

# T.S. ELIOT AND THE MODERNIST APPROACH TO TRANSLATION



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## Modernist Translation Practice

Translations, both with respect to their status of final products and to strategies of performance, reflect a given period of time, with its specific set of aesthetic standards and literary preferences. In the history of English translation, modernism proposed a revolution in the perception of this form of literary manifestation. This change of translation paradigm operated at various levels. One of them envisaged the approach to translation, which ceased to be viewed as a mere transfer of linguistic order.

Even before the set up of Translation Studies as a discipline in its own right which enlarged the perspectives on this phenomenon as inherited from previous epochs, modernist writers went beyond a consideration of translation as a marginal manifestation of a literary system. The modernists revolutionised translation methods and strategies in ways that questioned the notion of accuracy and blurred the boundaries between source and target text. Furthermore, they employed translations also as a component of their own productions, thus granting them a significant compositional role. It is the case of Pound's *Cantos* or Joyce's *Ulysses*. Besides using them as a structural element, modernists exploited translations as a means to express the aesthetic agenda of the movement.

Although the modernist translation practice does not follow the line of English translators from Dryden to their immediate precursors, the Victorians, it did not reject completely previous ways of performing translations. The dialogue with the past, which is one of the modernist concerns, is also reflected in modernist poets' translation practice, which presents itself at times as a synthesis of Elizabethan and Victorian policies, fused with the modernist historical perspective<sup>1</sup>.

In their translations, Elizabethans such as Arthur Golding or George Chapman treated the great names of ancient Rome and Greece as if they were their own contemporaries. They ignored the cultural and historical differences separating the moment of the source text production and proceeded to a domestication of the foreign text, making it fully assimilable by the English culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel Gallego Roca. *Traducción y Literatura: Los estudios literarios ante las obras traducidas*. Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1994, 26.

At the other extreme there is the Victorian translation policy put into practice by names such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Charles Swinburne or Matthew Arnold. Their respect for the source text was so great, that the main purpose of the translation was to render the remoteness of the original as accurately as possible.

Modernism imposed an update of Anglo-American translation preoccupations. Previous epochs viewed this activity as an instrument to renew and strengthen the influence of classic literature, both Latin and Greek. That is why many names of Elizabethan and Victorian translators came to be closely associated with titles of literary works of Antiquity: Chapman with the *Odyssey* or Golding with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In exchange, the new modernist program envisaged translations as an integral part of the agenda of cultural survival. Moreover, the translators did not limit their literary interest to Antiquity, but enlarged the translation horizon both temporally and spatially. Thus, contemporary literature became a viable alternative as a translation source. This is, for instance, the example of Eliot, who translated St. John Perse's *Anabase* or William Carlos Williams who rendered into English the works of Spanish and French writers such as Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz or Nicholas Calas<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, there were visible concerns with literatures outside the Western tradition and Pound's work on Chinese and Egyptian works is a relevant example in this respect. In fact, Pound's translation interests spread from Greek and Latin works to Italian and Anglo-Saxon literature, French mediaeval literature and the troubadours.

Translation appealed to modernist writers not only as an activity in itself, but also as a compositional technique. Their interest in a multitude of cultures and languages, each with its own peculiarities and way of representing reality, witnesses their wish to expand the expressive possibilities of English by infusing it with the energies of other linguistic manifestations.

The modernist discourse on translation is scattered in various articles and reviews signed by representatives of the movement. Apart from Pound, who made some remarks on translation aspects, few modernist writers addressed the issue directly. Nevertheless, their preoccupation with the multitude of cultural manifestations, their translation activity and the multi-linguistic dimension of their works such as Joyce's *Ulysses*, Pound's *Cantos* or Eliot's *The Waste Land* demonstrate the role they assigned to translation in their attempt of cultural rejuvenation.

The creativity of the translation practice is the great innovation of modernism in the field. One could even say that the modernists reinvented translation. They no longer consider, with their predecessors, that mastery of the source language was the prerequisite for embarking on this activity. The interpretation of the original text and the role assigned to it in the target system is much more important. So it is that in many cases, translators were not proficient or even familiarised with the language of the texts they were translating. It is the case of Pound's translation of Chinese poetry which he created following the notes of Ernest Fenollosa. Similarly, when he translated the Greek tragedies

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<sup>2</sup> Steven G. Yao. *Translation and the Languages of Modernism: Gender, Politics, Language*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 4.

*King Oedipus* and *Oedipus at Colon*, William Butler Yeats had little knowledge of Greek<sup>3</sup>.

As a result of this approach to the source language, linguistic constraints such as semantics or grammar were no longer considered and the translated texts were turned into instruments which helped create a new poetics. In this light, the line between source production and translation is blurred. Although this practice may leave room for controversy since it raises the issue of authorship, one should bear in mind that translations are in fact the expression of a certain age, with its needs and preferences, and that not one translation may be deemed the absolute and perfect target variant of an original. As products which mirror the principles governing an epoch, the creative translations of the modernists reveal precisely their preoccupation with innovation.

### **Eliot and his Translation of Cultures**

History, more precisely the interdependence of past and present, lies at the core of the modernist concept of culture. It is the awareness of the close connection between the two axes that ensures cultural survival and development not only at European level, but at a universal scale as well. Given the modernist emphasis on the coexistence of past and present, a new translation theory had to be devised to encompass a map of literatures which spread synchronically and onto as large geographic planes as possible.

This new translation theory is outlined by Eliot in his review of Professor Murray's translation of a classic Senecan tragedy, "Euripides and Professor Murray". Eliot emphasized that the epoch needed

a digestion which can assimilate both Homer and Flaubert. We need a careful study of Renaissance Humanists and Translators, such as Mr. Pound has begun. We need an eye which can see the past in its place with its definite differences from the present, and yet so lively that it shall be as present to us as the present. This is the creative eye<sup>4</sup>.

Eliot's proposal for a new translation theory encompasses the Antiquity of Homer, goes all the way through the Renaissance and does not rule out the age of Flaubert. The complex panorama created by translations should rely on the emphasis of differences which set the past apart from the present and on the manner in which the present assimilates the past so as to give it new meaning and life. This task can only be achieved by putting to work what Eliot called "the creative eye".

Considering the influential position which modernist writers bestow upon translation in Anglo-American literature, Eliot's claim for a translation which really speaks to contemporary readers is justified. Again condemning Professor Murray's translation for its choice of vocabulary, he stated: "Greek poetry will never have the slightest vitalizing effect upon English poetry if it can only appear masquerading as a vulgar debasement of the eminently personal idi-

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Yao. *Translation and the Languages of Modernism*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Euripides and Professor Murray" in *Selected Essays*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950, 50.

om of Swinburne”<sup>5</sup>. Eliot calls for a translation theory which represents the fusion of past and present of his historical method — the foreign author preserves his alterity due to the content and structure of his work, yet he is shaped so as to be recognizable by the modern reader. This is only natural, since each generation needs its own translations to reflect the evolution in time of artistic sensibility.

This vision is precisely what Lawrence Venuti reproached Eliot. The translation theorist accuses Eliot for approaching translation as domestication, which tends towards assimilation of the foreign text by the target system, in this particular case, the British. The fault Venuti finds with Eliot is that the latter manipulates translated texts so as to make them accommodate modernist ideas. He claims that, like Pound, Eliot “concealed his modernist appropriation of foreign texts behind a claim of cultural autonomy of translation”<sup>6</sup>. In Eliot’s reproach to Symons that he had not rendered Baudelaire into English according to modern canons, Venuti sees Eliot’s preference for the effacement of particularities of the original text, therefore for fluent translations.

According to Venuti, fluency “is assimilationist, presenting to domestic readers a realistic representation inflected with their codes and ideologies”<sup>7</sup>, therefore it operates in the direction of the annihilation of the otherness inherent in any foreign text from the perspective of target readers.

But Eliot’s preoccupation with many and diverse languages and cultures pleads against such allegations. Not only did he not limit the reception of the translated works to issues of target acceptability, but he considered that a critique of translation should encompass a number of extratextual factors, mainly historical, that may clarify the general context of the foreign text. Speaking about the Elizabethan translation of Senecan tragedies, he claimed that

The appreciation of the literary value of these translations is inseparably engaged with the appreciation of the original and of its historical importance; so that although at first sight a consideration of the historical problems may appear irrelevant, it should in the end enhance our enjoyment of the translations as literature<sup>8</sup>.

This interest in the enlarged context of the source text production hints at a concern with preserving as many details as possible on the foreign work. And this could hardly be interpreted as an attempt at obliterating the identity of such work.

The universal exchange of ideas which deeply concerned Eliot, as well as the concept of tradition which lies at the core of his poetics, suggest a constant preoccupation with this form of cultural transfer, namely translation. The essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” revolves around the idea of tradition and although it addresses original poetry, it has profound implications for translation as well.

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<sup>5</sup> T.S. Eliot. “Euripides and Professor Murray”, 48.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Venuti. *The Translator’s Invisibility*. London: Routledge, 1995, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Venuti. *The Scandals of Translation*. London & New York: Routledge, 1998, 12.

<sup>8</sup> T.S. Eliot. “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation” in *Selected Essays*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950, 52.

With Eliot, tradition acquires a new dimension; it is not only mere legacy, taken for granted, but one which involves hard work and which has to be deserved. Thus,

tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and, if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense [...]; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to writ not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order<sup>9</sup>.

Past and present create a unitary whole and acquire new levels of significance only in interaction. The past gains meaning not by being contemplated as a fixed form of experience. It has to be translated by the present conscience and thus, with the inherent similarities and differences between the two time dimensions, the past can contribute better to the shaping of the present.

Seen from this perspective, translation appears as the best tool of reviving past experience, since it assists the survival in time and space of a given author/text. Translations are a means of preserving a continuous contact with the past. Different languages have different ways of cutting out reality, but within the same language, distinct epochs conceptualize reality in distinct manners. As forms of interpretation, translations present themselves as the topos of reconciliation between the experience of the past and the way it is reconstructed to assist modern needs.

Venuti uses the following of Eliot's statements to support his alleged domesticating orientation: "the work of translation is to make something foreign or remote in time live with our own life"<sup>10</sup>. This statement is, in a nutshell, Eliot's entire perception of translation. In his opinion, translation is a double channel of communication.

On the one hand, it covers the space dimension, ensuring the contact with other cultures. On the other hand, due to its temporal axis, it preserves the communication with one's own past. This double axis suggests the desire to recuperate a wide range of works of art. At the same time, while preserving their otherness due to their time or space distance, translated works create a fusion with the present.

What Venuti ignores is the dynamism involved in this relation. He considers Eliot's use of the past as a mere exploitation of experience to support his "peculiar brand of modernism"<sup>11</sup>. But the relationship between past and present in Eliotian modernism is not a one-way relation, whereby the present fully transforms the past leaving it devoid of identity. In fact, between the two there is a mutually advantageous connection, since "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past"<sup>12</sup>.

Moreover, in "Notes towards the Definition of Culture", Eliot further develops this idea of the past-present interdependence: "what is wanted is not to

<sup>9</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", 4.

<sup>10</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Baudelaire in Our Time" in *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order*. London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Venuti. *The Translator's Invisibility*, 189.

<sup>12</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", 5.

restore a vanished or to revive a vanishing culture under modern conditions, which make it impossible, but to grow a contemporary culture from the old roots”<sup>13</sup>. His statement asserts the independence of texts brought to life in modern times and emphasises once more the role played by translations in the cultural development of a country.

Translation is also used in Eliot’s works as a compositional technique. His poetic texts require readers to make a massive effort of translation. In *The Waste Land* alone, he embedded not only allusions to works belonging to a various number of cultures (French, Italian, Latin), but also entire lines left in the original. The reader is thus confronted with two tasks at the same time. First, he has to detect the original context of each embedded text and second, he must try to translate the new meaning assigned to them as a result of Eliot’s surprising relocations. His greatest achievement in gathering together all the fragments which make the texture of *The Waste Land* resides in their governing idea of unity, of wholeness which dominates the text. Because fragments indicate that there must be a whole to which they belong. Due to such use, translations become an essential element of the reading process, providing keys which help decode the text.

The idea of unity and cultural dialogue is also the focus of Eliot’s “Notes Towards the Definition of Culture”. In this essay, he highlights the idea that he does not conceive unity as uniformity (“a world culture which was simply a uniform culture would be no culture at all”<sup>14</sup>), which annuls the entire concept of culture. His vision of culture encompasses a wide range of manifestations, often incongruent, which ensure diversity in unity. Thus, culture is “the product of a variety of more or less harmonious activities, each pursued for its own sake”<sup>15</sup>.

The same respect for diversity and autonomy is manifest in the consideration of various cultures. Modernism, as Eliot saw it, did not tend toward the annihilation of difference and alterity: “no man is good enough to have the right to make another over his own image [...]; We can also learn to respect every other culture as a whole”<sup>16</sup>. The encounter with the Other takes place in conditions of respect for his individuality. The other’s discourse is translated into one’s own language with no loss of identity; on the contrary, both parties involved in the dialogue extract the benefit of this interchange from their individual peculiarities.

Another issue which is tightly interwoven with the idea of cultural transfer is influence. Eliot placed great emphasis on this dimension of the relationship between two or more cultures. The idea of total assimilation cancels the possible effect of influence, which Eliot deems highly useful in the rejuvenation of any literature. The conditions which impact upon and favour the necessary renewal of literature are “first, its ability to receive and assimilate influences from abroad. Second, its ability to go back and learn from its own resources”<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> T.S. Eliot. “Notes towards the Definition of Culture” in *Christianity and Culture. The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977, 127.

<sup>14</sup> T.S. Eliot. “Notes”, 136.

<sup>15</sup> T.S. Eliot. “Notes”, 91.

<sup>16</sup> T.S. Eliot. “Notes”, 139.

<sup>17</sup> T.S. Eliot. “Notes”, 190.

Eliot's preoccupation with issues of intercultural exchanges is thus visible at various levels: in the design of his poetic work, in his social program and in his activity as a literary editor. The foundation of the *Criterion* (1923) was a massive effort of bringing together the great minds of Europe. The purpose of the journal was to reunite men of letters from the entire continent who, through similarities and differences of opinion, might keep alive the intellectual effervescence of the continent. It was "a bond which did not replace, but was perfectly compatible with national loyalties, religious loyalties and differences of political philosophy"<sup>18</sup>.

In order for the journal to reach as wide a readership as possible, the contributions of collaborators from all parts of Europe had to be translated into English. Translation was therefore acknowledged as a useful tool in ensuring the circulation of ideas with the help of a language that provided a high degree of accessibility due to its considerable coverage. The journal existed from 1923 until 1939.

### **Eliot's Translation of St. John-Perse's *Anabase***

In 1926, Eliot started to work on the translation of *Anabase*, a poem signed by St. John Perse. The translation appeared only as late as 1930. Eliot collaborated closely with the author, who constantly helped him with translating suggestions. This was not the first encounter between the two. In 1924, Perse had translated *The Waste Land* into French and published it in *Commerce*, a Parisian quarterly. Aware of the difficulty of the translation due to the poem's multiple possibilities of interpretations, Perse called it an "adaptation" and published the two texts *en regard*<sup>19</sup>.

A French poet and diplomat, he maintained a clear separation between his professional life and his literary activity. One of the most largely praised French modernist writers, St. John Perse (1887-1975) made proof in his works (gathered in volumes such as *Éloges*, *Exile*, *Vents*, *Amers*) of an extraordinary gift for writing highly musical poetry in prose form. In 1960, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

*Anabase* was written in China and published in 1924. It is the saga of a conqueror and his men, who embark on an expedition with exploratory purposes, and which culminates in the foundation of a new city. The conqueror is also the one who tells of the travels of this migratory people who move on horseback from the Asian steppes towards the sea, always in search of new adventures and discoveries.

Eliot's choice for this text could be viewed as an exemplification of his perspective on translation. The selection of the author to translate reveals his interest in the contemporary literature of another culture. In addition, Perse's text was not an ordinary literary piece, but one which challenges conventional forms of writing poetry. In the preface to the translated text, Eliot touches upon the reason for the choice of this text: "I believe that this is a piece of writing of the

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<sup>18</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Notes", 195-6.

<sup>19</sup> R. Abel. "Saint-John Perse Encounters T.S. Eliot" in *Revue de littérature comparée*, 49:3 (July-September), 1975, 425.

same importance as the later work of Mr. James Joyce, as valuable as *Anna Livia Plurabelle*"<sup>20</sup>.

*Anabase* owes its English translation to its new approach to poetry, which appealed to Anglo-American modernist writers, also concerned with the rejuvenation not only of poetry, but of literature in general. In addition, the poem contains a number of aspects which are of particular interest to Eliot himself and which he tackled in his masterpiece, *The Waste Land*: "The poem is a series of images of migration, of conquest of vast spaces in Asiatic wastes, of destruction and foundation of cities and civilizations of any races or epochs of the ancient East"<sup>21</sup>.

It is a common practice of modernist writers to surround their productions with extratextual elements, and translation does not make an exception from this convention. Eliot's preface to the translation somehow reminds of his Notes to *The Waste Land*. On the one hand, it provides a number of explanations whose purpose is to assist readers in deciphering the text. Therefore, he links the noun "anabasis" with the reference to Xenophon and the journey of the Ten Thousand, and already suggests possible reading directions. In addition, he supplies the ten divisions of the poem with titles, to help readers in the mazes of the poem.

On the other hand, the preface warns readers with respect to the difficulty of decoding the text. That is why the translator suggests a successive number of readings (he confesses having read the text himself five or six times) before they can grasp all the subtleties and intricacies of the poem.

As for the translation proper, Eliot mentions that he benefited from the collaboration with the author, who provided him with all the necessary clarifications. Eliot admits having interfered with the text when he states that "what inaccuracies remain are due to my own wilfulness"<sup>22</sup>.

Eliot's translation follows the source text quite closely and strives to render, besides the content, the rhythm and the expressiveness of the source poem. The strategies adopted by Eliot at the syntactic and lexical level reveal his concern with maintaining the text within the realm of poetry. He wishes to demonstrate, with the author, that regardless of the form it embraces, poetry remains recognizable as such due to expressive mechanisms of language.

The low number of explicitations to which the translator resorted do not account for a supposed desire to clarify the obscurity of the poem, which was not at all Eliot's purpose. They are simply necessary and do not modify in any way the message of the original text:

Car le soleil entre au Lion [...]  
For the Sun enters the sign of the Lion [...] (p.14-15)

[...] profession de son père: marchand de flacons.  
[...] profession of his father: dealer in scent-bottles. (p. 36-37)

Another example which is more an interpretation of the source noun is the translation of "vétérinaire" as 'horse-doctor'. It is clear that this translation decision was dictated by the context. Although the "vétérinaire" does not treat

<sup>20</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Preface" to St. John-Perse. *Anabasis*. London: Faber & Faber, 1930, 10.

<sup>21</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Preface", 7-8.

<sup>22</sup> T.S. Eliot. "Preface", 11.



horses exclusively, it is obvious that this is his main activity in a text which deals with hoards of riding conquerors.

Whereas there are few explicitations in the English version, the mechanism of additions is visible at various levels and fulfils various roles. Some of them appear at word level, where, due to the insertion of the predicate, they complete the sentence:

Ah! Tant de souffles aux provinces!  
O from the provinces blow many winds. (p. 14-15)

Au délice du sel sont toutes lances de l'esprit...  
In the delight of salt the mind shakes its tumult of spears... (p. 20-21)

Other times, they make the English text clearer than the source one:

Puissance, tu chantais sur nos routes nocturnes!...  
Power, you sang on our tracks of bivouacs and vigil. (p. 18-19)

The translation implies more than the original. It suggests the restless life of the conquerors, always on the road, for whom night is not only a time of rest, but also the time for being alert.

There is also a number of additions which result in an enlargement of the sentences:

Les armes au matin sont belles et la mer.  
Our burnished arms are fair in the morning and behind us the sea is fair. (p. 18-19)

Sur trois grandes saisons m'établissant avec honneur, j'augure bien du sol où j'ai fondé ma loi.  
I have built myself, with honour and dignity have I built myself on three great seasons, and it promises well, the soil whereon I have established my Law. (p. 18-19)

In this latter example, Eliot also resorted to repetitions ('I have built') in order to emphasize the conqueror's great endeavour of founding the city. Eliot completed Perse's 'honneur' with 'dignity'. Honour, Eliot seems to suggest, does not give the full measure of its weight unless it is completed by dignity.

At syntactic level, Eliot opted for the merger of two shorter sentences into a single one:

Le vent se lève. Vent de mer.  
Rises the wind, the sea-wind. (p. 24-25)

Bitume et roses, don du chant! Tonnerre et flûtes dans les chambers!  
Roses and bitumen, gift of song, thunder and fluting in the rooms. (p.24-25)

This strategy of combining sentences is at times in close connection with their declamatory nature. In suppressing exclamation marks (of which French makes extensive use when highlighting the emotional load of a statement) and in uniting sentences, Eliot creates the effect of a more moderate, more solemn tone. The same is visible in the following example:

Nous enjambons la robe de la Reine, toute en dentelle avec deux bandes de couleur bise (ah! que l'acide corps de femme sait tacher une robe à l'endroit de l'aisselle!)

We step over the gown of the Queen, all of lace with two brown stripes (and how well the acid body of a woman can stain a gown at the armpit). (p. 24-25)

The content of the brackets in the French text presents a detail of the woman's body. The sexually charged load of the text is achieved with the help of the adjective "acide", the interjection and the exclamation marks. They suggest the sensations the Queen awakens in the conquerors — lust and desire, the temptations of the flesh. In the English text, Eliot suppressed the interjection and the exclamation marks. The sentence is thus unloaded of its sexual connotation, being reduced to a mere observation of a natural manifestation of the human body.

Another issue worth mentioning is capitalisation. The French text makes little use of capital letters for nouns which are commonly met without capitalisation: "l'Étranger", "les Morts", "le Soleil". Eliot observed the same use in his text, but he also capitalised other nouns of his own choice. Thus, "maître du grain, maître du sel" becomes 'Master of the Grain, Master of the Salt'<sup>23</sup>. It is obvious that the motivation behind his choice is to further highlight the significance of the concepts thus stressed. "Grain" and "salt" are two of the essential components of survival, especially for people living in the desert. Moreover, salt has a recurrent presence in the poem, being the main object of commercial exchanges.

"Ville" is rendered by Eliot either as 'town', when mentioning places of little significance for the teller ('For my soul engaged in far matters, an hundred fires in towns wakened by the barking of dogs'<sup>24</sup>) or as 'City'. In this latter form, it always appears capitalised: 'City of your dreams'<sup>25</sup> which later in the text becomes 'Foundation of the City'<sup>26</sup>. It is no ordinary city, but a place long dreamt of by the conqueror, the supreme materialisation of any conquest with the ambition of founding a new civilization, the symbol of a new beginning.

There are many men of many ways among the Stranger's people: trackers of beasts, seekers of watercourses, breakers of camps. But the most important, the translator seems to suggest, are the 'Seers of signs and seeds'<sup>27</sup>. Their category is the only one which Eliot stressed graphically, for the actions and efforts of the others are highly dependent upon the Seers' gift to decipher the signs of nature and who foretell the success or failure of their exploring adventures.

The lexical level reveals Eliot's preferences for certain nuances. In selecting certain words, he added new layers of meaning to the source text. Where Perse talks about "pentes aves le sucre des coraux"<sup>28</sup>, Eliot used 'slopes with powder of coral'. "Powder" here, as a matter which is easily blown by the wind,

<sup>23</sup> St. John-Perse. *Anabasis*, 18-19.

<sup>24</sup> St. John-Perse. *Anabasis*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> St. John-Perse. *Anabasis*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> St. John-Perse. *Anabasis*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> St. John-Perse. *Anabasis*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> St. John-Perse. *Anabasis*, 18-19.

hints at the ephemeral nature of the things of this world and the eventual futility of grand human deeds.

The noun “*songe*” appears repeatedly in the source poem. Eliot used the rich synonymic resources of English to render it into the target language with nuances which change with the context. “*Songe*” is therefore ‘dream’, as the succession of subconscious errands of the mind during sleep:

Aux ides pures du matin, que savons-nous du *songe*?  
At the pure ides of day what know we of our entail of dream?” (p.18-19)

Other times, “*songe*” becomes ‘vision’:

[...] ceux qui ont fait de grandes choses, et ceux qui voient en *songe* ceci ou cela...  
[...] those who have done great things, and those who see this or that in a vision... (p. 28-29)

There are many feminine presences in the poem, but the lexical elements used by the author and Eliot to introduce them indicates at times a difference of treatment. In certain instances, Eliot’s words seem to suggest the potentially sinful nature of women, who unsettle men and distract them from their ways:

Le prêtre a déposé ses lois contre le goût des femmes pour les bêtes.  
The priest has laid down his laws against the depravities of women with beasts. (p. 28-29)

[...] vers nos filles ‘parfumées, qui nous apaiseront d’un souffle, ces tissus...’  
[...] towards our ‘scented girls, who shall soothe us with a breath of silken webs...’ (p. 46-47)

Women’s taste for beasts is amended by Eliot as “depravities”. And whereas in the French text the girls are dressed in delicate clothes, their dresses are interpreted by Eliot as “silken webs” which hint at spider webs. It is suggested that with their transparent and alluring attire, women try to ensnare men and prevent them from pursuing their dream of exploration and conquest.

When translating *Anabase*, Eliot had the great advantage of the sustained collaboration of its author. He was therefore assured that the final form of the English version met Perse’s approval. Although Eliot was very rigorous in following certain aspects of the source text such as its graphic shape, its structure and exotic atmosphere, his voice can be heard clearly especially at the vocabulary level. He did not make his translation choices based on a domesticating program, because the resulting English version is not an appropriation of the French source. Eliot’s lexical interventions reveal instead his personal interpretation of certain aspects present in the poem. The nature and place of his additions and his lexical preferences indicate his translation as being compliant with the modernist translation agenda.

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