

Lo Scudo di Achille  
Ricerche interdisciplinari  
3

Collana diretta da  
Mario Martino e Mena Mitrano

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**LITERATURE AND SCIENCE, 1922-2022:  
MODERNIST AND POSTMODERNIST  
PERSPECTIVES**

edited by  
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La collana pubblica studi che esplorano le intersezioni tra le varie discipline sia per ricostruire la genesi di fenomeni artistici e teorie dell'arte e della comunicazione, sia per cogliere le tendenze più recenti della cultura contemporanea. Al fine di garantire la qualità scientifica dei volumi pubblicati, la collana è *peer reviewed*.



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Davide Crosara

“HE KEEPS HIS EYES IN A PLASTIC BAG”: KAE TEMPEST’S URBAN ECOLOGIES

This article examines Kae Tempest’s poetic collection *Hold Your Own* (2014)<sup>1</sup> from the perspective of urban ecocriticism. In *Hold Your Own* Tempest rewrites of the myth of Tiresias, a myth that acquires new meanings if read in the light of ecocriticism. From the very beginning of Tempest’s work the character’s metamorphosis is associated with the radical changes experienced by South London’s urban landscape. In this respect, the collection suggests a possible dialogue with T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, a poem which has in turn been recently read through an ecocritical perspective.<sup>2</sup> With *Hold Your Own*, Tempest pursues an inter-textual work on ancient Greek culture already inaugurated with their first dramatic poem, *Brand New Ancients* (2013).<sup>3</sup> However, while the previous work (first staged as a long performance poem) narrated the stories of a plurality of contemporary deities,<sup>4</sup> *Hold Your Own* offers a more intimate, quasi-diaristic structure, providing a perspective that progressively enlarges its focus from personal to collective issues, including poignant meditations on an impending ecological catastrophe. It is made

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<sup>1</sup> Kae Tempest, *Hold Your Own* (Picador: London, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Modernism was considered for a long time deeply imbued with issues such as technology, industrialization, urban experimentalism. An ecocritical interpretation of the phenomenon has gained momentum only in the last decade, following the so-called “second wave” ecocriticism. Ecocritical readings of modernist poetry are still quite unfrequent. See Elizabeth Black, *Introduction*, in *The Nature of Modernism. Ecocritical Approaches to the Poetry of Edward Thomas, T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell and Charlotte Mew* (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-9.

<sup>3</sup> Kae Tempest, *Brand New Ancients* (London: Picador, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> *Brand New Ancients* makes use of classical structural devices like cathartic resolution and epic open-endedness, which are only hinted at in *Hold Your Own*, a work where epic resolutions are much more problematic. On the use of classic culture in *Brand New Ancients* see Justine McConnell, ““We Are Still Mythical”: Kate Tempest’s *Brand New Ancients*,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 22 (2014), pp. 195-206.

of a long prologue (*Tiresias*, the longest poem in the collection) and four sections: 'Childhood', 'Womanhood', 'Manhood' and 'Blind Profit'. Each section is opened by quotations from ancient Greek sources, all related to the character of Tiresias.<sup>5</sup> The five-part structure indicates two parallel movements. The first movement is the life journey of Tiresias and at the same time the narrative of a character's life experiences in XX1st century London, from childhood to maturity (these episodes containing clear autobiographical elements). This character, alternatively female and male,<sup>6</sup> can be identified with the poetic voice of the collection. A voice in charge of narrating Tiresias' history, too. This rhetorical device pairs the mythical element with what Tempest - in *Brand New Ancients* - defines "everyday odysseys".<sup>7</sup> *Hold Your Own* is at the same time the diary of a gay poet's upbringing (from violence and discrimination to self-realization through the art of the spoken word) and the diary or history of Tiresias, now an old man living in the suburbs of south London and bullied by the local teenagers. The London setting and the centrality attributed to Tiresias constitute important connecting elements between *Hold Your Own* and *The Waste Land*; Eliot famously defined Tiresias "the most important personage in the poem".<sup>8</sup> However, there is also a significant second movement at play in *Hold Your Own*, that from the private to the public sphere, from the narrative of individual traumatic experiences to meditations on human actions and their effects on the earth. This second movement, culminating in the final section of the collection, provides a bitter anatomy of contemporary society and a call for regeneration through myth, deepening the dialogue with Eliot's modernist tradition and, as I hope to demonstrate, offering the possibility of an ecocritical interpretation of *The Waste Land* itself.

The opening poem of the volume -*Tiresias*- relocates the blind prophet's vicissitudes in XX1st century London, where the suburbs are

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<sup>5</sup> Tempest quotes from all the classical narratives of Tiresias, particularly those included in *Oedipus Rex*, *The Odyssey*, *The Metamorphosis*.

<sup>6</sup> *Hold Your Own* anticipates Tempest's coming out as non-binary, and changing their name from Kate to Kae.

<sup>7</sup> Tempest, *Brand New Ancients*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, ed. L. Rainey (Devon: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 72.

progressively turned into gentrified areas and the people are constantly staring into their phones, the only 'vision' they are eager to accept.

The imaginative collaboration of the reader/listener is immediately invoked:

Picture the scene:  
A boy of fifteen.  
With the usual dreams  
And the usual routine.

A young child, Tiresias wakes up and gets ready for school. Hood up and headphones on, he sings hip-hop lyrics and avoids contact with the local bullies. However, instead of the route leading to school, that day he crosses "into the woods", where "he takes the old path".<sup>9</sup> The Ovidian myth is retold, but the scenery is quite different. There is no proper wood or forest to enter, but a path among bare clearings, rubbish and scattered, rusty objects.

There is the rope swing,  
There is the bath lying broken.  
There is his name in the bark.  
There are the trees,  
So slim and so stark  
In the thin little woodland.  
Hardly a forest,  
The last of the green washed clean by the grey.  
There is the bike chain that nobody wanted,  
There is a child's shoe  
– hope they're ok.<sup>10</sup>

It is here that Tiresias sees the two snakes. Their mating corresponds to the boy's discovery of sexuality, a rite of passage from childhood to adolescence.

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<sup>9</sup> Tempest, "Tiresias," in *Hold Your Own*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

Snakes. Two snakes!  
Coiling, uncoiling  
Boiling and cooling  
Oil in a cauldron  
Foil in a river  
Soil on a mood ring.

He stares:  
They spoil each other.  
They do things  
He has only dreamt of doing.

His blood's alive inside him, fizzing.  
He shuts his eyes and watches blotches  
Underneath his lids for minutes.  
But peeks before he knows he's peeking.<sup>11</sup>

He finally reaches for a stick and completes the action that turns him into a girl. New knowledge comes with the new identity: as a woman, Tiresias has to adapt to a sexist, patriarchal society:

She learns to be small and discreet.  
She learns to be thankful for all that she eats.  
She learns how to smile  
Without meaning an inch of it.<sup>12</sup>

Growing up, she learns how to cope with fits of anxiety and depression. She takes small drugs, she goes through the experience of prostitution, she survives. She finds a match, an older man, and they fall in love. But she decides to seek out for her past, returning to the places of her childhood. The search for home leads to the same "small clearing between the trees".<sup>13</sup> The urban landscape hasn't changed much. As before, the old pastoral poetry metamorphoses into the rhythms, objects, and slang of contemporary metropolis.

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<sup>11</sup> *Tempest*, *Hold Your Own*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*, p. 10.



There is a shopping trolley  
There are some keys  
There is a hawthorn  
There's a horse chestnut  
There's a used condom  
There's an old desk lamp  
There's a nice conker...  
Is that blood or ketchup?  
Birds in the branches

Light in the darkness  
Like sand in the toes of the bushes<sup>14</sup>

As was the case earlier, the suburban scenery prepares Tiresias' transformation: this time she metamorphoses from woman to man; or better, a human.

Tiresias.  
A full grown human.  
Moves on from what he cannot fathom.  
He swears his past will not consume him.

And so the man with many pasts  
Matures into his present,  
But he feels his waters move  
In the last arc of the crescent,  
And as the moon expands to full  
He feels his blood respond,  
But as all humans know to do,  
He holds it in  
And soldiers on.<sup>15</sup>

This stanza anticipates Tempest's search for a new conception of the human. This attempt at redefining human identity renews the regenera-

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ivi*, p. 13.

tion myths of *The Waste Land* and resonates with ethical undertones which will bear a more overtly political import in the following sections of the collection. Tiresias is now an old man living a quiet life with his husband. He does pottery, he joins the local choir. Meanwhile, on Mount Olympus the old fight between Zeus and Hera resumes. Accused of having the usual new love affair, Zeus defends himself affirming that “*Women like it more than Men*”.<sup>16</sup> His wife is of the opposite opinion, and only Tiresias, who has experienced both identities, can solve the quarrel. In these stanzas the lines are very close to the Ovidian source. Tiresias is abducted by Zeus, obliged to express his opinion, and blinded by a wrathful Hera. He returns to earth changed. He has received the gift of prophecy, but this new condition marginalizes the character even more. An old blind man in rags, he roams across London streets muttering words that nobody understands. However, the speaker of the poem thinks that humanity has a lot to learn from the blind prophet.

You're the crazy on the corner  
Old, and smelling weird  
Queuing for electric  
With birdbones in your beard.

You stagger on regardless,  
Swaying in the street  
Summoning an oracle  
That can't be arsed to meet.

While we assemble selves online  
And stare into our phones,  
You are bright and terrifying,  
Breath and flesh and bone.

Tiresias – you teach us  
What it means: to hold your own.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ivi*, p.15. Italics in the original.

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 23-24.

The prefatory poem ends with an invocation to the old prophet. Tiresias retains two gifts – vision and corporeality – that humanity, despite our incessant staring at screens and the potentially infinite multiplication of our selves, is about to lose. The following sections of the collection are structured as a diary where the harsh growth of a non-binary individual intermingle with Tiresias’ vicissitudes, retold from childhood to maturity. The two characters follow the same steps through South London: the schools where every non-conformity is suspect, the pubs and parties where bullying or harassment are the rule (*Sixteen*), the clearings where the miracle of the two separated snakes occurs again, but this time the *Snakes in the grass*<sup>18</sup> are a young couple making love while the future poet walks her dog in the park. Tiresias’ metamorphosis, and the first intimations of a prophetic destiny, coincide with the poetic persona coming of age: her first love (*On Clapton Pond at Dawn*), depression and drugs, prejudice, and self-acceptance, the first poem (*Penance*), the first bars on a stage (*The cypher*). Tiresias goes from boy to woman to man, every time losing their social relationships and social position, but at the same time gaining awareness and memory. Mirroring Tiresias’ transformation, the poet feels their body change and has to adapt accordingly. The discovery of poetry goes hand in hand with the consciousness that only an identity that accepts both female and male principles is truly human.

Be all that you are, all woman all soft.  
All man. All soft. All flesh. All bone. All organ.  
I find you more than yourself. I hear you talk to yourself in  
the night-time.  
But don’t worry, I won’t say a word to your friends.<sup>19</sup>

Tempest transports T.S. Eliot’s Tiresias from the XXth to the XXIst century. *The Waste Land* and *Hold Your Own* retain striking similarities with regard to both form and content. Myth is used by both poets as a connecting element, providing coherence to the poems. The use of sections or parts provides a further unifying tool. However, formal unity is

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<sup>18</sup> Tempest, “Snakes in the grass,” in *Hold Your Own*, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Tempest, “Man down,” in *Hold Your Own*, pp. 81-84.

hardly attained; it is rather constantly questioned by the recourse to fragment and a plurality of voices (Philomel, Madame Sosostris, Mr. Eugenides, the Typist and the Clerk, among others) in *The Waste Land*, while it is countered by the constant interchange between fiction and autofiction in *Hold Your Own*, where both Tiresias and the speaker mirror the author. In both works, the blind prophet is simultaneously a spectator and an active figure, leading the essential metamorphic movement of the poems. Eliot's soothsayer is an hermaphrodite, an "Old man with wrinkled female breasts"<sup>20</sup> who subsumes all the characters, identities and transformations of the poem. However, he can only testify violence and the impossibility of renewal, while the lost souls he describes remain "caught in the wheel of birth and death".<sup>21</sup> These scattered identities are the ruins that Eliot's work tries to 'shore up'. Differently from Eliot's, Tempest's character is gender-fluid and in perpetual motion, even when exiled or outcast. His identity is deeply related to the intermedial quality of Tempest's work. *Hold Your Own* is a poem but also a piece of performance poetry. It can be read silently or performed, with or without music. The chosen medium changes the text: the printed verses become bars and are modified onstage. Similarities and differences between *Hold Your Own* and *The Waste Land* can be also noticed in the ecocritical perspective which these works open. Myth is related, in both poets, to the search for renewal through ritual. Poetry retains, in both Eliot and Tempest, a restorative role. The final arrival of such renewal of the world, nature's wheel spinning forward after sterility, is at least problematic in both authors. Nonetheless, while vision is evoked but parodied in *The Waste Land*, it is explicitly attained, but hardly shared, in *Hold Your Own*. Here Tiresias and the poet experience prophecy and poetic inspiration as the culminating points of their metamorphosis.

She felt skies and bricks and rain.  
She felt it all  
It made her fall  
And weep beneath a crawling dawn  
When everthing was ruined; torn.

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<sup>20</sup> Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land*, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy R. Comley, "From Narcissus to Tiresias: T. S. Eliot's Use of Metamorphosis," *The Modern Language Review* 74 (1979): p. 286.

She felt ill.  
But she felt still<sup>22</sup>

Often described as an electric shock, vision reconnects the character with his inner self (or, as Tempest states in *On Connection*, a recent collection of essays) with what Jung called “spirit of the depths”.<sup>23</sup> Ancient, unconscious, and responding to the invisible world, this spirit speaks through dreams and visions. It “communicates through archetypes, masks, animal shapes” and “it is drawn to nature and wilderness”.<sup>24</sup> Once vision has reestablished this primeval cosmic connection, it is able to open the poetic voice to the whole community of humans. However, it is very hard to close the circuit: paralysed by numbness and alienated from nature, humanity has given up listening. Nature and the poet experience the same isolation from humans.

*What we lose*

When I was young  
I could speak to animals,  
these days  
I don’t know what to say.

They used to sniff my ears,  
but now  
they smell my fear  
and walk away<sup>25</sup>

This impasse characterizes the first three parts of *Hold Your Own*. Hardly attained, vision is often described as a wound, or an impairment. Or it is anaesthetised by the screen, the dominating prosthesis of the eye in contemporary society. In the fourth and last part of the collection, significantly titled *Blind Profit*, the poet searches for a way out of this im-

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<sup>22</sup> Tempest, “The woman the boy became,” in *Hold Your Own*, pp. 45–49.

<sup>23</sup> Kae Tempest, *On Connection* (London: Faber and Faber, 2022), p. 37. The quote is from Jung’s *Red Book*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ivi*, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Tempest, “What we lose”, in *Hold Your Own*, p. 57.

passee by means of a more overt resort to what can be termed as an urban ecocritical perspective.<sup>26</sup>

Sharp observer of the urban scene, Tempest finds in the streets a London a vantage point for a more general understanding of reality on a political level. The false perspective that both the poet and Tiresias try to overcome as individuals applies to social life, too: we tend to consider as eternal and universal values the vision imposed by the logic of profit. Tempest's Lewisham exemplifies the full extent of capitalistic exploitation: housing problems, poverty, discrimination, underpaid labour. A political attack that culminates into Tempests' anxiety towards climate change, capitalistic rapacity, and the narcissistic power of smartscreens. The last section of *Hold Your Own* can be read in the light of 'first wave'<sup>27</sup> green romanticism:<sup>28</sup> it is in some respects a dirge to the end of the pastoral world, which finds some continuities with Jonathan Bate's conception of "romantic ecology".<sup>29</sup> But, more significantly, Tempest's insistence on notions such as connection and empathy is attuned to a more recent trend in ecocritical studies, urban ecocriticism. The study of cities as ecosystems menaced by pollution, social inequalities and real estate speculation can find a literary equivalent in many post-apocalyptic fictions. As indicated by Andrew Ross, for a great part of the XIXth and XXth century the city was "the obvious backdrop for tales of power and corruption"<sup>30</sup> that found

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<sup>26</sup> A perspective almost dominating Tempest's last poetic collection, *Divisible by Itself and One* (2023), and already anticipated by T.S. Eliot in *The Idea of a Christian Society*: "Organisation of society on the principle of profit... is leading both To the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and to the Exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay". Quoted in Elizabeth Black, *The Nature of Modernism*, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> Ecocritical discourse is generally divided into a 'first' and a 'second' wave. An essential text summarizing the first development of ecocriticism is Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (2002), a volume which reads romantic poetry through an ecocritical lens.

<sup>28</sup> Tempest explicitly declares their debt towards British romanticism, with particular reference to William Blake.

<sup>29</sup> See Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991). See also his seminal study *The Song of the Earth* (London: Picador, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Ross (Interviewed by Michael Bennett), "The Social Claim on Urban

in detective and crime fiction the privileged genres. The city remained the "moral landscape" of fictions dominated by human agency, functioning more "like a Greek chorus".<sup>31</sup> Conversely, the end of the XXth and the beginning of the XXIst century seem dominated by dystopian science fiction and disaster genre. This shift can be explained in terms of a new awareness "about ecosystems and our doubts about their carrying capacity".<sup>32</sup> London, which already was a character in its own right in *The Waste Land*, in *Hold Your Own* becomes a living environment that reacts to human actions and to any change in the ecosystem at large. In the last section of *Hold Your Own* this post-apocalyptic imagery is powerful and disquieting. A significant example of this is *Cruise Control*, where climate change is represented as an impending apocalypse that nobody wants to see.

### *Cruise control*

The weather will change,  
We'll think it malicious.  
Speak hurricanes' names and worry in secret.  
The waves will build somewhere way out in the ocean,  
And flatten whole towns when they break on the beaches.

It won't be enough. We'll plough on  
The mightiest we've ever been.  
Standing like gods on the shoulders of history.  
Or tossing our curls in the sun.

**We'll stare down at the screens in our hands**  
**And smile at the photos.** Didn't we laugh.  
Strange voices will sing from street corners.  
Powerful men will mumble it into the backs  
Of the people they fuck. This is the end.

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Ecology," in *The Nature of Cities. Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*, ed. Michael Bennett and David W. Teague (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

Health and safety slogans will resonate like ancient proverbs.  
*Don't use the lifts in the case of fire.*  
*Make yourself aware of your nearest exit.*  
We'll bury our heads in the sand of our lovers.

The waters will boil in the oceans.  
Dead things will float on the waves.  
The ice caps will thicken to slush puppies  
As hurricanes twist  
Like boxers in sleeping bags, trying to throw punches.

There'll be fires in the forests, floods in the cities.  
And men too rich to swim will die.  
**The skin on our children will toughen and harden.**  
**And still we will debase ourselves**  
**For that piece of land or mineral**  
**That rock or bomb or golden egg**  
That might allow one dying person to imagine  
They are worth more than another.<sup>33</sup>

Aside from the very powerful imagery and the bitter irony that characterizes the whole poem, I'd like to concentrate for a moment on the third and last stanza. The lines I have emphasized show (stanza 3) how seeing and looking are two very different things for Tempest. Staring at screens is exactly what blinds vision and denies any possibility of seeing a dying planet. This blindness to prophecy and shared moral values turns into an act of self-destruction at the end of the poem. The last stanza meditates on the overwhelming role of mass consumption, which becomes consumption of the earth itself, exhaustion of its resources: debased beings grab the last piece of mineral as parasites dismembering a dying body.

The reference to the hardening of children's skin in this stanza reverses the possibility of metamorphosis as positive change or renewal. While Tiresias's blindness is an impairment which allows prophecy, the metamorphosis delineated in *Cruise Control* is explicitly characterized

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<sup>33</sup> Tempest, "Cruise control", in *Hold Your Own*, pp. 100-101. [emphases added]



as a regression, a spinning back of history that announces an impending ecological catastrophe. See in this context the dystopian imagery conveyed by another poem, *And as We Followed Dinosaurs*, where a post-human species displays in museums the only significant remnants of our civilization, smartphones:

**And as we followed dinosaurs**

Whatever follows us  
Will hunt for footprints in the lowlands,  
And piece together fragments of our habits  
From the internet.

A fossilised smartphone preserved behind glass  
For the new young to traipse past on school trips,  
Yawning.<sup>34</sup>

As I suggested at the beginning of this study, the ecocritical import of Tempest’s verses can also be used to read *The Waste Land* retrospectively, imbuing Eliot’s poem with new meanings. Ecocritical readings of modernist poetry usually tend to advocate for the presence of nature (rivers and riverbanks, woods or parks, domestic or more rarely wild animals) in the modern metropolis. These places and creatures often act as correlatives of the city’s topography (roads as rivers, squares as parks, crowds as flocks or herds). In my opinion it is more interesting to look for – as Tempest does – traces of the disappearance of nature from the city. The characters of *Hold Your Own* move through small clearings full of rubbish, backyards, bushes, or a “thin little woodland”<sup>35</sup> which is “hardly a forest”.<sup>36</sup> They embody what has been termed an ecocriticism without nature,<sup>37</sup> namely the depiction of nature as absence. As

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<sup>34</sup> Tempest, “And as we followed dinosaurs”, in *Hold Your Own*, p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Tempest, “Tiresias,” in *Hold Your Own*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> See Timothy Morton, *Imagining Ecology Without Nature*, in *Ecocriticism. The Essential Reader*, ed. Ken Hiltner (London & New York, Routledge, 2015), pp. 237-58. Morton underlines how romantic poetry could read in the Book of Nature a beyond, “but this Beyond is sick” (p. 243).

both *Tempest* and Eliot seem to imply, sometimes the withdrawal of nature from the city is tinged with Leopardian stoicism, and it can turn into a longing for a pastoral world gone forever. A world where the poet was the voice of the community. Eliot's and *Tempest's* Tiresias are urban wayfarers mapping this progressive loss of nature, expressing through their paths a humanity unable to reconnect with the earth. The end of *The Waste Land* seems to suggest an exit from the city, "following the journey through modern London, the poem ends in a desert landscape where the desire for water brings heightened awareness of the state of the land".<sup>38</sup> There is also the possibility of reading London itself as a desert waiting for the rain. *Tempest's* imagery privileges an apocalyptic flood. However, their characters never leave the city: the final vision - as we shall see - is offered to people exiting from pubs and bars. In both poets the desire to overcome sterility and incommunicability persists, kept alive by a poetry which echoes both the disappearance and the persistence of nature.

In this context it is important to notice that a last significant metamorphosis occurs in *Hold Your Own* – and possibly in *The Waste Land* – that of this poetic voice finally identifying with Tiresias. In the last section of *Tempest's* collection the two voices become explicitly coextensive, sharing the delineation of visionary ecologies that range, as we have seen, from urban hymns to visionary dystopias. From this perspective I find particularly relevant that the poem opening the last section of *Hold Your Own* is *The prophet Tiresias*, while the last lyric of the volume is (equally significantly) titled *Prophet*. This choice adumbrates the possibility of reading Tiresias as a poet, or the poet as a prophet.

An old tramp that nobody wants to listen to, this character walks out from a café, surrounded by everyday mutterings, and bitterly aware of Eliot's circularity of history:

### Prophet

See him, the old man, blind as our greed,  
Alone in the caff with his meat and his gravy.  
Witness to every great nation that rose up in hope

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<sup>38</sup> Black, *The Nature of Modernism*, p. 106.

And fell prey to itself. *This is slavery.*  
Is that what he says to himself? Was it maybe  
A mumble that meant something else? Was it *baby*  
*I miss you?* He gets up slow from the table.  
Gripping his cane so he's able.<sup>39</sup>

This prophet seems unable to share the old visions; the people hearing "his incantations" only "think he's rapping lyrics",<sup>40</sup> or ask him for lottery numbers. Nonetheless these visions are offered to the reader, in a final attempt to reconnect the rapping singer or modern *aoidos* to us, XXIst century inhabitants of the city.

Buzzwords everywhere. Progress. Freedom.  
He picks his teeth with a dirty needle  
And kicks his feet to the latest jingles.  
Ain't got no time to be dating singles.  
Far too busy trying to make things simple.  
*This old tribe ain't nothing special.*  
*All my life I've watched men wrestle,*  
*Stealing land to fly their flags.*  
He keeps his eyes in a plastic bag.

He keeps his eyes in a plastic bag.<sup>41</sup>

The choice between, metamorphosis or reification, rests on the readers, on their ability to see beyond the screen of greed and self-absorption, directing the gaze towards the earth. Meanwhile, the prophet's eyes are kept in a plastic bag. Another screen, or perhaps another token of the fragile but lasting connection between nature and the city.

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<sup>39</sup> Tempest, "Prophet," in *Hold Your Own*, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> Tempest, "Party time," in *Hold Your Own*, p. 106.

<sup>41</sup> Tempest, "Prophet," in *Hold Your Own*, p. 108.

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