

# INTERTEXTUALITY AS TRANSLATION IN T.S. ELIOT'S *THE WASTE LAND*

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## Resumen

La evolución reciente de los estudios de traducción ha impuesto la traducción como un concepto que supera los cambios interlingüísticos y que abarca varias formas como, por ejemplo, la reescritura, las interpretaciones y las relocalaciones de material literario en contextos sorprendentes. Una de las obras maestras del modernismo angloamericano, *La tierra baldía* podría ser utilizada como ejemplo para ilustrar la gama generosa de sentidos que se le puede asociar a la traducción. El poema es el topos de varios encuentros literarios, culturales e históricos. Estos forman una textura intertextual que permite el análisis de la intertextualidad como traducción desde la perspectiva de las transferencias de sentidos, de la transmutación y de la reinterpretación cultural.

**Palabras clave:** traducción, intertextualidad, reescritura, transferencia, citas, reinterpretación.

## Abstract

The latest advances in translation studies have revealed translation as a concept which transcends interlingual exchange and embraces many different forms such as rewriting, interpretation and relocation of literary material in surprising contexts. One of the masterpieces of Anglo-American modernism, *The Waste Land*, may be used as an example to illustrate the wide range of meanings which may be associated with translation. The poem is the *topos* of various literary, cultural and historical encounters, weaving an intertextual fabric which allows us to analyse intertextuality as a form of translation considered from the perspective of the transfer of meaning, cultural transmutation and reinterpretation.

**Keywords:** translation, intertextuality, relocation, rewriting, interlingual/intra-lingual transfer, quotations, reinterpretation.

## 1. *The Waste Land* as a Work of Translation

Recent decades of research in translation studies have advanced the idea that the translation field has broadened and expanded beyond the limits of mere linguistic considerations. Thus, translation is nowadays approached in terms of cultural exchanges, transfers of meaning, inter-systemic relations or interpretations which range from adaptation to complex recontextualizations. In this light, one of the

masterpieces of Anglo-American modernism, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1921), which is a fusion of literary experiments and methods, may also be considered from a translational perspective.

One of the main coordinates of the above-mentioned poem is intertextuality. In the structuralist vein, Allen (2000: 1) considers intertextuality as the relations "which exist between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations". The manner in which Eliot handled this literary technique and the results of his poetic endeavour can be likened to a translating effort. Relying on theories belonging to Steiner (1975) and Even-Zohar (1990), this paper intends to analyse the manner in which *The Waste Land* adopted a wide range of intertextual instances and transformed them into new material, continuing or altering original significances. Astounding interpretations, relocations and rewritings support the idea that *The Waste Land* may be approached as an elaborate work of translation, in which the task of the reader is to compose and decompose the distinct layers of significance together with the poet.

Lefevre (1992) considers translation as the most powerful type of rewriting (the forms of which include anthologies, translations proper, criticism, literary histories etc.), which is the transformation of an original material manipulated in such a way so as to suit the ideological trends or aesthetic purposes of a certain period/writer. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot takes over and rewrites fragments of world literatures, an endeavour that brings to the attention of modern readers, together with great literary names, writers or works that have been forgotten or neglected by contemporary literary tastes, taking the survival of the said work/writer a step further. As Lefevre (1992: 5) holds, "in the past, as in the present, rewriters created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature. These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities".

Poetry, as Eliot created it, is a place of various encounters: of the poet with his readers, of the readers with the text, of the poet with an entire tradition from which he extracts his inspiration. Artistic expression, and poetry in particular, is the sublimated essence of entire generations: "I have tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem with other poems by other authors and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written" (Eliot 1950: 17). *The Waste Land* is such a puzzle, in which representative items of world literature intermingle in an act of cultural interrelation and mutual reflection. Each piece depends upon the others and upon the context as a whole, and the overall poetic meaning is a blend of distinct references.

If considered from a certain angle, the monumental work which is *The Waste Land*, with its various cultural transmutations, may resemble an act of translation. In this respect, we look at translation as Even-Zohar (1990) does, in terms of transfer. He considers that the notion of "transfer" could be successfully employed to refer to translation, since it provides a wider context to the translating activity and allows

for inter-systemic relations, with their variety of types, to be included in the field of translation (Even-Zohar 1990: 74). Eliot himself resorted to various transfers. On the one hand, there is interlingual transfer, proven by the abundance of quotations in French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek, which are simply transplanted in a basically English-dominated context. This transfer provides them with new meanings and opens them to new interpretations.

On the other hand, there are intralingual relations, which envisage a fusion of language registers, from the colourful English of the London bar to the religious idiom of St. Augustine and to the elevated discourse of the speaker/poet as representative of the English-speaking intellectuals.

The transfers, either under the form of foreign languages preserved as such, or as presentation of distinct ideas and approaches to life in all its aspects, raise the issue of the Other, a chronotopical Other, remote both in time, as was the case with various English writers, or Virgil and Dante in the broader European context, and in space — Indian culture. The dialectic self-other automatically involves a process of decoding. The Other manifests his alterity and opens himself to interpretations, a process which transgresses the borders of self-referential frameworks. The two polarities converge in *The Waste Land* so as to create a new background, in which differences and similarities coexist and work together to find solutions to a situation of crisis.

*The Waste Land* is an intricate web of cultural references displayed under the form of allusions, quotations, partial translations and which spread over a wide array of time periods and spaces. The relations and associations among them or between them and the poem as a finished product suggest an impressive effort of finding a pattern that indicates the possibility of spotting unity in diversity. But this process deliberately implies certain transformations and recontextualizations that hint at a resemblance with a work of translation, because, in fact, as suggested by Carbonell (1996: 81) “any approach to a given culture always involves a process of translation”.

The relationship between two interacting cultural systems has beneficial consequences in either direction. The importing context, in this case *The Waste Land*, ensures the survival of the imported items, enriching their layers of significance due to recontextualization. The life of a work of art is the sum total of its derivations and interpretations which embrace a variety of forms (Gallego Roca 1994: 29). By means of such perpetual re-enactments, it proves its translatable nature and flexibility which allows it to fit a vast array of contexts. In turn, the resulting poem depends on the associations between the transferred items and their relation to the overall intention of the poem. It is a form of interdependence that ensures coherence and the set-up of a rich cross-cultural network of meanings.

This process alludes to the procedure of interanimation which raises both texts to a higher level, since their association provides more significance than they would not have enjoyed if considered in isolation. Steiner (1998: 425) mentions this procedure as mutually beneficial for two texts involved in a cultural transfer, since

it creates a “dialectic of fusion” in which the identity of either text is enriched and redefined by this relation of reciprocity.

Steiner (1975) holds that culture is a repetition of past meanings. By extrapolation, one could extend such statement to translation, since it is often deemed one of the basic components of culture, if not one of its main mechanisms. *The Waste Land* is a complex network of intertextual analogies and relations. The strategy of fusing elements belonging to distinct cultural spaces is basically the tool of translation and it can vary “from immediate reduplication on to tangential allusion and change almost beyond recognition. But the dependence is there and its structure is that of translation” (ibid.: 485).

Drawing on Jakobson’s (1992) classification of translation types, Steiner designs a new category which he places in between ‘translation proper’ and ‘transmutation’. He calls it ‘partial transformation’, which covers a wide range of cultural manifestations. They include “paraphrase, graphic illustration, pastiche, imitation, thematic variation, parody, citation in a supporting or undermining context, false attribution (deliberate or accidental), plagiarism, collage and others” (Steiner 1998: 437). Eliot’s poem does not merely take over previous texts, but proceeds to their ‘metamorphic repetitions’, a process which involves the adjustment of the imported item to fit the new context and the adjustment of the target context (which includes the readership) to accept and assimilate the presence of the Other (especially in the case of quotations in the original, where the Other can be sensed as resisting the assimilating tendencies of the target text).

Eliot’s design is to gather the debris of a crumbling world. To this end, he shores against the ruins of the European civilization any piece of art with particular intrinsic value or which represents a certain period or place. The intertextual framework unites fragments covering an impressive display of geographic spaces, from Europe to Asia, including references to the literary past of the poet’s adoptive country, Great Britain. From a temporal point of view, the poem moves mostly in a synchronic direction; the hypotexts trace Western artistic evolution from Antiquity to the beginning of the twentieth century. The palimpsest thus obtained is subjected to a process of contextual translation by means of which each piece is interpreted depending on its relation with the context in which it is placed. Chaucer’s April becomes “the cruellest month” from the perspective of the modern wastelander and Webster’s dog is turned from foe to friend, because it fulfils a completely different role in the modern poem.

Thus, the experience of the Other manifests itself not only in the encounter with a foreign culture. The poem contains allusions and quotations from works signed by names such as Milton, Spencer, Webster or Kyd, not easily recognizable by the contemporary readership. This process of transfer performed by Eliot is therefore faced with the issue of reception and literary history. As Benjamin (1989) indicates, within such types of exchanges, history introduces the concept of “temporal alterity”. Representatives of distinct periods are ultimately perceived by modern readers as a

“historical other” (Benjamin 1989: 61). An inevitable gap is visible between authors of the more or less distant past and modern receivers of their works. Consequently, the recovery of the meaning and identity of such intertextual instances might prove difficult, if not impossible, were it not for contextual indications or paratextual explanations — in this particular case, the final Notes.

The distance between past and present is also emphasised starting at a basic level, spelling. In the quotation from Kyd's tragedy, Eliot decided to maintain the archaized spelling: “Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe”. The detachment from bonds with the present is also visible in the indication of distance in time and space upon which the poem closes. The ending in Eastern key, which suggests the weight placed upon a literature outside Western borders, tends to subvert the dominance of previously listed items. The parallel with Indian culture triggers a re-assessment of the Western artistic legacy and of its positioning in the context of the contemporary panorama.

## 2. Untranslated Quotations

Eliot uses intertextuality under various forms, but one which is most frequently met is untranslated quotations, which raise the issue of language barriers and literary proficiency. *The Waste Land* contains a large number of quotations left in the original, from the epigraph to the final line and note. The reader is faced with the challenge of deciphering a multitude of languages, ranging from Latin, Old Greek and Sanskrit to Italian, French and German. The places and roles assigned to each of them vary depending on the context and the idea they have to support in the economy of the poem. Sometimes, English holds the core position, other times it becomes peripheral, renouncing the leading part in favour of other languages. Such is the case with the concluding lines, where it is but one of the pieces that create the final linguistic puzzle: “*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina / Quando fiam uti chelidon / – O swallow swallow / Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie / These fragments I have shored against my ruins / Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.*”

With such a wide array of linguistic representations, the poem could be read as a failure of communication caused by the lack of a common language. This, in turn, might be interpreted as having triggered all the plights of the modern world displayed in the poem. But, on the other hand, this linguistic device could be deemed a completion, at a different level, of the technique that allowed Eliot to employ a variety of points of view.

Multiple languages mean multiple perspectives. Interpretation is mediated not only by a single, but a variety of consciousnesses. Once the reader, who naturally expects to find a text in English, has overcome the feeling of initial frustration caused by such a surprising encounter, he might become aware that his vision of the world

is not the only valid one. His perspective is only one of a series of interpretations of reality, which complete and add new meanings to each other.

The Other comes to this linguistic encounter assuming many faces which point to the particular and the universal at the same time, in a context of interwoven relations. In fact, the apparent Babel might even provide the solution to the salvation of the waste land. Of divine origin, the word, instrument of creation, might help restore a lost unity. According to Donaghue (2000: 131), the aim of *The Waste Land* “is to establish the word that is true because it is not our invention, against the reduction of Logos to Lexis that has been effected upon the sole authority of the human will”. An original Adamic language encompasses all the fragments of post-Babel communication and may bring peace to the waste land and a return to the state of innocence and purity that preceded the fragmentation of modern languages/civilizations.

The idea of a return to the origins of language is emphasised right from the beginning of the poem. The paratexts make extensive use of allusions and quotations left untranslated. The epigraph, the dedication and the Notes create a frame for the entire poem, providing hints with respect to the lyrical content. In the attempt to fill in the potential information gap, they offer keys (a powerful symbol in the poem) to the puzzle that is the very matter of *The Waste Land*.

History over time and space comes full circle: the epigraph is in Latin and Greek, languages that symbolize civilizations that are the roots of an entire continent, and the final note explains the meaning of words in Sanskrit. Ancient languages represent the foundation of powerful cultures, with rich traditions and a seemingly different vision of the world as compared to the European one.

The Notes, where the reader might turn so as to find some translation or explanation of fragments left in the original, prove to be rather misleading. They do assist the reader but not in the expected manner. Instead, they provide completions and further quotations by means of mere transferences. Such is the case with the passage from Ovid on Tiresias upon which Eliot’s comment is that “it is of great anthropological interest” or the quotation from Herman Hesse (367-77 in the Notes), which, instead of clarifying the lines of the poem referred to, might frustrate a non German speaker.

Eliot had initially chosen as epigraph a passage from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. But at Pound’s advice, who considered that Conrad was not “weighty enough”, he replaced it with a quotation from Petronius’s *Satyricon*. In a mixture of Latin and Old Greek, the Sibyl of Cumae expresses her desire to die, which would put an end to the pain inflicted upon her by the burden of feeling all the suffering of the world. The epigraph opens the door to what the reader will meet further. It also indirectly introduces Tiresias, “the most important personage in the poem”, to use Eliot’s own words in the Notes.

Tiresias, like the Sibyl, fulfils the role of mythic seer, whose vision extends to the modern world. “What Tiresias sees is the substance of the poem” concludes

Eliot and the presence of such immortal seers reinforces the structure of *The Waste Land*. An all-powerful consciousness, seeing it all, containing all possible perspectives from within or outside time and experience: "A mythic seer like the Sibyl of Cumae or Tiresias differs from ordinary human beings in not being restricted to a single perspective, at a single moment" (Bentley and Brooker 1990: 46).

The mixture of past and present which defines the poem may be perceived as a whole due to the expertise of such seers. Unity is achieved by means of the superposition of multiple points of view and, implicitly, multiple interpretations. Each period can be seen from within, as a self-reflection, but also from the outside, through reference to a different epoch. Experience of reality encompasses all such perspectives and this is the essence of a seer's consciousness: "mythic seers have a binary perspective. That is, they enjoy both a mythic and a relational mode of knowing and being and, moreover, enjoy both at once. They can see from the inside, part to part, but also from the outside, part to whole" (Bentley and Brooker 1990: 47). The Sibyl's death wish may come, therefore, as the consequence of what her consciousness has gathered along centuries, culminating in the disaster of modernity.

The fragment from Petronius was maintained in the original and the reader is thus warned as to the nature of what would follow. There is no translation provided to the dialogue with the Greek-speaking Sibyl and the reader, unless assisted by his linguistic proficiency, feels compelled to decipher the message, either continuing to read the text or by looking it up elsewhere. The linguistic voyage continues with the dedication. Eliot acknowledges Pound's influence on the design of *The Waste Land* and addresses him as "il miglor fabbro", formulation borrowed from Dante. The Italian master used the same to honour the celebrated troubadour, Arnaut Daniel.

The series of parallelisms creates a bridge over time. Dante held Arnaut in high esteem, considering him "the finest smith of his maternal tongue" and, as such, the "best craftsman" of European letters. Eliot saw Dante as one of the greatest of European minds and, in the contemporary context, believed that Pound would best suit the role of "miglor fabbro".

Quotations from Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatory* also appear in the Notes. But the Dante-Arnaut reference is not limited to the dedication. It is resumed towards the end of the poem: "Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina". It is one of Eliot's favourite lines in the *Purgatory*. Dante placed Arnaut in the Purgatory. There, the troubadour, still singing, mentioned the joyous life he had had and for which he had to pay now. However, he talks of himself as of someone who continues to sing and, in so doing, he transcends suffering and turns it into art, into music.

As a matter of fact, the concluding lines are a puzzle of quotations, culminating with the words of Prajapati. As Brooker and Bentley (1990: 203) notice, all these final quotations have to do with music, "singing that persists through and transforms disaster". The line from Dante is followed by a quotation from an anonymous Latin poem, *The Vigil of Venus*, "Quando fiam uti chelidon". The poet laments the fact that he cannot express himself and waits for the inspiration that would enable him

to sing like a swallow. The line is completed by an allusion to poems by Tennyson and Swinburne, "O swallow swallow".

Both references remind us of Philomel's myth, a story which includes violence, suffering and finally, happy transformation. In contrast with the song of the swallow doubly invoked, there is the sad incantation of Nerval's Prince of Aquitaine, "Le prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie". Sitting on the derelict ruins of his once imposing castle, the prince laments his lot of being the last in the rich lineage of troubadours. Again, his pain is turned into art and suffering becomes music through a cathartic process.

Not the same could be said of Hieronymo, Kyd's hero, for whom not even art can quench his desire of revenge and the pain caused by his son's death: "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe". Eliot maintained the archaic spelling, he did not translate it into modern English, and so the rage and madness haunting the grieving father acquire gigantic proportions, as if surviving time and resisting forgiveness. Thus, the poem seems to deny the Christian principles in the New Testament which rely on love, humility and forgiveness and that have been mentioned before these last lines, and apparently closes on ideas reminiscent of the *lex taliones* governing the Old Testament. But the end comes after the Buddhist teachings, a plea for understanding and peace: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih".

The quotations in German have a definite role, too. In "The Burial of the Dead", in the scene of the hyacinth girl, Marie allegedly says: "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm'aus Lituanen, echt deutsch" [I'm not Russian; I come from Lithuania, a true German]. The issue of identity is addressed here and it is not accidental, since there have been a number of speculations as to the potential identity of the couple in this scene. The poem is inhabited by a wide array of characters: some faceless and nameless, a mass of anonyms in the hellish contemporary city of London, others carrying the burden of double sexuality, like Tiresias, others with personalities borrowed from ancient myths and legends.

Identity is therefore a concept with somewhat blurred borders and the quester, since he is the main character in the poem, seems to be searching for his own self, "visiting" several other selves, in several other languages and spaces: "The fragments are in many languages because the European culture is being tapped, going back to its earliest origins in the Sanskrit Upanishads. As the protagonist, through association and memory, makes his identity, he is able to give fragments a new order" (Langbaum 1973: 118). The identity of modern man is hinted at as a Babel-like creation, in which pieces of languages gather together in an attempt at founding a common ground of understanding.

After the end of World War I, in a Europe still trying to heal the wounds of the conflagration, *The Waste Land* was trying to restore a lost unity. At the time Eliot was writing it, many countries were in the process of gaining their independence and by so doing, of defining their identity. On the other hand, chaos was still imprinting its traces on the mentality of the world.



An aimless generation needed to feel that it still possessed some deep, lasting roots. Eliot, giving a voice to his generation (even if later he rejected the idea), tried to gather pieces of artistic craft which could give a new impetus to his confused contemporary fellows. As Eliot (1950: 229) himself claimed, “the impulse to repetition, to organization via backward reference is sovereign” and so it is that *The Waste Land* turns into a translation of impressive proportions, mixing various techniques and methods. One of them is foreignization, by means of which the poet-translator chooses to maintain references in the original in an attempt to shake readers from their comfortable reading habits and make them aware of the presence of the Other.

The experience of the Other is significantly captured in the partial quotation from Baudelaire: “You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, - mon frère!” It is as if the speaker recognizes in the reader a fellow in suffering, affected by the same major illness of modern times, the terrible spleen. The reader is the speaker’s “semblable”, his friend, yet hypocritical, since he does not care to admit that not even reading can chase away the feeling of acute boredom. The reader is addressed first in English and then in French since boredom, this “monstre délicat”, as well as its expansion, cannot be stopped by mere linguistic barriers.

By the same process, the reader is included in the great category of spleen-affected persons whose communication goes beyond words, because “although language is not universal, languages nevertheless form part of a universal society in which, once some difficulties have been overcome all people can communicate with and understand each other” (Paz 1992: 152).

If most of the other instances left untranslated are graphically marked, being written in italics, such is not the case with this one. It is as if Baudelaire’s line had already entered universal conscience and need not be marked as foreign. The Other is assimilated to the self in a union which transcends linguistic or time frontiers.

When translated from one language into another, *The Waste Land* proves to be a genuine touchstone for translators. This is partly due to the presence of such quotations in the original, which require that their near context is very carefully rendered so as to accommodate them as closely as possible to the original author’s intention. The great significance of untranslated quotations has been rightly grasped by translators into French, Spanish or Romanian. The versions in the above-mentioned languages have preserved the quotations as in the English text. Slight variations are registered, however, at the graphic level, since certain translators decided to maintain the italics where such existed in the English text, while others opted for their deletion.

### 3. Musical Echoes

References to Wagner are recurrent and imbedded in the poem at various levels. Thames nymphs are created after the model of Rhine maidens; Verlaine’s Parsifal is inspired by Wagner’s opera, not to mention the direct quotations from

*Tristan and Isolde*. These quotations allude to such strong human emotions, love, desolation, desperation, that could be expressed best through music; they refer to “the transformation of human experience beyond the capacity of human utterance to express it, for which the language of music is necessary” (Harris 1974: 108). And Wagner’s overwhelming music could be recalled to the reader only by rendering the quotations in German. The quotations are not direct interventions of the Wagnerian main characters. The former, “Frisch weht der Wind / Der Heimat zu / Mein Irisch Kind / Wo weilest du?”, is from the beginning of the opera, when Tristan brings Isolde to be married to King Mark. The song is sung by a sailor, who mentions a woman left behind. It is a song of hope and longing. In contrast, the latter quotation appears towards the end of the opera, when Tristan, lethally wounded, waits for his Isolde to come with the cure. While he is waiting, a shepherd comes to announce that Isolde’s ship is nowhere to be seen and that, as a consequence, the sea is empty: “Oed’ und leer das Meer”. The sea, silent and troubled, spreads like the threat of forgetfulness. The quotations are the frame of a love story in which the lovers experience a deep sense of loss and the inability to recreate the profound bond that had linked them “a year ago”.

#### 4. Shakespeare in Eliotian Translation

Besides quotations left in the original, Eliot also resorts to various allusions and juxtapositions of various literary voices, among which Shakespeare and Baudelaire’s have recurrent occurrences. Many times did Eliot express his admiration for Shakespeare, whose presence in *The Waste Land* may be recognized at several levels. Eliot employed Shakespearean themes and characters as counterparts or additions to his own. The greatness of the model, be it Hamlet, Ophelia or Ferdinand, is contrasted with the instability of a present devoid of ideals. Eliotian and Shakespearean characters play a game of rapprochement and detachment, some of them reflecting the others like in a mirror, others, by the same process of reflection, pointing to the difference.

Thus, there is Hamlet, who does not make a visible appearance in the poem, but who lives in Kyd’s Hieronimo in the concluding lines of *The Waste Land*. Like the Danish prince, the Eliotian main character is tormented by the dilemma of whether art could save or not a world on the verge of disaster. In fact, it seems that art and particularly words are the instruments of destiny; although they bring about death, they impart peace to the ghost of the beloved father and a sense of accomplishment to the son.

If Hamlet vacillates between madness and sanity, like most of Eliot’s characters who vacillate between life and death, true love and the illusion thereof, there is another one who comes to join the line of heroes living in between. It is the “broken Coriolanus”, whose fall was caused by his inability to balance pride with a

sense of proportion. Although a great warrior and a significant figure of the Roman aristocracy, he is finally made to pay with his life for having betrayed his fellow citizens. That is probably why his actions are brought to the modern consciousness by mere "aethereal rumours", not words or great stories of glory.

His life and its memory are inconsistent, immaterial, verging on inexistence. Failure, the reader seems to be reminded, is not an invention of the modern world. History has known many such cases, but the names of similar heroes still survive the passage of time, whereas the losers of modern times, who do not even have a label attached to their identity, will disappear without leaving any trace.

Coriolanus is contrasted by the figure of Ferdinand, the prince of Naples, who, due to a happy mixture of wisdom, humility and unconditional love, managed to reach everlasting bliss. "Those are pearls that were his eyes" he says in Shakespeare and later in Eliot, a quotation that appears twice in the poem, as a reinforcement of the water theme.

In the Shakespearean play, Ariel uses this metaphor to tell Ferdinand that his father was not dead, but was undergoing a transformational process following which his eyes were turning into pearls and his bones into corals. He hints at the idea of regeneration that also crosses *The Waste Land* like a red thread. Except that in Eliot's poem, Ariel is replaced by Madame Sosostriis and the regeneration process refers to an ancient character, the Phoenician sailor. And Madame Sosostriis warns against mere death by drowning ("Fear death by water!"), devoid of any further significance, as opposed to the promise of rebirth in Ariel's song.

Similarly, the corals formed through the accumulation of the allegedly dead king's bones are contrasted with the squalid and depressing image of the "rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones". The original Shakespearean theme of forgiveness and redemption is turned in the modern context into facts and dirty images reflecting the existing landscape, in which sacrifices of past heroes have lost any significance and have been completely demythified.

Shakespeare was also one of the writers who provided a hypertext for the game of chess. As was often noted, "A Game of Chess" is mainly concerned with the concept of loveless sex. In *The Tempest*, characters play chess as a gesture of reconciliation and as a symbol of sportsmanship. On the contrary, Eliot's use of the same game of the mind points to the fact that notions such as insanity or royalty (both represented by chess pieces) are well-represented in the poem. However, they seem to be dominated by the figures of the pawns, moved by a merciless destiny on the plane board of modern consciousness. Or, from a different perspective, "the people in the waste land belong to a drama they do not understand, where they move like chessmen toward destinations they cannot foresee" (Smith 1974: 82).

Shakespearean situations and characters are transformed by the creator of *The Waste Land* so as to obtain reflections, in most cases twisted, of Eliotian ones. Whether it is an unhappy Ophelia, the epitome of betrayed innocence, an opulent

Cleopatra, a revengeful Hamlet or a “broken” Coriolanus, the array of characters are tools to translate one literary experience into another. Eliot’s own statement, “I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this bovarysme, the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare” (Eliot 1950: 111), is an acknowledgment of the Elizabethan’s craftsmanship. By contrast, his characters lack the force and imagination even to see things as they are and to assume the consequences of such a state of affairs.

Shakespeare strolls the ruins of the waste land like the ghost of a murdered king, telling of things that once were and are no longer or that have survived in order to put together the pieces of a fragmented world. The invocation of his spirit, transformed and interpreted by the modern imagination, is one of the corner stones Eliot used to rebuild the destroyed castle of modern civilization.

## 5. Baudelaire’s Echoes

Eliot first came into contact with symbolist poetry in his first year of college. While browsing through the titles in the University library, he came across Arthur Symon’s anthology, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. In the essays where the poet approached the issue of Baudelaire’s works, he appraised his place among the great poets of modernity. Baudelaire’s attitude towards Good and Evil were somewhat echoed by Eliot’s own vision on the dualist facets of life: “So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist” (Eliot 1950: 380).

The statement is in fact a plea, even a call to action, to taking one’s life into one’s hands and doing something with it, assuming any consequences deriving from this. In *The Waste Land*, characters’ *modus vivendi* is an in-between good and evil, love and indifference; it is a road that leads nowhere. Except for a murderer digging a corpse in the backyard or for occasional prostitutes such as Mrs. Porter and her daughter, the faceless personages are not even able to take condemnable actions that could shake them from their somnambulistic existence.

Under such circumstances, evil could paradoxically come up as a viable alternative: “damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation – of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living” (Eliot 1950: 379). This terrible ennui affects both the characters and the “hypocrite lecteur”, a mere pawn in the game of modern life. “Hypocrite” because, although subconsciously aware of the futility of such endeavour, he keeps turning to reading as to a potent remedy for the illness he is suffering from. The hypocritical reader is yet another inhabitant of the “Unreal City”, the epitome of any human agglomeration with the pretence of urban civilization: “Unreal City / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn / A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many”.

In the Notes, Eliot indicated the first two lines of Baudelaire's "The seven old men": "Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves, / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant". The reader, unless already familiar with the poem, feels compelled to look it up; thus, he may discover that it can provide keys to the poetic ideas that will dominate "The Burial of the Dead" up to the end. The unreal city of London superposes over the image of Paris, itself inhabited by ghostly figures that approach the passer-by in full daylight. The spectrum finds an echo in Stetson, an ancient soldier in the battle of Mylae, except that in this case, it is the modern character that approaches the ghost. With surprise and perhaps a shadow of awe, he addresses him a question and a warning/suggestion: "Stetson! / 'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae! / 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year? / 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? / 'O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / 'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!"

The city is the perfect place for accidental meetings, some fortunate, some not quite so, since the alienation of the individual in the huge mass of anonyms does not allow any more happy reunions. The image of Baudelaire's Paris, "a cluster of intersecting trajectories, a fantastic arabesque of criss-crossing paths" (Evans 1993: 12), may very well reflect the foggy city of London.

In a manner similar to Baudelaire's, Eliot feels more attracted to depicting urban landscapes, inhabited by people with petty lives and almost inexistent expectations, rather than nature. The urban atmosphere is bleak and oppressive and it is pretty much the same whether we speak of London or Paris.

In Baudelaire, the city is invaded by "un brouillard sale et jaune", whereas London is surrounded by the "brown fog of a winter dawn". The colours are gloomy and dark; nevertheless, they create the perfect background for the multitude of people walking aimlessly down London Bridge. It is most probably a repetitive motion, a ritual they perform every night when the bells of St. Mary Woolnoth strike nine. The reduction of life to moments carried out mechanically is one of the symptoms of spleen, unconscious boredom. Baudelaire's crowds react in much the same way as Londoners do, and the spectacle of mediocre human nature awakens in the poet the painful feeling of spleen.

Nevertheless, Baudelaire's city is "fourmillante" and full of dreams, swarming with life under all its aspects. Life defines the city with the toing and froing of prostitutes, pimps, criminals, old persons walking in the street to chase away solitude. Imperfection is not rejected, but accepted as the symbol of mortality. The mere fact that the poet talks about them gives them an aura of "subtle decency". There is dynamism even under the form of repetitive motion.

Great cities such as Paris or London are in broad lines the same, but what sets them apart is the image seen from "the eyes of the beholder". If Baudelaire accepts the city as it is, Eliot sees it as "unreal" not because it is idealized, but because it is a vision pertaining to the realm of nightmares rather than dreams. The cruel aware-

ness of urban reality is not mediated by any trace of compassion for the human. Outdoor scenes are depicted as squalid and ignominious, a direct consequence of the inhabitants' actions. This bleak image of the city had been initiated by Baudelaire and was already common in French poetry from him onwards; in English poetry, on the contrary, few poets had expressed such a view when Eliot exposed his as he did in *The Waste Land*.

Nature is in an advanced stage of decay and, during summer nights, the river waters are spoiled with "empty bottles, sandwich papers, / silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends". Vegetation is nothing but home to repulsive rodents and the unworthy depository of bones, the ultimate remainder of past inhabitants. The sheer contrast between "then" and "now" is manifestly expressed in the nostalgic echoes of long-gone meaningful times that had left lasting traces: "O City city, I can sometimes hear / Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street, / The pleasant whining of a mandolin / And a clatter and chatter from within / Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold".

Items of the industrial evolution are included in this gloomy outlook on the city life. Baudelaire hailed them as factors of progress, recognizing at the same time their potential negative effects upon people's lives. In contrast, in *The Waste Land*, the poet's distaste for the elements of the civilized universe is manifest in the depiction of "trams and dusty trees", dust, which is a direct consequence of the transportation means. The landscape is also dominated by "the sound of horns and motors" that seem to disturb the deathlike somnolence of the inhabitants. Progress appears to add nothing to the inner life of the inhabitants; on the contrary, what might look like an increase of comfortable living standards numbs the spiritual growth of the beneficiaries.

As depicted by Eliot, the City stands as the ultimate representation of an urban community which is falling from within, torn by the misdeeds and superficial ideas consummated within its own walls. Debased by a strange combination which implies the wrong use of progress and unleashed basic instincts, it is among the many falling cities of the world, broadly suffering from the same illnesses: "Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal". The urban refuge is in fact a place of profound alienation and the image of Unreal London is turned into the small-scale representation of the entire European urban topography.

Eliot's effort of gathering together some of the great literary and cultural achievements of human civilization reveals his concern with unity in diversity. The manner in which he reinterprets such fragments, enriching their original significances and shedding new light upon them for the benefit of modern readers, demonstrates his great talent of transferring meaning across geographic spaces and language barriers, in an attempt which bears the echoes of a possibly recoverable Babel.

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