

T. S. Eliot, Ecofeminist

Over the past five decades the notion has taken root that T. S. Eliot is sexist. This has spawned the assumption that his poetry must also be sexist. Careful reading of his poetic oeuvre shows that his minor poem “Hysteria” does seem to suffer from a misogynist tone. This is an important reason for its minor status. To use one of Eliot’s familiar terms, the poem is failed by its objective correlative. The narrow tones reduce its objects, thus spoiling its emotional bearing for the reader.

However, reading any of his major poems allows a different picture to emerge when it comes to Eliot and sexism. As I will argue in the remainder of this [presentation], in his major poetry, a rubric including *The Waste Land*, *Four Quartets*, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” “Rhapsody on a Windy Night,” “Gerontion,” and “The Hollow Men,” Eliot surfaces as an early ecofeminist. This could come as a surprise to some critics. Has it not been established that Eliot is the epitome of the sexist poet? Does it not speak for itself that this sexist man’s poems oppress women? In response to these demanding questions this presentation will retain a certain literary equanimity for the moment, turning to *The Waste Land* published in 1922.

The fragmentary configuration of nuggets in this poem offers various images of waste, including images from working life. One of these depicts a scene from the closing of the London business day at [Quote/Unquote]“the violet hour,” presumably when light fades in its prolonged London manner. Millions return home after a long day at what was then, in the early twentieth century, the world’s central market place. As we will see, one of these is a typist returning to her small flat, a scene witnessed by the blind seer-prophet Tiresias, who turns out to be intriguingly hermaphrodite in Eliot’s poem. Tiresias shares with other figures in the poem such as the Sybil of Cumae and Madame Sosostris a double existence: he-she-it has the ability to experience the time-bound world of everyday life as well as the timeless

realm of spiritual perception, the numinous. These legendary personas therefore occupy that supreme space, also that very human space, between matter and spirit. They see a more comprehensive meaning because they see the everyday world from a timeless perspective. Like the other personas in the poem who experience unity between the two worlds, though, Tiresias seems to be on the very brink of death: exhausted, de-vitalized, participating in what Max Weber called in 1904, in a much-discussed phrase, *die Entzauberung der Welt*, that is, the disappearance of the numinous from everyday life (Josipovici 2010, 11). [Now that we have Tiresias more or less in place, let us revisit this passage of the poem as found on the first page of the handout in front of you. Quote]

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back  
 Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits  
 Like a taxi throbbing waiting,  
 I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,  
 Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see  
 At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives  
 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,  
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights  
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins.  
 Out of the window perilously spread  
 Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,  
 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)  
 Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.  
 I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs  
 Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—

I too awaited the expected guest.  
 He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,  
 A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,  
 One of the low on whom assurance sits  
 As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.  
 The time is now propitious, as he guesses,  
 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,  
 Endeavours to engage her in caresses  
 Which still are unreproved, if undesired.  
 Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;  
 Exploring hands encounter no defence;  
 His vanity requires no response,  
 And makes a welcome of indifference.  
 (And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
 Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
 I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)  
 Bestows one final patronising kiss,  
 And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit... [Unquote] (Eliot 2001, 12)

One marvels at how Eliot turns mundane realities and prosaic utterances into the poignant music of poetry. One marvels further at how carefully he depicts the suppression of women in modern time. To begin with, the typist is trapped in a tiny space within a mechanized city, and in his 1939 prose essay titled *The Idea of a Christian Society* Eliot critiques what he terms [Quote/Unquote] “the mechanistic life,” a way of existing that according to the poet denies the integrity of religious perception of the concrete unfolding of

existence (1980, 290). For him, this daily denial is the root cause of ecological destruction (1980, 290). Of course fellow poets and philosophers of Eliot's day were equally troubled by the mechanization of the relationship between humanity and Earth; the poet's conscious or unconscious choice of the typist image is not incidental.

She has been sitting in her office for hours and hours to press the hammers home. She lights her stove, a warm image that reminds of centuries of humanity carried by the intimate ritual of mealtime after a long, hard day prior to a long, unfamiliar night. But she lays out her food in those lonely tins, not least since mechanization and World War I in particular led to the skyrocketing of demand for canned food. The ritual has become enclosed in mass metal. More frighteningly, sex, too, has become mechanized, driven by urban ennui. Carefully these lines suggest the parallel between habitual control of Earth and abuse of female sexuality.

But now that the clerk has left, how does the typist respond? [As found on page three of your handout, we read that, Quote]

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,

Hardly aware of her departed lover;

Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:

“Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.”

When lovely woman stoops to folly and

Paces about her room again, alone,

She smooths her hair with automatic hand,

And puts a record on the gramophone. [Unquote]

(Eliot 2001, 12)

The mechanical imagery so carefully prepared in the preceding passage finds its culmination. Starting with the images of an engine, a taxi, a stove, and tins, we have progressed to an automatic hand. The typist looks in the mirror, she is too tired to think, her

actions are involuntary. The hand that types all day smoothes hair in a disconnected manner. She has been displaced in her home, and her so-called lover's assault is just part of the pervasive modern subjugation of an authentic inner existence reflected in a sensuous outer existence. The progression of mechanical imagery in the poem now goes further, suggesting that loose sex has become automatic: the little hole in the record is placed over the stunted little phallus of the gramophone. It turns and turns but the music probably means as little as the clerk's approach.

And Tiresias knows that sex has remained the most available form of mystical oneness between opposites in modern time but he witnesses how male dominance lays waste the prospect of that fragile unity. As in the case of all Eliot's allusions, these allusions to past texts in *The Waste Land* carry a prophylactic awareness of generational corruption to which I will return in this [presentation].

The timing of the rhyming in these lines of the words "and" and "hand" is almost unbearably sensitive and alive. With fragility the "and" wavers, a lyrical note, a momentary direct glimpse into the sensitivity that foresuffers the casually disturbing scene. The word "and" comes at the end of its line, suspending the line in expectation. And...[pause] what? And: she smoothes her hair with *automatic hand*. In this way the reader's expectation is also made to end in the image of repetition, set off against resilient sensitivity. The hypocrite reader is led to sympathize on a refined level with patriarchy's disregard for the typist and the earthly matters of food, sex, home, and so forth. As is usual in Eliot, the lines get under the reader's skin, sometimes even before one can explain the lines.

But is this the only image in the poem that critiques patriarchy, that is, male dominance that narrows and violates humanity's experience of Earth and female energies, thus also narrowing the experience of male energies? Far from it: once noticed, the poem

teems with images of this important critique. Consider, for instance, the persona of Lil. She is being discussed by anonymous female friends in a bar, presumably in London again. [As found on the handout on page three,] one of these friends gossips as follows [quote]:

When Lil's **husband** got demobbed, I said—

I didn't **mince** my **words**, I **said** to her **myself**,

**HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME**

Now **Albert's** coming **back**, make yourself a bit **smart**.

He'll want to **know** what you **done** with that money he gave you

To get yourself some **teeth**. He **did**, I was **there**.

You have them all **out**, Lil, and get a **nice** set,

He said, I **swear**, I can't **bear** to look at you.

And no more can't **I**, I said, and think of **poor** Albert,

He's been in the army **four years**, he wants a **good** time,

And if **you** don't **give** it **him**, there's others **will**, I said. [unquote] (Eliot 2001, 9)

Lil's friend is apparently quite concerned for her. Now that he has returned from war, Albert just wants a good time and surely a woman ought to do her best for any man, especially if the man has been largely absent performing military duties for his country. After all, he gave her money for new teeth. And Lil's friend also feels evident sympathy for poor Albert. Perhaps she has an eye on Albert, sensing the weakness of her friend Lil, her sudden opponent.

One imagines how the drinks go down in this busy bar late at night in the aftermath of wartime as Lil's friend continues to say [quote]

You ought to be **ashamed**, I said, to look **so antique**.

(And **her** only thirty-**one**.)

I can't **help** it, she said, pulling a **long** face,

It's them **pills** I took, to **bring** it **off**, she said.

(She's had **five** **already**, and nearly **died** of young George.)

The **chemist** said it would be **all right**, but I've **never** been the **same**. [unquote] (Eliot 2001, 10)

Not only has Albert trapped Lil's entire existence in his lust but the chemist could not care less about a dispensable woman's health. It "would be all right" but she is losing her teeth and suffering from the consequences of five pregnancies and an abortion. The poem shows how the male dominant act of modern war leads to hell not only for affluent urban women as found elsewhere in the poem (9) but especially for millions of poor women sitting in bars across the cosmopolitan world. With terror the passage shows what it means for a woman to get trapped in her biology (Brooker 1994, 239), while men cause the entrapment and shrug their shoulders. Though there is too little time here to discuss it comprehensively, the poem as a whole moreover shows intense awareness of a modern cultural language trap, that is, the one-sided condition at the opposite end of the biology trap, while the poem demonstrates that men are instrumental to the creation of both of these parallel traps.

The bartender wants to close shop, calling "HURRY UP **PLEASE ITS TIME**," reinforcing the poem's overall comment on the disenchanting nature of modern time. Lil's friend has one or two further observations to make and the little drama closes as her words melt into the much-discussed goodnight greeting of Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—words uttered by Ophelia just before she commits suicide. Eliot probably cites them in adumbration of Lil's fate [as found on your handout on page four, quote]:

Well, that **Sunday** Albert was **home**, they had a **hot gammon**,

And they asked **me in** to dinner, to **get** the **beauty** of it **hot**—

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS **TIME**

HURRY UP **PLEASE ITS TIME**

Goon**ight** Bill. Goon**ight** Lou. Goon**ight** **May**. Goon**ight**.

Ta ta. Goon**ight**. Goon**ight**.

Good night, ladies, good night, **sweet** ladies, good night, good night. [unquote] (Eliot 2001, 10)

And so it is clear that not only men but also women suffer from and participate in the cruelties resulting from war. I mention this because an intrinsic fibre of the poem's greatness is Eliot's egalitarian handling of the opposite realms of male and female experience. In a world strangely master-minded by the dry rationalism and control that comes when numinous perception of corporeal existence has lost its vitality in the mind of Europe (or in the mind of early globality, for that matter), Lil, her friend, the carbuncular clerk, and Albert suffer equally and they equally inflict suffering.

The victims include not only men and women but also language. In some respects modern English amounts to the poem's final irony since it is an extension of the Vedic, Greek, and Roman civilizations, while the poem painstakingly relates itself to how these cultures and languages have decayed over time. The poem's fragmentary English indeed presents a fractured ontology. Its modern English ironies point to cultural entropy. These daring acts of fragmenting the artistic medium reflect the risk that this poem and modern art as a whole is willing to take in the face of experience hollowed out by inauthentic inner worlds. These acts indicate the extent of modern art's artistic and social commitment. In the case of *The Waste Land*, that commitment is not afraid to tackle the central matter of skewed relations between men and women. It has not been mentioned, for instance, that gender is central to a passage in the poem containing some of the most extreme fragmentation in Eliot's oeuvre and modernism as a whole. It occurs at the conclusion of Section III of *The*

*Waste Land* titled “The Fire Sermon” where one finds what could be termed an embodied **crumbling**, [as found on page four of the handout, quote]:

“On Margate sands.

I can connect

Nothing with nothing.

The broken **f**ingernails of **d**irty hands.

My people humble people who expect

Nothing.”

**la la**

To Carthage then I came

**Burning burning burning burning**

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest

burning [unquote]

(Eliot 2001, 15)

Even at this end of linguistic limits, Earth is crucial to the poetic engagement. (After all, though *The Waste Land* is abundantly metaphorical, its title does contain the word “land.”) The passage refers to a place that Eliot knew when he was suffering from depression: a seaside resort at the Thames estuary in Margate (North 2001, 15). This sense of place reverberates in the other lines of this passage. One of the most striking is the allusion to the Philomela legend where she is raped by King Tereus in Ovid’s eighth century cornerstone text of Western culture titled *Metamorphoses*: that is, the image reading [Quote/Unquote] “The broken fingernails of dirty hands” with its emphatic full stop. It beams into the field of

significance with harrowingly concrete realism. The one-sidedness of emplacement that is too intense is paralleled by the one-sidedness of disjunction between spirit and matter.

I am struck further by the rhyming of “hands” with “sands,” which suggests Philomela’s terrible ordeal of being powerlessly pinned to the soil. The fragment viscerally describes the knowledge that the raping of Philomela involves an alienated physical closeness to and psychological distance from Earth. Humans cannot be this cruel without dissociating from Earth and who they are, their nature. From this perspective rape can be defined as the disconnection from nature that is concomitant with brutal employment of physical domination. It is little wonder that the next fragment, equally beaming onto the page as if from nowhere, “la la,” alludes to the Thames daughters, figures from the pagan past who used to present complete reciprocity between mytho-poetic insight and the flowing river. The fragment pitifully evokes a lost, sacred sense of Earth. Indeed, elsewhere the poem laments the bottles, sandwich papers, handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, and cigarette ends that the river bears (Eliot 2001, 11). The fragment “la la” moreover alludes to Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde* (North 2001, 14), sustaining the notion that fractious engagement with Earth mirrors the detriment of severance between male and female worlds.

The little piece from Augustine’s *Confessions*, [Quote/Unquote] “To Carthage then I came,” centres again on that ultimate earthly and mystical connection, sex—to which the whole of the solipsistic and much-discussed character of Eliot’s Prufrock of course cannot respond. To Carthage Augustine (1907, 31) comes only to enter a cauldron of unholy loves including all kinds of sexual promiscuities, Manichean complications of body-soul divisions, and a soap-opera-like disillusionment. He burns with desire that cannot be fulfilled, a theme not unlike themes carried by the rock songs of our day. Hence the apparently idiotic fragment “Burning burning burning burning” followed by broken images of the Lord plucking out the eye of desire so that tranquillity could arrive at last. One “final” and wholly isolated instance

of the fragment-verb “burning” breaks down as the passage and the section in the poem conclude.

As in the case of the other fragments in the poem, each fragment here is valuable since it carries a link with the meaningful past, in this instance the Buddha’s fire sermon. There the Buddha identifies the flames of desire (in mind, body, feelings, spirit, and in the eye) as the root cause of human suffering. Extinguishing these desires and the false impressions that brings them about causes what we term the peace that passeth understanding or, in a frequently-used current word, mindfulness of coexistence. But what happens to this important recognition if, through interference of an eye such as Albert’s or that of the carbuncular clerk, desire itself no longer occurs but only the automations of patriarchal “perception”? Eliot suggests (1980, 236) that the *prospect* of calmness, wisdom, and authentic coexistence is thwarted. Not even that full verbal phrase—“to burn with sexual desire”—rings completely true in a society where perception has become automatic. The alive everyday sense of good and evil has dissipated from this kind of perception, leaving humanity in doldrums between religious dispensations, doldrums that keep truly human behaviour uncannily alive. And language, having lost some of its vital sexiness because of its dissociation from an enchanted sense of Earth, can at best reflect the loss in a heap of broken images, including the depiction of Philomela’s broken fingernails in the unforgiving sand. Little or no reverence for concrete coexistence on Earth in fact means that matter turns into so much dormant, mute powder—“stuff”—which *The Waste Land* summarizes in a caveat reading [Quote/Unquote]: “I will show you **fear** in a handful of **dust**” (Eliot 2001, 6).

Paradoxically, Eliot renders these matters in the form of compellingly embodied poetry that persistently points at the **wholeness** of being by tracing its **absence**. The tensions between his dramatic aesthetic lyricism on the one hand and the narrowly alive flickering of authentic experience on the other, furthermore make of this poem a haunting work of art. And

part of the poem's relevance to our time is its mind-boggling adumbrations in 1922 of climate change or Earth fever, of a sombrely solar inner world reflected in the outer world of increasing desert, the desertification of planet Earth's living complexity (see also Harrison 1993, 149). Within *The Idea of a Christian Society* Eliot states in so many words that the modern lack of spiritual harmony with Earth would lead to [Quote/Unquote] "dearth and desert" and the intense suffering of future generations (1980, 290). But it is in the poem that we find the most lurid images of the desertscape within and without. I cannot do justice to all of these images. Hence I focus on one example, [as printed on page five of the handout, quote]:

[firm with pauses on [k]!]

Here is no water but only rock  
 Rock and no water and the sandy road  
 The road winding above among the mountains  
 Which are mountains of rock without water  
 If there were water we should stop and drink  
 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think  
 Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand  
 If there were only water amongst the rock  
 Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit  
 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit  
 There is not even silence in the mountains  
 But dry sterile thunder without rain  
 There is not even solitude in the mountains  
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl  
 From doors of mudcracked houses

[softer/ more furtive]

If there were water

And no rock

If there were rock

And also water [unquote]

(Eliot 2001, 6)

By presenting the modern condition of opposites in the form of this immense chanting that rings from a world of complete aridity, in the form of this searing desertscape, and in the form of this place of female hands pinned to the powdery sands of male brutality, Eliot provides a unique prototype of the current ecofeminist insistence (Carr 2011, 9) on the parallels between oppression of women and mutilation of Earth. King Tereus' "authority" and Philomela's rape reflect that particular modern lack of perceiving Earth and female energies in deep terms.

Where there should be a kind of "threeness" or three-dimensionality of inner recognition where grown-up power meets the sensitivity of feeling and sacredness, there is only the meagre and crippling "twoness" represented by two sets of one-sidedness, as mentioned: one a supposedly reasonable, patriarchal language trap and the other its parallel, a biology trap of the kind experienced by Lil. At the heart of this, or, at the lack of the heart of this, resides the recognition of patriarchy, once more: dissociation of male and female energies results in dominance that emaciates experience, including experience of maleness itself. Dryness cannot find its opposite of moisture to **open** renewed tangible spaces that would be joyous and fertile for growth. *The Waste Land* therefore gives us not only a profound and disturbing poetic description of the ecofeminist problem but also offers a **diagnosis** and prognosis. Opposite worlds that have split into parallel but disengaged sets of one-sidedness should combine again in that integrity which is of a corporeal, open-ended, dynamic, sensitive, and participating transcendence. And this can be achieved through re-

membering, re-integrating, the world of numinous awareness and the world of material being. It is my belief that the poem's conclusion carefully arrives at open-ended integration of this nature, as I argue in a monograph on Eliot and Earth.

Now, the proto-ecofeminist picture I sketched here does not show up in the extant critical response to Eliot. Over the past half century new strands of Eliot criticism have emerged that mirror the many shifts in emphasis that have characterized the study of literature, though, of course, excellent close reading of his work and life continued unabatedly. Very broadly speaking, these shifts have amounted to elision of great primary literary works such as *The Waste Land* in the name of a tidal wave of secondariness that wants secondary contexts to swallow primary texts. Lingering in the moment of the text has not been practiced in these criticisms. Often this view has portrayed authors with considerable gifts as little more than ideological puppets. In many cases the focus **shifted** to what could be **exhumed** about authors in a frenzy of personality forensics. In Eliot's case, he was more or less found to be a sexist, misogynist, totalitarian, fascist, anti-Semitic racist!

The attack has been a little less relentless over the past decade and the jury seems to be out on whether he really was so sexist and anti-Semitic in life, after all, even though these were of course common diseases from which most men in his days suffered quite unconsciously or "naturally." **Can** we expect of our poetic heroes to have risen in their daily lives above the taken for granted prejudices of their time? Perhaps my generation lacks self-irony here. For example, we do not yet think twice too much about driving our cars and flying in those tiny tubes that crack us across the oceans despite the knowledge that we are thus borrowing the atmosphere from our children as though it were a gigantic credit card that they will have to pay for by struggling to find water, food, or refuge from oppressive heat and climate migrators. How should **they** judge the relations between our texts and our lives?

At the outset of this discussion I mentioned the tendency among critics to assume that a sexist Eliot must have composed sexist poetry. This brings the conversation to the important cultural studies work of two superstar feminists, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The main culprit, the huge enemy to be brought down in their famous book titled *The War of the Words* indeed happens to be Mr. Eliot. In feminist warmongering huge targets count. Their assault ironically forces Eliot exactly into that terrain that he critiques, namely a binary logic of bitter enmity between two one-sided camps, one male and one female, as has been shown by Jewel Spears Brooker in her 1994 essay on Gilbert, Gubar, tradition, and female enmity.

They soon find Eliot guilty of such binaries: first the man, then his prose writings, and then, with the greatest of apparent ease, his poetry and *The Waste Land* in particular. In a false comparison with F. Scott Fitzgerald, who on one occasion took his wife Zelda's words as his own, Gilbert and Gubar find Eliot the man guilty of stealing from **his** wife, Vivien (Brooker 1994, 218; Gilbert and Gubar 1988, 153). But, as Brooker shows, the former was [Quote/Unquote] "a theft deeply resented" while the latter was [Quote/Unquote] "a gift joyously bestowed" (218). Brooker continues that [Quote] Eliot invited

not only Ezra Pound but his wife to look over his manuscript and make suggestions. In the second section ("A Game of Chess"), Vivien remarked through various words and lines and suggested alternates, with the note: "Make any of these alterations—or *none* if you prefer." Some of her recommendations are excellent, a fact Eliot easily recognized. He accepted, for example, her suggestion of "pills" to replace his more general "medicine" in the line that now reads, "It's them pills I took, to bring it off" [unquote] (218).

A number of Vivien's comments are enthusiastically appreciative: [Quote] "WONDERFUL... wonderful & wonderful... Yes... Splendid last lines," [unquote] she

writes in bold pencil next to lines in the poem's draft (218). The tone of her marginalia, writes Brooker, makes it clear that [quote] "she was delighted to be taken seriously as a reader-critic. Driven by their 'battle of the sexes' metaphor, however, Gilbert and Gubar missed a point that Vivien understood very well. Eliot respected her **judgement**, as he did that of Ezra Pound" [unquote] (218).

Having found Eliot guilty of female oppression and abuse in life, then, Gilbert and Gubar rush across to the poetry with binaries in hand. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" according to them shows that Eliot prefers culture over nature and therefore maleness over femaleness. Rather astonishingly, the opposite is again true: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" signposts that Eliot is sick of culture (Brooker 1994, 225). As for *The Waste Land*, they subsequently simply quote a mistaken James Joyce to clinch their mistaken finding that the major poem, too, suffers from the one-sided binaries that they project onto Eliot.

It is therefore necessary to point out, despite the valuable contributions that Gilbert and Gubar indeed made to the feminist debate, among other things by rescuing powerful female writers "from near oblivion" (Brooker 1994, 213), that their jingoist approach misplaces Eliot's poetry. Most particularly, it misplaces the remarkable ecofeminist aspect of the poem.

As a final consideration [tonight], after about thirty years of reading this poet, I would like to linger for a moment in the recognition that I have come to know two Eliots. These two Eliots are sometimes related and sometimes foreign to each other but I know whom among them is real, important, and knowable in a special sense. Let us say that the second Eliot is the persona of the man that we are able to build up around access to archives. This is a very important Eliot who is related to the first. But in a deadly sense I do not wish to meet him at my desk tomorrow morning whereas I almost always look forward to meeting again the first

Eliot, the one I continue to learn to know in his poetic compositions. There he becomes upon careful reading what George Steiner terms [quote/Unquote] a “real presence” (1989, 4), that is, when we meet in the poems as worlds he transgresses the boundaries of his ego and his personal history into my world as I transgress the boundaries of my ego and personal history into his world, a singular form of human freedom made possible by the immediacy of art. In this sense I meet in the poems what we term by way of the shorthand of his surname, “Eliot.”

I am reminded of Jacques Derrida who cites from Heidegger in his, Derrida’s, much-discussed biographical movie where Derrida more or less acts himself as a famous philosopher of our time, complete with cat and pipe. In the movie Derrida cites Heidegger who was asked what we should make of Aristotle’s life: [Quote] “He was born. He thought. He died,” Heidegger retorted, adding that [Quote/Unquote] “the rest is pure anecdote” (2017). This is relatively true but, *with* Derrida, I presume, I would not go as far as to say that Eliot was born, wrote poetry, and died, and that the rest was pure anecdote. Rather, the analogy that springs to mind for me when it comes to meeting the poetic Eliot in his poems is that of listening to music. It is as though I am a man who lives a shallow, poor life, struggling along. Then in a busy, noisy street this man incidentally passes a window and hears someone playing music on a piano, notes in sensuous touch with the tangible silence they create, while the drifting of that music into his incidental ear shows the man that life enjoys an unfathomable place of resonance where communication occurs on levels not noticed before. In short, the man experiences depth. And the event is entirely akin, as if by itself, to meeting a new person. Perhaps it is for this reason that we refer to Beethoven’s music simply as “Beethoven” and Eliot’s poetry as “Eliot.” “So, who are you reading at the moment?” “Well, I’m reading Eliot.” Behind the frailty of this everyday manner of speaking lies a considerable truth.

To boot, the idea of meeting someone in the poems is not as impressionistic as it sounds. Brain research is catching up with this recognition. I recommend the reading of Iain McGilchrist's book titled *The Master and his **E**missary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* as a whole, even as I necessarily fragment his argument by citing one or two passages from it. McGilchrist put himself in a position to give a particularly thorough and unique perspective on brain division and cultural development because he is an Oxford professor of literature who has qualified himself to practice as a psychiatrist and then, on top of that, as a specialist in the new science of neuroimaging. But of course the proof of the pudding lies in the reading, which I cannot recommend highly enough for those who continue to **dare** to **think** about opposite **conditions** in our time.

His book meticulously cleans from the table embarrassing popularized ideas about the divided brain. Language does *not* sit in the left hemisphere, for example. And the right hemisphere is not picturesque, silent, and conveniently female. Equally painstakingly McGilchrist gets rid of the reductive thought that everything can be explained by the physical nature of this imperative organ. On this basis and much more, and faced with a lack of exact English words, McGilchrist separates two forms of knowing as found in the German words *kennen* and *wissen* [a separation that will make instant sense to the Afrikaans speakers present tonight] (2012, 96). *Kennen* is to know someone intimately and it goes with **right** brain modes of attention. One does have knowledge, *wissen*, of one's beloved: his or her height, age, date of birth, and so on and so forth, but hopefully one does not share a knowing life with him or her based purely on attention to these relatively anecdotal facts that go with **left** brain modes of attention. Conversely and perhaps more importantly for our time (since we seem to be forgetting it), *kennen*, knowing in the individual sense, can be **applied** to apparently impersonal things such as a piece of music or a poem. In McGilchrist's words, [Quote] the

approach to music is like entering into relation with another living individual, and [brain] research suggests that understanding **music** is perceived as similar to knowing a person; we freely attribute human qualities to music, including age, sex, personality characteristics and feelings [unquote] (96).

This is also true, for me, of reading those literary works of art that get to me and stay with me. In the case here I simply applied my **experience** of reading *The Waste Land* to the important ecofeminist debate of our time, a lens enabling us to read our past authors to make them present for us in a special and important moral sense. It is here that I am baffled by the culture studies ease with which critics will glean moral victories from what we know about past persons and apply these supposed facts to the poems as though the poems do not exist as known individuals.

And the case of Gilbert and Gubar is not unique when it comes to Eliot. As I have shown in the mentioned monograph on Eliot and Earth, the inimitable Edward Said for whose writing I have great appreciation alas similarly ignores the poems to dismiss, in that case, Eliot's orientalism, again as though the alive individual sense of meeting the poems in their very who-ness has somehow quietly slipped out of the critic's jargon-filled office.

As McGilchrist probably knows by having examined many students' papers, the work of peers, and so on, it is not easy to put the individual experience of the poem or the piece of music into words. "The empathic nature" of experiencing the art work, he continues, [and I quote]

means that it has more in common with encountering a person than a concept or an idea that could be expressed in words. It is important to recognise that music does not *symbolise* emotional meaning, which would require that it be interpreted; it *metaphorises* it—"carries it over" direct to our unconscious minds. Equally it does not

symbolise human qualities: it conveys them direct, so that it acts on us, and we respond to it, as in a human encounter. In other words, knowing a piece of music, like knowing other works of art, is a matter of *kennenlernen*. Coming to us through the right hemisphere, such living creations are seen as being essentially human in nature [unquote] (96).

In the remarkable *kennenlernen* of exchanges with the Eliot that I meet in *The Waste Land*, an Eliot that I certainly also meet in most of his other poems and an Eliot shared with his many other readers in ways that are similar and therefore also different, it has become clear to me that on balance he is an incisive poetic critic of patriarchy, including his early portrayal of the unbearable parallels between rape and Earth-rape, parallels that have developed into a predominant feature of the past century, our century. This compelling criticism moreover enjoys the visceral nature of the experience of poetry, a lasting and unsettling impact of dazzling, sensitive, and terrible beauty. By way of continuing to catch up with *this* Eliot on the apparently endless journey of our maturation into living with and within the open-ended freedom of finding oneself on this Earth, the anachronistic ecofeminism of his major poetry should be given its historical and contemporary significance.

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[Harrison\*--include in chapter in book bibliography]

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