

## SEXING THE WASTE LAND

Gender, Desire, and Sexuality in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

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## Abstract

The article analyses T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) to show how Modernist men often plunge into the wild waters of gender and sexuality, revealing a remarkable degree of anxiety, only rarely accounted for by more traditional critical approaches. *The Waste Land* can be perceived as an expression of male hysteria and, the author argues, hysteria is never far from aberrant sexualities and unruly desires.

## POETRY FOR MEN

T.S. Eliot, exemplary of many male modernist writers, saw his mission in exclusively masculinist terms; for many male modernists, "one of the chief aims of the modernist movement, as they defined it, was the restoration of virility to poetry" (Lamos, 55). James Joyce wrote in his notebooks in the early 1920s that "T S Eliot ends [the] idea of poetry for ladies" (qtd. in Lamos, 55). Many modernist writers believed it was their calling to work towards a male literary coterie, including a primarily male readership, in "a revolt ... against what they saw as the effeminate influence of women writers as well as the prominence of women in the literary marketplace as publishers and patrons" (Lamos, 55, 56).

Harriet Davidson notes that "[r]ecent criticism sees the whole modernist movement as caused in part by shifting notions of sexuality and gender, resulting in an upheaval in both social customs and the very formation of subjectivities" ("Introduction", 15). Similarly, but more directly, Virginia Woolf, not without personal demur, "defined her generation's move away from Victorianism by their decision to talk openly about same-sex love". Moreover, she "felt that homosexuality was, for the next generation of writers, an exclusive passport for literary success" (Lee, 614). Gregory Woods follows Michel Foucault's thesis of the construction of homosexual identity when he claims that "[h]omosexuality is in essence a construct of the (late) nineteenth and twentieth centuries; as an essence it is just as distinctively a characteristic of modernism as are atonalism in music, Cubism in painting, or interior monologue in the novel" (5-6).

The anxiety of masculinity is never far from Eliot's writing. Try as he may to firmly constitute a male literary world, the feminine element makes continuous attempts at its disruption. Eliot's sexuality is thus never unproblematic; indeed, "[t]hroughout his early poetry Eliot typically depicts women as threatening figures who torment and castrate men" (Lamos, 77). In that respect, femininity can be seen as the disturbing element that makes men, either through their identification with or surrender to it, unmanly and effeminate. In short, as Eliot himself admitted, "the problem of female power lies at the core of modernist literature" (81).

Male uncertainty, in a psychological truism, tends to air its frustrations through violence against women. The substantial place that misogyny occupies within Modernism should be taken into account but it should also be emphasised that, moral(istical)ly regretful as it might be, for Eliot this misogyny seems to have been aesthetically productive. Following this logic, I disagree with some of the feminist interpretations that reject Eliot for his anti-women assumptions, because misogyny, among other concepts, when considered outside self-victimising discourse, reveals much more about the misogynist than many would be ready to acknowledge (occasionally even that he was not so misogynist as previously thought).

For a possibly fruitful analysis, therefore, not only gender, not only sexuality, and not only desire should be considered, but the very area where they intersect. Let us call it the queer spot, traditionally blind, and now impossible to ignore.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps appropriate to focus on the poem that brought Eliot fame, and has kept him famous (and occasionally infamous), the poem often seen as the embodiment of Modernism.

#### "MEMORY AND DESIRE"

"The thing now runs from April ... to shantih without [a] break", wrote Ezra Pound to T.S. Eliot in December 1921, commenting on the revisions of *The Waste Land*, which was to be published in *The Criterion* in the October of the following year (Pound's letter to Eliot, 24 Dec. 1921, in Eliot, *Letters*, 497). Even though its structure seems fragmentary, Pound's view of the completeness and unity of the poem appears to be based on formal as well as thematic levels. Stephen Spender correspondingly insists that although Eliot is "a poet of fragments", with fragmentary inspiration, his themes are not fragmentary at all. Rather, "[t]hey are obsessive" (106). Accordingly, I argue that some of the themes binding together the sections and fragments of *The Waste Land* are very closely associated with the notions of gender and sexuality, and in particular with the expression and repression of desire.

Despite Eliot's early critical assertion in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that 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" (21), many interpreters, and not only very recent ones, have seen a degree of biographical approach highly

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<sup>1</sup> Theoretically, my analysis is part(ial)ly indebted to queer theory, especially in its insistence on the relevance of the textual negotiations of (varied and often unstable) genders, desires, and sexualities rather than on stable and definit(iv)e identities that respect, rather than fight, the borders between what is decent or indecent, acceptable or unacceptable, gay or straight.

relevant to their analyses of his poetry. Indeed, so suspicious are some of them of Eliot's poetics of impersonality that they denounce it as "the purest camouflage, whether he was aware of subterfuge or not" (Hall, "Notes", 100-01). Not only aware of it, as Lyndall Gordon writes, Eliot's "celebrated theory of impersonality ... he once admitted, was a bluff" (*Imperfect Life*, 4).

Maud Ellmann insists that both Eliot and Pound "use the doctrine of impersonality to attack their own infatuation with its opposite", and they have both personal and political reasons for endorsing the doctrine (129). The conservative agenda behind the impersonality ideal, in Ellmann's view, began to germinate with Eliot's and Pound's rejection of individualism (198). A slight (mis)appropriation of the argument has given the impression to many critics, it would appear, that they have carte blanche to indulge in more or less deep, though hardly ever very profound, biographical interpretations via often rather implausible conjectures. It has become commonplace to insist that poetics and politics are inseparable and that every artistic, as well as intellectual engagement is ideologically (pre)determined, so much so that texts themselves often end up being ascribed marginal importance in comparison with the omnipotence of interpretation. And there is no denying that whether it is Eliot or his critics (of any conviction, it would seem), cultural hijacking appears tirelessly to be going on – most of all in the places where hijackers pretend to be liberators.

Nevertheless, impersonality has been shown to have had very personal origins, at least in the view of Eliot's more acerbic critics: Maud Ellmann traces the "prying form of criticism" back to the 1880s when, accompanying the rise of popular psychology, "readers had begun to search the text for confessions of the author rather than the truth of the external world". In her view, the impersonal theory of poetry is both a rejection of and a defence against that. She also quotes Eliot telling John Hayward "that he had 'personal reasons' for asserting his impersonality" (5).

For some critics, biography has been a no-go area; for others a go-go area. Eliot's own views against biographical interpretation of poetry have become well-known truisms: from his 1919 assertion that poetry is "an escape from personality" to his warning "against too much psychological and biographical conjecture in the explication of poetry" during his baseball-stadium lecture on "The Frontiers of Criticism" in Minneapolis in 1956 (Ackroyd, 317). And, of course, he prohibited an official biography of himself. In 1938 he told John Hayward, whom he had in mind as his literary executor, that his task would be to prevent the appearance of biographies, the publication of letters and early writings, in other words, "to discourage any attempts to make books of me or about me, and to suppress everything suppressable" (qtd. in Seymour-Jones, 577).

The directions biographically oriented interpretations point at are without fail Eliot's relations to women, particularly Emily Hale and his first wife Vivien, or – seeing *The Waste Land* as an elegy – to Jean Verdenal. It is interesting to observe that the critics of these two "camps" often use very similar strategies, even quote the same (excerpts from) texts, to support their oppositional claims. Exemplary of this are Lyndall Gordon, and John Peter, who support their interpretations of *The Waste Land*

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<sup>2</sup> See also Spender *passim*; Hall, 100; Froula, 166-67; Koestenbaum, 124; Woods, 121-23.

in the light of Eliot's possible real-life experiences with Hale or Verdenal, respectively.<sup>2</sup> It is clearly significant that, forty years after he had published his famous essay, Eliot himself described writing poetry as "[wanting] to get something off one's chest" (Hall, *Interview*, 207), and even though "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was written simultaneously with various fragments of *The Waste Land*, Eliot later commented on the poem as "only the relief of a *personal* and wholly insignificant grouse against life" (Eliot, *Facsimile*, xxxiii, emphasis added).

### "OLD MAN WITH WRINKLED DUGS"<sup>3</sup>

The individual is symptomatic of the state of civilisation as a whole (Spender, 91), but it is the very combination of the public and the private that gives *The Waste Land* its wider significance. Although we are likely to "perceive his poetry as negotiating intractable personal material which persists even in the final form" (Sharratt, 224), it is important to realise that the elements "which are undoubtedly personal in origin ... are also, while not surrendering the poignancy of personal experience, fully thematic, as well as recurrent, and thus something much more than merely or limitedly personal" (Olney, 4).

Among such characteristics, to be readily recognised in the discussion of the poem's intricate dealing with gender, desire, and sexuality, is its widespread ambiguity, more specifically, the ambiguity of gender with its unclear distinctions of male and female characters and voices. Carol Christ, for example, observes that "among the most striking characteristics of Eliot's poetry is the way in which it fragments not just female bodies but all bodies, and frequently in a way that makes gender ambiguous" (29). The reason for this, according to the author, is the problem that the representation of powerful women poses for Eliot's representation of men. To avoid this dilemma he often prefers not to attach gender to bodies at all (30). In *The Waste Land*, in its last section in particular, writes Christ, Eliot's many religious as well as natural images and allusions articulate human situations in a more abstract and gender-free manner, which, by avoiding the categories of body and gender, represses sexual difference (35-36).

In this respect Eliot's more general portrayal of men and women seems of some relevance. Wayne Koestenbaum maintains that "[a]ll of the women in the poem ... are sexually violated, and respond in a hysterical code to this violation" (133). Perhaps the most prominent example is the echoing of Philomel's rape in "The Fire Sermon" (ll. 203-05): "Twit twit twit / Jug jug jug jug jug jug / So rudely forc'd".<sup>4</sup> But Koestenbaum also argues for less obvious, that is to say more metaphorical, "rapes": the Rhine Maidens, for instance, upon realising that their river has been violated and plundered of its treasure, response hysterically: "Weialala leia / Wallala leialala" (ll. 290-91) (Koestenbaum, 134).

Harriet Davidson, on the other hand, admits that the women characters of the poem are linked rather traditionally with sexual desire and reproduction. "But", she

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<sup>3</sup> Eliot, *The Waste Land*, l. 228.

<sup>4</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1974 (1st publ. 1963). All references to Eliot's poetry, except when stated otherwise, are to this edition.

adds, “quite untraditionally the poem concerns itself not just with women as objects of desire, but also with women as subjects with desires” (“Improper Desire”, 127). The scene with the nervous woman (ll. 111-26) or the conversation in the pub (ll. 139-72), as two prominent instances, may not present women in a very positive, emancipated light, but they do bring female perspective into the poem, even if only to disclose “how often desire leads to frustration, ennui, and violence” (*ibid.*, 127).

Some feminist critics, however, have described Eliot as an “archetypal white male élitist conservative literary icon” (Sharratt, 232), and seen literary Modernism solidly founded on “interminable sexual warfare” (Brooker, 213). “For the male modernist”, Sandra M. Gilbert writes, “gender is most often an ultimate reality” (162), and conservative gender distinctions are fundamental for the reinforcement of patriarchal, hierarchical social order. She views the substance of *The Waste Land* as “a Dantesque Inferno of sexual misrule”, full of “anomalous sexuality [arising] from sexual anxiety and specifically from anxiety about a blurring of those gender distinctions in which human beings ought properly to be clothed” (162, 163).

Against the manipulation of binary logic and against the accusations of Eliot as “a nostalgic male with a sexist agenda”, consisting of his supposed devaluation of women’s intellect, his stealing of women’s work, his fight for a male literary history and sexist aesthetic, Jewel Spears Brooker points out that these critics of Eliot miss “the complexity and subtlety of his thinking”, and that their “blindness ... keeps them from recognising those aspects of Eliot’s thinking that support feminism” (219, 221, 223).

Perhaps one of the most explicit examples in *The Waste Land* of different kinds of ambiguity is “a bisexual seer” (Koestenbaum, 133) – Tiresias – an “old man with wrinkled dug” (l. 228). The discussion of this “spectator and not indeed a ‘character’ ... yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest” has been triggered off by Eliot himself in his “Notes on *The Waste Land*”. Eliot goes on to explain that the characters of the poem melt into each other, that all the men are actually one man, “and so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias”. A sentence from the same note, as famous and widely discussed as any, claims that “[w]hat Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem” (Eliot, *Poems*, 82). What does the blind man actually see? Indeed, how literally should Eliot’s conspicuously emphasised verb be taken? A. David Moody draws attention to the fact that we do not see what Tiresias sees; instead, we see him seeing, and “[h]is seeing, without love, passion or pathos, is the dead heart of *The Waste Land*: what the poet must pass beyond or perish” (92). But Eliot’s notes, on the whole “the embodiment of the implied male reader”, in Koestenbaum’s view, “demonstrate that the poem has absences which an external body must fill. The footnotes valorize the poem’s hysteria, and convert it from meaningless chaos into allusiveness” (136).

## THE HYACINTH BOY

If Tiresias is an instance of more outspoken gender ambiguity, then the hyacinth garden is much less obvious. At first glance, the lines in “The Burial of the Dead” seem to be pretty unambiguous: “You gave me Hyacinths first a year ago, / They

called me the hyacinth girl” (ll. 35-36). Lyndall Gordon seems convinced that these lines refer to Emily Hale, who “reappears, through memory and desire, as a source for the hyacinth girl” and “prompts a non-wasteland moment” (“Eliot and Women”, 10). But if we consider the mythological implications of the boy Hyacinthus, as well as the link that the manuscript of “A Game of Chess” makes between the hyacinth garden and the drowned sailor, already introduced by Madame Sosostriis and remembered by the neurotic’s partner – “I remember / The hyacinth garden. Those are pearls that were his eyes, yes!” (Eliot, *Facsimile*, 19, ll. 49-50) – then it is no longer entirely impossible to claim that the episode “appears to memorialize not a girl but a boy” (Froula, 162).<sup>5</sup>

Some of the ambiguity has to do with the voices of the poem, Christ argues. The male voice, which is not specific in terms of time and space, and “conveys emotion through literary quotation, and portrays experience only through metaphoric figuration” (31), is contrasted with a number of female voices, which, on the contrary, are presented within their settings, dramatic situations, individual stories, and voices. The only exception to this structure, according to Christ, is the hyacinth garden episode, the emotional centre of the poem, where the poet himself is the speaking voice (32).

Moody, who summarises *The Waste Land* as “at once the fulfilment and the contradiction of the romantic tradition of English poetry” (107), having “[a]t its heart ... an intense moment of passion, ‘ecstatic or terrible’, now removed into memory”, likewise maintains that this episode is the centre of the entire poem; and here the direct experience is of primary importance (79). Beside the hyacinth garden, according to Moody, the scenes with the neurotic woman and the typist’s rape are the two other centres which consequently give the surrounding passages their weight, and these in return provide the three centres with illumination and expand them into impersonal generalisations (80).

The three scenes that Moody foregrounds are eminently representative of the failure of (romantic) love and hence, through disturbing passion (“[b]urning burning burning burning” [l. 308]), indicative of a total breakdown of human relationships and profoundly unsatisfying existence. In “The Burial of the Dead”, the memory and desire of the hyacinth garden appear to be so overpowering that the speaker’s senses fail entirely. Unable to speak, see, reason, even live, he undergoes a paralysing experience, “[l]ooking into the heart of light” (l. 41). This ultimate experience, as light itself can be, is dazzling, but it is inexplicable and inexpressible. Therefore, it is only appropriate that the immediately following line, and at the same time the last line of the poem’s segment, should be in a foreign language: “*Oed’ und leer das Meer*” (l. 42). This quotation from Wagner in German, by way of the language and allusion, also relates to the Starnbergersee episode earlier in the section with Marie’s recollections of childhood fear and excitement, and structurally as well as thematically links to the other quotation from Wagner about the lover’s desperation (ll. 31-34).

The nervous woman in “A Game of Chess”, on the other hand, talks a lot, but does not seem to say much to her partner. His only responses – unspoken – are of a private nature, unrelated to the woman and her predicament. A step further, where

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<sup>5</sup> See also Woods, 122; Peter, 169; Seymour-Jones, 300-01.

love and sexuality fail so badly as to turn into downright brutality, is the episode with “the young man carbuncular” (l. 231) and the “bored and tired” typist (l. 236), told in a sharply cool manner by Tiresias:

Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
His vanity requires no response,  
And makes a welcome of indifference.  
 (“The Fire Sermon”, ll. 239-42)

Gordon’s explanation for *The Waste Land*’s disturbing treatment of desire and sexuality is Eliot’s “fierce disgust for the flesh” and his idea of love which “does not fit our usual categories, sexual or romantic”. She believes that Eliot “wished to transform the energy of desire into something absolute and lasting ... nothing less than perfect love” (“Eliot and Women”, 16). She supports her argument by a quote from Eliot’s essay “Views and Reviews” (1935):

I mean the turning away of the soul from desire ... of drugged pleasures, of power, or of *happiness*. I mean “love”, in the sense in which “love” is the opposite of what we ordinarily mean by “love” (the desire to possess and to dominate or to be dominated by) (qtd. in Gordon, “Eliot and Women”, 16).

What Eliot seems to be suggesting here is a defence against destructive, or errant desire which so often intrudes into his own poetry despite his attempts at keeping it at bay. This notwithstanding, it is not as obvious as Gordon seems to suggest whether Eliot’s definition is really so different from “our usual categories, sexual or romantic”. In this context, it is perhaps telling that the “*Datta*” of “What the Thunder Said” (ll. 401-09) suggests that the sole thing worth giving is “[t]he awful daring of a moment’s surrender” (l. 403). That this is (or should be) something out of the ordinary can be gathered from the lines following: the only existence of any valuable significance is that which is uncommon, even if “improper”, “[w]hich an age of prudence can never retract” (l. 404).<sup>6</sup>

Carole Seymour-Jones makes her case for Eliot’s disgust rather more specific. She notes on “the deep hostility of the verses whose subject is a woman” in contrast to those whose subject is male homosociality, or even homoeroticism (297). One of the most striking instances of Eliot’s “disgust for heterosexual love” (301) is perhaps the scene with Lil and Albert of *The Waste Land* (ll. 139-72). Some other critics have offered related views of the tensions operating in the poem. Gregory Woods, discussing *The Waste Land* within the tradition of classic elegies, writes that Eliot expresses “fastidious distaste for the sheer physicality of sex”, and therefore, in a deeply troubled way, “[f]or him the body was the object of fear and revulsion, perhaps especially when most intensely desired”; and it is no different with sexuality – it is a cause of despicable degeneration (187). This, in Woods’s interpretation, is true of Eliot’s atti-

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<sup>6</sup> What is that “[w]hich is not to be found in our obituaries” (l. 406), and that so fundamentally shakes our hearts, has, of course, been subject to various contesting interpretations. For a brief summary of the argument, see Seymour-Jones, 296.

tudes towards both homo- and heterosexuality. The openly homosexual episode with Eugenides (ll. 208-14), just like any other in the poem, “merely underlines how things have worsened since the moment in the hyacinth garden” (122).

#### “A HEAP OF BROKEN IMAGES”<sup>7</sup>

Colleen Lamos argues that the attraction that the poem has for present-day readers is in its resistance to coherence, which has led many recent critics to interpret it “as a critique of literary and sexual proprieties” (108). Harriet Davidson accordingly asserts that “*The Waste Land* can be read as a poem about the proper and the improper”; more specifically, it “returns again and again to ‘improper’ sexual desire, temptation, and surrender and their often tragic consequences” (“Improper Desire”, 122). The desire of New Criticism to establish the dominance of the proper over the improper is, according to Davidson, abundantly exemplified in the “Notes” that Eliot provided for the editions of *The Waste Land* following the publication in *The Criterion*. Whether Eliot’s purpose with the notes was wholly serious or not, he did encourage “the kind of source-hunting that began to take over readings of the poem” (*ibid.*, 124). Such views of “scholarly propriety” on the side of the “proper, pedagogic side” of the poem appeared “to promise a full and scientifically accurate explanation which would overcome its fragmentation and suggestiveness” (*ibid.*, 125).

Where Carol Christ makes the distinction between different (types of) voices along the gender divide, Davidson contrasts a lyric voice opening the poem (using metaphoric and symbolic images, repetitive and stylized syntax) with “the babel of many voices” (resisting categorisation, emerging in vivid scenes, full of movement and change) (“Improper Desire”, 125). While the singular authoritative voice, tending toward finality, relates the visions of waste and repulsion of life in a controlled manner, the other voices with their many shifts and alterations, make any definite, clear-cut demarcations of identities impossible. The two modes, “of sterile propriety and fertile impropriety”, run parallel to two of the poems most striking images: desert and water – “the dry, unchanging desert contrast[s] throughout the poem with life-giving rain and drowning sea” (*ibid.*, 126, 125).

Christine Froula’s reading of the poem similarly finds “the deep conflict in the poem between forbidden passion ... and the self-disgusted degradation and repudiation of such desire” (167). Her point of departure is the manuscript of *The Waste Land*, and the fact that its initial title was “He Do the Police in Different Voices” prompts her to name the speaker’s divided selves, split apart by his internal need to repress desire, “the Police” (“the forbidding, judging, threatening self”) and “the Lover” (“the passionate, remembering, desiring self”) (168). The already mentioned merging of characters into one another, often from attractive into repugnant (an opposite example would be the blending of Mr. Eugenides with the Phoenician sailor) stems from the need of the Lover in the speaker to appease the repressive Police (174). This approach has enabled Froula to combine some of the more controversial inter-

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<sup>7</sup> Eliot, *The Waste Land*, l. 22.

pretations of *The Waste Land*. Acknowledging the view that the poem is an elegy for Verdenal, she maintains that it is more than that – first and foremost, it mourns the Lover, whose death is again and again brought forward, because

[b]y the lights of the Police, the unworthy Lover must be suppressed, drowned, so that the modern poet can abandon his former sins, amend his life – so that he can, in other words, fashion himself the inheritor not only of Dante’s poetic authority but of the Christian epic poet’s moral authority (175).

Inasmuch as the poem is open to different interpretations because of its interest in metamorphosis, quick and unorthodox juxtapositions, blurred boundaries, the blending of characters and voices, extensive intertextuality, as well as the refusal to make definite connections between images, scenes and voices, the reader is “drawn into the chain of desire to search for final meanings in a poem which suggests these meanings but then denies them any stability” (Davidson, “Improper Desire”, 128). Yet, as much as the reader, together with the Police, may strive for order, and aspire to enforce complete control,

the desire for stability, the desire to end desire, is always a paradoxical one.... The reader’s interpretation, like any desire for order, is really just another proliferation of possibility, not at all a stabilizing of the poem. In this sense all desire is improper desire, disrupting clarity and stability in favor of change and movement (*ibid.*, 126).

The tensions between the desire for order and the surrender to the chaotic desire of life, Davidson points out, remain in place throughout the poem (“Improper Desire”, 129-31).

## WOMEN: HISTORICALLY HYSTERICAL?

Wayne Koestenbaum argues that there are clear “affinities between the discourse of high male modernism and the discourse of hysteria” (114). For him, too, “the desire is ultimately stronger than prudence”; and he analogously explains what he calls “hysterical discontinuities” in the light of *The Waste Land*’s textual history, which he perceives as a repression of “Eliot’s arguably sexual interest in Jean Verdenal” (135). Pound’s revisions buried the “homosexual subtext” and omitted the more “elucidative” poems, and that is why “*The Waste Land* suffers from Eliot’s reminiscences of Jean Verdenal” (124). Throughout his analysis, Koestenbaum argues that the reminiscences that hysterical texts (like patients) suffer from are those of queer erotic attachments. That also explains, for him, the role of Ezra Pound for the poem. Pound set out to cure the poem’s hysteria by cutting certain representations of the feminine and by masculinising its core, and he demanded less indecisive language (124-25). Pound saw Eliot’s – and his speakers’ – inability to act, either erotically and linguistically, as the “primary hysterical symptom”. He did not allow Eliot any affinities with the effeminate Prufrock and the anxious Gerontion, who are “afraid of desire

and direct statement". Whatever the cost, Pound attempted to rid his friend of "pathological indecision about gender and sexual preference" (128-29).

It has to be stressed again that

[f]ar from proving that Eliot was secretly homosexual or that the 'hyacinth girl' is Verdenal in disguise, these contiguities demonstrate the vagrancy of forbidden desires and identifications which Eliot considered errant and, especially later, tried to distinguish sharply. Indeed, they testify to the force of Eliot's determined, stiff-upper-lip affirmation of heterosexual masculinity (Lamos, 114).

Following the Freudian notion that hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences, Maud Ellmann defines *The Waste Land* as "the most hysterical of texts" (91), whilst Christine Froula, too, observes the poem's abundance of reminiscences and disturbances. She maintains, moreover, that the Lover is not entirely silenced because he has learnt how to escape, or avoid, the Police: he has to be, not unlike the songs of the mythological birds, unintelligible (177). The very end of the poem returns to the inability of expressing oneself and communicating with others. Echoing the devastation of the Babel Tower, fully in line with the poem's persistent use of a mixture of voices, the final lines in English (including its Elizabethan variant), Italian, Latin, French, and Sanskrit, coming from widely disparate contexts, has to be the one choice to illustrate how the Lovers' self-imposed unintelligibility culminates in *The Waste Land*:

I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me  
Shall I at least set my lands in order?  
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down  
*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam uti chelidon* – O swallow swallow  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine í la tour abolie*  
These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih

("What the Thunder Said", ll. 423-433)

But just as the more you try to suppress something, the more it will force its way onto the surface, so the disruptions of the repressed subtext and the aberrations of all sorts are never far away. Koestenbaum asserts that the "memories of enacted desire return so intensely that by each section's end, Eliot's language is fractured". This is one of the basic characteristics of hysterical discourse, which is the result of the "extreme retreat from desire into hysteria" (134, 135).

It is very important to add that just as a hysteric needs an analyst, hysterical discourse (in Eliot's case a poem) needs a reader. Such a confessional discourse "is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (Foucault, 61). If we

relate this to *The Waste Land*, then Koestenbaum's interpretation seems quite to the point. "As hysterical discourse", he writes, "*The Waste Land* remains passive: it invites a reader to master it. Unwilling to explain itself or move past hysterical disjunction, requiring a reader-as-collaborator ('mon semblable, – mon frère!' [l. 76]) to unravel its disguises, it is a feminine text, and implies a male reader" (135).

Hysteria is, generally speaking, often directly linked to sexuality but it is typical of Eliot's poetry up to the mid-1920s that the tackling of male sexuality through hysteria takes the direction from external description to internal revelation: at first it seems as if the male speaker only described hysteria around himself, generally in a woman, but it eventually turns out that he is at least as much the victim of the condition as she is. The belief that hysteria is solely a female malady is thus ceaselessly unmasked as a mere disbelief.

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