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## ACCOMODATION AND OTHERING: TRANSNATIONAL PREMEDIATION IN THE MODERNIST EPICS “THE WASTE LAND” AND ULYSSES

**Keywords:** *epic genre; transnational premediation; alterity; conviviality; anti-essentialism; irony; historical sense*

**Abstract:** *The paper reviews the discourse of two high modernist epics, T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and James Joyce’s Ulysses, famous for the amplitude of their intellectual, cosmopolitan outlook in the horizon of the early 1920s. We wish to see the difference between the ways they transcended borders, by virtue of their generic definition, as epics, and as programmatic modernist experiments, on the one hand, and the priorities of recent discourses which have adopted the transnational agenda, on the other hand. The focus on the dynamic of accommodation and othering aligns cosmopolitan internationalism in these canonical texts with the cultural, civic and political constants presupposed by transnationalism. Reaching out from the alterity and conviviality connection, there emerge two common denominators: the capacity to overcome essentialism by accommodating exilic selves and the inauguration of loci for symbolic rearticulation in post-traumatic contexts. In addition, modernist cosmopolitanism stands out through the way it resorts to irony and parallelisms of the past with the present for overcoming exhausted and exhausting essentialism or parochial stereotyping. The paper points to the intersection of two sets: the old modernist (and the traditional comparative literature) discourse practices, as one set, and the newer (critical and emancipatory) transnationalist set of discourses. The mechanisms of cultural memory and mediation, in particular, explain what is specific for this intersection. The complexity of “The Waste Land” and Ulysses suggests that the modernist avant-garde premediated not a few of the currently trendy intellectual, academic and cultural themes. This creates a tradition of transnationalism even though, in former ages, the political dimension of literary discourses bore different names.*

This text has its origin in an observation about remediation in cultural memory studies which triggered the association between past and present (traumatic) transnational, lieux de mémoire. Astrid Erll’s essay “Literature, Film and the Mediality of Cultural Memory”, included in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* that she co-edited in 2008 with Ansgar Nunning, contained the following observation:

remediation tends to solidify cultural memory, creating and stabilizing certain narratives and icons of the past. Such stabilizing effects of remediation can be observed in the emergence of “9/11” as an American, and indeed transnational, lieu de mémoire. The burning twin towers quickly crystallized into the one iconic image of the event, and this icon has been remediated

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ever since: in television news, photography, movies, comic strips, etc. But such iconization is not restricted to visual media (Erll and Nunning 393, author's emphasis).

Once the icon of the twin towers was treated as a matter of memory, it immediately evoked the literary image of Eliot's lines in "The Waste Land", V., "What the Thunder Said":

What is that sound high in the air  
Murmur of maternal lamentation  
Who are those hooded hordes swarming  
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth  
Ringed by the flat horizon only  
What is the city over the mountains  
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
Falling towers  
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
Vienna London  
Unreal. (367-377)

This association allows one to move to and fro between re-mediation and its iconic signs, on the one hand, and transnationalism, as the topic for analysis here, on the other hand. Speaking from the crossroads of the two recent empirical disciplines of cultural memory and transnationalist studies, it is possible to make a case here for something that can be termed transnational premediation. Such a case can be made by looking at contexts in which transnationalist discourse manifested itself yesterday by comparison with today; the aim is to assess the genres of discourse which qualify as transnational in various periods of time and the connections between them.

Casting a retrospective look at the epic genre as a transnational kind of discourse *avant la lettre* means looking at the response to the First World War trauma given in "The Waste Land" and at the response given in equally global terms to less internationally perceivable grievances and battles in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Yet both texts travelled across the borders of time and space as canonical twentieth century epics. They represent types of discursive reactions to what Stephen Dedalus called "the nightmare of history" (Gabler 28).<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not they respond to the (cultural and political) marginalization by domineering nations of near or far subalterns in the past or at present – all of which inevitably culminate, sooner or later, in pitched and/or sky-battles – literary texts prove capable to dwell on the battle between accommodation and othering as mechanisms of cultural signification in modern traumatic contexts. As far as accommodation is concerned, post-war epics fare more than well in respect to globalism in that they are

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<sup>1</sup> The full quotation from the "Proteus" episode in *Ulysses* is: "History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake". The e-book edition of *Ulysses* used here throughout will be the Vintage 1986 one edited by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior; it will be referred to with the first editor name.

based on the amplest international perspective invoked to transcend stale and dominant commonplaces. Aiming to restore commonsense with eroding ironies, they are also in the service of a fairer, civic view of life. They amplify what is private and local when constructing their public discourse. Eliot musters a cacophony of voices and of derelict scenes that are the other side of modern public pride and its sphere. Set in the “unreal City” Eliot’s is bitter – and in fact unbearable irony for Londoners. In his text he slays the dominant discourse of respectability. In the previously quoted passage he waxes tragic, actually. “The Waste Land” reaches for the towers of Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London – to declare them unreal, in the poem’s latter part, “What the Thunder Said”; this is a final amplification of the ghostly City of London declared, and presented, as unreal in several private scenes from “The Burial of the Dead”, “A Game of Chess” and “The Fire Sermon”.

“The Waste Land” is a cosmopolitan lament for the loss of cultural steerage in times of nearly cosmic guilt and bereavement. It is a lay apocalypse transnationally projected against the canvass of English culture (see the transposition of London scenes set in the postwar present to other canonical EngLit times and further out than to the imperial Ganges: to the Vedic, Sanskrit and Buddhist Orient after a Wagnerite and Paris detour, following the ritual journey in stages to Delphic, Dantean and Christian loci). In its constant to and fro movement from national to topically transnational issues, the poem recites its story of decay in a dense series of dramatic monologue chunks. As practised in the nineteenth century by Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson or Algernon Swinburne, the dramatic monologue was the national ironic form of English poetry revived by the Victorians in response to their own crisis of faith at a time of material prosperity and cosmic disorientation. It gave prominence to the accents of the individual voice caught or heard while speaking introspectively, from behind a mask, putting into words shameful, disturbing or scandalizing truths and pouring them into the ear of a conventional and deaf age. With the dramatic monologue, after the First World War, T.S. Eliot managed to give the widest international turn to the discourse of national disorientation and the result was the creation of a resounding, bleak kind of cosmopolitanism. It had irony – cosmic cultural irony – underpinning it as part of the dramatic monologue generic repertoire.

Irony was equally an othering tool in the discourse of the Irish transnational modernist epic – not in verse, but in prose. With his invertedly heroic ode to Dublin in *Ulysses*, Joyce also projects “a jovial hullabaloo among the stars” (to repeat a phrase from Wallace Stephens’s address “To a High Toned Old Christian Woman”, in poetry). Dublin is a city of ghosts peripatetically filmed back at us by Stephen Dedalus; over it is superimposed a more accommodating city of silent thoughts and juicy desires knitted into a modern fabric of Homeric stories revolving around the character of Leopold Bloom. The irony of giving to the parochial, anachronistic nationalist Dublin a Jewish Odysseus in the figure of Mr Bloom is huge, cosmopolitan and beautifully transnational. This irony is accommodating and constructive because it transcends several forms of othering (colonial, local and racial) and translates the margins, bringing them into focus; consequently, here is created a compellingly new translocality: Mr Bloom, the marginal Dubliner is promoted to the prestigiously transnational status of Odysseus owing to his adventurous and heroic consciousness whose stream convinces anyone reading the book that the mind

has the power to triumph over circumstances threatening to other and annihilate the person. In the movements of his conscience, followed from the early morning of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1904 till late into the night, i.e., from 8 o'clock till 2 a.m., he transforms from a civic and domestic loser into an epic range victor over several intimately adverse circumstances. Not only does he manage to successfully sail away from his usurped marriage in the morning, only to return and clear the coast "when the night is ripe" (our pun). By his decision to stay away from a polluted marital bed all day, he will turn from the othered husband into the accommodating adventurer who can come home with spoils: he will bring along with him a virtually grown son, Stephen Dedalus – to defeat the tenebrae of lost lives: the lost life of Ruddy, the Blooms' male offspring; the lost life of the adult marital couple seeking daily usurping surrogates in moral darkness; Stephen's young life spent among unworthy citizen-friends. Mr Bloom, the marginal Jew, plucked Stephen from the unhealthy germination bed of national usurpers of all hues: the young Anglo-Irish Buck (Mulligan), in the episode "Telemachus", or Mr Deasy, the West-Briton Nestor in the episode of the same title; the scholarly crew of revivalists, who are the cultural nationalists of the day gathered in Dublin's National Library; and – last but by no means least, being relevant for the political topic of this paper – come the ultra-nationalist gang of usurpers gathered in Barney Kiernan's pub for a very strange Irish five o'clock. Because, as a transnational Jew, Mr Bloom is the other to many an ultra-nationalist Dubliner, in the episode "Cyclops". Consequently, Mr Bloom's discourse accommodates – and defeats – the nationalistic and atavistic pathos for othering by answering in the positive, authentic and humane vein all the questions meant to challenge him. "What is your nation?" the Jew is asked with disdain by the head of the barbarous nationalist gang ready to tar and feather him. "Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland" (Gabler 272). Then he counters their passionate xenophobia in an exchange fraught with rhetoric that allows astute, informed, or simply civically minded readers to distance themselves from the blinded nationalists' activism. Mr Bloom says: "But it's no use . . . Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life." He is asked "What?" and must add, being embarrassed by the need to explain the obvious: "Love. I mean the opposite of hatred" (Gabler 273). This exchange between Mr Bloom and the fervent nationalists bespeaks the dialectic of accommodation and othering. It is fair to say that the counterpart of the ironically framed plea for love launched in modern(ist) epics is the plea for civic justice in transnationalist contexts.

By the same token, what connects aesthetically cosmopolitan internationalism with the global or planetary citizenship championed in the postcolonial discourse of transnationalism is both these discourses' capacity to create loci for the symbolic rearticulation of otherness in discourse. What is at stake in both (cultural) cosmopolitanism and (civic) emancipatory transnationalism is a problem of identity and the possibility of constructing a sufficiently solid subject position after taking stock of the unethical predicament of the present. Not only the Dublin nationalists of the "Cyclops" episode but also the Londoners are caught in despicably loveless encounters in "The Waste Land" defiled life, though they are not caught with force but rather with hatred and sterile relations between men and women.

Speaking as he does in the previous quotation about men and women generically, Mr Bloom's civic consciousness draws the otherwise experimental and aestheticist narrative discourse into the public sphere. "The Waste Land" is similarly intended as a significant public sphere discourse. It is a global scope moral lesson in the sterility of stereotyped love that Eliot gives us in "The Waste Land"; there is sterile love, if it is love at all, fraught with hysteria in "A Game of Chess" and with promiscuousness, on Margate sands, also in the scene with the typist and the young man carbuncular, and even in the Elizabeth and Leicester scene – to read "The Fire Sermon" in a disorderly way. In general, the unreal-city scenes are public laments for the loss of the modern world. Readers are given in "The Waste Land" intellectual and moral types – which is why the resulting literary species has the scope of an epic.

But the modern is an experimental epic in an ironic dialogue with the matrix of the genre. Old epics used the multiple in order to commend the one, the singular and exceptional and epic may have been, since time immemorial, the globalized species of discourse which accommodated the local to arrive at global meaning. In the modern transnational guise, public exemplary discourse is epic not because it exalts the heroic as old epics did, but because it struggles to be progressive. In this respect, early twentieth century epics should be interrogated as potentially progressive responses – coming from the margins – to the exceptionalism and centrality of great nations' ethic. Eliot spoke on behalf of the great nations at a time of crisis (see "Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, London") and approached their greatness from a dead end – and from the dead land of the post-war present. Joyce gave greatness to the Dublin margins of the English empire, challenging a particular metanarrative, the imperial one, and replacing it with another, which rehearsed history copiously. Both Eliot and Joyce created a historically challenged metanarrative of the present.

The historically challenged, and, therefore, ironic epic is the form of progressive critique and self-criticism of the high modernists. Consequently, we can analyze their entire discourse as premediation of the lessons in transnationalism drawn from John Carlos Rowe's article "Transnationalism and American Studies", where we read, for example:

In recent years, some scholars, like Wai-Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature* (2007), have employed the term 'planetary' as an alternative to 'global' to suggest a progressive, cosmopolitan response to one-way globalization. . . . Transnationalism is also intellectually allied with new theories of cosmopolitanism and post-national conceptions of 'global' or 'planetary' citizenship. (Rowe 1)

When viewed from abroad, as in the title of Alfred Hornung's third article of roughly the same title, "Transnationalism and American Studies: The View from Abroad", the transnationalist agenda adds an academic dimension to this discourse: transnationalism is addressed "to the global academic community". Albeit not being addressed to an academic community, by the encyclopaedic range of their literary discourse and taste, both Joyce and Eliot, in *Ulysses* and "The Waste Land", worked with academic judiciousness. As proof of this, the addition of Notes to "The Waste Land" and

of savvy commentaries informed by Joyce's personal explanations were required to decode the modernist epics' methodical composition were concerned.

In so far as the other features of transnationalist discourse are concerned, both anti-essentialism and conviviality ("the ecological concern for accepting alterity as a mode of conviviality" – Spivak's ideas in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) quoted by Hornung repeatedly, which ideas we might replace by "accommodating difference or accomodating alterity") are profusely present in both Joyce's and Eliot's epics. What better instance of anti-essentialism than the speech from the cage with culture's royal prerogative submerged and caricatured savagely in vignette after vignette in the scenes and parts of "The Waste Land"? In Joyce it is conventionalism in general and, in particular, nationalistic Irish or Anglo-Irish colonial essentialism that are defied. They are and not only defied in the Eliotean boudoir or raping scenes, but also in the numerous convivial scenes that take place in no end of Irish pubs, ancient concert rooms or the lobby of a maternity house in Ulysses's Dublin – not to mention the number of incredible scenes in the jakes, in the public bath, on the beach as the background for intense sexual excitement and masturbation. These are definitely unparalleled forms of ironical sharing from the very wings of the civic scene.

When Eliot's and Joyce's ironic epics transcend exclusivist, local discourses, they accommodate endemic othering of public discourse. As such, paradoxically perhaps, they contribute to the redefinition and revision of citizenship with cosmopolitan means. For when cosmopolitanism is underwritten by (post-war or colonial) trauma, it can contradict regular discourse politics, as indicated even by the mere title of another text co-authored by Alfred Hornung, Günter H. Lenz, William Boelhower, Alfred Hornung, Rob Kroes, and Rüdiger Kunow, "Symposium: Redefinitions of Citizenship and Revisions of Cosmopolitanism--Transnational Perspectives". It appears, then, that the two twentieth century epics can hardly be challenged for their cosmopolitanism from a transnational perspective, given that, through their irony, they challenge so many othering conventions and they participate, and through them high modernism, also participates in the anti-foundationalist platform that is common to transnationalism and several forms of critique in vogue today.

In addition, perhaps the transnational premediation of the two high modernist epics is not surprising given the exilic status of the two writers and the global perspective of the world that their status encouraged. Eliot's Americanness prompted his aligning to the European metropolitan mentality and he used Englishness as a kind of desirable European koine in "The Waste Land". Joyce's highly paradoxical, wistful relationship with Dublin made him subject an exile's nostalgia to the severest self-critical attitude of the writer and come up, just as Eliot did, with a new formula for the exilic acculturation. As migrant writers, Eliot's and Joyce's is a case of overseas transculturation, as the latter term was defined by Fernando Ortiz, in referring to the evolution of Caribbean colonialism, in 1940:

Transculturation is a set of ongoing transmutations; it is full of creativity and never ceases; it is irreversible. It is always a process in which we give something in exchange for what we receive: the two parts of the equation end up being modified. From this process springs out a

new reality, which is not a patchwork of features, but a new phenomenon, original and independent. (Ortiz 95)

The two authors of modernist epics, then, irreversibly participated to the dominant, cosmopolitan and ambitious cultural discourse with their ironic, original and independent voices. They gave something in return for the global cultural perspective they inherited and sounded, at the same time. Pushing even further the transfer of terms across domains, Eliot's and Joyce's transnationalism *avant la lettre* responds to the definition of transcultural transnationalism through premediation, in the spirit that the latter notion is explained by cultural memory studies:

The term "premediation" draws attention to the fact that existent media which circulate in a given society provide schemata for future experience and its representation. In this way, the representations of colonial wars premediated the First World War, and the First World War, in turn, was used as a model for the Second World War. (Erl 392)

In addition, the premediation and remediation inherent to cultural memory mechanisms are handled by the two twentieth century epics in ways that strengthen one of the general observations ascribed to Fernando Ortiz about the ultimately personal level at which acculturation is made complete. As reported by Padmini Bannerjee and Myna German in 2011, Ortiz advanced the idea that "transculturation is driven by powerful forces at the macrosocial level, yet ultimately it can be resolved at the interpersonal level" (Bannerjee and German 31).

Because cultural effects are measurable more concretely at the interpersonal, grassroots level, it is interesting to see what restrained one of the two modernist epic writers from responding to war at a time when it was in the foreground as a macrosocial force.<sup>2</sup> Ulysses heroically resists the cooperation with any of the themes that were in the air at the time, as if they were all culinary art themes, when understanding them by Hans Robert Jauss's much later standards. James Joyce's metanarrative of Ulysses transcends the transnational war theme by remediating the heroic epic. He resisted the dominant panic of the First World War aftermath by othering the unheroically modern present aided precisely by the heroic, epic frame remediation. Joyce's successful remediation of the past literary events in the modern low key led to the creation of another species of modern adaptation of heroic age literature than the eighteenth century mock-heroic recipe.

It is hard to put a name to the species of adaptation that the great Irish modernists created. But what can be affirmed is that Joyce's novel(istic) *Odyssey* uses irony as constructively and as much in order to accommodate the other as our latter-day transnational and transcultural discourses with their aim of empowering and accommodating othered people(s). Similarly, the Eliotean performance is that of remediating transnational culture and reiving it from its ashes by using the national

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<sup>2</sup> There are so many more, and more direct, literary references to war in modernist texts: in Eliot's Gerontion as the universal war veteran before "The Waste Land" and Lil's husband who got demobbed, in "A Game of Chess"; in the suicidal shell-shocked Septimus Warren Smith of Woolf's war novel with such a feminine title and touch, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

dramatic monologue verse tradition with his talent. One can only salute his capacity of restoring to the Western cultural discourse its agency and allowing it to remain pertinent among the macrosocial forces by accommodating their pulsating other which emerged, as it always will, in times of powerful, global bereavement.

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