

# TRANSFERS OF MEANING AND WRITING TECHNIQUES IN T. S. ELIOT'S *THE WASTE LAND*

## TRANSFERTS DE SENS ET TECHNIQUES LITTÉRAIRES DANS *LA TERRE VAINÉ DE T. S. ELIOT*

### TRANSFERURI DE ÎNȚELES ȘI TEHNICI LITERARE ÎN *TĂRÂMUL PUSTIU DE T. S. ELIOT*

Lect. univ. dr. Roxana BÎRSANU

Conf. univ. dr. Elena MUSEANU

Romanian-American University, Bucharest

E-mail: [roxanabirsanu25@yahoo.com](mailto:roxanabirsanu25@yahoo.com)

[emuseanu@yahoo.com](mailto:emuseanu@yahoo.com)

#### Abstract

*One of the most salient features of modernist aesthetics is that it proposes a fusion of elements pertaining to distinct arts. A good example is poetry, which resorts to techniques borrowed from painting such as the collage, juxtaposition or fragmentation. The modernist project relies heavily on the intersemiotic dialogue of arts. Our paper analyses such intersemiotic exchanges in modernist poetry with a particular focus on T.S. Eliot's „The Waste Land”. We look into the techniques and strategies to which Eliot resorts in order to embed music and painting into the fabric of his poem and the effects they have on the generation of a plurality of perspectives on reality.*

#### Résumé

*L'une des caractéristiques les plus saillantes de l'esthétique moderniste est qu'elle propose une fusion d'éléments appartenant à des arts distincts. Un bon exemple est la poésie, qui fait appel à des techniques empruntées à la peinture telles que le collage, la juxtaposition ou la fragmentation. Le projet moderniste s'appuie fortement sur le dialogue intersémiotique des arts. Notre article analyse ces échanges intersémiotiques dans la poésie moderniste avec un accent particulier sur le travail de T. S. Eliot „La terre vaine”. Nous examinons les techniques et les stratégies auxquelles Eliot a recours pour intégrer la musique et la peinture dans la structure de son poème et leurs effets sur la génération de plusieurs perspectives sur la réalité.*

#### Rezumat

*Una dintre cele mai importante trăsături ale esteticii moderniste este faptul că ea propune o fuziune de elemente ce aparțin unor arte distincte. Un exemplu bun este poezia, care face apel la tehnici împrumutate din pictură cum ar fi colajul, juxtapunerea sau fragmentarea. Proiectul modernist se bazează pe dialogul intersemiotic între arte. Acest articol analizează aceste schimburi intersemiotice din poezia modernistă, axându-se pe lucrarea lui T. S. Eliot „Tărâmul pustiu”. Vom analiza tehnicile și strategiile la care recurge Eliot pentru a integra muzica și pictura în structura acestui poem și efectele pe care le au ele asupra generării mai multor perspective asupra realității.*

**Keywords:** *modernism, intersemiotic, music, poetry, deconstruction.*

**Mots-clés:** *modernisme, intersémiotique, musique, poésie, déconstruction.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *modernism, intersemotic, muzică, poezie, deconstrucție.*

## Introduction

In the era of post-postmodernism, when artistic expression is often the embodiment of a unique mixture of artistic fields and the *topos* of experiments involving both popular and high culture, the highbrowism of modernist principles seems farther than ever. Nevertheless, on the current background of surprising artistic experiments, the figure of T.S. Eliot – one of the pillars of Anglo-American modernism – does not seem, paradoxically, out of place; quite the opposite. This “conflicting and compelling figure”, as Chinitz calls him (2003, 7), continues to arise the same interest and debates as heated as today as they were in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Eliot’s work (even his biography) is constantly revealing new layers of meaning and fosters new interpretations from perspectives that are of utmost interest for readers, critics and thinkers of the time we are now living.

From among the many labels that have been attached to him, perhaps one of the most pervasive and relevant for the purpose of our endeavour is ambivalence. In Eliot’s case, ambivalent does not mean dual; it just reflects an in-betweenness to be detected at many levels of Eliot’s personality: he was born on American land, but was adopted by England, to which he was extremely devoted until his death; he was raised as a Unitarian, but converted to Anglicanism; he was one of the representatives of highbrow culture, yet maintained a fascination with the complexities and richness of popular culture. Perhaps his status as a foreigner as he considered himself, with deep roots in two different cultural traditions – but without a clear affiliation to none to the repudiation of the other – might partially account for Eliot’s penchant for experiments, for *mélanges* and for the unexpressed desire to create unity out of disparate and apparently incongruent elements. It was particularly controversial that Eliot, known for his extensive culture and respect for tradition and the glorious past of human civilisation, used elements of popular culture as poetic material: “In the ‘Eliot era’, art was revered; the transcendent value (and, to a great extent, the composition) of the ‘canon’ or ‘tradition’ was taken for granted; the distinction between high culture and popular culture (synonym: ‘low taste’) was unconditional” (CHINITZ, 2003, 2).

The serious game of high literature that Eliot proved to master so well would have been impossible in the absence of solid knowledge and a consistent interest in various fields of human civilisation. Eliot studied thoroughly both European and Sanskrit philosophy, Christian and Buddhist systems of thinking, pagan rituals and mythology, but was equally interested in architecture, visual arts, music and ballet. The acquired knowledge and his personal artistic experiences were both critically conveyed in his essays and articles, and transposed into poetic material, since his poetry transcends the confines of mere linguistic expression.

The rich variety of materials Eliot made use of in his poetry closely reflects the agenda of modernism. One of the features which differentiated modernism from the literary movements that preceded it was this wholly innovative approach to writing that adopted literary strategies, methods and techniques from other arts. It was Pound who, as one of the initiators of the modernist trend, proposed writers and poets in particular to look for revolutionary ways to express their artistic identity and creativity, by “making it new”, a phrase which he turned into his battle cry. One might argue that Pound expressed thus “the wish that poetry could be written with something other than words” (KERMODE quoted in LEVENSON, 1984, 12) and that it could incorporate materials, but also techniques from painting or sculpture.

Not necessarily as an application of his friend’s urge to search for new modes of expression, Eliot masterfully blended in his poetry the richness of the past human civilisation with a crude reflection on/of debased modern culture, but also with interpretations, relocations and revisitations of musical pieces (both classical and popular), ballet performances and visual arts. Thus, he proved his extraordinary ability to manage “the parodies and ventriloquial effects of English music hall [...], literary variations on the effects of collage Cubism, montage techniques borrowed from the repertoire of early cinema” (LITZ 1973, 8).

Literary criticism has always considered Eliot a difficult poet, one who challenges his readers with every line and every instance. Aside from his writing style which often makes use of synesthetic techniques borrowed from other arts, his poetic and dramatic works also draw their complexity from their rich intertextual fabric. In the absence of extremely vast knowledge of world literature, philosophy, mythology etc. and/or of a critical apparatus, readers would miss a great deal of the richness and beauty of Eliotian poetic expression.

The focus of our research is *The Waste Land*, considered Eliot's masterpiece, a landmark of literary modernism (along with James Joyce's *Ulysses*) and one of the greatest achievements in the literary creation of the twentieth century. The poem was largely written in 1921, and Eliot benefited from guidance and constructive criticism from his close friend, Ezra Pound, another American transplanted to Europe. The publication process was cumbersome, but finally successful in 1922, when it was published on both shores of the Atlantic, in England and the United States. It represented a major success not only for the author, but also for the literary trend he was promoting, being, as Pound claimed, "the justification of the 'movement', of our modern experiment since 1900" (1950, 180). And it was, indeed, the work that imposed modernism as a great literary trend, both due to the publicity surrounding the poem that imposed it to the then-modern readership and to the heated debates and controversies with which it was received by the critics.

Among the chief criticisms that were brought to the poem was its difficulty, which made it quite inaccessible to readers with modest literary, philosophical and artistic background knowledge. This difficulty resides mainly in its intertextuality, since *The Waste Land* is a palimpsest with layers over layers of meaning drawn from resources as varied as Shakespeare, Chaucer, French symbolists, pagan rituals of fertility, Sanskrit philosophy, Christian thinkers such as Saint Augustine and the Bible. "*The Waste Land* is a puzzle, in which representative items of world literature, together with allusions to painting, music and dance, intermingle in an act of cultural interrelation and mutual reflection. Each piece depends upon the others and upon the context as a whole" (BÎRSANU, 2014, 179).

The poem consists of five sections and reflects the debased state of the modern context after World War I. Readers are presented with a challenge right from the epigraph, taken from Petronius's *Satyricon*. In the quotation, Sybil – a prophetess who is cursed to age, but not allowed to die – reiterates her wish to die because what she sees in the future does not encourage any desire to live. Sybil's wish perfectly mirrors Eliot's own perspective of the present: modernity is doomed to perdition unless it learns how to rely on the past glory of world civilisation that might ensure its survival.

Although *The Waste Land* gathers bits of knowledge and creations from all over the world and from a vast geographical area, the main resources Eliot relied upon for inspiration are two anthropological references, namely James Frazier's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From ritual to romance*. Both books analyse the importance of fertility rituals of ancient times for modern thinking. These fertility rituals centre on the figure of the Fisher King, who turns the land he is ruling into a "waste land" because he loses his potency. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot relies on the image of the Fisher King to suggest the possibility that the king may never regain his potency and, as a result, his kingdom (which actually stands for modern civilisation) may never again reverse to its once glorious state of fertility and meaningful experiences.

In this paper, we approach *The Waste Land* as the locus of multiple transfers, the intersection of multiple languages and arts (particularly music and painting). The manner in which Eliot organised, combined and relocated various elements of universal artistic creations, spread along geographic and temporal axes, can be likened to a work of translation. In this particular case, translation is not understood as mere linguistic transfer, but as interchange and transformation of forms and meanings. In this respect, we can apply what Roman Jakobson calls *transmutation* or *intersemiotic translation*, which is the transfer of signs from one semiotic system into another. This approach is also supported by the concept of *ekphrasis*, promoted by Umberto Eco or *partial*

*transformation* designed by George Steiner. *The Waste Land* perfectly illustrates Steiner's concept, since it refers to a wide array of artistic manifestations such as “paraphrase, graphic illustration, pastiche, imitation, thematic variation, parody, citation in a supporting or undermining context, false attribution (deliberate or accidental), plagiarism, collage and others” (1998, 437). In *The Waste Land*, Eliot did not simply borrow or imitate texts from the more recent or distant past, but he adjusted them so as to suit their new place, in a manner that simultaneously signals their foreignness and explains why they are present in the poem.

One might even claim that Eliot is a great “translator” in the sense developed by Robert de Beaugrande, who sees the process of translation as occurring “not merely when a person ‘transposes’ a ‘source language text’ into a ‘target language text’, but in the far broader sense of when a person transposes any content into any form or from one form into another form” (1994, 2). Transfers and transpositions are present in the Eliotian poem as various levels. In this paper, we intend to look into how transfers are both applied at the technical level (in terms of writing strategies and techniques borrowed from other arts, as mentioned before) and in terms of motifs and themes that are deracinated from their original contexts and transplanted in *The Waste Land*. For this poem is not only the poetic interpretation and revisitation of previous texts, but it also crosses boundaries in respect of languages (many quotations preserved in their original languages), literary genres (allusions to and incorporation of fragments from religious texts, opera librettos, sonnets and tragedies) and arts.

### **Linguistic transfers**

The above-mentioned transfers only make sense if contextualized both textually, and with the poet's frame of mind. Eliot's purpose was to revive the “waste land” of modernity, a feat which, in his opinion, was only possible with the help of great past achievements in arts. The entire poem is an antithesis between the greatness of the past in its artistic forms and the weakness and superficiality of the present, its inability to exploit the past fully. The only survival of a crumbling world (as Europe was in the aftermath of World War I) could be ensured by the revival of the past and its reinsertion in the modern framework of thinking.

Language is the raw material from which the poet started. And he shaped it so as to be able and accommodate the plethora of ideas meant to reach the readers. English alone, however, was not felt as being always sufficient for the difficult task of conveying them all. Or at least not in the form recognised and used by the modern readership. That is why in *The Waste Land* Eliot resorted to intra- and interlinguistic transfers. Intralinguistic transfers take the form of a mixture of language registers: there is the pub scene, with the colloquial speak of small clerks, but also the religious language of Saint Augustine, not to mention the high-class discourse of the main male character/poet who represents British intelligentsia. These surprising linguistic associations do not end here. In the reference to Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, Eliot exploits spelling variation: “Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe”. In doing so, he emphasised once more the gap between past and present, their seeming incongruity.

Interlinguistic transfers reflect a fusion of languages, more precisely, quotations and allusions in foreign languages, which are moved into an English-dominated context. Readers are expected to be able and decode the poetic message hidden in quotations in Latin, Old Greek, French, German, Sanskrit and Italian. The interplay of languages supports a contextual instance and suggests the spatial, and not only temporal, gap between the present and past artistic achievements. This genuine linguistic trip begins at the epigraph, which is both in Latin and Old Greek. It continues with the dedication to Pound which is in Italian – “il miglor fabbro”. It is in itself a web of intertextuality: the quotation is from Dante, who considered the troubadour Daniel Arnaut to be a real craftsman of European letters. Eliot himself saw Dante as one of the greatest European minds, but he considered that in modern times, this part could well be played by Pound. Medieval questers were often faced with challenges meant to test their perseverance and worthiness of the task. If the

reader can be compared to a modern quester of truth and beauty, than we might claim that this difficult first encounter with the poem (the above-mentioned quotations force the reader to look for their meanings either by searching them, or by continuing reading the poem) is also a test, following which the reader proves whether s/he deserves to attempt a decoding of the concealed poetic message.

The self is thus confronted with the Other, who thus becomes a chronotopical other, to use Andrew Benjamin's words, and needs to solve the linguistic puzzle that may hold the key to the solution for the restoration of the barren land. The multiplicity of languages translates into a multiplicity of perspectives on reality. Readers are thus made aware that their view of the world does not hold the value of absolute validity and that unity is most of the time achieved through diversity.

The final lines of the poem are a culmination of a linguistic puzzle that best reflects the dialogue between distinct epochs, civilisations and world views:

*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.  
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
 Shantih shantih shantih

All these final lines are closely connected with music, a form of art which, as Eliot might seem to suggest, may assist the salvation of a decaying civilisation. They all reflect "singing that persists through and transforms disaster" (BROOKER & SPEARS BENTLEY, 1990, 203). The first quotation is one of Eliot's favourite lines from Dante's *Purgatory*. Dante depicts the famous troubadour as paying for his earthly sins, but who now has turned his suffering into music. The next line is taken from an anonymous Latin poem, *The Vigil of Venus*. It has to do with lack of inspiration – the poet expresses his hopes that we would soon regain the inspiration to sing like a swallow. The reference to Nerval, "Le prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie", presents the former prince on the ruins of his castle, lamenting the fact that he was the last in a long line of gifted troubadours. However, through this cathartic experience of suffering, he managed to transform grief and unhappiness into music.

This Babel, as suggested by the ending of the poem, might represent the salvation of the land. "Of divine origin, the word, instrument of creation, might help restore a lost unity. (...) 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/civilisations" (BÎRSANU, 2014, 193).

### **Intersemiotic transfers**

#### *Visual arts*

Eliot's poetic work perfectly illustrates Pound's urge addressed to the other modernist writers to look for modes of expression outside language. This approach to how new materials may be turned into art is what provides modernism with the freshness and innovation that sets it apart from previous aesthetic movements. In his poetry, Eliot embedded not only leitmotifs, themes from and allusions to cinema, music, painting and ballet, but also techniques and strategies borrowed from these arts.

A special part is played by visual arts. From a very early age, Eliot took an interest in the visual art movements such as German expressionism, vorticism, futurism, and especially cubism with whose principles he entered into contact in Paris and then in London. The poems where motifs

from and associations with the above-mentioned artistic trends can be detected reveal the poet's profound understanding and appreciation of this aesthetic form of manifestation. That is why visual arts were a rich source of inspiration both in terms of content, and in respect of writing techniques. Themes inspired from paintings take sometimes the form of overt allusions and associations, while other times they require the reader's intimate familiarity with the respective works, in the absence of which the poetic content would lose a deeper level of significance.

Although familiar with the classical masterpieces of world painters, the modernist poet seemed to display a certain degree of mistrust in the interest they may raise among modern consumers of art. Eliot himself seemed to resonate best with surrealism and cubism, to which he felt most akin. Cubist artists were among the first who set out to explore the infinite possibilities of combinations between language and paint. They considered that painting could be made and could acquire a more profound meaning through the use of less conventional means than were previously employed in painting.

Eliot was familiar not only with Cubist works, but also with the emulation of ideas that lead to its emergence, since he frequented the same circles as other young artists of his time. Here is what he says in one of his letters: “I have just been to a cubist tea. There were two cubist painters, a futurist novelist, a vorticist poet and his wife, a cubist lady black-and-white artist, another cubist lady [...]. We discussed poetry, art, religion and the war, all in quite an intelligent way, I thought” (1988, 77). One could interpret this as the perfect metaphor of how distinct emerging trends (vorticism, futurism, cubism) unite in their distinct view of arts and reality in order to create a new world order of artistic sensitivity.

What particularly drew Eliot towards cubism was its perspective on reality: the viewer is presented with simultaneous images of the same concept/object, which suggest a multitude of interpretations that cut out reality differently. The collage, juxtapositions of ideas and themes, fragmentation and relocations are all techniques and strategies that Eliot borrowed from cubism. The practice of collage, particularly met in Picasso and Braque, indicates a fragmentation of space meant to accommodate exactly this pluriperspectivism.

The technique of collage as used in *The Waste Land* is especially visible in the sketching of the poetic characters. Thus, there is the figure of “the third” alluded to both in the trip to Emaus and in Shackleton's expedition, but also the image of characters who suffered deaths by water such as Phlebas, the drowned Phoenician sailor, and Ferdinand, the dead king of Naples, relocated from Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

The same applies to the depiction of the female characters in *The Waste Land*. Here, the woman is not one, but many, with as many faces and personae as any complex person may display. The female figure reminds of Picasso's portraits, with juxtaposed features which reflect both the physical appearance, and the inner thoughts. Cleopatra is therefore placed next to fragile and delicate characters such as Shakespeare's Ophelia and Philomel or the hyacinth girl, but also to other feminine presences represented by Madame Sosotris, the clairvoyant, Mrs. Porter, the typist and the low-class women of the bar scene. Each of these women comes with her own set of beliefs, level of education, life experiences, suffering and expectations and stands for different things: fragility, delicacy and innocence, but also pleasure of the flesh, cunningness, opportunism and superficiality.

These figures are a collage of other figures, which are sometimes remote geographically, and other times temporally. He manages to create a full image by juxtaposing fragments of seemingly disparate models, similar to a painting of Braque's, for instance. It is an illustrative example of the manner in which Eliot proves his adherence to modernist tenets, since “modernist literary doctrines are modelled on contemporary philosophical trends as well as theories of painting and sculpture. Poets share the pervasive idea in modernist painting and philosophy that truth is fragmentary, relational and complex. Hence the modern form must embody this multiform, prismatic reality, which can no longer be encompassed in a single unified scheme” (PATEA, 2011,

140). It would have been, therefore, impossible to sketch these complex poetic characters in one linear stroke, as they are representatives of such “prismatic reality”, consisting of a multitude of truths and identities.

The collage of distinct literary genres, voices and styles is closely connected with two other techniques taken from visual arts, namely juxtaposition and fragmentation. They trigger further difficulties in deciphering the poetic message because of the seemingly incoherent collection of allusions, fragments and characters of ancient and modern world literature and arts, that seem to lead the narrative thread in no direction; this apparent lack of coherence was actually the main criticism the poem faced immediately after its publication.

From cubist painters and the cubist philosophy, Eliot borrowed especially techniques and methods of creation. In terms of themes, they were not the only visual influence that can be traced back in *The Waste Land*. According to the poet’s own explanations in the Notes that accompany the poem, the following lines are inspired by a painting signed by Hieronymus Bosch, widely acclaimed as the precursor of the Surrealists.

A woman drew her long black hair out tight  
 And fiddled whisper music on those strings  
 And bats with baby faces in the violet light  
 Whistled, and beat their wings  
 And crawled head downward down a blackened wall.  
 And upside down in air were towers  
 Tolling reminiscent bells that kept the hours  
 And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

Although Eliot does not specify exactly which painting he used as reference, it most likely is the Flemish painter’s triptych called *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-1504), more precisely the part entitled *Hell*. This is an illustration of the punishments incurred by sinners in hell for their earthly deeds. Bosch is famous for his gloomy scenery populated by nightmarish creatures. In the lines specified above, Eliot manages to create one of his most successful synesthetic scenes, in which sounds and visual images blend so as to illustrate some sort of modern hell: the dominating colours are oppressive and dark – the woman has black hair, the light is violet, the wall is blackened. The simultaneity of different strange sounds generates an insane, disturbing cacophony: the woman absurdly plays on strings made of her own hair, bats whistle, bells strike the hour, while voices reach the surface from “empty cisterns and exhausted wells”, with echoes that we can only imagine as creepy and mysterious. It is a surrealist image, which perfectly renders the idea of hell, the perfect illustration of the physical and spiritual “waste land” of modernity.

To sum up, one could say that Eliot used the collage, a literary technique very dear to modernist poets, in order to provide coherence to a “heap of broken images” which was the European culture after World War I. The cubist effects of this method are achieved, as mentioned above, through the superposition of distinct cultures, languages, distant time frames and geographic areas, the main poetic intention being to cancel the superficial mimetic rendition of reality. As for the blend between past and present, or, to be more precise, the parallelism between the two, it is visible at this level as well: there are old masters such as Bosch whose art coexists in *The Waste Land* with the art of cubists and surrealists, in a dialectic perspective that ensures the visual simultaneity of reality levels.

#### *Music transfers*

In *The Waste Land*, intersemiotic transfers are not limited to the dialogue between language and painting. Since his student years, Eliot had been deeply preoccupied with the intimate connection between language and music, not only the musical material that could serve as a source

of inspiration for the poet, but the poetry which resides in language, in the patterns of linguistic expression. It all started with the profound influence exerted upon him by French Symbolism, a literary trend whose philosophy was infused with the notion that music and poetry are inextricably linked. This influence would endure for a lifetime, since, in the Appendix to *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot would confess that: “I venture to say that without this French tradition [which started with Baudelaire and ended with Paul Valery] the work of three poets in other languages – and three very different from each other – I refer to W.B. Yeats, to Rainer Maria Rilke, and, if I may say so, to myself – would hardly be conceivable” (1977, 112).

As was the case with visual arts, Eliot surprises readers again by superposing elements of classical music, the value and appreciation of which were already demonstrated by the test of time, and of jazz, a music genre which, in Eliot’s time, was frowned upon by the music establishment for being low-brow, incoherent and superficial.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot uses Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde* both as a source of literary motifs, and as a writing technique. Wagner himself reinterpreted the myth, when he changed the focus from the physical plane of this romantic story to the psychological one; to this end, he sublimated the narrative material into music that was meant to mirror the characters’ inner turmoil which took the form of “endless yearning, longing, the bliss and the wretchedness of love” (WAGNER quoted in NEWMAN 1981, 206).

The Wagnerian couple is taken over by Eliot to reflect a modern couple, but in reversed mirrors:

*Frisch weht der Wind*  
*Der Heimat Zu*  
*Mein Irisch Kind*  
*Wo weilest du?*  
‘You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;  
They called me the hyacinth girl’.  
- 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.  
*Oed’ und leer das Meer.*

The Wagnerian love story used as the frame and the modern romantic affair are both tragic, but in different ways. In the mythical couple, the heroes cannot fulfil their love because of an adverse external factor, which was beyond their control; in the case of the modern pair, they fail to do it because they are unable to connect emotionally. Both the man and the hyacinth girl remember the passionate encounter they had a year before, but in the meantime the man seems to have gone through a transcendental experience (he looked “into the heart of light” – a metaphor for illumination, spiritual awakening) which makes it impossible for him to reconnect with the girl physically.

The isolation of the lovers because of their impossibility to communicate is placed in the foreground of the scene. Frame and centre overlap and reflect each other in a twisted image. Although the two couples are connected by feelings of hope, their stories converge towards the same inability to share a material union in one case and a transcendental connection, in the other. The story of Tristan and Isolde, the archetype of supreme love, and the modern romantic affair are doomed to fail precisely because hope does not have an actual anchor in reality and thus the feeling of desolation is absolute, as indicated by Eliot’s reference to Act III, Scene IV in Wagner’s opera: “Desolate and empty the sea”.

Wagner's sober music is counterbalanced in *The Waste Land* by the rhythms of jazz, which complete the musical imagery of the poem. Here, jazz plays a double part. On the one hand, it is one of the very few elements pertaining to Eliot's native culture. At the beginning of the twentieth century, ragtime – a form of popular music as jazz was considered at the time – was only beginning its career in Europe. Eliot was a great fan of ragtime, which he chose to include in his masterpiece: "I was intrigued by this power to move me while eluding my understanding. Somehow its [*The Waste Land*] rhythms were often closer to those of jazz than were those of Negro poets, and even though I could not understand then, its range of allusion was as mixed and as varied as that of Louis Armstrong" (ELIOT quoted in CHINITZ 2003, 141). Indeed, Eliot successfully applied the techniques of jazz – syncopated rhythms, the rupture of musical lines, a clever blending of allusions and an apparent lack of coherence generated by a multitude of associations and allusions – in order to use language with the same musical effects.

On the other hand, jazz was welcome by European artists as an image of change, a break away from the stiff upper lip tradition of European music. "Jazz was embraced by avant-gardists and progressive intellectuals as a symbol of their onslaught against sterile mores and 'traditional' aesthetics. For these groups, jazz became the cornerstone of a new, more broad-minded attitude towards popular culture, often leading to a call for commerce between high culture and the popular" (CHINITZ, 2003, 30). Eliot was among the first modernists to include in his poetry the rich and varied tradition of popular culture, which was thus made to co-exist with the everlasting masterpieces of classical music.

In the literary trend called the "jazz movement", writers resorted to syncopation and the adaptation of the poetic discourse in a way that might reflect how members of pop culture use grammar and vocabulary. In the following lines, Eliot made full use of the above-mentioned techniques:

Good night Bill Good night Lou Good night May  
Goodnight.  
Ta ta. Goodnight. Goodnight.  
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies good  
night, good night

Although these lines close the pub scene, they also allude to Shakespeare's Hamlet, the moment he takes his goodbyes. Actually, in 1912, Hamlet became a character in a ragtime piece, the "Shakespeareian Rag" spelled by Eliot "Shakespeareian". The association seems again surprising, if not irreverent. However, it emphasises once again the role of the poet who, similar to a ragtime composer, gathers pieces of previously created works and rearranges them in order to produce a new puzzle, in which the images complete the picture by asserting their differences. Eliot's insertion of these allusions to popular culture was erroneously interpreted as further emphasis of the clash between classical and modern values. But the comment on the "Shakespeareian rag", namely that it is "so elegant / So intelligent" suggests the poet's genuine appreciation of this musical genre, which, as hinted in *The Waste Land*, can play its part in the survival of modern European culture.

### Conclusions

Transfers of meaning, reconstructions of styles and artistic modes of expression, but also revisitations of ancient myths and their relocation in the modern environment are strategies which contribute to the status of *The Waste Land* as a landmark of literary modernism. A single reading of the poem is utterly insufficient if one wishes to submerge into the depths of its poetic significance. Readers need to repeat the experience, each time discovering new and intriguing layers of meaning; the task of the reader – who stands for a modern quester – is to search for and see through the

mysterious fabric of the poem in a manner similar to what the poet himself did when hiding the message in this rich intertextual maze.

In *The Waste Land*, Eliot manages to give voice to historical, mythical, literary, religious figures, who cross centuries of human experience in all its complexity, with their own background of grief, happiness, epiphanies or debasement. As suggested in the final lines, despite the disillusion and weaknesses of modern civilisation, there is still hope that humanity could regain its vitality if it learns how to rely on the past and use its lessons as a foundation for the future. In this key, the poem becomes a space of reconciliation, not only between past and present, but also between seemingly incongruent fields of artistic expression through the masterly blend of language, sound and colour.

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