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METAPHORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Endeavours to engage her in caresses

Which still are unproved, if undesired.

Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;

Exploring hands encounter no defence;

His vanity requires no response,

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Discourse, and on what might be meant by a treat

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because students have access to sources of allusions at their fingertips through technology, but also, more recently, with the reconsideration of sexual abuse and sexual harassment on campuses made visible through the #MeToo protests. From Title IX officers at universities to the #SayHerName movement, from pussy hats to battles over transgender bathrooms, our students are more sensitized to and informed about the battles that rage over gender, sexuality, intersectionalism, and power than they were just a very short while ago. The first

student; now I hear it frequently (and convincingly) called a poem that stages and performs racial and gender violence and investigates trans* experience. My own teachers directed me away from Lil to Philomel to Nightingales and Keats — our students want Keats, but also to discuss, really discuss, the assault of the typist.

practice. It was also what Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo movement, emphasized over a decade ago in her work with black young

was to simply state:

About a year ago, when the nation was reeling from the Harvey Weinstein allegations, the actress Alyssa Milano, in an effort to show that sexual violence and assault

women who had been sexually harassed

85 million mentions within a month. We are all familiar with the names now associated with sexual harassment allegations in politics and entertainment, including Bill Cosby, Roger Ailes, R. Kelly, Matt Lauer, Brett Kavanaugh, Donald Trump, and in academia, too, with scandals at Stanford, NYU, and Columbia within the last 6 months alone. In the field of literature and theory, a recent letter to The Chronicle of Higher Education demands that Judith Butler step down as President Elect from the MLA after she signed a letter protesting the allegations against Avital Ronell, while another article in the same publication asks

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too personalized individual, the "carbuncular" clerk, himself constructed as a repulsive image of social mobility "on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire." The event, similarly, connotes nothing but its depraved materiality and is to be drowned out with the automated sound of the gramophone: "Her brain allows one halfformed thought to pass: / 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over'"

The solitude of the isolated woman - opiating herself on the mass-produced "art" of the mechanical age - clearly stands in for what Eliot constructs as the condition of humanity generally in the early twentieth century. It is important to note that in this scene, Eliot places the reader and narrator (Tiresias?) of the poem beside the woman and not the man, as Brooker and Bentley point out (56). In fact, Eliot excised earlier portions of "The Fire Sermon" which follow the progress of the clerk as he departs the scene: he offers a "patronizing kiss," "grotes" to the stairs, and

... at the corner where the stable is,

Delays only to urinate, and spit. (*Waste Land Facsimile*, 47)

The excision heightens the extent to which point of view remains with she who is violated and not with the violator; the reader, then (by virtue of reading - by virtue of entering the waste land) must not only side with but remain with the victim. This is not to say that point of view is the woman's; Tiresias remains voyeuristically apart from those he watches, enabling a flirtatious association with rape that remains essentially private and powerfully sovereign: Eliot thus "theatricalizes," as Irmischer puts it, "the peculiar tension between the two positions of looking (the voyeuristic seeing- without-being-seen) and of being looked at" (590). It is hard to see in this mobility of the voyeuristic gaze the "collapse of gender distinctions" that Bose - and Eliot himself - argue Tiresias represents; rape fantasies in *The Waste Land* speak more to Eliot's need for a palatable vision of submission than to his desire for androgyny.

*Texas Studies in Literature and
Language*, 39 (1997), 375-398 (pp.377-378)]

Excerpt from: Susan Andrade, *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958-1988*

I argue that reading allegorically allows one to

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life. These [Afr
of both literal and allegorical meaning: family does not disappear so that the glory or pathos
of nation might be revealed. Instead, family retains its literalness, its banality, as well as its
real material and social significance, thereby troubling the tendency of the national allegory
to soar into the realm of the transcendent.

[Susan Andrade, *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958-1988*
(London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 1-38]

Discussion Questions:

- What stood out as important to you?
- Do you interpret the typist as a metaphor?

- ~~What stood out as important to you?~~