

Psychoanalysis in Search of Itself:

Jacques Lacan, T. S. Eliot, and the Seductions of Modernism

Mario Beira and Dany Nobus

"I journeyed to London, to the timekept City,
Where the River flows, with foreign flotations.
There I was told: . . ." [*et la suite*]

T. S. Eliot, Choruses from 'The Rock'¹

Introduction

The argument underpinning this essay is relatively simple, although to the best of our knowledge it has not been previously formulated as such in the literature on Lacanian psychoanalysis, neither in its features and contours, nor in its repercussions. When, during the Summer of 1953, Lacan set himself to work on the lengthy theoretical position paper that was to have served as the focal point of discussion for the 16th *Conférence des psychanalystes de langues romanes*, the acrimonious split that had divided the French psychoanalytic community during the month of June prompted him to recover the foundational principles of psychoanalysis by radically transforming the way in which Freud's brainchild had developed following his death. In 1953, Lacan

thus took advantage of an institutional crisis to change the face of contemporary psychoanalysis, with the purpose of retrieving and reinstating its true value. We shall never know what Lacan would have written if he had done so as a member of the *Société psychanalytique de Paris* rather than the newly established *Société française de psychanalyse*, yet the content of his text is most likely to have been substantially different, if only because he would not have experienced the same urge to expose his colleagues' numerous misconceptions of psychoanalytic theory and practice, even less the need to outline a completely new programme for psychoanalysis. As Lacan himself put it in the opening paragraph of his report: "The discourse that the reader will find here warrants an introduction that provides some context. Because it bears its mark".²

In trying to reclaim Freud's original spirit of discovery by fundamentally recalibrating the psychoanalytic doctrine of his day, Lacan adopted the same position as the modernists during the first decades of the twentieth century. We will even go so far as to propose that, in 1953, Lacan consciously embraced the modernist reevaluation of all sociocultural values, which had risen to prominence during the 1920s as a reaction against the conventional celebration of realism, naturalism, and rationalism, with a view to restoring what he considered to be the truth of Freud's invention. We are fully aware that this proposition may strike the reader as distinctly bizarre or perhaps as outright paradoxical, for three main reasons. First, quite a few prominent representatives of the modernist movement were highly critical of Freud's explanatory paradigm, especially in its applications to literature, because it was brandished as reductionist and simplistic. For example, despite her unwavering commitment to publishing English translations of Freud's work via the home-run Hogarth Press she had set up with her husband, Virginia Woolf did not hesitate to

distance herself from psychoanalysis as a dubious, flattening and vulgarising narrative, which “is a patent key that opens every door” and therefore “simplifies rather than complicates, detracts rather than enriches.”³ Second, whereas Freud himself constructed his theories as much in close alliance with the major human cultural accomplishments as through his private clinical encounters, there is no evidence that he felt any affinity at all for the modernist movement. When, on 10 October 1921, André Breton tried to convince Freud how surrealism would never have seen the light of day without his revolutionary method of dream interpretation and various psychoanalytic concepts, the Viennese conquistador of the unconscious remained rather unimpressed by what the new French artistic group had to offer.⁴ Third, some of the psychoanalytic advances Lacan singled out for trenchant criticism in his 1953 report had to some extent been actively supported by Freud himself. The most poignant example is the psychoanalytic approach that went by the name of ‘ego-psychology’, whose principal champions were Heinz Hartmann, Ernst Kris, and Rudolph Loewenstein, and which regarded the aim of the clinical process as a strengthening of the patient’s ego.⁵ This “tendency in psychoanalysis”, Lacan asserted, which presents itself “under the heading of the theory of the ego or technique of the analysis of defences”, “is diametrically opposed to Freudian experience”.⁶ It is not entirely clear what ‘Freudian experience’ means, in this case, yet Lacan seemingly overlooked that in Chapter 6 of *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Freud’s final expository treatise, the founder of psychoanalysis himself had unequivocally asserted that the psychoanalyst must first of all “strengthen the weakened ego” by expanding the patient’s self-knowledge.⁷ Clearly, this is not where Lacan situated the truth of Freud’s

doctrine, *pace* the fact that on the eve of his death Freud himself had ostensibly taken his discoveries into the direction of ego-psychology.

Despite the fact that he rarely acknowledged it, Freud's later model of the human mind and its associated psychoanalytic technique did not strike Lacan as a psychoanalytic outlook that was worth rescuing, because he effectively regarded it as a deviation from the ground-breaking, 'proto-modernist' principles that animated Freud's early works. Influential as it may have been, insofar as Freud's 'second topography' (the distinction between the ego, the id, and the superego) had led to the identification of the ego as the prime locus of psychic control, which could be leveraged clinically for the purposes of enhancing the patient's mental health *qua* social adaptation, Lacan saw this development as the insidious re-emergence of an illusory, 'pre-modernist' view on human subjectivity, which emphasizes self-governance, personal autonomy, a life-affirming sovereignty, and a solid sense of identity that is conditioned by an experience of selfhood over which human beings have full control. The Freudian texts to which Lacan wanted to return were those in which human consciousness was portrayed as fractured and dislodged by the uncontrollable forces of the unconscious. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Lacan ascertained the true subversive power of Freud's work, which he believed to be already modernist in its depiction of a ruptured, alienated human mind that is forever in a state of turmoil.⁸ In this essay, we shall therefore argue that, in 1953, Lacan espoused the modernist aspiration of rescuing the cultural values of creative innovation and expression by totally reinventing them, in order to return a Freudian apparatus that already integrated some of the key precepts of modernism itself. To

realise this project, the poetry of T. S. Eliot, and especially his 1922 poem “The Waste Land”, was Lacan’s main guide.

Lacan Reads T. S. Eliot

As an artistic movement, modernism took root during the late 19th century and came into its own during the first two decades of the 20th century, in part as a reflection of how the human condition had changed in the wake of industrialisation, urbanisation, and secularization. T. S. Eliot is typically seen as one of the principal advocates of the modernist revolution in literature, although he was by no means the first to push the boundaries of literary convention and to experiment with versification and typography. Published in 1922, the same year as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Eliot’s “The Waste Land” is generally regarded as his masterpiece and has become one of the undisputed high points of literary modernism. Throughout all five of its sections, the sprawling poem creatively combines diverse themes and notions, which speak not only to the death of God in the modern world, but also to the disastrous effects of war and the destabilising impact of industrialisation on the human life form. By contrast with the Romantic poetry of the early and mid 19th century, Eliot’s poetic vision is driven by disillusionment, despair, decay, tragic love, destructive lust, and inescapable death. For all its apparently redeeming envoi of peace and tranquillity, the prevailing sensation is one of bleak, hopeless and harrowing misery, against a desolate psychic landscape of brooding, anxious anticipation of some form of cosmic salvation.⁹

In the vast body of work that constitutes Lacan’s writings and seminars, there are but five explicit mentions of Eliot, the most influential religious poet of the 20th century. First, in *Seminar VI, Desire and Its Interpretation*, Lacan at one point evoked

Eliot's 1917 poem "The Hippopotamus". In it, the weight and habits of the Church are compared to the bulky mass of the poem's title beast, only for the poet to conclude that, for all its flaws and limitations, the latter is greatly superior to the former.¹⁰ Eliot's "metaphysical ideas are awful," Lacan opined, but he is "nevertheless a great poet".¹¹ Later in the same seminar, Lacan referred to Eliot's 1919 essay on *Hamlet*, in which "more or less the greatest modern English poet" had gone so far as to claim that "Shakespeare was not equal to the task of dealing with his hero", much like Hamlet himself is not up to the task of avenging the death of his father, so that *Hamlet* is essentially an artistic failure.¹² Four years later, in *Seminar X, Anxiety*, Lacan turned to "The Waste Land" on two separate occasions. In the session of 20 March 1963, he quoted one of Eliot's own notes to the third part of his poem ("The Fire Sermon"), in which the emergence of the blind prophet Tiresias is glossed with reference to lines 320-338 in Book 3 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹³ Recounting the story of how Tiresias spent seven years living as a woman and was eventually struck blind by Juno when, having transitioned back to his male form, he sided with Jupiter that "women enjoy more pleasure in bed than ever we men do", Lacan agreed with Eliot that the "whole passage from Ovid is of *great anthropological interest*."¹⁴ Some two months later, in the session of 29 May 1963, Lacan then recited, in English, four lines from a subsequent stanza of "The Fire Sermon", in which a lovely woman, once her brutal lover departed, "stoops to folly", "[p]aces about her room again, alone", "smoothes her hair with automatic hand", [a]nd puts a record on the gramophone".¹⁵ If one is asking oneself what is involved in a woman's desire, Lacan proclaimed, one needs to acknowledge that it is "determined by the question, for her too, of her *jouissance*".¹⁶ Finally, towards the end of *Seminar XIV, The Logic of Fantasy*, Lacan associated the

title of “The Waste Land” with the ineluctable putrefaction of the human sexual relation, whilst simultaneously calling Eliot an old reactionary character.¹⁷

Relying on these scarce, scattered and disparate fragments from Eliot’s poetry, one would feel hard pressed to argue that his work played a significant role in the development of Lacan’s thought, even though it is clear that Lacan was sufficiently familiar with it, including the notes that Eliot himself attached to “The Waste Land”, to recall one or the other passage when it suited his purposes. Merely relying on these explicit references, the question of Lacan’s engagement with Eliot could easily be closed as a purely circumstantial matter of personal taste. However, in doing so, one would overlook Eliot’s indisputable significance as a ‘spiritual source’ for Lacan’s 1953 ‘Rome Discourse’, in which three citations, references and allusions unequivocally point towards “The Waste Land”, although Eliot is never mentioned by name.¹⁸

The first instance of Lacan relying on Eliot in his “Rome Discourse” occurs towards the end of the second section of his report, when the first four lines of the 1925 poem “The Hollow Men” are quoted in English: “We are the hollow men/We are the stuffed men/Leaning together/Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!”¹⁹ In 1953, one partial and two complete French translations of Eliot’s poem were available, yet for some reason Lacan preferred to quote the four opening lines in English, adding his own words “*et la suite*” (“and so on”) to exhort the reader to consult the entire composition—in the absence of both the title of the poem and its author.²⁰

Lacan’s second invocation of Eliot is more difficult to detect and will probably only be identified by those readers who are fully conversant with “The Waste Land”.²¹ For the second epigraph of the third and final section of his text, Lacan chose a sentence in Latin and Greek from the fourth episode of Gaius Petronius Arbiter’s

Satyricon: “Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα, τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω.”²² In English, the sentence reads: “In fact, I actually saw with my own eyes the Sybil at Cumae dangling in a bottle [ampulla], and when the children asked her in Greek: ‘What do you want, Sybil?’ she used to answer: ‘I want to die’”.²³ This particular phrase was selected by Eliot as the epigraph for “The Waste Land”, for reasons which he himself never clearly explained. Eliot had originally chosen a passage from Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness*, in which the narrator reflects upon the death of the vicious ivory trader Kurtz, but he replaced it with the sentence from Petronius following a brief exchange of letters with Ezra Pound in January 1922.²⁴ On 18 June 1944, Eliot’s secretary wrote to Ethel M. Stephenson: “Mr Eliot . . . asks me to tell you that the quotation is from *Petronius*—*Satyricon* 48.8. The speaker, Trimalchio, is drunk. He [Eliot] does not know himself what the explanation is, and says that so far as his poem is concerned it does not matter.”²⁵ Some five years later, Eliot himself replied to an inquiry from the American critic Grover Smith in equally oblique terms: “The connection of *Heart of Darkness* with *The Waste Land* is simply that I had thought of using as the epigraph the dying words of Mr. Kurtz. Ezra Pound demurred at this as he thought that the quotation was not weighty enough for the occasion, and it was after that that the quotation from Petronius came into my mind as being what I wanted.”²⁶ Over the years, scholars have pointed out that the Sybil’s confinement to her bottle provided Eliot with “In the Cage” as the working title for the second section of his poem and that the content of Petronius’ sentence alludes to a world that is “barren, desolate: a spiritual void”.²⁷ The latter observation definitely relays the hopelessness of the Sybil’s predicament—she has been granted eternal life, but not

eternal youth and is therefore eternally trapped in a withering body—but it does not account for the peculiar circumstances (a profligate banquet) in which the story is told.

When Lacan included the passage from Petronius as an epigraph for the final section of his “Rome Discourse”, he failed once again to mention Eliot by name, choosing instead to extract the sentence from “The Waste Land” by attributing it directly to its Roman source.²⁸ It is of course possible that he was familiar with Petronius’ *Satyricon* and the literature associated with the Cumaean Sybil prior to his reading “The Waste Land”. Educated as he was by Marianist priests in Paris, Lacan must have at least been partially familiar with the “Oracula Sibyllina”, with the Way of the Cumaean Sibyl, and with its role in the history of Christianity.²⁹ However, it is equally possible that Lacan, after reading “*The Waste Land*”, decided to investigate the history of the priestess associated with Sibylline prophecies, and then chose to place the final part of his text under her tragic, disturbing desire for reasons that did not immediately relate to Eliot’s poem.

The third instance where we find Lacan turning to Eliot in his “Rome Discourse” appears at the very end of his text. There we find him calling upon the three Sanskrit imperatives from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* to which Eliot also alluded in the final section of “The Waste Land”, before bringing his poem to an end. Once again, Lacan did not relate the material back to Eliot’s poem by providing a reference to his work. The story is originally told in Chapter 2 of Book V of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, as follows:

The descendants of Prajāpati, of three kinds, gods, human beings and demons, lived as *brahmacārins* with their father Prajāpati. When they had completed their studentship, the gods said, ‘Teach us, father.’

He spoke to them the syllable DA. 'Did you understand?'

'We understood,' they said. 'You told us, "Be self-controlled (*dāmyata*)."'

'OM,' he said. 'You understood.'

Then the human beings said to him, 'Teach us, father.'

He spoke to them the same syllable DA. 'Did you understand?'

'We understood,' they said. 'You told us, "Give (*datta*)."'

'OM,' he said. 'You understood.'

Then the demons said to him, 'Teach us, father.'

He spoke to them the syllable DA. 'Did you understand?'

'We understood,' they said. 'You told us, "Be compassionate (*dayadhvam*)."'

'OM,' he said. 'You understood.'

This is what the divine voice that is thunder repeats: 'DA DA DA', 'Be self-controlled! Give! Be compassionate!' One should practise this set of three: self-control (*dama*), giving (*dāna*) and compassion (*dayā*).³⁰

In "The Waste Land", Eliot presented the three Sanskrit words—*dāmyata*, *datta*, and *dayadhvam*—in a different order than in the original text, since he placed *dāmyata* after *datta* and *dayadhvam*.³¹ In the first, mimeographed version of his report, Lacan too changed the order by listing them as *dāmyata*, *dayadhvam*, and *datta*, which matches neither the original nor Eliot's sequence. When he returned to his text in 1956 to prepare it for publication, he changed the sequence and adopted the order that can be found in the original.

As to the translation of the Sanskrit verbs, Eliot rendered *datta* as ‘give’, which Lacan followed by offering ‘donnez’ in the published version of his text.³² However, *dayadhvam* was translated by Eliot in his notes to the poem as ‘sympathise’, while Lacan rendered it as ‘faites grâce’ or ‘be merciful’.³³ *Dāmyata* Eliot translated as ‘control’, whereas Lacan opted for ‘domptez-vous’ or ‘master yourselves’.³⁴ Alternative ways of spelling the nouns from which the three Sanskrit verbs are derived can be found in the literature. Indeed, in a note to his translation of Lacan’s *Écrits*, Fink observes that the term *datta* is at times given as *danam*, with *dayadhvam* appearing as *daya* and *dāmyata* as *damah*.³⁵ While Lacan initially presented the three Sanskrit verbs in his report in an order that reverses the one Eliot followed, he spelled the three words exactly as Eliot did in “The Waste Land”, although they also appear in the same way in the French translation of the *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad* by Herold that Lacan could have consulted.³⁶ Much as Lacan did not directly quote “The Waste Land” at the end of his text, he did not quote this French translation of the *Upanishad* either, but rather offered a free adaptation of the story of Prajāpati in the mimeographed document, which was subsequently revised for publication. It is also worth noting that Lacan’s French translations of *dāmyata* (‘domptez-vous’) and *datta* (‘donnez’) accord with Herold’s options, whereas this is not the case for *dayadhvam*, which Herold translated as ‘soyez compatissants’ and Lacan rendered as ‘faites grâce’. What may seem a matter of philological detail, here, actually reaches out into the heart of our argument. Irrespective of Lacan’s scholarly omissions (quotation marks, detailed source references, and explanatory notes), the way in which he recounts the story of Prajāpati makes us wonder whose words we are reading, whose voice is speaking, where the words are stemming from, how their enunciation should be

attributed and, perhaps most importantly, how the source of their emission influences the meaning they are supposed to convey.³⁷ Comparing Lacan's French interpretations with Eliot's translations and the original, one is definitely left to wonder how we ought to understand what the thunder really said to his descendants.

Modernist Psychoanalysis?

Throughout his writings and seminars, it was by no means unusual for Lacan to refer to a specific author without mentioning his or her name. For example, at the end of the introduction to his "Rome Discourse", Lacan discussed an article on Freud's theory of the instincts, in which "the author, by way of the strict tautology of his false premises, comes to the conclusion that the instincts in question are reducible to the reflex arc", without ever providing the author's name, or the title of the essay in question.³⁸ Likewise, in *Seminar IV, The Object Relation*, Lacan devoted quite a few sessions to discussing "a sort of collective work that has just come out" without ever disclosing the title of the volume, or its editor.³⁹

The naïve explanation for the recurrent absence of authors' or editors' names in Lacan's texts is that it represents a case of sloppy scholarship, Lacan failing to adhere to the standard principles of academic writing, or applying these rules rather loosely, i.e. without caring all that much about detailed references and the mandatory clarification of source materials. However, upon closer inspection of the names that are omitted from the texts and seminars, a rather different perspective on Lacan's (poor) scholarly practice emerges. In many cases when an author is not mentioned by name, the person's work, or occasionally the person him- or herself, is singled out for vitriolic, often sarcastic criticism. In other instances, there is historical evidence that

Lacan had at one point fallen out with the author whose name is being withheld, or that he could have had strong personal and/or professional motives for silently passing over his or her identifying characteristics. In other words, whenever Lacan did not refer to an author *by* name, the omission is often rooted in an intentional, deliberate resolve on Lacan's part not to honour the person by allowing him or her to exist *in* name. Withholding the name, then, often constitutes Lacan's rhetorical way of extracting the person from the sphere of symbolic existence.

However, when it comes to T. S. Eliot, it is difficult to see why Lacan would have had recourse to such a calculated act of 'symbolic burking'. As the explicit references to Eliot in his seminars demonstrate, Lacan was generally appreciative of the poet's works and since, for all we know, the two men never crossed paths, he could not have had any personal and/or professional reasons for omitting his name. Some scholars have suggested that Lacan did not need to mention Eliot by name in his "Rome Discourse", because his authorship was blatantly obvious.⁴⁰ This may have been true for "The Hollow Men", but could it also have obtained for the epigraph from Petronius and for the story of Prajāpati? Even though "The Waste Land" was undoubtedly known to some of the readers of Lacan's 1953 text, how many would have been sufficiently familiar with it to detect the hand of T. S. Eliot in the sentence on the Cumaean Sibyl and in the Sanskrit words at the end? Moreover, the issue is confounded by the fact that, unlike Eliot, Lacan directly attributed the Sibyl's depiction to Petronius and that, like Eliot but only in one of his own notes, he also explicitly referred what the thunder said to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*. Even those readers who knew "The Waste Land" well enough to link both passages in Lacan's text to Eliot's poem could therefore have doubts about the exact, secondary source, because

Lacan himself provided clear, detailed, alternative sources, one of which (Petronius) not appearing in the poem at all.

Despite Lacan's inclusion of the primary sources for Petronius and the *Upanishads*, it is also difficult to entertain the idea that Lacan omitted Eliot's name in his "Rome Discourse" in order to enhance and relay his own erudition. It is not uncommon for scholars to directly cite primary source materials they have in fact discovered in a secondary text, without thereby also mentioning the latter, for the sole purpose of increasing their intellectual stature in the eyes of their readership. Yet as we observed in the previous section of this essay, Lacan did not just copy the passages on the Cumaean Sibyl and Prajāpati from Eliot. In the former case, he must have traced the original source, which Eliot did not provide, and in the latter case his idiosyncratic translations of some of the Sanskrit verbs may very well indicate that he also verified and worked on the original.

At this point, we wish to argue that, if Eliot's name is completely absent from the "Rome Discourse", the omission is as intentional as Lacan's trademark 'symbolic burking', but is performed on radically different grounds, whose rationale is to be found in the guiding principles of modernism itself. If Eliot did not attribute his own epigraph to "The Waste Land" to Petronius' *Satyricon*, it is most likely because he did not want the source (the author and his text) to preside over the meaning of the sentence in question, and for that meaning then to influence the meaning of the poem as a whole. As we saw in the previous section, either speaking via his secretary or with his own voice, Eliot was eventually prepared to disclose the source of the epigraph and to explain how it had come to replace a fragment from *Heart of Darkness*, yet he never went so far as to tell his correspondents what its significance was for "The Waste

Land”, settling instead on the evasive (and perhaps disingenuous) comment that it does not matter. On 13 October 1927, Eliot wrote to the English poet Claude Collier Abbott: “The only legitimate meaning of a poem is the meaning which it has for any reader, not a meaning which it has primarily for the author.”⁴¹ Writing in response to the English critic and educator I. A. Richards, Eliot articulated this perspective on the relation between authorship and meaning more forcefully in his 1933 essay “The Modern Mind”: “[I]n one sense, but a very limited one, he [the poet] knows better what his poems ‘mean’ than can anyone else; he may know the history of their composition, the material which has gone in and come out in an unrecognisable form, and he knows what he was trying to do and what he was meaning to mean. But what a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author; and indeed, in the course of time a poet may become merely a reader in respect to his own works, forgetting its original meaning—or without forgetting, merely changing.”⁴²

Removing or suspending the authorship of a poem is thus a means of charging the reader or the listener with the full responsibility for meaning making processes. In the absence of the authorial voice, the source of the poem becomes hollow, much like the men whose headpiece Eliot described as regrettably filled with straw in “The Hollow Men”. In principle, there is no reason as to why this postulate would not extend beyond the realm of poetry, even though prose and criticism are generally not concerned with seeking a balance between meaning and sound (musicality, rhythm, intonation, etc.). And even when the point from which the message is emitted, which Lacan would designate as the ‘enunciating subject’ (‘sujet de l’énonciation’), is known, named, or inferred, the meaning of the message remains primarily conditioned by its

recipient.⁴³ This is also the principal lesson of the second chapter of the fifth book of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. The syllable Da comes from the voice of the god of thunder, yet Prajāpati does not prejudge how his response should be understood. He dutifully satisfies his children's demand that he teach them something, yet in each case the sound of his message is identical, whereas its meaning differs according to the status of the three groups of listeners. And for all the divergence in meaning that the children attribute to their father's message, it is invariably being confirmed as an index of accurate understanding. Prajāpati can hardly be held responsible for imposing a certain meaning upon his children's mind; it is the children themselves who hear the sound of thunder in their own subjective way, filling the semantic hollowness of their existence with a meaning that is not only entirely particular to them, but that is subsequently being endorsed as a veracious imperative.

Beyond the contents of the instructive parable of Prajāpati, Lacan did not avoid including its original source, but decided not to mention its presence in "The Waste Land", because he did not want his readership's interpretation of the story to be influenced by the semantic resonances of Eliot's poem. In removing Eliot from the interpretative process—even though the poet and his poem might not have offered all that much in the way of a clear, meaningful context—Lacan ensured that the reader of his "Rome Discourse" would be in a similar position as the children of Prajāpati. In response to his audience's request of being taught something about the function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis, Lacan produced his own protracted Da and left it up to his (undoubtedly bemused) human readers and listeners to decide what the signifier meant, restricting himself to the observation that "men [human beings] recognize each other by the gift of speech."⁴⁴

Of course, Lacan's purposeful omission of "The Waste Land" at the end of his text does not explain why he did not adopt Eliot's practice of also deleting the original source in his citation of the Cumaean Sibyl's story. If the removal of authorship from a written or spoken expression serves the purpose of placing semantic intentionality entirely on the side of its recipient, why would Lacan decide to add Petronius's name to the second epigraph of the last section of his "Rome Discourse"? In this case, we believe, the objective (meaning is to be situated on the side of the reader) is identical, yet the rhetorical technique for achieving it is almost exactly the opposite, or at least the precise counterpart of omitting authorship. In providing his readership with the original source of the story about the Sibyl, Lacan complicated its interpretation by multiplying the number of voices. Instead of obfuscating the message's point of emission by eliminating the source and/or the author, the 'enunciating subject' is fundamentally distorted here through the conflation of a multitude of speakers, none of whom being identifiable as the reliable originator of the message, in whose words its true meaning can be found. By referring his readers to the exact passage in *The Satyricon* where the Sibyl's words are summoned, the status of the speaking agency is thus rendered problematic, to the point where the meaning of the enunciation becomes mysterious and blurred.

Whereas it would seem that it is the Sibyl who admits that her only wish is to die, her words are a response to the inquisitive children, who either hear the message in the presence of Trimalchio, or convey it to him, yet it is a highly inebriated Trimalchio who tells the story to his dinner guests with the sole intention of bragging about his knowledge, as is recounted in itself by Petronius in a book (*The Satyricon*) that has in itself been collated by various editors on the basis of surviving fragments.

Making abstraction of how the passage served Eliot as the epigraph for “The Waste Land”, albeit allegedly without this having any bearing on the poem, Lacan’s addition of the original source to the Sibyl’s “I want to die” creates a confluence of four different voices, the veracity of at least three of which can be thrown into doubt. If the Sibyl’s own words, despite her highly advanced age and her heavily decayed body, can be considered truthful, they are heard and conveyed by children (notoriously unreliable witnesses), retold by Trimalchio (a pretentious freedman who enjoys showing off, but whose learning is deeply flawed and no doubt also muddled by his drunken state of mind), and jotted down by Petronius in a series of satirical adventures that are intended to capture the chaotic excesses of the Neronian period in Roman history. The net result is that, once again, it is the reader who is left to make sense of the episode, including the reason as to why Lacan himself would have chosen it as a heading for the last section of his “Rome Discourse”.

Now, it would be remiss to forget that Lacan’s 1953 report was meant to clarify the function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis, theoretically as well as clinically, and that for all its rhetorical pyrotechnics it was primarily intended as an innovative manifesto for practicing psychoanalysts in the newly created *Société française de psychanalyse*. Lacan’s veiled reliance on the modernist tradition, and T. S. Eliot in particular, was not in itself a contribution to modernist literature—even though some readers would have inevitably read it like this—but a strongly worded and occasionally sarcastic programme to rescue Freud’s discovery from the hands of all those who had turned it into a formalistic set of precepts. If, in his embrace of T. S. Eliot’s poetry and criticism, Lacan not only demonstrated his familiarity and his sympathy for the modernist movement, but also his willingness to adopt some of its

critical principles, this cultural allegiance was designed to show that the theory and practice of Freudian psychoanalysis itself was constructed upon proto-modernist foundations—in spite of the modernists' own ambivalent attitude towards the purportedly reductionist impact of its concepts and interpretative tools.

In 1953, Lacan's modernist take on psychoanalysis manifested itself in his budding conception of the human subject as the psychic instance that is created and conditioned by language, yet not as a conscious agency, but rather as an unconscious 'hollow' receptacle, where various discourses come together and thoughts are being exchanged in the fundamental absence of a coherent, controlling centre.⁴⁵ Behind the 'subject of the statement' ('sujet de l'énoncé'), i.e. the words that are spoken by the patient in psychoanalytic treatment, there is an 'enunciating subject' somewhere, but the latter is not readily identifiable within those words and it may very well be made up of a multiplicity of voices. For example, if a patient declares in analysis "I am an idiot", then the psychoanalyst would be mistaken to take this 'I' of the sentence (the 'subject of the statement') as identical to the 'I' from which the enunciation flows. It may very well be the case that the 'I' of the statement combines within itself an amalgamation of subjective voices whose origin is situated outside the speaking subject, but who have nonetheless nestled themselves in the patient's unconscious. The 'I' of the statement might very well represent the patient's father and mother, who at some stage, back in the mist of subjective time, designated their son as an idiot. In this instance, the enunciating subject is present in the expression of the words, but other voices have occupied its place at the level of the sentence (and the associated self-designation), filling the hollow space from where the enunciation stems with their own subjective authority.

In addition, Lacan's reliance on modernism crucially affected his take on psychoanalytic interpretation, to which the third section of his "Rome Discourse" (with the citation from Petronius and the story of Prajāpati) was devoted. Lacan's argument, here, emulated Eliot's position that it is not up to the poet to predetermine the meaning of a poem, but that the latter's interpretation is to be reserved for its reader. Similarly, Lacan suggested that whereas the act of interpretation is commonly reserved for the psychoanalyst, as the complement to the patient's free associations, this does not imply that psychoanalytic interpretations, as supposedly stemming from the authoritative voice of the clinician, should pinpoint and relay the meaning of the patient's discourse. In order to avoid their operating as externally imposed, alienating semantic interventions, the task befalling the psychoanalyst is rather to have recourse to an interpretative technique that allows patients to come up with their own reading of the analyst's words. This is one reason as to why, during the early 1950s, Lacan argued that the analyst's use of the variable-length or the short session has the distinct advantage that it does not feed the patient any specific meaning, since it merely comes down to an unexpected temporal interruption, rather than a specific verbal intervention that is almost inevitably charged with meaning.⁴⁶

Conclusion

On 16 June 1975, Lacan was invited to deliver the opening address at the 5th International Joyce Symposium, in the *Grand Amphithéâtre* of the Sorbonne. Unlike Freud, Lacan seldom enriched or substantiated his writings and lectures with anecdotes from his personal life, yet on this occasion he clearly could not resist the temptation to reveal that at the age of 17 he had been privileged to meet James Joyce

in person at the bookshop and lending library of Adrienne Monnier. “So too did I attend when I was twenty,” he continued, “the first reading of the French translation of *Ulysses* that came out.”⁴⁷

At the age of 74, Lacan could probably be forgiven for misremembering how old he was when he met Joyce at Adrienne Monnier’s shop. As the archival records of Monnier’s “La maison des amis des livres” show, a young man by the name of Jacques Lacan did register with the lending library on 14 January 1919, when he was 17, but Joyce did not arrive in Paris until July 1920, when Lacan would have been 19 years old.⁴⁸ However, on 7 December 1921, Monnier did devote an evening event to the reading of fragments of Joyce’s forthcoming book *Ulysses*, translated into French by Valery Larbaud, Jacques Benoist-Méchin and Léon-Paul Fargue.⁴⁹ Earlier that year, on 27 July, the American-born Sylvia Beach had moved the English language equivalent of Monnier’s shop from its original premises on the *rue Dupuytren* to a new building just across the road, under the name of “Shakespeare and Company”. Instead of competing, the two women decided to work together on making their initiatives a success and joined hands in the organisation of exhibitions, readings, and musical events.⁵⁰ During the 1920s and 30s, Monnier and Beach succeeded in creating an extraordinary gravitational pull to their joint establishments, “Shakespeare and Company” becoming the cultural centre of Anglophone writers and artists in Paris, Monnier’s shop being regularly frequented by everyone belonging to the artistic vanguard on the French scene.⁵¹

Although he regularly travelled to Paris to meet with writers, editors, and publishers, T. S. Eliot did not participate in a reading at “Shakespeare and Company” until 6 June 1936. On 24 April 1936, Beach wrote to Eliot: “I can hardly believe that

such a historic event is really approaching. It is most kind of you, Mr. Eliot, to come.”⁵²

To the best of our knowledge, Lacan never commented—as he did with regard to Joyce—on his meeting Eliot, or attending a reading of “The Waste Land” and other poems at “Shakespeare and Company”. However, given his interest in modernist literature, and the fact that Jean de Menasce’s French translation of “The Waste Land” was first published in 1926, it is quite likely that Lacan developed a familiarity with the poem (and Eliot’s other works) relatively soon after their first publication.

In her biography of Lacan, Elisabeth Roudinesco relied on a conversation with Lacan’s first analysand Georges Bernier to state that, during the early years of World War II, Lacan and Bernier met in Marseilles and decided to translate some poems by T.S. Eliot, because “England was the world’s last hope, and as a result English literature and English thought were the only ones that existed”.⁵³ Lacan had never learnt English at school, but he had reportedly started taking private English lessons from René Varin, who was a government official at the French Foreign ministry.⁵⁴ Which poems by Eliot the two men agreed to tackle remains unclear. Since “The Waste Land” already existed in de Menasce’s translation, it would seem odd if they had decided to produce their own, but this does not mean that it would have been entirely out of the question.

In any case, Lacan’s interest in modernist literature spanned at least a period of thirty-odd years, from his attendance at the reading of fragments of the French translation of Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1921 until his recurrent, though veiled references to Eliot in his 1953 “Rome Discourse”. During the early 1920s, he would evidently not have been listening to (and reading) *Ulysses* and other modernist texts against the professional (or even intellectual) background of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and practice. But some thirty years later, Eliot did not enter the “Rome Discourse”, albeit

as an absence, merely for the purposes of literary embellishment. At that stage, Lacan deliberately relied on Eliot, and the way in which the modernists had retained the value of literature by literally reinventing it, with a view to doing the same for psychoanalysis. And the modernist means that Lacan employed to revivify the true spirit of Freud's original inspiration even matched the end that they were supposed to serve. For Lacan in 1953, Freud's discovery had always already been modernist in its theoretical assumptions and its clinical implications.

But why, of all the modernist writers he could have chosen, would Lacan have turned to Eliot in his "Rome Discourse" to attempt to revivify and restore what he viewed as the original spirit and truth of Freud's discovery? The style of Eliot's work was distinctly modernist, yet the subject of his work, especially in "The Waste Land", was singularly devoted to challenging modern secularism—the death of God, which most modernists in European cities embraced.⁵⁵ Lacan's strategy vis-à-vis Eliot was thus peculiar and odd, especially since he presented himself to the world, as did Freud, as a non-believer and an atheist. Why appeal to Eliot, a God intoxicated man, to provide direction to his report in Rome, while silencing his name in the process?

First of all, Eliot's name itself might have figured in the equation. Eliot himself undoubtedly knew that his family name meant 'God letter' in Hebrew, the language of scripture, and Lacan could have known this too, including that the letter of God, when it crystallizes into a name, is not to be represented or mentioned in full. We also know that Eliot's paternal grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot (1811-1887), a graduate of Harvard's Divinity School in 1834 who became an influential Unitarian minister and educator, served as an instructor of Hebrew during his days at Harvard before moving to Saint Louis circa 1834.⁵⁶ Was his grandson, a Harvard graduate

himself, who studied Sanskrit and Hebrew at the university, unconsciously following and obeying the letter of his family name when composing “The Waste Land”, a poem he wrote during a period of personal crisis which led him to seek psychological help from Dr Roger Vittoz in Switzerland?⁵⁷ There are other factors to consider, for it turns out that Lacan delivered his “Rome Discourse”, which gave birth to the key principles of what would subsequently become Lacanian psychoanalysis, on 26 September 1953, i.e. on the very same day Eliot celebrated his 65th birthday in the timekept City. Was Lacan consciously aware of this fact? His research on Eliot with Bernier a decade earlier must have led him to come across the fact that Eliot was born in Saint Louis (Missouri) on 26 September 1888.⁵⁸

Yet another factor to consider is that Lacan, during the discussion that followed the morning after he delivered his report, boldly and publicly pronounced Serge Leclaire, his most gifted analysand, a psychoanalyst (*un analyste*).⁵⁹ Leclaire thus became the first nominated Lacanian psychoanalyst in history. His best known contribution was the analysis he provided of the unicorn dream, first published by him with Jean Laplanche in 1961.⁶⁰ Not generally known, however, is that Leclaire’s dream was not dreamt by one of his patients (Philippe Georges Elhyani, as he named him) but by Leclaire himself. Hence, the text of the dream he published provides us with the interpretation that he and his analyst (Lacan) devised sometime between 1948 and 1953.⁶¹ Leclaire’s dream, dreamt by him in response to his thirst and desire for water, might itself have been a product of his reading of “The Waste Land”. The dream features two individuals (Elhyani as Leclaire, and Liliane as a possible incarnation of Lacan) who, while walking in a forest together, are suddenly and surprisingly joined by a third figure (a unicorn) which, says Leclaire, “crosses our path”. The trio then walk

down together towards a clearing, which they divine down below. The dream neatly reproduces a scene which Eliot captures towards the end of section 5 of “The Waste Land”:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
--But who is that on the other side of you?⁶²

Eliot informs us via a note that the “hooded figure in the passage” was a reference by him to the Emmaus episode in the New Testament (Luke 24:15), an event which reports on two of Christ’s disciples who, feeling dejected after his crucifixion and death, decide to walk together towards the town of Emmaus, when a mysterious third figure suddenly appears and joins them on their walk. The figure turns out to be the resurrected Christ, who hides his identity at first, but reveals himself to his two disciples in time to admonish them for their lack of faith.⁶³ Leclaire never mentions Eliot’s passage on Christ as the third figure and his silence itself uncannily repeats Lacan’s own silence on Eliot’s name in his Rome report. Leclaire’s failure to name Christ is rendered even more peculiar by the fact that he, when reporting his unicorn dream, relates that the dreamer, i.e. himself, was familiar both with the ‘Lady and the Unicorn’ tapestries at the Cluny Museum in Paris and the ‘Hunt for the Unicorn’ Tapestries at the Cloister’s branch of the New York Metropolitan Museum.⁶⁴ Both

series, the one at the Metropolitan in particular, involve an effort to artistically represent Christ's passion, his crucifixion and resurrection.⁶⁵ Circling back two decades earlier, could it possibly be by accident that Lacan, at 8 o'clock in the morning of 26 November 1934, woke up after experiencing a powerful circumcision dream while in analysis with Loewenstein, to record and reflect on the dream in a booklet he had acquired four years earlier when attending the famed Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria, a theatrical event typically produced every ten years in Southern Germany to stage Christ's crucifixion, passion and resurrection?⁶⁶

Finally, it is crucial to note that, early in the afternoon of 27 September 1953, Jacques Marie Lacan—Leclaire's analyst and the only surviving child of his mother who did not enter the world on a Christmas Day—decided, after pronouncing Leclaire an analyst and as the conference in Rome had come to an end, to travel to the Pope's summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, accompanied by Leclaire and Maryse Choisy to catch a glimpse of the Bishop of Rome from afar, as part of the public audience that had gathered there seeking his benediction and blessing.⁶⁷ We know that Lacan had already tried to arrange a personal meeting with the Pope via his brother, which he hoped might have occurred during his time in the Italian capital in September 1953. Pope Pius XII never responded to Lacan's request.⁶⁸ The best Lacan could do was thus to ask Leclaire and Choisy to join him on his side trip after the conference in Rome had concluded, the trio making their way to Castel Gandolfo to wave at the Pope after he emerged from his balcony to address the faithful. Lacan's decision to go greet the Pope from afar likely issued from his having received the news on 26 September, just before or just after he delivered his Rome report, that Pope Pius XII was at Castel Gandolfo and had announced a new encyclical, which for the first time in the history

of the Church proclaimed a “Marian Year” to honour the Virgin Mary. News on the encyclical appeared on the front pages of newspapers in Italy and throughout the world, including *The New York Times*, which published a front page story on the Pope’s announcement on its Sunday, September 27 edition.⁶⁹ The story in *The New York Times* opened with a 26 September dateline from Rome, before going on to report that the Pope had “addressed an encyclical letter to the Roman Catholic episcopacy throughout the world today [on 26 September] proclaiming a Marian Year to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception”.⁷⁰

Lacan’s reliance on the modernist tradition via Eliot for launching his ‘return to Freud’ in Rome is rendered even more strongly by the fact that Eliot, in a note to “The Waste Land”, declared the figure of Tiresias “the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest”.⁷¹ Indeed, Sergi has proposed that Tiresias emerges not only as the “Modernist maypole” in “The Waste Land”, but also in the work of another key figure in the modernist movement, namely *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound.⁷² As such, it is not surprising to find Lacan proposing, in light of Eliot, that Tiresias—“the seer, the soothsayer”—ought to be seen as the “Patron Saint of Psychoanalysis”.⁷³ All of this we take as an open “blank card”, which Lacan, relying on Eliot and the modernist tradition, presented to his disciples and future followers when delivering his revolutionary report in the Eternal City for them to interpret.⁷⁴

Notes

- ¹ T. S. Eliot, "Choruses from 'The Rock'," in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 153.
- ² Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 197, translation modified. This text, which is often referred to, including by Lacan himself, as the "Rome Discourse", exists in three different versions. The original typescript, which carried the title "Fonction de la parole dans l'expérience analytique et relation du champ de la psychanalyse au langage", was distributed as a mimeograph before the conference to its attendees and to some of Lacan's friends and supporters, and never published as such. The second, extensively revised version was retitled "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse" for publication in 1956 in the first issue of the journal *La psychanalyse*, whereas the third and final version was slightly rewritten for inclusion in *Écrits*. The quoted phrase about the text being marked by its context is identical in each of the three versions. For the second version, see Jacques Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," *La psychanalyse* 1 (1956): 81-166. For a survey and commentary of the textual variants in the second and the third version, see Ángel de Frutos Salvador, *Los Escritos de Jacques Lacan. Variantes textuales* (Madrid: Siglo veintiuno, 1994), 100-111 & 330-333. A comparison of all three versions is available as item 54 on the Lacan pages of Richard G. Klein's website: <https://www.freud2lacan.com/lacan/>
- ³ Virginia Woolf, "Freudian Fiction," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Vol. 3: 1919-1924*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: The Hogarth Press, 1988), 197. Woolf's essay originally appeared anonymously, as per the magazine's editorial policy, in *The Times Literary Supplement* 949 (25 March 1920): 199 as a review of the novel *An Imperfect Mother* by J. D. Beresford. The Hogarth Press started publishing English translations of Freud's works in 1922. For a more detailed discussion of Woolf's ambivalence towards psychoanalysis, see Jennifer Spitzer, *Secret Sharers: The Intimate Rivalries of Modernism and Psychoanalysis* (New York NY: Fordham University Press, 2023), 59-87.
- ⁴ Whether surrealism constitutes a specific strand of modernism is probably open to debate, yet Freud's outspoken scepticism towards the new art forms that emerged in the aftermath of the Great War, which he himself attributed to a profound lack of understanding, primarily evinces his deep-rooted preference and sympathy for the Western canon and classical Antiquity. For Breton's visit to Freud, see Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*. Revised and updated edition (Boston MA: Black Widow Press, 2009): 146; Marcel Scheidhauer, *Freud et ses visiteurs Français et Suisses francophones (1920-1930)* (Strasbourg: Arcanes, 2010): 33-36; Aaron H. Esman, "Psychoanalysis and Surrealism: André Breton and Sigmund Freud," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 59, no. 1 (2011): 173-181.
- ⁵ See, for instance, Heinz Hartmann, *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*, trans. David Rapaport (Madison CT: International Universities Press, Inc., 1959).

- Hartmann's short book is based on a lecture presented before the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1937.
- ⁶ Lacan, "The Function and Field", 227.
- ⁷ Sigmund Freud, "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 23, ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 177.
- ⁸ Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vols 4/5, ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953); Sigmund Freud, "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 6, ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960); Sigmund Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 8, ed. & trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960).
- ⁹ See, for example, David Ellis, "Modernism and T. S. Eliot," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2018): 53-64; Louis Menand, "T. S. Eliot and Modernity," *The New England Quarterly*, 69, no. 4 (1996): 554–579; Jed Rasula, *What the Thunder Said: How The Waste Land Made Poetry Modern* (Princeton NJ-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022).
- ¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book VI: Desire and Its Interpretation (1958-'59)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge-Medford MA: Polity, 2019), 106; T. S. Eliot, "The Hippopotamus," in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 43-44.
- ¹¹ Lacan, *The Seminar. Book VI*, 106.
- ¹² Lacan, *The Seminar. Book VI*, 271; T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 87-94.
- ¹³ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book X: Anxiety (1962-'63)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge-Malden MA: Polity, 2014), 183; T. S. Eliot, "Notes on the Waste Land," in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1*, 74-75; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 108-109.
- ¹⁴ Lacan, *The Seminar. Book X*, 183-184; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 108; Eliot, "Notes on the Waste Land," 74. For some reason, Eliot's phrase "great anthropological interest" is printed in italics in the English text of Lacan's seminar, which is not the case in the original French edition, nor in Eliot's notes. See Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre X: L'angoisse (1962-'63)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: du Seuil, 2004), 214.
- ¹⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar. Book X*, 264-265; T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 64.
- ¹⁶ Lacan, *The Seminar. Book X*, 265. It is worth noting that at the time Lacan delivered this seminar two complete French translations of "The Waste Land" had been published—one by Jean de Menasce in 1926 and one by Pierre Leyris in 1947—but that Lacan nonetheless offered his own French rendition of the verses, whilst

- dutifully remarking that Eliot had taken the first line (“When lovely woman stoops to folly”) from Oliver Goldsmith’s 1766 novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The two complete French translations of “The Waste Land” are included, without Eliot’s notes, in Joan Fillmore Hooker, *T. S. Eliot’s Poems in French Translation: Pierre Leyris and Others* (Ann Arbor MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 227-236 and 239-250. For the original French translations, see T. S. Eliot, “La terre mise à nu”, trans. Jean de Menasce, *L’esprit* 1 (1926): 174-194; T. S. Eliot, “La terre vaine,” in *Poèmes 1910-1930*, trans. Pierre Leyris (Paris: du Seuil, 1947): 84-159. Leyris’ translation was published in a bilingual version, whereby T. S. Eliot’s own notes to “The Waste Land” were supplemented with notes by John Hayward.
- ¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre XIV: La logique du fantasme (1966-’67)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: du Seuil, 2023), 305.
- ¹⁸ The same principle applies to all three versions of the text.
- ¹⁹ Lacan, “The Function and Field”, 234. The mimeographed version of the “Rome Discourse” contained a typographical error in the third line, insofar as it stated ‘learning’ rather than ‘leaning’. Lacan corrected the mistake for the 1956 publication of his text.
- ²⁰ The two complete French versions were published in 1934 and 1936 as “Les hommes creux” in the journals *Le journal des poètes* and *Mesures*, in translations by Charles Moncheur and Georges Cattaoui respectively. One year before “The Hollow Men” was officially released in English, the journal *Commerce* published a bilingual version of the first part of it in 1924, translated by St.-John Perse. Another complete French translation by Pierre Leyris was released in 1965 as “Les hommes vidés” in the journal *Mercure de France*. When revising his report for *Écrits*, Lacan could thus have also decided to include this most recent version. The reader will find all of the French texts brought together in Fillmore Hooker, *T. S. Eliot’s Poems in French Translation*, 251-260.
- ²¹ Anthony Wilden’s first English translation of Lacan’s “Rome Discourse”, from 1968, which omitted the preface because it was considered “more a matter of anecdote than of history”, alerted the reader at this point to “The Waste Land” in its critical apparatus and this practice has been followed in all subsequent English renditions of the text. However, the reference to “The Waste Land” remains absent from all French editions. See Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore MD-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), xxiii and 138-139.
- ²² Petronius, *Satyricon*, trans. Michael Heseltine & W. H. D. Rouse, revised by E. H. Warmington (Cambridge MA-London: Harvard University Press, 1969), 100.
- ²³ Petronius, *The Satyricon*, trans. J. P. Sullivan (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 38.
- ²⁴ See T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land. A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts, Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London-Boston MA: Faber & Faber, 1971), 125; T. S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land, with Eliot’s Contemporary Prose*, 2nd edition, ed. Lawrence Rainey (New Haven CT-London: Yale University Press, 2005), 75-76; Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).
- ²⁵ Cited in Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems*, 593. Eliot’s secretary had to clarify the source of the quotation, because Eliot himself had not provided the reader with his own annotation for it.

- ²⁶ Ibid, 591-592. Eliot did seem to have a predilection for Petronius, since he chose another passage of *The Satyricon* as the epigraph for *The Sacred Wood*.
- ²⁷ Matthew Hollis, *The Waste Land: A Biography of a Poem* (London: Faber & Faber, 2022), 241; Helen Morales, "Introduction," in Petronius, *The Satyricon*, xxv.
- ²⁸ Much like Eliot did not provide the reader with any information pertaining to the origin of his epigraph, the two complete French translations of "The Waste Land" that Lacan would have had at his disposal when he wrote his text in 1953 also did not include the source of the citation. If Lacan indeed took the sentence from "The Waste Land", he therefore must have checked its precise source in order to attribute it, with the number of the relevant section, to Petronius' *Satyricon*.
- ²⁹ See Marlena G. Corcoran, "The Corcoran Gallery: The Way of the Cumaean Sibyl," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 78, nos 3/4 (1995): 649-660; Daniel Hadas, "Christians, Sibyls and Eclogue 4," *Recherches augustiniennes et patristiques*, 37 (2013): 51-129.
- ³⁰ *The Upanishads*, ed. and trans. Valerie J. Roebuck (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 81-82.
- ³¹ Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems*, 70-71.
- ³² Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems*, 70 & 76; Jacques Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," in *Écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 1966), 322; Lacan, "The Function and Field," 265.
- ³³ Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems*, 76; Jacques Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," in *Écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 1966), 322; Lacan, "The Function and Field," 265.
- ³⁴ Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems*, 76; Jacques Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," in *Écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 1966), 322; Lacan, "The Function and Field," 265. Eliot had studied Sanskrit with James Haughton Wood at Harvard during the academic year 1912-'13. See Robert Crawford, *Young Eliot: From St Louis to The Waste Land* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015): 170-171.
- ³⁵ Bruce Fink, "Translator's Endnotes," in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 792, note 322, 8.
- ³⁶ See *L'Upanishad du Grand Aranyaka*, trans. A.-Ferdinand Herold (Paris: Librairie de l'art indépendant, 1894), 123-124. Lacan could not have taken his French translations of the three Sanskrit verbs from the two complete French versions of "The Waste Land" that were available at the time, because at this point de Menasce had rendered T. S. Eliot's notes, in which the verbs appear, as "donne, comptis, dirige" and Leyris had included them as "donne, sympathise, dirige". See T. S. Eliot, "La terre mise à nu," 194; T. S. Eliot, "La terre vaine," 155. Lacan's French adaptation of the three interpretations of the thunder's monosyllabic message thus raises the largely unresolved question as to whether he could also have been working with the original Sanskrit text, with or without the assistance of a Sanskritologist. For an interesting exploration of this question, see Catherine Clément, "Lacan indien," *La cause freudienne* 79 (2011): 49-57.
- ³⁷ Whether Lacan's decision to end his "Rome Discourse" with an invocation of the *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad* was directly inspired by his reading of "The Waste Land" is difficult to prove beyond reasonable doubt. As with the citation from Petronius, his first source may have been the original, which he could have subsequently

stylised in accordance with Eliot's poem. However, a close look at the material in Lacan's text reveals that he erred when mentioning the source of Prajāpati's lesson to his children in the *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad*. In his essay, Lacan claimed that the exchange between Prajāpati and his children appears "in the first Brahmana of the fifth lesson of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad". In his notes to "The Waste Land", Eliot too stated: "The fable of the meaning of the Thunder is found in the *Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad*, 5.1." But the story in question appears in the second rather than the first section of lesson 5, and the first section, though short, is impossible to overlook in printed editions of the *Upanishads*. In addition, the fact that Lacan wrote the name of the specific *Upanishad* as *Brihadaranyaka*, i.e. exactly as Eliot did, does appear to suggest that his first source for the story was "The Waste Land". In the first English translation of the "Rome Discourse", Lacan's error was silently corrected. Alan Sheridan did the same when he translated Lacan's text for the selected *Écrits*, yet Bruce Fink maintained the error in his complete English translation of *Écrits*, without drawing the reader's attention to the mistake in an editor's note. Strangely, Eliot's own error was also silently corrected for what is meant to be the definitive edition of "The Waste Land". See Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, 86; Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 106; Lacan, "The Function and Field," 265; Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 1: Collected & Uncollected Poems*, 76.

³⁸ The article in question is Maurice Bénassy, "Théorie des instincts," *Revue française de psychanalyse* 17, no. 1/2 (1953): 1-109. It had been prepared as the position paper for the 1952 *Conférence des psychanalystes de langue française*.

³⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book IV: The Object Relation (1956-'57)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge-Medford MA: Polity, 2020): 5. It concerns Sacha Nacht (Ed.), *La psychanalyse d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Jorge Baños Orellana, Jacques Lacan, il miglior fabbro (2^e entrega), <https://www.elsigma.com/coleccionables/jacques-lacan-il-miglior-fabbro-2-entrega/71>. Accessed on 15 March 2024.

⁴¹ T. S. Eliot, *The Letters of T. S. Eliot. Vol. 3: 1926-1927*, eds Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber and Faber, 2012): 752.

⁴² T. S. Eliot, "The Modern Mind," in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933): 130.

⁴³ See, for example, Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 677.

⁴⁴ Lacan, "The Function and Field," 265.

⁴⁵ When revising a large collection of his essays for the publication of *Écrits* in 1966, Lacan wrote a short text entitled "On the Subject Who is Finally In Question" that would immediately precede the new version of his "Rome Discourse". See Jacques Lacan, "On the Subject Who Is Finally In Question," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 189-196.

⁴⁶ Towards the end of his "Rome Discourse", Lacan wrote that the 'short sessions' belonged to "a stage in my career that is now over", yet some people who were in

- analysis with Lacan at the time, or who knew about his clinical practice, have disputed this concession. See Lacan, “The Function and Field,” 259.
- ⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, “Joyce the Symptom,” in Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book XXIII: The Sinthome*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge-Malden MA: Polity, 2016): 142. This text is an English translation of the notes taken by Éric Laurent of Lacan’s lecture. For the publication of the conference proceedings, Lacan submitted a completely different text, although under the same title as his original presentation. See Jacques Lacan, “Joyce le Symptôme,” in *Joyce & Paris 1902 . . . 1920-1940 . . . 1975. Actes du Cinquième Symposium International James Joyce—Paris 16-20 juin 1975*, eds. Jacques Aubert & Maria Jolas (Paris-Lille: Éditions du CNRS/Publications de l’Université de Lille 3, 1979): 13-17. For an English translation of the latter text, see Jacques Lacan, “Joyce the Symptom,” trans. A. R. Price, *The Lacanian Review: Journal of the New Lacanian School and the World Association of Psychoanalysis* 5 (2018): 13-18.
- ⁴⁸ See Laure Murat, *Passage de l’Odéon. Sylvia Beach, Adrienne Monnier et la vie littéraire à Paris dans l’entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Fayard, 2003): 62-63. Murat gives Lacan’s age at the date of his first registration as 18 years old, yet since he was born on 13 April 1901 he would not reach that age until about four months later. For Joyce’s arrival in Paris, see Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*. New and Revised Edition (Oxford-New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- ⁴⁹ See Murat, *Passage de l’Odéon*, 329; Michael Thomas Davis, “Jacques Lacan and Shakespeare and Company,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 32, nos 3/4 (1995): 754-758. For an homage to Adrienne Monnier’s legendary bookshop and lending library, including the memoirs of Monnier herself, see Adrienne Monnier, *Rue de l’Odéon* (Paris: Albin Michel 1960).
- ⁵⁰ See, for example, Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company*. New Edition (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Ralph Schor, *Le Paris des écrivains américains 1919-1939* (Paris: Perrin, 2021); Noel Riley Fitch, *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983).
- ⁵¹ The success of both women’s ventures was also due to their intrepid devotion to promoting the literary avant-garde, which resulted to some extent in the shops boasting a ‘succès de scandale’ after Beach published Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1922 and Monnier did the same for the book’s French translation in 1929.
- ⁵² Cited in Murat, *Passage de l’Odéon*, 315 note 2.
- ⁵³ Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York NY: Columbia University Press, 1997): 159.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.
- ⁵⁵ Strangely enough, this did not apply to Vienna. As Whalen has argued, the modernist culture in Freud’s city was not secularist but religious. See Robert Weldon Whalen, *Sacred Spring: God and the Birth of Modernism in Fin de Siècle Vienna* (Grand Rapids MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).
- ⁵⁶ See Crawford, *Young Eliot*, 17.
- ⁵⁷ See Matthew K. Gold, “The Expert Hand and the Obedient Heart: Dr. Vittoz, T.S. Eliot, and the Therapeutic Possibilities of The Waste Land,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 23, nos 3/4 (2000): 519-533.

- ⁵⁸ Our sincere thanks to W. Ronald Schuchard, General Editor of the recently published eight-volume edition of Eliot's *Complete Prose*, for confirming that Eliot was in London when he celebrated his 65th birthday.
- ⁵⁹ See Jacques Lacan, "Réponses aux Interventions 27 septembre 1953," in *Autres écrits* (Paris: du Seuil, 2001): 162
- ⁶⁰ See Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "L'inconscient. Une étude psychanalytique," *Les Temps Modernes* 17, no. 183 (1961): 81-129. Leclaire eventually published the unicorn dream solely under his name. For the publication history of the dream after 1961, see Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "L'inconscient. Une étude psychanalytique," in *L'inconscient. Vle Colloque de Bonneval*, ed. Henri Ey (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966): 95-130; Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study," trans. Patrick Coleman, *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 118-175; Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study," in *The Unconscious and the Id: A Volume of Laplanche's Problématiques*, trans. Luke Thurston and Lindsey Watson (New York NY: The Other Press, 1999): 224-272; Serge Leclaire, "The Dream with the Unicorn," in *Psychoanalyzing: On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practice of the Letter*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998): 70-87.
- ⁶¹ See François Dosse, *History of Structuralism, Vol. 1: The Rising Sign, 1945-1966*, trans. Deborah Glassman (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 123.
- ⁶² T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," 69.
- ⁶³ Biblical scholars have long been familiar with the fact that unicorns are mentioned in Christian literature, including the New Testament, as symbols for Christ. See Allen Tate, *Christ and the Unicorn* (Westbranch IA: Cummington Press, 1966); Jane Beal, "The Unicorn as a Symbol for Christ in the Middle Ages," in *Illuminating Jesus in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Beal (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 154-188; Joseph Hirst, "On the Religious Symbolism of the Unicorn," *The Archeological Journal* 41, no. 1 (1884): 230-241.
- ⁶⁴ See Leclaire, "The Dream with the Unicorn," 149-150, note 3.
- ⁶⁵ See Helmut Nickel, "About the Sequence of the Tapestries in 'The Hunt of the Unicorn' and 'The Lady with the Unicorn,'" *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 17 (1982): 9-14; Adolfo Salvatore Cavallo, *The Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York NY: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1998); Margaret B. Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries – Cloister Museum* (New York NY: E.P. Dutton, 1976).
- ⁶⁶ See Jacques Lacan, "Le carnet des rêves," in *Lacan Redivivus*, eds. Jacques-Alain Miller & Christiane Alberti (Paris: Navarin, 2021): 15-34.
- ⁶⁷ Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. (Chicago IL-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990): 103 & 261. We skip various facts here, which help further support the observation that Lacan's trip to Castel Gandolfo with his two companions repeats the central elements of Leclaire's unicorn dream, which can be designated as the founding dream of Lacanian psychoanalysis.
- ⁶⁸ The fact that Lacan tried to obtain an audience with Pope Pius XII should not be interpreted as a sign of his megalomania, because the Bishop of Rome was greatly interested in psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and clinical psychology. On 16 April

1949, he had already accorded an audience with the Russian-American psychoanalyst Gregory Zilboorg and on 13 April 1953, less than six months before Lacan would deliver his “Rome Discourse”, he had addressed the 5th International Congress on Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology in Rome. See, in this respect, Caroline Zilboorg, *The Life of Gregory Zilboorg, 1940-1959: Mind, Medicine, and Man* (Abingdon-New York NY: Routledge, 2022): 139; Pope Pius XII, *On Psychotherapy and Religion: An Address of His Holiness Pope Pius XII to the Fifth International Congress on Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology April 13, 1953* (Washington DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1953).

⁶⁹ “Pope, proclaiming a Marian Year, asks prayers for Church Liberty”, *The New York Times*, September 27, 1953, front page. <https://www.nytimes.com/1953/09/27/archives/pope-proclaiming-a-marian-year-asks-prayers-for-church-liberty-pope.html>, accessed on 1 June 2024.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ T. S. Eliot, “Notes on the Waste Land,” 74.

⁷² Stephanie Sergi, *The Role of Tiresias in T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land*, unpublished MA Thesis (California State University, Bakersfield CA, 2011); Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, 4th collected edition (London: Faber & Faber, 1987).

⁷³ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book X: Anxiety*, 183.

⁷⁴ Joshua Evans, “The Blank Card: Meaning and Transcendence in T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land,” *Agora* 20, no. 10 (2011): 1-8.