

Intertextuality: The Themes of Death, Sterility and Aridity in Eliot's The Waste Land As A Case Study

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الملخص

يعد التناسل أحد من المصطلحات الأدبية التي شهدت اهتماما واسعا لدى نقاد الأدب في جميع أنحاء العالم في الفترة الأخيرة من القرن العشرين وفي السنوات الأولى من القرن الحالي. وتحاول هذه الدراسة أن تعرض بعض تعريفات هذا المصطلح وتتبع أصله وتطوره. كما تحاول أن تميز بينه وبين بعض المصطلحات الأخرى التي تتداخل معه. أنها تعرض لأشكاله وآلياته كما تظهر وتعمل في مفاهيم الموت والعقم والجذب في قصيدة اليوت "الأرض الخراب" وهي تركز على أشكال التناسل الأسطوري والديني والأدبي ثم تقسم هذه الدراسة تبعاً لها.

Abstract

Intertextuality is one of the literary terms which has recently received a special interest by literary critics all over the world. The present study tries to provide some definitions of this term and trace its origin and development. It also tries to draw a distinctive line between this term and some other terms and concepts, like influence, which, sometimes, overlap with it. It tackles its forms and mechanisms as they appear and work in themes of death, sterility and aridity in Eliot's The Waste Land. This study, however, concentrates on mythical, religious and literary intertextuality, for the poet absorbs, transforms, parallels and contrasts with some stories, situations and ideas in these sources. Accordingly, this paper is arranged.

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I. Intertextuality

Intertextuality is one of the modern critical terms which, with other terms, grant the twentieth century criticism its identity. It liberates the text from the traditional approaches which used to attribute it to some sociological, economic and other factors. It deals with the text far from being a creative production resulting from the writer's point of view towards life around him. Instead, intertextuality looks at any literary text as a mosaic of other contemporary and old texts which are present and functional, in different ways, in the existed text. In this respect, the poet's originality is put in a critical corner and the interest of connecting the life of the author with his literary production, which had long admired historical and social critics, seem far from the core of the critical process.

Since "text" is the field work of intertextuality, it is convenient to see what a "text" is first. Ronald Barthes sees that:

A text is a multi dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations.... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. Its only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them. ⁽¹⁾

Thus, a text is not an original or invented production; it is created and generated by other texts and the writer's function becomes a compromising one which serves a specific theme or idea.

Intertextuality is derived from the Latin "intertexto" which originally means "to intermingle while weaving".⁽²⁾ A literary work, thus, is not simply the product of a single author, but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself. Any text, Julia Krestiva argues, "is a constructed of mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another".⁽³⁾ By "absorption" and transformation", Krestiva has left a room for the author's role. She has not regarded him as a mere vehicle for gathering information and ideas from different sources and organizing them in a suitable way to convey a certain message. She is not as extremist as Barthes in this subject in so far as she regards the author as a further pole in the creative process.

Some other critics see that intertextuality is a matter of allusion only. M. Danesi in his Messages and Meanings concentrates on a fact that intertextuality is usually defined as "where a text alludes to another text".⁽⁴⁾ This point of view seems to be narrow for the term we are considering is a broad and problematic one and there are different aspects which are, more or less, related to it. Allusion is but one of them. Noel Burch, on the other hand, does not agree with Krestiva though his definition does not refer to absorption and transformation of other texts. It simply refers to the existence of other texts in the

mind of the reader while reading the existed ones. He depicts the idea of intertextuality as an important characteristic of Japanese literature. By this term he refers to the way in which Japanese readers are inclined to "read any given text in relation to a body of texts".⁽⁵⁾

Though Burch has not added any valuable information to what the others have argued, yet he takes us to another fact which is closely related and associated with studying intertextuality; it is the role of the reader who, through his traditional and personal education and readings, represents another pole in this process in so far as he is aware of the areas of intertextuality in the text he reads.

The critic who made a courageous advance in this realm, is Terence Hawks who suggests in Structuralism and Semiotics that "most works of literature, in emitting messages that refer to themselves, also make constant reference to other works of literature"⁽⁶⁾ So the major reference of any literary text is to itself a matter which gives the author a decisive role in composing and inventing his text. This role, however; should be aided by a constant reference to other texts.

The above definitions, with the exception of Hawks' refer to the passive role of the author. His role is nothing more than gathering and compromising.

In 1968 Barthes announced "the death of the author" and "the birth of the reader", declaring that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination".⁽⁷⁾ What Barthes says, declares two facts: the

first refers to intertextuality as a concept which reminds us that each text exists in relation to others. In fact, "texts owe more to other texts than to their markers".⁽⁸⁾ This fact paves the way to the other fact, i.e is the death of the author.

What is worth mentioning here is that intertextuality, sometimes, meets what is usually said about influence; other times it differs from it. Though both of them seem to have direct and indirect references to the relationships between the read text and other texts or other fields of knowledge yet intertextuality differs from literary influence and passive acceptance of inherited literary authorities, models and values. It is a specific phenomenon in literature. It could be said that even influence "belongs in the domain of intertextual relationships, but only as a form with a minimum level of dialogism".⁽⁹⁾ To look to this matter from another perspective, intertextuality represents a re-creative power in so far as it transforms, absorbs and directs some information of the old texts to serve other new themes while influence primarily means:

The passive position of one text in contrast to the active role of the other. In the process of influence one text appropriates and transfers features from another text without transforming them in accordance with a new goal of its own.⁽¹⁰⁾

However, intertextuality is achieved in the form of citation, allusion, polemic, travesty, parody and the text which is referred to remains recognizable.⁽¹¹⁾

2- Intertextuality in "The Waste Land"

To the best of my knowledge, most of those who wrote about intertextuality in Eliot's poetry have not succeeded in presenting a clear and complete idea about this subject. They did not talk but about allusion as a kind of intertextuality which had not been invented at that time. Hence, to trace intertextuality would be difficult because of Eliot's frequent references to other literatures, languages and cultures which require a special knowledge in order to be traced.⁽¹²⁾

The sources of Eliot's poetry are varied and numerous. By sources we mean the literary or other works by which his poetry is visibly influenced, in terms, say, imagery, verse form or subject matter. Sometimes, the borrowings are obvious as they are from well-known works; and Eliot would be expecting his reader to recognize these sources and follow his use of them. But sometimes the sources are little-known or obscure. In these cases we can assume that Eliot would not expect or require his readers to identify them; and sometimes the sources are unconscious in so much as the borrowed material comes to Eliot's mind without having any sense of external origin. To make an exhaustive inquiry into these areas would be as an enormous and complex task as we have already noted, and it would take us into literary history and psychology of creation. On this Eliot says "A large part of any poet's inspiration must come from his reading and from his knowledge of history".⁽¹³⁾ What history means for T. S. Eliot is that all large quantity of heritage including myths

stories, religions and literature. All these sources provided Eliot with different themes and views towards the world.

This, as far as Eliot is concerned, doesn't diminish the poet's originality. True originality, as he sees, lays in "an original way of assembling the most desperate material to form a new whole".⁽¹⁴⁾ Accordingly the reader has to decide in what way the original context is being transported by implication into the poem.

2.1 Mythical Intertextuality

Myths represent an essential source for Eliot and play a vital role in conveying the themes of death, aridity and sterility in ***The Waste Land***. Eliot explores the world of ancient myths and chooses those which suit the subject matter of his poem. Sometimes, he absorbs a certain myth and distributes it in his text; other times, he transforms, changes and adds to it to serve the theme he intends to convey. The myth of Cumaen Sibyl about whom Trimalchio says:

*For I saw with my own eyes the Sibyl of
cumae hanging up in a bottle, and when
the boys said, "Sibyl what do you want?"
She replied "I wish to die"*⁽¹⁵⁾

covers almost the whole body of the poem. It works in every line which depicts the fears of the wasteland dwellers and their wishes to escape their sterile life and the difficulty of salvation. The myth describes the famous prophetess Sibyl:

*To whom Apollo had granted as many
years of life as she could hold grains
of dust in her hand. Having neglected
to ask to remain young also, she continued
to wither into miserable old age.⁽¹⁶⁾*

This myth, however, engenders the main themes of this poem and most of the characters which are depicted in it. As a result, they, now and then escape to some past remembrances looking for a shelter whatever illusive it is.

The death wish, which is directly expressed by Sibyl, results from her disability to live in a changeable, yet effective world. The characters depicted in *The Waste Land* also wish to die but they do not express this wish directly. Good poetry usually avoids directness. However, the poet knows how to absorb this myth and parallel its theme.

The eastern myth of the "Dead god", whose main function is symbolic rather than intertextual, appears in short glimpses only. It is referred to in "The Burial of the Dead". Eliot absorbs this myth, transforms and reverses it to serve a certain goal. He introduces the reader to this myth by referring to the corpse of the "Dead god" indirectly:

*There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying "Stetson".
"you who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,*

*"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
(LL. 69 – 73)*

Sir James Frazer tells about the priests (of Egypt) who
*used to bury effigies of Osiris made of
earth and corn. When these effigies
were taken up again at the end of the
year or of a short interval, the corn
would be found to have sprouted from
the body of Osiris, and this sprouting
of the grain would be hailed as an omen
or rather as the cause of the growth of
the crops"*(17)

This myth participates in enriching the themes of death and sterility in the poem. The crop which Eliot refers to represents the grand corps of all those who died in war. The three successive questions in the last two lines of the previous stanza express doubt about resurrection and new life. Furthermore, the third one has a greater chance than the first two in revealing the fact. Hence, the opportunity of the god's resurrection, which represents good and fertility, is absent in Eliot's wasteland. This is reinforced in some latter lines of the same part where Eliot refers to a certain narrative of the story of the myth when the god's wife tries to gather his scattered

pieces with the help of the trustful and loyal dogs.⁽¹⁸⁾ The poet does not take this narrative as it is. He transforms it to serve the theme of sterility which covers broad areas of the poem:

*"Oh keep the dog far hence, that's friend to men,
"Oh with his nails he'll dig it up again" (LL. 374 – 75)*

Now Eliot mixes the ritual represented by burying the effigies of the god with the original myth to which we have already noted. The protagonist of the wasteland who speaks and comments on what he sees, like all other dwellers of the land, is afraid of god's resurrection which definitely will direct him against the sterility which he used to accept.

In "A Game of Chess", the poet employs the Philomel myth in order to show how sexual act is mean and how it devalues man and puts him in an equal position with animals. The ancient myth tells about Philomel who was raped by King Tereus and how he cut out her tongue. In spite of this, she was capable of revealing the event to her sister Procne, the King's wife. In revenge Procne killed her son Itys and served his flesh to Tereus. The gods turned Philomel and Procne into a nightingale and a swallow respectively:⁽¹⁹⁾

*The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursue
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears. (LL. 99 – 104)*

The sexual desire which devalues the king in the previous myth, devalues everyone in the wasteland. In this corrupted environment sexual act can be carried out easily. There is no need for raping. The typist receives her boy friend in her room and offers her body mechanically to the mean sexual act. In "The Fire Sermon" Tiresias narrates what he "can see".

*He, the young man carbuncular, arrives
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare (LL. 231 –
232)*

*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 (236 – 42)*

And gropes his way, finding the stairs (L. 248).

The woman does not resist and the man has not raped. It is something common among the dwellers of the wasteland for the woman is happy that the act was over:

"Well now that's done: and I'm glad its over: (L 252)

Though both the story of the myth and the description of what happened to the typist show the devaluation of man, yet the second experience exposes man's surrender to this desire which is fruitless. The mechanical surrender of the typist parodies the resistance of Philomel and thus expresses the sterility of the sexual act which must be subdued to certain rules and must be fruitful. Hence both absorption and transformation are working together in this space.

2. 2. Religious Intertextuality

The themes we are considering find in The Old Testament a good source where they are widely dealt within many occasions. T. S. Eliot now and then alludes to certain stories and prophecies of some Hebrew prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah to contrast or parallel what the protagonist of his poem sees and describes. In "The Fire Sermon", the protagonist talks about his brother's death and his father's before that in a way that shows the horror of the world of the dead in which no glimpse of another life appears:

*Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year
(LL. 191 – 195)*

The above lines are intertextualized with Ezekiel "Valley of dry bones" to which God brought him:

The hand of LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley: it was full of bones (Ezekiel: 37)

Ezekiel does not only describe the scene of this valley as the protagonist of the Eliot's poem does; but also he goes on describing how, by the grace of his LORD, he was able to gather the scattered bones, cover them with flesh and recreate or resurrect them:

And I was prophesying, there was a noise a rattling sound, and the bones come together, bone to bone, I looked, and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them. (Ezekiel: 37)

Though both scenes describe the bones of people who died in past periods, yet the dead in the religious scene are resurrected and they return to life while in Eliot's wasteland death is eternal and there is no hope in coming back to life. The poet makes full use of this story and parodies it in order to show the diminished hope in salvation among the dwellers of his wasteland in which the saviour is absent. There is only a blankcard while the "Hanged Man" cannot be seen among Sosostriis cards:

- - - - - and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man - - - - - (LL 52 – 55)

The crucifixion of Christ is part of the fertility cycle which its deepest roots in the widespread myth of the god who has to be slain⁽²⁰⁾. However, the crucifixion is connected with a resurrection promise which will come. In the wasteland there is no sign of this god a matter which heralds the continuity of death, sterility and destruction.

The gloomy scene of the wasteland where man can neither get rest nor can he find a shelter for everything seems to turn against him even nature:

- - - - - where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, and the cricket no relief;
(L 22 – 23) 23)

can be traced back in Ecclesiastes 12: 5 (The Stages of Life):

When men are afraid of heights and danger
in the street, when the almond tree
blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself
desire is stirred. Then man goes to his
eternal home and mourners go about
the street.

Though Eliot slightly modifies and changes in his description concerning his tree which is dead and the biblical tree which "blossoms" and the cricket with the grasshopper, yet both scenes express the dilemma of man in such a fearful and arid environment. The poet succeeds in absorbing and paralleling the dreadful and unpromising situation of man. Aridity in Eliot's poem deepens as his protagonist cannot even hear a sound of water in the rock:

And the dry stone no sound of water(L. 24)

Everything is arid in the wasteland and senses are confused because of thirst. The protagonist is fully aware of the fact that the stone is dry which obviously means that there is no water yet he hopes that his audible sense will belie his vision. This problem needs a miracle like that of Moses who struck the dry stone and water came:

*I will stand there before you by
the rock Horeb. Strike the rock
and water will come out of it for
the people to drink. (Exodus 17)*

Eliot takes this "dry rock" out of its original context where it responded to the divine order and the needs of thirsty people and put it in its inanimate feature and geological job.

The need for water which is solved by Moses is not solved in the vision of Jeremiah. Judah's wells are empty and her cisterns broken and people are barren; they faced the same problem the twentieth century man faces in this poem. In (Jeremiah, The Unfaithful Wife, 3). We read: "Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains". And in (Drought, Famine, and the Sword, 14):

*Juda mourns, her cities languish; they
wail for the land, and a cry goes up from
Jerusalem. The nobles send their servants
for water; they go to the cisterns but find
no water. They returned with the Jars
unfilled;*

Eliot absorbs the original text concerning the deadly need for water and the aridity which struck Juda and employs it in a clever way to show the symbolic aridity of the twentieth century Europe.

Sterility in "***The Waste Land***" has a further level of meaning and it is shown through man's sense of deprivation:

By the waters of leman I sat and wept (L. 82)

The above line is intertextualized through parody with the opening lines of Psalms, 137:

"By the river of Babylon, we sat and wept, when we remembered Zion".

The speaker in the poem is deprived and a captive exile and he is left alone a matter which is expressed by the use of the personal deixis "I". No one consoles him and he has to struggle against his loneliness alone. The Hebrews, on the other hand, were captivated in Babylon; but that was a divine will which will not last forever and salvation will follow. Furthermore, the personal deixis "we" refers to a group of people who "weep" for what they have done. In short, what they are doing now is a collective prayer of repentance. Eliot transforms the original text; he changes the river of Babylon to "water of leman" and he depicts a single mourner instead of many mourners who are shown in the original text in order to deepen the dilemma of the twentieth century man.

2. 3. Literary Intertextuality

Among different sources which participate in constructing Eliot's mosaic is poetry; one can easily hear the voices of poets from different periods in his poem. He parallels and contrasts these voices whenever his text needs. In the scene where he describes Belladonna's sumptuous furniture one can think about many historical women who lived an extravagant and luxurious life and who represented "examples of love that comes to grief"⁽²¹⁾. Cleopatra is one of the most important women to whom Eliot alludes. In "The Fire Sermon"

Belladonna announces the sterility of her life for she is tired and gives no sense of passion. Her speech with her man is "without and real communication even in her pampered sense"⁽²²⁾:

My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.

I never know what you are thinking - - - - -

(LL 111 – 14).

While Cleopatra is indulgent in lust as well as in real passion for Antony and she died for it, Belladonna's relationships express woman's vanity only. Eliot parallels Belladonna with Cleopatra in lust and transforms her in love to serve the theme of sterility of love.

Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" helps Eliot by means of transformation in exposing his deprived protagonist and the continuity of sterility. His protagonist is pursued wherever he turns his face. There is something which reminds him of his eternal loss and defeat:

But at my back in a cold blast I hear

The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear, (L

185–186).

The situation of Eliot's protagonist is difficult indeed. He lives in a scene which is totally dominated by death or some of its

instruments represented by the 'cold blast' and the 'rattle of bones'.
And later we read:

*But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The Sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeny to Mrs. Porter in the spring. (197 – 199)*

We can easily touch the intertextual dimensions with Marvell's poem where the first phrase "But at my back" has its own importance in the Marvellian theme:

*But at my back I alwis hear
Time's winged chariot harrying near: (LL. 21 – 22)*

Obviously, Marvell deals with the theme of mortality behind which time lurks. He tries to win over the destructive power of time through Carpediem or sexual love. His fear of time's passing became an incentive and the terror mortality is integrated with his desperate attempt to make use of his life:

*Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one Ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
Throughout the iron gates of life. (LL. 41 – 44)*

Eliot parodies Marvell's theme for time is not important according to his protagonist because sterility controls everything. He transforms "Time's winged chariot" into the sounds of horns and

motors which bring Sweeny to his woman. He used Marvell's phrase in a very different context where terror is turned upon erotic love as well as upon death. The protagonist is used to hearing harsh horns which foretell what will happen between Sweeny and his woman. The modal "shall" expresses the continuity of this sterile relationship and states that future will not bring any notable change. Hence, the swift time, which Marvell talks about, becomes very slow if it is not wholly stopped. Furthermore, what deepens the sense of sterility is that Sweeny visits his woman in spring – a season of fertility and resurrection while the context does not express but a fruitless relationship. Hence, sex in Eliot's wasteland has become a part of living death.

To deepen the sense of death and sterility Eliot likens his wasteland, though indirectly, to Dante's Inferno. He absorbs the same idea and employs similar images which all depict man in a real agony. The dwellers of the wasteland are described in the same way as Dante describes souls who lived "without infamy and without praise".

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, where exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
(LL. 60 – 65)*

The protagonist's description of London workers is probably inspired by their appearance in the "brown fog". They are suffering from a living death represented by their short sighs and a burden which forces them to look at their feet. There is no bright future for them. They have to continue living a life which is similar to death: The above description parallels what Dante says about the wandering souls in his (*Inferno* III, 55 – 57): "So long trained people, I would never believe death had undone so many". He also goes on to describe these souls as hopeless for there is no sign of salvation. They cannot even weep. All what they can do is to utter sighs. In (*Inferno* IV, 25 – 27) we read:

"Here, to my hearing, there was no weeping, but sighs, which caused the eternal air to tremble".

Eliot takes the same idea as it is in an attempt to expose the difficult life of the people in his wasteland which parallels the agony in which the wandering souls of the *Inferno* live where death becomes a wish.

Conclusion

Intertextuality means a conscious communication between at least two texts and two textualities, between one text and one context. There are more different types of intertextuality, some of them can be touched in Eliot's "The Waste Land". They appear on different levels but the main ones are the mythical, the religious and the literary. They dominate Eliot's masterpiece and they serve to develop the idea he tries to convey. They also help the poet to say much in little in so far as he sometimes indirectly refers to a certain myth or biblical story or line(s) of poetry to add new meaning to his poem or to enrich his main themes. Sometimes, the poet parallels the source he takes from; other times he contrasts it. He absorbs and transforms texts whenever this satisfies his need. However, intertextuality does not diminish the poet's originality and Eliot was fully aware of this fact.

Notes

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2. - - - - - "Intertextuality", [www Document) URL,
<http://www.intertextualitythm,2005,page1of2>.
3. "Intertextuality", page 1 of 2.
4. M. Dansi: Messages and Meanings: An Introduction to Semiotics, (Canadian Scholars Press: Toronto, 1994), P. 276.
5. - - - - - "Essay, Questions for Masks", [www Document)
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7. Chandler, page 3 of 11.
8. - - - - - "Intertextuality and Dialogue", [www Document)
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9. Katica Kulavkova: "Intertextual Options and Modifications",
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10. Kulavkova, page 7 of 9.
11. Kulavkova, page 9 of 11.
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(London, New Father Lou, 2002) P. 304.
13. Laurence Pirrine: The Elements of Poetry, (Southern Methodist University, 1981) P. 676.

14. Helen Williams: The Waste Land, (Edward Arnold, Ltd, London, 1968), P. 27.
15. David Manson: The Waste Land: A Critical Commentary, (American R. D. M. Corporate, New York, 1965) P. 67.
16. Manson, P. 67.
17. Sir James Frazer: The Golden Bough Part IV, Vo II, (London, 1936) P. 90.
18. Frazer, P. 91.
19. Auther Cotterll: World Mythology, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1966) P. 124.
20. Frazer, P. 91.
21. D. W. Harding: "What the Thunder Said", The Waste Land in Different Voices, A. D. Moody (ed), (London, Billing and Sons Ltd, 1974) P. 18.
22. Williams, P. 54.

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