

T.S. Eliot – Wasteland (1922)

Admonished by the sun's inclining ray,  
And swift approaches of the thievish day,  
The white-armed Fresca blinks, and yawns,  
and gapes,  
Aroused from dreams of love and pleasant  
rapes.  
Electric summons of the busy bell  
Brings brisk Amanda to destroy the spell;  
With coarsened hand, and hard plebeian tread,  
Who draws the curtain round the lacquered  
bed,  
Depositing thereby a polished tray  
Of soothing chocolate, or stimulating tea.

Leaving the bubbling beverage to cool,  
Fresca slips softly to the needful stool,  
Where the pathetic tale of Richardson  
Eases her labour till the deed is done.  
Then slipping back between the conscious  
sheets,  
Explores a page of Gibbon as she eats.  
Her hands caress the egg's well-rounded dome,  
She sinks in reverie, till the letters come.  
Their scribbled contents at a glance devours,  
Then to reply devotes her practic'd powers.

"My dear, how are you? I'm unwell today,  
And have been, since I saw you at the play.  
I hope that nothing mars your gaiety,  
And things go better with you, than with me.  
I went last night--More out of dull despair--  
To Lady Kleinwurm's party--who was there?  
Oh, Lady Kleinwurm's monde--no one that  
mattered--  
Somebody sang, and Lady Kleinwurm  
chattered.  
What are you reading? anything that's new?  
I have a clever book by Giraudoux.  
Clever, I think, is all, I've much to say--  
But cannot say it--that is just my way--  
When shall we meet--tell me all your  
manowuvers:  
And all about yourself and your new lovers--

and when to Paris? I must make an end,  
My dear, believe me, your devoted  
friend".

This ended, to the steaming bath she moves,  
Her tresses fanned by little flutt'ring Loves;  
Odours, confected by the cunning French,  
Disguise the good old female stench.

Fresca! in other time or place had been  
A meek and lowly weeping Magdalene;  
More sinned against than sinning, bruised and  
marred,  
The lazy laughing Jenny of the bard.  
(The same eternal and consuming itch  
Can make a martyr, or plain simple bitch);  
Or prudent sly domestic puss puss cat,  
Or autumn's favourite in a furnished flat,  
Or strolling slattern in a tawdry gown,  
For varying forms, one definition's right:  
Unreal emotions, and real appetite.  
Women grown intellectual grow dull,  
And lose the mother wit of natural trull.  
Fresca was baptised in a soapy sea  
Of Symonds--Walter Pater--Vernon Lee.  
The Scandinavians bemused her wits,  
The Russians thrilled her to hysteric fits.  
For such chaotic misch-masch potpourri  
What are we to expect but poetry?  
When restless nights distract her brain from  
sleep  
She may as well write poetry, as count sheep.  
And on those nights when Fresca lies alone,  
She scribbles verse of such a gloomy tone  
That cautious critics say, her style is quite her  
own.  
Not quite an adult, and still less a child,  
By fate misbred, by flattering friends beguiled,  
Fresca's arrived (the Muses Nine declare)  
To be a sort of can-can salonniere.  
But at my back from time to time I hear  
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread  
from ear to ear.