., started for home on a boat filled with fine fish. They were in the habit of fishing among the islands beyond Moskoe, nearly to Vurrgh. Maelström (a Norwegian name, Moskoe-ström) is between Lofoden and Moskoe. If usual, they could evade anything hard. But then, everything was unusual, and a terrible hurricane arrives without warning. They manage to survive despite being temporarily submerged in the water. But unfortunately, driven by the wind, they, like a mill-race, were caught by the Maelström. "As it was, I involuntarily closed my eyes in horror" (189). They were being plunged into the abyss.

But even in such an extremity, the old man became possessed with keenest curiosity about the whirl itself and restored his self-possession. When they slowly spiral downward, the old man observes the wreckage that swirls around him. He found that small shapes and cylinders descend most slowly into the abyss. He lashes himself to the water cask and cuts himself loose, signaling to his brother to

seek nearby barrels. However, his brother refuses to move, so that he was plunged headlong into the chaos of foam below. Before long, a great change took place in the character of the whirlpool, and the gyrations grew, gradually, less and less steep. At last, he did escape it. Michael J Cummings says that this story can be interpreted as an allegory for every human being's journey through the turbulent times of life.¹² Likewise, the tale of Phlebas, as Brooker perceives, refuses the kind of allegorization that one figure represents one concept (*Reading the Waste Land*, 163). Hence we can understand that it is an allegory for the storms of life anywhere in the world.

Moreover, in order to understand the tale of Phlebas better, we need further extensive survey. It participates in another theme of *A Descent into Maelström*. The main character in *A Descent into Maelström* has a wish to explore its depths, even at the price of death. The old fisherman says, "my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see" (188). Eventually he was able to survive a descent into a raging whirlpool with the keen curiosity and wits. And, going through "the pathway between Time and Eternity", he tried to peep into the mysteries of the world with his poetic (or scientific) insight, but he was wholly powerless before "the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of God's works" (177).

After all, none of the fisherman's old mates and daily companions, including the narrator, could have understood his tale. In this sense, he is equivalent to a poet who, as the price of trying to transgress the bounds of consciousness and language, lives unnoticed with broken body and soul amidst those who know nothing of his art. For Žižek, Poe's abyss of the Maelström is exactly the site that *jouissance* appears as the horrifying abyss of the thing which can only be approached in a suicidal heroic act of transgression, of excluding oneself from the symbolic community (*On Belief*, 19). On this premise, Žižek translates the story of the Maelström into that which the subject desperately endeavours to maintain a proper distance towards *Jouissance*, the abyss of traumatic/excessive enjoyment which threatens to swallow us up (*The Plague*, 175). In this way, Žižek adds the old fisherman to the tragic heroes of Oedipus and Antigone. At any rate, in Eliot's mind, some whirlpool stories are naturally combined and condensed into Phlebas.

Next, Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* is another case in point. *Heart of Darkness*, like *A Descent into the Maelström*, is "a story within a story" which also is generally called frame story. A frame story of *The Maelström* is that a single narrative by the old fisherman is set in the context of the telling of a story by the unnamed narrator, just as in *Heart of Darkness* the primary narrator is Marlow but his account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person (*A Norton Critical Edition*, 256). Since this novel is inconclusive, it may be difficult for us to get any definite meaning from this

enigmatic novel, but it is certain that it has a few common themes with *The Waste Land*. Kurtz is the man, whose mother was half-English and father was half-French, hence all Europe once contributed to the making of him. For Marlow, Europe is “higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose” (28). And Kurtz is “an emissary of pity, and science, and progress” (28), and at the same time, a modern who has “no restraint, no faith, no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself”. Progress proves the ultimate Enlightenment gospel, and the theodicy had become secularized in the modern world.¹³

Kurtz, for Marlow, is a prodigy who embodies liberalism, humanism, utilitarianism, and science. All these big ideas endorse any behavior of Europeans. But Marlow, perhaps unconsciously, casts doubt on humanism: “It(the earth) was unearthly and the men (wild men) were....No they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it — this suspicion of their not being inhuman” (37). Economic dealings were amenable to scientific inquiry and rational calculation: “What saves us is sufficiency — the devotion to efficiency (10), but they really may be “just robbery with violence” (10). Marlow describes one scene of the trades, “a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness and in return came a precious trickle of ivory” (21). Moreover, in a beautiful piece (of memorandum?) written by Kurtz, the notion of Benevolence, one of the moral sentiments of utilitarianism, is augustly addressed, but its philanthropic guise is soon flayed by the words, “Exterminate all the brutes !” (50-1). After all, trading or exploiting goes hand by hand with “humanizing, improving, instructing” (34).

Nevertheless, Marlow desperately refuses that the memory of Kurtz is deserted with “an everlasting rest in the dustbin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats of civilization” (51). Kurtz is an extremist who “stepped over the edge” of life and of European civilization, where, as Taylor says, can be the site of wild and formless striving, of violence and unstrained sexuality (672). He at times behaves as “a despotic figure which stands for the primordial *jouisseur*” (Žižek, *Ticklish*, 315). Kurtz’s soul is a battleground for the competing forces of good and evil, and of “surrender to the exotic, the stranger, the other and domestication of them” (Sontag, 70). There the traditional expectations of “savage natives” and “enlightened European” are turned over.

But what Marlow saw at Kurtz’s deathbed is that his cry is an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions (*HD*, 70) and what he remembered is “his (Kurtz’s) abject pleading, his abject threats, the colossal scale of his vile desires, the meanness, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul” (72). For Marlow, Kurtz’s death might have been a victory, because Kurtz was a hero for him. But this view of Marlow may go awry

from the reality of Kurtz, even if one of Marlow's functions is to explore how deeply problematic is one individual knowledge of another (316). And finally Kurtz died in eternal condemnation as an abject being.

After all, for Marlow who, in contrast with Kurtz, stays within the civilization, it follows that "all that had been Kurtz's, had passed out of Marlow's hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career" (71). In the things Marlow lost are included self-authorization and heroism as the facets of immanent frame of modernity which Taylor sees in "western secularization". And this sense of loss also is duplicated by Marlow's failure of understanding Kurtz. In the final moment, Kurtz also, like Tiresias, turns out to be a blind seer: "I (Marlow) understand better the meaning of his stare that could not see the flame of the candle but was enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness"(69). Kurtz can well see the mere show (appearance) and can tell what it really means (reality). But finally what he saw is hollow "at the core" of reality. And what is worse, Kurtz himself is the hollow itself. One of the differences between Kurtz and Tiresias is in the point that Kurtz, wanting only justice, was buried by the pilgrims in a muddy hole. Kurtz cannot avoid punishment. In *Heart of Darkness*, transgression and punishment are two sides of a single coin (28).

In any case, Kurtz who is an offspring of Europe's merits and faults, for exactly that reason, was cast outside the civilization. What characterizes the European civilization, for Žižek, is precisely its *ex-centered* character (*On Belief*, 67). It means that the ultimate pillar of Wisdom, the secret *agalma*, the spiritual treasure, the lost object-cause of desire, which we in the West long ago betrayed, could be recuperated out there, in the forbidden exotic place (67). As can be seen in the phrase: "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (*HD*, 35), Kurtz also is condemned to "the search for the lost spiritual innocence of Our Own civilization" (Žižek, *On Belief*, 68). The fusion of this nostalgic drive and the imperialist's acquisitive one in Kurtz makes his life intractable for us. But the fate of Kurtz, that of modern thought seeking its self in its other, breaks down (Sontag, 69). Thus, Phlebas and Kurtz, we can say, are twins in the way of life.

Next, the two lines "and the deep sea swell/And the profit and loss" are later developed into the following passage in *Four Quartets* :

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
 And found and lost again and again : and now, under conditions
 That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.

For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

(“East Coker”, V)

For Kurtz also, “the rest is not our business”: “His need was to exist and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk and with a maximum of privation” (*Heart of Darkness*, 55). Here the vicissitudes of our life, through the contrast of “profit and loss”, “rose and fell”, and “age and youth”, are schematized, which may be abstract to impede interpretation (Sontag, 10). At the bottom of the sea, Phlebas, putting on all the traits of European, sleeps as if he was embraced by Freud’s “oceanic feeling as a delusionary cure for human suffering”, not as the source of religious needs (*CD*, 10). At this stage, there still is something to prevent our access to the maternal object.

As is well known, the Phlebas passage is the translation of the latter half of Eliot’s earlier poem, “Dans le Restaurant”. Therefore, the part also is some of help to understand the passage. “Dans le Restaurant” tells about the lubricious memory of an old waiter. He experienced an initiation into sex at the age of seven with the younger girl. But on the beggar’s washday the outcome of the event was sad. The coming of a large dog made him afraid, run away, and left her in midcourse. He reacts with revulsion. For the speaker, a young man, the waiter’s story is as shabby and dirty as his outward look. He claims, “So then you have your vulture!” In his memory also, the likeness remained poignant. In the end he asks the waiter to clean the dirt from his face, giving him money for a bathhouse. This story reminds us of “the failed potential in the Hyacinth garden” (Gish, 87). Sexual discovery as intimacy and joy and that as degradation and disgust are intersected in mind. In a sense, the waiter is a collection of common and lecherous men in the twentieth century. And the young man also is polluted by his time.

The phrase “Gentile or Jew”, as Southam points out, connotes two types of human being, being in accord with the Biblical distinction between the faithful believers, the Jews, and those who rejected God, the Gentiles. Finally, the narrator admonishes us, readers, as the voyagers of life: “O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,/Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you”. All, including the young man and the old waiter, can never avoid the fate of Phlebas. Therefore, the phrase “Consider Phlebas” implies that the reader should consider “the people hidden behind Phlebas and their misfortunes”. “A current under sea/Picked his bones in whispers”, of course, is an echo from *The Tempest*: “Nothing of him that doth fade, /But doth suffer a sea-change/Into something rich and strange”(1.2). As a compensation for burial, Phlebas’ bones are picked up, just as the derelict, insane, fragmentary objects of modern civilization are picked up by a poet.

In “his bones”, the dead skull would be contained. Then picking up his bones is equal to picking up his spirit. According to Žižek following Hegel, the skull is a small scale of ‘objective correlative’ for spirit. Žižek remarks, “the subject, totally lost in the medium of language, finds his objective counterpart in the inertia of a non-language object (skull, money) (*Sublime*, 212). In “Little Gidding”, Eliot says “Every poem an epitaph”. Moreover, Phlebas is a displaced man from *jouissance*, like Prospero and Alonso who are unwillingly uprooted from their home under each condition. Then, Prospero, Alonso, and Phlebas together are in “the like loss” (*The Tempest*, 5.1. 144). Thus, “Death by Water” is the epic of the displaced person, as *The Waste Land* as a whole is so.

Gish says, “the earlier versions of “Death by Water” point toward two kinds of experience: the horror of physical death, which becomes muted to quietness, and the release from the fires of passion”(87). The gloomy mood brought about by Kurtz’s cry, “The horror! the horror”, overhangs both “Death by Water” and “What the Thunder said”, which can be known from the phrase in the earlier version: “horrified past horror” (59).

Finally, let’s glance again at Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*. Therein, we can see an assertion of Freud that the Christian communion is essentially a fresh elimination of the father, a repetition of the guilty deed (192). Freud continues, “we can see the full justice of Frazer’s pronouncement that ‘the Christian communion has absorbed within itself a sacrament which is doubtless far older than Christianity’ (192). Whether the assertion is right, I have no faculty to judge. Freud goes on to remark, “An event such as the elimination of the primal father by the company of his sons must inevitably have left ineradicable traces in the history of humanity, and the less it itself was recollected, the more numerous must have been the substitutes to which it gave rise” (182). The application of this view to Eliot shows that when he dismissed the Eliot ideal in his youth, he in the unconscious would have committed the murder.

In any case, the murder of all powerful father serves to entrench the prohibition, and consequently imbeds the prohibition into culture, namely there comes a communally shared guilt and regret. The dead father as guardian of *jouissance* is subsequently replaced by the (castrated) masters. They, castrated by symbolic order or language (Lacan), vainly seek the shadow of *jouissance* and died in remorse.

As one example of the substitutes, James Strachey, translator of *Totem and Taboo*, not showing the reason, cites Ariel’s words of *The Tempest* beginning with “Full fathom five thy father lies....” (192). Perhaps, it would be why the drowning of Alonso who was once King of Naples, though all this really is their imagination, is that of his son Ferdinand, too. In other words, Ferdinand also can

be a substitute of Alonso, and they also of Prospero. After all, *The Tempest* is a story of authority and its loss in which is linked with that of Phlebas. Moreover, in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud introduced Schiller's phrase: "All that is to live in endless song/Must in life-time first be drowned" (130). Hence the image of drowning, we know, has been a recurring one in the history of European thought. Thus it follows that "Death by Water" can be the dirge for the elimination of the primal father, not merely of Phlebas. This is the reason why "Death by Water" sounds most authoritative (Reeves, 80).

To sum up, Adonis, Oedipus, Alonso, Kurtz, and Phlebas are the substitutes of the primal father. But they cannot be perfect substitutes. In consequence, they themselves have to face the horror without the primal father or God. After all, Phlebas is an embodiment for a collective mind of Europe of which the successive generations unconsciously take over the sense of guilt of the murder of the primal father and of the incest with the mother, i.e. the 'Oedipus complex'. Žižek says, "the traumatic event (the Oedipus complex) is, rather, what *always-already had to happen* the moment we are within the order of Culture" (*TS.*, 315).

Notes

1. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (Penguin: Modern Classics), p. 10.
2. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford and New York, Oxford UP), p. 490.
3. T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Draft Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Valerie Eliot (Faber & Faber, 1971), p. 129.
4. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, tr. and ed. by James Strachey with a biographical introduction by Peter Gay (W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 189.
5. George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (Faber and Faber, 1967), p. 203.
6. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, tr. by Katherine Jones (Vintage Books, 1967), p. 40-50.
7. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. with Introduction and Notes by Owen Knowles (Penguin Classics, 2007), xxiii.
8. *Plato's Philebus*, tr. with an introduction and commentary by R. Hackforth (Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 6.
9. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. by John Cumming (The Continuum Publishing Company: New York, 2002), p. 46.
10. Dominic Manganiello, *T.S. Eliot and Dante* (The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989), p. 28.
11. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (Penguin Books, 1986).
12. <http://cummingstudyguides.net/Guides4/maelstrom.html>, 2011/08/30.
13. Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), p. 445.