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Bombast and Sesquipedalian Words: Translation, Mistranslation, and the Epigraph to *The Waste Land*

Ruth Alison Clemens

Abstract:

The epigraph to T. S. Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land* (1922) is one of the most well-known paratexts of twentieth-century literature. However, as previous scholars have noted, the popularized English translation from the Ancient Greek of Petronius' *Satyricon* contains a small but significant mistranslation: the Cumaean Sibyl is not actually hanging in a cage. This essay unearths another meaning in Ancient Greek of the *ampulla* in which the poet oracle is trapped: bombast. Using a Deleuzean new-materialist reading of text and paratext, this article proposes how the new meanings of the *ampulla* reconfigure both the significance of the original mistranslation and also the position of the poem itself, with its bombastic networks of allusions and paratextual complexities.

Keywords: Eliot; Modernism; Mistranslation; *Satyricon*; Paratext; Deleuze.

What makes a translation 'feeble'? What social, political, or cultural forces give a translation its strength or powerlessness? Rather, what makes *the* translation feeble—to speak of *a* translation is to speak of translation in general as relation-in-itself. What are the *specific* relations that *the* translation forms and, conversely, how does the 'feeble' translation—feeble in its inadequacy of maintaining the illusion of the veil of Babelian universal language—reveal the relations of the literary encounter itself? The instances of feeble translation in question in this article are those revealed in and around the paratexts to *The Waste Land* (1922) by T. S. Eliot, which become appropriated, mistranslated, and edited over the course of the poem's textual history—thus hinting, perhaps, at their power.

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T. S. Eliot is often portrayed as one of the founding fathers of the twentieth-century Anglophone literary establishment, the authoritative and austere critic and master of the canon. According to his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Eliot is remembered for the ‘conservative religious and political convictions’ of his later years and for his fame which gave him an ‘air of authority, at first brash, and then monumental’.¹ Indeed, a major current of Eliot’s legacy today is that of an academic poet whose work is formally and politically difficult. This legacy persists; writing in a review of Robert Crawford’s biography of Eliot in *The Times* in January 2015, Philip Collins begins by noting that ‘as a man, [Eliot] has a rather austere reputation. That impression is enhanced by [his] reputation for poetry so complex that it requires explanatory footnotes’.² Here, Collins is of course referring to the endnotes to *The Waste Land*, which is well-known for its abundance of allusions, including texts in English, French, German, Italian, and Sanskrit. However, Collins is wrong. The notes are not ‘explanatory’: although presented as the empirical support for the sources presented in the poem, they do not actually offer an explanation.

The Waste Land, as well as being a multilingual poem, is a paratextual poem. It includes a number of literary paratexts—a dedication, epigraph, date colophon, and a long series of endnotes, as well as titles. As is the case with multilingual or translational literature, the paratexts become especially significant. Paratexts are an inherently multilingual strategy—when texts enter translation, they often gain paratexts such as explanatory footnotes. In this article, I explore the relation between translation and paratext in Eliot’s long poem, focusing on the concept of the ‘feeble translation’ developed from Eliot’s original endnote to line 433 of the poem. I draw from Gérard Genette’s theory of the paratext, mapping the poem’s paratexts in the first section. In the second section I outline a broader theory of the paratext, using Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s writing on reading as a simultaneously material and conceptual process to frame literary paratexts as instances of movements of thought materially recorded on the page.

As minor textual devices, the paratexts of *The Waste Land* have a dual status. They are under-read, perceived as less significant than the central poetic text itself. At the same time, they have in some ways a higher degree of power than the poetic text—they are able to be fluid and amorphous, changing from edition to edition, and they represent the only part of the poem which Eliot amended after the original publication. This gives them a unique relationship to the

poem itself. In particular, the original endnote to line 433 proposes that English can only offer a ‘feeble translation’ of Sanskrit.³ However, in 1932 Eliot amended this endnote, substituting the feebleness of translation for a decidedly stronger notion of linguistic equivalence. Focusing scholarly attention on the paratexts reveals these differing textual and conceptual manifestations of translation, and in turn allows us to interrogate them.

What did Eliot mean in writing that a translation could be ‘feeble’? Taking Eliot’s original framing of translation as ‘feeble’ in his poem, I develop a reading of Eliot’s translational paratexts which allows for new reconfigurations of the poem more broadly. Like paratexts, translation is fluid, amorphous, and unfixed. The idea of an original translation is, in many ways, an oxymoron—likewise, paratexts can transform and multiply without the authenticity of the central text being called into question. I thus conceptualize paratexts and translation as ‘feeble’ in that they run counter to the fixed epistemological figure of the classical book, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980):

A first type of book is the root-book. The tree is already the image of the world, or the root the image of the world-tree. This is the classical book, as noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority (the strata of the book).⁴

Therefore, I see Eliot’s ‘feeble translation’ as a way of undermining the noble strength and fixity of the epistemological and literary figure of the classical book. In the following section of this article, I suggest that Eliot redacted the feeble translation in favour of equivalence because of his increasing belief in this sturdy figure of the classical book.

If Eliot in 1922 saw the moments of translation in the poem as feeble, how then does this transform our readings of them? This brief but significant conceptualization of translation forces us to look again at the moments of translation and the source texts.⁵ Using the lost concept of the feeble translation to read the other instances of paratextual translation in *The Waste Land*, previously unrecognized translational possibilities emerge. In particular, it reveals the possible feeble translations contained within the epigraph to the poem, the quotation from Section 48 of Petronius’ *Satyricon*. Through re-reading the epigraph with the feeble translation in mind, I propose a possible alternative translation of one of the most well-known multilingual parts of the poem. Specifically, the Cumaean Sybil of the epigraph is normally interpreted as being trapped in either a cage or, more rarely, in a glass bottle. However, as I show in the final section of this article,

the *ampulla* in which she dwells has another meaning—bombast. This additional translation transforms the reading of the poem as a whole. The poet-figure whose powerful voice but powerless and aged body introduces the poem and stand in for the poet-figure is located within a different space: bombast is the material space of the poem.

It is significant that this feeble translation occurs in the epigraph of the poem, as epigraphs are inextricably linked to the epistemological form of the book. In his study of the epigraph, Genette notes that they first appeared in the seventeenth century with the rise of print and, following the golden age of the book, grew in popularity over the following centuries.⁶ They thus evolved as part of the genetic code of the classical and rooted ‘tree-book’ as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari.⁷ While this is the opposite of the ‘feeble’ text, it is always being undermined by lines of flight—constant movements and transformations. Through reading the translational paratexts of *The Waste Land* as ‘feeble’, I show how paratexts in general are devices which work to uphold Deleuze and Guattari’s figure of the classical book but at the same time inevitably undermine it by belying the exteriority of the text. They are like the *ampulla* in which the Cumaean Sibyl, the voice of the poet, is trapped—neither cage nor glass phial, but a hot air balloon.

Feeble Translations in the Paratexts

It is important to note the status of the poem’s paratexts as less fixed than the poem itself—they are movable, they appear and disappear, and they are editable. In the early editions of *The Waste Land* especially, the various paratexts which accompany the poem appear amorphous and unfixed, partly due to the differing formats and media used to publish the poem in the 1920s. The endnotes, the paratextual sixth section of the poem, are absent from the first editions of the poem in *The Criterion* and *The Dial* but appear in its book editions and in every collected edition that has followed.⁸ Eliot’s dedication to Ezra Pound, ‘For Ezra Pound | *il miglior fabbro*’, does not appear until 1925 where it is preceded by the title and epigraph on the title leaf of the poem.⁹ The epigraph is omitted from the *Criterion* edition but appears in the *Dial* edition on the first page of the poem, between the title and the beginning of the first section. In the first book edition the epigraph appears as set apart from the poem on the title leaf, where it has remained ever since.

In recent editions of *The Waste Land* the year of its publication—‘1922’—is included on the title page after the title but before the epigraph and dedication. However, this date does not

appear in the 1922 edition of the poem. It is unclear when the inclusion of this date occurred, and Jim McCue and Christopher Ricks make no mention of it in their otherwise thorough and genetic recent annotated edition of Eliot's poems. The presence of the year in later and current editions, as well as situating the text in a specific period of time, has the effect of indicating that the text about to be read is the original and unabridged 1922 version. However, this is not true. Parts of the text were amended in subsequent editions and it is these amended versions, not the 1922 text, which are published (somewhat misleadingly) with the year of publication appearing after the title. The biggest of Eliot's amendments to the poem after its initial publication is one which changes a core part of the poem entirely: an amendment to the translational endnote regarding the meaning in English of the Sanskrit word 'Shantih'. The poem's well-known final line is the meditative repetition of the Sanskrit:

Shantih shantih shantih¹⁰

Eliot's endnote to this line, the final note of the poem, calls this series of repeated words 'a formal ending to an Upanishad'.¹¹ This much is almost correct—Vedic recitations within Hindu traditions end with the chant of a mantra constituted of shantih repeated three times, preceded by the syllable Om.¹²

But how does 'Shantih' work within the context of the poem? As K. Naranyana Chandran notes, this line 'has the singular distinction of having baffled the best commentators on the poem'.¹³ Naranyana Chandran argues that the omission of Om means that 'fragmentation is literally carried to its very last line' of the poem.¹⁴ However, due to the poem's textual and paratextual multiplicity the location of the end of the poem is debatable. It is important to consider the paratexts as well as the poem itself in any reading of the text, including what Colin MacCabe calls the 'final medley of citations, fragments shored against the poem's ruin'.¹⁵ Thus, *The Waste Land* ends the way the Bible begins—with 'word'.¹⁶ Or, more properly, the poem ends with the endnote to line 433.

However, there are two different versions of this endnote, the former from the first edition of 1922 and the latter from editions published between 1932 and the present day:

The Waste Land (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922):

433. Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. 'The Peace which passeth understanding' is a feeble translation of the content of this word.¹⁷

The Poems of T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 2015):

433. Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad.
'The Peace which passeth understanding' is our equivalent to this word.¹⁸

The first version of the endnote was the only version until 1932, when the second version appeared in the American Harcourt Brace printing of *Poems 1909–1925*.

While Christopher McVey's groundbreaking 2016 analysis of the textual history of the 'feeble translation' endnote offers the persuasive explanation that the critic F. R. Leavis influenced Eliot's amendment, I suggest that this editorial change also points towards a change in Eliot's cultural and linguistic politics.¹⁹ It may signal more openly Eliot's Christian nationalism and conservatism, as well as the ever present misogyny, racism, and traces of cultural hierarchization which pierce his writing. These are some of the difficulties faced by contemporary scholars who write about Eliot. I am persuaded by McVey's assertion that the textual history of this footnote helps to construct a larger history of European modernism's problematic and uneven power relationship with non-Western texts. This relationship is complicated by multidirectional flows of power and processes of knowledge building in the way that such intertextualities point towards what McVey calls 'tentative experiences of encounter, self-awareness, and cultural openness'.²⁰

To conclude this section, the amendment Eliot made to the final note of *The Waste Land* has a dual status: it belies that Eliot saw the endnotes as significant enough to edit while at the same time revealing that Eliot's feelings about translation and translatability had changed in the years since he wrote the poem. What, then, should a reader of *The Waste Land* do with this information? It is important to reread the poem through the lens of the 'feeble translation'. I hold that doing so reveals a text which is fluid and multiple, undermining as it attempts to uphold the noble and interior figure of the classical book.

A Theory of the Epigraph

In the following section I concentrate my analysis on the epigraph of *The Waste Land*. I will be treating the epigraph as it appears in the book editions of the poem: on the title leaf set apart from and preceding the central text. As with *The Waste Land*, the epigraph is usually the first part of the text the reader encounters after the title. All epigraphs have some relationship with the central text: the reader must discover this relationship, linking together the epigraph and the central narrative like pieces of a textual jigsaw. This is reflected in Genette's own

summation of the readerly relationship with the epigraph: 'the use of an epigraph is always a mute gesture whose interpretation is left up to the reader'.²¹ The epigraph is 'mute' until it achieves connectivity with a reader, at which point it becomes a readerly experience rather than a fixed and static representation. As Réda Bensmaïa writes in the introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), this is the conceptualization of reading as a 'procedure in action, this continuous process'.²² Deleuze and Guattari are useful for reading spatial and material devices such as paratexts due to their insistence on an understanding of reading that is not limited to the interpretation of signs and symbols but which encompasses its machinistic ability to produce an event that has creative potential.²³ The presence of an epigraph—especially a multilingual epigraph—thus has the potential to foreground the relational and exterior implications of writing. The reader and the text connect in an instance of reading-as-event, each copy of the text being a repetition, each reading of which produces difference as it pushes each reader down a line of becoming through the process of thought.

The Deleuzian concepts of difference, repetition, and becoming are useful in understanding how the reader negotiates a relationship between the epigraph and the central text. This means thinking about literature not in terms of its concrete representations of meaning but of its capacity for dynamic experientiality: what André Pierre Colombat calls its 'connections, transformations, arrangements and productions'.²⁴ Genette writes that the epigraph works not to helpfully clarify a signified meaning communicated from the author to the reader but instead to stimulate the reader to produce, to create, to experience—in other words, to think:

The semantic relevance of epigraphs is often, as it were, random; and without the least ill will, one can suspect some authors of positioning some epigraphs hit-and-miss, of believing—rightly—that every joining creates meaning and that even the absence of meaning is an impression of meaning, often the most stimulating or most rewarding; to think without knowing what you are thinking—is that not one of the purest pleasures of the mind?²⁵

The epigraph relates the reader to the text; it is a cog in the literary machine, affecting the reader, working to produce affects in the reader. As Stendhal wrote of the novelistic epigraph:

The epigraph must heighten the reader's feeling, his emotion, if emotion there be, and not present a more or less philosophical opinion about the situation.²⁶

Thus, the work of the reader (and, indeed, the critic) is not to discover or interpret the meaning of the linguistic sign but to contemplate it as an inventive encounter or event in a liminal space between the reader and text. As Michel Charles writes, the function of the epigraph 'is easily to give food for thought, without one's knowing what the thought is'.²⁷ The epigraph thus produces thought, and the work the reader must do in connecting the epigraph and the text, highlighting the processual nature of reading.

Like other paratexts, the epigraph is necessarily material. This is evident in Genette's attempt to define the device. He writes that it appears 'at the *edge* of the work, generally closest to the text'.²⁸ As well as being constituted by text and therefore constitutive of an abstract idea, because of its relation between the text and reader the epigraph is material and spatial: it has extension in a metaphysical sense. This is the case for literature and other forms of art: it necessarily has extension and duration in its existence as a physical thing, and it is also defined and constituted by abstract ideas and concepts, and literary paratexts present a moment where this material-semiotic nexus is tangible. Using this concept to examine literature means that the way the text is extended spatially has a parallel relationship with the way the ideas created by the text are arranged in thought. Deleuze's own concept of spatiality and materiality similarly echoes his conceptualization of thought as rhizomic:

Matter thus offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns: no matter how small, each body contains a world pierced with irregular passages, surrounded and penetrated by an increasingly vaporous fluid, the totality of the universe resembling a 'pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves'.²⁹

These moments of material and conceptual porousness are made visible in a text's paratexts. The paratexts are 'feeble' in the sense that they are minor parts of the text, amorphous and unfixed, but through this they create conceptual caverns of thought, new spaces for ideas which can reconfigure the central text. This way, the interiority of the classical book is undermined. This is particularly potent when read in connection with the material turn in literary theory, which, through examining what Paul Eggert calls 'how the engines of textuality actually worked' in a socio-historic sense, treats the material manifestation of the text as an artefact in its own right.³⁰ As Alberto Manguel writes, this materiality means treating the text differently:

Even today, submerged as we are by dozens of editions and thousands of identical copies of the same title, I know that the book I hold in my hands, that volume and no other becomes the Book. Annotations, stains, marks of some kind or another, a certain moment or place, characterize that one volume as surely as if it were a priceless manuscript.³¹

Here lies the relevance of treating *The Waste Land* as a material artefact as well as an abstract text. The poem and its paratexts occupy space differently in its various early manifestations, and thus affect the reader differently. Its differing spatial arrangements negotiate various differences in thought produced by the literary machine.

Bombast and Sesquipedalian Words: The Epigraph

An understanding of material and spatial elements is important when looking at the epigraph generally. This gives a solid theoretical grounding for the following section, in which I propose a new translation of *The Waste Land* epigraph. Genette writes that epigraphs are often ‘puzzling,’³² and Victor Hugo called his own use of novelistic epigraphs ‘strange and mysterious [...], which adds singularity to the interest and gives more expressiveness to each part of the composition’.³³ *The Waste Land*’s epigraph is a similarly defamiliarizing and mysterious puzzle, which contributes to the poem becoming what Maud Ellmann terms ‘a sphinx without a secret’.³⁴ The poem is unresolvable and misleading, inviting and resisting interpretation. This forms the crux of the poem’s modernism: *The Waste Land* speaks of the ennui of the modern world, a ‘heap of broken images’ in which one can ‘connect nothing | with nothing’.³⁵ Eliot’s modernism is partly characterized by his poetic use of defamiliarizing imagery, which aims to counteract the banal and fragmented modern condition by utilizing the creative potential of thought to perceive the world in unsettling and unknown ways.

The epigraph of *The Waste Land* is a quotation of a passage from section 48 of Petronius’ Roman satire *Satyricon* (first century CE):

Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi
in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα
τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: ἀποθανεῖν θέλω.³⁶

It is significant that the epigraph is not translated. Assuming the reader has a limited understanding of Latin and Greek compared to their command of English, they are placed in a position of distanced knowing or understanding before the poem has even begun.

According to B. C. Southam, the translation given for this epigraph in Eliot's own edition of *The Waste Land* is as follows:

Yes, and I myself with my own eyes saw even saw the Sybil hanging in a cage; and when the boys cried at her: "Sybil, Sybil, what do you want?" "I would that I were dead", she caused to answer.³⁷

I give this translation initially because this is the translation Eliot gives and thus it may help to indicate the way in which Eliot himself interpreted this passage in his native tongue. However, as is often the case with classical texts, many other translations of Petronius exist, as do translations of this epigraph specifically by editors and critics of Eliot. The one that is used most frequently by scholars, for example by Valerie Eliot in her 1971 editorial notes to *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript* and more recently in the Ricks and McCue commentary in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, is as follows:

I saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her: 'Sybil, what do you want?' she answered: 'I want to die.'³⁸

This is adapted from Michael Heseltine's 1913 translation, published in a popular Loeb edition and the most used and widely available English translation at the time the poem was written; Grover Smith writes that the publication of this edition helped *Satyricon* to enjoy 'celebrity and notoriety in the Edwardian and Georgian eras'.³⁹

The epigraph is a quotation from a passage in the *Satyricon* in which the character of Trimalchio drunkenly boasts to the guests at his feast that he saw the Sibyl trapped in the ancient Greek city of Cumae. The myth of the Cumaean Sibyl is as follows: the god Apollo wished to take her virginity, and offered to grant any wish in exchange for it. She asked to live for as many years as there were individual grains in a pile of sand. The god granted her wish, but she refused to accept his advances. Spurned, Apollo gave her eternal life but not eternal youth, leaving her doomed to grow old and her body to wither away. Eventually, only her voice – and her powers of prophecy – remained.⁴⁰ Although the use of this passage by Eliot may appear straightforward because its subject introduces the poem's major themes of impotence, myth, and hopelessness, all is not as simple as it seems. Both of the translations I give above contain a small yet crucial mistranslation: the Latin word *ampulla* does not mean 'cage'. It means flask, jar, or bottle, and in a later edition of the translation Heseltine amended this word accordingly. Though archaic, *ampulla* is a word used in English – it refers to a type of object purchased by pilgrims, containing holy water or oil, and *ampullas* are still used in the coronation of British

monarchs. It is arguably the most translatable word in the epigraph for non-readers of classical languages. The word is used elsewhere in *Satyricon*: in Section 78 Trimalchio opens an *ampullum* and anoints the crowd with the liquid held inside. It is therefore clear that this object is not a cage, and in a later revised edition of the Heseltine translation this word has been changed to 'flask'.⁴¹ In a 1973 essay, Hugh Kenner was the first to notice that 'cage' is a mistranslation of 'bottle'.⁴² As Heseltine's 1913 translation uses 'cage,' it could simply be the case that Eliot used for his source the most popular and widely available translation of the time, and therefore unknowingly adopted the mistranslation into his construction and reading of the poem.

However, Eliot could read Latin and had already read *Satyricon* before the publication of the 1913 Loeb edition. At Harvard in 1908–9 Eliot took Clifford H. Moore's Latin course 'The Roman Novel: Petronius and Apuleius,' and Eliot's undergraduate edition of *Satyricon* (Bücheler 1904), which includes marginalia by Eliot commenting on the Latin, is available in the Hayward collection.⁴³ Taking these factors into account, it is probable that Eliot would have known *ampulla* did not mean 'cage,' especially considering his knowledge of other languages: the French *ampoule* is 'bulb' or 'phial'. More interestingly, Eliot insists to E. M. Stephenson in a letter of 9 July 1944 about proofs of her book *T.S. Eliot and the Lay Reader* (1944) that 'bottle' would be an incorrect translation: 'I think you should check, not only your quotations from other languages, but your translations of them: e.g. I saw with my own eyes the Sybil at Cumae, hanging in a bottle.'⁴⁴ However, Stephenson uses 'bottle' in her book, and Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue err on the side of caution, arguing that 'it is not clear whether TSE meant that "bottle" was wrong or that it was right'.⁴⁵

I remain unconvinced by Ricks and McCue's assertion of the ambiguity of whether Eliot's use of 'cage' is intentional or accidental. Eliot was familiar with a poetic translation of the story by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who uses 'cage' for *ampulla*:

She hung in a cage, and read her rune
To all the passers-by⁴⁶

Despite this, he attempts to distance himself from Rossetti's poem. In a letter to publisher Giovanni Mardersteig on 15 June 1961, Eliot writes of his epigraph:

I think it is quoted somewhere by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, but at the same time I must defend my use of the quotation by saying that I have read the *Satyricon*.⁴⁷

Although a possible source of inspiration for Eliot's use of 'cage,' this letter suggests that Eliot wanted to acknowledge that he knew the Rossetti poem but that the source of the epigraph is the Latin text itself. Furthermore, Eliot's use of 'cage' establishes the bird imagery that is continued throughout the poem: he is playing with translation for his own ends.⁴⁸ The second section of the poem, 'A Game of Chess,' is titled 'In The Cage' in the draft manuscript.⁴⁹ 'Sybilla' was Vivienne Eliot's occasional pen name in the *Criterion*,⁵⁰ and her hand contributed to the composition of 'In The Cage'.⁵¹ A number of sources have linked this section of *The Waste Land* to Eliot's personal life and his then-troubled marriage to Vivienne. For example, Burton Blistein argues that 'A Game of Chess' 'owes much to Eliot's difficult relationship with his first wife,'⁵² and Martin Scofield writes similarly of the narrators of this section:

The taciturn man is clearly part of the central voice of the poem, and the neurotic, insistent lady cannot but recall something of what we have learned about Eliot and his wife at this time from biographical work.⁵³

However, suggesting that Eliot used 'cage' because the imprisoned Sibyl of the epigraph and the woman of 'A Game of Chess' reflect Eliot's relationship with Vivienne is an inadequate explanation of the mistranslation. I propose an alternative explanation for Eliot's intentional mistranslation of *ampulla*. As I write above, the epigraph is taken from Section 48 of *Satyricon* in which Trimalchio is boasting to Agamemnon that he is widely read, is familiar with Homer, and has two libraries. According to André Schüller, the passage illustrates Trimalchio's 'obvious half-learning or fake learning'.⁵⁴ The 1913 Loeb edition comments that 'Trimalchio's knowledge of literature is as vague as his geography'.⁵⁵ The speaker of the epigraph is vague, boastful, deceitful, 'full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse,' to borrow from another of Eliot's poems.⁵⁶ This mirrors *The Waste Land* itself: it looks like a puzzle but there is no solution, a 'sphinx without a secret'.⁵⁷ On 18 June 1944, Eliot's secretary responded to a query about the epigraph:

Mr. Eliot [...] asks me to tell you that the quotation is from *Petronius—Satyricon* 48.8. The speaker, Trimalchio, is drunk. *He does not know himself what the explanation is*, and says that as far as his poem is concerned *it does not matter*.⁵⁸

The *Satyricon* passage itself is a non sequitur in a conversation by a fraud boasting about his literary refinement—that he has a Greek and Latin library—and Eliot quotes the passage in both Greek and Latin

in the epigraph. The poem is like Trimalchio's boastful monologue: there is no answer to the mysteries of the poem; it is full of bombast. It uses a saturation of texts and languages to interact with the reader; to make them search for the unifying meaning that must be there. But it is not—which is the heart of *The Waste Land's* linguistic deterritorialization.

To return to my original question, I posit that Eliot consciously chose to mistranslate the word *ampulla* in the paratexts to the epigraph. As well as 'flask,' this Latin word has another meaning: 'inflated discourse, *swelling words*, *bombast*'.⁵⁹ Here the relevance of the title of this chapter reveals itself: ostensibly due to the inflated appearance of the flask, *ampulla* also means 'bombast'. It is used in this sense by another Latin satirist, Horace, in line 97 of *Ars Poetica*: 'prociit ampullas et sesquipedalia verba'—he 'flings forth bombast and sesquipedalian words'.⁶⁰ J. H. Quincey noted in 1949 that both classicists and ancient commentators have extensively discussed the metaphorical use of the Latin terms *ampullae* and *ampullari* to denote 'the turgid or elevated style of poetry or oratory'.⁶¹ Despite this, I have not found scholarship which connects this well-known metaphor for bombastic poetry to Eliot's use of the word in the epigraph to his poem.

Based on what we know of Eliot's Harvard education, it is likely that he was familiar with Horace as the other central Roman satirist as well as Juvenal, and in particular with the text of the *Ars Poetica*. It is possible that this paratextual use of 'cage' as a translation of 'ampulla,' a word which means 'bombast,' was a deliberate decision. It even seems a likely decision when read in the context of a poem which is supposedly still 'so complex that it requires explanatory footnotes'.⁶² This becomes a self-conscious decision when read alongside the poem's endnotes, which mislead, depart from academic convention, and do not provide the empirical support expected in this paratextual form (as I explain further in the following section). It is possible, of course, that the fact that 'ampulla' also means 'bombast' is merely a coincidence, but even if this is the case it gives a reconsideration of the poem especially in light of the fact that *The Waste Land* was rumoured to be a hoax at the time of publication—and the poem's paratexts contributed to that rumour, as a March 1923 review in *Time* magazine shows.⁶³

A more complex figuration emerges in light of this new reading of the epigraph via its multilingual, translational, and paratextual possibilities. The Sibyl—the poem—is trapped in, enclosed within, or surrounded by bombast, which is materially enacted by the paratexts which surround the poem, enclose it, and formally perform a citational rooting of it within a network of meanings. While this could be read as

illustrating a modernist anxiety about linguistic and semantic fluidity and undecidability, a closer reading of the text the epigraph alludes to offers a different implication. The sentence which immediately follows the passage of the *Satyricon* used for the epigraph reveals the relation between the epigraph and the poem itself. From the 1913 Heseltine edition of *Satyricon*:

‘Yes, and I myself with my own eyes saw the Sibyl hanging in a cage, and when the boys cried at her: “Sybil, Sybil, what do you want?” “I would that I were dead,” she used to answer.’

He had still more talk to puff out.⁶⁴

After Trimalchio finishes his story about seeing the Sibyl, the narrator accuses him of being literally *full of hot air*. Thus begins the poem: its multilingual paratexts with their feeble translations make the verse the punch line to the joke. Reading the paratexts to *The Waste Land* as sites of feeble translation reveals new readings of the poem itself. Here, the feeble translation of *ampulla* as ‘bombast’ reframes the poem entirely: the Sybil, archetypically the voice of the poet, is located within boastful emptiness. The noble and interior classical book is, in this case, full of hot air.

Conclusion

Through a new reading of the epigraph of the poem which considers its multilingualism and paratextual mistranslations as sites of feeble translation, in this article I propose a new possibility surrounding the mistranslation of the word ‘ampulla’ for cage: ampulla as bombast. This bombast is multilingual and citational, playfully undermining textual and hermeneutic authority through the very devices and conventions which are supposed to uphold it. While *The Waste Land* is not simply a lamentation of fragmentation, it is certainly not a straightforward celebration of fragmentation either. The poem presents constraining power as well as the possibility for potential transformation in its content as well as its form. *The Waste Land* is a text which presents linguistic difference in multiple ways. The multilingualism of the poem is not as fluid or diffuse as the multilingualism of the paratexts. In particular, the figure of the Smyrna merchant supports Juliette Taylor-Batty’s reading of the poem as presenting negative connotations of linguistic mixing as ‘implicitly representative of a materialist and technological modernity that threatens a “rooted” and “organic” sense of national culture’.⁶⁵ This, it seems, frames modernist multilingualism as part of the noble and

organic ‘root-book’. On the other hand, the poem’s paratexts present linguistic hybridity and multiplicity as a self-evident part of literary history, as part of what in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919) Eliot calls the poet’s ‘historical sense’.⁶⁶ Rosi Braidotti writes that the advanced capitalism of modernity presents a quantitative proliferation of difference in which ‘the centre merely becomes fragmented, but that does not make it any less central, or dominating’.⁶⁷ Reading the poem without its paratexts, this is often the case for *The Waste Land*. However, through reading *The Waste Land* via its multilingual paratexts, I have shown that it offers a qualitative shift: language, author, and text transform themselves through the very devices and conventions which constitute their authority. This way, the strong power of the ‘classical book’ is not simply fragmented, but transformed through feeble translations.

Notes

1. Ronald Bush, ‘Eliot, Thomas Stearns (1888–1965)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Online edn, ed. by Lawrence Goldman, January 2010. < <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32993> > [accessed 11 August 2021].
2. Philip Collins, ‘Young Eliot; From St Louis to *The Waste Land* by Robert Crawford’, *The Times*, 31 January 31 2015, < <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/books/non-fiction/article4336187.ece> > [accessed 11 August 2021].
3. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. 64.
4. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 5.
5. Here I invoke Susan Stanford Friedman’s planetary critical practice of modernist ‘Re-vision,’ which is ‘the act of looking again, of defamiliarizing the familiar archive by looking anew through a different lens, asking new questions of “high modernism”’. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 76.
6. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), pp.144–46.
7. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 5.
8. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (eds), *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume I* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), p. 547.
9. Ricks and McCue, p. 595.
10. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume I*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber and Faber 2015), pp. 53–77 (p. 71).
11. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 2015, p. 77.
12. Interestingly, scholars have commented upon the notable absence of ‘Om’ at the end of the poem, suggesting that the lack of this syllable—which symbolizes the supremacy of Brahman and the essence of all existence—is an intentional way of refusing a final unity or benediction. This supports Naranyana Chandran’s interpretation that this omission carries the poem’s fragmentation to its absolute end. K. Narayana Chandran, ‘“Shantih” in *The Waste Land*’, *American Literature* 61, no. 4 (1989), 681–83 (p. 683).

13. Narayana Chandran, p. 681.
14. Narayana Chandran, p. 683.
15. Colin MacCabe, *T. S. Eliot* (Horndon, Tavistock: Northcote House, 2006), p. 41.
16. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 2015, p. 77.
17. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922, p. 64.
18. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 2015, p. 77. Surprisingly, the 2015 complete editions of the *Poems* by Ricks and McCue on no occasion print the original endnote to line 433 as part of the poem, despite including the full text of *The Waste Land*, plus a twenty-four-page long editorial composite which includes never-published material such as the epigraph from Conrad, and 162 pages of commentary. In fact, the original endnote is only ever cited indirectly and in an incomplete form, via a quote from F. R. Leavis specifically concerning the critic's criticism of the wording of this endnote.
19. Christopher McVey, 'Feeble Translations: Failure, Global Modernism, and *The Waste Land*', *South Atlantic Review* 81, no. 2 (Summer, 2016), 173–190.
20. McVey, p. 175.
21. Genette, p. 156.
22. Réda Bensmaïa, 'The Kafka Effect', trans. by Terry Cochran, in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) pp. ix–xxi (p. xxi).
23. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 116.
24. André Pierre Colombat, 'Deleuze and Signs', in *Deleuze and Literature*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and John Marks (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 14–33 (p. 18).
25. Genette, p. 158.
26. Stendhal, *Œuvres Intimes Tome 2: 1818–1842* (Paris: La Pléiade, 1982), p. 129. Translation by Jane E. Lewin in Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), p. 158.
27. Michel Charles, *L'Arbre et la source* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), p. 185. Translation by Jane E. Lewin in Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), p. 158.
28. Genette, p. 144.
29. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 5.
30. Paul Eggert, 'Version-Agency-Intention: The Cross-fertilising of German and Anglo-American Editorial Traditions', in *Variants 4: The Book as Artefact: Text and Border*, ed. by Anne Mette Hansen, Roger Lüdeke, Wolfgang Streit, Christina Urchueguía, and Peter Schillingsburg (Amsterdam: Rudopi, 2005), pp. 5–28 (p. 6).
31. Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*, (London: Flamingo, 1977), p. 245.
32. Genette, p. 158.
33. Victor Hugo, *The Works of Victor Hugo, Volume 8*, trans. unknown (New York: Jenson Society, 1907), p. 8.
34. Maud Ellmann, 'A Sphinx Without a Secret', in '*The Waste Land*' – T. S. Eliot, ed. by Michael North (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 258–74 (p. 178).
35. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 2015, pp. 55; 66.
36. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 2015, p. 53.
37. T. S. Eliot in B. C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 6th edn. (London: Faber, and Faber, 1994), p. 133.

38. Michael Heseltine (ed. and trans.), *Satyricon*, in *Petronius, with an English translation by Michael Heseltine, and Seneca Apocolocyntosis, with an English translation by W. H. D. Rouse* (London: Heinemann, 1913). Quoted in Ricks and McCue, p. 593. In Valerie Eliot's editorial notes to the 1971 annotated edition of the poem, 'Sibyl' is misspelled 'Sybil'. See T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. by Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 126.
39. Grover Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, 2nd edn. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 303.
40. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book XIV: 101–153: *Aeneas and the Sybil of Cumae*, trans. by A. S. Kline (Charlottesville, VA: The Ovid Collection at the University of Virginia Electronic Text Centre, 2000) <<http://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph14.htm>> [accessed 11 August 2021].
41. Michael Heseltine (ed. and trans), *Satyricon*, revised by E. H. Warmington, in *Petronius, with an English Translation by Michael Heseltine, Revised by E. H. Warmington, and Seneca Apocolocyntosis, with an English Translation by W. H. D. Rouse* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 101.
42. Hugh Kenner, 'The Urban Apocalypse', in *Eliot in His Time: Essays on the Fiftieth Anniversary of 'The Waste Land'*, ed. by A. Walton Litz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 23–50 (p. 38).
43. Ricks and McCue, pp. 593–94.
44. In Ricks and McCue, p. 593.
45. Ricks and McCue, p. 593.
46. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by William M. Rossetti (London: Ellis. 1911), p. 240.
47. In Ricks and McCue, p. 593.
48. See line 18, 'I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter', as well as lines 99–103, 'The change of Philomel [...] "Jug Jug" to dirty ears', and lines 203–6, 'Twit twit twit | Jug jug jug [...]', and line 428, '*Quando fiam uti chelidon* – O swallow swallow'. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 2015, pp. 55–71.
49. Eliot 1971, p. 11. 'In The Cage' alludes to the title of Henry James' 1898 story about a thwarted telegraphist. Interestingly, this story is also about an instance of feeble translation, in that the telegraphist falls victim to her mistranslations between Morse code and English.
50. Ricks and McCue, p. 593.
51. Eliot 1971, p. 13.
52. Burton Blistein, *The Design of 'The Waste Land'* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), p. 175.
53. Martin Scofield, *T. S. Eliot: The Poems* (London: Faber and Faber 1988), p. 18.
54. André Schüller, *A Life Composed: T. S. Eliot and the Morals of Modernism* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002), p. 140.
55. Heseltine, 1969, p. 99.
56. T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume I*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (London: Faber and Faber 2015), pp. 5–9 (p. 9).
57. Ellmann, p. 178.
58. In Ricks and McCue, p. 593, emphasis my own.
59. Charlton Thomas Lewis and Charles Short, 'Ampulla', in *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879). Online edn. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=ampulla>> [accessed

- 11 August 2021]. In this discovery I am indebted to my friend and colleague Adam Gargani at the University of Leeds for his knowledge of Ancient Greek and his encouragement with this research.
60. Horace, *Ars Poetica*, bilingual edn., trans. by Jennifer Ferriss-Hill, in *Horace's Ars Poetica: Family, Friendship, and the Art of Living*, by Jennifer Ferriss-Hill (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. xi–xli. Bombast here is *ampullas*, in the plural.
 61. J. H. Quincey, 'The Metaphorical Sense of *ΛΗΚΥΘΟΣ* and *Ampulla*', *The Classical Quarterly* 43, no. 1/2 (1949), pp. 32–44 (p. 32).
 62. Collins, 2015.
 63. J. F., 'Shantih, Shantih, Shantih: Has the Reader Any Rights Before the Bar of Literature?', in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 104–5 (p. 104).
 64. Michael Heseltine (ed. and trans.), *Satyricon*, in *Petronius, with an English translation by Michael Heseltine, and Seneca Apocolocyntosis, with an English translation by W. H. D. Rouse* (London: Heinemann, 1913) pp. 85–87.
 65. Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 10.
 66. T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: Vol. 2, The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber and Faber, 2014), pp. 105–14 (p. 106).
 67. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 13.