

Dear Mike,

I am writing in response to my first re-reading of *The Waste Land* for many years. I printed it out and was reading it on the train on the way to work Thursday 13th November 2015. That same evening by co-incidence there was an article by David Sexton in the Evening Standard on the publication of the letters of T.S Eliot volume 5 1930-31.

There is a haunting photograph entitled ***Troubled Minds:*** of Eliot pictured in 1932 with Virginia Woolf standing next to him and to one side his first wife Vivien looking like their daughter, small and constrained. Both women are wearing hats and so have lost their eyes in the reproduction of the image. They seem like a cross between dressed statues, their faces reduced to shadow and the most basic form of mouth, nose, cheek, their heads fused with hats with an encircling band of darkness and puppets or those images of effigies of the dressed dead which I can't find but know exist. I will bring the image with me.

There is a quotation from Eliot where he talks of his editing work:
'an editors existence is very ascetic – ie ones business is to excite other people to write and (not) to have time to read or write or think oneself.'

Looking up Eliot's biographical details I am struck that the first search does not even mention his marriages. There is something so strong about the complete erasure of the female in this act of historicising, which is so different from the poem where female presences flicker through the death sentence of the poem. Evocations of music hall, Cleopatra, and the sense of the religious next to the illicit, which seems very much of its time There is a melancholy sense of a world put together through quotation rather than experience and a mockery of learning at the same time.

The first image for me to contribute that came to mind was my own image of the river Thames, the fact that its own history is one of damage and recovery and also that the view it depicts is totally masked now by new buildings seems fitting.

The water, rock, oil, tar, dust, cold and sense of isolation, which permeate the poem and yet the vividness of sensate experience shifts of weather and incidental every day details punctuated by loaded references, allusions, jumps of time and space also make me think of Hito Steyerls writing and video works.

Below is an image of the work *Never Home (almost home reclaimed)* 2013



I have also found a whole range of images, which I am scanning and examining one being this photograph of the what I think must be the Women's press club in London during the second world war, of course so much later than the poem.



I know my grandmother is in this picture but not where. It is only on digitally scanning the photo that I am able to locate her. Zooming in and moving around the photo I find she is sitting right at the back of the image near the notice board. She was at that time the editor of two women's magazines True Stories and True Romance. One of her jobs was to change the language so that the Americanisms in the stories were anglicised. I didn't know Eliot was American. There is something both stifling and celebratory in this image. The poem has an atmosphere, which belongs with this image for me, though of course it perhaps 20 years later than the poem, the times get lumped together in a past I never knew. I think it is the closest I get to a sense of the literary, which seems part of Eliot's world.

The men and women many of whom had survived one war were inside another by the time of this picture.

The stamp on the back of the photo identifies Joyce Dunbar as the creator and Black Star Pictures 'a small but very active photo agency with offices in Clifford Inn London' as the commissioner. .



The owner was Muriel Segal but the company had its main offices in New York Anita Summer (nee Gottlieb) a secretary at black star press described the setting;

Fleet Street was where all the newspapers were concentrated- News Chronicle, Evening standard, News of the World, Daily Express Daily Herald,.. was very narrow ; when double decker buses rolled through passers-by could almost touch the drivers. There were lots of pubs and tea-rooms where the journalists hung out. Our quarters were cramped and had a musty smell from all the pictures. There were piles and piles of them waiting to be re-filed. ¹

¹ Carole Nagga George Rodger: *An Adventure in Photography*, 1908-1995 pg 47