

A Historical Aspects of Major Criticisms on the *The Waste Land*

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I

In the century since the first publication of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), the art of writing poetry has undergone several revolutions. In the period between 1930 and 1955, roughly, Anglo-American poetry has produced a crop of poet-critics who are particularly conscious of their art and their techniques. This consciousness stems to a large extent from the influence of Eliot.

In general, modern literature, and particularly modern poetry, is the heir of many schools and many traditions. It is not a thing in isolation, sprung whole out of the modern age. However, it is generally agreed that the modern idiom of poetry depends primarily on two traditions – the metaphysical, stemming from John Donne, and the symbolist, from Stéphane Mallarmé (1842~1898). The metaphysical poets pursued integrity by analysis: the symbolist poets invoked it by intuition and suggestion. The symbolists tried to hasten the disintegration of the modern world by a derangement of the senses in order that, by recombining the explored elements with little or no relations to their former structures, they might construct a truer world of inner reality. Since grammar, syntax, and structure are also logical structures, the symbolists discarded or exaggerated traditional usage. The metaphysical poets, on the other hand, used all their intellectual as well as their intuitive and suggestive resources to bring congruity to discordant ideas and images.

Against the background of these movements *The Waste Land* was born in 1922, and by the 1940's it had become a standard in most anthologies of modern poetry. It has been studied and criticized by numerous critics and poets; in fact, for many new poets it has formed the first introduction to contemporary poetry. The poem is characterized by its intellectual complexity, its wasteland derogation of possibilities, the use of language of common speech, precision, the creation of new rhythms, absolute freedom in choice of subject matter, the evocation of images in concrete, clear poetry, and

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concentration.

Right after *The Waste Land* was published, many contemporary reviews, including those in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Manchester Guardian*, and *New Statesman* expressed their bewilderment over this new imagistic poem. F.L. Lucas's comment in the *New Statesman*, that "a poem that has to be explained in notes is not unlike a picture with 'This is a dog' inscribed beneath"¹, I had an obvious appeal to readers accustomed to simple poems about simple feelings. Even Clive Bell, in a review in the *Nation and Athenaeum* found "the poem influenced by a lack of imagination."² Quite a few early commentators suspected hoax. Arnold Bennett asked the author whether the notes were "a lark or serious", and in 1923 writers in the *Christian Science Monitor*, and *Time* all suspected that their legs were being pulled.³ In the same year N.P. Dawson, in the *Forum*, considered that it was natural for the poem to be enjoyed more in Prohibition America than in England: The dirge is doubtless "Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum", and the lament is "Oh how dry I am."⁴ Ezra Pound, in 1940, felt that "the poem had suffered because of the notes, the addition of which was, anyway, quite fortuitous."⁵

When the poem was published in the first issue of the *Criterion* (Oct. 1922) and reprinted in *The Dial* in November of the same year, it appeared without footnotes. In his excellent account of the publishing history of the poem, D.H. Woodward recounts how Gilbert Seldes, managing editor of *The Dial*, deliberately promoted the poem's American success, including in his efforts the commissioning of Edmund Wilson to write a review. This favorable review 'The Poetry of Drouth', was later rewritten for *Axel's Castle* (1931) in which Wilson praises "the poem as a mirror of post-war society, with a new music, even in its borrowings", although he recognizes in Eliot the peculiar conflicts of the Puritan turned artist.⁶ Seldes himself heaped eulogies on the poem in a review in the *Nation* epitomizing the intellectual's feeling that he was living in a broken, decaying civilization.

Another influential review was Conrad Aiken's in the *New Republic*. In a postscript, he recalls his unique good fortune in having been Eliot's friend for fifteen years and having seen parts of the poem

1. C.B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchcliffe, ed. in the Introduction to T.S. Eliot: *The Waste Land* (Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1968), p.11. And F.L. Lucas, *New Statesman*, XXII(3. Nov. 1923) 116.

2. *Ibid.*, p.11 and E.C. Bell *Nation and Athenaeum*, XXXIII(22 Sept. 1923) 772-3.

3. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.11. And A.H. Nelson, 'The Critics and The Waste Land,' in *English Studies*, XXXV. (1955).

4. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.11. And N.P. Dawson, "Enjoying Poor Literature," in *Forum*, IX(1923) 1373.

5. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.12.

6. *Ibid.*

in draft. He also raises crucial question that absorbed critics down to the present day : what kind of unity and structure has the problems. For Aiken, the poem is “a brilliant and kaleidoscopic confusion”, but this “heap of broken images” is justified “as a series of brilliant, brief, unrelated or dimly related pictures by which a consciousness empties itself of its characteristic content”. For him, its “incoherence is a virtue because its donnée is incoherence.”⁷

Such early commendations set an intellectual fashion for the 1920s, and by the time he came to write *Axel's Castle* Edmund Wilson could talk of how the poem “enchanted and devastated a whole generation”.⁸ George Watson stresses the extraordinary quickness with which the poem was accepted as a masterpiece and its great effect on young readers. By the 1930 E.M. Foster, Bonamy Dobrée, William Empson, Laura Riding and Robert Graves were among the many writers expounding its virtues. Perhaps the most influential was I.A. Richards, who in 1926 extended his *Principles of Literary Criticism* by an appendix on T.S. Eliot. He finds no logical scheme in *The Waste Land* but argues that readers react with a unified emotional response. The poetry achieves form by “a music of ideas, a phrase repeatedly criticized and discussed by subsequent critics.”⁹

In the 1930s the academics took over. F.O. Matthiessen and Cleanth Brooks were highly influential, and their works have instructed thousands of students how to respond to Eliot. Equally important was the section on Eliot in F.R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), in which Leavis argues the two major objections to the poem, its “rich disorganization and its erudition.” He refers to Richards's theory of the music of the ideas, and himself talks of the poem's “depth of orchestration” : the poem does not lack organization for it aims at the unity of an “inclusive consciousness.”¹⁰

All these academic critics are convinced that the poem possesses its own kind of unity. Matthiessen talks of the ‘musical organization’ of the poem's dramatic structure and of its lyrical intensity in *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (1935), and Cleanth Brooks puts forward a subtle theory explaining how the irony works on different levels to create a sense of the oneness of experience and the unity of all periods in “Critique of the Myth” (1939). This kind of justification is continued in Hugh Kenner's *The Invisible Poet : T.S. Eliot* (1959), in which he describes the influence of F.H. Bradley's philosophy on Eliot and sees the loose sequence of poems in *The Waste Land* co-existing as a “zone of consciousness.”¹¹ All these critics balance their search for unity with inquiry into the erudition, showing consi-

7. Ibid. p.13.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid. and in F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London : Chatto and Windus, 1932).

11. Cox and Hinchcliffe, Ibid., p.14.

derable critical acumen in their analysis of ambiguities found in particular passages. But the dangers of academic criticism can be seen in Grover Smith's *T.S. Eliot's poetry and Plays* (1956) ominously subtitled 'A Study in Sources and Meaning.' This is, I will study more later, an invaluable source-book for the allusions in the poem.

The early doubts about the poem's structure were not silenced by many critics which fell upon the poem in the post-1930 period and which, ironically, served only to emphasize the other objection to the poem, namely its "erudition".¹² In 1943 the iconoclastic Yvor Winters declared that "Eliot, in this matter : the result is confusion and journalistic reproduction of detail".¹³ These criticisms were repeated by Karl Shapiro, while in *Image and Experience* (1960) Graham Hough argues that the poem lacks unity of tone.

In the same year (1960) David Craig made a frontal attack on Leavis's position, insisting that "the poem's attempt to create an impersonal portrait of society is a pretence and a sham. The poem is actually a romantic expression of personal depression, which some intellectuals have accepted because it reflects their own malaise, but which has no relevance to actual twentieth-century social conditions."¹⁴ For Craig, the poem is too genteel, too anti-life. In 1964, C.K. Stead rejected critical in *The New Poetic* in which he looks for a statement of beliefs rather than submitting to the "direct experience" of the poem. As an example of this "direct experience" Frank Kermode studied the modernism in *The Waste Land* in his essay "A Babylonish Dialect" (1967). He writes that the poem "resists an imposed order : it is a part of its greatness, and the greatness of its epoch."¹⁵ I have read these chronological reviews of criticisms briefly and found that the arguments will continue : are the notes a waste of poem ? Does the poem exhibit no progression as Leavis says ? Does the poem accurately record the society of post-1918 ? Whatever future critics may decide, the poem will surely continue to fascinate and inspire its readers. I am going to study and interpret some criticisms in more detail and trace the development of the criticisms, identifying some major trends in them.

12. Ibid., p.16.

13. Ibid., p.16. And Yvor Winters, *On Modern Poets* (New York, 1959), p.70.

14. Cox and Hinchcliffe, Ibid., p.16. And David Craig, *The defeatism of The Waste Land* (1960),

15. Cox and Hinchcliffe, Ibid., p.17. and Frank Kermode, *A Babylonish Dialect* (New York : Random House Inc., 1968),

II

A review of *The Waste Land*, with the title, "An Anatomy Of Melancholy" appeared in the *New Republic* on February 1923, four months later after the poem's publication. Conrad Aiken says this is the first full-length favorable review that the poem has then taken. Aiken says that Eliot is one of the most individual of contemporary poets, and at the time, anomalously, one of the most traditional. By individual Aiken mean that "Eliot is aware in his own way with his delicate sensibility, so that his works are somewhat shrinking, somewhat injured, and always sharply itself."¹⁶ But he also is, more than most poets, conscious of his roots which were "quite conspicuously French, and dated 1870~1900." With this sense of the past, Eliot was positively redirected his roots in his poem as the major motive of the work.

Aiken also stresses that the poem is important for its "allusive method." It is a poem of allusion and symbols in the whole. Most of its symbols are drawn from Classics or legend. Eliot has thought it necessary to supply, in notes, a list of the many quotations, references, and translations with which it bristles. Eliot observes candidly that the poem presents "difficulties" and requires "elucidation". This serves to raise the question whether these difficulties are the result of complexities, a fine elaborateness, or of confusion. Aiken also raises the question whether the poem is a perfect piece of construction, the complex material being mastered and made coherent. Aiken reads the poem solely with the intention of understanding the symbolism with the aid of the notes, of making out what it is that is symbolized, and how these symbolized feelings are brought into relation with each other and with other matters in the poem. Aiken finally concludes that the poem is not, in any formal sense, coherent. He says that "We cannot feel that all the symbolisms belong quite inevitably to where they have been put ; that the order of the parts is an inevitable order ; that there is anything more than a impulsive progress from one theme to another ; nor that the relation between the more symbolic parts and the less is always as definite as it should be."¹⁷ Aiken says "what we feel is that Mr. Eliot has not wholly annealed the allusive matter, has left it unabsorbed, lodged in gleaming fragments amid material alien to it."¹⁸ Again, there is a distinct weakness consequent on the use of allusions which may have both intellectual and emotional value for the poet, but none to readers. The Waste land of the Grail Legend might be a good symbol, if it were something with which readers were sufficiently

16. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.91. And Conrad Aiken, "An Anatomy of Melancholy" in *New republic*(1923).

17. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.95.

18. *Ibid.*

familiar. But it can never, Aiken stresses, even when explained, be a good symbol, simply because it has no immediate associations for readers.

Aiken also criticizes Eliot's misuse of symbols as theme which fails to be associated with readers, so that its overtone sounds is nonsense to reader. The hyacinth fails, for example, to convey its proper meaning to the reader who is not familiar with its references. Finally Aiken points out "that the poet assumes for his allusions, and for the fact that they actually allude to something, an importance which the allusions themselves do not, logically, command, nor aesthetically command ; which is pretentious."¹⁹ However, Aiken changes his attitude when he looks at the poem's elements of variety. He says the poem has an emotional value far clearer and richer than its arbitrary and rather unwor-
kable logical value. The poem originally consisted of a number of separate poems which have been telescoped-given a kind of forced unity. *The Waste Land* conception offered itself as a generous net which would contain such varied elements. Aiken says that "We are aware of this superficial binding—we observe the anticipation and repetition of themes, motifs ; 'Fear death by water' anticipates the episode of Phlebas, the cry of the nightingale is repeated ; but these are pretty flimsy links, and do not genuinely bind because they do not reappear naturally, but arbitrarily."²⁰ Aiken continues, "This suggests, indeed, that Mr. Eliot is perhaps attempting a kind of program music in words, endeavoring to rule out emotional accidents by supplying his readers, in notes, with only those associations which are correct. He himself hints at the musical analogy when he observes that 'in the first part of Part five three themes are employed'."²¹

Aiken thinks, therefore, that the poem must be taken as a 'brilliant and kaleidoscopic confusion ; as a series of sharp, discrete, slightly realted perceptions and feelings, dramatically and lyrically presented, and violently juxtaposed(for effect of dissonance, so as to give readers an impression of an intensely modern, intensely literary consciousness which perceives itself to be not a unit but a chance correlation or conglomerate of mutually discolorative fragments."²² Readers are invited into a mind, a world, which is a "broken bundle of mirrors", a "heap of broken images."²³ Aiken explains that Eliot, finding it impossible to say just what he means, recapitulates, enumerates all the events and discoveries and memories that make a consciousness, emulating the magic lantern that throws the nerves in pattern on a screen. Aiken says if the reader perceives the poem in this light, "as a series of bril-

19. Ibid., p.96.

20. Ibid., p.97.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

liant, brief, unrelated or dimly related pictures by which a consciousness empties itself of its characteristic contents, then he also perceives that, anomalously, though the dropping out of any one picture would not in the least affect the logic or meaning of the whole, it would seriously detract from the value of the portrait.”²⁴

Aiken reaches thus the conclusion that the poem succeeds by “virtue of its ambiguities, not of its explanations ; by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan. Its incoherence is a virtue because its *donnée* is incoherence. Its rich, vivid, crowded use of implication is a virtue, as implication is always a virtue-it shimmers, it suggests, it gives the desired strangeness.”²⁵ But when Eliot uses an implication beautifully Aiken accepts the poem as a powerful, melancholy tone-poem. Finally Aiken says when “our reservations have all been made, we accept *The Waste land* as one of the most moving and original poems of our time.”²⁶

When I look, however, into Aiken’s review I can perceive a sort of confusion in that there are ambiguities and paradoxes in his critical and eulogical point of view. As Aiken raises the question about the unity or structure he dispels allusions of the poem as to its nature. He points out that “Eliot’s idea that the *Waste land* is, as a kind of epic in a walnut shell, elaborate, ordered, unfolded is totally false because, with or without the notes the poem belongs rather to that symbolical order in which one may say that the meaning is not explicitly, or exactly, worked out.”²⁷ And then he defends the poet admitting the beauty of the allusive method for its ambiguous emotional “ensemble”. While he stresses that “the key to an implication should be in the implication itself, not outside of it.”²⁸ When one admits his opinion that “with or without the notes the poem belongs to the symbolic order of which meaning is not worked out”, then why Eliot himself invites readers into the notes and how the poem can capture readers only with the incoherent structure and ambiguous theme, unless their association with the poet’s sense of the past, memories, encyclopediac anticipations have not all been made ?

24. Conrad Aiken, *Ibid.*, p.98. and Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.

25. Conrad Aiken, *Ibid.*, p.98.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, p.96.

28. *Ibid.*

III

Edmund Wilson also praises, in *Axel's Castle*(1931), that *The Waste Land* is the most complete expression of the theme of emotional starvation. Wilson identifies the sterility of *The Waste Land* as that of the Puritan temperament. The theme of the girl with the hyacinths represents for the poet some fulfillment foregone in youth and now agonizingly desired. Wilson recognizes throughout the poem "the peculiar conflicts of the Puritan turned artist : the horror of vulgarity and the shy sympathy with the common life, the ascetic shrinking from sexual experience and the distress at the drying up of the springs of sensual emotion, with the straining after a religious emotion which may be made to take its place."²⁹ Wilson also finds the poet's gloomy moods of a New Englander regretting an emotionally undernourished youth. The colonization by the Puritans of New England has brought a commercial-industrial civilization to the European cities as well as to the American ones. Being an English citizen, Eliot has the desolation, the aesthetic and spiritual drought of Anglo-Saxon middle-class society which oppresses London as well as Boston. So, the terrible dreariness of the great modern cities is the atmosphere in which *The Waste Land* takes place. Wilson adds then that this Waste Land has another aspect, it is a place not merely of desolation, but of anarchy and doubt. In the post-War world of shattered institutions, strained nerves and bankrupt ideals, life no longer seems serious or coherent so that people have no belief in the things they do and consequently they have no heart for them.

Water is the important symbol, therefore, for it would generate the renewal and strength for the real contemporary London and the haunted wildness of the medieval legend. Water would free the soul from its prison-like body and invoke in desperate need the memory of an April shower of the poet's youth. The poet, therefore, who is traveling in a country cracked by drought, dreams of this water, the rain. Wilson also finds the poetic mood that "the heroic prelude of the Elizabethan has ironic echoes in modern London streets and drawing-rooms ; lines remembered from Shakespeare turn to jazz or refer themselves to the sound of phonographs."³⁰

Wilson now says Eliot's poetic method is excellent for his developing a new technique, at once laconic, quick, and precise presentation of thoughts. His thoughts moves very rapidly and by astounding cuts. They move not by logical stages and majestic roundings of the full literary curve, but as live thoughts move in live brains. In order to examine this combination of thought and the move Wilson

29. Edmund Wilson, "the Puritan turned Artist," in *Axel's Castle*(1931), And Cox and Hinchliffe, *Ibid.*, p.100.

30. Cox and Hinchcliffe., *Ibid.*, p.102.

illustrates some lines from the nightingale passages :

Above the antique mantel was displayed
 As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
 The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
 So rudely forced ; yet there the nightingale
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.

Looking at the picture of Philomela changed to a nightingale the poet associates his own plight in the modern city, in which some "infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering" thing is being done to death, with Philomela, raped and mutilated by Tiresias. But in the earthly paradise, there had been a nightingale singing. Philomela had wept her woes in song, though the barbarous king had cut her tongue-her sweet voice had remained inviolable. And with a sudden change of tense, the poet flashes back from the myth to his present situation :

And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
 "Jug Jug" to dirty ears.

Wilson explains the song of nightingale was represented in old English popular poetry by such outlandish syllables as 'Jug Jug'-so Philomela's cry sounds to the vulgar. Wilson finds Eliot has here, in seven lines of extraordinary liquidity and beauty, fused the picture, the passage from Milton and the legend from Ovid, into a single moment of vague poignant longing.

Wilson now examines the structure of the poem and points out that Eliot, and Pound who influenced Eliot finds a school of poetry which depends on literary quotations and allusions. However, there is a curious contrast between Eliot and Pound, Pound's work has been particularly erudite, whereas Eliot possesses a complete literary and personal integrity. Eliot has thought persistently and coherently about the relations between the different phases of human experience and his passion for proportion and order is reflected in his poems. Wilson adds "He is, in his way, a complete man, and if it is true, as I believe, that he has accomplished what he has credited Ezra Pound with accomplishing-if he has brought a new personal rhythm into the language-so that he has been able to lend even

to the borrowed rhythms, the quoted words, of his great predecessors a new music and a new meaning-it is the intellectual completeness and soundness which has given his rhythm its special prestige."³¹

With the peculiar fragmentary in form, Eliot had introduced many phrases from Shakespeare and Blake for purpose of ironic effect. He has always been addicted to prefacing his poems with quotations and echoing passages from other poems. And he has introduced passages in six foreign languages including Sanscrit. Wilson says that the idea of the literary medley itself seems to have been borrowed from Pound. Wilson is, therefore, dismayed to discover that lines among those which he believed to represent Eliot's residuum of original invention had been taken over or adapted from other writers. So, Wilson says, "One would be inclined a priori to assume that all this load of erudition and literature would be enough to sink any writer, and that such a production as *The Waste Land* must be a work of second-hand inspiration."³² Readers are sometimes visited by uneasy recollections of (?), in the fourth century, composing Greek-and-Latin macaronics and piecing together poetic mosaics out of verses from Virgil. Yet Eliot succeeds in conveying his meaning, in communicating his emotion, in spite of all his learned or mysterious allusions, and whether the reader understands them or not.

Wilson expresses, anyway, Eliot's success for all poet's fragmentary method, for all his integrity and complexity in subject matter. Another factor of Eliot's success is the dramatic character of his imagination for modern poetic drama of modern drama on verse. Wilson assumes that "English drama ended when the blank verse of the Elizabethan ran into sands, until it occurs to us that Eliot himself is really a dramatic poet."³³ Eliot's poems are based on unexpected dramatic contrasts and characters who have become a part of our modern mythology. *The Waste Land* owes a large part of its power to its dramatic quality.

In any case, Wilson concludes that *The Waste Land* has been generally read as some sort of modern "vers de societe"³⁴, and it has had the effect of a little musk that scents up a whole room. And as for *The Waste Land*, it enchanted and devastated a whole generation.

F. O. Matthiessen's *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot* is probably the best single introduction to Eliot's work. It provides preeminently a general understanding of the wholeness of Eliot, of the interrelationship among the several features of his poetry-by taking its cues from the prose. This is apparent in

31. Ibid., p.105.

32. Ibid., p.104.

33. Ibid., p.106.

34. Ibid.

its chapter titles, which are phrases quoted either directly or in effect from Eliot's criticism. Matthiessen provides much instructive information about the poems and about Eliot's critical position. In demonstrating how Eliot lives up to his own principles and in defending those principles, he returns again and again to the more important poems, but he never gives an thorough and uninterrupted analysis of any of them. The tendency of his treatment is to provide a general orientation to all of Eliot's work, to establish a sympathy with Eliot's intentions and an appreciation of the extent to which they are achieved. This tendency is more or less common to all the defenders of Eliot's unity and makes their comment more interpretative than judicial.

F.R. Leavis also is one of the defenders of Eliot's work. As I have illustrated already. Leavis talks, in *New Bearings in English Poetry*, of the poem's musicality. As "depth of orchestration" the poem has musical organization which is crucial effect for the unity of an inclusive consciousness. Leavis insists "the anthropological background plays an obvious part in evoking that particular sense of the unity of life which is essential to the poem and is a peculiarly significant expression of the scientific spirit."³⁵ Leavis demonstrates in an analysis of "The Burial of the Dead" how the organization of the poem is obvious without the aid of notes, but he admits that the poem is available only to a limited audience, though this is itself a symptom of the culture that produced the poem. His book is really important in the way he uses the poem to illustrate his own view on history and minority culture.

For Leavis, *The Waste Land* accurately reflects the breakdown of tradition in contemporary civilization :

In considering our present plight we have also to take account of the incessant rapid change that characterizes the machine age. The result is breach of continuity and the uprooting of life. This last metaphor has a peculiar aptness, for what we are witnessing today is the final uprooting of the immemorial ways of life, of life rooted in the soil."³⁶

Perhaps Leavis was the most powerful figure in the transformation of the poem into a myth, a representative symbol of the breakdown in modern consciousness. This leads him to declare that the poem can only exist for an extremely limited audience equipped with special knowledge, though his demonstration by analysis indicates that this is not as devastating as many critics have suggested. Nevertheless, in his view, works expressing "the finest consciousness of the age inevitably appeal only to a minority of trained sensibilities who have cut themselves off from their hostile environment."³⁷

35. Ibid., p.13. and F.R. Leavis, Ibid., pp.93, 94.

36. Cox and Hinchcliffe, Ibid., p.14.

37. Ibid.

As I mentioned earlier, Grover Smith, however, has shown the dangers of academic criticism in *T.S.Eliot's Poetry Poetry and Plays* (1956). In his "Study in Sources and Meaning" he tries to illustrate the allusions in *The Waste Land* by providing a rational structure for each section and to hunt down every reference. He tells, for example, of 'the cock, crowning enigmatically in Portuguese', and says that the young man carbuncular "is the quester himself; the food laid out in tins is a kind of Grail repast which the Loathly Damsel has prepared". We here can see that a unified narrative is imposed on the poem by taking Tiresias as the central consciousness, every incident spoken by him or reflecting his memories: "Blind and spiritually embittered, Tiresias wrestles with buried emotions unwittingly revived."³⁸ Grover Smith himself seems to wrestle desperately to fit all the details into his pattern. The illogicalities and confusions he is drawn into are nicely demonstrated in the following passage:

At his meeting with the hyacinth girl in the Waste Land, Tiresias the quester has omitted to ask the indispensable question of the Grail initiation. Evidently he has merely stood agape while she, bearing the sexual symbol—the spike-shaped blossoms representing the slain god Hyacinth of the Golden Bough—has awaited the word he cannot utter:

Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing.
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

Grover Smith explains that "Eliot diversified the pattern slightly, for the hyacinth is a male symbol, and then, too, the quester himself has given the flowers to the hyacinth girl. But the effect is the same as in the Grail narratives."³⁹

The last criticism which I read is Frank Kermode's "Babylonish Dialect" which appeared in the *New Statesman*, London, in 1965. This essay is the brilliant study of modernism in *The Waste Land* in which Kermode says that "Eliot has the marks of a modern kind of greatness those beneficial in-

38. *Ibid.*, p.15. and Grover Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp.88, 95.

39. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.15. and Grover Smith, *Ibid.*, p.74.

tutions of irregularity and chaos, the truth of the foul rag and bone shop. Yet we remember him as celebrating order. Over the years he explored the implications of his attitudes to order, and it is doubtful whether many people capable of understanding him now have much sympathy with his view. His greatness will rest on the fruitful recognition of disorder, though the theories will have their interest as theories held by a great man."⁴⁰

Kermode also mentions that Eliot has an aspect of a larger and even more surprising traditionalism when Eliot is called royalist. Kermode insists Eliot was an imperialist in a weirdly pure sense. Kermode thinks this seems at odds with certain aspects of poet's thought-his nostalgia for a closed society, his support for American agrarianism ; but in the end, although he suppressed *After Strange Gods*, they grow from the same root. The essay on Dante, which is one of the true masterpieces of modern criticism, has been called a projection on to the medieval poet of Eliot's own theory of diction and imagery ; but it has, Kermode says, an undercurrent of imperialism, and can usefully be read with the studies of Virgil and Kipling.

The other side of this city of the corrupted dignity of Rome is the Babylon of Apocalypse. Kermode says it is the 'Blick in Chaos'. He finds the imagery of sea and imperial city, the city which is the whore and the mother of harlots, with Mystery on her forehead : Mme Sosostriis and the bejewelled lady of the game of chess-diminished as the sailors and merchants have dwindled to Phlebas, the sea swallowing his concern for profit and loss, and to Mr. Eugenides, his pocket full of currents(base Levantine trade) and his heart set on metropolitan whoring. This is the London of *The Waste Land*, the City by the sea with its remaining flashes of inexplicable imperial splendor.

Kermode concludes, however, that "for its resisting an imposed order, the poem is a part of greatness, and the greatness of its epoch. Therefore, *The Waste Land* can be called an imperial epic ; but such comforts as it can offer are not compatible with any illusions, past, present, or future."⁴¹

IV

The predominant impression one gets when reading through the early criticism of the poem is of a responses that is both serious and questioning. In America the tone was set very much by *The Dial*,

40. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *ibid.*, p.228. and Frank Kermode, *A Babylonish Dialect*(Random House Inc., 1968), pp.67-71.

41. Cox and Hinchcliffe, *Ibid.*, p.234.

whose comments on the award were written by Seldes, and by Edmund Wilson's review, which the former commissioned. After earlier incomprehension and distrust in American criticism, *The Dial* took its tone from Eliot himself, who had demanded of the food critic "a creative interest, a focus upon the immediate future." Further, *The Dial* recognized and approved in Eliot that absence of localism and provincialism, shown in his lack both of apology and of aggression, which allowed him to take his place in a European as well as an American context.

Edmund Wilson, then, in December 1922, described the poem in terms of spiritual drought and the failure of fertility commenting that it seemed the product of a constricted emotional experience, though as a poet Eliot belongs to the divine company. Wilson saw the poem as a triumph in spite of its lack of formal unity, each fragment being an authentic crystal, in contrast to the bewildering mosaic of the *Cantos* of Pound.

In 1923 Conrad Aiken made two important points, first, that Eliot's literary roots were in the French poetry of 1870 to 1900, and, second, that the body of Eliot's work presented the consciousness of the twentieth century poet as very complex and very literary, "a poetry not more actuated by life itself than by poetry." This led on to the recognition that allusion was the fundamental method of the poem. Yet Aiken read these allusions as symbols in the usual sense, as concentration of meaning in a image or images. But what it was that kept these symbols together and guaranteed their unity, Aiken was unable to say, beyond positing "a dim unity of personality or consciousness that sustained the whole assemblage of fragments."⁴² In other words, he was not prepared to re-examine that identification of meaning with unity that his reviews consistently imply and which, it might well be argued, it was Eliot's purpose to displace.

It is likely that Eliot's work—the methods and principles of his criticism and the broader implications of his poetry—will continue to serve as the specific issue for controversial comment and the development of disparate attitudes. Interpretations and analysis of his poetry, however, have tended to become more specialized, more strictly in the academic vein. "Argument in such writing is seldom more than the courteous expression of differences among scholars. This situation contrasts strikingly with the welter of irate and impatient differences of opinion which followed the appearance of *The Waste Land*. The first issue of time (March 3, 1923) reported the rumor that *The Waste Land* was written as a hoax, and that this possibility was considered immaterial by some of its supporters, who claimed that results, and not intentions, were the concern of literature."⁴³

42. Michael Gramt, ed. *T.S. Eliot, The Critical Heritage* Vol.1 (London: Routledge&Kegan Paul, 1982), p.21.

43. Unger, Leonard ed. *T.S. Eliot: A Selected Critique*(New York: Rinehart & Company Inc., 1948), p.xviii.

Finally, the conflict of view over *The Waste Land* seems to bear out Gabriel Josipovici's judgment in 'The Lessons of Modernism' (1977) that Eliot's earlier work resists that "fundamental temptation, the temptation to ascribe meaning, and derives its power instead from its embodiment of a sense of awakening, an awakening that is always frightening". There was no doubting, however, among the hostile reviewers, of Eliot's importance and, as George Watson put it in 1965, "admirers and detractors were equally agreed about the reality of his reputation."⁴⁴

44. Michael Grant, *Ibid.*, p.22.

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