

## “AND I TIRESIAS HAVE FORESUFFERED ALL...” – MORE THAN ALLUSIONS TO OVID IN T. S. ELIOT’S *THE WASTE LAND* ?

**Dirk Weidmann**

Philipps University, Marburg

### T.S. Eliot – Life and Literature

It was the year 1914 and shortly before World War I when T. S. Eliot decided to study in the German city of Marburg for one semester in order to advance his plan for a Ph.D. in philosophy<sup>1</sup>. During this time, he seemed to be eagerly interested in traditional elements within everyday life, as can be deduced from several letters to his friends: He praised the pastor’s wife for her delicious German food<sup>2</sup>, and mentioned the “Student verbindungen [sic!]” which were “holding fests [sic!] and parades”<sup>3</sup>, for instance. Besides his interest in local customs, those letters give information on the fact that he was working up his Greek in the mornings<sup>4</sup>, thereby following his interests

in languages and – among others – classic literature<sup>5</sup>.

Eliot’s interest in the role of tradition might have been awakened by one of his professors at Harvard University, George Santayana. Santayana was used to exemplify the change of tradition by referring to public architecture: In his point of view, the old tradition which could be traced back to the founding fathers of America is a rather genteel one and can be symbolized by the architecture of a mansion. In marked contrast, skyscrapers should be seen as innovative, but aggressive enterprise, indicating technical progress. By using this allegory, Santayana wanted to express that the American industrial productivity “had far outrun its productivity in philosophical, cultural, and aesthetic affairs”<sup>6</sup> – all in all, this trend was seen as a deplorable affair.

Almost five years after his stay in Marburg, Eliot condensed his various experiences concerning tradition in an academic essay entitled “Tradition and the Individual

<sup>1</sup> The title of his thesis was “Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley”. He finished his work in 1916, but he would not receive his degree right away. The reason was that he was loath to travel to Massachusetts which would have been required for his dissertation defense. Finally, the thesis was published in 1964, as Bush [INT 1] indicated – a detail which most of Eliot’s biographers do not mention at all.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. S. Eliot in a letter to his friend Conrad Aiken, dated from 25 July 1914. In: Eliot 1988: 43.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot in a letter to Conrad Aiken, dated from 19 July 1914. In: Eliot 1988: 41.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T. S. Eliot in a letter to Conrad Aiken, dated from 25 July 1914. In: Eliot 1988: 44.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pearce 1967: 12f. Eliot had studied the Classics, German, French, and English literature at Harvard University. Moreover, he read Indian and Sanskrit literature.

<sup>6</sup> Jay 1997: 57.

Talent”. Here, he described the relation between an author and literary tradition in general. The text contains the following sentences:

*No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. [...] In a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past.*<sup>7</sup>

This particular statement will turn out to be essential for our reading of *The Waste Land*: Eliot states that whenever someone is trying to understand literature, this can only be successful if this person recalls his knowledge about the writings of earlier authors.<sup>8</sup> Due to parallels or contrasts, readers would easily be enabled to detect a writer’s intention. Probably, Eliot’s message might have been the following: Past times made up similar facts and circumstances, let’s remember those and take them into consideration when discussing present issues. As far as Eliot is concerned, tradition is even more important than the biography of the author when it comes to an interpretation of the text – “and for the most part critics had accepted that view in reading his work.”<sup>9</sup>

The fact according to which all literary roots of Europe should be bared in antiquity may serve as a convincing explanation why Eliot was in favor of Latin and Greek: “We can hardly be expected to realize, during

adolescence, that without a foundation of Latin and Greek we remain limited in our power over these other subjects.”<sup>10</sup> In another essay, Eliot even refers to those ancient languages as the “blood-stream of European literature.”<sup>11</sup> We will see that Eliot sticks to his own principles when he introduces the character of Tiresias in *The Waste Land*: Without a solid basis in literature, especially Latin and Greek, Eliot’s long poem would not be understood<sup>12</sup>.

## The Waste Land – Poem and Poetics

It’s time to focus on the poem’s topic: In his essay “Critique of the Myth” – first published in 1939, – Cleanth Brooks concludes that *The Waste Land* is based on the “contrast between two kinds of life and two kinds of death.”<sup>13</sup> In his opinion, the underlying concept of this poem is a paradox: “Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be life-giving, an awakening to life.”<sup>14</sup> I would partially subscribe to Brooks’ opinion: His approach to challenge the meaning of life seems to be reasonable in principle – but

---

<sup>10</sup> Eliot 1947: 170. At the end of this quote, Eliot refers to modern languages and history.

<sup>11</sup> Eliot 1957b: 70. Nonetheless, Eliot laid emphasis on the fact that this image is not based on the assumption that these languages serve as two different systems of circulation, “[...] but one, for it is through Rome that our parentage in Greece must be traced” (ibd.).

<sup>12</sup> As an example for the importance of Greek literature, one may recall the epigraph from the beginning of *The Waste Land* to his memory, where the text provides Greek and Latin sentences by Petronius Arbiter referring to the Sibyl of Cumae: “NAM Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σύβυλλα τί θέλει; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω.”

<sup>13</sup> Brooks 1969: 129.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>7</sup> Eliot 1920: 49f.

<sup>8</sup> While Eliot focuses on the role of literary predecessors through the eyes of the reader, other researchers like Harold Bloom (1975) look at those predecessors through the eyes of the actual author who is said to be influenced by his colleagues’ works.

<sup>9</sup> Gish 1988: 16.

to my understanding, *The Waste Land* also deals with the perversion of traditional, i.e. well-established ways of life. For me, the text is both a description of modern industrialized times, causing emotional isolation, and perverted sexuality, even though a newspaper reviewer – by way of punning on the title – suggested it is only “so much waste paper.”<sup>15</sup>

Born in America in 1888, Eliot witnessed the rapid changes and new technologies which had eroded public as well as private areas: Social unrest, depression, industrial development, and the rise of America as a world power – these may be sufficient as keywords which are by far not exhaustively complete<sup>16</sup>. As a consequence, more and more people had the impression that the world was changing too fast to be comprehensible: Traditional ways of living had been altered, and in many people’s point of view not for society’s sake.

When analyzing poetry created during these years, it may occur to readers that texts had turned to be rather pessimistic, pointing out deplorable states of affairs. In most cases, no obvious sequence or traditional forms, such as metre or rhyme schemes, can be found; therefore, the critical reader may get the impression of inconsistent literature which might be characterized as “difficult and enigmatic.”<sup>17</sup> When readers complained about the difficulty of modern poetry, Eliot answered as follows:

---

<sup>15</sup> Powell 1969: 30.

<sup>16</sup> Those phenomena cannot be analyzed in detail in this essay. For a first lucid overview, the reader is highly recommended to consult the introductions by Gish (1988) or Avery (2005).

<sup>17</sup> Gish 1988: 21.

[... T]here may be personal causes which make it impossible for a poet to express himself in any way but an obscure way; while this may be regrettable, we should be glad, I think, that the man has been able to express himself at all. [... A]nd I think that an interaction between prose and verse, like the interaction between language and language, is a condition of vitality in literature.<sup>18</sup>

Much like an eclectic imitation, *The Waste Land*, too, consists of various fragments. These fragments have been “shored against my ruins”<sup>19</sup>, as the lyrical I declares at the end of the poem. In order to achieve both, securing himself against the charge of plagiarism<sup>20</sup> and enlarging the amount of his poem<sup>21</sup>, Eliot made an almost excessive use of footnotes in which he hinted at his sources for those fragments and added further comments. For contemporary interpreters, this valuable assistance offers a great chance for intertextual work. Nonetheless, this chance is an enormous challenge at the same time: When attempting a profound interpretation of *The Waste Land*, almost complete knowledge of the entire occidental literature is required because of the vast amount of

---

<sup>18</sup> Eliot 1951: 52.

<sup>19</sup> *The Waste Land*, l. 430. All quotations concerning the text of *The Waste Land* follow the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Michael North (2001).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Eliot 1957a: 109. Here, Eliot explains that those footnotes to *The Waste Land* were intended to “[spike] the guns of critics of my earlier poems who had accused me of plagiarism.”

<sup>21</sup> A. Walton Litz (1973: 8f.) elaborates on the fact that “[w]hen *The Waste Land* was first published in magazine form in the autumn of 1922 it was free of annotation [...]” The reason for adding notes to the poem is said to be that the book publisher Liveright had insisted on a longer volume, hence Eliot included them (see also Eliot 1957: 109). However, Litz goes on to explain that there was no need for Eliot to invent those annotations for the publisher: They had already existed and were spread among Eliot’s friends who read the drafts.

quotations and allusions<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, Eliot's annotations contain the risk of being overinterpreted and misleading, a point that will be further discussed later.

Without any doubt, each and every footnote to *The Waste Land* would deserve a detailed analysis in how far it influences the understanding of the poem. For this essay, I chose to concentrate on an annotation which is central in a dual sense of the word: On the one hand, it can be found almost in the middle of the poem, on the other hand, it is – to my point of view – one of the most important hints which leads us to a profound interpretation of *The Waste Land*. Among others, Eliot adopted some aspects from the Ovidian Tiresias legend for his complex long poem<sup>23</sup>. Indeed, it is in his annotation to line 218 when Tiresias is mentioned for the first time in *The Waste Land*. Here, he is on the verge of accidentally witnessing the fornication between a typist and a worker, and Eliot sets out to explain the role of the Greek seer:

*Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character", is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest [...].*<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> To Eliot, modern language had to be allusive in order to dislocate language into its meaning. This was necessary due to the complexity of modern life. Cf. Bode 1998: 248.

<sup>23</sup> The scope of the character of Tiresias is well displayed by Ugolini (1995).

<sup>24</sup> *The Waste Land* – annotation to ll. 218ff.

Afterwards, Eliot quotes the entire passage of the Tiresias legend from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Explicit reference to Ovid – an obvious invitation to compare his work with an ancient one! What should interpreters make out of Eliot's explanation?

At first, we have to realize that Tiresias is neither one of the protagonists of *The Waste Land* nor does he speak for the characters who are directly involved in the action. He is rather intended to classify their deeds while revealing some of his distinctive features<sup>25</sup>. As a consequence, he might be some sort of medium for the author: Since he does not manipulate the development of the content, his function can be interpreted as a pure vehicle carrying ideas and themes, hereby acting as a pointer to indicate the principles Eliot wants to stress.

In my reading of *The Waste Land*, I would subscribe to Gish's opinion according to which it is the distanced voice of Tiresias which enables Eliot to express his own revulsion<sup>26</sup>. This point can be deduced from the text, as will be shown next.

We meet old Tiresias in an "unreal city"<sup>27</sup> where he witnesses a quick love affair. As Eliot has mentioned in his annotation to line 218, his Tiresias is meant to have the same distinctive features as this Tiresias who had to change his sex twice in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Therefore, we should recall the Ovidian Tiresias and the implications of his "gender-hopping":

There are two reasons why people are transformed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gish 1988: 39 and 78.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Gish 1988: 78.

<sup>27</sup> *The Waste Land*, l. 207. (Quoted according to North 2001: 12.)

Transformations are in the utmost cases intended to be either a punishment or a rescue<sup>28</sup>. Following this reading of the *Metamorphoses*, the transformation of Tiresias mentioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> book should be defined as another punishment. It is here<sup>29</sup> that we are taught about the reason why Tiresias was blinded and granted a seer's power: After he had involuntarily changed his sex twice (a fact which has become famous as "melampody") and thus knew love from both points of view, Tiresias was consulted by Jupiter and Juno who could not agree on the question who has greater pleasure in love: men or women. When the seer supported Jupiter's point of view, Juno condemned Tiresias to eternal blindness. By way of compensation, Jupiter gave him the power of prophecy.

From his own experiences – resulting from the melampody Ovid described in his *Metamorphoses* – Tiresias knows about the upcoming pleasures very well, hence he can predict how this scene will end: In lines 228–230, he says:

*I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dug  
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest –  
I too awaited the expected guest.*

The 'rest' is finally explained by the woman in line 252 after the sexual act is over. She utters:

*Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.*

This offers a deep insight in the principles of the *Waste Land*: Here, the sexual act is the negation of what it ought to be – it

is no longer the "act of life"<sup>30</sup> but it is associated with discomfort, nearly a kind of unpleasant interruption of daily business: The man quickly leaves afterwards, the woman sighs with relief that "it's over" after all and starts the gramophone. Altogether, this description is diametrically opposed to a romantic situation – there is no place left for any pleasure at all.

In most cases, interpreters who concentrated on the role of Tiresias mainly focussed on this quick love affair without paying close attention to ancient Tiresias characters. For Nancy Gish, for instance, this scene is designed to point out a sharp contrast: In her opinion, lovers have to engage in the most total contact available to humans – so do this woman and man. However, they still seem to be separate after all: They neither give nor feel anything similar to love or pleasure which is, according to Gish, quite depressing<sup>31</sup>. In addition to this, Langbaum also hints at the absence of morality: "[... The] fornication with a clerk leaves her [i.e. the typist] neither a sense of sin nor a memory of pleasure."<sup>32</sup>

In my opinion, both observations seem to be conclusively substantiated and correct, but those interpreters hesitate to point out the underlying continuity: Single elements that can be perceived in this scene could always be observed in the past; and modern times, which are represented in *The Waste Land*, logically contain the offspring and culmination of a prior undesirable development. Hence, it seems to be vital for a successful interpretation to hark back to

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Gall 2006: 146. The transformation of both Syrinx and Daphne may serve as examples for retrievals, the transformations of Tiresias and Actaeon, in contrast, can be seen as punishments.

<sup>29</sup> Esp. with verses 316–338.

<sup>30</sup> Wilks 1971: 66.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Gish 1988: 77.

<sup>32</sup> Langbaum 1973: 107.

both language and texts produced during the Classical Antiquity since “[n]o modern language could aspire to the universality of Latin [...]”.<sup>33</sup>

### “Make up your mind [...]” – The Importance of *The Waste Land*’s Manuscript

Although readers can fall back on Eliot’s own annotations to the poem, there is still too many vagueness in those interpretations mentioned above. Therefore, it seems advisable to bring in another important source for researchers – Eliot’s manuscript of *The Waste Land* itself.

It is due to the foresight of Eliot’s second wife Valerie that contemporary interpreters can make use of another important source contributing to a fact-grounded interpretation of *The Waste Land*: After Eliot’s passing away, she edited a facsimile of the original drafts<sup>34</sup>, including all annotations of Ezra Pound to whom *The Waste Land* had been dedicated. When examining those drafts, it becomes obvious that the published version of *The Waste Land* is alienated – the draft versions often show additional phrases or deletions which would have sometimes

made the content of the Tiresias passage clearer.

The two short passages previously mentioned are afflicted, too: In comparison with those drafts, a whole verse has been deleted after the Norton Critical Edition’s verse 229. Next to the typed stanza, Ezra Pound has placed his comment: “Too easy”. Because times are not easy to follow, the poem’s understanding should be neither. To his mind, the deleted verse would have indicated Tiresias’ rejection of those deeds too obviously. By offering a cross rhyme, it reads “Knowing the manner of those crawling bugs“, hence, the whole stanza would have been:

*I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dug,* 228  
*Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest,* 229a  
*Knowing the manner of these crawling bugs,* 229b  
*I too awaited the expected guest.* 230

The investigation of the manuscripts supports those interpretations by Gish and Langbaum: Eliot’s original edition of those verses would have indicated Tiresias’ function as an omniscient spectator (“knowing the manner”, l. 229b). Moreover, the additional noun phrase “crawling bugs” (ibid.) would have hinted at Eliot’s rejection of the way this act of love is performed: It evokes unpleasant feelings; readers are involuntarily led to images of pesky and disgusting animals. After the deletion of this helping hand, especially non-classicists now had to cope with a text which was indeed more difficult.

So far, we have realized that Tiresias is neither a passerby nor an accidental spectator: He is rather a seer who can rely on certain foreknowledge. Additionally, by way of analyzing the manuscript, we can

<sup>33</sup> Eliot 1957b: 70. One of T.S. Eliot’s favourite authors might have been Vergil – a fact which can be deduced from his statement “Our classic, the classic of all Europe, is Vergil” (ibid.).

<sup>34</sup> According to Valerie Eliot, three leaves of the first drafts for *The Waste Land* might have been composed around 1914 or even earlier. But Hugh Kenner, who shows an interest in this point in his essay “The Urban Apocalypse”, doubtfully alludes to the fact that Eliot himself has never mentioned *The Waste Land* in his letters until 5 November 1919 (Kenner 1973: 24). On this day, Eliot wrote to John Quinn: “[...] I hope to get started on a poem I have in mind” (Eliot 1988: 344). This “poem” is commonly regarded to be *The Waste Land*.

find evidence for his refusal which serves as a value judgement of the figure. As a last step, we have to investigate the role of Tiresias as such.

Another comment by Pound aims at line 251, addressing Eliot – probably only half-way ironically – as “Tiresias”. Originally, Eliot intended this verse to read as follows: “Across her brain one half-formed thought may pass”. The use of the modal verb “may” stroke Pound, as it would have made the message sound uncertain despite the fact that a direct quote is following in line 252:

*Across her brain one half-formed thought may  
pass:* (251)  
*'Well now that's done, and I am glad it's over.'*  
252

Since direct quotes should rely on profound knowledge, Pound wanted to eradicate this illogical phrasing. Therefore, the facsimile presents Pound's rather long intervention:

*make up your mind  
you Tiresias  
if you know  
know damn well  
or  
else you  
dont. [sic!]*

Eliot must have been convinced, since after all, the Norton Critical Edition reads as follows:

*Her brain allows one half-formed thought to  
pass:* 251  
*'Well now that's done, and I am glad it's over.'*  
252

Pound's influence on Eliot had always been quite strong, they both benefited from each other in terms of their literary work.

As Pound was asked to revise Eliot's script, we may assume that he was aware of Eliot's thoughts and intentions. When he wrote his comment “Make up your mind you Tiresias [...]”, he addressed Eliot as Tiresias, following the equivalence “Author = Eliot = Tiresias”. This substantiates the claim that Eliot himself is present in the poem, too.

Thus far, we have reason to believe that Eliot referred to the Ovidian Tiresias in order to express that it is the seer who might be the figure fitting best to detect the undesirable developments of modern times. This is possible because Tiresias has “foresuffered all”<sup>35</sup>, i.e. he is familiar with both the man's and the woman's point of view. He can detect the underlying principles of modern times while passing by. Consequently, Tiresias' interest in modern sexuality is not due to excessive voyeurism, but is grounded on comparison to own experience.

### **Eliot's Tiresias – Just Ovidian?**

It would certainly be “too easy”, as Pound has put it, if those findings would already make up a final solution. I would say that Eliot stayed true to his own principles and expected his readers to have at hand an almost complete knowledge of occidental literature. Hence it is not enough to analyze the Ovidian Tiresias exclusively – interpreters should take into account other sources which present the character of Tiresias.

Some researchers, for instance, wisely suggest that it is highly recommendable to fall back on terms traditionally used for drama interpretations<sup>36</sup>. According to them,

<sup>35</sup> *The Waste Land*, l. 243.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Thompson 1975: 193.

Eliot's Tiresias is said to serve the function of the chorus in ancient drama, mediating between the actors and the audience (or the readers, respectively) – an interpretation of the role of the chorus which was still prominent in Eliot's days<sup>37</sup>. This idea may lead us to the role of Tiresias in Sophocles' tragedy *Oidipous týrannos* – despite of the fact that Eliot does not mention the Greek tragedian explicitly<sup>38</sup>. But bearing in mind Eliot's cited at the beginning of this essay, there is no need for the author to point out that those features can be traced back to ancient Greek literature as well: As it has been emphasized before, Eliot expects an educated reader who is familiar with the content of famous literature.

In Sophocles' tragedy, it is the seer who is aware of the fact that Oedipus has slain his father. Furthermore, he detects that the sexual relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta is the reason for the curse which has been lying over Thebes. Cleanth Brooks comes up with a convincing remark: He

---

<sup>37</sup> Rainer Thiel (1993: 2ff.) discussed the role of the chorus in ancient drama and explained that the perception of the chorus as the megaphone of the author had been a prominent one since A. W. Schlegel compiled his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* in 1809. Here, Schlegel described the chorus as "personifizierten Gedanken über die dargestellte Handlung, die verkörperte und in die Darstellung aufgenommene Teilnahme des Dichters als des Sprechers der gesamten Menschheit" (Lohner 1966: 64). More than hundred years later, von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1921: 517) accepted this as a possible interpretation, too.

<sup>38</sup> Though not mentioned directly, *The Waste Land* alludes to other common features of Tiresias in lines 245–246 when Tiresias utters: "I who have sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead.)" Here, other classical references to Tiresias are made: In Sophocles' *Oidipous týrannos* and *Antigóne* he is the seer sitting in front of a wall, and in Homer's *Odyssey* he acts as Odysseus' adviser in the underworld.

pointed out that Oedipus had committed his sins in ignorance, „[...] and knowledge of [this dead] brings horror and remorse“<sup>39</sup>. In contrast to this, the act which the narrator in *The Waste Land* witnessed, is (surprisingly?) not regarded as a sin, but as a casual copulation.

In both *Oidipous týrannos* and *The Waste Land*, it is Tiresias who happens to know the root of all evil<sup>40</sup> – nonetheless, he is not the character who is scheduled to cause an immediate turning point. He might state the facts and circumstances correctly and foresee future processes, but despite of this, he is not able to influence them. In Sophocles' tragedy, Tiresias is assertively consulted as an epitome of knowledge. However, as Philip Vellacott deduced from the tragedy<sup>41</sup>, it is Tiresias' primary function to suppress unwanted knowledge: It is not of great use for a society to convict the king of murder. Therefore, Tiresias initially hesitates to reveal his knowledge; he seems to be uneasy throughout this scene. But although he clearly blames the king of being the reason for the problems of Thebes, Oedipus does not understand the scope of the seer's statement. Instead of this, the king summarily flies into a rage<sup>42</sup>. Interestingly enough, Tiresias makes clear that he will not be the reason that leads to the king's downfall. Hence, Tiresias' role in *Oidipous týrannos*

---

<sup>39</sup> Brooks 1969: 145.

<sup>40</sup> As for *Oidipous týrannos*, Tiresias unmistakably utters: "I say you have slain Laios." (l. 362); in *The Waste Land*, he is aware of the consequences of the typist's and the clerk's copulation.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Vellacott 1971: 158.

<sup>42</sup> For Ugolini, there is no doubt that this contradiction between Oedipus' inability to grasp the underlying problem and Tiresias' well-grounded knowledge is the leading motive of this scene. Cf. Ugolini 1995: 193.

is restricted to that of an omniscient person who knows the protagonists' (tragic) flaws and wants to avoid an interrogation – a fact which can well be observed in *The Waste Land*, too.

## Conclusion

If we want to condense those previous results, we are strongly invited to conclude that modern times are – in Eliot's eyes – nothing but a fast-moving metamorphosis which is not to be stopped: Tiresias, the only character who would be able to alter the development due to his extraordinary abilities, does not risk an attempt to induce change. Hence, it should be possible to assume that ordinary human beings are not able to cause change all the more.

*Pánta chorei kai oudèn ménei.*<sup>43</sup> – *Cuncta fluunt.*<sup>44</sup> – Nothing is stable forever! This realization is part of the message that both Ovid and Eliot present within their works. In order to elucidate his message, Eliot falls back on Tiresias, a character that can combine his knowledge about past and future incidents. Furthermore, this seer integrates all possible human experiences regarding both sexes. His traditional features – which an educated reader would clearly associate

with him – help to extend the scope of the narrator's discernment and comments: the problems identified by Eliot's Tiresias are not restricted to a wasteland and its modern principles. Since Tiresias has received the gift of an extremely long life – a detail that is also not mentioned in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*<sup>45</sup>, – we are able to deduce that certain difficulties turn out to be universal and timeless, reoccurring from time to time throughout history – and therefore in future, too.

At this point, we have finally gained a circular argument: as history teaches by examples, it qualifies us to reflect on past disasters, missed opportunities, and achievements. Hence, we have to compare the lessons of history with our own circumstances in order to get the utmost out of it. In addition, basically, the passage from Eliot's essay on tradition concentrates on a similar appeal: the complete meaning of a poem will not be discovered until readers have reflected on its content by taking into account earlier texts. These findings of Eliot were not new, indeed. But Eliot was the one who, at the same time, was able to present illustrative examples – like the character of Tiresias in *The Waste Land*, who has "foresuffered all".

---

<sup>43</sup> Platon, *Kratylos* 402A = A6.

<sup>44</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XV, 178.

---

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Bömer 1969: 536, referring to Schwenn 1934: Col. 129–132.

## REFERENCES

Anderson, William S. (ed.), 2001: *P. Ovidius Naso – Metamorphoses*, München und Leipzig: Saur [Bibliotheca Teubneriana].

Avery, Donald H. and Irmgard Steinisch, 2005: "Industrialisierung und ihre sozialen und politischen Folgen, 1877–1914", in: *Länderbericht USA. Ges-*

*chichte, Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur*, eds. Peter Lösche, und Hans Dietrich von Loeffelholz, Frankfurt: Campus, 78–108.

Bloom, Harold, 1975: *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bode, Christoph, 1998: "Der Blick von außen:

Bemerkungen zum Ort der literarischen Moderne“, in: *Die Zwanziger Jahre in Großbritannien. Literatur und Gesellschaft einer spannungsreichen Dekade*, eds. Christoph Bode und Ulrich Broich, Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 239–266.

Bömer, Franz, 1969: *P. Ovidius Naso – Metamorphosen. Kommentar zu Buch I–III*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter.

Brooks, Cleanth, 1969: “The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth“, in: *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land. A Selection of Critical Essays*, eds. Charles B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe, London: Macmillan (Essay first published in: Brooks, Cleanth. *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939.)

Bush, Ronald: “T.S.Eliot’s Life and Career“, University of Illinois, < [http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/eliot/life.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/eliot/life.htm) > (last access: 20 February 2009).

Eliot, Thomas S., 1920: *The Sacred Wood*, London: Methuen.

-----, 1947: “Modern Education and the Classics“, in: Thomas S. Eliot, *Essays: Ancient and Modern*, London: Faber and Faber, 161–174.

-----, 1951: “The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism“, in: Thomas S. Eliot, *Points of View*, London: Faber and Faber, 50–52.

-----, 1957 a: “The Frontiers of Criticism“, in: Thomas S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, London: Faber and Faber, 103–118.

-----, 1957 b: “What is a Classic?“, in: Thomas S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, London: Faber and Faber, 53–71.

Eliot, Valerie (ed.), 1971: *The Waste Land. A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, London: Faber and Faber.

-----, 1988: *The Letters of T. S. Eliot – Volume I: 1898–1922*, New York / London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publ.

Gall, Dorothee, 2006: *Die Literatur in der Zeit des Augustus*, Darmstadt: WBG.

Gish, Nancy K., 1988: *The Waste Land – A Poem of Memory and Desire*, Boston: Twayne. Gordon, Lyndall, 1977: *Eliot’s Early Years*, Oxford: OUP.

Jay, Paul, 1997: *Contingency Blues: The Search for Foundations in American Criticism*, Madison/Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Kenner, Hugh, 1959: *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

-----, 1973: “The Urban Apocalypse, in: A. Walton Litz, *Eliot in His Time. Essays on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of The Waste Land*, Princeton / New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 23–49.

Langbaum, Robert, 1973: “New Modes of Characterization in *The Waste Land*“, in: A. Walton Litz, *Eliot in His Time. Essays on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of The Waste Land*, Princeton / New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 95–128.

Litz, A. Walton, 1973: “*The Waste Land* Fifty Years After“, in: A. Walton Litz, *Eliot in His Time. Essays on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of The Waste Land*, Princeton / New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 3–22.

Lohner, Edgar (ed.), 1964: *A. W. Schlegel: Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

North, Michael, 2001: *T. S. Eliot – The Waste Land*, New York und London: W.W.Norton [Norton Critical Edition].

Pearce, Thomas S, 1967: *T. S. Eliot*, London: Evans Brothers.

Powell, Charles, 1969: “The Waste Land – A Review“. Manchester Guardian, 31 October 1923, in: *T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land. A Selection of Critical Essays*, eds. Charles B. Cox and Arnold P. Hinchliffe London: Macmillan, 29–30.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich et al., 2004: *Platon: Sämtliche Werke, Bd. 3*, Reinbek: Rowohlt.

Schwenn, Friedrich, 1934: “Teiresias“, in: *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, eds. Georg Wissowa / Wilhelm Kroll / Karl Mittelhaus, Stuttgart: Metzler, Vol. V.1, Col. 129–132.

Thiel, Rainer, 1993: *Chor und tragische Handlung im ‘Agamemnon’ des Aischylos*, Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner.

Thompson, Eric, 1975: „Das wüste Land: die metaphysische Perspektive“, in: *Zur Aktualität T. S. Eliots*, eds. Helmut Viebrock and Armin Paul Frank, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 190–212.

Ugolini, Gherardo, 1995: *Untersuchungen zur Figur des Sehers Teiresias*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

Vellacott, Philip, 1971: *Sophocles and Oedipus*, London: Macmillan.

Von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Ulrich, 1921: *Griechische Verskunst*, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung.

-----, 1939: *Sophokles – Oedipus*, Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung.

Wilks, A. John, 1971: *A critical commentary on T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’*, London: Macmillan.

“AND I TIRESIAS HAVE FORESUFFERED ALL...” –

DAUGIAU NEI ALIUZIJOS Į OVIDIJŲ T. S. ELIOTO POEMOJE *BEVAISĖ ŽEMĖ*

**Dirk Weidmann**

S a n t r a u k a

Šio straipsnio tikslas – išnagrinėti Teiresijo charakterio vaidmenį T. S. Elioto epinėje poemoje *Bevaisė žemė* (*The Waste Land*). Siekiant atsakyti į šį klausimą, pirmiausia svarbu apžvelgti T. S. Elioto literatūrologines idėjas; antra, reikia atrasti ir išnagrinėti Teiresijo vaizdavimo Ovidijaus *Metamorfozėse* ir pasakotojo charakterio *Bevaisėje žemėje* paraleles.

Elioto tekste yra daugybė netiesioginių nuorodų, leidžiančių suvokti šio charakterio kaip paties autoriaus mediumo funkciją. Be to, geras visos ankstesnės literatūrinės tradicijos ir ypač ypatybių, kurios buvo priskiriamos mitiniam Teiresijui, išmanymas yra esminė prielaida adekvačiam autoriaus pozicijos poemoje suvokimui.

*Gauta 2009 09 22*

*Autoriaus adresas:*

Alter Kirchhainer Weg 29

35039 Marburg (Lahn)

El. paštas: [weidmandirk@aol.de](mailto:weidmandirk@aol.de)