

JAMES JOYCE AND THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT

By Elaine Mingus

They are quite different, yet I think at a deeper level, we can find commonalities in their thinking as writers.

First, I have some biography:

Both published major works in the 1920s.

Joyce changed the novel for all time, and his Ulysses was named the best novel of the 20th c. Eliot changed poetry for all time, and Eliot's "The Waste Land" has been called the most important poem of the 20th c.

Joyce was born on the bank of the meandering Liffey; Eliot in St. Louis, on the banks of the Mighty Mississippi. Both left their native land - Joyce from Dublin to Europe and Eliot from the U.S. to Britain. Both felt strongly about their homeland and culture.

Eliot went to Harvard and loved the rocky new England coast, but settled in London as a British subject. He also traveled Europe and was praised for his influence on English Letters as an American, and won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Both Joyce and Eliot had someone close to them in the life who had serious mental problems: Joyce's daughter Lucia who died in an institution, and Eliot's wife Vivian who also died in a mental hospital. he married again after her death.

Joyce and Eliot perhaps only met in the flesh once, in Paris. Eliot tried to give him a pair of old boots and found him arrogant. But he greatly admired Joyce, whose self-confidence was something that he lacked. He admired Joyce's use of myth for showing similarities and differences between the ancient and the contemporary. Eliot called it "the most important expression of the present age". He wrote: "Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him." He was referring to the "mythic" style rather than the conventional narrative style.

Pagan myth and Christian theology is connected for both Joyce and Eliot. This is obvious in Joyce's novels, and Eliot mixes them in "The Waste Land". Both saw a recurring pattern in various myths; for instance, vegetation myths of rebirth, and resurrection. They both mixed sacred and "profane" myths. Also both crossed over from one culture to another and constantly quoted the ancients.

Both Joyce and Eliot studied Bruno of Nolan, a brave soul who died at the stake for his belief that opposites need each other and can sometimes blend or come together. One example is time/space. In Finnegans Wake Shem can be time and Shaun space. Joyce also shows reconciliation of opposites with his "Greekjew" and "Jewgreek" in Ulysses. This is sprinkled throughout Eliot's writings, contraries reconciled, as in his "Four Quartets".

It is important that Joyce and Eliot both turned to Vico and his philosophy of cycles and renewal; there is no resolution for either Joyce or Eliot, but linking of beginnings and endings. Joyce however, also seems in Finnegans Wake, to have used Nietzsche and his idea of the Eternal Recurrence and Death of God. Nietzsche terms it "Dionysian". In this view there is no final truth. This would depart from Eliot.

Another theme common to both is water and the dry land, also the sea as the source of primal life and energy: the "ALP" chapter of Finnegans Wake with flowing river landscape, and myth, history, jests, fables. Here is water as it bubbles and hurries at its source, then as it is seen, heard, felt. (He also reminds us that even poets have underwear and someone has to wash them). Eliot makes the polluted Thames a symptom of the degradation of modern life in "The Waste Land", but also desert. Water is an important motif in his "Four Quartets".

Both Joyce and Eliot write about rootless people in a city, Dublin or London, itself a symbol for a world that is sterile and waiting for renewal. Joyce's Dubliners shows a paralyzed city, whose occupants often feel like victims. Eliot's "Unreal City" in "The Waste Land" is ditto really; inability of people to believe in anything and the result is a "heap of broken images". The post-war tragedy is reflected here.

Both found some unified pattern in variety and complexity. Juxtaposition is common to both, and transposing the sentimental to the witty. Classic legends and natural beauty are superimposed on the tawdry tavern. Of course, Joyce probably had the corner on internal dialogue, puns, parodies, and paradoxes. One could contrast Eliot's great care of the English language with Joyce's "broken English", puzzles and riddles. But on the other hand, occasionally Eliot loosens up as in the gossipy cockney conversation in "The Waste Land".

We treasure Joyce's *Critical Writings and Letters*, but it was Eliot who was much renowned for his literary criticism, lectures and articles almost as much as for his poetry. Some say his dogma was in his prose, which is formal, reserved, and eloquent. This in part due to his being from Puritan New England.

Joyce and Eliot were both among the "Avant-Garde" for a long time, separated from Victorian predecessors, and said to be hoaxes without morals, especially Joyce. But they both received praise as well; they were both given support and financial aid by Harriet Weaver, editor and owner of the *Egoist Magazine*.

The conversational tone of both of these writers invites the reader to see the commonality of human experience. Writer and reader share the situation and we find the *necessity* of reader participation and involvement, a co-creator with the author. They are both more likely to include than omit. For instance, the "encyclopedism" of Joyce and the use of foreign language by both.

Joyce and Eliot both loved music and use of rhythm. Joyce's "Sirens" is made for music lovers. But music of all kinds is scattered throughout his writing. Eliot's rhythm is often musical and he was a love of music and dance. "You are the music while the music lasts", he said in "Four Quartets".

Joyce's comedy often masks seriousness. *Finnegans Wake* has been called a "comic gospel", sense through nonsense. Eliot also shows this to a lesser degree as in "A Cooking Egg" and "The Cats".

Finnegans Wake deals with the dream world, the "night-world". Eliot dealt with dreams but in a different way. In his essay on Dante for instance: "We have nothing but dreams and we have forgotten that seeing visions - a practice now relegated to the uneducated - was once treated with interest and discipline."

It is true that both of these writers were highly independent, yet Eliot with his modesty and politeness was not a Joyce, was more of a loner. He "retired to the citadel of self and shut the door", said someone. Eliot was much more cautious than Joyce and felt answerable to tradition.

As far as church and religion goes, they did a flip flop. Joyce, having been taught by Jesuits, left the church for good. But Eliot later turned back to the Anglican Church permanently. This shows in their writing: Joyce at one point called God a "Nobadaddy". In his parody of "The Lords Prayer" we see the secular figure "Anna the Allmaziful". The Joycean Hades is not a devil or Satan and is not hell. Eliot used Christian terms more seriously. About The Divine Comedy he said: "I had to descend into hell and view Purgatory before I could finally envision Heaven or the Divine". For him history moves toward a divinely established goal outside human history and understanding. This is a major difference between them. Joyce admired Blake, but Eliot objected to Blake's "homemade theology."

Joyce was sympathetic to feminism. In "The Dead" he puts ethical weight on "an intense romantic and spiritualized love rather than on a dead marriage". He praised Ibsen and his insight into women and also had a friendship with Francis Skeffinton, a feminist. This is far different than Eliot's unsympathetic treatment of women in general and his negative opinions of them. The sexual content in his writing deals with failure of potency, guilt from desire as "lust". Women are often seen as lower beings. He *did* show realization of women as city's victims, loveless, and without hope.

Joyce was interested in the Zionist issues in Trieste, and reacted against the Anti-Semitism there. He saw that the Hebrew people were oppressed as the Irish were. In Ulysses we see Bloom as a middle-class Jewish Irishman, suspect because of his "otherness". A Pacifist, his "love opposite of hatred" is the closest Joyce ever comes to the pronouncing of a creed, says Zack

Bowen. It was Bloom's response to the Citizen's nationalism. But Eliot showed Anti-Semitism in his writing and feared "free-thinking Jews".

Joyce was a renegade and had a defense against authority. He looked at Revivalism by Protestant and Catholic and saw them both as corrupted. He was also against any idealized version of Irish Peasantry, and to him the bourgeois were "petty-bourgeois". But Eliot was at times called a "snob" and moved in different circles than Joyce would have been comfortable in.

Eliot's "The Waste Land" on one level is post-war London, his vision of spiritual death in the modern world. But there is also a personal level with Tiresius, narrator. It speaks to and for its time and beyond its time about the ordeals of a life in the process of becoming. It is full of irony and a variety of sources mingle and flow into each other. Eliot used the idea of the wounded king effecting the fertility of the land, from Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance. There is a desert setting in "The Waste Land", dryness, a mood of solitude and urban despair in the 20th c. The river is filled with tears and blackened by suffering. People are too oblivious to their condition. There are prophetic voices and lyric moments as "These are the pearls that were his eyes", from Shakespeare's "The Tempest".

The real plot in "The Waste Land" is an inward journey. In the last part, people wait for rain, a sign of spiritual fertility. Thunder rumbles in Sanskrit. There is some enlightenment and possible regeneration. But it leaves us between collapse and recovery. "These fragments I have shored against my ruins". "Shantih, Santih, Shantih". Eliot expressed surprise that "The Waste Land" was seen as a statement about the modern world, but it is hard not to see this poem as such, with its nameless millions in the dreariness of the city.

Nathan Halper, along with others, says that Eliot is mentioned several times in Finnegans Wake and that it is because he lifted things from Ulysses for "The Waste Land". Halper thinks it is the "Proteus" chapter that "The Waste Land" is indebted to the most, metaphysical and allusive. Then Stephen's virgin "Lady of Letters" he had seen by a shop window - he supposes she wears "stays, suspenders and yellow stockings, darned with lumpty wool". Eliot's typist in "The Waste Land" has on here divan "stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays". Also the dog in "Proteus" and "The Waste

Land" suggest it. Ulysses and "The Waste Land" were both published in 1922. But at the time Eliot was assistant editor of the Egoist which had published segments of Ulysses.

Halper gives examples of Eliot's appearance in Finnegans Wake: "Thou in shanty! Thou in scanty santy!! Thou in slanty scanty shanty...The law does not aloud you to shout". A marginal note is TRISHAGION. This means "Sanctus Sanctus Sanctus". Then "Noblett's surprise (of course Nobel Prize) and other examples. In allusions to "The Waste Land" Joyce shows his dislike of it. In a letter to Miss Weaver in 1925, he included a parody of it.

"Ash Wednesday" is more Christian than any of Eliot's poems; we do see here his transformation from skeptic to religious believer and turning away from the world: "I do not hope to turn again". There are some compelling images here, as turning on the winding stairs; honest examination of one's man's inner change.

"Four Quartets" was the peak of achievement for Eliot. It was his "last and greatest" with new depth and clarity. The four elements are brought together with the water and fire of raids on London but also water of baptism and fire of purgation: religion in the mystical tradition. There is incursion of the timeless into time in "Four Quartets". History is shown as a pattern of "timeless moments" in "an essential now". The "Still point of the turning world". It holds in tension all irreconcilable elements and is the archetype of the journeying soul. "In my beginning is my end" and "In my end is my beginning". The river is destroyer, man's time, rhythm of life, but the sea is earth's time, rhythm of eternity.

For Eliot, spiritual life is associated with nature, often a garden - its lack is a desert. The rose-garden is associated with what might have been, related to time and history; the yew tree is a symbol of death and eternity, "Not farewell but fare forward, voyagers". "Four Quartets" ends with a vision of wholeness. "The fire and the rose are one." "And all shall be well" from Dante.

Ulysses and "The Waste Land" both end with a word that is repeated. In Ulysses it is "yes" and in "The Waste Land" it is "Shantih" (the peace that passeth understanding).

Finally Joyce says "Loud, heap miseries upon us yet entwine our arts with laughters low". And Eliot "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of our journey will be to arrive at the beginning and to know it for the first time."

MAJOR SOURCES FOR BOTH JAMES JOYCE AND TS ELIOT

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