Title	A labyrinth for exorcism : The notes and structure of The Waste Land
Sub Title	浄めのための迷宮 : 『荒地』の註と構造
Author	坂本, 光(Sakamoto, Hikaru)
Publisher	慶應義塾大学藝文学会
Publication year	1987
Jtitle	藝文研究 (The geibun-kenkyu : journal of arts and letters). Vol.51, (1987. 7) ,p.12- 1
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	
Genre	Journal Article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00072643-00510001-0273

A Labyrinth for Exorcism: The Notes and Structure of *The Waste Land*

Hikaru Sakamoto

No book can be read independently; consciously or otherwise, the reader cannot help being influenced by other works. Some writers have tried to utilize references to other works in order to steer the reader's attention; T. S. Eliot succeeded in doing just this in *The Waste Land*. *The Waste Land* has always been read from the viewpoint of its structural features. Fragmentary structure, allusions and parodies conspicuous in Eliot's early poems are more prominent in *The Waste Land*. Few readers can fail to notice them even before seeing the explanatory notes added by Eliot. The notes are inescapable traps. The books mentioned in the notes cover subjects ranging from poetry to anthropology. The reader is encouraged to follow them up and even to uncover other sources. The sources hint at motifs which underlie the mythical structure of *The Waste Land*, and disclose the coherence of the seemingly fragmentary poem. But there have also been negative reactions to this aspect of *The Waste Land*. Claims of intellectual snobbery are typical. Some say the notes are a form of hoax, while others claim they are proof of Eliot's lack of originality or creativity. Although these censures are unfounded, it cannot be denied that aimless source-hunting creates a sterile atmosphere around *The Waste Land*. George Williamson points to a more suitable approach: " In this poem Eliot has given us an ' ordered presentation of emotions,' with the necessary scaffold supplied by anthropology. What we need to understand is the emotional structure of *The Waste Land*, not the anthropology "[1]. It is crucial for a proper, fertile understanding of *The Waste Land* to appreciate the function of the notes, which are powerful enough to dominate our

perception of the poem, as Eliot intended.

The Waste Land appeared first in October 1922, in the initial issue of *The Criterion;* its first American publication was in *The Dial* of the following month. However the notes did not appear until the poem was published in book form by Boni and Liveright of New York, 15 December 1922. The omission of the notes in the first two publications made many people assume that they were only of decorative value. One of Eliot's statements in a lecture, published as " The Frontiers of Criticism " (1956), has been used to support this assumption:

> I had first intended only to put down all the references for my quotations, with a view to spiking the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism. Then, when it came to print *The Waste Land* as a little book . . . it was discovered that the poem was inconveniently short, so I set to work to expand the notes, in order to provide a few more pages of printed matter[2].

The notes thus served as a filler for the Liveright edition. But this fact negates neither the influence which the notes have exercised on the reception of *The Waste Land* nor the fact that their effect was intended. In this statement, Eliot recognizes that he had intended to add notes before Liveright demanded more pages, and the omission of the notes in the first two publications also does not prove their insignificance. Furthermore, they were already finished before the first publication of *The Waste Land*, as is proved by a letter, dated 31 August 1922, written by Gilbert Seldes, managing editor of *The Dial:*

> We must assume that Eliot O.K.'s publication in the *Dial*, without the notes . . . which are exceedingly interesting and add much to the poem, but don't become interested in them because we simply cannot have them[3].

The omission of the notes should thus be attributed to some reason other than Eliot's negligence. Most cogent is a hypothesis offered by

Grover Smith: he surmises that this omission was due to Eliot's conceren about the copyright in the United States. Eliot and his American agent, John Quinn, worked cleverly to make the best profit from the publication of *The Waste Land* in the States, allowing only Liveright to publish the notes. In those days, a prose work in English published abroad must appear within a set period of time in the United States in order to be protected under American law; had the first publication contained the notes, Eliot would have lost the copyright to them in the United States if the Liveright edition had been delayed[4].

Later Eliot appeared to lose interest in the notes, sometimes denying their significance. In the lecture he deplored the fact that the notes had resulted in " the remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship that is still on view today. I have sometimes thought of getting rid of these notes; but now they can never be unstuck."[5] However, if the notes were insignificant, he could have deleted them at any time. There seems to be a contradiction between *The Waste Land* and Eliot's statements concerning it in his later years, especially regarding his attitude to the notes. Asked by a interviewer in 1959 whether Pound's pruning of *The Waste Land* had changed its intellectual structure, Eliot answered, " No. I think it was just as structureless, only in a more futile way, in the longer version[6]." Yet it was Eliot who wrote, at the beginning of the notes, that " Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legened: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge)." He recommended readers to consult Weston in order to overcome the " difficulties of the poem." It is important to note that Eliot refers to a " plan," which really suggests a structure. If one consults Weston and *The Golden Bough*, one can discern in *The Wasted Land* a minute network of symbolism related to the Grail legend and vegetation ceremonies, and focused in the title. The symbolism in *The Waste Land* may seem to be incidental, but it is not at all incoherent[7]. His " plan " is obviously reflected in the structure revealed in the notes. Eliot's disregard of the notes and the structure many years later seems to show his alienation from the author of *The Waste Land*.

In the same interview in 1959, Eliot replied that *Four Quartets* was his best work[8]. He agreed that his language had become much simpler after writing plays, and that *Four Qquartets* was much easier to understand than *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*. According to Eliot, this can be attributed to his maturity: " I think that in the early poems it was a question of not being able to—of having more to say than one knew how to say . . . " In *Four Quartets*, Eliot's mature style is very impressive; it creates a stable calm. *Four Quartets* is autobiographical, solidly organized from a retrospective point of view. Structurally it is completely different from *The Waste Land*. Eliot turned away from the structure of *The Waste Land* after having won the maturity, because it reminded him of the place he escaped.

The Waste Land is composed in a way that is very different from the retrospective method employed in *Four Quartets*. Central to its structure is Tiresias, as shown in the note to l. 218:

> Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a ' character ', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem[9].

This note solves most of problems which jeopardize the coherence of *The Waste Land:* the existence of many viewpoints or characters, sundry language, and fragmentary episodes. According to Eliot, Tiresias is the kernel unifying all elements which seems to be incidental. All voices and viewpoints in *The Waste Land* are those of Tiresias metamorphosing sequentially; *The Waste Land* is Tiresias's monologue. For him there is no confinement to either gender or chronology. He is free to be a Phoenician sailor, or a small house agent's clerk in modern London[10]. Tiresias has all the ages within him, which means that he cannot stand still at any point in time. This is the structure of *The Waste Land;* it

stands in complete contrast to the stability of *Four Quartets*, which expresses retrospective calmness. It is natural enough that Eliot, having reached this stable phase, felt *The Waste Land* to be structureless.

Tiresias's freedom from time does not mean he transcends time; it is quite the contrary. He can see everything which the human intellect can perceive; he remembers everything human beings have experienced or will experience in the future and transforms himself into anyone he likes merely by recalling the memories which that person possessed. But what Tiresias sees in *The Waste Land* does not include the future; cut off at a point in 1922, he is confined to the past. He has an immense memory but, being blind, he cannot find his own personal memory by checking his identity against the world around him. Thus devoid of a mental anchor, he is unable to organize the memories he has inherited. He is a spectator who has lost his viewpoint. Therefore he always transforms or amalgamates himself into what he remembers and observes. Tiresias's situation is a variation on Eliot's motif of half-death, the confinement between death and life seen in many of his earlier poems. Among the shadows of Tiresias, it is most prominent in Sybil. Destined to live for as many years as the sand grains she grasped in her hand, she craves for death, having withered in a jar. Half-death is also half-life, implying a loss of fertility. Tiresias fails both to extinguish himself and to proceed to the future; he wanders through his collective memory which, devoid of the winds of time, has turned into the doldrums. *The Waste Land* begins with the allusion to the spring scene at the beginning of general prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. But, instead of fertility, spring rain provides Tiresias with only a cruel awakening from his dormant and temporary peace. April is the cruellest month.

" What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem "; it is an orderless complex of the past, resembling the " pure duration " introduced by Henri Bergson. According to Bergson, man is always situated at the very point where his past " expires in a deed in the flux of time[11]," and man's consciousness originally consists of " a mutual penetration, an interconnexion and organization of elements, each one of

which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it[12]." Bergson's influence on Eliot's early poems has often been pointed out[13]. In " Tradition and the Individual Talent " (1919) Eliot presents his concept of tradition as the growing corpus of the literary past which continually adopts new works, re-adjusting its organization. And in *The Waste Land*, this concept is responsible for a dominant feature of composition. Tiresias provides a viewpoint which is moving about in a memory created by the interpenetration of various experiences. But Bergson's optimism is quite unlike the underlying tone of *The Waste Land*. The suffocation seen in *The Waste Land* comes from the loss of the future; everything works inward. The eyes of the blind prophet can see nothing but his inner world, symbolizing his self-confinement. His only contact with the outer world is done with words which are common property being outside the individual. This distortion of Bergson's concept should not be overlooked, since young Eliot's inclination to Bergson is well known.

In 1910, Eliot graduated from Harvard and spent a year in Paris. There he studied French literature at the Sorbonne and heard Bergson's Friday lectures at the Collège de France. Eliot was one of those Americans who visited the continent in a quest for the past, searching for a basis to their identity. In " On Henry James " (1918), Eliot describes the consummation of such Americans as a " European—something which no born European, no person of any European nationality, can become[14]." Eliot means an artificial European made up by inheriting and synthesizing the past; this is also Tiresias's identity and the constitution of Eliot's poems.

Bergson's influence, however, did not continue for long. In 1927, Eliot denied the Bergsonian time doctrine: " . . . it reaches the point of a *fatalism* which is wholly destructive. It is a pure naturalism. What is true for one age is not true for another, and there is no external standard[15]." It is certain that he rejected the Bergsonian concept of time and inclined to some kind of absolute order around the year 1913. It was then that Eliot encountered Charles Maurras's work and became influenced by his anti-Rousseauist, anti-republican ideology[16]. In 1913,

an article in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, to which he subscribed while in America, called Maurras's three traditions ' *classique, catholique, monarchique* "[17]; later, in 1928, Eliot described his point of view as " classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion[18]."

Eliot began to work on *The Waste Land* in 1919, finishing it in 1922. It was cast between two poles: sympathy for Bergson's internal time doctrine and a belief in order outside the individual. The features of *The Waste Land* are utltimate forms of Eliot's poetic devices commonly seen in his early poems; therefore, one can say that it was written during the last phase before his turning away from Bergson. Tiresias is a reflection of Eliot who failed to control his memory so as to create something new from it. He came to the continent to inherit directly the substance of his culture, the thin shadow of which he had seen and detested in New England[19]. But what he inherited drowned and confined him in the doldrums of memory: " . . . all our knowledge will be dead from that moment when the door of the future shall be closed " (*Inferno*, 10.106–8)[20]. Other than seeking an external order he could not find any way by which to organize his memory and make it the basis of creation. The escape from the doldrums of memory was necessary for him to situate himself at the very point where his past expired " in a deed in the flux of time " and to put in practice his theory presented in " Tradition and the Individual Talent."

All that has been said about Tiresias up to this point can be derived from *The Waste Land* only if the notes act as an entrance, leading the reader into the poem. But the critics of the " bogus scholarship " also focus on this aspect of the notes; they maintain that such a entrance is an apparition. But while the notes act as an entrance to the interior of the poem, the main text of *The Waste Land* has also an access leading to this faculty of the notes.

At the end of the poem, Tiresias's metamorphosis reaches its climax; according to the notes, the last strophe consists of 6 allusions, and critics have added further sources not mentioned by Eliot.

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 à 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
(*The Waste Land*, 423–33)

In these lines, Tiresias wanders through the Grail legend; Isaiah 38.1[21]; a nursery song; *Purgatorio; Pervigilium Qeneris; El Desdichado;* and *The Spanish Tragedy*. And he hears the voice of the thunder again. If the sources are consulted, it is obvious that these crowded allusions of fertility hint at Tiresias's oscillation between despair and anticipation of regaining fertility. But then how can the reader interpret ll. 430–1?

The first sentence of l. 431 comes from Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, and the second from the subtitle of the play. Hieronymo, a knight marshal of Spain, plans revenge on the murderers of his only son. When he is asked to produce a play at court, he agrees in order to slay the murderers on the stage and replies that " Why then I'll fit you; say no more " (4.1.70)[22]. The play is a tragedy written in various languages, like *The Waste Land*, and each performer must act his or her part in an unknown language. When one of the murderers, who is also an actor of Hieronymo's play, complains " But this will be a mere confusion / And hardly shall we all be understood," Hieronymo says in reply, " It must be so, for the conclusion / Shall prove the invention and all was good " (4.1.182–3). After the others leave the room, he says to himself:

Now shall I see the fall of Babylon,
Wrought by the heavens in this confusion.

And if the world like not this tragedy,
Hard is the hap of old Hieronimo.
(*The Spanish Tragedy*, 4.1.195–8)

After taking his revenge, Hieronymo displays his son's corpse behind a curtain and gives a brief explanation to the andience. Then he bites off his tongue and dies.

This abrupt reference to *The Spanish Tragedy* at the end of the poem deserves careful examination. Hieronymo's play is especially important, because of its resemblance to *The Waste Land*. Both contain multiple languages, charged with impending confusion; the "Babylon" which Hieronymo mentions is obviously Babel[23]. Although Hieronymo expects the collapse of the tower, Eliot actually experienced it. He piled up the fragments of the past in an attempt to synthesize an artificial European, but he failed; his tower crumbled, drowning him in the doldrums of memory. Just as Hieronymo plans to stage the fall, Eliot produces it in *The Waste Land*. And after finishing both add commentaries to their work[24].

After the catharsis on the stage, Hieronymo gives a brief account of what has happened. But his confession is insufficient, leaving the audience at the entrance of an interminable supposition regarding the facts of the murder. Hieronymo's revenge is completed in front of the audience, but, in a sense, it begins at the point where he bites off his tongue. The audience unconsciously enters a state of uncertainty; in which they begin to imagine events which will never be revealed. Hieronymo has created a labyrinth which keeps on expanding.

Eliot followed Hieronymo's example. After concluding the poem with a word meaning "the peace which passeth understanding," he leaves insufficient notes for the reader[25]. The notes form an entrance to the labyrinth of literary memory each reader possesses, inviting us to seek for what the poet leaves unsaid. But the poet's silence is an allusion to all of literature; the reader cannot reach any destination. All he can do is wander in literary memory. And the labyrinth grows larger, each time the reader steps further into his literary memory. Line 431

hints at such an intention.

The accusation that Eliot's notes are a hoax is thus partly true. But they are deadly serious. In 1924, Arnold Bennet asked Eliot whether the notes were a " a lark or serious." Eliot's answer was that " they were serious, and not more of a skit than some things in the poem itself[26]." The notes are indispensable to *The Waste Land* for two reasons. The poem is a model of Eliot's situation, and the notes help the poem to serve as a simulator or objective correlative of it. We are reminded of Harry's words to Mary in *The Family Reunion* (1939):

> If I tried to explain, you could never understand:
> Explaining would only make a worse misunderstanding;
> Explaining would only set me farther away from you.
> There is only one way for you to understand
> And that is by seeing.
>
> (1.2.228–32)[27]

The notes dominate the reception of *The Waste Land* in order to show the reader the " fear in a handful of dust " which Sybil has grasped in her hand.

The ability of the notes to steer the reader comes from the bird's eye view they enjoy of the whole poem. From this we know that the poet obtained a viewpoint which enabled him to analyze and mock his situation. Therefore the existence of the notes alludes to Eliot's recovery from sterility in the doldrums of Bergsonian memory; creating a labyrinth for the reader was a kind of exorcism for him.

NOTES

1) George Williamson, *The Talent of T. S. Eliot*, Chapbook 32, (Seattle: University of Washington Book Store, 1929), 33.
2) T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), 109.
3) Daniel H. Woodward, " Notes on the Publishing History and Text of *The Waste Land* " (1964), rpt. in *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land*, eds. C. B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe (London: Macmillan, 1968), 78.
4) Grover Smith, *The Waste Land* (London: George Allen and Unwin,

1983), 80.

5) Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, 109–10.

6) An interview conducted by Donald Hall, recorded on tape, and subsequently edited by Eliot. *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, 2nd series (New York: Viking, 1963), 96.

7) For the symbolism of the Grall legend and vegetation ceremonies in *The Waste Land*, see Elizabeth Drew, *T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949); George Williamson, *A Reader's Guide to T. S. Eliot: A Poem-by-Poem Analysis* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1953); Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); B. C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 4th ed. (London: Faber, 1981).

8) *Writers at Work*, 104–5.

9) All quotations of *The Waste Land* are from *The Collected Poems: 1909–1962* (London: Faber, 1963).

10) Grover Smith has made a detailed analysis of this aspect of Tiresias, describing it a " Proustian element," in *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, 58–59, and *The Waste Land*, 50.

11) Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1911), 88.

12) Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1910), 101.

13) Eliot told he was a Bergsonian when he composed " The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock " (completed in 1911). See Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot: A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 41, 45. Nancy K. Gish analyses the Bergsonian aspect of the early poems in *Time in the Postry of T. S. Eliot: A Study in Structure and Theme* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

14) *The Question of Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. F. W. Dupee, (New York: Henry Holt, 1945), 109.

15) " Mr Middleton Murry's Synthesis," *Criterion* (October 1927): 346.

16) Ackroyd, 41.

17) Caroline Behr, *T. S. Eliot: A Chronology of his Life and Works* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 7.

18) *For Lancelot Andrews: Essays on Style and Other* (London: Faber, 1928), 7.

19) See Peter Revell, *Quest in Modern American Poetry* (London: Vision, 1981), 12–14.

20) Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, vol. 1 of *Inferno*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 105.
21) Southam, 109.
22) All quotations of *The Spanish Tragedy* are from *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. J. R. Mulryne (London: Ernest Benn, 1970).
23) The Geneva version, the common household Bible in Kyd's age, uses " Babel " both for Babel and Babylon throughout the Old Testament (some 275 times). See S. F. Johnson, " *The Spanish Tragedy*, or Babylon Revisited," *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Craig*, ed. Richard Hosley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 25.
24) While Hieronymo's play is performed in Greek, Latin, Italian and French, in the *The Waste Land* the last 9 lines prior to the voice of the thunder are written in Latin, Italian and French. Interestingly, missing Greek is Tiresias's mother tongue, so one might suppose that the lines written in English were originally " spoken " in Greek.
25) Eliot's note to l. 433.
26) Cited in Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot* (1959; rpt. London: Methuen, 1965), 156. For the date of this conversation, see Behr, 25.
27) T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), 309.

My thanks are due to Mr Andrew Armour for his kind advice and careful reading of my manuscript.