

PARADIGMS OF DISPLACEMENT IN *THE WASTE LAND*

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The poem is exile, and the poet who belongs to it belongs to the dissatisfaction of exile. He is always lost to himself, outside, far from home; he belongs to the foreign, to the outside which knows no intimacy or limit. Exile, the poem, makes the poet a wanderer, the one always astray, he to whom the stability of presence is not granted and who is deprived of a true abode. (Blanchot 237-8)

Exile is both a central theme and a characteristic biographical pattern of artistic modernism. In all the arts, a surprising number of the central figures of high modernism were exiles from their native countries: Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schonberg, Bela Bartok, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Wassily Kandinsky, Pier Mondrian, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ford Madox Ford, W. H. Auden, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann, Paul Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Some of these exiles were mainly voluntary, as in the case of Pound, Eliot, others were forced out of their native country by wars, revolutions, and persecutions.

With T. S. Eliot, exile was a chosen way of life: he left America in 1914 to study at Oxford and the First World War made him an exile because he could not return to America during the war. However, after the war his stay was voluntary and he returned to America only for visits. As he once put it, he became a “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-catholic in religion” and underwent a process of transformation into what must have been his own idealized vision of an Englishman.

The Waste Land (1922) was the major work he created as his long exile began. The exploration of exile at the symbolic level allowed T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* to develop complex visions of the impact and implications of modern spiritual exile. Much discussion of Eliot's poem centers on the question of the protagonist, whether or not he/she is single or multiple, but what is of interest for the topic of my study is the fact that all the major voices in *The Waste Land* manifest some form of exile – some are exiles in space, others in time, but all are anxiously aware of being somewhere they do not feel at home (see Cawelti).

As argued in the next pages, the five sections of *The Waste Land* seem to outline a topography that is best described in terms adapted from St. Augustine's *Confessions* as a *regio dissimilitudinis*, a region of difference. One of the prime features of this land "where all is different" is language: to be exiled here is to "struggle through trackless wastes" (Augustine vii) of time and change, escapable only through the (non-discursive) Incarnation. In the same way, Jacques Derrida considered exile an essential condition for poetry; together with the explanation it inspires, he wrote, poetry is "the very form of exiled speech" (67). Interestingly, both Augustine and Derrida see exile as existing within language; the distinction lies in the value each appends to this situation. For Augustine, the ultimate feature of an exile secluded from the "land of peace" is language; in the evolution of words in time "there is no place to rest" (Augustine iv). Evidently, Derrida is one of the modern theorists: in contrast to Augustine, he sees displacement and difference – an "absence of locality" (169) – as vital to poetic autonomy.

With Eliot, place is both subject and trope. That is to say that not only does place function thematically, but it also functions metaliterary as a way for the text to comment on its own discursive status. In one way, the places of the poem – Starnbergersee, the Thames, London, its streets, Carthage, the gardens, the mountains, Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, the sea – perform as markers in the poet's spiritual journey, or as instruments to measure spiritual development beyond time, place, and, in all probability, beyond language.

The opening lines graft the poem to another text by means of a 'total negation', which reverses the meaning of the foreign text (Kristeva 195). Thus, April's sweet showers from *The Canterbury Tales* are denied in 'The Burial of the Dead' (a prayer-book heading), expressing a "ceremonial of dust thrown and of souls reborn" (Kenner 178):

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

The technique used here belongs to the device of parody, which is the typical example of the carnivalesque discourse (Kristeva 94) since it quotes from, and alludes to its original, abridging and inverting its characteristic devices. Roger Fowler notes that

The caricaturist's 'original' is not some other already existing style or work: he holds a distorting mirror up to life, where as the parody is a mirror of mirror, a critique of a view of life already articulated in

art. Parody is so common an element in literature precisely because it adds this extra level of critical comment, which is lacking from literature. (173)

After the opening invocation to April, the poem jumps to a conversation between a young man, apparently from England, and an older woman, an exiled aristocrat from Lithuania. She speaks to him of her present condition of anxiety and emptiness and about her happier memories of childhood (ll. 13-18). Stranded in the Starnbergersee, Germany, what draws the reader's attention is their common condition of anxious homelessness.

A timeless prophetic voice describing the Waste Land leads to a quote from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* that speaks longingly of home and of the girl left behind. This is quoted in the original German, as are many of the literary and cultural tags Eliot intersperses abundantly throughout the poem. Each of these quotes has specific meanings. For example, the *Tristan* quote introduces the themes of tragic love, lust, and death, and creates an ironic contrast with the "hyacinth girl" passage that immediately follows. Nonetheless the overall use of different languages deepens the sense of exile that pervades the poem, as nothing characterizes the experience of exile more than the encounter with a different language and the difficulties involved in trying to understand and learn it. The readers of *The Waste Land*, confronted by unfamiliar languages and allusions, turn themselves into spiritual exiles lost in strange labyrinth of history, culture, and myth. Therefore, they become disoriented and homeless, they feel caught in-between alien traditions.

With the "hyacinth girl" episode the poem also introduces the theme of the critical failure of love to surmount the despair of homelessness. This theme will recur on many occasions, as with the miserable rich couple of 'The Game of Chess', as well as with the homosexual Mr. Eugenides, the typist, and the three seduced "Rhine Maidens" from 'The Fire Sermon'. Following the "hyacinth girl", we are presented with Madame Sosostris, clearly another exile. The resurrected voices of the past literary tradition are mixed with the imagined ones, such as Madame Sosostris's, who tries to connect the main symbolic characters in the poem using her Tarot pack of cards (Spender 97). However, Eliot's jocular note that he uses the Tarot pack of cards only to suit his own convenience (176) makes the prophecy false, and the speaker's anxiety about originality and theft ironical ("Tell her I bring the horoscope myself: / One must be so careful these days", ll. 68-69).

In the hints at ancient Egypt and Phoenicia, as well as Renaissance Italy, which are made in her cards, we encounter another kind of exile who will be central to the poem. Just as many of the personas are exiles in space,

others are what might be called exiles in time, represented through a conspicuous series of anachronisms, such as the presence of Oedipus at the lustful bed of the typist and the young man carbuncular.

The first section concludes with a voice mirroring that of the young man at the Starnbergersee, which depicts contemporary London in terms taken largely from Dante's *Inferno* (ll. 63-64). There are hints that this speaker is an exile both in space and time, since he seems to look on the scene as a stranger and has been with Stetson in the ships at Mylae. Further, his final words from Charles Baudelaire are spoken in French. Even more important is the way in which the passage introduces the theme of spiritual exile, that of death in life; though still living in present-day London, the figures the speaker describes have also crossed over into the land of the dead.

The decadent opulence of the room, whose description opens 'A Game of Chess', provides the proper setting for neurosis, sterility and claustrophobia. Here, the atmosphere becomes suffocating both by the excessive detail ("golden Cupidon", "sevenbranched candelabra", "jewels", "coloured glass", "synthetic perfumes", "coffered ceiling", etc.), and by the numerous allusions and even pastiche of a Jacobean and Elizabethan tradition in literature. If in parody the writer subversively criticizes his model by using, as a basic technique, the 'impersonalisation' of the parodied style (Fowler 173), pastiche recreates the original by a clear mimicry of the model's style. As it will be seen, all the heroines the text alludes to by the pastiche of Marvell, Pope, Keats, Shakespeare, and Milton—Cleopatra, Lamia, Belinda, Imogen, Eve, Philomela—are embodied by the neurotic women in their common lament of man's lack of sensibility (cf. Moody 85):

'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?' (l. 125)
'What shall I do now?
I shall rush out as I am, and walk in the street
With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
What shall we ever do?' (ll. 132-135).

In 'The Fire Sermon', the typist, who is too "bored and tired" to speak out her regrets, matches both the range of the feminine characters from the previous parts of the poem, and the squalor of the urban image she is set against. Part of the 'unreal city', Thames that "sweats/ Oil and tar" (ll. 267-268) can be seen as another improper setting: "The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,/ Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/ Or other testimony of summer nights" (ll. 177-179) .

It can be noted therefore that there are striking similarities between the Thames and the Styx, between the city of London and Dante's *Inferno*,

and more importantly, these allusions are paralleled by the bibliographical data in the Notes.

Here, prominence is also given to Ovid's work since Tiresias is acknowledged as the central figure of the poem: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character', is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. (...) What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem" (78).

As a matter of fact, Dante and Ovid are often grouped together as poets of exile. In his essay "Exile and Relegation in Dante and Ovid", Robert Wilson draws a fundamental difference between the nature of the two poets' exile. Whereas Ovid is relegated rather than exiled, meaning that he is confined **to** Tomis, Dante is excluded **from** Florence. The critic stresses the fundamental difference in the exile experiences of these two poets:

Dante was not limited to any particular location, which meant that he could remain in fairly close proximity to Florence, thus experiencing less of the cultural isolation described by Ovid. Taken together, Dante's positive comments about geographically specific locations and actual individuals, and his negative, but geographically anonymous, picture of the bitter personal experience of **exile**, show that he locates his **exile** internally rather than externally. He is not restricted to any particular place and so does not associate his suffering specifically with any of the places where he spends his **exile**. Even if he changes his location, he carries the fact that he is excluded from Florence with him. This then requires an internal solution to the problem for Dante, who seeks to change the meaning of his **exile**, and widen his horizons. Ovid, on the other hand is, in effect, a prisoner, not free to move from Tomis, and this fact dominates his treatment of his **exile**. (Wilson 47-8)

As a matter of fact, quoting the Latin text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the poet provides his Tiresias with a literary biography that accounts for his osmosis of identities (Elmann 97) and his power of prophecy. The legend tells how Tiresias was turned into a woman (as a curse for his hitting of two copulating snakes) and then, after seven years he was turned back into a man because he had committed the same sin. Due to his experience, Tiresias was asked by Jove to witness his quarrel with his wife, Juno, about whether a man or a woman enjoys a greater pleasure. Since Tiresias supported Jove, he was blinded by Juno; Jove gave him the power of prophecy instead (cf. Southam 172).

With reference to this legendary figure, Maud Elmann notes that in *The Waste Land*

(...) Tiresias could be seen as the very prophet of abjection, personifying all the poem's porous membranes. A revisionary, he foresees what he has already foresuffered, mixing *memory and desire, self and other, man and woman, pollution and catharsis*. (78) (italics mine)

Unlike Madame Sosostris whose vision of things is made unclear by the mediated use of the Tarot, Tiresias has a direct perception of other's life and thoughts ("foretold", "foresuffered"). Lacking passion completely, the love scene between the typist and the young carbuncular man is perceived from a detached point of view. This episode is in fact enclosed within the 'old' mind of the experienced prophet: "these lovers exist only in the eye of their Seer; and he beholds only what he already knows or foresuffered" (Moody 90):

The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference. (ll. 235-241)

As a consequence of his androgyny ("old man with wrinkled tugs", "Old man with wrinkled female breasts"), blindness, and gift of prophecy ("to perceive", "to foretold", and "to foresuffer" are used in their past tense forms), Tiresias's presence in the poem blurs the boundaries between *the self* and *the other* ("throbbing between two lives"). This fact that may be associated with a high degree of impersonality:

And I Tiresias foresuffered *all*
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by *Thebes* below the wall
And *walked among* the lowest of the *dead*. (ll. 243-246) (italics mine)

Tiresias attempts to heal the symptom of *(in)betweenness* equally displayed by the text, which is in a continuous dialogue with other texts, and by the 'I' of the text, scattered into different *personae*.

The incantation of the three Thames-daughters in lines 266-306 alludes to Wagner's opera *Die Götterdämmerung* (The Twilight of Gods), III, I, where the Rhine-maidens anticipate the return of the river's treasure that has been stolen (Southam 176-7). In Eliot's version, the Thames and London are created both from a modern and an Elizabethan perspective by a consciousness that cannot help dissolving itself:

The barges wash
 Drifting logs
 Down Greenwich reach
 Past the Isle of Dogs.
 Weialala leia
 Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester
 Beating oars
 The stern was formed
 A glided shell
 Red and gold
 The brisk swell
 Rippled both shores
 Southwest wind

Carried down stream
 The peal of bells
 White towers
 Weialala leia
 Wallala leialala. (ll. 274-290)

The fragments at the end of 'The Fire Sermon' are directly expanding the song since, in Wagner's original, the Rhine-maidens recover the god from the ashes of the hero's funeral pyre (Moody 96). St Augustine's *Confessions* ("To Carthage then I came", l. 307, and "O Lord Though pluckest me out", l. 309) frame some Buddhist elements ("Burning burning burning burning", l. 308) referred to in the notes as originating in *Buddhism in Translation* (Eliot 79)

Unlike *citation*, which is, technically speaking, a text that is directly recopied in the original language of the source-text, *allusion* to other works can occur in the form of a commentary (ironical or not)—their source is attested in the notes—, or as a reminiscence, '*trace mnésique*', in Kristeva's words (74).

Allusions to religious writings and mythical texts run along the whole length of the poem, and they are decoded by Eliot himself in 'Notes', where he also indicates some 'reading clues' and a certain 'bibliography':

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge). (...) To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general (...); I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognize in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies. (76)

Using patterns of myth and religion, Eliot makes of his poem (especially of Part V) an illustration of his '*mythical method*'. In his 'Ulysses, Order and Myth' (1923), the essayist celebrates Joyce's novel in which he inaugurates what Eliot calls 'the mythical method'. This method is considered to oppose the 'narrative' one, since it is "a way of controlling, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (177).

On the other hand, according to Roland Barthes, myth can be seen as a language, a system of signs, and therefore a system of communication, a mediator (see *Mythologies*). Consequently, given a presupposed absence (of faith in this case), in a certain context (i.e. the modern Europe, and by extension, the modern literature), "the elements of a mythic message are so arranged as to attempt to mediate the gaps" (Fowler 154).

In 'What the Thunder Said', the journey to Emmaus (ll. 322-365) and the approach to the Chapel Perilous (ll. 331-394) contrast the theme of "the present decay of eastern Europe" (Eliot, 79). The story (Luke xxiv, 13-31) tells that, on the day of Christ's resurrection, the two disciples which travel on the road to Emmaus are talking over the recent events (the trial, the crucifixion), while Christ has joined them without being recognized (Southam 185):

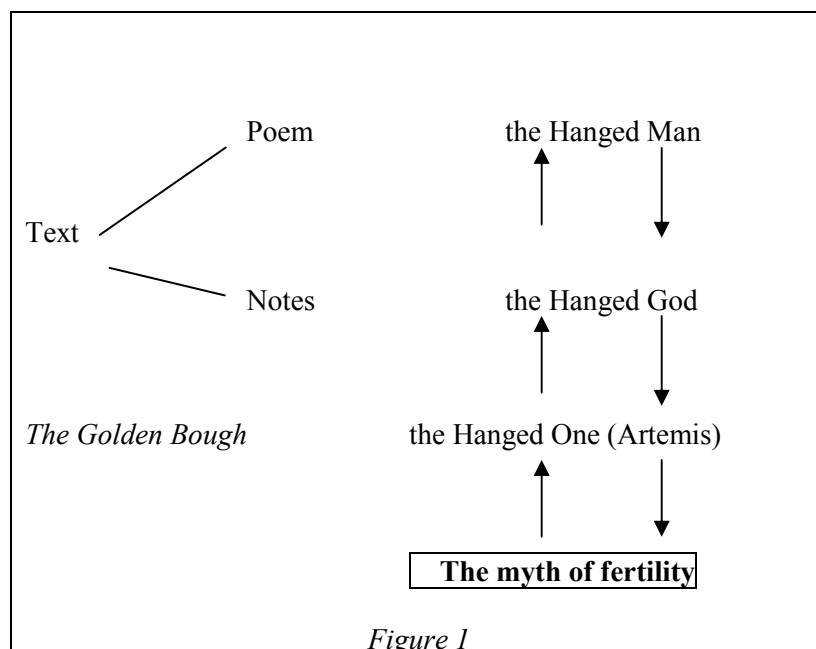
Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you? (ll. 359-365)

In Kristeva's approach to literature, the fragments of mythical, political, or scientific origin enter the intertextual space of the discourse as 'grafts', as they bear the traces of their original context:

Pris à des textes *mythiques* (les Vedas, le Tao-Tö King, la Kabale, ou à ces écrits modernes qui refondent les mythes anciens ...), *scientifique* (Héraclite, Lucrèce...) ou *politique* (Marx, Lénine, Mao Tsé-toung), les prélèvements laissent voir l'engendrement à travers cette triple orientation [...]. Ces prélèvements ne sont pas des citations ...; ils sont *natifs* de ce processus d'engendrement de sens que le texte met en scène. (271-272)

These *grafts* function as a "signifying complex" and are inserted in the text (the syntagm) engendering their original context (the paradigm), as "*coupure-renvoi*" (Kristeva 271-2).

In the same way, the use of mythical elements taken from some mythical writing (e.g. *The Upanishads*, *The Bible*) or from the scientific studies of Weston (*From Ritual to Romance*), Frazer (*The Golden Bough*), and Warren (*Buddhism in Translation*) function both paradigmatically, by foreshadowing their original function (religious, spiritual), and at the text level, as samples of an ideal past that comes into contradiction with the decay of the present time. For example, in 'The Burial of the Dead', it seems that the figure of the Hanged Man, a Tarot card, which is missing from Madame Sosostris's 'prophecy' ("I do not find/ The Hanged Man", ll. 54-55), a sign of misfortune. But in the notes, Eliot gives it another significance by associating the Hanged Man with the Hanged God from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. In this book, Frazer accounts for different kinds of ritualistic death with the gods who ensure the fertility of the land and its people, by their sacrifice and force of resurrection. One of these gods, Artemis, who was considered to be the great goddess of fertility (Frazer 7), "appears to have been annually hanged in effigy in her sacred grove of Condylea among the Arcadian hills, and there accordingly she went by the name of the Hanged One" (355). Therefore, a linear reading is not adequate; the meaning is filled only in a parallel reading of the two texts, and in their association on the paradigmatic axis:



The mythical element (the Hanged Man), initially ‘cut’ *from* the context (the myth of fertility) and inserted in the poem (the first range of arrows in *Figure 1* indicates this procedure schematically), is decoded only in relation to its original place, shifting in the opposite direction (the second range of arrows), a process mediated by the notes. As stated by Eliot in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”, the mythical temporality and the temporality of the text are connected to each other by the poet’s “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” (*Selected Prose* 177). At this syntagmatic level, the graft fits into the main theme of the poem: the fact that the Tarot card illustrating the Hanged Man is missing may be associated with lack of fertility, which is a characteristic of both the land and its people.

From this point of view, I think that both the mythical elements and the reference to F.H. Bradley’s philosophical thought in *Appearance and Reality* (cf. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* 80) are such *grafts*, which, together with the other forms of oblique intertextuality, justify the reading of *The Waste Land* as a dialogic text.

As noted so far, the allure of the past is indeed strong showing that an exile is essentially a retrospective being.

The option not to utter any words results in silence, solitude, and ironically an acceptance of one’s own banishment. As speech is obliterated,

silence erases the person from the collective memory of those left behind on the native land and prevents him or her from ever being recognized by the inhabitants of the new home. Silence, moreover, “diminishes personal memory, inasmuch as writing provides for a recovery of past mementos via an imaginary journey back home, when physically such a return is impossible” (Píchová 8).

The theme of exile on the present temporal axis dominates the poem up through ‘The Fire Sermon’. However, in ‘Death by Water’, with its fatal sea voyage, the poet makes a transition to ‘What the Thunder Said’ and the poem’s final quest. This can be understood as a desperate journey through space and time to return from exile and to come home at last, only to discover that in this life the human fate is exile and homelessness. Spatially and temporally we travel from the present back through the history of Western civilization to Ancient India, and ultimately to the very beginnings of history in myth. Yet, the end of this quest is the realization that time and space are not man’s home and that the very condition of history is the exile from the divine. In the dazzling and jagged sequence of multilingual fragments of the final stanza, the protagonist prays for peace. Using the injunctions of the prehistoric Indian myth of the thunder as a sort of mantra, the poetic self waits beside the sea for his escape from history and his final return from exile.

As seen so far, the splitting in two of the personas torn between homeland and home-in-exile is manifested at spatial, temporal, and personal levels. Schizophrenia introduces other motifs common to the works written in exile, with homo- sexuality, schizophrenia, sterility, absence, estrangement, the double and role reversal being among the most noteworthy. These motifs are paradigms of exile or metaphors of exilic experience. Motifs of dismemberment and disintegration are probable metaphors of painful separation from the homeland which metaphorically alludes to the loss of what once used to be an orderly world.

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