

# Poems

*T.S. Elliot*

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To Jean Verdenal 1889-1915

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## **Gerontion**

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

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,  
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.  
I was neither at the hot gates  
Nor fought in the warm rain  
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,  
Bitten by flies, fought.  
My house is a decayed house,  
And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,  
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,  
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.  
The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;  
Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.  
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,  
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.

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

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

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,  
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk  
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero  
With caressing hands, at Limoges

Who walked all night in the next room;  
By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;  
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room  
Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp  
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door. Vacant shuttles  
Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,  
An old man in a draughty house  
Under a windy knob.

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

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last  
We have not reached conclusion, when I  
Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last  
I have not made this show purposelessly  
And it is not by any concitation  
Of the backward devils.  
I would meet you upon this honestly.  
I that was near your heart was removed therefrom  
To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.  
I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it  
Since what is kept must be adulterated?  
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:  
How should I use it for your closer contact

These with a thousand small deliberations  
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,  
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,  
With pungent sauces, multiply variety  
In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,  
Suspend its operations, will the weevil  
Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled

Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear  
In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits  
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn,  
White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,  
And an old man driven by the Trades  
To a sleepy corner.

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

### **Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar**

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

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

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

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

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

A lustreless protrusive eye  
Stares from the protozoic slime  
At a perspective of Canaletto.  
The smoky candle end of time

Declines. On the Rialto once.  
The rats are underneath the piles.  
The jew is underneath the lot.

Money in furs. The boatman smiles,

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

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