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BAUDELAIRE AND MORÉAS’S SYMBOLISME IN T.S. ELIOT’S, THE WASTE LAND

But there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination. The Death of the Author 1967 (Barthes 1987)

Did late 19th-century French Symbolisme influence poetic modernism in England?

In France, where new visual art forms flourished from the 1860s, the artistic genre of Impressionism brought poets like Laforgue and Mallarmé to mimic the abstract symbolism of the visual arts in poetry. Jean Moréas, a Greek poet, essayist, and art critic, who wrote mostly in French, analysed these poetics starting with those of French Modernism’s trailblazer, Charles Baudelaire. Moréas found allegory, poetic impersonality, a language of objects and of nature behind the emotion they intentionally evoked. He welcomed this new poetry as the death knell of tired, old Romanticism.

The 30-year old Moréas published his manifesto, Le Symbolisme, as an article on 18th September 1886 in Le Figaro: it described a literary circle of poets to be known from then on as les Symbolistes: they were Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine and de Banville. The Symbolistes were no longer to be confused with an affiliation of frivolous writers called La Décadence.

Moréas’s seminal article appeared thirty-six years before T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land and reads uncannily like a ‘blueprint’ for this long poem: Moréas provides a key to deal with The Waste Land’s ‘difficult language’; he elucidates Eliot’s use of obscure allegory by showing how the poem has a goal, not of bringing the reader to flounder in difficulty, but of bringing him or her to experience emotion. Eliot’s objective correlative, used in his long poem and discussed below, is so well embodied in Moréas’s article, that it is difficult to imagine, in light of his and of Ezra Pound’s admiration of French modernism, that Eliot had not been influenced by Moréas’s essay.

What evidence upholds such an affirmation? This paper explores this question.
Eliot, a twenty two year-old American philosophy student at Harvard, discovered French Symbolisme reading about the poet, Jules Laforgue, in Arthur Symons’s, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (Symons 1899) before leaving to spend a term at the Sorbonne in 1910. He discovered how this movement spanned both the literary and the visual arts and especially how Laforgue’s poetry drew on Impressionism. He also discovered Henri Bergson’s lectures when in Paris: Bergson redefined literary temporal structure to bring tension and variation between standard markers of time; he justified Proust’s caprice of memory eclipsing clock time by stirring the involuntary memory of his narrator, and he shaped Woolf’s Westminster chimes, which parse the time of a single day in Mrs. Dalloway. Eliot writes of time in The Waste Land, stating that:—

There is no nostalgia for the trappings of the past, so far as I can see, and no illusion about the world ever having been a pleasanter place to live in than it is now. There is no time sense (Eliot’s italics) there, in that literal way; the glories and the sordors are both aspects of futility. (Letter to Paul Elmer More, 20 July 1934)

But he was to become sceptical of Bergson’s ideas; he increasingly found them solipsistic, and self-indulgent because they closed out social and historical reality: at all events, his interest in France would continue as, from 1914, focus on war became preoccupation with France for everyone, including for Eliot.

Moréas’s article elevates Charles Baudelaire to the pinnacle of Symbolisme.

We have already proposed the name of Symbolisme as the only one capable of reasonably conveying the current movement of the creative spirit in art. This name can be kept….Let’s say then that Charles Baudelaire ought to be considered the real forerunner of the current movement; M. Stéphane Mallarmé equips it with a sense of mystery and of the ineffable; M. Paul Verlaine broke to his credit the cruel fetters of verse which the illustrious fingers of M. Théodore de Banville had softened up before him. (Moréas, Jean 1886)
And he invents the word, *Symbolisme*, alluding to line 3 of Baudelaire’s early poem, ‘*Correspondances*’:

- Nature is a temple where living pillars
- Release at time confusing words;
- Man crosses there forests of symbols

*Symbolisme*, he claims, is not didactic but transformational: indeed, there is no bluster or moralising in Baudelaire’s lines above;

- As the opponent of instruction, of bluster, of faulty awareness, of detached narration, *symboliste* poetry attempts to clothe the Idea in perceptible form, which would not serve its own purpose, but, while expressing the Idea, would remain subject to it.¹ (Moréas, Jean 1886)

Our understanding of *Symbolisme* and of Eliot’s work would be poorer without Moréas’s guidance: in his seminal article, he describes a symbolism different from William Blake’s allegorical work, from his ‘dark satanic mills’, to his ‘Tyger Tyger, burning bright’, Blake’s symbolism is of another tenor: it adopts images of children, flowers, doves, lambs and seasons, presented in a quasi-sublime style, very differently from the precise, object-centred verses of Baudelaire. For this reason, this paper maintains the word *symbolisme* to define Moréas’s French form, which is also possibly Eliot’s, but probably neither William Blake’s, Dylan Thomas’s, A.E. Housman’s, Emily Dickinson’s nor Robert Frost’s.

The first section in this paper discusses how ‘difficult’ expression in poetry such as Mallarmé’s seems to abandon the reader, with T.S. Eliot unsympathetically insisting that the poetic voice must be difficult. Furthermore, Roland Barthes is quoted where the problem of unknown authorial intention arises. *The Death of the Author* 1967 (Barthes 1987)

The second section examines Moréas’s modernist guidelines for the form and content of *symboliste* poetry including the idea of the disappearance of the author: with these guidelines, Moréas lays the groundwork for Eliot’s definition of his *objective correlative*.

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¹ La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
• Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
• L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles

² Ennemie de l’enseignement, la déclamation, la fausse sensibilité, la description objective, la poésie symbolique cherche à vêtir l’Idée d’une forme sensible qui, néanmoins, ne serait pas son but à elle-même, mais qui, tout en servant à exprimer l’Idée, demeurerait sujette.
Finally, this paper offers a way of expanding ‘clouds’ of synonyms to ‘get’ Eliot’s ‘point’ (Perry 2018) in his *The Waste Land* on the understanding that Eliot’s allegation of ‘dislocating language into its meaning’ (Eliot 1932) does indeed imply discovering affects\(^5\).

The *symboliste* poet, Mallarmé, often abandons the reader to his ‘difficult’ expression and white gaps in his poems to ponder obscure meaning unguided by the poet, and T.S. Eliot unsympathetically echoes that the poetic voice *must* be difficult.

> We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into *his* meaning. (*italics mine*) From *The Metaphysical Poets* (Eliot 1932)

Eliot implies in this last sentence that the importance of the poet’s, of *his* intended meaning is paramount: if this implies removing any initiative of understanding from the reader, then this comment is roundly challenged by Roland Barthes.

As the reader becomes engrossed in *The Waste Land*’s allegory and rhythms, he or she does find it a difficult poem, but much good poetry is: after hearing T.S. Eliot read it aloud in 1922, Virginia Woolf writes: 'It has great beauty and force of phrase: symmetry; intensity. What connects it together, I'm not sure' (Perry 2018, 31).

Eliot claims that French poetry had more to offer him than English poetry: what might this have been?

> The taste of an adolescent writer is intense, but narrow: it is determined by personal needs. The kind of poetry that I needed to teach me the use of my own voice did not exist in English at all; it was only to be found in French. From *Yeats* (1940) (Eliot and Kermode 1975)

And he is not averse to poaching, waggishly writing in *The Sacred Wood* two years before *The Waste Land*’s publication that:

> Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. (Eliot 1920)

\(^5\) An *affect* encompasses the broad range of feelings that people can experience including both *emotions* and *moods*. 

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Much of the difficulty in *The Waste Land* arises from the interplay of symbolism, whose interpretation is necessarily subjective, and John Porter Houston brings light onto the French origin of this style, writing in *French Symbolism and the Modernist Movement* that: -

Difficult expression’ in poetry cannot be imagined without French *Décadence*, and its contingent modernist movement towards free verse, towards the prose poem and to *symbolisme* (Houston 1980, 142).

He adds that *symboliste* poetry can be ‘unresolved, disorientating, incoherent, fragmentary, disordered and generally disturbed’. *Symboliste* poetry is difficult because a poet writing in this style tries to elicit affects, ‘deserting’ the reader to brood over the poetry’s *symbolisme* alone, and we can never know whether the affects experienced by the reader are those intended by the poet: Roland Barthes argues that the process of signification through which meaning is communicated, as Eliot intends by ‘dislocating’ language into the poet’s meaning, is only truly completed by the act of reading, and that any given reader will have a different reading of a text from any other, and thus that any text has multiple meanings. *The Death of the Author* 1967 (Barthes 1987)

*Symbolisme* marks the cultural dawn of the *abstract* and forces the artist’s, or poet’s, desertion of his or her viewer or reader to face artistic work unguided. Lewis (2007) writes that:-

The emphasis on the arrangement of…a…painting, and the possibility of breaking with the traditional illusion of three-dimensional space, pointed the way toward abstract art, just as Mallarmé's emphasis on a pure poetry pointed away from literature as representation of the objective world.

And to stress this, Lewis quotes Mallarmé:

> To name an object is to destroy three quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which comes from guessing at it bit by bit: to suggest, that is the dream. It is the perfect practice of this mystery which constitutes the symbol: evoking an object little by little to show an emotion, or, inversely, choosing an object, and releasing an emotion by a series of findings. *Enquête de Jules Huret*, (Thibaudet 1926)

Accordingly, the gaps (*les blancs*) between the words of Mallarmé’s poetry bring the reader to wander into loose arrays of meaning: any reading can be understood to mean something different from any other. The signs and gaps on the page do nothing more than filling a space, and the poet is not around to explain, leading Roland Barthes to state in *The Death of the Author*:

> For Mallarmé, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach through a pre-existing impersonality….Mallarmé’s entire poetics consists in suppressing the author for the sake of the writing….The modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text: he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the
subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is written here and now. *The Death of the Author* 1967 (Barthes 1987)

In this second section, Moréas explains his modernist guidelines for the form and content of symboliste poetics upholding the idea of the disappearance of the author: in doing so, he lays the groundwork for Eliot’s expression of his *objective correlative*.

Moréas’s modernist guidelines present the *form* of symboliste poetry under various aspects:

- as simple and elegant using rich but moderate language; Moréas call this ‘lush’, vigorous, modern *French*;
- with rotating gaps, baffling ellipsis, hanging discontinuity;
- as old metres artfully upset with rhymes, which can be obscure, but must be fluid; they are free from traditional metrical constraints; the new *vers libres* showing varying rhythms;
- as irregular scansion; unlike the ‘traditional’, constrained *Alexandrines*, rhythmic combinations may now even be based on prime numbers, seven, eleven or thirteen;
- *symbolisme* is ‘not didactic’: its poetry does not show off but is attentive to, and engrossed in, its narrative; *symbolisme* shuts out the ‘exquisite’ inspiration and vain subjectivity of romantic poetry by rejecting its ‘instruction and bluster’;
- the writing is characterised by difficult expression, by overdetermination and by repetition.

Moréas provides symboliste guidelines for syntax and style, writing:-

> Rhythm: the ancient metric revived; disorder artfully ordered; the dawning rhyme beaten as a shield of gold and of bronze, next to rhymes of obscure fluidity; the alexandrine with multiple and moving stops; the use of prime numbers – seven, nine, eleven, thirteen – resolved into various rhythmic combinations of which they are the addition⁶ (Moréas, Jean 1886).

And Eliot appears to agree that:

> I know that a poem, or a passage of a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it finds expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image. (Eliot 1942)

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⁶ Le Rythme : l'ancienne métrique avivée ; un désordre savamment ordonné ; la rime illuscente et martelée comme un bouclier d'or et d’airain, auprès de la rime aux fluidités abscones ; l’alexandrin à arrêts multiples et mobiles ; l’emploi de certains nombres premiers – sept, neuf, onze, treize – résolus en les diverses combinaisons rythmiques dont ils sont les sommes.
Thus, obeying Moréas’s guidance, Eliot overdetermines some of his text and includes mystifying ellipsis and hanging discontinuity: for example, at the end of *The Fire Sermon*, the lines become curt and fitful; their fragmentary style may bring the reader an idea of gloom and disruption.

304 My people humble people who expect
305 Nothing.”
306 la la
307 To Carthage then I came
308 Burning burning burning burning
309 O Lord Thou pluckest me out
310 O Lord Thou pluckest
311 burning

Moréas’s article describes the new forms in detail: -

For precise overall understanding, *Symbolisme* requires a standardised and complex style; of untainted word forms, of rhythms which block alternating with rhythms of oscillating gaps, of weighty over-determination, of mystifying ellipsis, of unexpectedly hanging discontinuity, all too daring and in multiple forms; finally, of good language - established and modernised – fine, lush and vigorous7. (Moréas, Jean 1886)

And, among the numerous examples of Eliot applying such advice in *The Waste Land* are:-

- rhythms which block, alternating with rhythms of oscillating gaps (‘I think we are in rats’ alley’ 115-124);
  115 I think we are in rats’ alley
  116 Where the dead men lost their bones.
  117 “What is that noise?”
  118 The wind under the door.
  119 “What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?”
  120 Nothing again nothing.
  121 “Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
  122 “Nothing?”
  123 I remember

- weighty over-determination (‘I too awaited the expected guest’ 230-235);
  230 I too awaited the expected guest.
  231 He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
  232 A small house agent’s clerk, with one bold stare,
  233 One of the low on whom assurance sits
  234 As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
  235 The time is now propitious, as he guesses,

- mystifying ellipsis (‘…The hot water at ten.’ 135);

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7 Pour la traduction exacte de sa synthèse, il faut au symbolisme un style archétype et complexe ; d’impollués vocables, la période qui s'arc-boutant alternant avec la période aux défaillances ondulées, les pléonasmes significatifs, les mystérieuses ellipses, l'anacoluthe en suspens, tout trop hardi et multiforme ; enfin la bonne langue – instaurée et modernisée –, la bonne et luxuriante et fringante langue

By Robert Gillespie of Blackhall, OBE University of Sussex Centre for Creative and Critical Thought
“What shall we ever do?”

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

- unexpected, hanging discontinuity (‘Why then Ile fit you,’ 431);

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe.


- fine, lush, vigorous language (‘Summer surprised us,’ 8-11);

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.

- disorder artfully ordered (‘My nerves are bad tonight.’ 111-114);

“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.”

- rhymes of obscure fluidity (‘You who were with me’ 70-76);

“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
“That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
“Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
“Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
“Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!
“You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!”

- the use of prime numbers in metre resolved into rhythmic combinations (‘A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,’ 62-64);

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,

- and vers libres everywhere.

Lines 60 to 76 discussed in this paper come across as stilting, uncertain and moody, but they are rhythmic: they work like music, and not like a metronome, as Pound wished. The verse claims modernist indulgence for its stunning metrical irregularity: the shortest line (60) has four syllables and the longest (69) has thirteen, a prime number; seven of the lines have eleven syllables, also a prime number.

In presenting the content of Symbolisme, Moréas explains that it includes objects, nature, actions, things, and phenomena, in a poetry which is not about these objects, nature, actions, things, and phenomena; it is about producing emotion in the reader. Thus, although symbolisme roots itself in the real and in the natural, it searches to mediate the ineffable: its symbols communicate affects to be experienced by the reader but never specifies what the affects are. Otherwise said, the poet’s art in symbolisme, writes Moréas, is to use the physical world to...
produce a desired affect within the mind of the reader: nature, human actions and perceptible phenomena are expressed, but never the emotion itself.

Moréas adds various topics of symboliste content:

- ugly city subjects; dirty, shady, mechanical beings quivering between setback and decay, where deeds are never completed;
- the fragmented first-person narrator; Houston credits Laforgue, and not Eliot, with the modernist invention of the fragmented first-person poem, so Eliot is not the first to use a Tiresias figure to intertwine fragments of plot; Laforgue influences not only Prufrock, but The Waste Land and other Eliot works too (Houston, 1980, p. 82);
- the poet’s persona must disappear from the poem and, if characters appear, writes Moréas, they do so as instruments to reveal feeling.

Maud Ellmann claims (Ellmann 1988) that Eliot and Pound fail to hide their poet’s persona from their poetry, even though, Frank Kermode’s The Uses of Error confirms Eliot’s admiration of ‘heroic’ Baudelarian poetic impersonality (Kermode 1991, 285). The idea of authorial impersonality was not new: in 1852, Flaubert, resisting the excessive subjectivity of Romanticism, wrote that:

> The artist in his work should be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere.

Eliot really does seem anxious to remove his persona from his poetry: he writes that a poem is not a self-portrait; that poems ought to be obscure and complex artefacts detached from the poet’s person. Barthes robustly supports this: it cannot be otherwise; only language subsists, not the author. Impersonality is not an idle choice; Eliot writes:

> The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality...The feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet...Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality...the poet has, not a “personality” to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not impressions and experiences combined in peculiar, unexpected ways. Tradition and the Individual Talent (Eliot 1932)

His ‘impersonal’ concept of poetry is intended to focus attention ‘not upon the poet, but upon the poetry’, and, of course, Moréas welcomes this impersonal concept as belligerently anti-romantic, writing that:

> In its narrative symbolisme shuts out the ‘exquisite’ inspiration and vain subjectivity of romantic poetry by rejecting its ‘instruction and bluster.'
Barthes echoes this belief when he writes in *The Death of The Author*: -

Linguistically, the author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I is no more than the man who says I: language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’. *The Death of the Author* 1967 (Barthes 1987)

*The Waste Land*, writes Houston (Houston 1980, 123), is about the breakdown of Eliot’s *personal* relations; lines 300-305 appear ripe with personal circumstance: -

300 “On Margate Sands.
301 I can connect
302 Nothing with nothing.
303 The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
304 My people humble people who expect
305 Nothing.”

It would then seem unfeasible to disassociate Eliot’s public face from his long poem and, during his lifetime, his reluctance to further expose his private dismay to the host of pundits swarming around his work, is not surprising. Mary Barnes Hutchinson, who was close to Eliot from 1916 to the end of his life, after hearing the poem, even went so far as to refer to *The Waste Land* as ‘Tom’s autobiography’ (Perry 2018, 17).

Barthes writes: -

The explanation of a work is always sought in the man who has produced it
And, as a post-structuralist, he does not agree that trying to ‘capture’ authorial intention is the right thing to do. *The Death of the Author* 1967 (Barthes 1987)

Houston and Hutchinson appear to argue that Eliot’s goal may have been to find comfort (433 Shantih) by offloading his anguish onto his poetry. In the autumn of 1921, he went to the seaside at Margate (300-305) after collapsing from exhaustion and before leaving to consult neurosis specialist Dr. Vittoz in Lausanne. Eliot wrote his distressed lines in the Nayland Rock shelter, which looks out over the sands.

Do Conrad’s quoted lines in Eliot’s first choice of epigraph, about ‘The horror! the horror!’ of a dying ivory trader’s life in the jungle (Conrad 1902), bear witness to something of the abyss of Eliot’s distress? He writes that ‘Poetry is an escape from emotion’; so did his mind tend to

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8 ‘Mistah Kurtz—he dead.’ taken by Eliot as the first, unadopted choice of epigraph for The Waste Land from Joseph Conrad’s, *The Heart of Darkness* 1899.
melancholia? Did distress and melancholia influence his choice of allegory? Was his objective correlative intended to communicate such moods? Barthes tells us we can never know.

Eliot continued to work on his long poem in 1921 while convalescing by Lake Leman (182). Ezra Pound was living in Paris, where he edited Eliot’s draft (Eliot Valerie 1971) applying his credo in the spirit of Imagist poetry to write of things rather than of ideas, to cut verbiage which doesn't contribute and to compose poetry as would a ‘musician’ rather than a ‘metronome’.

Pound recognises the poem’s stature, writing shortly after it is published in 1922, that:

Eliot came back from his Lausanne specialist looking okay; and with a damn good poem in his suitcase…About enough, Eliot's poem, to make the rest of us shut up shop. Eliot's waste land is I think the justification of the movement, of our modern experiments since 1900. (Lewis 2007)

As poetry should not glorify the poet, it should not show off either: Ezra Pound applies the injunction to not show off by boldly scuttling Eliot's initial proposal for the first fifty lines of his poem, which described a drunken evening ending up in a brothel (Eliot Valerie 1971). This original tableau seems unnecessarily vulgar, it almost stupefies the reader that the poet could write such lines; almost as much as Eliot’s antisemitic profanity corrupts poems such as, *Burbank, Gerontion, Sweeney Among the Nightingales, A Cooking Egg, and Dirge*; but, when Eliot takes a grip on himself, he is capable of writing great poetic beauty with natural reserve, for example the intriguing, misty enjambments which followed Pound’s original ‘scotched brothel’ as, ‘April is the cruellest month’, and which now open the poem:

1   April is the cruellest month, breeding
2   Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
3   Memory and desire, stirring
4   Dull roots with spring rain.
5   Winter kept us warm, covering
6   Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
7   A little life with dried tubers.

Also, in line 65, there are few adjectives:

64   Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
65   And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
66   Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,

Each man fixing his eyes before his feet has nothing to brag about; it is stark fact, simply stated; it is not didactic; it does not show off; it is attentive to, and engrossed in its naturalistic narrative; and it stirs emotion in the reader.
Where *symboliste* poetry is already less lyrical than Romanticism, Pound’s Imagist poetry is even ‘harder’: he wants to escape unnecessary words; his liking for *vers libres* shares something of Moréas’s opinions; poetry has to be objective, direct, with no excessive use of adjectives and with no ‘shaky’ metaphors that ‘wouldn't permit examination’ (Jones 2001). Eliot recognises his debt to Pound, *il miglior fabbro*:

*The Waste Land* … left (Pound’s) hands, reduced to about half its size, in the form in which it appears in print. … I should wish the blue pencilling on it to be preserved as irrefutable evidence of Pound’s critical genius …

*(An Examination of Ezra Pound (ed. P. Russel) 1946)*

It contained some stanzas in imitation of Pope, and Ezra said to me: ‘Pope’s done that so well that you’d better not try to compete with him.’

(Conversation, recorded in 1958, between T. S. Eliot and Leslie Paul)

Moréas challenges worn-out Romanticism with his article’s militant words:

Romanticism unfurls its flags over classical debris badly preserved…. It is because every artistic expression becomes inevitably impoverished, exhausted; then, from copy to copy, from imitation to imitation, what was full of sap and freshness dries out and shrivels; what was new and spontaneous becomes cliché and commonplace…. Romanticism, having sounded all the turbulent alarms of revolt, after its days of glory and battle, lost its strength and favour, abdicated its heroic boldness, became tidied up, sceptical and full of common sense….

And he welcomes modern literary tropes into the new *Symbolisme*:

And what can we reproach, what rebuke can we make against the new school? The misuse of flamboyance, the oddness of metaphor, a new vocabulary where harmony combines with colour and line: all typical of every renewal…. Obvious disorder, radiant insanity, passionate intensity are the truth itself of lyric poetry. The sin of falling into figurative and colourful excess is not, and our literature will not perish in this way…. it is not intensity and abuse of embellishment which kills it, it is banality. (Moréas, Jean 1886)

In applying his literary philosophy, Eliot develops the idea of an *objective correlative* which appears to build on Moréas’s words on evoking affects.
Symboliste poetry attempts to clothe an idea in ‘perceptible form’, in nature, in objects, without drawing attention to the objects themselves: ideas are intended to eclipse those same objects which ultimately serve only to convey the ideas, claims Moréas. Such poetry speaks of objects, of nature, actions, things, and of phenomena, but its poetry is not about them: this naturalism exists only to trigger affects in the reader (Moréas, Jean 1886).

Like Moréas’s symbolisme almost four decades earlier, Eliot states that his objective correlative conveys feeling by describing nature, and that the poet must choose an appropriate expression, an objective correlative, to arouse feeling in ‘persons of sensibility’ and, in a reflexion on the claim that ideas should eclipse the objects which symbolise them, he writes:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked… The artistic “inevitability” lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion… The intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object, is something which every person of sensibility has known (italics mine). 

Hamlet and his problems, (Eliot 1932)

It follows that Moréas’s Symbolisme and Eliot’s objective correlative concur that allegory can engage meaning beyond the literal with a collage of allusions capable of arousing feeling; both contend that such literature awakens affect without interpretation, expanding language into a mental scene which brings the reader to a sense of ‘heightened reality’. But Moréas’s 1886 article appeared before Eliot’s Hamlet and his problems in 1920, which reads like a reformulation of Moréas’s work. The Waste Land followed, published in 1922.

To his other modernist tropes, Moréas adds that the symboliste poet overdetermines ideas in ‘rich analogy’:

The idea in turn must not deprive itself of the rich overlay of peripheral analogy, as the essential characteristic of symboliste art consists in never going as far as the distillation of the idea itself 11. (Moréas, Jean 1886)

Eliot asserts that he guides his reader through his overdetermination and rich analogy, insisting that there is a correct way of reading his poem to ‘get the point’: -

I gave the references in my notes, in order to make the reader who recognized the allusion, know that I meant him to recognize it, and know that he would

11 L’Idée, à son tour, ne doit point se laisser voir privée des somptueuses simarres des analogies extérieures ; car le caractère essentiel de l’art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu’à la concentration de l’Idée en soi.

have missed the point if he did not recognize it. *What Dante Means to Me*, 1950... (Ed. V. Eliot 1965)

But how can a reader know he or she ‘gets’ the point if Eliot is not around to explain?

Would Roland Barthes believe it possible to ‘get’ the point in this way? Probably not: he writes:

His (the author-scriptor’s) hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture….Once the author is gone, the claim to “decipher” a text becomes quite useless. *The Death of the Author* 1967 (Barthes 1987)

And some forty years before Barthes’s essay, Eliot even provides support for Barthes’s ideas, contesting the need for the reader to ‘get’ his ‘crude, private experiences’ at all.

An explanation by the author is of no more value than one by anybody else...the only legitimate meaning of a poem is the meaning which it has for any reader, not a meaning which it has primarily for the author. The author means all sorts of things which concern nobody else but himself, in that he may be making use of his private experiences. But these private experiences are merely crude material, and as such of no interest whatever to the public. (Letter to Claude Colleer Abbott, 13 October 1927)

As well as Barthes, other critics are suspicious of interpreting authorial intention: Maud Ellmann and Barbara Johnson alert the reader in their own ways to the perceived pitfalls of interpreting such poetry: Maud Ellmann’s critical reading of *The Waste Land* conjures up a Derridean idea of meaning in the gaps and of a powerless author: -

*The Waste Land*...is a riddle to itself. Here it is more instructive to be scrupulously superficial than to dig beneath the surface for the poem’s buried skeletons or sources. For it is in the silences between the words that meaning flickers…These silences curtail the power of the author, for they invite the *hypocrite lecteur* to reconstruct their broken sense (Ellmann 1987; Derrida Jacques 2004).

Furthermore, Barbara Johnson explores the reader’s ambivalent role as a subjective interpreter because of structural loss of meaning in symbols. Reading *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, she states that symbolic secrecy is inseparable from the trade of writing: the reader faces ‘not obscure symbols, but symbols standing for the obscure, for the lost, for the irretrievable’ (Johnson 2014, 39):

Symbols are symbols...what is lost is known only in that it is lost...they are figures for which no literal proper term can be substituted, they are in other words catachreses, figures of abuse, figurative substitutes for a literal term that does not exist...The structure of catachrestic symbolism is the very structure of...loss: every lost object is always in a sense a catachresis, a figurative substitute for nothing that could ever be literal...what begins as a fairly routine...
analogy tends in the course of its elaboration to get wildly out of hand. (Johnson 2014, 40)

In line with Barthes, with Ellman and Johnson, poetic interpretation then entails a serious snag that no reader can ‘feel’ a poem as the poet ‘felt’ it; the reader cannot but ‘miss the point’ because only private reading reveals affects, and these are personal to the reader.

Houston, probably expecting literal explanation of Eliot’s difficult allegories, writes that Eliot goes too far in abandoning his reader:

Symbols…which are discursively presented in Dante and other earlier writers, may be merely suggested or else disguised in a realistic background. Eliot’s poetry is characteristic in its often covert handling of conventional symbols which are explicit in other poets (Houston 1980, 221).

Allegory and silences bring a reader to wander into an open chain of signification, into ‘ever expanding commentary’: any reading can always be read to mean more than, or less than, or something different from any other. In addition, Eliot is not around to explain: he wrote at another place and at another time, so the signs he left on the page mediate nothing more than a spectral presence of the poet (Royle 2003 Ch5-7). It seems impossible to get Eliot’s point at all: the reader only gets signs on a page; he or she can never capture the poet’s intended feelings.

Barthes hits the final nail into the coffin of deciphering authorial intention by completely allotting interpretation of meaning to him or her, who reads:

Once the author is gone, the claim to ‘decipher’ a text becomes quite useless. To give an author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing….The space of writing is to be traversed, not penetrated….The true locus of writing is reading. The Death of the Author 1967 (Barthes 1987)

With the purported fiction of understanding authorial intention broken, do any instruments remain at the reader’s disposal to attempt to ‘get’ Eliot’s point? His own advice appears troublesome, if not mischievous: -

Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book (From Ritual to Romance) will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest in the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. (Notes to The Waste Land)

Eliot makes a wide, idiosyncratic choice of literary content for his ‘incidental’ symbolism: around forty references provide the allegories which constitute his cultural backdrop, drawn from Verlaine’s Parcifal (202) to Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde (31-34), and from the Grail legend (51)
to a wide personal selection of literature beyond his allusion to the Arthurian legend of the Fisher King. The field in question in Weston’s book is the early European medieval period and the literature, legends, and folklore of the time: her interest lies in a specific area within this time period to do with the Grail Legend where the Waste Land and the Fisher King are connected as: heal the king; heal the land.

It does seem difficult with such a remote cultural sweep to decode the lavish complexity of Eliot’s allegories, so perhaps a reader cannot even begin to ‘get’ the ‘point’. If the reader believes in Symbolisme and in the objective correlative, then he or she accepts that the ‘point’ of the long poem is to perceive an emotion through the poem’s allegories; however, he or she must also acknowledge that Barthes, Ellmann and Johnson all insist that structurally, there can be no pretence of ever detecting Eliot’s, or any other absent poet’s, intentions.

In 1956, Eliot owns up to possibly having misguided his readers:

I must admit that I am …not guiltless of having led critics into temptation. The notes to The Waste Land! I had…intended only to put down all the references for my quotations, with a view to spiking the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism…the poem on its first appearance…was discovered…inconveniently short, so I set to work to expand the notes…they became the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view today…I have sometimes thought of getting rid of these notes…. They have had almost greater popularity than the poem itself. The Frontiers of Criticism, 1956 (Eliot 2009)

His admission is instructive in confirming that Symbolisme and his objective correlative give no importance at all to scholarship, objects and ideas used in his allegories, because they are only there to arouse feeling in the reader; as he otherwise said, Eliot’s suggested scholarship is only there to support a grumble: -

Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of criticism of the contemporary world, and have considered it, indeed, as an important bit of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling. (1933: Excerpts from Lectures 1932–1933 documented by brother, H.W.Eliot, Jr.; collection Valerie Eliot)

This final section discusses how synonymy may help to ‘get’ the point (Perry 2018) of Eliot’s The Waste Land if the poet’s declared intention of ‘dislocating language into its meaning’ (Eliot 1932) is understood to mean more easily discerning affects using semantics.
Lines 60 to 76 of The Waste Land’s Chapter I, The Burial of the Dead, which make up one of twenty-five distinct verses in five chapters of the poem, can help explore use of synonyms: -

60  Unreal City,
61  Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
62  A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
63  I had not thought death had undone so many.
64  Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
65  And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
66  Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
67  To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
68  With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
69  There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: “Stetson!
70  “You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
71  “That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
72  “Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
73  “Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
74  “Oh keep the Dog far hence, that’s friend to men,
75  “Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!
76  “You! hypocrite lecteur!-mon semblable-mon frère ! »

The method is to erect Eliot’s chosen signifiers into a synonymic ‘cloud’ in the hope that a semantically enriched framework brings nuance to stimulate feelings. For example, beginning with line 63, the single word, ‘undone’ probably alludes, we read, to the neutrals in Dante’s Inferno (Perry 2018, 57). ‘Undoing’ conveys an image of doom and of, the O.E.D. suggests, ‘ruin by a disastrous setback’. Signifiers such as ‘doom’, ‘disaster’, ‘setback’ and ‘ruin’ are synonyms which are not in the text but which seem to add nuance to meaning beyond the poet’s word, ‘undoing’, alone: the road to an affect appears possibly more clearly, and as Moréas explains in his article, Dante’s Inferno is quickly forgotten, but the emotion remains.

Eliot uses this word, undoing, slightly differently in another verse, ‘Richmond and Kew “undid” me’ (294); is there an idea here of poverty, a sensation of despair? How are these London outskirts important? The reason Eliot wrote about them, according to Barthes, is unimportant; whatever mood the reader captures is quite the opposite, supremely important.

Accordingly, the gradations of meaning introduced by a cloud of synonyms expands understanding, forcing focus away from the literal meaning of any particular signifier to perceiving an emotion and possibly engaging a road to exploring a Derridean ‘supplement’12.

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12 The concept of the supplement arises from the common derivation of two French verbs, suppléer, to substitute. It is simultaneously something which completes another thing, which makes up for something missing, and which ‘informs’ another as something extra (Derrida 1995). The cloud of synonymic signification fits this idea.
Assorting a signifier with a cloud of its synonyms is like adding a chord to shore up a musical note.

To continue, the sentence in line 66 may evoke *constraint, drudgery* and *futility*. Flowing uphill would be laborious for an allegorical Thames, and flowing ‘down’ King William Street would in fact imply a climb North from the Thames to the Bank of England, towards *capitalistic hegemony* and *travail of the masses*: signifiers ‘lurk’ here of the *arduous*, of the *crushing* and of *exploitation*, revealing what, in defining *symboliste* literature, Moréas calls, ‘*frustrated crowds enduring setbacks*’\(^\text{13}\), and revealing this word, *setbacks*, again\(^\text{14}\). Eliot presents a *choking*, *zombie*-like, city people in a brown fog, constrained to *aimless* movement in a Baudelairean, *Les Sept Vieillards* image of *ghostlike* old age, of *sickness, fragility, dirt* and of *impending death* (Baudelaire 2008, 176): this is city-centre (*cité*) poverty, evaporating from the sight of the bourgeoisie into an *abyss of non being*, conjuring up *hopelessness* and *unhappiness, doom* and *despair, melancholy, lack of purpose and restlessness*.

In line 76, Eliot copies Baudelaire with a pastiche of his start of the last line in his preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal*: ‘You! Hypocrite *lecteur!*-mon semblable,-mon frère!’ Baudelaire’s paraphrased apostrophe in the poetic preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal ‘Au Lecteur’* (Baudelaire 2008) addressed by Eliot to the hypocritical reader (76), conveys Baudelaire’s thoughts that the worst of all sins is *ennui*, boredom. Eliot appears to concur and qualifies this notion with his opinion that doing nothing is close to nonbeing.

So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist. It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true to say that his glory is his capacity for damnation. From *Baudelaire* (Eliot 1932)

\(^{\text{13}}\) Tantôt des foules, superficiellement affectées par l’ensemble des représentations ambiantes, se portent avec des alternatives de heurts et de stagnances vers des actes qui demeurent inachevés. (At times, crowds outwardly disturbed by the mass of surrounding displays, progress with choices between setbacks or decay towards deeds which remain incomplete.)(Moréas, Jean 1886)

\(^{\text{14}}\) With all the slipperiness and the precaution imposed by the distorting lens of the translator’s choice of the word, *setback* to translate the French. For Derrida, translation is none other than *transformation*, albeit a regulated one, because equivalence is virtually impossible. Indeed, translation is ‘a notion of transformation of one language by another, of one text by another’ (Derrida, Bass, and Ronse 1981).
Eliot uses the similar signifiers ‘undone’ (63) and ‘undid’ (294) as one of numerous examples of repetition. Michael Levenson affirms the modernist nature of Eliot’s repetition, which occurs both within and across his poems: -

The telegraphic repetition, the echo belonging to no continuous voice, the tonal play that aligns distant elements without building narrative connections—these are the emblems of modernist intra-textuality (Levenson 2011, 669).

The poet compensates ambiguity with frequent repetition in this ‘modernist intra-textuality’. He also overdetermines ideas, often rewriting a similar one in other lines: for example, lines 62 and 66 appear to convey similar ideas:

62 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
66 Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,

Or similar moods in lines 64 and 65:

64 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
65 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Or outright repetition in lines 60 and 207:

60 Unreal City,
207 Unreal City

In France, city-centre (cité) poverty is resolutely a theme of modernist, and not of romanticist poetry, where Charles Baudelaire breaks with romantic tradition in his description of dirt and of old age. In lines 60 and 61 of The Waste Land, which quote Baudelaire’s Les Sept Vieillards relating a Fourmillante\footnote{One overrun like ants.} cité under a yellow fog (Baudelaire 2008, 178), the French poet describes a ghostly passage, one after the other, of seven identical, scruffy, bent, old men, each one, alone, entering and leaving the narrator’s murky field of vision: Eliot’s ‘dawn’ fog is brown in The Waste Land (60;61):

60 Unreal City,
61 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

He repeats the same theme as the ‘Unreal City at “noon” under a brown fog’ (207):

207 Unreal City
208 Under the brown fog of a winter noon

But, like Baudelaire’s, the fog is yellow during the ‘dusk’ of his earlier Prufrock:

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening.
Even if The Waste Land's symbols are overdetermined or repeated, they are never explained and, the less clearly a symbol is based on an association, the greater the ambiguity and the more possibility there is for what Houston calls, ‘ever expanding commentary’ (Houston 1980, 221)16.

Moréas continues his analysis of symboliste poets: if supporting characters appear in such literature, they do so as instruments to reveal feeling and to quicken imagination, writes Moréas:

Sometimes an individual advances in settings distorted by his own fantasy, by his personality; in this distortion lies the only reality. Beings with mechanical gestures, with shaded outlines, quiver around this individual: they are no more than pretexts for feelings and for speculation17. (Moréas, Jean 1886)

He describes symbolisme using a Baudelairian theme of city poor; of disturbed crowds enduring setbacks. As if Eliot had indeed read Moréas, he echoes similar city dejection as a backdrop for communicating gloom:

62 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
63 I had not thought death had undone so many.

Eliot adds a facet of his life in Lombard Street, where he worked at Lloyds Bank across from a Queen Anne Baroque church, Saint Mary Woolnoth (67). Was he expected each morning to arrive at the office with a ‘dead sound’ on the final stroke of nine (68)?18

Here too, the reader can gather a cloud of synonymic signifiers which contribute an overall expression enriching affect.

Lines 70 to 72 move from antiquity, from the ships at Mylae, to the Gothic fantasy of a corpse planted in a garden, a corpse which may ‘sprout’ and ‘bloom’.

70 “You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
71 “That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
72 “Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

16 Houston also intriguingly observes that symbols become meaningful as an associative complex but cannot as a conflictual one, which would tend to weaken allegory (Houston 1980, 39).
17 Tantôt un personnage unique se meut dans des milieux déformés par ses hallucinations propres, son tempérament ; en cette déformation git le seul réel. Des êtres au geste mécanique, aux silhouettes obombrées, s’agitent autour du personnage unique : ce ne lui sont que prétextes à sensations et à conjectures.
18 Line 67 was originally written by Eliot as a false rhyme with line 68 by ending with the word, ‘time,’ but he changed ‘time’ to ‘hours’ after reinstating two lines which Ezra Pound, in rereading The Waste Land, had wanted to remove (Eliot Valerie 1971).
Could this refer to a war-torn character suffering from hallucinations? Does the narrator here present a shell-shocked comrade at arms? The ‘demobbed’ of World War I are constant players in European poetry and fiction after 1918. Ezra Pound’s annotations successively change Eliot’s line 139, from Lil’s husband ‘coming back out of the Transport Corps,’ to ‘Discharge out of the Army’ and then simply to, ‘demobbed’ (Eliot Valerie 1971, 13). Could Stetson symbolise a demobbed American seaman, from the ships off the coast of Sicily, suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? Is the ‘You who were with me’ an ex-serviceman hallucinating over ‘that’ corpse, an intruder lodged in the private garden of his mind? The lines may awaken, for example, impressions of futility, of desolation, of anguish at the violent loss of comrades, of deep, personal grief, of isolated suffering: but of course, every such perception is personal to the reader and different from any other. Once again, such an exercise uses synonymy to enrich the tableau.

In 1919, Sigmund Freud publishes *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which he writes that repeated nightmares of shell-shocked war casualties almost invalidate his idea of ‘dreams as wish fulfillment’, and where he argues the existence of a ‘death drive’ as the pervasive desire for ultimate quietude (Thurschwell 2009, 86). *The Waste Land* appears three years after Freud’s essay, and is itself followed in 1925 by Virginia Woolf’s tragic, shell shocked anti-hero, Septimus Warren-Smith hallucinating over his friend, Evan’s, violent death in *Mrs Dalloway*: it ends in Septimus’s tragic suicide, in his own desire for Freudian ultimate quietude. D.H. Lawrence follows suit in 1928 writing in Italy of the wounded officer, Sir Clifford Chatterley’s, marital problems and anger following a matrimonially disastrous wound in the muddy trenches of war. These texts are preoccupied with war’s devastating aftermath: in introducing Stetson, Eliot’s own text appears similarly obsessed.

War entails desolation, pain, the breakup of marriage. Through Derridean différence (Royle 2003)¹⁹, we read the poem a century later and have no idea of the colossal waste and intense distress but for the performativity of Eliot’s writing: the time which separates destroys

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¹⁹ The (a) of différence is a deliberate misspelling of différence, though the two are pronounced indifferently: différence plays on the fact that the French word différer means both "to defer" and "to differ" which leads to the notion that words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean, thus, meaning is continually "deferred" or postponed through an endless chain of signifiers. It also relates to distance, sometimes referred to as espacement or "spacing" in time as a force that generates misunderstanding, or in space, which engenders binary oppositions and hierarchies.
ability to capture the anguish behind Woolf, Lawrence and Eliot’s figures, who assume Moréas’s tragic mask of humanity\textsuperscript{20}.

Again, and again, Eliot’s erudition appears in quotations taken from Shakespeare, Spencer, Marvell, Day, Goldsmith, Froude, Dante, St. Augustine, Hesse, Bradley, Weston, de Nerval, Wagner, Webster and others. For example, lines 73 to 75 quote Cornelia’s song in John Webster’s, \textit{The White Devil}, where she urges flowers and leaves to cover Marcello’s grave and where the field mouse and the mole to protect his corpse, as the narrator agonises over the safety of the dead man’s bones:

\begin{verbatim}
73 “Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
74 “Oh keep the Dog far hence, that’s friend to men,
75 “Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!
\end{verbatim}

‘They would not bury him because he died in a quarrel’, Cornelia’s sings, professing that Marcello will become one again with the earth providing the wolf does not disturb his bed; Eliot’s enjambments quote her: -

\begin{verbatim}
5 Winter kept us warm, covering
6 Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
\end{verbatim}

‘His body will feed the ground and life will “sprout” again’, where the inearthed dead push up flowers in Eliot’s first enjambment:

\begin{verbatim}
1 April is the cruelest month, breeding.
\end{verbatim}

From line 72, the narrator enquires whether another corpse, Stetson’s, has begun to ‘sprout’, linked this time to an image of psychiatric damage caused by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and of lunacy, bringing the reader to feel possibly both revulsion and sorrow.

To understand Moréas’s key to the complex symbolisme of Eliot’s ‘difficult language’, the reader of Eliot’s poem may experience affects such as fear, horror, pain, anger, isolation, fatigue, revulsion, grief, depersonalisation and of despair and compassion, or even of relief, through the final Upanishads: the poem’s symbolisme performs its task by stirring emotion without the reader having to pore over the detail of Eliot’s allegory; once emotion is felt, Eliot’s scholarship has done what the poet, according to Moréas, set out to do. Cultural detail is not critical to ‘getting’ Eliot’s ‘point’because his ‘point’ is a mood to be sensed. According to Moréas’s Symbolisme and to Eliot’s objective correlative, the detail of Cornelia’s woe or of Stetson’s corpse are thus not

\textsuperscript{20} Lui-même est un masque tragique ou bouffon, d’une humanité toutefois parfaite bien que rationnelle. (He himself is a tragic mask or joker of a humanity however perfect, even if rational.)(Moréas, Jean 1886)
germane to Eliot’s purpose: the ‘point’ is expanding meaning beyond language into an affect; it is enough that the reader grasp ‘intense feeling’ or, better still according to Eliot, ‘that particular emotion’, but this cannot be because the reader is not Eliot himself.

The device of transformation is central to Moréas’s Symbolisme: in his 1886 Le Figaro article, he writes that:

The Idea in turn must not deprive itself of the rich overlay of peripheral analogy, as the essential characteristic of symboliste art consists in never going as far as the distillation of the Idea itself. In this way, in such art, pictures of nature, human actions, all perceptible phenomena are not intended to express themselves; they are only there as perceptible expressions intended to represent their hidden relationship with the original Ideas (Moréas, Jean 1886)\(^\text{21}\).


The image of ‘warm, gentle snow keeping graves warm’ (5,6) from Cornelia’s song stands in an affective theme apart from the others and appears closer to the tone of the first verse, showing a different connotation.

Expanding signification in this way cannot ‘get’ Eliot’s feelings, but widening the synonymic range possibly improves the chances of capturing something comparable. Whoever builds a synonymic cloud reading the verse in this way may have less difficulty encountering

\(^{21}\) L’Idée, à son tour, ne doit point se laisser voir privée des somptueuses simarres des analogies extérieures ; car le caractère essentiel de l’art symbolique consiste à ne jamais aller jusqu’à la concentration de l’Idée en soi. Ainsi, dans cet art, les tableaux de la nature, les actions des humains, tous les phénomènes concrets ne sauraient se manifester eux-mêmes ; ce sont là des apparences sensibles destinées à représenter leurs affinités ésotériques avec des Idées primordiales.
emotions and moods of fear, greed, horror, pain, anger, isolation, fatigue, revulsion, sorrow, depersonalisation, despair and others: if so, the poem’s symbolisme succeeds in its goal of stirring feelings by presenting nature and objects.

As a reader identifies these or other affects, possibly with mounting feelings of dismay, do Eliot’s words not ‘gallop to the rescue’? At the closing chapter of the poem, What the Thunder Said, the narrator proposes to offset the mood with an array of empathy, compassion, rejection of cruelty and of hard heartedness by ‘thundering’ Das to ‘shore’ these ‘fragments’ against his ‘ruins’. Eliot counsels here the divine guidance (400-422) of Hindu Upanishads, Indian religious and philosophical texts in Sanskrit dating from about 800 B.C. The narrator may find comfort in this wisdom, which abates desire, greed and anger in search of ‘Shantih’, the ‘peace which passeth all understanding’ (433). Perhaps the reader even discovers forbearance in the thunder’s Dāmāyata (418) to Eliot’s struggle in coping with nervous illness.

The distressed and aimless crowd and the terrifying tenor of Stetson’s hallucinations call for compassion and charity to counter despair, depression, depersonalization and the horror of war. This ‘shoring’ appears as a central idea in The Waste Land: Eliot seems to claim that his poem is not just about despair, but about how to deal with it too.

If the symbol does its job, it then disappears from the mind of the reader, eclipsed by the emotion it symbolises. Not all critics agree with going so far as to state that emotions should dislodge the perceptible forms, objects, situations or chain of events which symbolise them. For example, the compassion a reader may feel for Stetson’s lunacy in line 69 of The Waste Land may not necessarily occlude the thought of his suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or Septimus Warren Smith’s haunting by Evans: both are weighty, recurring post-war Freudian themes portrayed contemporaneously by Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot, who did correspond from time to time by letter.

It would remain to read other verses in a similar way.

Eliot’s objective correlative is said to function in The Waste Land to generate emotion, but can it help the reader to ‘get’ his intention as Eliot appears to believe? Critics believe not. However, if Eliot’s ‘getting it’ implies capturing not his intention, but his emotion, then this opens onto a different question: if the reader can’t ‘get’ Eliot’s intention, can he or she ‘get’ an emotion Eliot possibly feels and intends to communicate to the reader?
A reader reads and interprets written signs on a page as language to then derive information before deriving feeling. However, a listener listens to music and derives feeling immediately, in the same way as a sightseer sees beauty immediately in an alpine scene. The reader needs to capture intellectual content from written language before feeling emotion: he or she naturally questions signification; there is a need to understand. This tenuous generalisation searches to illustrate that symbolisme and the objective correlative surface emotion from written language by forcing thought before the reader experiences emotion. Unlike a listener or a sightseer immediately perceiving beauty, the reader cannot sidestep thought which written language forces on him or her on the ‘road’ to ‘getting’ an emotion. This phase is controlled by the reader’s intellect which cannot reproduce the author’s because their cultural determinants are never the same; so, it would tend to extend Barthes’s reasoning on authorial intention to the reader not ‘getting’ Eliot’s emotion either.

Would this support what Pound meant by composing poetry like a ‘musician’ rather than like a ‘metronome’? Would a capture of emotion reading written poetry even be possible in the way a listener to music or an sightseer in the Alps encounters immediate rapture?

But, the question was rather, is Eliot’s long poem an English archetype of French poetic Symbolisme?

There are reasons to believe this to be the case beyond the striking similarity between Moréas’s description of poetic Symbolisme and Eliot’s formulation of his objective correlative: it seems so well to embody Moréas’s symboliste guidelines, that his difficult The Waste Land can almost be read as an exercise in applying them: they fit so well, and both Eliot and Pound so admired and emulated French literary modernism, that it is difficult to imagine that neither was unaware, nor had not read, Moréas’s Symbolisme, which had appeared over thirty years beforehand.

Eliot obliquely confirmed ten years after the poem’s publication its conformity to Moréas’s guidelines by claiming the irrelevance of its allegorical content compared with the significance of the mood the poem was intended to portray: to repeat from the above; -

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22 Does this not support Derrida’s phonocentric idea in his Of Grammatology, of the ‘superiority’ of spoken language to written language?
To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling. (1933: Excerpts from Lectures 1932–1933 documented by brother, H.W. Eliot, Jr.; collection Valerie Eliot)

Articles by French critics until at least 1929 claim again and again that Pound’s Imagism was nothing other than Symbolisme, and, according to Pound, Eliot's The Waste Land was (intriguingly) after all, the justification of ‘the movement’, of their ‘modern experiments since 1900’ (Lewis 2007); of what experiments, if not of Imagism, Symbolisme and Vorticism?

And how was Eliot’s long poem hailed by the contemporary English literary community? How did this nation look upon a possible cultural incursion by a ‘foreign power’ so soon after the most destructive war seen to date forty miles ‘across the water’ on this rival’s home ground? Perhaps too much separated the two countries culturally: the English literary community did appear to be, at best, suspicious of French modernism. If no notion of French cultural influence was written into The Waste Land’s bloodline, is it not because Eliot was probably unwilling to specify symboliste influence in his long poem after earlier criticism of his Prufrock? The American poet and critic, Louis Untermeyer, wrote: -

Prufrock, published in 1917, was immediately hailed as a new manner in English literature and belittled as an echo of Laforgue and of the French symbolistes to whom Eliot was indebted. (Untermeyer 1942)

However, in The Poetry of Drouth, twenty-six years before Eliot’s 1948 Nobel prize for Literature, and just after publication of The Waste Land, another American writer and critic, Edmund Wilson, conferred, on behalf of the literary world, an eternal compliment centred on the poet himself….not on Baudelaire in France….but on Eliot, then in England:

There might not be very much of him, but what there was had come somehow to seem precious and now the publication of his long poem, The Waste Land, confirms the opinion which we had begun gradually to cherish, that Mr Eliot, with all his limitations, is one of our only authentic poets.

23 There is more than a soupçon of Pound’s Imagism (‘Here is no water but only rock’ 331-345) and possibly of his Vorticism in Phlebas’s whirlpool (‘As he rose and fell’ 316-318).
BIBLIOGRAPHY