

Second Norton Critical Edition: T. S. Eliot: “The Waste Land” and Other Poems

Thomas J. Farrell

Volume 3, numéro 1, printemps 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1097598ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1097598ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

New Explorations Association

ISSN

2563-3198 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Farrell, T. (2023). Compte rendu de [Second Norton Critical Edition: T. S. Eliot: “The Waste Land” and Other Poems]. *New Explorations*, 3(1).
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1097598ar>

© Thomas J. Farrell, 2023



Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d’auteur. L’utilisation des services d’Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d’utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l’Université de Montréal, l’Université Laval et l’Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>



Review: *Second Norton Critical Edition: T. S. Eliot: "The Waste Land" and Other Poems: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by Michael North (W. W. Norton & Company, 2022).

Thomas J. Farrell

University of Minnesota Duluth

tfarrell@d.umn.edu: tfarrell@d.umn.edu

The American-born Nobel Prize winning poet Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) published his famous poem *The Waste Land* in 1922. The Irish novelist James Joyce (1882-1941) also published his famous novel *Ulysses* in 1922 (which ran afoul of obscenity laws).

The Second Norton Critical Edition of *T. S. Eliot: "The Waste Land" and Other Poems: Authoritative Texts, Contexts, Criticism*, edited by Michael North of UCLA was published in 2022 by W. W. Norton and Company to commemorate the publication of Eliot's most famous poem in 1922. (The First Norton Critical Edition, edited by North, was published in 2001.)

North is the author of the 1991 book *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* and the 1994 book *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth Century Literature*.

Of course, anyone who is interested may buy a Norton Critical Edition. However, Norton Critical Editions are used primarily by college students, for whom they are the required texts in literature courses.

In the Second Norton Critical Edition, Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* appears on pages 43 to 66

-- ably annotated by North in the footnotes (pp. 43-60) and in the "Notes" (pp. 61-66). Among the twenty other poems, from two collections (1917 and 1920), in the Second Norton Critical Edition, we have "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (pp. 5-8) and "Gerontion" (pp. 25-27).

Basically, *The Waste Land* is a poem expressing what the Spanish Renaissance mystic St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuit order, refers to as desolation in his famous *Spiritual Exercises* (1951). The Victorian Jesuit poet and classicist Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) wrote some famous sonnets that literary critics refer to as sonnets of desolation. For a discussion of Hopkins' sonnets of desolation, see the American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and cultural historian Walter J. Ong's 1986 book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (pp. 62 and 145-159), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.¹

Ah, but if you are not at the present time feeling a strong sense of personal desolation about your own life, on the one hand, and, on the other, a strong sense of personal desolation about the current state of society in the world at the present time, why in the world would you want to read a poem expressing a strong sense of desolation? That's a good question. You probably wouldn't want to read it. Or at least you would find it difficult to relate to.

However, in the case of Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land*, perhaps you do not need to have ever experienced a strong sense of desolation about your own personal life, but perhaps only a strong sense of desolation about the current state of society in the world at the present time, in order to find the experience of reading his 1922 poem rewarding. But you do not have to be a complete misanthrope, or a complete cynic, about your fellow human beings today to be

concerned about such international societal problems as global warming and the rise of right-wing authoritarian leaders around the world today. After all, even Pope Francis issued his famous eco-encyclical letter *Laudato si'* in 2015. Like T. S. Eliot, Pope Francis is deeply influenced by the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. In the Christian tradition of thought, St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, played a key role in formulating the Christian doctrine of Original Sin – and St. Augustine appears in Eliot's famous 1922 poem, as does the Buddha.² (Eliot had studied Eastern religion as part of his graduate studies in philosophy at Harvard University.)

Now, as a thought experiment, we may imagine Pope Francis himself reading Eliot's famous 1922 poem in the 2022 Second Norton Critical Edition, even though English is a second language for the multi-lingual pope. For the sake of discussion, we may imagine that the pope himself is not experiencing what St. Ignatius Loyola refers to as desolation about his own personal life. But could the pope who wrote the moving cry in his 2015 eco-encyclical *Laudato si'* allow himself to enter into the spirit of desolation about the current state of society in the contemporary world today? Could he relate to the reference to Augustine in the poem – and to the reference to the Buddha? Would the end of Eliot's poem strike the pope as positive enough and hopeful enough that he could draw fruit from it? In all honesty, I do not know how well Pope Francis might be able to relate to Eliot's famous 1922 poem. But the end of the poem is challenging.

Now, in the 2015 book *Cynic Satire*, the late Eric McLuhan (1942-2018; Ph.D. in English, University of Dallas, 1982), the eldest son of Marshall and Corinne McLuhan, he uses the terms cynic satire and Menippean satire interchangeably. Dr. Eric McLuhan suggests that Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* is a Menippean satire (pp. 196-197, 213 [including note 224], and 230).

Dr. Eric McLuhan also suggests that James Joyce's 1939 experimental novel *Finnegans Wake* is a Menippean satire in his 1997 book *The Role of Thunder in "Finnegans Wake."* In Dr. Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *Cynic Satire*, he differentiates Menippean satire from both Juvenalian satire, on the one hand, and, on the other, Horatian satire. In his view, the distinguishing hallmark of Menippean satire is that it is designed to attack the reader. But he claims that this is not the case with either Juvenalian satire or Horatian satire.

According to him, "Horace's great contribution [to satire] was to discover how to treat common things with dignity and poise, setting aside crude and barbarous forms of attack" (p. 182). But Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* does not "sustain an urbane and civilized style and tone that is smooth and even" (p. 182).

By contrast, according to Dr. Eric McLuhan, Juvenalian satire "[b]roadcasts the high dudgeon and the righteous moral code [and] applies the verbal lash, to drive out wickedness and sin [and it] brings back idealism and rectitude" (p. 183). These descriptors of Juvenalian satire do not fit Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land*.

So by Dr. Eric McLuhan's standard for Menippean satire, both Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* and Joyce's 1939 experimental novel *Finnegans Wake* are deliberately designed by their respective authors to attack their readers, because each work "Enhances play and wit in all forms and by all available means" and "Shuns good taste as a refuge of the witless, sets aside moralizing as an approach" and "Carrie[s] to its logical conclusion, low-and-motley satire turn[ed] into serious art" – serious art that "Plays with and attunes the reader response; loosens up the reflexes to promote balance and play among the faculties, cure up-tight

robotism and self-importance, restore [the] sense of human scale, [and] proportion” – all by attacking the reader! (p. 184).

Now, in North’s “Introduction” to the Second Norton Critical Edition (pp. xvii-xxvi), he says that “Eliot was something of a puzzle to himself [in 1915]” (p. xvii). North also says, “There were many reasons for this situation, but one of the more obvious, especially in the crisis year of 1915, was the tension between the conservative narrowness of his American upbringing and the cosmopolitan world he discovered as a student in Europe. Eliot grew up in St. Louis. . . . Eliot later described the atmosphere of his childhood as one of ‘Unitarian piety and strict Puritanism’” (pp. xvii-xviii; my ellipsis).

I looked up the quote that North here carefully attributes to Eliot. North is here quoting from *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume I: Collected and Uncollected Poems*, edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (2015, p. 535). In Eliot’s unpublished address to the All Souls Club in 1960 (years after his famous conversion to Anglicanism in 1927), he says, “I was brought up in the orthodoxy of Boston Unitarianism: I use the word “orthodoxy,” because the tendency of American Unitarianism in our day has been to wander further and further from the attachment to the memory of Jesus Christ which gave it its tenuous claim to being Christian. . . . My father was brought up in the atmosphere of Unitarian piety and strict Puritanism” (p. 535; the ellipsis is in Ricks and McCue’s text).

In any event, Eliot had a strong abiding sense of the importance of the doctrine of Original Sin. The American Eliot specialist Jewel Spears Brooker has discussed the problem of evil in Eliot’s writings and related works in her 2018 book *T. S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination* (for specific pages references to her discussion of the problem of evil, see the “Index” [pp. 205-215] for the

entries on Augustine; Baudelaire; the Bible; Eliot's *Burnt Norton*; Dante; evil, problem of; idea/reality; the Incarnation; irony; Jesus Christ; Julian of Norwich; Eliot's *Little Gidding*; music; mysticism; philosophy; poetry; and Eliot's *The Waste Land*).

Now, Also in North's "Introduction," he says, "What seems a wildly impulsive commitment to a young Englishwoman, Vivien Hugh-Wood, he had known only for a few months, happened to coincide, that same June [1915], with the first publication of [Eliot's poem] 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' On the slender promise of this single poem, which is, of course, about the terror of commitment, Eliot took the step that utterly changed his life [by marrying Vivien Hugh-Wood]. Later [when he wrote *The Waste Land*], when the marriage, at least, seemed a mistake, he looked back at his leap into the unknown with fatalistic regret: 'The awful daring of a moment of surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract' (*The Waste Land*, ll. 403-404). And yet this ["awful daring"] remained for Eliot, through *The Waste Land* at least, the only possible formula for change, the only escape from an ossified past to a daunting future" (p. xix).

Subsequently, North says of *The Waste Land*, "The past, as presented in the poem, does not add up, and tradition fails to accomplish its defining task of handing on when it comes to the present with nothing more than 'a handful of dust' (l. 30). The agonizing gap between the past and the future, which was the defining problem of Eliot's private life in these years, is dramatized in *The Waste Land* as the 'shadow at morning striding behind you' and 'the shadow of evening rising to meet you' (ll. 28-29), and it is generalized in the crowds for whom memory and desire conspire to empty out the present. In *The Waste Land* as in Eliot's private life, the only way across this gap is to leap" (pp. xxiv-xxv).

Nowhere in North's "Introduction" does he explicitly advert to Eliot's famous 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which is reprinted in volume 2 of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, covering the years 1919 to 1926, edited by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (2021, pp. 105-114).

In my judgment, North's remarks here that "tradition fails to accomplish its defining task of handing on . . . to the present" clearly show that he has picked up on the strong expression of desolation in Eliot's 1922 poem -- but that he has not picked up on why Dr. Eric McLuhan suggests that Eliot's 1922 poem is a Menippean satire.

However that may be, we should also note that North describes Eliot as suffering from "[t]he 'lifelong affliction' of indecisive, obsessional thought" that at times could produce in him "a state of tense mental paralysis" (p. xxiii; North's quote of the words "Lifelong affliction" is from a letter of Eliot's). But what if we understand Eliot's self-disclosure in the quoted letter as also somehow applying to the poet who wrote *The Waste Land*? Could we then understand the various fragments in his 1922 poem as expressing his "Lifelong affliction" of ruminating that North characterizes as "indecisive, obsessional thought"? This application of North's characterization of Eliot would help us understand why Eliot the poet had produced the unwieldy manuscript that his friend and fellow poet Pound helped him edit. In effect, Pound in his editorial assistance to Eliot played a role of guidance analogous to the roles of Virgil and Beatrice play in providing guidance to the character named Dante in the poet Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

If Eliot himself had a certain critical distance about himself and his propensity toward his "Lifelong affliction," how would he handle his affliction in his 1922 poem *The Waste Land*?

Dante-the-poet created Dante-the-character in the *Divine Comedy*. But Eliot-the-poet does not create a fictional character referred to as Eliot-the-character in *The Waste Land*. As to guidance, in Eliot's 1922 poem, he turns to St. Augustine and the Buddha – each of whom is almost ethereal in the poem compared to the portrayal of Virgil and Beatrice in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But we could say that fragments of Eliot-the-character and of the counterparts of Virgil and Beatrice as guides do turn up, albeit cryptically, amid the various voices in Eliot's 1922 poem. Yes, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, we do indeed hear the various voices of certain souls portrayed in the afterlife. But Eliot's 1922 poem is not exactly focused on the afterlife, but rather on this life and on the voices that we hear in what North refers to as “tradition [that] fails to accomplish its defining task of handing on” (p. xxv).

Figuratively speaking, all of us may imagine our consciousness as involving various voices, some of which may be more prominent and more dominant than others. In this way, each of us as readers of Eliot's 1922 poem encounter various voices in it that are different from the voices we carry in our own consciousness. Perhaps the voices in his poem may make us feel challenged by them – or even attacked by them. Yes, in many instances of the fragments that are literary, we may feel challenged because we do not grasp the literary reference. But if we imagine that Eliot was writing his 1922 poem primarily for those readers who would immediately grasp each literary reference, then we are imagining him writing his poem for a relatively small audience. Ah, but what if Eliot was seeding his poem with literary references that he himself did not expect very many readers to grasp immediately? If this were the case, why then would he seed his poem with so many literary references? Yes, he wanted to challenge his readers. But Dr. Eric McLuhan's claim that Eliot's 1922 poem is a Menippean satire suggests that Eliot was seeding it with literary references not just to challenge his

readers, but also to make them feel that they were under attack by his poem.

Now, in the “Contexts” section of the Second Norton Critical Edition (pp. 67-170), North has included selections by Sir James G. Frazer (1854-1941) on “The Killing of the Divine King” (pp. 72-73?) and “[Adonis and Christ]” (pp. 73-75?) – and a selection “[The Road to Emmaus]” from the King James Bible (Luke 24:13-32; pp. 100-101).

However, more broadly, I would remind college students who use the Second Norton Critical Edition that the imagery of the waste land also refers to the desert in which Moses and the ancient Israelites wandering for forty years in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible – and the desert in which Jesus is tempted by the devil for forty days and nights in the three synoptic gospels: Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; and Luke 4:2.

Also in the “Contexts” section of the Second Norton Critical Edition, we learn that Eliot himself once, subsequently, after his most famous poem was published in 1922, described it in the following words: “To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling” (p. 135). The attribution printed on page 135 says, “Quoted by the late Professor Theodore Spencer during a lecture at Harvard University, and recorded by the late Henry Ware Eliot, Jr., the poet’s brother.”

Yes, *The Waste Land* is “personal” in the sense of being and a “personal” “grumbling” “grouse against life,” and it is “a piece of rhythmical grumbling.” But we may resist Eliot’s supposed characterizations here about it being “wholly insignificant” and “just” “a piece of rhythmical grumbling.”

Concerning the “personal” aspect of the “grouse against life,” see Robert Crawford’s 2015 book *Young Eliot: From St. Louis to “The Waste Land.”* North is familiar with Crawford’s 2015

book (pp. ix and 341), but he does not reprint anything from it in the Second Norton Critical Edition. Instead, he reprints a selection from Lyndall Gordon's 2012 book *The Imperfect Life of T. S. Eliot* (pp. 109-116). Perhaps I should also say here that North includes a nicely annotated "T. S. Eliot: A Chronology" (pp. 337-339).

In addition, in the "Contexts" section of the Second Norton Critical Edition, North reprints selections from Eliot's famous 1919 manifesto "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (pp. 147-154), the principles of which he himself presumably follows in his famous 1922 poem.

North also reprints Eliot's 1923 somewhat polemical review essay titled "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth" (pp. 165-168). In it, Eliot says, "Among all the criticism I have seen of the book, I have seen nothing – unless we except, in its way, M. Valery Larbaud's valuable paper which is rather an Introduction than a criticism – which seemed to me to appreciate the significance of the method employed – the parallel to the *Odyssey*, and the use of appropriate styles and symbols to each division" (p. 166). Subsequently, Eliot says, "In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him" (p. 168).

Eliot himself had read parts of Joyce 1922 novel as they were published in literary periodicals, and Eliot himself pursues a method in *The Waste Land* that Joyce pursues in *Ulysses* -- a method involving a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity (and medieval and Renaissance and later sources as well). If you catch all, or most, of the learned but cryptic allusions to past sources that Eliot works into *The Waste Land*, good for you – provided that they enrich your experience of reading the poem. However, if any, or many, of the learned allusions ring no bells of recognition for you, just let your mind and memory free associate, as

it were, on the imagery Eliot uses in the poem.

Eliot's 1923 essay "*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*" is also reprinted in volume 2 of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, covering the years 1919 to 1926, edited by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (2021, pp. 476-481). The editors also reprint a note that Eliot wrote in 1964 on the occasion of his 1923 essay being reprinted in a volume of literary criticism. In Eliot's 1964 note, he says the following:

"In rereading, for the first time after many years, this expression of my critical opinion, I am unfavorably impressed by the overconfidence in my own views and the intemperance with which I expressed them. The sentence beginning 'the next generation is responsible for its own soul' strikes me as both pompous and silly. And Wyndham Lewis, before he died, wrote two books, *The Revenge for Love* and *Self-Condemned*, which are not only far superior to *Tarr* but which are definitely 'novels.' To say that the novel ended with Flaubert and James was possibly an echo of Ezra Pound and is certainly absurd. To say that other writers must follow the procedure of *Ulysses* is equally absurd. But I disagree as much now as I did then with the words quoted from Mr. Aldington writing in the *English Review* in 1921" (p. 479).

In the "Criticism" section of the Second Norton Critical Edition (pp. 171-336), North includes selections from contemporary "Reviews and First Reactions" (pp. 173-206) and notable "Twentieth Century Criticism" (pp. 207-289) and recent "Reconsiderations and New Readings" (pp. 291-336).

The longest selection of “Twentieth Century Criticism” is Cleanth Brooks’ 1937 essay “*The Waste Land: An Analysis*” (pp. 233-259). In it, Brooks (1906-1994) describes what he refers to as “Eliot’s basic method”: “*The Waste Land* is built on a major contrast – a device which is a favorite of Eliot’s and [which is] to be found in many of his poems, particularly his later poems. Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even sacrificial death, may be life-giving, an awakening to life. The poem occupies itself to a great extent with this paradox, and with a number of variations on it” (p. 234). Amen.

One selection of “Reconsiderations and New Readings” consists of passages from Juan A. Suarez’s 2007 book *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (pp. 121-125 and 132-134) titled by North as “[The Gramophone in *The Waste Land*]” (pp. 322-329). I have not read Suarez’s 2007 book. In any event, in the selection from Suarez, he says, “Where Eliot was aesthetic, others have tried to be didactic, yet after decades of hermeneutic exertions, scholarly glosses on sources and structure still fall short of explaining the work’s fascination” (p. 329). As we might expect, Suarez does not claim to have explained *The Waste Land*’s fascination. Nor do I. However, its fascination may be due in large measure to its being Menippean satire, as Dr. Eric McLuhan (2015, pp. 196-197, 213, and 230) claims that it is.

Now, Suarez says about the closing lines of *The Waste Land*, “The poet himself is turning the dial here, or else a disc jockey that delights in creating such mosaics of sound and language. The idea appears elsewhere in Eliot’s work. In his famous essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent,’ written three years before *The Waste Land*, [Eliot] repeatedly characterizes the mature poet as an impersonal ‘medium’ for the storage and transmission of information. ‘The mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature poet not precisely in any valuation of “personality” not by being necessarily more interesting or having “more to say,” but rather by

being *a more finely perfected medium* in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.’ He continues: ‘The poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together’” (p. 327; the italicization is in the text of the Second Norton Critical Edition). I would simply point out here that Eliot never repudiated his 1919 essay.

If we were to omit Eliot’s word “feelings,” we should note that many careful readers over the centuries “stor[ed] up numberless phrases and images” in their commonplace books, presumably for handy later retrieval and use by the reader. As Eliot himself uses the various literary fragments in *The Waste Land*, they are, for him, literary commonplaces that he has stored up and retrieved from his memory.

Ong discusses commonplaces in detail in his seminal 1967 book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (for specific page references concerning commonplaces, see the “Index” [p. 347]). In the subsection “Commonplaces as Oral Residue” (pp. 79-87), Ong connects the use of commonplaces by orators and poets alike in Western culture with the composing practices of oral poets such as Homer. More specifically, Ong connects the use of commonplaces with the practices of oral singers of tales as delineated by Albert B. Lord in his classic study *The Singer of Tales* (1960) and by Eric A. Havelock in his book *Preface to Plato* (1963) – two books that Ong never tired of referring to. Ong’s reviews of the books by Lord and Havelock are preprinted in *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2002, pp. 301-306 and 309-312, respectively).

The classic study of commonplaces in medieval Latin literature is E. R. Curtius’ book *European*

Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (1953).

Eliot and Curtius were friends – and Curtius translated *The Waste Land* into German (1927). For further information about Curtius, see volume 8 of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, covering the years 1954 to 1965, edited by Jewel Spears Brooker and Ronald Schuchard (2021; for specific page references to Curtius, see the “Index” [p. 606]).

But let me be clear here. I am not suggesting that Eliot somehow intuitively knew what Lord would eventually detail about oral composing practices in his 1960 book that launched a thousand studies. No. Rather, I am suggesting that as Eliot played with his own composing practices in writing the unwieldy manuscript of what eventually emerged as *The Waste Land*, he somehow hit upon using paratactic structures with literary fragments that he remembered and in certain other contexts as well. In Jewel Spears Brooker’s 2018 book *T. S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination*, mentioned above in connection with the problem of evil in Eliot’s work, she discusses Eliot’s use of paratactic structures in his poetry (pp. 7, 65, 71-73, and 75). But she does not mention Lord’s 1960 book or Ong’s 1967 book.

Now, North rounds out the Second Norton Critical Edition with “T. S. Eliot: A Chronology” (pp. 337-339), mentioned above, and a categorized “Selected Bibliography” (pp. 341-345), in which he lists “Bibliographies” (p. 341), “Biographies” (p. 341), “Works and Editions” (pp. 341-342), and “Criticism” (pp. 342-345).

In the chronology, North includes the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, which young Eliot attended (p. 337). But North says not a word about Eliot’s meeting Emily Hale. In addition, North does not explicitly refer to World War I. For information about Eliot and Emily Hale, see Robert Crawford’s two-volume biography of Eliot: (1) *Young Eliot: From St. Louis to “The*

Waste Land” (2015), mentioned above; and (2) *Eliot After “The Waste Land.”*”

The Medium and the Message

Next, I want to return to Suarez’s observation about the fascination of *The Waste Land*. I have suggested that its fascination may in large measure be attributed to its Menippean satire (see Dr. Eric McLuhan [2015, pp. 196-197, 213, and 230]). But I now want to note that the parables attributed to Jesus in the canonical gospels hold a similar fascination for Christians (see, for example, Crossan [1973, 1980, 1982, 1988, 1994, and 2012]; but also see Farrell [2022]). Do the parables attributed to Jesus in the canonical gospels involve what Dr. Eric McLuhan (2015) operationally defines and explains as Menippean satire?

The Irish-born New Testament scholar and historical Jesus specialist John Dominic Crossan (born in 1934) operationally defines and explains the term parable in his admirably lucid and learned 2012 book *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction about Jesus*. In it, Crossan does not explicitly refer to the Canadian literary scholar and media ecology theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943) by name. Nevertheless, Crossan refers to Marshall McLuhan’s famous quip that the medium is the message and subsequently alludes to it (pp. 6, 44, 112, 116, and 134). Crossan says, “If the medium is the message, what is the special relationship between [Jesus’s] message of the kingdom of God and his medium of parabolic challenge? Why did Jesus ‘not speak to them except in parables,’ as Mark 4:34 puts it?” (p. 6). Subsequently, Crossan says, “Chapter 6 [“The Kingdom of God: The Challenge of Collaboration,” pp. 113-137] asks, “Why did Jesus choose this third category of challenge [parables] – rather than riddle [parables] or example [parables] – for his parabolic vision of the kingdom of God? Is there some peculiarly appropriate interaction between the medium and the message, between Jesus’s challenge

parables and God's divine kingdom?" (p. 44; Crossan's italicization). Crossan subsequently alludes to McLuhan's quip: "*Why* did Jesus use such challenge parables? Is there some intrinsic connection between Jesus's *medium* of parabolic challenge and his *message* of God's kingdom? And, if so, what is it?" (p. 112) – which is what Crossan next turns to considering in Chapter 6: "The Kingdom of God: The Challenge of Collaboration" (pp. 113-137).

Subsequently, Crossan says, "how is the *medium* of Jesus' challenge parables particularly or especially appropriate to that *message* of God's kingdom?" (p. 116).

Crossan later says, "Why, then, did Jesus trust so much in his audience and grant so much to their reaction? Why not just tell them what he wanted to say openly and literally – like a modern church sermon? Because a *challenge-parable medium is perfect for a paradigm-shift message. Because a collaborative eschaton requires a participatory pedagogy*" (p. 134; Crossan's italicization).

A bit earlier, Crossan says, "In itself *eschaton* means the 'last' or 'end' of something, so its meaning depends completely on what that something is" (p. 118). On the next page, Crossan says, "An apocalypse is simply a revelation (Latin *revelatio*), a divine or prophetic message about something" (p. 119). Crossan then refers to apocalyptic eschatology, which he operationally defines and explains as meaning "some *Special Divine Revelation about the Great Divine Cleanup of the World*" (p. 119; Crossan's capitalization and italicization). Whew! That's a mouthful! Next, Crossan clarifies that what the historical Jesus referred to as God's kingdom might be referred to in non-patriarchal terms as "style of ruling" or "ruling style" (p. 119). Crossan says, "How would the 'ruling style' of God differ from that of a human emperor? That is what is at stake in the phrase 'kingdom of God'" (p. 119).

In Crossan's "Epilogue: History and Parable" (pp. 243-252), he says, "Jesus proclaimed a participatory or collaborative eschatology by announcing that the kingdom of God was not an act of unilateral intervention by divinity, but an act of bilateral cooperation between divinity and humanity" (p. 245).

Now, as we noted above, Dr. Eric McLuhan (2015, esp. pp. 182-184) works with a threefold schema of satire: Juvenalian satire, Horatian satire, and Menippean satire (which he also refers to as cynic satire, referring to the wandering philosophers in the ancient cynic tradition of philosophy at the time of the historical Jesus – but could the historical Jesus have been mistaken for a wandering cynic philosopher?). Dr. Eric McLuhan intimates that his threefold schema of satire in Western tradition is comprehensive.

For the most part, Crossan (2012) works with a threefold schema of parables: riddle parables, example parables, and challenge parables (e.g., p. 6). However, he also identifies a fourth kind of parable that he refers to as an attack parable (p. 7), which he sees as the kind of parable that each of the four canonical gospels, each considered as whole, constitute (pp. 157-242). In Dr. Eric McLuhan's thumbnail characterization of the three kinds of satire in Western tradition (pp. 182-184), he uses the word attack to characterize each one, but he also differentiates each kind of attack, using his understanding of the three ancient verbal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (also known as logic) in Western tradition to differentiate them from one another. He sees Horatian satire in terms of literary rhetoric on the attack (p. 182); Juvenalian satire in terms of dialectic (moral philosophy) in attack mode (p. 183); and Menippean satire in terms of grammar (etymology/interpretation: diagnosis) in active mode – on the attack (p. 184). Ah, but which of those three forms of attack would Crossan's fourth kind of parable represent?

Whichever one of those three forms of attack that Crossan's fourth kind of parable represents, we would end up naming the genre of satire as the genre of writing represented by each of the four canonical gospels.

Now, Crossan stipulates, "All parables are *participatory pedagogy*" (p. 245; his italicization). He also says that the historical Jesus was "an oral teacher with an interactive audience" (p. 111). Of his threefold schema of parables, Crossan says, "That typology includes *riddle parables* or allegories, *example parables* or moral stories, and *challenge parables* or provocations" (p. 136; his italicization). Of challenge parables, he says, "Their purpose is – from the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins – to 'Jolt / Shake and upset your mortified metaphors'" (p. 111).

Crossan (2012) says, "The term 'metaphor' comes from two Greek roots; one is *meta*, 'over' or 'across,' and the other is *pherein*, 'to bear' or 'to carry.' Metaphor means 'carrying something over' from one thing to another and thereby 'seeing something as another' or 'speaking of something as another'" (p. 8; his italicization). He also says, "A parable – whether it is short, medium-length, or long – is a metaphor expanded into a story, or, more simply, *a parable is a metaphorical story*" (p. 8; his italicization).

Crossan operationally defines and explains the three kinds of parables in the first five chapters of his 2012 book:

Chapter 1: "Riddle Parables: So That They May Not Understand" (pp. 13-27);

Chapter 2: "Example Parables: Go and Do – or Don't Do – Likewise" (pp. 29-44);

Chapter 3: "Challenge Parables: Part I: Down from Jerusalem to Jericho" (pp. 45-64);

Chapter 4: "Challenge Parables: Part II: The Word Against the Word" (pp. 65-88);

Chapter 5: "Challenge Parables: Part III: Let Anyone with Ears to Hear Listen!" (pp. 89-112).

Now, can we perhaps align the moral stories that Crossan refers to as example parables with the moral code that Dr. Eric McLuhan (2015, p. 183) sees as the central characteristic of Juvenalian satire?

I do not see much similarity between what Crossan (2012) operationally defines and explains as riddle parables and what Dr. Eric McLuhan (2015, p. 182) operationally defines and explains as Horatian satire. However, unlike Dr. Eric McLuhan, Crossan does not see his threefold schema of parables as covering all forms of parables – after all, he himself names a fourth kind of parable that he sees as the genre of each of the four canonical gospels.

Now, because Dr. Eric McLuhan (2015, pp. 196-197, 213, and 230) claims that Eliot's 1922 poem *The Waste Land* is an example of Menippean satire, can we also use what Crossan (2012, pp. 45-112) operationally defines and explains as challenge parables to characterize Eliot's challenging 1922 poem *The Waste Land*? Or should we use what Crossan says about the fourth kind of parable, the attack parable (e.g., p. 7), which sees as characterizing each of the four canonical gospels (pp. 157-242), as aligning with one of other two forms of satire that Dr. Eric McLuhan discusses, remembering that he sees all three forms as representing an attack mode of one sort or another?

This brings me to a further differentiation that Crossan makes regarding the live preaching/teaching of the historical Jesus. Crossan (2012) says, "Challenge parables are not attack parables" (p. 135) – which seems to rule out all three forms of attack that Dr. Eric McLuhan discusses in connection with the three forms of satire in Western tradition. Crossan also says, "The first two types [of parables] – *riddle* [parables] and *example* [parables] all have

a somewhat adversarial edge, but the third type – *challenge* [parables] is extremely gentle in its provocative content. Those three challenge books [Ruth, Jonah, and Job; see pp. 67-88] are *pedagogical*, or instructive, rather than *polemical*, or aggressive. They want to seduce you into thought rather than beat you into silence and batter you into subjection. That is also the mode used by the challenge parables of Jesus just seen in those same preceding chapters. Even if *ironic*, they are always *irenic*. We will have to watch that spectrum from the pedagogical to the polemical in Part II [of his 2012 book], because if the parables *by* Jesus were primarily pedagogical challenges, those *about* Jesus [i.e., the four canonical gospels] will usually move beyond pedagogy to polemic and beyond challenge to attack” (pp. 136-137).

Now, can we perhaps link what Crossan (2012, pp. 45-112) operationally defines and explains as challenge parables with what Dr. Eric McLuhan (2015, p. 184) operationally defines as and explains as Menippean satire, but without the active attack mode? Or should we link what Dr. Eric McLuhan operationally defines and explains as Menippean satire with what Crossan (2012, pp. 157-242) says about the four canonical gospels?

As we noted above, North reprints the account of Luke 24:13-32 about the road to Emmaus from the King James Bible in the “Contexts” section of the Second Norton Critical Edition (pp. 100-101). Crossan discusses the road to Emmaus episode in Luke as an example of a challenge parable (2012, pp. 3, 4, and 94).

Finally, as a final reflection on Marshall McLuhan’s famous quip that the medium is the message, I want to mention Thomas D. Zlatich’s ambitious essay “*Language as Hermeneutic: An Unresolved Chord*” in Walter J. Ong’s posthumously published uncompleted book *Language as Hermeneutic: A Primer on the Word and Digitization*, edited and with

commentaries by Thomas D. Zlatich and Sara van den Berg (2017, pp. 147-180). In it, Zlatich sets out to “discover why Ong envisioned this book to be a synthesis of his life work” (p. 146).

Zlatich is also the author of the ambitious essay “Faith in Pretext: An Ongian Context for [Herman Melville’s Novel] *The Confidence-Man*” in the anthology *Of Ong and Media Ecology*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2012, pp. 241-280).

At a certain juncture in his essay in Ong’s 2017 book, Zlatich quotes Ong as saying, “‘by dialectically structured I do not mean containing a contradiction. . . I mean that ultimately profound statements are always duplex: they say, at least by implication, two things that are related to one another by asymmetric opposition’” (p. 164). Zlatich is here quoting from Ong’s 1981 book *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality [Gender], and Consciousness* (p. 31), the published version of Ong’s 1979 Messenger Lectures at Cornell University.

Subsequently, Zlatich says, “‘The medium is the message’ may be true, but is not complete or final. ‘The medium is *not* the message’ is also true, in some ways, ways that must be negotiated in dialogue – of which there is no end. [Ong’s book] *Language as Hermeneutic* reaffirms the ‘is-but’ structure of asymmetrical opposition in aphorisms as an alternative to the flat contradiction, ‘is-is not,’ of binary thinking, which Ong identified with the sixteenth-century logician and educational reformer, Peter Ramus [1515-1572]” (pp. 164-165). Zlatich is here referring to Ong’s 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason [in the Age of Reason]*.

Later, Zlatich says, “Ong resisted using the term ‘media,’ believing that the word clouded the human interactions that are endemic in human communications” (p. 170). Zlatich here cites Ong’s 1977 book *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of consciousness and*

Culture (p. 46).

In conclusion, if we were to apply Marshall McLuhan's famous quip that the medium is the message to Eliot's 1922 poem, we would note, of course, that it is a written and printed literary work. As such, it calls for an Ongian context comparable to what Zlatic supplies in his ambitious 2012 essay "Faith in Pretext: An Ongian Context for [Herman Melville's Novel] *The Confidence-Man*," mentioned above. Just as other forms of contextualizing materials can be found in the 2006 *Second Norton Critical Edition: Herman Melville: "The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*, edited by Hershel Parker and Mark Niemeyer, so too various forms of contextualizing materials can be found in the new 2022 *Second Norton Critical Edition: T. S. Eliot: "The Waste Land" and Other Poems*, edited by Michael North of UCLA.

Notes

¹ Ong's most sustained discussion of Eliot can be found in his essay "T. S. Eliot and Today's Ecumenism" in the journal *Religion and Literature* (Summer 1989). It is reprinted in volume two of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1992b). Over the years, Ong discussed Eliot in the following shorter pieces: (1) "Burnt Norton" in St. Louis" in the journal *American Literature* (January 1962). (2) "Only Through Time," a review-article of Eliot's 1965 book *To Criticize the Critic: Eight Essays on Literature and Education* in the periodical *Poetry* (July 1966). (3) Untitled review of Fei-Pai Lu's 1966 book *T. S. Eliot: The Dialectical Structure of His Theory of Poetry* in the journal *American Literature* (January 1967).

² Concerning Pope Francis' view of evil, see my online article "Pope Francis on Evil and Satan" (dated March 24, 2019). Pope Francis' 2015 eco-encyclical *Laudato si'* is available online in

English and other languages at the Vatican's website.

References

Brooker, J. S. (2018). *T. S. Eliot's dialectical imagination*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Crawford, R. (2015). *Young Eliot: From St. Louis to "The waste land."* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Crawford, R. (2022). *Eliot after "The waste land."* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Crossan, J. D. (1973). *In parables: The challenge of the historical Jesus*. Harper & Row.

Crossan, J. D. (1980). *Cliffs of fall: Paradox and polyvalence in the parables of Jesus*. Seabury Press.

Crossan, J. D. (1982). *Parables and presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition*. Fortress Press.

Crossan, J. D. (1988). *The dark interval: Towards a theology of story* (rev. ed.). Eagle Books/ Polebridge Press. (Original work published 1975)

Crossan, J. D. (1994). *The essential Jesus: Original sayings and earliest images*. HarperSanFrancisco/ HarperCollins.

Crossan, J. D. (2012). *The power of parable: How fiction by Jesus became fiction about Jesus*. HarperOne/ HarperCollins.

Curtius, E. R. (1953). *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (W. R. Trask, Trans.). Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1948)

Eliot, T. S. (2015). *The poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume I: Collected and uncollected poems* (C. Ricks and J. McCue, Eds.). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Eliot, T. S. (2021). *The complete prose of T. S. Eliot* (8 vols.; R. Schuchard and others, Eds.). Johns Hopkins University Press; Faber and Faber.

Farrell, T. J. (2019, March 24). Pope Francis on evil and Satan. opednews.com URL:

<https://www.opednews.com/articles/Pope-Francis-on-Evil-and-S-by-Thomas-Farrell->

[Abortion_Catholic_God_Homosexuality-190324-51.html](https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/nexj/article/view/38353)

- Farrell, T. J. (2022). Walter J. Ong's bold thought and John Dominic Crossan's timid view of the historical Jesus. *New Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication*, 2(2). URL: <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/nexj/article/view/38353>
- Francis, Pope. (2015). *Laudato si'* [Encyclical letter]. Available online in English and other languages at the Vatican's website.
- Havelock, E. A. (1963). *Preface to Plato*. Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press.
- Hopkins, G. M. (1990). *The poetical works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (N. H. MacKenzie, Ed.). Clarendon Press/ Oxford University Press.
- Lord, A. B. (1960). *The singer of tales*. Harvard University Press.
- Loyola, St. I. (1951). *The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius: A new translation, based on studies in the language of the autograph* (L. J. Puhl, Trans.). Newman Press.
- McLuhan, E. (1997). *The role of thunder in [James Joyce's] "Finnegans wake."* University of Toronto Press.
- McLuhan, E. (2015). *Cynic satire*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- North, M. (1991). *The political aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*. Cambridge University Press.
- North, M. (1994). *The dialect of modernism: Race, language, and twentieth century literature*. Oxford University Press.
- North, M., ed. (2022). *Second Norton critical edition: T. S. Eliot: "The waste land" and other poems: Authoritative texts, contexts, criticism* (M. North, Ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ong, W. J. (1958). *Ramus, method, and the decay of dialogue: From the art of discourse to the art of reason*. Harvard University Press.

- Ong, W. J. (1962, January). "Burnt Norton" in St. Louis. *American Literature*, 33(4), pp. 522-526.
- Ong, W. J. (1966, July). Only through time (a review of T. S. Eliot's 1965 book *To criticize the critic*). *Poetry*, 108(4), pp. 265-268.
- Ong, W. J. (1967a). *The presence of the word: Some prolegomena for cultural and religious history*. Yale University Press.
- Ong, W. J. (1967b, January). Untitled review of F-P Lu's book *T. S. Eliot: The dialectical structure of his theory of poetry*. *American Literature*, 38(4), pp. 573-574.
- Ong, W. J. (1977). *Interfaces of the word: Studies in the evolution of consciousness and culture*. Cornell University Press.
- Ong, W. J. (1981). *Fighting for life: Contest, sexuality [gender], and consciousness*. Cornell University Press.
- Ong, W. J. (1986). *Hopkins, the self, and God*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ong, W. J. (1989, Summer). T. S. Eliot and today's ecumenism. *Religion and Literature* (University of Notre Dame), 21(2), pp. 1-17.
- Ong, W. J. (1992b). *Faith and contexts* (vol. 2 of 4 vols.; T. J. Farrell and P. A. Soukup, Eds.). Scholars Press.
- Ong, W. J. (2002). *An Ong reader: Challenges for further inquiry* (T. J. Farrell and P. A. Soukup, Eds.). Hampton Press.
- Ong, W. J. (2017). *Language as hermeneutic: A primer on the word and digitization* (T. D. Zlatic and S. van den Berg, Eds.). Cornell University Press.
- Parker, H. and M. Niemeyer, eds. (2006). *Second Norton critical edition: Herman Melville: "The confidence-man: His masquerade: An Authoritative text, contemporary reviews, biographical overviews, sources, backgrounds, and criticism* (H. Parker and M. Niemeyer, Eds.). W. W. Norton & Company.

Suarez, J. (2007). *Pop modernism: Noise and the reinvention of the everyday*. University of Illinois Press.

Zlatic, T. D. (2012). Faith in pretext: An Ongian context for [Herman Melville's Novel] *The confidence-man*." *Of Ong and media ecology* (pp. 241-280; T. J. Farrell and P. A. Soukup, Eds.). Hampton Press.