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Imagism, Vorticism and Modernism in The Waste Land

Fortunately, as the reader becomes engrossed in The Waste Land’s symbolism and rhythms, he or she becomes less troubled with its difficulty: it is 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' (PS 31).

T.S. Eliot believes that poetic expression must be difficult...:

We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult...The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.

...and writes that French poetry has more to offer him than English:

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.

While living in Paris in 1921, Ezra Pound edits Eliot’s draft of The Waste Land, applying his modernist credo 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’: the poem is Eliot's brainchild, but he confers the superlative epithet, *il miglior fabbro*[^3], the best craftsman, on Pound.


I discuss how French symbolisme influences Eliot's poem and how Moréas’ article provides a practical guide to reading it. Symbolism spans both the literary and the visual arts: as Laforgue’s poetry draws on impressionism, I examine how *The Waste Land’s* structure draws on cubism, which, at the time of Eliot and Pound’s collaboration, is the most vibrant of the European visual arts movements. In the wake of his imagism, Pound also intriguingly renames cubism to ‘vorticism’ in England. I explore how other modernist avenues outlined by Moréas apply to Eliot’s ‘long’ poem, referring to its five ‘movements’ as ‘chapters’ to avoid confusion with artistic movements. 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 of the poem, help to bring these ideas into focus:

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,
Much of the difficulty in this poetry arises from the interplay of symbolism, whose interpretation is necessarily subjective. Moréas and the writers, John Porter Houston and Arthur Symons, suggest how to read symbolic poetry, and the literary critics, Barbara Johnson and Maud Ellmann alert the reader to its pitfalls.

Eliot’s Notes following *The Waste Land* begin:

Not only the title, but the plan, and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail Legend.

He makes an idiosyncratic choice of literary content for his ‘incidental’ symbolism: numerous allegories constitute his particular brand, drawn from Verlaine’s *Parcifal* (202) to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (31-34), and from the Fisher King of Arthurian legend (51) to a wide personal selection of literature.

Moréas writes that symbolism is not didactic; that it does not show off and that it is attentive to, and engrossed in, its narrative. *Symboliste* poetry ‘clothes’ ideas in objects without drawing attention to the objects themselves: ideas are intended to eclipse those same objects, which ultimately only serve to convey them. The poet does not specify or
develop ideas, but can overdetermine them in ‘rich analogy’. Symbolism describes nature to shut out the ‘exquisite’ inspiration and vain primacy of romanticism. It speaks of objects, nature, actions, things, and phenomena, but its poetry is not about them: its naturalism exists only to trigger affects in the reader. If characters appear, they do so as instruments to reveal feeling, writes Moréas: narrators ‘assume the tragic mask of humanity’; disturbed, ‘frustrated crowds endure setbacks’ and ‘mythical fantasies sprout from antiquity’ (MJ).

Additionally, in his article, Moréas presents modernist poetry as simple and elegant, as liberated from traditional metrical constraints.

Symbolist poetry is unresolved, disorientating, incoherent, fragmentary, disordered and generally disturbed, adds John Porter Houston: symbolic allegory engages more or less definable meaning beyond the literal. Like Moréas, he states that symbolism conveys feeling by describing nature and not by glorifying the poet; he observes that its content is frequently melancholic (HJ 2;23;95). It should awaken an affect without interpretation, ‘expanding language’ into a mental scene and bringing the reader to a sense of ‘heightened reality’, he writes. The Waste Land’s symbols are overdetermined or repeated, but never explained, and, the less clearly a symbol is based on an association, the greater the ambiguity and the more possibility there is for ‘ever expanding commentary’ (HJ 85;221).

Eliot’s poetic mind naturally tends to melancholia, which affects his choice of symbols: he suffers from nervous disorder in the winter of 1921, and works on the poem while convalescing for three months in Margate (300) and by Lake Leman in Geneva (182). Freud explains that neurosis places psychical construction before factual reality, and that neurotics react as seriously to thoughts as people without neurosis react to reality. Eliot seems to
keep his wretched thoughts in check by attempting to detach his person from the poem’s naturalistic and historical narrative, explaining, for example, in *Hamlet and His Problems* (1921) that Hamlet cannot be understood outside the play’s historical context:

> The Hamlet of Shakespeare will appear to us very differently if, instead of treating the whole action of the play as due to Shakespeare’s design, we perceive his Hamlet to be superposed upon much cruder material which persists...

He believes that we must revisit the past to understand the present and draws on language from Homer to his own times to do so⁹, employing allegory to arouse feeling and enriching his symbolism with a *collage* of isolated, literary allusions. The poet must choose an appropriate expression, an ‘objective correlative’, to arouse feeling in ‘persons of sensibility’ reasons Eliot, 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.

Although symbolist poetry is rich in objects, its obscure allusions rather suggest subjectivity, the poet invariably deserting his reader to ponder the poem’s confusion alone (HJ61), even if Eliot insists that he makes the effort to guide his reader, strongly implying 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 recognised the allusion, know that I meant him to recognise it, and to know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognise it (PS 35).
His classical education is crucial to his choice of allegory: he admires classicism because it recounts eternal tales of man’s folly. Tiresias is *The Waste Land’s* apt *raconteur*: as a result of his own rashness, he becomes a liminal figure between man and woman, between the seeing and the blind, and a prophetic mediator between humans and gods\(^{10}\) (218;228;243): Moréas would recognise in Tiresias one of his ‘mythical’ fantasies ‘sprouting from antiquity’.

Not all readers can agree on a single, ‘centred’ symbolic reading, and Barbara Johnson explores the reader’s ambivalent role as a subjective interpreter. Reading Thoreau in *Malden*, 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’ (JB 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. (JB 40)

Eliot’s symbolic poetry, then, entails a serious snag: Johnson’s remarks imply that no reader can ‘feel’ the poem as the poet ‘felt’ it; the reader cannot but ‘miss the point’ because only private reading reveals affects, which are personal to the reader. Houston writes that Eliot even 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 (HJ 221).

Maud Ellmann’s critical reading of *The Waste Land* evokes a Derridean theme:

*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 (EM).

These ‘silences between the words’ 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. Besides, Eliot is not around to explain: he writes at another place and at another time, so the signs he leaves on his page mediate nothing more than a spectral presence of the poet (RN Ch5–7). It seems impossible to get Eliot’s point at all, because the reader can never capture the poet’s actual or intended feelings, in fact, the only tool at the reader’s disposal is a careful analysis of the poet’s written language.

The word, ‘undone’ in line 63, for example, alludes to the neutrals in Dante’s *Inferno* (PS 57). ‘Undoing’ conveys an image of doom and of, the *O.E.D.* suggests, ‘ruin by a disastrous setback’. ‘Doom’, ‘disaster’, ‘setback’ and ‘ruin’ add *nuance* to meaning beyond the word ‘undoing’ on its own, and this word reappears slightly differently in another verse, ‘Richmond and Kew “undid” me’ (294).

The sentence in line 66, which surprisingly lacks a subject, evokes constraint, drudgery and futility, all potential signifiers. Flowing uphill is laborious for the allegorical Thames and flowing ‘down’ King William Street implies 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 Moréas calls, ‘frustrated crowds enduring setbacks’. Eliot presents a choking, zombie-like, city people, constrained to aimless movement in a Baudelairean, *Les Sept Vieillards* image of ghostlike old age, sickness, fragility, dirt and impending death (BC 176): this is city poverty, evaporating from the sight
of the bourgeoisie into an abyss of non being, conjuring hopelessness and unhappiness, 
doing and despair, melancholy, lack of purpose and restlessness. Eliot adds a personal facet 
of his life in Lombard Street, where he worked at Lloyds Bank across from a Queen Anne 
Baroque church, Saint Mary Woolnoth (67), and where, no doubt, he was expected every 
morning to be on time at the final stoke of nine at the office (68). 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 Pound had wanted to remove. 
Here too the reader gathers another ‘cluster’ of complementary signifiers which contribute 
to an overall symbolic ‘cloud’ of signification for the whole verse.

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. Could this refer to a 
tragic character suffering from hallucinations? Does the narrator here present a shell-
shocked comrade at arms? The ‘demobbed’ of World War II are frequent protagonists in 
European literature after 1918: for example, 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’ (EV 13). Could Stetson symbolise a 
demobbed American seaman, from the ships off the coast of Sicily at modern day Milazzo,
suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder? Is he an ex-serviceman hallucinating over a 
corpse, over an intruder lodged in the private garden of his mind? The lines awaken an 
impression of futile desolation, of anguish at the violent loss of comrades, of deep, intensely 
personal grief, of isolated suffering. In 1919, Sigmund Freud publishes Beyond the Pleasure 
Principle, in which he writes that repeated nightmares of shell-shocked war casualties
of a ‘death drive’ as the pervasive desire for ultimate quietude (TP 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* ending in Septimus’ 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 its devastating aftermath, as, in introducing Stetson, Eliot’s appears to be too. War entails desolation, pain, the breakup of marriage. We read the poem a century later and have little real idea of the colossal waste and intense distress of those times without the remarkable performativity of that writing: furthermore, the time which separates us still destroys our ability to capture the degree of anguish behind Woolf, Lawrence and Eliot’s figures, who assume the ‘tragic face of humanity’.

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 74 and 75 quote Cornelia’s song in John Webster’s, *The White Devil*, where she conjures flowers and leaves to cover Marcello’s grave and the field mouse and the mole to protect his corpse. Cornelia sings ‘Winter kept us warm, covering Earth in forgetful snow’. Eliot uses her words, where the inearthed dead push up April flowers in ‘the cruellest month’ (1-7): but he writes of intense cold, of sudden frost in line 73, which disturbs the corpse’s bed, where the narrator agonises over the safety of the dead man’s bones:

> But keep the wolf far thence, that’s foe to men,
For with his nails he’ll dig them up again.
They would not bury him ‘cause he died in a quarrel.

Despite a strange swap between Webster’s ‘wolf far thence’ and Eliot’s ‘Dog far hence’, Cornelia’s song claims that Marcello will become one again with the earth and that, providing the wolf does not disturb his bed, ‘His body will feed the ground and life will “sprout” again.’ This rings of line 72, where the narrator enquires whether Stetson’s corpse has begun to ‘sprout’, returning the reader to an image of psychiatric damage caused by post-traumatic stress disorder and to an image of lunacy, bringing him or her to feel revulsion and sorrow.

In The Lesson of Baudelaire, Eliot cites the beginning of the last line of Baudelaire's introduction to Les Fleurs du Mal entitled, Au Lecteur, in the phrase, ‘Vous hypocrite lecteur...’. This is also, in its longer form, line 76 of The Waste Land as pastiche, ‘You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!’ (BC 4). However, Baudelaire, the outrageous French modernist of his time, uses the informal, familiar Tu, placing it at the beginning of the penultimate line, and not the formal Vous misquoted by Eliot (BC 4). This indelicate apostrophe appears after the French poet’s stinging description of mankind’s miserly and sinful decadence, lulled by the devil onto a fated path to hell, followed by a demon nation of the walking damned, of latent criminals drowned in vice. ‘You, hypocrite reader... you, the narrator’s fellow man... you, his brother,’ are condemned to ennui, to an abyss of non being, writes Baudelaire, and Eliot agrees.

Such a reading of lines 60 to 76 throws light onto the meaning of Eliot’s language and onto his symbolic, ‘objective correlative’ for the whole verse. The reader might feel fear of evil
and of death having read of a ‘horror of dying’, an ‘abyss of nonbeing’, a ‘demon nation’, the ‘devil’, the ‘walking damned’ and ‘criminals drawn into vice and desolation’; elsewhere, a sensation of the pain and anger of lunacy, found in ‘isolation’, ‘madness’, ‘suffering from shellshock’, ‘hallucination’, ‘individual pain’ and ‘despair’. We might associate a Gothic horror of the grave with ‘violent death’, ‘frozen corpses’ and ‘dogs digging up human bones’. We might recognise the fatigue and despair of crushing labour in ‘travail’, ‘drudgery’, ‘hegemony’, ‘constraint’, ‘exploitation’ and the ‘burden of the arduous and of the crushing’. We might sense greed, disinterest and depersonalisation in ‘pointless waste’, ‘futility’, ‘decadence’, ‘miserliness’, ‘unlearned lessons’ and, for the literary reader, the ‘stupidity of poets not fulfilling their moral function’. The image of ‘warm, gentle snow keeping graves warm’ (5,6) from Cornelia’s song appears to stand in a theme apart from the others, and is possibly closer to the tone of the first verse, showing quite different signification. It is worth noting that expanding signification in this way is no guarantee of ‘getting’ Eliot’s intended feelings, but that widening its scope possibly improves the chances of ‘getting’ some of them. Whoever reads the verse in this way recognises affects of fear, greed, horror, pain, anger, isolation, fatigue, revulsion, sorrow, depersonalisation, despair and possibly others: if so, the poem’s symbolism has succeeded in its goal of stirring emotions and feelings, and it remains to read the other verses in a similar way.

As a reader identifies these or other affects in this verse with mounting feelings of dismay, do we not find Eliot’s words ‘galloping’ to the rescue? At the closing chapter of the poem, *What the Thunder Said*, the narrator proposes to offset its mood with an array of empathy, compassion, rejection of cruelty and of hard heartedness. The narrator suggests his thundered 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 finds 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 *Damyata* (418) to the poet’s struggle to cope 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. It appears that the sign, Da, ‘thundered’ three times, proposes a way of combating the poem’s moody content. His ‘shoring’ appears as one of Eliot’s central ideas in *The Waste Land*: he is claiming that his poem is not just about feelings, but about how to deal with them too.

Symbolism becomes ‘imagism’ in England in 1912, thanks to Pound. He ousts the Pre-Raphaelites, rejects the portly Victorian poetry of Empire, and accepts no resemblance with English *fin-de-siècle* or Georgian poets. Imagism isolates poetic objects to show what he calls ‘luminous details’: his ‘Ideogrammic Method’ juxtaposes material events to communicate ideas, sounding very like symbolism. Pound publishes his ‘don’ts’ in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*, where he advises Imagist poets to apply more or less some of what Moréas had already noted in 1886.

Any *soupçon* of French cultural influence is carefully removed from *The Waste Land*'s identity in England. Articles by French critics until at least 1929 claim again and again that imagism is nothing other than *symbolisme*, but Pound’s decisions come as no surprise, as the contemporary English literary community appears unenthusiastic about modern French influence anyway. Louis Untermeyer writes with abrupt finality:
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.  

*The Waste Land* appears at a time of burgeoning visual arts movements in Europe, which play a significant role in the literary arts too. Laforgue writes of impressionism:

> With Monet and Pissarro everything is obtained by a thousand little dancing strokes in every direction like straws of colour ... the whole thing is a symphony which is living and changing like the ‘forest voices’ of Wagner...recording the most sensitive gradations and decompositions on a simple flat canvas. This principle has been applied not systematically but with genius by certain of our poets and novelists.

Symbolism does not explain *The Waste Land’s* perplexing structure of five chapters of twenty-five disconnected verses. Jacqueline Vaught Brogan, in *Part of the Climate: American Cubist Poetry* (VBJ), describes ‘cubist poetry’ as verbal *collage*, and offers *The Waste Land* as an example. As impressionism influences Laforgue’s poetry, so cubism influences *The Waste Land*. The poem’s obscurity comes in part from its *collage* of unrelated, enigmatic verses, which veer from one set of allegories to another, taunting the reader to make sense of them (PS 27-30). Brogan notes that cubist poems, such as *The Waste Land* and Pound’s *Cantos*, are made up of multiple voices speaking at different times: these literary works show disassociation and rearrangement rather than free association and rhetoric (VBJ 5).  

Brogan describes Eliot and Pound’s work as ‘synthetic’ cubism. Eliot’s lines allegorically resemble Picasso’s brush strokes: he writes on paper as the painter paints on canvas. Picasso’s cubist painting shows geometrically separated planes, synthesising an image only when seen together. Just as the painter disjoins his painting into a *staccato* of planes, Eliot disjoins his poem into a *staccato* of isolated symbolic verses, each one like a cubist plane.
The poet intends that they all finally synthesise a five-chapter, ‘poetic gestalt’ to mediate the affect symbolically evoked by Eliot’s ‘objective correlative’.

In 1913, pre-war England, two years before he gets Eliot’s *Prufrock* published, Ezra Pound renames cubism to vorticism, and a 1919 letter exists which explicitly associates Eliot’s poetry with it, although it does not specify which of Eliot’s poems qualifies: the vorticist painter, Wyndham-Lewis, writes the letter to his American patron, John Quinn, a collector of cubist art, suggesting content for a possible third, post-war issue of the vorticist magazine, *BLAST*, to include ‘a long, new poem by Eliot’. Sadly, the issue is never published.

When, in 1922, *The Waste Land* appears, vorticism has disappeared as an ‘artistic’ casualty of the war, and Pound has decamped to Paris. The vorticist movement, whose final magazine might conceivably have confirmed a part of *The Waste Land* as vorticist, is forgotten, and both the poet and its *miglior fabbro* move on: Pound to Fascist Italy and Eliot to the looming fall of the British Empire.

Eliot’s modernism is cheerfully stolen from France: he writes in *The Sacred Wood* two years before *The Waste Land*’s publication:

> 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.

Modernist features other than symbolism and cubism show up in the poem: they comprise such traits as the fragmented first-person narrator; difficult expression; ugly city topics; overdetermination and repetition; disappearance of the poet’s persona; irregular scansion, and moderate language.
Houston credits Laforgue, and not Eliot, with the modernist invention of the fragmented first-person poem (HJ 82): 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. Furthermore, Houston asserts 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* (HJ 142).

City poverty is a theme of modernist, and not of romanticist, poetry. Baudelaire breaks with romantic tradition in his description of dirt and old age. In lines 60 and 61 of *The Waste Land*, which quotes *Les Sept Vieillards*, where Baudelaire writes of a *Fourmillante cité* under a yellow fog (BC 178), the French poet describes a ghostly passage, one after the other, of seven identical, scruffy, bent, old men, each one entering and leaving by himself the narrator’s murky field of vision. Eliot’s ‘dawn’ fog is brown in *The Waste Land* (60;61) and, like Baudelaire’s, yellow during the ‘dusk’ of his earlier *Prufrock*. He writes the same lines as the ‘Unreal City at “noon” under a brown fog’ in line 207. Michael Levenson affirms the modernist nature of Eliot’s repetition which occurs both within and across his poetry, noticing the *collage* of verses too:

> 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 (LM 669).

Symbols become meaningful as an associative complex but cannot as a conflictual one, which would tend to weaken allegory (HJ 39): Eliot applies this and compensates ambiguity with frequent repetition in ‘modernist intra-textuality’ and overdetermined ideas, often
rewriting a similar one in successive lines. For example, lines 62 and 66 appear to convey similar sentiments, as do lines 64 and 65; and 207 repeats line 60.

Mary Barnes Hutchinson, who was close to Eliot from 1916 to the end of his life, after hearing the poem, refers to *The Waste Land* as ‘Tom’s autobiography’ (PS 17). Eliot appears overly anxious to remove his persona from his poem: again and again he writes that a poem is not a self-portrait but, despite this modernist conviction which in fact is Baudelaire’s, he fails to disappear. Eliot insists that poems ought to be obscure and complex artefacts detached from the poet’s person, but it is a poem about the breakdown of Eliot’s personal relations, writes Houston (HJ 123). Rife with personal circumstance, it appears impossible to disassociate his public face from it, and, during his lifetime, his reluctance to further expose his dismay to the host of scholars swarming around his work, is not surprising.

Eliot, who is so attentive to his choice of words, writes that, ‘A passage of a poem expresses itself as rhythm before words, the rhythm giving birth to the idea and to the image’ (PS 37). Lines 60 to 76 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 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.

Another modernist feature is affirmed by Ezra Pound, who applies the injunction to not show off by impudently scotching Eliot’s initial proposal for the first fifty lines of his poem, which describe a drunken evening ending up in a brothel (EV). The original tableau seems vulgar, radically different from the intriguing, misty enjambments which follow as, *April is*
the cruellest month, and which now open the poem. Line 65 is another example of the discretion which Moréas expects of modernist poetry: there are few adjectives; 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.

Moréas’ seminal article appears thirty six years before The Waste Land, and reads uncannily like its blueprint. It provides a valuable key to open the complex symbolism of the poem’s ‘difficult language’, and, as Moréas predicts, little of Eliot’s difficult symbolism finally eclipses the wave of affect the poem evokes in its reader. Whether we call it imagism or not, the 1886 article’s advice brings the reader to detect the feeling of anguish of a despairing poet with a nervous disorder, of a poet who is unhappily married and who has endured a European war with thirty-eight million casualties in four years. However, Moréas’ advice is not enough in itself to negotiate the poem’s difficulty: the reader turns to Brogan, who recognises its literary structure as synthetic cubism, whether we call it vorticism or not. She foregrounds the ‘verbal collage’, which encourages the reader to uncover meaning verse-by-verse before trying for an overall epiphany.

Baudelaire’s rugged apostrophe addressed to the ‘hypocrite’ reader, and Conrad’s lines in Eliot’s first choice of epigraph, about ‘The horror! the horror!’ of a dying ivory trader’s life in the jungle, bear witness to something of the abyss of Eliot’s distress. He appears to believe that poetry should perform to reverse the cultural and moral slide of humanity, and is upset that English poetry, unlike Baudelaire’s in France, has not done its job. Distinguished poets
are ‘trifling’ and lack curiosity in moral matters, he writes, in a telling indictment of English, ‘freakish and odd’ modernism\textsuperscript{32}. Literary critics certainly do not say this about Eliot: in The \textit{Poetry of Drouth}\textsuperscript{33}, twenty six years before his 1948 Nobel prize for Literature, and just after publication of \textit{The Waste Land}, the American critic, Edmund Wilson, confers, on behalf of the literary world, an eternal compliment on the poet himself:

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.
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1 The Lesson of Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot *Tyro*, vol. Ip4, Spring 1921.
3 Quoting line 117 of *Canto XXVI* of Dante’s *Purgatorio*
4 Symons delves into the symbolic poetry of his French contemporaries including Laforgue and especially, Mallarmé, whose *mards littéraires* Symons often attends in Paris from around 1883.
5 J. P. Houston’s *Symbolism and the Modernist Movement* (HJ) repeatedly presents *The Waste Land* as symbolist.
6 Specifically of the rigidity of the French Alexandrines.
8 Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics S. Freud, 1913
9 Eliot writes that art which already exists is part of a simultaneous order and that the creation of a new work of art occurs in relation to all works which precede it, so subtly altering the existing state (ET 38).
10 At school, Eliot learns Latin, Ancient Greek, French and German: numerous characters, places and allusions in his poem stem from these cultures, for example: Carthage (307); the sea battle in the Punic wars at Mylae (70); Verlaine’s Parcifal (202); Wagner’s Rhine Maidens (277;290;306); Tereus (206), who rapes his sister-in-law, Philomela (99), and is duped by his wife into eating his own child.
11 See Nicholas Royle: *Derrida* (RN 14-17).
12 In Dante’s *Inferno*, the ‘neutrals’ are the restless souls of those who take no position in moral crisis (v 55-57).
13 This church, a stone’s throw from the Bank of England, brings capital close to Christianity, recalling Max Weber’s 1901 thesis linking capitalism to the rise of Protestantism, however Calvinist Christianity justifies the virtuous accumulation of capital, and Eliot was from a Calvinist family.
14 Mylae
It has been speculated that the name comes from ‘Ariel Stetson,’ an anagram of ‘Stearns Eliot,’ the poet’s name excluding ‘Thomas.’

In Eliot’s first draft, the dog, like dogs of war and Webster’s wolf, are foe to men; however, Pound modifies Eliot’s dog to a friend, possibly weakening the allusion.

Eliot returned to Harvard to study Indian philosophy and Sanskrit in 1911.

The same sign elicits compassion as the thunder’s ‘Dayadhvam’ and is aimed at demons; generosity as the thunder’s ‘Datta’ aimed at humans, and restraint and forbearance as the thunder’s ‘Damyata’ aimed at celestials.

Pound’s *A Few Don’ts* was first printed in *Poetry* I,6 (March 1913). His dos include: direct treatment of the thing whether subjective or objective; as regarding rhythm, to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome; and a don’t: to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.

In the April 1913 issue of *Poetry*, Pound publishes a haiku-like poem called, *In a station of the Metro:*

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Pound claims his method is based on haiku after reading work by American Orientalist, Ernest Fenollosa.


Eliot was twenty eight and had just published *Prufrock* when Picasso’s cubist *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* was publicly exhibited in Antin for the first time in 1916. Eliot’s friend and advisor, John Quinn, a successful New York lawyer of Irish descent, collected cubist works by Picasso, Braque, Metzinger, Villon, Gris and Gleizes. Quinn died in 1924, two years after *The Waste Land* was published: Eliot’s original script, modified by Ezra Pound was lost in Quinn’s estate until it resurfaced in 1968 in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

Eliot is said to have drafted *The Waste Land* during his nervous illness in the autumn of 1921 (PS 122).

Between 1913 and 1915 the English artist Wyndham-Lewis develops the cubist style which Ezra Pound dubs vorticism. Lewis’s *Rebel Art Centre*, which runs for only four months, gives birth to a vorticist magazine called, BLAST, and, after the movement’s only U.K. exhibition in 1915, the movement disappears.

Who also happens to be T.S. Eliot’s patron.

The Sacred Wood, Essays on Poetry and Criticism T.S. Eliot, Methuen, 1920

Literally an ‘ant infested city’, signifying one overrun with people

Eliot writes that very few recognise an expression of significant sentiment which has its life in the poem rather than in the history of the poet; the poet’s progress is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of his own personality before the poetic medium: impressions or experiences which appear significant to the poet’s own image have no place in poetry (ET1 40-44).

In a 1933 Harvard lecture, Eliot states that, ‘there may be personal causes which make it impossible for a poet to express himself in any but an obscure way,’ and, speaking in this personal vein of his first wife Vivien, Eliot confesses that, ‘to her, the marriage brought no happiness. To me it brought the state of mind out of which came The Waste Land’ (ET2). He says that, ‘To me, it (The Waste Land) was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grous against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling’ (PS 14). Wallace Stevens derides *The Waste Land* as, ‘a bore, the supreme cry of Eliot’s despair and not of his generation’s’ (VBJ 77).

The Lesson of Baudelaire, T.S. Eliot Tyro, vol. Ip4, Spring 1921. Symons claims that Baudelaire, the father of French modernism was little-known and much misunderstood in England (SA 113). Eliot quips that the English poets who consider themselves most opposed to Georgianism, and who know a little French, are mostly such as could imagine the last judgement only as a ‘lavish display of Bengal lights, Roman candles, Catherine wheels and inflammable fire balloons.’