

**'IT'S' MISPELLED: HISTORY OF AN ERROR IN
THE WASTE LAND**

ALTHOUGH PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY (mid-October 1922), the first English and American printings of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* show several discrepancies (*The Criterion*, I, 1 (October 1922) and *The Dial* 73, 5 (November 1922) respectively). One such discrepancy recurs five times in the refrain of the bartender in ll.141, 152, 165, 168 and 169 of the poem, which occurs in section II, 'A Game of Chess': *The Criterion* prints 'HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME', whereas *The Dial* has 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME'. There is no doubt as to Eliot's intentions here: his typescripts consistently read 'IT'S'.¹ The American text is therefore in error.

The error, nonetheless, was retained in the first American book edition of *The Waste Land* (New York, Boni and Liveright, 1922), while the first English book edition (Richmond, The Hogarth Press, 1923) is correct in this regard. The next two English book publications, however, raise a problem: both *Poems 1909-25* (London, Faber, 1925) and *Collected Poems 1909-35* (Faber, 1936) print 'ITS'. What has to be explained here is why the misspellings, hitherto occurring only in American editions, crept into the English texts. The interest of this is that many subsequent English collections, unlike the original English magazine and book printings, wrongly print 'ITS': this is true, for instance, of *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Faber, 1940), *Collected Poems 1909-62* (Faber, 1963) and *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (Faber, 1969). Our hypothesis is that, because of the greater numbers of errors in the Hogarth Press edition as compared to Boni and Liveright's, the latter may have been adopted as the printer's copy for *Poems 1909-25*.²

Interestingly, the error in question is found neither in Faber's limited edition of *The Waste Land*, three hundred copies of which were published in December 1961, nor in the second impression of *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Faber, 1971). In the latter, the mistake is silently corrected. Despite these changes, the error has not been remedied in any of the other Faber collections in which the poem is reprinted. Indeed, although the first edition of *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1948) and several subsequent Faber reprintings do not contain the error, it was re-introduced in one of the paperback impressions published between 1966 and 1972.³

Finally, we might highlight one more error, especially confusing because it involves an emendation for which there is no justification. In an appendix to the facsimile of *The Waste Land*, Valerie Eliot reprints the text of the first (American) book edition of the poem. Her version reads 'HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME' (see pp.138-9). Yet, as we have noted, the Boni and Liveright edition of 1922 omits the apostrophe.

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NOTES

1. See Valerie Eliot, ed., *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts* (London, Faber, 1971), pp.12, 14, 18, 20.
2. For comparative textual evaluation of the various editions and general discussion of the textual history of the poem, see Daniel H. Woodward, 'Notes on the Publishing History and Text of *The Waste Land*', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 58(1964), 252-69.
3. The 1965 impression prints 'IT'S'. Unfortunately, none of the intervening impressions are available in the Faber archive, so it is at present impossible to state precisely in which the error was re-introduced. The authors would be grateful for further information on this point.

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