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A Portrait of a Poet's Mind: Eliot's Tradition and the Individual Talent

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ABSTRACT: I attempt to uncover the intrinsic dynamics that stand behind literary production. Hence my emphasis on T. S. Eliot, his literary production and understanding of poetics. This article focuses on Eliot's understanding of the task of the poet as a sort of literary recycler using anything at hand for his own end to create a work of art. The artist is neither the originator of his writing nor has he a complete authority over it. Nevertheless, the poet has to have a sense of history and tradition and the talent to employ several techniques like myth and allusion.

Keywords: T.S. Eliot, Poetics, Tradition, Talent, Literary Production

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INTRODUCTION

> When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience.
>
> T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets"

> I agree with Borges that literature can never be exhausted, if only because no single literary text can ever be exhausted.
>
> John Barth, *The Literature of Exhaustiveness and The Literature of Replenishment*

Eliot never failed to reveal his fascination with "The Metaphysical poets," as Eliot's quote illustrates. In a way he is partly responsible for the resurrection of their fame in the twentieth century. Besides the Metaphysical poets, Jules Laforgue is another figure that formed Eliot the Poet, who, to quote Eliot, is "nearer to 'the school of Donne'" (*Selected Prose* 119). What Eliot admired in them is their gift of "amalgamating disparate

experience." An example of this can be seen in the difference between the poet and the ordinary man who

> falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking. (*Selected Prose* 117)

From the above, one may deduce that anything and everything may go into a work of art. The artist according to such definition is more of a literary recycler; he uses anything at hand for his own end to create a work of art. This brings to mind the notion of *bricolage* advanced by Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind.*

"Lévi-Strauss," says Gérard Genette in "Structuralisme et Critique littéraire," "caractérise la pensée mythique comme 'une sorte de bricolage intellectuel'" ("Lévi-Strauss characterizes the mythological mind as 'some sort of intellectual *bricolage*'"). Genette adds that "La règle du bricolage est de toujours s'arranger avec les moyens du bord" ("The rule of *bricolage* is to always make do with the means at hand") (37). He then tells us that this definition fits literary criticism. *Bricolage* as a way of thinking is not the characteristic of "primitive civilizations" only. There is an intellectual activity, i.e. criticism, which belongs to the most developed cultures, to which Lévi-Strauss' definition of *bricolage* applies (Genette 37).

If one took this observation and compared it to what Eliot considers the task of the artist and the way he works, the conclusion would be that the critic is not the only *bricoleur*--the writer is another. If "myths have no authors" (qtd. in Derrida 389), the writer, as well as the critic, is neither the originator of his writing nor has he a complete authority over it. "His only power," Barthes tells us, "is to mix writings" (224). This is the same idea Eliot advances in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" using science as an analogy of artistic creativity:

> I therefore invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide. . . . When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of the filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present. . . . The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. ("Tradition" 26)

Derrida, in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," goes further to say that "every discourse is *bricolage*" (388). Eliot's idea of "amalgamating disparate experience" falls within this definition of artistic creation as collage and *bricolage*. One of Eliot's main concerns is that language, "the shabby equipment," as he calls it in *Four Quartets* (*Complete Poems* 128), is his tool of creation. The writer works with language which is not completely his and which is marked by history and tradition. "The poet," says Eliot,

> must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (*Selected Prose* 118-19)

Eliot's notion of artistic creation is the same as Derrida's notion of discourse as *bricolage* in that both ideas deny and expose the myth of the writer as the creator and the center of his discourse, as the engineer that creates his own instruments before going to work. It is

in this sense that Derrida deconstructs Lévi-Strauss' differentiation between the engineer and the *bricoleur* since it designates the writer as engineer who, conversely,

> should be the one who constructs the totality of his language . . . would supposedly be the absolute origin of his own discourse and would supposedly construct it 'out of nothing,' 'out of whole cloth,' would be the creator of the *verbe ,* the *verbe* itself. (388)

Eliot's sense of artistic creation as having nothing to do with the invention of discourse but rather as the reworking of tradition, amalgamating disparate experience, fusing and transforming them, makes perfect sense. For Eliot:

> 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. ("Tradition" 27)

The significance of the task of the writer is not in trying to create something out of thin air, but rather in combining heterogeneous materials in order to "make it new," to use *il miglior fabbro*'s, that is Pound's, motto:

> if you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you can see how great is the variety of types of combination. ("Tradition" 27)

This combination *ad infinitum* is what accounts for the literature of replenishment rather than the literature of exhaustion (John Barth's title). This notion of writing as combining heterogeneous materials is akin to Roland Barthes' declaration that a text is

> a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. (224)

The poet needs to be aware of the historical situatedness of himself and his time and possess the historical sense to be able to reach such combinations. "And he is not likely to know what is to be done," says Eliot, "unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past" ("Tradition" 30).

It is easy to consider the historical sense as pertaining only to the notion of tradition, however an important part of the historical sense has to do with the way Eliot sees the manifestation of the individual talent. The whole argument of tradition as continuity and change has to do with novelty which Eliot defends for the sake of the individual talent. This is obvious in the fact that the historical sense is "nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year." It is so because it is "what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity" ("Tradition" 23).

The historical sense is what enables the talent to deal with the fragments of history, fuse such heterogeneous material and transform it into "something better, or at least something different" (*Selected Essays* 182). It is my intention, then, to pay close attention to these defining aspects of the individual talent and how they are manifested in *The Waste Land.*

What one should bear in mind here, is not the parts of the poem and what they mean to a particular reader, for example my own reading, but the diversity of the material and the sources be they emotional or intellectual. Eliot does not deny the existence and the importance of emotions and feelings in poetry.

One may argue that an important meaning of *The Waste Land* is the repressed side of the poem: the tension between the desire of the poet to reveal and conceal the ghosts and

the demons that haunt him which may have been what triggered the writing itself. As a matter of fact, unconsciously a writer leaves behind traces of the repressed, such as the anxiety of writing, for the interested critic to collect. However this does not conflict with the notion of a work of art as a *bricolage* of diverse materials. The danger is to consider that part as the sole significance of the work of art for a work of art is that, but also much more. All writers experience the anxiety of belatedness:

> In some moods we writers may feel that Homer had it easier than we. . . . We should console ourselves that one of the earliest extant literary texts . . . is a complaint by the scribe Khakeperresenb that he has arrived on the scene too late: "Would I had phrases that are not known, utterances that are strange, in new language that has not been used, free from repetition, not an utterance that has grown stale, which men of old have spoken." (Barth 38-39)

The dilemma of the belated writer, and for that matter every writer, is that for communication to take place, he must use the language "which men of old have spoken" and written. For a mature use of language, the writer has to develop a sense of history.

HISTORY

An aspect of the historical sense is having, in the words of Eliot, "a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together" ("Tradition" 23). A. D. Moody asks if this means that "the historical sense includes a sense also of what is outside history" (*Poet* 71). And in fact it does, for holding in one vision the timeless and the temporal allows seeing beyond time. Moody concludes that for Eliot it seems that

> the wisdom to be derived from the study of history is that history is futile and meaningless. The purpose of being conscious of the past is to avoid repeating it. (72)

One should wonder how one can "avoid repeating" the past, that is, learn a lesson from it, if the past is "meaningless." On the contrary, however, and especially in the context of his idea on the timeless and the temporal, Eliot does in fact believe in the meaningfulness of history. Otherwise he would not declare that

> What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to do so throughout his career. ("Tradition" 25)

The belief in the meaningfulness of history is the cornerstone of Eliot's concept of tradition, if not his philosophy of life. Without the belief in the unity of time and the meaningfulness of history, the whole argument of the historical sense and the need for tradition would not stand.

Eliot is arguing for a holistic view of time and this consists not in seeing the timeless and the temporal separately, but in seeing and juxtaposing them together. In holding past and present in one single grasp, in using a continuous parallel between past and present experiences, one becomes capable of detecting the accidental from the universal, of seeing the significance of the chaos or anarchy of one's own time. This holistic view can help not only in seeing meaning in history but also in finding how to come to terms with the chaos and anarchy of one's own time. It can help in detecting the way the past was able "to shore" meaning against its "ruins". The holistic view can secure the knowledge that

precedes action. The consciousness of the past helps one decide what needs to be done and in Eliot's own words, one

> is not likely to know what is to be done unless [one] lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless [one] is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living. (*"*Tradition*"* 30)

What is already living can be the predicament of Man. It can be, for example, the fear of facing the unknown, the fear of the past and rebirth illustrated in the opening scene of *The Waste Land*, and the fear of the present which makes Marie helplessly hold fast to her past. It can also be the failure of Tristan and Isolde and that of the hyacinth couple or the failure of Stetson to see the real significance of the past and the meaning of the vegetation ceremonies not just a mere imitation of ritual's surface aspect. It can also be the fear of a writer that his spring has run dry.

The consciousness of history not as "withered stumps of time" (*Waste Land* line 104), but, in the words of Derrida, as "the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined" (388) helps the artist rework and adapt tradition. The notion of isolation, blindness and lack of communication and understanding in "A Game of Chess," where both the man and the woman feel lonely though they are together, also exist in the lamentation of the Rhine and Thames maidens and Lil and Ophelia and in the passage about the typist and the clerk and the Queen and Leicester. This notion may also be perceived in the sinning of St. Augustine and the rebellious unbelievers to whom God sent Ezekiel, and in the suffering of Christ and of Philomel.

However, such a notion of history is also present in the existence of the intense love of the hyacinth couple and of Tristan and Isolde. This may point to the existence of hope and a way out, especially with St. Augustine's "O Lord thou pluckest me out" (309). This hope can be sensed through the mission of Ezekiel and his preaching of the coming of the Messiah and through the presence of Christ as a savior, or through the transformation of the king alluded to in *The Tempest* as well as that of Phlebas. Hope is also present through the allusion, towards the end of the poem, to the salvation of Arnault Daniel in: "*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina,*" ("then he dived into the fire that purifies them") (428).

History not only gives the writer a point of view as to the meaning of the past in its relation to the present, the comparison and contrast he can make, and the material he can use, but also informs him about his own art: where to start and what to do. In the words of John Barth:

> The forms and modes of art live in *human history* . . . [for] artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work. (37-38)

The fact is that there is nothing "natural" about language or art; both are conventional. A good command of those conventions needs, in the words of Eliot, "great labour" to learn the culture and the tradition that developed them. For Eliot that culture and tradition happen to be a European one**.**

The European Mind

The historical sense, says Eliot, to unfold another layer of it, "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe . . . has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order"

("Tradition" 23). This is another aspect of the historical sense that takes us to a different plane of what it means to develop the individual talent.

The notion of literature as embracing the whole art of Europe is an essential part of the individual talent. "Maturity of mind:" says Eliot, "this needs history, and the consciousness of history. Consciousness of history cannot be fully awake, except where there is another history than the history of the poet's own people" (*On Poetry* 62). This broad sense of tradition bespeaks Eliot's craving for a principle that unifies rather than isolates, that gathers rather than disperses.

This notion of a European literature existing simultaneously, as a continuum, is most obvious in *The Waste Land*. However it is not incorporated for the sake of decoration; it is so woven in "the pattern in the carpet," to borrow the title of Elisabeth Schneider's book, that without this European color the whole piece would have looked pale. As a matter of fact, a central aspect of the meaning of *The Waste Land*--the notion of a European cultural forum--is addressed through this all-embracing vision. Moreover the European allusions form a dialectical relationship with the rest of the poem which they modify as much as are modified by.

It is revealing that the first task that the reader of *The Waste Land* must come to terms with is a multi-tongued European text: the epigraph, in Latin; the dedication, "for Ezra Pound," in English; and the allusion, *il miglior fabbro,* in Italian. Thus the frame of the poem is set with large boundaries of perspective.

In "The Burial of the Dead" Marie does not want to be considered Russian and prefers to speak German to confirm her origin; she wants to be confined within that frame and, thus, only confirms her isolation. The German quote, being within the English stanza, is set off to reaffirm the isolation. Marie thus is at once like and unlike the first speaker. What links both and justifies their being in the same stanza is their mutual share of isolation and fear. However, Marie here is the counterpart of the first speaker of *The Waste Land* and each refers to the lack from which the other is suffering. While the first speaker dreads memory and prefers forgetfulness, Marie is frightened by the present and prefers to live in the past. Co-existing within one stanza they interact and the reader senses the disconnection that isolates each of them.

The hyacinth-garden scene is set between the first and the final acts of Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. The hyacinth couple and Tristan and Isolde are then fused and the whole German text, the entire story behind the opera, is thus vividly incorporated into the poem, enhancing the feeling of loss and desolation. Likewise the *Inferno* of Dante is projected onto the London scene giving it the hell-like mood needed for the understanding of the Waste Land (Bedient 64). Blended with Baudelaire's "unreal city" and the allusion to "Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant" (*Complete Poems* 51), the whole passage gains much in meaning and significance. Thus the dilemma sweeps out of its locality towards a more universal implication that yokes together Dante's, Baudelaire's, and Eliot's time.

However, in "The Fire Sermon," which comes at a point when the notion of desolation and chaos has been established, the reference to Paul Verlaine's *Parsifal*--"*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*" (202)--restores the cycle of rebirth. The second stanza of "The Fire Sermon" initially veers toward despair especially with the "whoring" of Mrs. Porter and her daughter. The reference to children singing occurred when Perceval succeeded in curing the king which preceded the return of fertility to the

land (Bedient 114). Though this shows how far the quester is from solving his own dilemma, the reference, especially due to the innocence of the children, insists on the existence of a way out.

Starting from "The Fire Sermon," Eliot draws more on *Purgatorio* than *Inferno.* For example, the beginning of the third stanza is modeled after the evening scene at the opening of *Purgatorio viii* (*Complete Poems* 53). This reference to *Purgatorio* after that of *Inferno* in the previous section shows that there is a progression and thus gives an extra surge of hope. After the most despairing scene, that of the typist, and at the close of "The Fire Sermon," the second reference to *Purgatorio* comes at the right time. Not only does it point to the similarity between the situation of the two women but also saves the scene from total despair, for though her soul suffers at the present time the promise of heaven is looming ahead:

> 'Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
> Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
> Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe.' (293-95)

In "What the Thunder Said," the reference to Hermann Hesse's *Blick ins Chaos* incorporates the upheavals in Europe into the text of the poem and links it to the disorder of Western and Eastern Europe. Through this reference, the description of Europe by Hesse bears a heavy weight upon that of post-war London. This allusion allows at once a great economy in dealing with the theme that Eliot calls "the present decay of eastern Europe" (*Complete Poems* 54), heightens the notion of an overwhelming state of chaos, and invites the consideration of a global solution.

By the close of the poem, Eliot gives his *coup de grâce*. "These fragments I have shored against my ruin" comes after three lines in different languages, and the demonstrative pronoun "these" points up to the importance of this togetherness. Eliot's reference to Gérald de Nerval's sonnet *El Desdichado* (the Disinherited) (*Complete Poems* 55), which discusses tradition as a lost heritage (Southam 144), brings to the fore not only the refusal to give up one's heritage, but also the need for shoring up and updating it. "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo is mad againe" (*The Waste Land* 423), reminds us of Hieronymo's refusal to give up and points to his way of creation. It is a self-reflexive cue to Eliot's technique. Hieronymo was not mad, but was fusing a muddle of languages for his own purpose, a practice which Eliot repeats. Nevertheless, when Eliot wrote "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *The Waste Land* he was not European yet.

This may arguably be due to his zeal to subscribe the new world with the old one, or due to the tension and anxiety to belong to Europe and in order not to be considered a foreigner. Again this can be one force behind his work, but cannot explain the totality of the poem and the essay.

Simultaneous Order

The idea of the importance of a unified body of European literature sets the frame within which Eliot wants to move. Yet what needs more clarification is this notion of the simultaneous existence and the simultaneous order. The emphasis on simultaneity and order, though echoing Eliot's care for the notion of unity and betraying his fear of isolation and alienation, sets another aspect of the historical sense in full view. Eliot is advocating not only a broader sense of the past, "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and

within it the whole of the literature of (one's) own country" ("Tradition" 23), but also an important aspect of continuity and change in the relation between past and present.

The notion of simultaneous existence and order of the body of European literature refers to the need for the presence of the literary text as an experience that modifies the writer's sensibility. It is an understanding of writing as an activity that does not take place in a vacuum, but rather as interacting, arguing with as well as communicating through the dead writers. The idea of simultaneous order and existence suggests the chain or the continuity between the old and the new, and the past and the present, though not necessarily as an improvement, nor as a sequential time-bound progress from good to better.

This idea of development without improvement seems to be quite enigmatic. "'[E]volution'," explains Fei-Pai Lu, "involves the replacement of the old by the new." This is against the spirit of the simultaneous order and existence, against the presentness of the past. The need for continuity is basically a need to rework and modify tradition. "'Preservation'," adds Lu, "keeps the identity of the continuum which is tradition" (81). However, with preservation there is the danger of stagnation and, in the words of Lu, "petrification." This is why Eliot is advocating change. Change is a necessity for tradition to continue its existence in the present. "[T]he obvious fact," says Eliot "[is] that art never improves, but the material of art is never quite the same" ("Tradition" 25). Eliot, influenced by Bradley, is suspicious of dualism that sees things as either/or; he rather sees that things are inter-connected (*Knowledge* 26). Hence the existence in the discourse of Eliot of a number of seemingly contradictory terms that he "yokes together." Thus you find past/present, continuity/change, tradition/ individual talent, death/rebirth, personal/impersonal, where these concepts are not mutually exclusive.

For Eliot, writers are not only "connected by tradition in time, but also are related so as to be in the light of *eternity contemporaneous*, from a certain point of view cells in a body" (qtd. in Lu 83, italics mine). An important aspect pertaining to the notion of continuity and change is the guiding aspect of the past, and the effect of the present on the past. "[W]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens *simultaneously* to all the works of art that preceded it" ("Tradition" 23, italics mine). What Eliot suggests here is the way the present modifies the past. "The past," says Eliot, "should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" ("Tradition" 24). This may be best described in terms of a kind of literary "check and balance."

This notion of the simultaneoous order with the dialectical relationship between the old and the new can be a handy concept for the writer to give himself permission to "steal" from the wealth of tradition without the tension of feeling guilty. It provides the ephebe with a way to become part of the canons. However, the mature poet knows how to steal, knows the effective way to take a word or a phrase from Virgil, Dante or Homer. The belated writer, if he has true talent, not only benefits from the ancestors, but also helps in the prolongation of their lives and their status as canons. The writer has a significant share in canon-formation and this process is not one sided. Eliot, for example, has benefited from the Metaphysical poets as much as opened new avenues for their texts. The list of the books in the notes of *The Waste Land* became the list that the student of literature was supposed to know. Thus allusion is not plagiarism but rather an art in itself: the art of borrowing.

ALLUSION

Allusion is a valuable method that enables Eliot to touch upon many disparate themes with an all-embracing grasp. Within this technique, comparison and contrast represent an effective means through which Eliot could achieve his purpose. It is a valuable method as well for making what is absent become present, for allusions are absentees that are made present. Presence and absence are confused and the boundaries that separate them are eliminated. The historical sense is an ability to understand that the writer's doom of belatedness, though it may cause him/her to suffer from the anxiety of influence, is that he or she must speak intertextually through the voices of the dead. The historical sense as stated above, is achieved through the juxtaposition of past and present experiences. This juxtaposition serves to highlight the differences and similarities, not to refer to a clear cut good and bad, but to fuse and confuse perspectives so as to allow as many points of view as possible. However, there is always a sense of something to be done, of "great labour" to be exercised, though what needs to be done depends on the perspective from which one looks.

An example of allusion is the evocation of spring as the time for pilgrimage in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as a background for comparison and contrast with the opening lines of *The Waste Land*:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain. (1-4)

This is to be compared and contrasted with the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*.

> Whan that Aprill with his shoores soote
> The droghte of March hath perced to the
> roote,
> . . . . . .
> Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimage. (17)

The obvious similarity is that in both cases it is spring, the time of birth. However, while Chaucer's April is happy and promising in keeping with the traditional image of Spring, Eliot's is fearful and ominous. Moreover, the Wastelanders are afraid of birth, of action, while the pilgrims of *The Canterbury Tales* embark upon their journey to renew their faith. The effect of Chaucer's spring, with what it brings of clarity of vision and purpose, is that it serves as an incentive to start a pilgrimage. In opposition the uneasiness of the first voice of *The Waste Land* stems from the fact that due to confusion, loss of direction and fear of action, the Wastelanders prefer to forget their task and their past because the pilgrimage, symbolizing action, has become a burden.

The juxtaposition of the two scenes highlights the religious or perhaps the intellectual laziness of the Wastelanders. It is due to this juxtaposition that one feels that something needs to be done. Tradition here may play the role of a mirror for the Wastelanders to see themselves and recognize their follies and fallacies. "In a peculiar sense," says Eliot, " he [the poet] will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past" ("Tradition" 24). Set against the General Prologue, the opening lines of *The Waste Land* condemn the lack of action and point to the need for a pilgrimage, a quest, or an act to "set [the] land in order" (*Waste Land* 426). Thus if the Wastelanders are not judged by the standards of the past, they should at least be directed by it.

In addition, the urge for action in *The Waste Land* is suggested by biblical diction and heard in the parallel between the voice of God addressing Ezekiel and that of the prophetic voice addressing the "Son of Man":

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water. (19-24)

In his notes to *The Waste Land,* Eliot wishes these lines to be read with Ezekiel II, i and Ecclesiastes XII, v as a background. The similarity between the Israelites and the Wastelanders is that both are lost souls. They lack the right belief. They neither listen to the messengers of God, nor learn from their own experience or that of their forebears. Moreover, they worship "broken images."

However different the worshipped gods of the Israelites and the Wastelanders may be, both groups need guidance. The situations of the Israelites and the Wastelanders seem to be similar, but the difference is that the Wastelanders should have known that past and avoided repeating it. "[T]he difference," says Eliot, "between the present and the past is that the consconscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show" ("Tradition" 25).

Another parallel is created between Ezekiel and one of the voices of *The Waste Land*. As Ezekiel has the task of bringing God's words to the worshipers of the "broken images," so the quester of *The Waste Land* ought to do something against the "empty cisterns and the exhausted wells" (385). The basic aim of this allusion is to point to the necessity of action and the lessons that the Wastelanders ought to have learned.

It is important to notice here that through biblical allusion Eliot is able to yoke and fuse various themes and meanings. The roots and the land are intertwined with speech and communication. The infertility of the land becomes the impotence of the people that turns into the inability to "say or guess," because of their lack of knowledge. Any theme that the reader notices, be it about religion, society, impotence, ignorance, or of the inability to write, would make use of the rest of the symbolically charged words such as "roots", "knowledge" and "a heap of broken images."

It is due to such knowledge--a heap of broken images--that speech is lacking. If the past is mere images, not experiences, and if those images are not only broken but also just a heap without order, it is no surprise that the result of the accumulation of disorder is that "You cannot say." The notion of order is of extreme importance for Eliot as it is the backbone of his idea of the chain of time and the presentness of the past. In other words, due to the absence of something to hold on to, the Wastelanders are lost in the "many cunning passages, contrived corridors," (*Complete Poems* 22), of contemporary history.

The notion of loss is even more aggravated by the blending of the lost souls of Dante's *Inferno* with the crowd of "the human engine" going to work in London:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs short and infrequent, were exhaled,

And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (60-65)

The allusion to Dante gives force and concision to the image of the lost souls aimlessly walking through time. The image is significant for in the same act of vision, it enables the poet to bring together loss, short-sightedness, and life and death. The crowd of Londoners becomes a crowd of zombies who wander the streets without a purpose, knowing neither from where they come nor to where they are going. This specific image mingles with the allusion and becomes rich enough to allow and accommodate various interpretations.

The closing lines of Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* which suggests a parallel not only to intense emotion but also to failure, to loneliness, to silence: "*Oed' und leer das Meer,*" ("waste and empty [is] the sea") (42). The widening rift between Tristan and Isolde mirrors that of the hyacinth couple, but, instead of the sea, it is lack of communication that fails the latter:

_Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence. (37-41)

The inability to speak is directly related to the inability to see and both are related to life and death. The lack of communication is blindness itself and death in its negative sense as opposed to what Cleanth Brooks calls "life-giving" death (129).

"Looking into the heart of light, the silence" recalls Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* In the phrase "heart of light" there is a reverse reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* There is also a reference to the absence of communication because of the silence. Whatever heart of darkness means [deep darkness or dark heart] the heart of light is positive for it signifies its opposite. Yet the Wastelander is silent in front of all that is positive. The heart of light for Eliot is the past, tradition, not "as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus" ("Tradition" 24), but as the needed reference to hold on to in this world of uncertainties. The silence is the inability to see any use, any shoring up of that light.

Another example of the failure to grasp the meaning of the "heart of light" is the inability of the couple of "A Game of Chess" to learn from the past that fills their room. In fact their past fills them with emptiness for it exists only for decoration. The whole section refers to the betrayal suggested by the reference to *Women Beware Women* (Gardner, *Art* 93). The trapped woman is contrasted to Cleopatra as the setting is denigrated as synthetic when compared to that of the Egyptian queen described in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. At the end of the scene, we hear the woman cry out of loss, confusion and boredom:

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do to-morrow?
"What shall we ever do?" (131-34)

Loss, confusion and boredom are also heard in "The Fire Sermon" through the comparison of the Thames in the echoes of Spencer's celebration of the joys of marriage in "Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song" (183) and the Thames of "the loitering heirs of city directors" (180). The confusion and loss are also maintained with the reference to Saint Augustine in Carthage. However, through such a reference and the establishment

of the similarity of situation between the past and the present, Eliot is able to suggest a way out with "O Lord thou pluckest me out" (309).

Allusion, then, is not only a tool or a technique, but also a necessity. An important part of writing is triggered by and communicates through the intertextual relations. The denotations and connotations of words and sentences are marked by the history of their use and users. However, everything depends on the writer's talent and the way his material channels the allusion to his meanings. A misused allusion can hinder communication. Also, not all readers notice what is being alluded to. As a matter of fact there is no unified tradition, since not all people in a culture command the same range of knowledge. Hence an allusion should be flexible and rich enough to allow the many possibilities of literature. Allusions should be equivocal and ambiguity is an important aspect of art without which a literary work would not outlive its community and time. Most of Eliot's allusions, as we have seen, are rich enough not to hinder communication when unnoticed, but rather broaden the scope of significance. It is this adaptability and flexibility of *The Waste Land* that allows readers of different backgrounds and times to find meanings and connections that apply to their own time and situation.

MYTH

Juxtaposition through the mythological method is another equally valuable way of the "raid on the inarticulate" (*Complete Poems* 128); it is a "way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history," a technique which Eliot found praiseworthy in Joyce's *Ulysses,* for

> In using myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. (*Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* 177)

What makes this praise significant for *The Waste Land* is not only that Eliot read *Ulysses* at a time when *The Waste Land*, or at least parts of it, was incubating in his mind (Eliot read part of it before its publication (*Facsimile* xxii)), but also that Eliot himself admitted the influence of Joyce on him and the lasting impact of such a method. When giving a voice to his appreciation of *Ulysses* Eliot said that "I have nothing but admiration; in fact I wish, for my own sake, that I had not read it" (Southam 98). Thus myth is a basic background device that runs throughout *The Waste Land*, and Eliot acknowledges his debt in this respect to Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Weston's *From Ritual To Romance*.

By the end of the first section of *The Waste Land,* the planting of the corpse by Stetson

> "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? (71-73)

becomes a mock sacrifice when contrasted with Frazer's depiction of the vegetation ceremonies and the drowning of an effigy of the god to secure the rebirth of the season. From the above quote, it is clear that the Wastelanders do not really believe in what they are doing. They probably do not know the significance of such acts and proceed with the ritual out of habit or mere imitation. Repetition of the past is blindness and this blind adherence to the past is meaningless with respect to the challenges facing the quester. In

keeping with this, Eliot says that "[t]o confirm merely would be for the new work not really to confirm at all" ("Tradition" 24).

From Weston's *From Ritual To Romance* Eliot took the legend of the Waste Land which later served as a title for the poem. In the legend of the Waste Land the king is sick due to a wound, to old age, or to rape and sin. The result of his sickness is that the land is laid waste and infertile and the people are sterile. "Not only the title," to quote from Eliot's notes, "but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem" (*Complete Poems* 50) suggest the similarities between the legend and the situation of the "new" Wastelanders and their infertile land.

Once the parallel has been established, the laziness of the Wastelanders is highlighted at once. The sluggishness of the Wastelanders is rendered more acute by the suggestion of the quest and the questing knight. In the legend of the Waste Land what is the center of the narrative is not the waste but the quest. Due to the sickness of the king and the barrenness of the land, a Knight, be it Gawain, Galahad or Perceval, sets out on a quest. The quest constitutes, to quote Weston, "the task of the hero" (12), a task that would relieve the king of his plight and the land of its blight. Hence the need for a similar quester and a quest becomes urgent, the need for action a necessity, and consequently the inaction of the Wastelanders a sin.

The sense of urgency and depravation is depicted, as well, in the fusion between the legends of the Rhine maidens, the Thames daughters, the exiled Israelites, and the lamentation of Ferdinand, the prince of *The Tempest*, for the supposed wreck of his father. The Rhine maidens lament the loss of the gold of the river as the nymphs of the Thames seem to lament the loss of something that has to do with "their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors" who having "departed, have left no addresses" (180-81). The echoes of loss are also heard in the merging of the lamentation of the Israelites recalling the exile in Babylon and the loss of their homeland--"By the water of Leman I sat down and wept" (182)--with that of Ferdinand mourning "the king my father's death" (192). Here myth is mixed with literature and history and all become one.

Another aspect of the mythical method is the effect the legend of Philomel brings to bear upon the typist and her carbuncular lover. Philomel is raped by the king, her sister's husband, and to prevent her from divulging his deed, he cuts out her tongue (Gish 63). A modern version is the scene of the typist and the clerk. "The time is now propitious, as he guesses, / . . . . Flushed and decided, he assaults at once" (235, 239). However, while Philomel changes into a swallow and weaves her story, the typist "turns and looks a moment in the glass / . . . . And puts a record on the gramophone" (249, 256).

This scene is witnessed by Tiresias the seer. Tiresias is significant here because of the difficulty to reduce him to one single aspect. He has many facets. By dint of this multifold identity, as we shall see, the presence of Tiresias can bring innumerable connotations that are attributed to him in one way or another. The peculiarity of Tiresias is that he experienced both being male and female; he is also blind but "can see" into the past and the future. The experience of becoming female is due to his striking two copulating snakes. Later on he found the same snakes copulating and he struck them again reverting this time to a male (Southam 126). The scene of the typist and the carbuncular clerk especially through the declaration "I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs / Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest" (228-29) is reminiscent of the snake legend which tints the love-making scene with animal-like copulation.

However, the importance of Tiresias in the poem stems more from another aspect which Eliot clearly points to in his notes on *The Waste Land*:

> Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest . . . the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem. (52)

Eliot is silent about what Tiresias can see. What he actually sees is what the readers, in their diversity and differences, see. Neither the writer nor a single reader can determine what Tiresias sees.

The presence of Tiresias in a modern scene is in itself very telling. In a way, he embodies the presentness of the past not as a mere "voyeur" but as a force that channels the experiences of the past to a present most in need of such knowledge. It is not a coincidence that the qualities which Eliot gives as reasons for ranking Tiresias as "the most important personage in the poem" are the ability of seeing and uniting. It seems ironical to attribute the quality of seeing exclusively to the blind personage of the poem and Eliot mentions this idea not only in the poem but also in his notes to further emphasize it. The ability of the blind to see heightens the blindness of those who physically should be able to see. The inability to see but what is physically present is blindness. Hence Eliot points to the need for us to differentiate between sight and insight.

However, one may also wonder whether Eliot is implying that the modern poet should be a Tiresias. Can Tiresias be an example for the modern poet, extending his knowledge across time, age and sex? Can the writer represent various points of view? Eliot here may be advocating the notion of the writer who is pedantic and disinterested. It seems that Eliot is hinting at the necessity for the writer to acquire learning and tradition to broaden his horizon. It may be true that tradition and the historical sense expand the viewpoint of the writer. However, it is hard to believe that any writer can be totally disinterested. The only hope probably is to permit as many points of view as possible. Eliot's solution is the notion of the reader as partner, "mon semblable, mon frère" (76).

Thus, Eliot does not explicitly state what the Wastelanders cannot see for, again, it is the task of the reader to see the way Tiresias sees:

> I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
> *Perceived* the scene, and *foretold* the rest
> . . . . . .
> (And I Tiresias have *foresuffered* all. . . .) (228-29, 243)

What makes Tiresias able to feel and predict what is going to happen is the fact that he not only experienced those same scenes before, but also he suffered in order to acquire such a perception. An important aspect that makes him special is that he is an example of a variety of experiences. The legend goes that Jove and his wife quarreled over the enjoyment of sexual intercourse. While Jove believed that women enjoy it ten times more than men, his beloved, Juno, held the opposite view. To settle the matter, they agreed to have Tiresias proclaim the judgment. On telling what he thought was the truth, he angered Juno and she struck him blind. Since he could not undo the punishment of the goddess, Jove gave Tiresias the gift of prophecy (Southam 126). One may wonder what price need the modern poet and the reader pay to acquire such a gift.

As Tiresias paid the price for his perception, so the Wastelanders require "great labor" to lift the curse that has fallen on them and their land. The need for action, accepting

pain and thus paying the retribution price, is thus foregrounded. Worth noting also is the fact that the blindness of the Wastelanders to what Tiresias can see is obvious in the scene of the typist in which the couple find it impossible to communicate. One perceives the couple's loneliness, when the carbuncular clerk, moved by his appetite and selfishness, is unable to detect the needs of his partner, while the typist, bored and indifferent, is incapable of articulating her desires.

This lack of communication and this solitude are spotlighted with the presence of Tiresias due to his second feature: the uniting quality. This second quality is one of the watchwords with which Eliot is concerned. Hardly any personage, except Tiresias, can claim the legitimacy of such a quality. As mentioned above, he experienced being male and female; in additional, he lived in the underworld:

> I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
> Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
> . . . . . .
> I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
> And walked among the lowest of the dead. (218-20, 245-46)

By mentioning these experiences, Eliot not only underlines the importance of Tiresias and the unity with the diversity he bestows upon the poem but also points to the guiding aspect related to Tiresias. Due to his gift of prophecy, Tiresias is often present to provide guidance as to the way of restoring the land to order, or to offer perspective to the wisdom-seeker; for illustration one only needs to refer to the cases of Oedipus and Odysseus. Thus, as a visitor from the past, as a link between the world and the underworld, the living and the dead, Tiresias is present in the Waste Land to provide guidance, a mission for which he served whenever the land went 'out of order,' or when the horizon turned cloudy.

The presence of Tiresias is often intertwined with a time of crisis, and his presence in *The Waste Land* gives a background notion of such times, hence the need for guidance. The guidance of Tiresias is his unifying aspect made possible through his symbolic presence. The absence of unity between the dead and the living--the absence of the past in the present--is what highlights the isolation and lack of communication in the Waste Land, as suggested by the scene of the typist and the declaration

> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
> Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
> Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus. (414-17)

Coriolanus is broken due to pride and selfishness, and Tiresias is present to provide guidance against selfishness and isolation by suggesting something to hold on to, to unite with against the chaos and disorder. Tiresias is thus a significant aspect of the historical sense of *The Waste Land* and as spectator has a variety of heterogeneous experiences within him that refer to the multiplicity of the world.

Transformation

Modification, or transformation, is yet another significant aspect of the individual talent. Thanks to the individual talent, continuity and change are secured. "Poets arrive at originality by different routes . . . the process," says Eliot, "is rather towards a finding of themselves by a progressive absorption in, and absorption of, and rejection (but never a

total rejection) of other writers" (Preface v). So the process of continuity and change is one of "in, of and out" relationship with the other artists, with the writer's predecessors. Again, one may sense the way Eliot sees the relation between writers as an interactive relationship:

> [W]e endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. ("Tradition" 22)

An example of "the immortality of ancestors" can be seen in the interaction one finds in the text, for instance, between Eliot and Andrew Marvell. In "To His Coy Mistress" Marvell makes use of the *carpe diem* motif. He tells his beloved that had they had eternity at hand, her coyness would have been accepted and he would have devoted ages to the description of every part of her body. He then tries to persuade her to make much use of her time and yield to him. With one single line, "but at my back from time to time I hear," Eliot is not only able to incorporate the whole argument of Marvell's poem into his own but also to twist the totality of the argument to suit his own purpose. While "To His Coy Mistress" argues for making much of time in order to make love, making love in Eliot's version, after coloring it with copulation becomes a futility and the whole *carpe diem* motif, to make much use of time, is used against making love and compels the protagonist of *The Waste Land* to "hurry up [for] it's time" to keep going and carry on his own quest.

It is worth noting also that the mere presence of the past in the present is significant by itself for it is already a modification of it. The modification of the past takes place when the past is brought into the present, into a new context. That past acquires a new meaning that had never been intended. "[T]he difference between the present and the past," says Eliot "is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show ("Tradition" 25). When, by the end of the poem and after all those allusions, the protagonist says "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," he almost literally means it. The more allusions you detect, the better your understanding will be. Thus Eliot tries to accomplish his part of channeling the past into the present "against [its] ruins."

However, I would like to briefly refer to an almost ignored aspect related to transformation as an outspoken theme in *The Waste Land.* Though this theme can easily blend with most meanings that the reader may judge as significant, I would like to look at it from the possibility of the point of artistic creativity and the notion of the individual talent. Writing as a theme takes an important space in the poem and it is high time to investigate it, not as the sole meaning of the poem, but as one possibility of reading *The Waste Land* among many others.

There are many instances, as I have investigated above, that show the importance of speech and communication as one of the themes in the poem. The reference to writers, writing, voices and language are omnipresent in every part. The self-reflexivity to art and Eliot's own technique is considerable. The importance of the "lecteur," the reader, gives more credibility to such a theme. As a matter of fact the facsimile shows in its examples of parodies and imitations of other writers that the poem may have been started as an exercise in writing, that the only conscious effort was to write and imitate the masters of the past. Conrad Aiken, a close friend to Eliot, was right when he commented that "in *The*

Waste Land Mr. Eliot's sense of literary past has become so overmastering as almost to constitute the motive of the work." Then he added that it is "a poetry actuated not more by life itself than by poetry" (54).

In fact, Bloom sees that *The Waste Land* must have been triggered by Eliot's anxiety of writing and that it has to do with "a poetic crisis that Eliot could not quite surmount" (*Waste Land* 5). Gregory Jay is right in considering that the theme of sexual impotency can easily be turned into a literary one (153). In fact the symbolic interconnection between the pen and the penis is an old one. My reservation, however, is first about the consideration of tradition or the poet's instruments of creation as "dull roots." Second, I refuse to take Eliot as the protagonist and the center of his poem because this is exactly what Eliot warns us against.

The first aspect of transformation can be detected from the title. Action is needed to change and transform not only the infertile land and the Fisher King (tradition and the precursors), but also the quester himself. The same tone of the importance of the transformation of the land and its people is found with reference to the vegetation rituals of the ancient civilizations from the *Golden Bough* (Matthiessen 43). One such ritual was the drowning of the king, that is, the effigy of the king, for the sake of the rebirth of the land with the transformation of the season.

Death and rebirth has always been one of the impelling aspects of the poem and critics have not failed to see its importance. From the legend of the Waste Land, Eliot takes us to another legend in which death and rebirth, and transformation are significant: the legend of the Sibyl of Cumae. She is an example of what happens when the cycle of transformation and change in death and rebirth is discontinued: she is shrunk and was left in a cage wishing for death (Southam 133).

Fear of change is also the main tone of the voice that is afraid of April in the beginning of "The Burial of the Dead." What this unnamed voice complains about and that links it to the title of the poem and the epilogue is the effort that is related to the metamorphosis of things. Marie, too, is afraid of change and transformation and wants to hold fast to the past. She does not want to bury the roots, the dead, as the title indicates, and as a result they do not clutch and become like "bones cast in a little low dry garret, \ Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year" (194-45).

It is under this light that *The Tempest* and its notion of sea change become foregrounded. The transformation of the father, the ancestor, through a symbolic death and rebirth is the image that fuses Ferdinand and his father the King with the drowned king of the vegetation rites and the Fisher King of the Grail legend. 'Death by Water" takes up the same motif of drowning and fuses it with the transformation through cleansing and participation in baptism.

Another example of transformation is the legend of Philomel, taken from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. An important aspect in this legend is the transformation of suffering and the inability to speak into art. As her tongue had been cut out, Philomel resorted to weaving her message and transformed her inability to speak (Gish 63). The same aspect can be seen in the resurrection of Christ, as mentioned in part five of the poem, which links the archetypal image of suffering in death and rebirth to transformation of the land and the people.

In incorporating some of the riches of his ancestors like Ovid, Ezekiel, Shakespeare and others, Eliot is not only contributing to the continuum of tradition, but also referring to

the wealth and diversity of that tradition. By the same token he makes literature and writing an integral part of his poem and adds other possible meanings to tradition as well as to his own work.

Conclusion

It is not only due to this conscious acknowledgment and subscription to tradition that Eliot is remarkable. "The good poet," says Eliot "welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn" (*Selected Essays* 182). *The Waste Land* is rich enough to encompass many readings and thus it is the epitome of freedom from closed systems. In its details as well as in its totality the poem allows different interpretations by different readers. It is this openness and this multiplicity that fascinates many readers. It is this evasion of any one meaning that is its mystery. It is this defying of limitations that is its secret; to reduce it to one meaning means its death. It is also thanks to the diversity of the sources of his poetry and the insistence on fusion and transformation as the only way to continuity and change that Eliot should not be confined within the cage of one sole meaning. It is this aspect that makes him worthy of the praise he, himself, bestowed upon Shakespeare:

> About any one so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong. (*Selected Essays* 107*).*

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