

Isaac Sequeira Memorial Lecture

Shoring Fragments of *The Waste Land* Centennial

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Most centennials are observed, celebrated, or passed off in quiet. A grim solemnity attends the first, fanfare and fun, the second; indifference, even repugnance, marks the third. At 100, books are no different from our old teachers. We grow old with them. Very few of them are gratefully remembered still with awe and affection; most, clean forgotten having known them once; and those few we manage to remember now and then, often unhappily, are forgiven. *The Waste Land* joins a few classics students of English prefer to landmark alongside Joyce's *Ulysses* that inspired it in some ways. And among the less-read equals in long shelf-life are Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and Aaron's *Road*, Cummings' *Enormous Room*, Mansfield's *Garden Party and Other Stories*, and Yeats's *Later Poems*. Academics who sharpen their pencils in anticipation of centennials are not sure they have anything new to say about this book or that. However regretful they have reached a point of negligible returns; they still feel free to marvel at the work's continued appeal to new generations of readers. Moreover, that "appeal," rather than the work, calls for a reasonable defence. Since the readers of Eliot's poetry were, and still are, in an imaginary classroom, they understand. ("Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom," rued William Carlos Williams in his *Autobiography* when he had first read *The Waste Land*) (174). The poem's marmoreal image has given the classroomers a phrase they fondly recall: "memory and desire" (1.3)¹ Mixed in due proportion; they still hope to generate new centennial readings.

What It Means to Understand

I shall begin with two less-known passages from Eliot's prose that suggest what understanding modern poetry enjoins in its readers. (It is more than likely that *The Waste Land* was at the back of the poet's mind whenever he talked of meaning and understanding.) The first is from Eliot's letter to Virginia Woolf in 1930. The second is from his Preface to *A Little Book of Modern Verse*, chosen by Anne Ridler in 1942.

I think that perhaps the chief result and reason for re-reading a thing many times is not that one gets to understand it better but merely that one gets used to it— that is, understanding a thing chiefly means that one no longer bothers about the supposed need for understanding it. (Letters V 229)

[T]o understand the [modern] poet, we should have, in fact, to reach a degree of self-consciousness of which mankind has never been capable, and of which, if attained, it might perish. (Eliot "Preface" 8)

It is clear from such observations that Eliot did not equate our usual levels and kinds of understanding with the modern poet's because, as his early essays leading to *The Waste Land* and those that follow its publication, such as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* suggest, one's "understanding," such as it is, is always contingent on one's reading habits. In other words, we manage to understand the most complex things and people only because we meet them so often and eventually get used to them. It is only natural, however that the fear of being misunderstood haunts all poets. The classics whose centennials we convene in homage to their writers run this risk most of all. Perhaps the centennials make for new ways of misunderstanding the classics we seem to understand so well. For all the refinements poets seek in language, the world poses newer challenges for those who insist that they understand everything about its lyric black holes. To such readers, Eliot once remarked that "It is a test ... that genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood" (*Selected Prose* 206).

The Making and Unmaking of Readers

Instead of asking what we lost in the tumult of the centennial, it may be worth asking what we still have of *The Waste Land*. A fair answer would be: many more texts of the poem since its first publication in 1922 that incrementally swelled our physical shelves and virtual folders, besides many more of our memories of poring over the apparatus for reading *The Waste Land*. Meanwhile, the poet of *The Waste Land* had, like W. H. Auden's Freud, become "a whole climate of opinion," to the making of which those papers still contributed.

At 50, *The Waste Land* continued to intrigue readers differently. Very close to the poem's half-century, in 1971, *A Facsimile & Transcript of the Original Drafts* of the poem appeared. The question that remained at the time was: What really is/was *The Waste Land*? Was that a poem Eliot wrote? Was it a poem written by the Other Eliot under psychiatric care, or did one of the co-opted authorial selves become one as Eliot-Pound? Alternatively, one vetted by a specially elected committee of Eliot's first readers, including Vivien Eliot, or the editors who fine-comb submissions in publishing houses, or redactors among the poet's personal correspondents, publishing agents, or student researchers and textual scholars, source-hunting sleuths, and not to speak of a whole army of annotators, explicators, and commentators; critical schools and their sponsors; compilers, anthologists, translators Never before in the English poetic tradition had a poem's scene of writing become more alluring for interpretive forays than the poem itself. So relentlessly dissected and critiqued for its faults of commission and omission, or those fancied to have been committed in its composition and dissemination, the poem's death was kept away by live discussions. Long before we got used to Michel Foucault's "author function" rather than the Author, the Eliot critics intuited what that function eerily entailed. Nearly everything in and about *The Waste Land*, including Eliot's Notes, added since its first publication in *The Criterion* and *The Dial*, received urgent critical attention. If Cleanth Brooks and Austin Warren's *Understanding*

Poetry (1936) had not showcased *The Waste Land* as its prize catch, the copyright fees might have proved quite forbidding to the publisher.²

Where (we ask, pace Choruses from ‘The Rock-1934) is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge, and where the knowledge we have lost in information? The memories of the good old Waste Land are now randomly lodged in our subconscious while the conscious mind forages among: the young poet’s notebook from 1909 to 1917 edited and annotated by Christopher Ricks in *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996); the epistolary progress of the poem’s se(le)ctions still “doing many voices” and seeking a cohesive title; Lawrence Rainey’s collations of literally hundreds of papers and notes, letters, student papers, twenty-odd fragments between 1913 and 1922, all meticulously arrayed in the notes to his two books *Revisiting The Waste Land* and *The Annotated Waste Land*, simultaneously appearing in 2005. Many older readers of the poem might own copies of Ricks and both books by Rainey, but still would gladly return to their favourite Faber redactions of the good old 1960s. My copy, its pencilled margins intricately filled with cross-references, ripostes, naïve quotes and queries, still tells me under what cloud of unknowing I had then read the poem, or what hints and guesses conducted me through “the cunning passages and the contrived corridors” of critical studies at the time. What “original” was transcribed as what “copy” by Eliot, what master-copy was later enslaved to make for the press, in which hand or by using what typewriter, etc. was big meat for speculation by critics all through the 1970s, all of them unmindful however of the poet’s “Son of man/ You cannot say, or guess” (ll: 20-21) reminder. The story of *The Waste Land* thus meanders along itinerant narratives of documentary evolution and series of publications but the thing that still troubles most readers is the poem’s (also, the poet’s) ontological insecurities and instabilities. It seems, so much depended upon Eliot’s resolutions of aim and effect. For the most brilliant Anglo-American readers, it seemed, such things mattered rather than what the poem as a whole was supposed to mean.

If we allow for a moment that *The Waste Land* was a text that anticipated the great paradigm shifts that we generally attribute to poststructuralist theory, then we shall see how Eliot's poem fell first into the interpretive hands of New Critics, "close readers" closest to the manner born. Nevertheless, what they preferred reading (the poem, form, language, signifier ...) to those other things that mattered to a new generation of readers (the poet, content, intention, signified ...) made all the difference. In short, the new readers were very careful that their "close reading" did not end up as closed reading. They certainly enjoyed their reading at a distance. Moreover, they quickly and wisely realized that the world would not make sense at once, but would rather make sense slowly, in time, when their reading opens up rather than closes down passages for the traffic of returns and recovery. Give. Sympathise. Control. Collateral damages were many, but the sheer munificence and camaraderie of Eliot's well-wishers helped *The Waste Land* from dying at birth. Further, the postnatal hermeneutical support and incubated exegetical care it received at the hands of a devoted cohort of critics and teachers the world over not only saved it from oblivion but helped it grow older, unencumbered since by minor threats and casualties, and now reach a centenarian's great day. But for the solid materiality of its mountainous scholarship of hundred years, where would *The Waste Land* be? Save a few truly perceptive and insightful studies that have transformed our ways of reading so much that we sometimes forget what it was like to read Eliot otherwise, much of what we read as "stories" of scholarship lose something in the telling. On the occasion of *The Waste Land* centennial, therefore, we may be forgiven if we are not sure what we think we are celebrating— its life, or afterlife?

***The Waste Land* in a Culturally-Different Classroom**

What works and what does not in culturally-different classrooms when *The Waste Land* is read is unpredictable. Much, I believe, depends on what students recall, mostly upon a teacher's prompt. When, for example, regarding the "Murmur of maternal lamentation" (l:

367), Grover Smith alerts us to “The women weeping for Christ and women weeping for Tammuz” (94), and Harold Fisch hears “Rachel weeping for her children in chapter 31 of Jeremiah” (139), I seem to hear more resonantly Gāndhāri’s cries and curses of *Stree Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. Doesn’t she almost lament, looking at her slain sons, “I had not thought death had undone so many”¹ ? (63) Certainly, to what echoic parallels a reader responds, and to what other allusive lengths they do not, is contingent on a widely rich cultural memory Eliot assumes his readers to have.

What I have found unmistakable however is Eliot’s indebtedness to the Ṛishyaçringa legend of *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, not least because that young adult reminds me of the Hyacinth Garden of “The Burial of the Dead.” Eliot’s Boy recalls that the Hyacinth Girl’s “arms were full, and [her] hair wet, [she] could not/ Speak ...” (ll: 38-39). The poet’s direct source is evidently Jessie Weston. She retells the Indian legend in *From Ritual to Romance*, observing why freeing the waters is a theme central to “the old story-telling formula” of the Aryan race in general (25):

[In the *Mahabharata*] we find a young Brahmin brought up by his father, Vibhāṇḍaka, in a lonely forest hermitage absolutely ignorant of the outside world, and even of the very existence of beings other than his father and himself. He has never seen a woman, and does not know that such a creature exists.

A drought falls upon a neighbouring kingdom, and the inhabitants are reduced to great straits for lack of food. The King, seeking to know by what means the sufferings of his people may be relieved, learns that so long as Ṛishyaçringa continues chaste so long will the drought endure. An old woman, who has a fair daughter of irregular life, undertakes the seduction of the hero. The King has a ship, or raft (both versions are given), fitted out with

all possible luxury, and an apparent Hermit's cell erected upon it. The old woman, her daughter and companions embark; and the river carries them to a point not far from the young Brahmin's hermitage.

Taking advantage of the absence of his father, the girl visits Rishyaçriṅga in his forest cell, giving him to understand that she is a Hermit, like himself, which the boy, in his innocence, believes. He is so fascinated by her appearance and caresses that, on her leaving him, he, deep in thought of the lovely visitor, forgets, for the first time, his religious duties.

On his father's return he innocently relates what has happened, and the father warns him that fiends in this fair disguise strive to tempt hermits to their undoing. The next time the father is absent the temptress, watching her opportunity, returns, and persuades the boy to accompany her to her 'Hermitage' which she assures him is far more beautiful than his own. So soon as Rishyaçriṅga is safely on board the ship sails, the lad is carried to the capital of the rainless land, the King gives him his daughter as wife, and so soon as marriage is consummated the spell is broken, and rain falls to abundance. (30-31)

While Weston cites this *Mahabharata* episode in order to point up details from the Percival/Grail legend for comparison, my students now begin to see its crucial significance for Eliot's narrative. Few western commentaries draw upon Weston's "Freeing of the Waters" chapter (25-33) as holding the sure key to some of the blocked streams and rivulets of Eliot's fragments. All stagnant and frozen as puddles in large stony terrains, this narrative stream waits to be set free as it were. The metaphors of stilled or muddied water bodies are plentiful in *The Waste Land*. And we always sense someone as witnessing around riverine precincts, hearing, or overhearing music creeping by them (as in l. 257); or someone longing for the rain,

or being prodded by yet another voice musing by slow-moving streams. For a quick sampling: “for you know only/ [a place where you see] the dry stone [and hear] no sound of water” (ll: 21, 24); “Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song” (l: 176); “By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept .../Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,/Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song, for I speak not loud or long ” (ll: 182-184); “While I was fishing in a dull canal” (l: 189); “ ‘This music crept by me upon the waters’ ” (l: 257); “The river sweats/ Oil and tar” (ll: 266-267); “The brisk swell/Rippled both shores” (ll: 284-285); “ ...the deep sea swell” (l: 313); “A current under the sea” (l: 315); “Entering the whirlpool” (318). And finally, in the opening movement of “What the Thunder Said,” beginning line 331 (“Here is no water but only rock”), we hear a chorus’s subjunctive thoughts on water and thirst:

Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water

...

But there is no water. (ll: 331- 358)

At all such crucial junctures, readers sense a narrative overture. A story is about to begin, but it stops short or gets deflected. When the voices chant long litanies for redemptive grace, it is suggestive that they long for life by water, some irrigational facility, and potential fertility while traversing dry, rocky ground. The songs of the Thames-daughters rhyme with those of the Rhine-daughters to which Eliot’s Note # 266 aligns them. The integration of such narrative fragments (shoring them against ruins, so to speak) is predicated upon the freeing of waters leading to fertility and new life, and redemption for those abandoned on the banks of canals and ditches along the city.

The Mythical Pedagogics

For Indian students somewhat familiar with the popular legends of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the allusive trail of *freeing the waters* will certainly have yet another

significance. Whether Eliot alludes to the legend of Bhagīratha as well is moot but some of its crucial details will nonetheless provoke thought when we consider the arrested if blocked narrative flow of the poem. Bhagīratha's Herculean yogic effort brought down the recalcitrant Ganga ("sunken" as the poet qualifies it at line 395) so that he could perform the funerary rites for his Sāgara ancestral clan. A detail often missed in this legend is Ganga's own rather conceited thought that no force on earth would be able to withstand her massive downward rush and sweep from such celestial heights, but Śiva volunteers to receive and dam Ganga on his head. (Now the narrative turn at this point is quite revealing.) The mighty god not only withstands the immense pressure of the free-sliding Ganga but has her massive flow blocked and contained in just two locks of his matted hair. Gangādhara (Śiva) now plays with this sunken river that suffers the ignominy of circulating within Śiva's matted locks, meandering in circles. Freeing the waters is now Śiva's privilege. Bhagīratha prays to the Lord to set Ganga free. The sunken Ganga is so released and the parched earth gratefully receives her. Fertility restored, Bhagīratha commences his dharmic austerities. Here again, Eliot's method is one that recalls a narrative of gifts denied or declined for once but eventually freed and generously shared, a thought informing his reflection in the lines, "The awful daring of a moment's surrender/ Which an age of prudence can never retract" (ll: 404- 405).

Faint though his resemblance may be to the drowned sailor of Part V, Bhagīratha, like Phlebas the Phoenician, was once just as worldly and materialistic. Water purifies Phlebas, who forgets "the cry of gulls and the deep sea swell/ And the profit and loss" (ll: 313-314). As he enters the whirlpool" having "passed the stages of his age and youth" (ll:318-317), he is chastened like Bhagīratha who begins his renewed life of severe austerities. For this reason, I do not read this section called "Death by Water" as elegizing a drowner's sea-change. In the esoteric rendering of this legend in *Vasiṣṭarāmāyaṇa*, we meet the young Bhagīratha who asks his guru how he could end suffering, overcome the fear of old age and death, and how to fight

worldly delusion. His guru gives him much the same Vedantic counsel that Eliot has never felt tired of repeating in all his major poetry, beginning with *The Waste Land*. Renunciation, in short; “A condition of complete simplicity” which the poet’s conclusion to the *Four Quartets* qualifies parenthetically as: “Costing not less than everything...,” (“Little Gidding” l: 256). Bhagīratha duly embraces renunciation by even giving up his kingdom for peace (*ātmaśāntih*). Consider, then, Bhagīratha, who was once handsome and tall as you.

What Have We Given?

That nobody but T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound could have got away with the muddle of a poem like *The Waste Land*, by shoring fragments to make them look like a poet’s work the way they consequently did, is also now a fact of English literary history of one hundred years. When we look at this poem part by part, we are struck by the many things that would still challenge our comprehension: chiefly, its dense allusiveness and narrative incoherence, its incompatible but contrapuntal effects that take long to register, and its stunted personae rather than full-fledged “characters,” and the poet’s added-on glosses. Not to speak of the annoyance we feel when we do not quite “see” the voices as we hear them; like the couple as they speak: ““My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me. /Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak”” (ll: 111-112). Where is the stage, and where the off-stage from where such voices come?³ The poem’s occasionally simplistic, stark, and reductive representation of stereotypes (typecasting a typist most of all!) are pretty much like those Prufrockian shadows who just come and go. These pathetic figures of a passing show draw no more than a melancholic remark or a whining aside each time from a voice that rarely speaks its name or provenance like Tiresias. (And if, for once, Tiresias sees, as Eliot avers he does in his “Notes,” we are not sure that he “sees” the way we do.) The poem’s quasi-dramatic passages are a serial tableaux arresting rather than moving a narrative through by providing a visual or auditory impetus. *The Waste Land* is by far the only poem in English that holds back more than it gives, or gives

away, and preaches gift as a prime, supreme virtue in life. Eliot's allusive pertinacity is often his readers' despair. What, indeed, has he given? Probably the great lesson his followers today learn most of all about language as a simulating device.

It has sometimes seemed to many teachers however that probably these very serious "problems" have certain advantages for their classrooms.⁴ Where diehard teacher-interpreters among us have completely drawn a blank, the less determined and relaxed instructors have seen the way the fragments work, or do not. This is no small recognition. That "you cannot say or guess" grants an advance bail for our minor explicatory faults of commission and omission. For, when a student-narrative meets a Master-Narrative to argue a new case for *The Waste Land*, who will demur? All said and done, one's own reading, however inadequate, will meet some level of understanding a "Fire Sermon," and what happens "At the violet hour, when the eyes and back/ Turn upward from the desk ..." (ll: 215-216). I have not seen a student paper offering anything so drastically different from a Northrop Frye's or a Helen Vendler's reading of the Clerk-Typist scene. And if my students ever do better than a critic, and indeed surprise me by their "misreading," I grant them the liberty to understand differently, which I take to be the prime objective of any respectable interpretation. And *The Waste Land* is by far the first English poem that declares the vanity of all interpretive vanities by letting one interpreter do no better than their forerunners.

My worry begins however not when young readers in my sessions respond, but when they do not. Reader responses are easy to theorise. Gaps are there to fill, and the more narrative gaps one spots there to fill, the better for the complacent reader. But I wonder what fancies curl around *The Waste Land* images and cling, and what may the notion of a reader as an infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing, suggest. I have seen a whole group of students sometimes remain untouched by any rasa these fragments evoke in them. When Conrad Aiken once suggested to Eliot that *The Waste Land* reminded him of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of*

Melancholy, a book infamous for chronicling unrelieved depression and existential boredom, the young poet is said to have pulled a long face. Students love to relate to texts that embody and convey the dominant *rasa* they project through the action and suffering of its characters. *The Waste Land*, alas, is no such poem.⁵

Sometimes this peculiarly distressing situation has prompted my reflections on the still-unassimilable Waste Land in our classrooms. Set against the familiar Author/Text/Reader, where will the Teacher figure in a triangular paradigm of recalcitrant reception? (I recall the Prufrockian grouse: “I have heard the mermaids [read western scholars] singing each to each. / I do not think that they will sing to me.”) Is there a theory in the world of critical traditions that redeems young readers’ complete indifference to imperious totalizing aesthetic claims? It is not always easy for Indian students of English to adopt and comply with the protocols of grim reading to which modernist classics and the canon have inured, by and large, their western counterparts. It is arguable with appropriate examples from *The Waste Land* that an average Indian teacher’s pedagogic options or resources will evoke no *rasa* (in the exalted sense of aesthetic enjoyment or pleasure) in their students.

When students do not respond to Eliot’s polyphonic and wide-ranging allusions, I still sense somehow a confused and confusing *rasa-dhwani* at work. They discover perhaps that *bībhatsa* works well with aborted narratives and tantalising glimpses of inhumane abuse.⁶ The “abject” and the uncanny evoke extreme emotions of loathing in young minds, a sure test that they do respond but not quite the way textbooks allow. Quite puzzlingly for them, *The Waste Land* ends with *shāntih*, mocking the putative *sānta rasa*. Eliot would seem to suggest, perhaps ironically, that even the antithesis of *rasa* is not to be spurned as anything inconsequential. Is he not perhaps saying that only those who have *rasa* of some kind know what it is to want to get away from it? What else do the poem’s raucously disgusting episodes of violence and mayhem suggest? I have since then called it *virasa* (in my feeble translation,

a blend of acedia and existential boredom) that poems like *The Waste Land*, some parts of fiction like Joyce's or Woolf's, or Gertrude Stein's, or drama like Beckett's or Pinter's, evoke. I would even suggest that it may just as well be possible for some teacher to examine *The Waste Land* samples of *virasa* while teaching it. The unrelieved boredom of having to list and comment on western civilization and its discontents is among the safest predictable exam questions on *The Waste Land*. That, indeed, we might call another banality of evil. *Virasa* is a *rasa*. We all know it when we suffer it, but no tradition would consider it "aesthetic" enough to theorise it. *Virasa* even militates against the senses of soothing comfort and lasting pleasure elite theories of art canvass in ancient cultures.

The Piece That Passeth Understanding ...

It will take a little longer than we think for the dust to settle on the debates such as the difficulties of modernism, and for us to unlearn the grimness that we have adopted in reading the poem.⁷ Neither perverse whim nor wishful thinking will take us where *The Waste Land* commentaries, even the best of them, promise to do. But it may be possible for even the first readers of *The Waste Land* today to see that poets do have a better option than Nora of *A Doll's House*. While she could only slam the door and walk out on Torvald who could not be saved from his self-delusions, the poets still try to see if their poetry could help the Torvalds of their day to introspect. In other words, as Eliot himself stated, he "may have expressed for [some of the more approving critics of *The Waste Land*] 'the disillusionment of a generation,' which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned," and wryly added, "but that did not form part of my intention" ("Thoughts After Lambeth" 324). When, by the 1950s however, the critical labour around *The Waste Land* seemed to grow unchecked, and the textual vivisection seemed to him rather intolerable, Eliot remarked that "it was evident that the writers did not resent the puzzle they thought I had set them— they liked it. Indeed, though they were unconscious of the fact, they invented the puzzle for the

pleasure of discovering the solution” (*On Poetry and Poets* 109). At the centennial gatherings, it would certainly help to consider that, or the poem, as the less puzzling option for future readers of Eliot’s poem.

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Notes

1. I follow the Boni and Liveright edition’s line numbers that appear parenthetically throughout this essay. The numbering in other editions of *The Waste Land* corresponds with this, except that in Boni and Liveright, ll.346 and 347 are counted as a single line.
2. The Faber fees are forbidding still. Towards small-scale readers and institutions, the Faber barons are uncharitable. And this, despite the easy e-access to websites that print *The Waste Land* with impunity, notes and all. Eliot himself, we recall, was averse to letting any of his poems, including *The Waste Land*, being cut up into fragmentary units as “excerpts” for their use in assorted anthologies. On the difficulties of quoting Eliot and the endless trouble for securing Faber permission for publishing scholarship on *The Waste Land* in particular, see Bernard Sharratt’s “Interludes: copyright and criticism” in *On Eliot: These Fragments*, pp. 124-132.)
3. I have explored the use of scenes and voices here in juxtaposition to a crucial scene from *Macbeth* in “Using Reading Frames: An Example from *The Waste Land*.” *English in Education*, 29.1, 1995, pp. 31-39.
4. For assorted reflections of this kind, see my *DA/Datta: Teaching The Waste Land*, where teachers from various parts of the world tell us what new lessons in poetic pedagogy have animated their classroom discussions.

5. I am not sure whether this was the case with that Chinese student of whom William Empson writes: “I was rather pleased one year in China when I had a course on modern poetry, *The Waste Land* and all that, and at the end, a student wrote in the most friendly way to explain why he wasn’t taking the exam. It wasn’t that he couldn’t understand *The Waste Land*, he said; in fact, after my lectures, the poem was self-explanatory: but it had turned out to be disgusting nonsense, and he had decided to join the engineering department. Now there, a teacher is bound to feel solid satisfaction; he is getting definite results.” (Quoted in Harwood; his epigraph to chapter “Death by Exegesis,” p. 86.)
6. *Bībhatsa* is caused by extreme revulsion, and physical and emotional discomfort. Unspeakably revolting episodes of obscene violence and offensive actions in A Facsimile and Transcripts are by far familiar to students. The “Me-too” scenes in *The Waste Land* apart, the dull canals, rodent-infested bylanes, and decayed holes have caught the attention of conservationists and ecological crusaders since the late 1920s. No other poem of the last century or this has run the whole gamut of senses and synonyms of waste generated by human beings since the Bible. Few poems in English show us the invaluable human lives set against such appalling light as the inhumanely wasteful and wasted lives in this poem. If one were to write a history of the modern packaging industry, I would imagine that author devotes a whole chapter to the packaging industry of *The Waste Land*, the poem’s vastly-funded and relentlessly overworked factories of exegetical and textual commerce across the world. The IT returns of distinguished poets’ archives are not public documents, but a safe guess would be that *The Waste Land* citations in books alone might have been annually fetching handsome rights-and-permissions fees for the poet’s publishers/ estate.
7. I refer, of course, to Richard Poirier’s widely-known essay called “The Difficulties of Modernism and the Modernism of Difficulty” of the late 1970s. “Modernism happened,” he declared, “when reading got to be grim” (272), aligning academy, elitism, and privilege in a predictably complicated nexus.

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