

THE WASTE LAND IN THE MAKING

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When in 1959 the *Paris Review* interviewer asked T.S. Eliot concerning the whereabouts of the *Waste Land* manuscripts, Eliot answered :

Don't ask me. That's one of the things I don't know. It's an unsolved mystery. I sold it to John Quinn. I also gave him a notebook of unpublished poems, because he had been kind to me in various affairs. That's the last I heard of them. Then he died and they didn't turn up at the sale. (1)

When Eliot made this statement, he was not aware that one year earlier in 1958 Mrs. Thomas F. Conroy, John Quinn's niece, had sold the manuscripts to the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library for \$ 18,000. She had discovered in the early fifties that they had been kept in storage with other papers of Quinn. The sale was kept private even from both Eliot and Pound. It was only in 1968 that Eliot's second wife, Valerie, learned about it, and the first public revelation came in the form of an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 7 November 1968 by the bibliographer Donald Gallup. Then in 1971 Mrs. Valerie Eliot published a facsimile and transcript of the original drafts of the poem including the annotations of Ezra Pound. The mystery of the missing manuscript is now solved. We are now able to assess Pound's contribution which hitherto had been only a matter of conjecture. In addition the poem has now gained in lucidity, since the missing parts — not really organically related to the whole, but still illuminating — are now restored.

John Quinn, with whom the *Waste Land* manuscripts were consigned, was in many ways Eliot's benefactor. His role in helping Eliot to bring the poem to the world was perhaps no less than Pound's

(1) Kay Dick (ed.) *Writers at Work*, Penguin, p. 118.

who helped him in shaping it. It was Quinn who negotiated on Eliot's behalf the publication of his first two volumes *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917) and *Poems 1919*. He also commissioned him in 1971 to publish a brochure on Pound: «Ezra Pound, His Metric and Poetry», then published anonymously, but now available in *To Criticize the Critic* (1965). When Quinn learned, through Pound, of Eliot's financial and nervous strains, he offered to guarantee a regular substantial income to relieve him of the burden of banking business, and give him leisure for composition. Eliot, who had refused Pound's «Bel Esprit» (2) plan as disguised charity was almost prepared to accept Quinn's offer (3).

John Quinn's efforts in getting *The Waste Land* published and securing good terms for Eliot with Liveright the publisher were generally known, but the full details have only been revealed when Valerie Eliot published extracts from the letters exchanged on that score. Eliot wished to make a present of the *Waste Land* manuscripts as a token of his gratitude, but Quinn offered to purchase them. It was finally agreed that the *Waste Land* manuscripts would be given as a gift, and that Quinn instead should buy the manuscripts of *Prufrock* :

I certainly cannot accept your proposal to purchase the manuscript at your own price, and if you will not accept it in recognition of what you have done for me lately and in the past, it will not be any pleasure to me to sell it to you. I therefore hope that you will accept it. But as I feel that perhaps you like some of my early poems best I should be glad, for example, to send you the manuscripts of *Prufrocks* (sic) instead, and I hope you will let me do this. (4)

Quinn, however, sent Eliot a cheque for \$ 140 for the manuscript, despite the arrangement. He also negotiated, in addition to the publication of the poem in book form by Liveright, that it should be published in a magazine, *The Dial*. For this Eliot got another \$ 150 plus the *Dial's* annual award worth \$ 2000.

The reader is referred to Donald Gallup's article (*TLS* 7 Nov. 1968) for a thorough description of the Quinn *Waste Land* manuscripts, and also to Valerie Eliot's edition of this material. The newly published parts deserve particular mention. These include sections of the poem omitted by Pound, and satellite poems not originally form-

(2) Eliot to Henry Eliot 8 November 1922, Transcript, p. xxv.

(3) Eliot to Quinn 4 October 1923, Ibid. p. xxviii.

(4) Ibid., p. xxiii.

ing corporate parts of the *Waste Land*, though closely associated with it. The longer omitted parts of the poem are :

a) The first 54 lines of Part I, originally entitled «He do the Police in Different Voices».

b) The first 72 lines of «The Fire Sermon» in heroic couplets parodying Pope's *The Rape of The Lock*.

c) The greater part of «Death by Water» (83 lines) containing a shipwreck scene based on the Ulysses canto in the *Inferno*.

The Quinn manuscripts, in addition to the *Waste Land*, included the following satellite poems, most of which have not been known before. (5)

a) «The Death of Saint Narcissus» (published in the sixties in *Poems Written in Early Youth* in the Faber Collected Edition, 1969).

b) «Song for the Opherion» (uncollected but published pseudonymously in *The Tyro* 1921).

c) «Exequy» (unpublished).

d) «The Death of the Duchess» (Unpublished 73 lines). This fragment, closely related to «A Game of Chess», is based on the bed-chamber scene in John Webster *The Duchess of Malfi*.

e) «Elegy» (unpublished).

f) «Dirge» (unpublished).

g) Drafts of three untitled and unpublished poems. The first and the last of them supplied lines for «What The Thunder Said», and the second is influenced by *The Bhagavad-Gita*. (6)

All these poems were annotated by Ezra Pound, some of them heavily so. With the exception of the first two, they made their first appearance in print in Valerie Eliot's edition (1971).

(5) Hugh Kenner (*The Invisible Poet*, Methuen, 1969), p. 127, refers to a triad of *Dream Songs*, offshoots of *The Waste Land*, discarded by Pound and reworked by Eliot into *The Hollow Men*.

(6) Transcript, p. 130.

It would appear from the learned notes appended to *The Waste Land*, and from the huge bulk of critical material written about it, that this is a poem which grew «in pure mind». But no poem, however learned, could be divorced from experience. Perhaps Eliot's «impersonal theory» has been emphasized a little too much. It is a significant fact that in the very essay on «Hamlet and His Problems» in which he advanced the principle of «objective correlative», Eliot speaks of works of art where this principle fails to satisfy. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one such work. It is not autonomous ; it relies too heavily on forces and passions that lie outside the limitation of characters and the scope of events. To understand those forces and passions one has to reckon with the author's own experience which gave rise to them. Eliot proceeds :

We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle ; under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know. We need a great many facts in his biography ; and we should like to know whether, and when, and after or at the same time as what personal experience he read Montaigne, II.xii, *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*. We should have, finally, to know something which is by hypothesis unknowable, for we assume to be an experience which, in the manner indicated, exceeded the facts. (7)

By the same token, it may well be asked in connection with *The Waste Land*, under what personal conditions did Eliot read Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* or Fraser's *Golden Bough*, books that have partly become famous on account of Eliot's reference to them in the notes to the poem. Though no definitive biography of Eliot is likely to come out in the very near future, yet facts are gradually turning up from various sources which may clarify the situation. The appearance of Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography* in 1969 shed some light on the genesis of the poem, since Russell knew Eliot as a Harvard student and was very close to him during his early marriage days. Also the publication in 1971 of Robert Sencourt's *Memoir* is instrumental since Sencourt knew the Eliots as inmates of the same sanatorium in 1927, and became a life-long friend of Eliot ever since. He was therefore in a position to know some of the intimate details

(7) Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, pp. 102—103.

relative to the composition of the poem. More important than either is the publication of some of Eliot's own letters in Valerie Eliot's introduction to her edition of the poem. When all these sources are considered it will be found that they reinforce Eliot's description of *The Waste Land* (used as a motto by his wife) as «the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life ; it is just a piece of rhymical grumbling».

✦ Writing on Pascal's *Pensées* in 1931, Eliot was clearly referring to his own experience when composing *The Waste Land*. (8) Explaining how Pascal produced his great work *Lettres Ecrites à un Provincial* while he was in extremely poor health, Eliot says :

but it is a commonplace that some forms of illness are extremely favourable, not only to religious illumination, but to artistic and literary composition. A piece of writing meditated, apparently without progress, for months or years, may suddenly take shape and word ; and in this state long passages may be produced which require little or no retouch. (9)

A much more explicit statement by Eliot on the psychological conditions conducive to poetical composition comes in *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism* :

I know, for instance, that some forms of ill-health, debility or anaemia, may (if other circumstances are favourable) produce an efflux of poetry in a way approaching the condition of automatic writing — though in contrast to the clamis sometimes made for the latter, the material has obviously been incubating within the poet, and cannot be suspected of being a present from a friendly or impertinent demon. What one writes in this way may succeed in standing the examination of a more normal state of mind ; it gives me the impression, as I have just said, of having undergone a long incubation, though we do not know until the shell breaks what kind of egg we have been sitting on. To me it seems that at these moments, which are characterised by the sudden lifting of the burden of anxiety and fear which presses upon our daily life so steadily that we are unaware of it, what happens is something *negative* : that is to say, not «inspiration» as we commonly think of it, but the breaking down of strong habi-

(8) See Bradbrook, P. 8, where she refers to a broadcast by Valerie Eliot on 7 November 1971.

(9) *Selected Essays*, p. 405.

tual barriers — which tend to reform very quickly. Some obstruction is momentarily whisked away. The accompanying feeling is less like what we know as positive pleasure, than a sudden relief from an intolerable burden. (10)

This tallies well with Conrad Aiken's account of how *The Waste Land* came to be written. Eliot had complained to him in the winter of 1921-1922 of a state of psychological suspension he was suffering from which prevented him from putting pen to paper, though his mind had been pregnant with ideas. The «log-jam» was broken when Aiken passed this information to a psychotherapist who ascribed it to Eliot's perfectionism. (11) As late as 1959 T.S. Eliot still entertained the same views concerning the psychological origins of a work of art. *The Paris Review* interviewer questioned Eliot concerning his objection in «Thoughts After Lambeth» (1931) to the description of *The Waste Land* as expressing «the disillusionment of a generation».

Eliot replied :

I think that in «Thoughts After Lambeth», I was speaking of intention more in a negative than in a positive sense, to say what was not my intention. I wonder what an «intention» means. One wants to get something off one's chest. One doesn't know quite what it is that one wants to get off the chest until one's got it off. But I couldn't apply the word «intention» positively to any of my poems. Or to any poem. (12)

In view of the above statements by Eliot himself, it is inevitable, in an examination of the genesis of *The Waste Land*, to probe into psychological and biographical factors that interfered in the making of the poem. This becomes especially imperative considering that this is a poem chiefly concerned with the private fortunes or misfortunes of the individual : the problems of sex, the sanctity of the family institution, and the religious needs of man. It is true that politics are here involved — kingship, war, and «the present decay of east-easern Europe» — but these are seen as the wider ripples of a crisis basically psychological. The devastation of the land is the price the king has to pay for his private sins.

(10) *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, pp. 144—145.

(11) Conrad Aiken, «An Anatomy of Melancholy», *Casebook*, p. 91.

(12) *Writers at Work*, p. 119.

The Waste Land was composed at a time when Eliot was living under great tensions. He had professional worries, economic strains, and devastating matrimonial troubles. His unpremeditated, clandestine marriage to Vivian Haigh-Wood interrupted his academic career as a would-be philosopher, much to the chagrin of his mother. She wrote to his former Harvard professor, Bertrand Russell to dissuade him from changing his course. His family in America were appalled by his marriage and by his decision to settle in Britain. In consequence his descendants were to be disinherited. Eliot made an effort to justify his decision and win his father's approval by publishing a collection of critical essays, *The Sacred Wood*, but this came only after the death of his father in 1919. This death added to his worries for he became concerned about a lonely, ageing, ailing mother. Together with the withdrawal of his allowance, marriage proved to be an economic burden. He had to take a teaching post and later found work with Lloyd's Bank. This proved to be a demanding job that took a heavy toll of his health and his leisure. The sickness of Eliot's wife and her removal to a country house brought the family to a point of near destitution. On occasion they had to rely on the financial support of friends like Bertrand Russell. No doubt Mrs. Eliot's unpredictable and rather cynical though seductive character had been chiefly responsible for much of the poet's uncertainties and melancholy feelings. Russell, who knew the Eliot's intimately during this period, thus describes them :

I dined with my Harvard pupil Eliot, and his bride. I expected her to be terrible, from his mysteriousness ; but she was not so bad. She is light, a little vulgar, adventurous, full of life — an artist I think he said, but I should have thought her an actress. He is exquisite and listless ; she says she married him to stimulate him, but finds she can't do it. Obviously he married in order to be stimulated. I think she will soon be tired of him. She refuses to go to America to see his people, for fear of submarines. He is ashamed of his marriage, and very grateful if one is kind to her. (13)

Later, Russell described her as a person who lives on a knife-edge, and will end as a criminal or a saint. (14) Apparently she had cast

(13) Russell, *Autobiography*, II, p. 54

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 56.

her spell on Russell himself who had accompanied her to Torquy in 1916 while Eliot remained behind in London. In an obvious reference to her affair with Russell, Robert Sencourt thus describes her character :

Essential to her vivacious nature was her mingling of sparkle and sensitiveness with the sardonic and playful. This was the secret of her undeniable seductiveness, a quality which was felt by at least two of the most brilliant minds of the time (Tom Eliot and Bertrand Russell). It is normal for a woman to enjoy her power to play upon the strings and nerves of manhood till they hasten the throbbing pulse with sensations of peculiar pleasure. Of this normal femininity in Vivienne all who knew her at all well were deeply aware. It was not surprising if impressionable men who saw much of her came under the spell of her fragile, mercurial vivacity. Her bridegroom was probably the first of these, he may not have been the last. (15)

Small wonder then that when the marriage was cracking up years later, and when Mrs. Eliot was suffering spells of insanity, that Eliot should write thus to Russell :

I will tell you now that everything has turned out as you predicted 10 years ago. You are a great psychologist. (16)

The part that Bertrand Russell played in Eliot's early life has not been fully revealed, but there is no doubt that it was tremendous. He is the «Mr Apollinax» of Eliot's Harvard poem whose «dry and passionate talk devoured the afternoon». His pacifism, and his disgust with the belligerent spirit of Europe were feelings that he communicated to Eliot and they found their way to *The Waste Land*. In his *Autobiography* Russell describes London and Waterloo station in words highly reminiscent of Eliot's «unreal city» and of the crowd that «flowed over London Bridge, so many» :

After seeing troop trains departing from Waterloo, I used to have strange visions of London as a place of unreality. I used in imagination to see the bridges collapse and sink, and the whole great city vanish like a morning mist. Its inhabitants began to seem like hallucinations, and I would

(15) Sencourt, p. 53.

(16) Russell, *Autobiography*, II, p. 173.

wonder whether the world in which I thought I had lived was a mere product of my own febrile nightmares. (17)

Some of these hallucinatory feelings must have gone into Part IV of *The Waste Land* in which Eliot comments on «the present decay of Eastern Europe». It will explain such lines as :

What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

It will also explain the hysterical visions of the subsequent lines. No wonder then that Russell, who liked the poem, had a particular admiration for this last part. Russell's involvement with the poem is in fact greater than might at first appear. It is to him that Vivien Eliot thought the poem should be sent for revision. The following letter from Eliot to Russell is self-explanatory :

I am delighted to get your letter. It gives me very great pleasure to know that you like *The Waste Land*, and especially Part V which in my opinion is not only the best part, but the only part that justifies the whole, at all. It means a great deal to me that you like it.

I must tell you that 18 months ago, before it was published anywhere, Vivien wanted me to send you the MS. to read, because she was sure that you were one of the very few persons who might possibly see anything in it. But we felt that *you* might prefer to have nothing to do with *us* : It is absurd to say that we wished to drop you. (18)

(17) *Ibid.*, p. 18. in footnote Russell says :

I spoke of this to T. S. Eliot, who put it into *The Waste Land*.

(18) Russell, *Autobiography*, II, p. 173.

The great thing I am trying to learn is how to use my energy without waste, to be *calm* when there is nothing to be gained by worry, and to concentrate without effort. I hope that I shall place less strain upon Vivien who has had to do so much *thinking* for me ... I am very much better, and not miserable here — at least there are people of many nationalities, which I always like I am certainly well enough to be working on a Poem. (19)

This is what Eliot wrote to his brother on 13 December 1921 from the sanatorium in Switzerland as he was composing the last part of *The Waste Land*. It supports what Russell had mentioned about the stimulative role of Eliot's first wife, and contains a virtual admission of her positive influence on the poet's intellectual efforts. An examination of *The Waste Land* manuscripts shows that at least she was consulted concerning the parts that were written in Margate before Eliot's separate sojourn in Switzerland. The «Game of Chess» is as heavily marked by Ezra Pound as by Mrs. Eliot. Her marginal notes are indeed significant. For while she was puzzled by the opening lines (understandably, since much of the meaning of these lines is allusive, and requires a good deal of erudition), yet against the following highly strung speech of the nervous lady she writes WONDERFUL.

«My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad, Stay with me
«Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
«What are you thinking of ? What thinking ? What ?
«I never know what you are thinking. Think».

Ezra Pound noted «Photography», meaning that this is an actual reproduction of real life conversation. The possibility is that these could have been part of a familiar conversation in the Eliot household. Eliot was known for his reticence and his incommunicative attitude while with people. Twice Eliot had to remove his wife to the country and to shuttle from London to Marlow or to Chechester where she was left to the care of nurses and doctors. Earlier on in 1915 Russell spoke of Vivien Eliot as having «impulses of cruelty to him (Eliot) from time to time. It is a Dostoevsky type of cruelty, not a straightforward every-day kind». (20) Naturally such lines would then ring a

(19) Transcript, p. xxii.

(20) Russell, *Autobiography*, II, p. 55.

bell in her mind as would the last line in «A Game of Chess» quoting Ophelia :

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night,
good night.

Ophelia's madness was occasioned not merely by the murder of her father at the hands of an inadvertent lover, but also by the dim prospect of her sterile relation with Hamlet. This certainly appealed to Vivien Eliot who must have seen points of similarity between her own situation and temperament and those of Ophelia. Like Ophelia, she was divided between a strong passion for life and a suicidal impulse (from which she was saved by Russell in 1916). (21)

The theme of sterility haunted Mrs. Eliot's mind, as it was she who substituted a key line in the poem bearing on this problem :

What you get married for if you don't want to have children.

This line is inserted in the middle of a cockney conversation directly copied from life ; «pure Ellen Kellond» (22) — Lou — who was the charwoman of the Eliots in 1915.

It is no coincidence that up to and including *The Waste Land* ladies have appeared in Eliot's poetry as nervous, touchy, speechless with terror, lonely, supersitious, seductive and affecting knowledge of the arts. Obviously they are all modelled on Vivien Eliot. In *Prufrock* «The women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo». The heroine of «Portrait of a Lady» is an amateur of music ; she is irritable and frustrated at the futility of her life, while the young man is shy and irresponsible. In «Gerontion» we see the scared Fraulin Von Kulp «who turned in the hall, one hand on the door». The first part of *The Waste Land* gives us «Marie» (23) absolutely terrified as she slides down the mountains, and also «the Lady of the Rocks, the lady of situations». In «A Game of Chess», the lady amidst her *bric à brac* recalls Vivien Eliot who was herself something of an artist and whose father was a painter and etcher. (24) Fresca, the literary lady in the discarded part of «The Fire Sermon», may indeed be a replica of Mrs. Eliot, especially as Fresca, the voluminous reader is unable to communicate.

(21) See Eliot's letter to Russell on January 1916 : «I believe we shall owe her life to you, even». *Ibid.*, p. 58.

(22) Transcript, p. 127. Eliot himself gave this explanation.

(23) Eliot had actually met Marie Larisch, niece of the Austrian Empress Elizabeth. The description of the sledding is taken verbatim from his conversation with her. She had written an account of it in *My Past* (London 1913). *Ibid.*, p. 126.

(24) Sencourt, p. 49.

I've much to say —

But cannot say it — that is just my way —

Vivien Eliot's identification with Fresca may be also evidenced by the fact that she appropriated this discarded part to herself in an article she published in *The Criterion* in 1924. (25)

In view of the above there is good reason to accept Adamson's following statement :

It is becoming a critical truism to state that, without a knowledge of Eliot's tragic first marriage, a complete appreciation of the poems is totally impossible — whatever Flaubert, Valery and Eliot may have said about the objective impersonality of art. In particular, it is impossible to take in the full, heart-rending meaning of *The Waste Land* and *Ash — Wednesday* without this knowledge. Eliot himself was well aware of this. He made no attempt to deny that Vivienne was the quixotic, elemental spirit who had quickened the poetic impulse within him. (26)

Eliot's reference in the notes on *The Waste Land* to the «plan» of the poem misled critics and earlier reviewers into the belief that it was consciously and carefully pre-structured. There is ample evidence to the contrary, however. Eliot himself categorically denied that the poem had a preconceived intention. (27) Nor did the poem spring out of one impulse or one particular mood. A period of over two years elapsed between his first mention of the poem in a letter to Quinn on November 1919 and his handing over the manuscript to Pound for revision in January 1922. Certain parts of the poem were known earlier on to friends of Eliot before they went into it. Conrad Aiken, who had known Eliot since his Harvard days, testifies to this. He finds an analogy between *The Waste Land* and *Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* on account of the erudite nature of both works, then proceeds :

How could I mention that I had long been familiar with such passages as «A woman drew her long black hair out tight»,

(25) «Letters of the Moment II» *Criterion*, II, no. 7., 1927. See Transcript, p. 127.

(26) Sencourt, p. 11.

(27) See the end of Part II of this paper.

which I had seen as poems, or part-poems, in themselves ? and now saw inserted into *The Waste Land* as into a mosaic. This would be to make use of private knowledge, a betrayal. Just the same, it should perhaps have been done, and the conclusion drawn : that they were not organically a part of a total meaning (28)

Aiken's statement can now be easily substantiated. The passage now forming lines 377—384 of *The Waste Land* was originally part of an untitled poem, then unpublished, now available in Valerie Eliot's edition. It runs as follows :

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper-music on those strings
The ShriII bats quivered through the violet air
Whining, and beating wings.
A man contorted by some mental blight
Yet of abnormal powers
Such a one crept head downward down a wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells —
And chanting voices out of cisterns and of wells. (29)

Examples of this kind can be multiplied. The Phlebas passage forming Part IV «Death by Water» is a direct translation of a passage in Eliot's earlier French poem «Dans Le Restaurant» :

Phlébas, le Phénicien, pendant quinze jours noyé,
Oubliait les cris des mouettes et la houle de Cornouaille,
Et les profits et les pertes, et la cargaison d'étain :
Un courant de sous-mer l'emporta très loin,
Le repassant aux étapes de sa vie antérieure.
Figurez-vous donc, c'était un sort pénible ;
Cependant, ce fut jadis un bel homme, de haute taille (30)

The opening of «What the Thunder Said» is an adaptation of an unpublished poem which ran as follows :

After the turning of the inspired days
After the praying and the silence and the crying
And the inevitable ending of a thousand ways
And frosty vigil kept in the withered gardens

(28) Casebook, p. 93.

(29) Transcript, p. 113.

(30) Faber Collected Edition, p. 51.

After the life and death of lonely places
After the judges and the advocates and wardens
And the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the turning of inspired nights
After the shaking spears and flickering lights —
After the living and the dying —
After the ending of this inspiration
And the torches and the faces and the shouting
The world seemed futile — like a Sunday outing.

The newly discovered poem «The Death of the Duchess» based on Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, provides several of the images and some of the lines of *The Waste Land*, and is especially relevant to «A Game of Chess».

e.g. A We should have marble floors
And firelight on your hair
There will be no footsteps up and down the stair
(Death of the Duchess, 11. 27—29)

Under the brush her hair
Spread out in little fiery points of will
Glowed into words, then was suddenly still.
(Death of the Duchess, 1 35—37)

Cf. Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.
(*Waste Land*, L1. 107—110)

B And if it rains, the closed carriage at four.
We should play a game of chess
The ivory men make company between us
We should play a game of chess
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.
(Death of the Duchess, L1. 60—64)

Cf. And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.
(*Waste Land*, L1. 136—138)

«The Death of Saint Narcissus», published among Eliot's juvenilia in the collected Faber edition, contains an earlier version of the crucial lines of the opening part, «The Burial of the Dead». Saint

Narcissus is an earlier sacrificial figure in Eliot's poetry, an embryonic Phlebas :

Come under the shadow of this grey rock
Come in under the shadow of this grey rock
And I will show you a shadow different from either
Your shadow sprawling over the sand at daybreak, or
Your shadow leaping behind the fire against the red rock :
I will show you his bloody cloth and limbs
And the grey shadow on his lips. (31)

Perhaps this section can be concluded by a reference to «Gerontion» which Eliot wished to republish as a prologue to *The Waste Land*, but Ezra Pound advised against it :

I do not advise printing «Gerontion» as preface. One don't miss it at as the thing now stands. To be more lucid still, let me say I advise you not to print « Gerontion » as prelude. (32)

It had always been thought, before the discovery of *The Waste Land* manuscripts, that the complexity of the poem is due in a large measure to Ezra Pound's excisions of sequential links. It is now evident that the omissions were in no way detrimental to the «unity» of the poem, if at least because such a «unity» had never been part of Eliot's intention. In a reference to Ezra Pound's «obstetric efforts» more than twenty years later, Eliot says :

It was in 1922 that I placed before him in Paris the manuscript of a sprawling, chaotic poem called *The Waste Land* which left his hands, reduced to about half its size, in the form in which it appears in print. (*Poetry*, 1946) (33).

It is a little surprising that, even so, an important critic like John Wain could still believe that :

Whole sections of the poem had been tossed out, making it more difficult (because connecting links had disappeared) but also more cinematic in its abrupt changes of focus and its

(31) Transcript, p. 95.

(32) Casebook, p. 25.

(33) As quoted by John Wain, «Poetry», in *The Twentieth Century Mind*, II, p. 313.

rapid tracking and panning alternating with sudden close-ups. (34)

It will be seen, however, that Pound's interference with the draft of *The Waste Land* is twofold : structural and stylistic. In all cases it made for greater lucidity, sharpness, definition of purpose and compact effect.

Perhaps Pound's letter to Iris Barry (27 July 1916) may throw some light on his notions of structure, and would therefore illuminate his procedure with *The Waste Land* :

The whole art is divided into :

1. Concision, or style, or saying what you mean in the fewest and clearest words.
2. The actual necessity for creating or constructing something ; of presenting an image, or enough images of concrete things arranged to stir the reader.

Beyond these concrete objects named one can make simple emotional statements of fact, such as «I am tired», or simple credos like «After death there comes no other calamity».

I think there must be more, predominantly more, objects than statements and conclusions, which later are purely optional, not essential, often superfluous and therefore bad.

Also one must have emotion or one's cadence and rhythms will be vapid and without any interest.

It is as simple as the sculptor's direction : «Take a chisel and cut away all the stone you don't want. (35)

Again Pound's views on the style and language of poetry may be summed up by a reference to his following letter to Herriet Monroe (January 1915) :

Poetry must be *as well written as prose*. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e. simplicity). There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions. It must be as simple as De Maupassant's best prose, and as hard as Stendhal's.

There must be no interjections. No words flying off to nothing. Granted one can't get perfection every shot, this must be one's INTENTION.

(34) *Ibid.*, p. 313.

(35) Ezra Pound (ed. J.P. Sullivan), *Penguin Critical Anthologies*, p. 64.

Rhythm MUST have meaning. It can't be merely a careless dash off, with no grip and no real hold to the words and sense, a tumty tum tumty tum tum te.

There must be no clichés, set phrases, stereotyped journalistic. The only escape from such is by precision, a result of concentrated attention to what is writing. The test of a writer is his ability for such concentration AND for his power to stay concentrated till he gets to the end of his poem, whether it is two lines or two hundred.

Objectivity and again objectivity, and expression : no hindside-before-ness, no straddled adjectives (as «addled mosses dank»), no Tennysonianness of speech ; nothing — nothing that you could'nt, in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say. Every literaryism, every book word, fritters away a scrap of the reader's patience, a scrap of his sense of your sincerity. When one really feels and thinks, one stammers with simple speech ; it is only in the flurry, the shallow frothy excitement of writing, or the inebriety of a metre, that one falls into the easy — oh, how easy ! — speech of books and poems that one has read.

Language is made out of concrete things. Central expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness ; they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act *by* the writer.

«Epithets» are usually abstractions — I mean what they call «epithets» in the books about poetry. The only adjective that is worth using is the adjective that is essential to the sense of the passage, not the decorative, frill adjective. (36)

There are four main «cuts» that Pound considered necessary for the smoother flow of the poem. They are :

- a) Fifty-three lines under the original title «He do the police in Different Voices», placed before the present opening of the poem.
- b) The «Frescan episode», originally forming the first seventy-two lines of «The Fire Sermon». There were also an additional seventeen lines intended for insertion after line 57.
- c) Fifteen lines falling between the Smyrna merchant passage and the Typist episode.
- d) The greater part of «Death by Water», eighty-three lines, based on the Ulysses canto in Dante's *Inferno*.

(36) *Ibid.*, p. 57—58.

The first of these excised parts has an anecdotal tone and is given in the first person singular, suggesting autobiography. It speaks of a little «hoozing» party, followed by a casual visit to the theatre. The reference to the «Opera Exchange» is indeed based on actual fact. (37) A rather satirical account is then given of an unsuccessful experience at a brothel, terminating by a hair-breadth escape from the police. The title «He do the police in different voices» contains an allusion to Dickens's novel *Our Mutual Friend* where the little foundling Sloppy is thus described by the old widow Betty Higden :

I do love a newspaper. You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices. (38)

The passage contains a number of motifs that recur in the poem. Hyrtle, the shady woman, owner of the brothel, reappears as Madame Sosostris (afraid of the police), as Mrs. Porter (of the seamen's song, a brothel keeper in Cairo), and as the whore — the third of the Thames daughters. The appearance of the police, «the fly-cop», anticipates the possible threat of the police to the fortune-teller in Part 1, and also the trial and arrest of Christ in the opening of «What The Thunder Said». The whole episode is pervaded with horror, boredom and disgust is recurrent throughout the poem. Although there is little need to push the autobiographical element too far (39) yet it would be easy to see why Pound had omitted this «pseudopersonal» passage. First, it would make a lot of the details of subsequent parts of the poem rather repetitious and superfluous. The explicit, anecdotal manner of this passage would have rendered Graham Hough's criticism of the style of *The Waste Land* as «disruptive» (39), more cogent. Not only the title, but indeed the style is Dickensian. Some of the details are grotesquely so. For example a brothel keeper can have her notions of respectability. Refusing the man entry she says :

I'm not in business here for guys like you ;
We've only had a raid last week, I've been warned twice.
I've kept a decent house for twenty years, ...

When the man is surprised by the police he ludicrously seeks

(37) Transcript, p. 125.

(38) Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, chapter xvi.

(39) As Miss Bradbook had done. She says :

Section I thus would have outlined Eliot's career from Harvard to Germany, to London, ending with his meeting with Stetson (Pound, the Westerner par excellence), p. 13.

(40) Casebook p. 65.

permission to get his hat. The cabman, who had been in a hurry to get home, finally ends by running a race on a bet with a passenger while another holds the watch. Perhaps Pound found the Dickensian humour of this passage quite out of tune with the «high seriousness» of other parts. It is to be contrasted with the cryptically telegraphic Smyrna Merchant passage, or with the menacingly tragic song of the Thames daughters.

The second reason justifying Pound's omission must be the obvious personal tone of the passage. That also goes in a large measure for the «Fresca episode» in *The Fire Sermon*, containing a letter very much in the character of Mrs. Eliot. It also explains the omission of the shipwreck scene in «Death by Water», ostensibly based on the Ulysses canto in Dante's *Inferno* (xxvi 141—142), but certainly inspired by Eliot's life-long passion for boating. The reference here to The Dry Salvages (rocks off the coast of Massachusetts that gave the title to the third Quartet) confirms the autobiographical origin of the passage. Miss Bradbrook also draws attention to Eliot's juvenile story about a shipwreck which he contributed to the school magazine *The Smith Academy Record*. (41)

It would then appear that Pound's excisions were meant in the first place to remove all the «confessional» parts of the poem when they are not instrumental to grasp the meaning of the whole. There were other reasons for these excisions, however. For example the whole of the Fresca episode, intended as a parody on Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* is omitted with the advice :

It's no use trying to do something that somebody else has done as well as it can be done. Do something different. (42)

Pound himself was in the habit of recasting ancient works (e.g. *Homage to Sextus Propertius*), but he did so with a view of investing them with a modern mantle that would make them relevant to a contemporary situation. The Fresca passage, one feels, is only half-heartedly modern. Fresca, despite her Freudian inhibitions and her knowledge of Giroudoux, is still a museum piece from an eighteenth century gallery, if at least because of her reading in Richardson and Gibbon. In addition to this antiquarian quality, Pound also objected to the rhyme as «dragging out to diffuseness».

The same objections may have also arisen in connection with the

(41) Bradbrook, p. 13.

(42) *Writers at Work*, pp. 118—119.

shipwreck scene in «Death by Water» which Pound marked as «Bad-but cant attack until I get typescript». When the typescript came, he simply crossed it over. It is too episodic and topical and much too realistic in detail to fit in with the general tenour of the poem. Having made his cuts and advised against the inclusion of further pieces, Pound saw a pattern emerging :

The thing now runs from «April ...» to «Shantih» without a break. That is 19 pages, and let us say the longest poem in the English langwidge. (43)

Pound's corrections aimed not only at the elimination of diffuseness but also at discarding both what is personal and what is abstract in Eliot's imagery and vocabulary. He was also averse to the use of cliché. For example, he cuts the following quatrain describing the «young man carbuncular» noting in the margin «personal» :

A youth of twenty one, spotted about the face,
One of those simple loiterers whom we say
We may have seen in any public place
At almost any hour of night or day.

Where there is the suspicion of a personal opinion obtruding, Pound would make the some objection. In the description of the mantelpiece in «A Game of Chess», he omits the following bracketed line with the remark «Had is the weakest point» :

Above the antique mantel was displayed
(In pigment, but so lively, you had thought)
A window gave upon the sylvan scene

Also the nervous words of the lady in «A Game of Chess» are twice objected to as «photography», suggesting that they are reproductions of actual speech.

The following is an example of Pound's wariness of enslavement by rhyme which may lead to tautology. Brackets show his omissions :

The typist home at teatime, who (begins)
(To) clears (her broken breakfast) away breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out squalid food (in tins),
(Prepares the room and sets the room to rights).

Against this he quotes Paule Verlaine «qui dira les gaffers de la rime», and goes on to remark that «verse not interesting enough as verse to warrant so much of it».

(43) Casebook, P. 22.

Greater precision of language and clarity of purpose are also advocated as in the two following warnings against the use of the word «perhaps» :

And (perhaps) a weekend at the Metropole.

(L.100 Fire Sermon)

Which Eliot changed to

Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

Also the following line describing the «young man carbuncular»

(Perhaps) his inclinations touch the stage.

Which Eliot discarded altogether. Prunings in the interest of precision are best illustrated by the following omission of the word «MAY» :

Across her brain one half-formed thought (may) pass.

Against this is set the very characteristic comment :

make up your mind. You Tiresias, if you know,
know damn well, or else you don't,

Pound was not only concerned with verbal precision, but with the precision of idea as well. For example the following lines contained an image which he considered incongruous :

Like a taxi throbbing waiting at a stand
To spring to pleasure through the horn or ivory gates

«Taxi» cannot logically go with «spring», so the line was dropped. Also in the line «her hair/Spread out in *little fiery points of will*», he omits the italicized words with the remark : «dogmatic reduction but wobbly as well».

It should now be clear that Eliot's mind is not an «impersonal» mind, indifferent or neutral to experience. Rather it should be characterized as receptive and wide-ranging, delicately susceptible to impressions of people with whom he had mixed, and open to the influence of books and writers that swam into his ken. Perhaps the word «chameleonic» may be helpful. The scholarship and learning with which his poetry is packed should not divert our attention away from the relevance of biographical facts, nor should the biographical facts overshadow the learning. They are both essential, two sides to the same coin. That Eliot's mind was receptive may be shown by the fact that he submitted *The Waste Land* for Ezra Pound's inspection and was quite willing to accept his remarks. Further than that, the

poem derives not only from Dante and Shakespeare but also from Ellen Kellond, Eliot's charwoman.

We should not expect from such a mind to plan in advance what material it is going to absorb or the manner in which it will absorb it. If any pattern emerges, it is always retrospective, and may not perhaps be indigenous. Such a pattern would not be delimiting, but would make for an ever widening scope. It will certainly allow for a variety of interpretations, and may then make sense to a multiplicity of readers.

Though Eliot had written to his mother about *The Waste Land* that he had put so much of his life into it, yet is a poem in which he achieved the highest virtue an artist can possess : **NEGATIVE CAPABILITY.**

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