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Dialogic Voices in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

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Abstract

Since the publication of Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal collection of essays, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), which fostered a strong belief in the social and dialogic disposition of language, it has been held that among literary genres, the novel is truly dialogic and the poetic forms such as epic and other kinds of lyric are monologic as they merely project a single voice of the author. However, probing deeply into *The Waste Land*, we realize that as a poetic genre, T. S. Eliot's masterpiece reflects and incorporates various discourses of the past into its own discourse, all of which being in dialogue with each other give voice to the malaise and agony of the Western civilization. Additionally, the diverse voices in the poem, which are mingled together and flown into each other, shed light on the very fact that there is no monological voice relating to Eliot in the poem, since the different voices therein do not allow the authorial voice to come to the fore. Focusing on the weave of voices in *The Waste Land*, this paper, therefore, explores how the numerous discourses in the poem partake in a dialogue and relate to other discourses. It demonstrates that *The Waste Land* represents an ongoing dialogue between multiple voices within which an infernal vision of Europe is expressed. The findings of this paper make it clear that: first, *The Waste Land* is a plural text due to the presence of assorted voices in the poem; second, the poem has a dialogic and therefore intertextual nature, for the voices in the poem are related to each other and are involved in a dialogue, which subverts the authority of any single voice namely Eliot's authorial voice.

Key Words: Dialogic, Utterance, Intertextuality, Polyphony, Heteroglossia, Centrifugal

1. Introduction

The year 1981 when *The Dialogic Imagination* was published by Mikhail Bakhtin is a revolutionary year for most critics and language scholars in that it is a radical break away from abstract Saussurian linguistics with its focus on the rules and conventions of language to the social imperative of language viewed in its "concrete living totality" (Bakhtin, *Problems*

of Dostoevsky's Poetics 181). The particular emphasis of the book, laid by Bakhtin, is on the dialogic disposition of language. Bakhtin regards language as a social phenomenon which comes to exist in the social interaction between different speakers in specific social situations. By highlighting the social specificity of language, Bakhtin aims to indicate that language always "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (qtd. in Allen 29). It always involves

two or more speakers speaking at the same time while they are expressing and exchanging ideas in a specific social context. It is very important to note that among literary genres, Bakhtin finds the novel as the vivid illustration of dialogism and the social dimension of language, since in his view, it adapts and incorporates “various ‘languages’ of society into its own discourse” (Booker 110). In other words, it reflects the “image” of various discourses in a dialogue indicating the dialogic nature of society which is dominated by “the play between voices” (Worton & Still 169). According to Bakhtin, in the dialogic world of the novel, in which all voices partake in a dialogue, we can find no singular or monologic voice standing objectively above other discourses and expressing a universal truth. Bakhtin holds that truth does not come to exist within an individual consciousness; rather it is “born” dialogically among people in a social interaction (Farmer xv). While Bakhtin gives credit to the novel as a genre which presents a dialogue between a network of voices, he diminishes the significance of the poetic genre by proclaiming that poetry is characterized by monologic, “unitary,” and “indisputable” discourse as it defines itself as the “language of the gods” and a “priestly language” (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 287). Bakhtin claims that poetry limits itself to a single voice of the author and is deprived of “the influence of . . . social dialects” (ibid.). Accordingly, this paper is an endeavor to study and analyze T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in the light of Bakhtinian hermeneutics to reveal Bakhtin’s contradictions in the context of poetic discourse. The paper

argues that *The Waste Land* is not monologic discourse which merely reflects Eliot’s authorial voice. Conversely, it is a dialogic text, for it depicts an ongoing dialogue between various voices of society which collectively through their interaction with one another pronounce the truth of modern times that is the cultural decadence of Western civilization.

2. Discussion

I

The Waste Land, the chief oeuvre of Modernism, was published in October 1922 first in America in a literary review entitled *Dial* and then in England in the first issue of *Criterion*. Published the same year when James Joyce published his *Ulysses* (1922) and served as a complement to it, both in its form and method, *The Waste Land* together with Joyce’s *Ulysses* give voice to a new epoch called Modernism which finally appeared “on the scene of public debate” long after forty years in which it had been released into the “public consciousness” (Raine 71). For many critics such as Rebecca Beasley (2007), *The Waste Land* is the representation of a “modernist template” from which other modernist works are created (79). It is a product of an era of “high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism” in which art turns from realism toward “style, technique, and spatial form” for the deeper penetration of life (ibid.). Born after a chaotic time when Britain declared war on the Central Powers in 1914, and composed when Eliot was suffering from a mental breakdown due to the problems he faced in his marriage with his wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood, the poem

attempts to weave into its very texture and structure the sense of disintegration, chaos, and fragmentation of the twentieth century modern life (Cooper 64). To this end, the poet assembles fragments and quotations from literary past into the poem or a “heap of broken images” to portray a battlefield after the battle; a shattered world which is devoid of meaning and order (Childs 74).

The poem with its disjointed and fragmented nature baffled many readers and critics.

Critics such as Edmund Wilson (1922) even dismissed the poem declaring that, Eliot has written “a puzzle” rather than a poem and that his poem awakens no interest in the reader (“The Poetry of Drouth” 136). In *Twentieth Century in Poetry: A Critical Survey* (1999), Peter Childs asserted that *The Waste Land* “alienated” its readers due to its “dry intellectualism” which resulted in “word play, erudition, and formalism” (63). Lawrence Rainey in *Revisiting the Waste Land* (2005) affirmed that the poem was “IMMENSE. MAGNIFICENT. TERRIBLE” (sic) (103). He suggested that the poem’s chaotic nature could be “impaired” by taking into account Eliot’s notes to the poem (ibid.). Eliot welcomed the opinions of these critics. He accepted that his poem was difficult and hence, needed clarification. So, he added his notes to *The Waste Land* which traced the sources of many references he had used in it. Besides adding notes to the poem, Eliot, following the mythic method used in *Ulysses*, emphasized that the mythic method in his poem gives structure and order to it. In “*Anthropology*” (2006), Patricia Rae maintains that Eliot justified the use of myth

in his poem in his essay, “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*” (1923) in which he declared that the mythic method in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* gives order, design, and coherence to the chaos of modern life (97). In this regard, Eliot asserts, “It [the mythic method] is a way of controlling, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (qtd. in Scofield 128).

As a dialogic landscape, expressing the sense of cultural anarchy, *The Waste Land*, similar to the novel genre, orchestrates and organizes various discourses of past into its own discourse. The poem is a tissue which is woven with numerous discourses belonging to different times and cultures. As Childs asserts, the poem is “a mosaic of social discourses and ideological viewpoints” in which several speech genres including “pub conversation and autobiographies of aristocracy, Wagner and nursery rhymes, the Upanishad and the Bible, commerce and Dante” coexist alongside one another (81). It is crucial to realize that Bakhtinian concept of “stylization,” which he describes as one of the characteristics of the novel and defines as the appropriation of the discourses within society (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 193), holds true for *The Waste Land*. As a poetic discourse, *The Waste Land* adapts voices from literary past and assimilates them into its texture. As Russell Elliott Murphy (2007) suggests, Eliot weaves the discourses of past centuries and millennia into the structure of the poem (432). A reader of *The Waste Land* can discover within the poem utterances

belonging to various sources of culture including the utterances of Ezekiel, Buddha, St. Augustine, Spenser, Shakespeare, Webster, Middleton, Dickens, Wagner, Baudelaire, Conrad, and Huxley.

The fact that *The Waste Land* is a tissue of discourses indicates that the poem is plural, since it echoes diverse voices in its texture. The poem is regarded as “a babel of voices” (Davidson 125); that is, the voices are mingled together so much so that it is difficult to recognize who is speaking. In *T. S. Eliot: The Poems* (1988), Martin Scofield affirms, “reading *The Waste Land* is like turning the turning-knob on a powerful radio receiver and catching a succession of various voices” (110). The voices in *The Waste Land* are not only associated with the voices of figures from literary past such as Dante, Shakespeare, Spenser, Middleton, Wagner, and Chaucer but also they are connected with the voices of characters, i.e. Marie, Madame Sosostris, the nervous woman, the pub woman, and the Thames daughters. Besides literary voices and the characters’ voices, we have also prophetic voices and non-human voices in the poem. The prophetic voices in the first part of the poem, “*The Burial of the Dead*,” including the voice of the Cumaean Sybil, the prophetic old woman, and the prophetic voice of Ezekiel, are joined in Part III, “*The Fire Sermon*,” by Buddha’s and St. Augustine’s voices and in part V, “*What the Thunder Said*,” by voices from Hindu Vedas, the sacred writings of Hinduism, particularly Upanishad (Cooper 73). The non-human voices in the poem also include the voices of the nightingale, the cock, and the thunder.

The plurality of voices and the dialogic nature of *The Waste Land* are best emphasized by the original title of the poem, “*He Do the Police in Different Voices*.” This title which is a quotation from Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) describes “the performative elements” of the poem by referring to Dickens’s character, Sloppy, who dramatizes voices in the novel while reading a newspaper. In his *T. S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* (2004), Richard Badenhause mentions that Eliot, like Sloppy, sought to “perform” the poem by dramatizing the voices within it and he did so in the summer of 1922 when he “sang it, chanted it, rhymed it” for the Woolfs (108). In this sense, as Childs rightly states, the poem, like Dickens’s character, “orchestrates and mimics a polyphony of speech” (81).

Considering *The Waste Land* as a weave of voices, we come to the realization that the poem can be characterized as “heteroglossia” and “polyphony,” concepts which Bakhtin defines as the existence of multiple discourses in a text and the simultaneous combination of different voices, respectively, and he only attributes to the novel. As already mentioned, identical to the novel, *The Waste Land* reflects varied discourses in its structure. In the poem, there are “vulgar discourses as well as polite ones, vernacular as well as literary, and oral as well as written” (Childs 80). The poem is also a polyphonic text, for there are moments in the poem within which the voices dissolve and transmute into each other and consequently, it becomes impossible for the reader to recognize who is speaking. In his “*Improper Desire*:

Reading *The Waste Land*” (1994), Harriet Davidson declares, “the many abrupt changes and mutations in the voices of the poem make vague the proper boundaries between identities, increasing the reader’s confusion about who is speaking” (126). Similarly, in his “T. S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*” (2006), David Chinitz suggests that “the coexisting and competing voices” in the poem make it difficult for the reader to identify where one voice stops and the next begins (326). Hence, the points of view in the poem shift swiftly and abruptly and are replaced by one another. The voice of Geoffrey Chaucer, “April is the cruelest month breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land . . .” (I. 1-2), at the very beginning of the poem, is suddenly replaced by the voice of Marie, “Bin gar keine Russin, stamm’ aus Litauen, echt deutsch” (I. 13). Marie’s voice in line 13 is then displaced by another voice in line 20, which is associated with the prophetic voice of Ezekiel uttering, “. . . Son of man, / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images . . .” (I. 20-23). This voice is also changed into the voice of Richard Wagner, “Frisch weht der Wind / Der Heimat zu / Mein Irisch Kind / Wo weilest du?” (I. 31-34). This pattern of shifting voices continues till the last part of the poem, “What the Thunder Said,” where we hear the voice of the thunder along with mingled voices belonging to other languages and cultures. Therefore, in *The Waste Land*, parallel to the novel, there is struggle between various “ideological viewpoints,” since the different voices blend “cacophonously in a collective speech” and compete with one another (Chinitz 326).

It is crucial to realize that Bakhtin’s notion of polyphony described as the chorus of voices within the novel is closely related to Eliotic concept of the collective temperament or personality in a literary work. In effect, Bakhtin’s notion of polyphony is a continuation and an elaboration of the Eliotic concept of the collective temperament, articulated many years ago. In his famous essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), Eliot declares that the poet should avoid the emotional excesses of Romantic poetry and be impersonal. He claims that “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” and insists that the poet should always depersonalize himself to create a literary work which is not the expression of his poetic individuality and emotions but an articulation of a collective personality or a collective literary tradition (17). For this very reason, Eliot uses many voices or personalities in *The Waste Land* instead of a single poetic individuality or monologic discourse in order to suppress his voice and to be impersonal. Additionally, Eliot, thinking that his own voice would not be sufficient for articulating the agony of a civilization, “falls back on the voices of literary precursors to buttress his modern dirge” (Badenhausen 99). The collective voices and personalities in the poem, though at first separate and disconnected, are joined together to communicate the sense of cultural decadence and spiritual dissatisfaction in the poem.

Thinking about *The Waste Land* as a dialogic and a polyphonic text, we deduce that the only voice that we do not hear in the

poem is the voice of Eliot which has been lost amid the colliding and blending of various voices (Raine 91). Indeed, there is no monologic voice of Eliot in the poem as the numerous voices, which struggle and compete with one another, do not allow Eliot's voice to come to the fore. It must be noted that the invisibility of Eliot's voice in *The Waste Land* once more highlights Eliot's theory of Impersonality which lines up with some of the positions later advanced by Bakhtin regarding the de-centering of the author's voice. In his *Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin makes a distinction between the two forces of language which he calls "centripetal" and "centrifugal." He declares that the "centripetal" force tends to "centralize" or "homogenize" the monologic discourse of the author while the "centrifugal" force seeks to "decentralize" and "disperse" the authoritative voice of the author (270). He claims that unlike poetry which unifies one discourse, the novel is "shaped by decentralizing, centrifugal forces" (273). Accordingly, similar to Eliot who believes that the poet should depersonalize himself in writing poetry, Bakhtin holds that the authorial voice must be decentralized, for beside the author's voice, there are numerous voices of society in the novel possessing their own ideological view points. Moreover, identical to Bakhtin, Eliot follows the notions of "dispersion" and "dissipation" in his poetry to indicate the "movement away from an authoritative centre" and to suggest the "centrifugal" nature of his poems (Lamos 45). Eliot, like his literary mentor, Pound, believes that in criticizing the social, political, and religious ideologies of the times, authors should

distance themselves from their materials, in the sense that a literary work's arguments should not be made in the author's voice, for that would turn it to "propaganda" (Beasley 88). For this very reason, Eliot and Pound always seek to construct their poems out of many voices so that the voices can speak directly to the reader without the "mediation or interpretation of the author" (ibid.). This procedure not only makes their poems impersonal but also protects them from being turned into propaganda. Therefore, Eliot is right in declaring, "You cannot create a very large poem without introducing a more impersonal point of view, or splitting it up into various personalities" (qtd. in ibid.).

With the absence of Eliot's voice, which he has consciously suppressed, the voices in *The Waste Land* particularly the discourses in "The Burial of the Dead," "The Game of Chess," and "The Fire Sermon" through their social exchange with one another articulate the malaise and agony of modern times. In her "A Contrast" (1923), Harriet Monroe mentions that *The Waste Land* is "the reaction of a suffering valetudinarian to the present after-the-war chaos in Europe with its tumbling-down of old customs and sanctities" (104). She asserts that with its shifting voices and scenes, the poem expresses everything about the "agony and bitter splendor of modern life" (ibid.). Each of the individual voices in the poem express their world views or their perceptions of the world in a dialogue and consequently, help to the construction of the central idea of the poem, which is concerned with Western cultural disintegration, since the dialogue between voices in a text indicates that its

dominant idea is formed dialogically due to the fact that in a dialogue, the theme of an utterance always meets with and relates to the themes of other words and utterances (Allen 21).

II

The dialogic discourses in the first part of the poem, "The Burial of the dead," utter the sense of spiritual draught and the death-in-life condition of the inhabitants of the waste land or modern world. The utterances articulated by these voices in a dialogue are not singular and monologic standing separately from other utterances. On the contrary, they have a dialogic and intertextual orientation, for they resonate with and relate to other utterances. Beginning with the epigraph of the poem, we can hear the voice of Sibyl, the prophetic old woman, in Gaius Petronius's *Satyricon*. Loved by Apollo, Sibyl was given an immortal life. However, she forgot to ask Apollo for "eternal youth" (Ackerley 24). Consequently, during the course of time, she withered and became older and older till she "shrank to the weight of a feather" (ibid.). Trying to escape her death-in-life existence, her only wish was to die because only death was a release from the pains of the living. Appreciating Sibyl's discourse, which indicates her immortal life, her aging, and her longing for death, we can relate her story with the story of modern civilization which has developed through the ages and has grown old. The only way for it to come to life again is death, since it is only through death that rebirth results (Childs 75).

Sibyl's utterance and her longing for death, which results in rebirth, is dialogically

connected to the literary discourse of Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* which describes the arrival of spring and a call for renewal: "When April with his sweet showers / The draught of March has pierced to the root, / And bathed every vein in such liquid, / By power of which this flower is engendered" (1-7). However, when we read the opening lines of Eliot's poem, we are surprised to find out that Chaucer's description of spring is totally different from the description of spring in the opening lines of the poem which regards April as the "cruellest month," for it stirs "dull roots" with spring rain and gives a new life to the dead land (I. 1, 4). In his *T. S. Eliot: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2009), Steve Ellis contends that Eliot through the "ironic rewriting" of the opening lines of *The Canterbury Tales* aims to indicate that, unlike Chaucer who considers spring as a sort of pilgrimage, a journey for spiritual regeneration which is accompanied by change and renewal, the inhabitants of the waste land reject any idea of rebirth (46). Despite the fact that *The Waste Land* like *The Canterbury Tales* is a sort of pilgrimage, it has none of the "humor or jollity, or boisterous comic voices" of the latter (ibid.). Furthermore, unlike Chaucer's pilgrims, Eliot's pilgrim is not sure of "the path to the holy place" (Childs 77). The poem takes the reader to the decayed London, to Carthage, to Phoenicia, to other cities of Europe; however, it never reaches to the holy shrine (ibid.).

After the bitter invocation of spring, we suddenly hear another voice speaking in German: "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm 'aus Litauen, echt deutsch" ("I am not Russian at

all: I am Lithuanian, authentic German”) (I. 12). This utterance belongs to Countess Marie Larisch of Austria who recollects her childhood experiences with her cousin, Archduke Franz-Ferdinand whose name reminds us of the heir to the throne of Austro-Hungarian empire who was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist and as a result, war broke out (Murphy 427). Marie’s words in lines 17 and 18 of the poem, “In the mountains, there you feel free. / I read much of the night, and go south in the winter,” is a rejoinder to Sibyl’s words, since all words in a dialogue are directed toward an answer. Parallel to Sibyl’s utterance, which suggests a longing for rebirth, Marie’s words point to the idea of regeneration. As Hugh Kenner (2007) suggests, Marie’s lines are the true indication of her boredom with life and with “human society” and her longing for change and renewal (16). He claims that the emptiness expressed by these lines represents “spiritual bankruptcy, deracinated ardor, and an illusion of liberty” (ibid.).

The ideas of emptiness and spiritual draught, which were formed within the dialogue of voices, are further followed by the words of Ezekiel and Madame Sosostris. The prophetic discourse of Ezekiel uttering, “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish? . . .” (I. 19-20), describes a desert and a barren landscape and in this way, depicts the spiritual aridity of the inhabitants of the waste land and portrays “the relics of once thriving civilization now sinking in the sand” (Chinitz 330). Ezekiel’s voice dialogically meets with the voice of Madame Sosostris which expresses the

degradation of religion in modern times. Madame Sosostris is a fortune teller who plays a pack of Tarot cards and by this means introduces most of the characters of the poem: “Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks . . . / Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel, / And here is the one-eyed merchant” (I. 49-50). It is worth noting that the pack of Tarot cards by which Madame Sosostris predicts the poem’s characters was originally used in ancient Egypt to foretell “the rise and the fall of flood waters of the Nile River” which were the source of life and fertility for the farmers (Weirick 19). However, in modern times, it has turned into a device for fortune telling. What can be deduced from Madame Sosostris’s discourse is that the inhabitants of modern world are spiritually lost, for they devalue God and seek other alternatives for Him i.e. “the divinations of Madame Sosostris” and her Tarot cards (Chinitz 327).

In the last section of “The Burial of the Dead,” we hear Charles Baudelaire’s utterance in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) and the literary discourse of Dante in *Inferno* which invoke prior discourses and answer to them. In response to the preceding utterances, i.e. Sibyl’s, Marie’s, Ezekiel’s, Madame Sosostris’s words, Baudelaire depicts London as an “Unreal City” (I. 60), in which people are “surrounded by death” and they lead a life of living death (Childs 78). In a similar vein, Dante, by articulating, “I had not thought death had undone so many” (I. 60), make a rejoinder to the previous discourses. He portrays a crowd flowing over London Bridge and compares them to the lost souls who flow into hell in

Inferno. In “‘Each in his Prison’: Damnation and Alienation in The Waste Land” (2009), Mathew J. Bolton affirms that similar to the damned souls in Inferno, who suffer within the hell’s “inner circles,” the inhabitants of the unreal city are spiritually lost as they look down at their feet (149). Akin to the souls in Dante’s Inferno, the Londoners have lost their spiritual capacity to recognize God. As is evident in lines 67 and 68, Saint Mary Woolnoth, the church of London, whose chimes once invited the faithful for pray, now has “a dead sound,” for the “religious congregation” of the past has become “a faithless crowd” (194).

III

The portrayal of failed civilization continues into the second section of the poem which is called “The Game of Chess.” Similar to “The Burial of the Dead” which paints a picture of a waste land through the dialogue of voices, this section offers another waste land from a different angle. As Scofield rightly affirms, the sterility prevalent in the first section recurs in the second part of the poem where sterility in human relationships can be detected (126). Through the discourses of Dido, Cleopatra, and Philomela from literary past and by means of invoking their tragedies and love suicides, “The Game of Chess” aims to indicate the failed loves of the past. Furthermore, this part of the poem depicts a dialogue between the couples of two social hierarchies, the upper-middle class and the pub working-class, to emphasize that these classes are under the same universal curse that is failed relationships in modern times.

“The Game of Chess” opens with a detailed description of a rich woman and her lavish surroundings. The utterances in the opening lines of this section collide with Shakespeare’s discourse in Antony and Cleopatra (1623). The depiction of the woman’s chair as a “burnished throne” that “glowed on the marble” (II. 77-78) echoes Shakespeare’s description of Cleopatra: “The barge she sat in, like a burnish’d throne, / Burn’d on the water; the poop was beaten gold; / Purple the sails, and so performed that / The winds were love-sick with them” (II. ii. 195-98). Amid the description of the lady’s boudoir, we also trace Virgil’s voice. Line 92 of the poem, “Flung their smoke into the laquearia” addresses Virgil’s Aeneid which recounts the luxuriousness of “the banquet” which Dido, the Queen of Carthage, has provided for her lover, who does not return her love and takes advantage of it (Weirick 35). Along with the voices of Cleopatra and Dido, we can hear Philomel crying “‘Jug Jug’ to dirty ears” (II. 103). This voice takes us back into the myth of Philomel who was seduced by her brother-in-law, king Tereus, and was changed by the gods into a nightingale. Through the words of Philomel, Dido, and Cleopatra all which address one another in a dialogue, the idea of sexual sterility becomes dominant which we can connect to modern times. The word “yet” in line 100 of the poem, “. . . yet, there the nightingale / Filled all the desert with inviolable voice” clearly indicates that the sexual brutality of the past is continued into the present. The voice of the nightingale still pursues and fills the desert.

To direct the reader's attention to the sexual sterility of the present, "The Game of Chess" offers gender relationships of the well-off and the working-class couples in order to suggest that both social hierarchies suffer from the same malaise of the times. Lines 111-12, "My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me. / Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak" present the reader the pseudo-conversation of the well-off couple in which a nervous woman in an anxious tone urges her husband to speak and to reveal his thoughts (Scofield 114). The repetitive syntax in these lines represents the woman's mental breakdown and her desire to communicate with the man. However, the man remains silent in the face of the woman's frantic and nervous questions (Bolton 197-98). Only is the reader able to hear the man's unspoken thoughts: "I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones / I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes" (II. 115-16, 124-25). The man's thoughts and the woman's "shrill speech," point to the couple's "dreadful stasis," which they are unable to transform, and depict the meaninglessness and the boredom of their lives (Bloom 43).

In a similar vein, when we shift to the pub scene, we realize that the working-class couple maintains the loveless relationships of the upper class couple. Similar to the previous scene in which a lack of communication occurs between the man and the woman, human relationships in this scene have been reduced to "matters of lust, bad teeth, abortion, and adultery" (Bloom 43). Akin to the former scene in which the theme of sexual sterility is dominant, this scene also ascertains the fact that sex in

modern times is seldom healthy. Lil has borne Albert five children at the expense of her own health. Marriage in this scene is associated not with love but with "procreation" (Chinitz 328): "What you get married for if you don't want children" (II. 164). Parallel to the prior scene, sexual sterility in this scene is reflected through Lil's abortions. As Childs declares, "One social world is savagely still, the other marked by unwanted fertility and lust" (78).

IV

Perusing the third section of the poem, "The Fire Sermon," we perceive that this section is in a dialogic contact with "The Game of Chess" and is intertextually related to it. Tracing the weave of voices in this section, we understand that they address and direct their words to Dido, Cleopatra, Philomela, the pub and the middle-class couple and therefore, relate to them. Through the words of the nymphs, the heirs of city directors, the typist and the young man, and the Thames daughters, this section gives voice to violation and abuse which we found in "The Game of Chess." Parallel to "The Game of Chess," "The Fire Sermon" introduces a world in which carnal desire has become so "rampant" that it has led to unholy loves (Kenner 21).

"The Fire Sermon" opens with an image of the polluted Thames river. In an elegiac tone, the speaker describes the river and the desolated surroundings. The river is located in a "brown land" (III. 175) in which summer has gone and the nymphs have departed and hence, autumn dominates the land. The river's tent is broken and it is polluted with sandwich papers, empty

bottles, and cigarette ends (III. 173, 177). The Thames has turned into the residence of rats, which drag their slimy belly on the bank, and it sweats oil and tar (III. 187, 267). Set in ironic contrast with the images of the polluted river, the literary discourse of Edmund Spenser is invoked which describes the Thames as “sweet”: “Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song, / Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long” (III. 183-84). As Kenner claims, the ironic contrast in these lines suggests that the world of Spenser’s *Prothalamion* (1596) when the nymphs “scattered flowers on the water” is gone (22). The nymphs are not the nymphs which existed in the world of Spenser. They are controlled by their carnal desire. Their friends are “the loitering heirs of city directors who unwilling to assume responsibility for any untoward pregnancies departed” (sic) (ibid.).

The fire of passion and the rampant carnal desire, which are prevalent in this section, are expressed through the discourses of the typist and the young man and their encounter which indicates mechanical loves and “dehumanized interactions” and is the source of Eliot’s sense of cultural sterility. This scene, which depicts the typist receiving the young man in her flat, suggests the mechanical erotic love between them and demonstrates that their lovemaking is as “cold-blooded” as the lovemaking of snakes, since there is no “sense of communion” between them (Bolton 199). In this act of automatic love, the man does not care about what the woman feels: “Exploring hands encounter no defense; / His vanity requires, / And makes a welcome for indifference” (III. 240-42). Similarly, the typist feels no

remorse over her seduction uttering, “Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over” (III. 252). As Chinitz rightly declares, this line which indicates the typist’s indifference to her seduction represents “social decay” (329). Likewise, Bolton contends that the mechanical sexual encounter between the typist and the young man vividly depicts sexual degradation in modern times (199).

Accompanied by the voices of the typist and the young man, the voices of three Thames daughters reinforce the ideas of cultural decay and degeneration. These voices are not only in dialogue with the preceding voices, i.e. the voices of the typist and the young man but also they are in a dialogic relationship with past literary discourses due to their double-voiced nature. Within the songs of the three Thames daughters, we detect two literary voices. One of these voices belongs to Queen Elizabeth and her lover, the Earl of Leicester, who are sailing on the Thames river. As Harold Bloom (1999) mentions, the invocation of Elizabeth and Leicester in lines 279-89 points to another unholy love, for at the age of Queen Elizabeth “sexuality was used for political gain” (44). Another voice is the voice of Richard Wagner who in *Götterdämmerung* (1874) recounts the Rhine maiden’s laments for the river’s lost gold. Similar to the Rhine maidens in Wagner’s opera, who describe the river’s lost beauty, the Thames daughters characterize the Thames as sordid and shabby: “The river sweats / Oil and tar” (Weirick 65). Furthermore, the laments of the Rhine maidens are equated with the laments of the Thames daughters who have been raped. As Craig Raine (2006) states, each of the Thames daughters speak in

separate voices, however, the story of seduction which they tell is “a continuity” (79). One of the Thames daughters relates her “joyless seduction” (79) uttering, “By Richmond I raised my knees / Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe” (III. 294-95). The other evaluates the consequence of her seduction which has resulted in infidelity:

“. . . . After the event / He wept. He promised ‘a new start.’” (III. 297-98). The last of the Thames daughters feels a kind of “shame” and “inferiority” (ibid.) for her seduction: “My people humble people who expect / Nothing” (III. 304-305).

V

“Death by Water,” the other section of the poem, is regarded as a complement to “The Fire Sermon.” Based on Barthes’s ideas regarding the reader’s role in making sense of a plural text, the reader establishes relationships between these two sections and understands that, similar to “The Fire Sermon” which touches on the purgation by fire, this section is also concerned with ideas of rebirth and renewal. “Death by Water,” which is a translation of one of Eliot’s poems entitled “Dans le Restaurant” (1917), focuses on ideas of “baptism” and the ancient vegetation ceremonies regarding rebirth by water (Childs, *Twentieth Century Poetry* 77), which were discussed early in detail. This rather short section reflects the voice of Phlebas, the drowned Phoenician sailor and a trader, whose death Madame Sosostris had predicted in “The Burial of the Dead”: “Is your card the drowned Phoenician sailor / Fear death by water” (I. 47, 55). Furthermore, the echo of Phlebas, who dies by water, was evident in the lines

from Shakespeare’s *Tempest* in which a man drowns in the sea (Bloom 44): “Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck / And on the king my father’s death before him” (III. 191-92). With regard to the vegetation ceremonies which are prevalent in this section, we mentioned early that the ancient Greeks tried to promote the rebirth of the fertility gods, i.e. Adonis and Attis, whose health were connected with the health of nature, by filling their effigies with seeds and burying them or by throwing their effigies into the sea in order to come to life again. Here, the reader can perceive that Phlebas is associated with the fertility gods, since similar to the fertility gods whose effigies were thrown into the sea, he is drowned in the sea in order to come to life again (Beasley 84). Through drowning by water, Eliot not only suggests rebirth and regeneration but also points to the fact that worldly concerns such as profit and loss are “meaningless at the bottom of the sea” (Bloom 44): “Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead, / Forgot the cry of the gulls, and the deep sea swell / And the profit and loss” (IV. 312-14). As Sarker claims, Phlebas by drowning in the sea is released from the fire of passion because the “sea currents pick the lust from his bones and he reverses the course of his life” (101).

The ideas of rebirth and renewal, which the reader discovered in the preceding Section are pursued in the final part of the poem, “What the Thunder Said,” which is considered by Eliot to be the best part and the only part that “justifies” the whole parts of the poem (Miller 371). The voice of thunder which dominates this section brings the ideas of fertility and renewal, since the

reader connects its voice with the hope of rain and hence, the fertility of the arid land. Furthermore, the reader realizes that the voice of thunder can also be the voice of God, for in Bible God speaks in the voice of thunder (Childs, *Twentieth Century Poetry* 78). In T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land: Sources and Meaning* (1971), Margaret C. Weirick suggests that the voice of thunder in the fifth section of the poem is identified as the voice of God who offers a cure for the meaningless lives of the inhabitants of the waste land (72). Considering these alternate possibilities, which refer to renewal and offer a cure for the dead land, the reader, however, learns that achieving the goal—revitalizing the arid land—is too far, since the land still lies waste amid “the mountains of rocks” and “the sandy roads” (V. 332, 334). Despite the sound of the thunder and the possible hope of rain, there is no water in the land. Besides, the questing knight who starts a journey to the Perilous Chapel in order to rescue the Fisher King, who has become impotent, and to procure the veil, which lies over the land, has not yet reached there and as a result, as the readers notice, the Chapel is empty: “There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home” (V. 389). Cooper asserts that the knight's pilgrim is “disappointed,” for the inhabitants of the waste land have not yet been able to “deliver the promised satisfactions, emotional, intellectual, or sexual” (77). Therefore, in this section, similar to the preceding sections of the poem, Eliot clearly presents to the reader the chaos and the crises of the modern society and then diagnoses its ills in order to be cured (Scofield 121). In T. S. Eliot: *The Pattern in the Carpet* (1975),

Elisabeth Wintersteen Schneider mentions that Eliot who is preoccupied with the ills of the modern society aims to cure them by asking some central questions in his poem: “Is there hope for civilization? How it can be saved? What is it now, that it should need saving?” (65). As Schneider declares, the answer to these questions lies in the cure of the souls through “ethical and emotional change” which is more represented more represented in this section by the commands of the thunder (66). “What the Thunder Said” opens with the laments over Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. The opening lines of this section refer to the events before Christ's crucifixion including “the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the betrayal by Judas Iscariot, the imprisonment and the trial before Pontius Pilate,” and finally the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday (Weirick 73).

After the torchlight on sweaty faces
 After the frosty silence in the gardens
 After the agony in stony places
 The shouting and the crying
 Prison and palace reverberation. (V. 322-26)

It is important to note that these insistent lines with the repetitions of “after” and the accumulation of nouns are similar to the “beating of the sun” or “the throbbing of the mind in the desert” (Scofield 121). The reference to Christ's agony in these lines emphasizes “the impression of lifelessness” which the reader would later identify in the following lines of this section in the images from a desert land (Biswas 97). In *Intertextuality in The Waste Land* (2007), Asit Biswas mentions, “the reference to the Gethsemane Garden helps making the scene of lifelessness in the following lines of the poem” (96). He states that the presence of

the desert in this section, which is connected with lifelessness, is due to the fact that “the vital spirit is gone from life and the place has become almost uninhabitable” (97).

The scenes of lifelessness which are connected with the crucifixion of Christ appear in lines 331-58 in which follows the description of “a desiccated landscape” where there is no trace of water and the people are suffering from a drought (Bloom 44): “Here is no water but only rock / Rock and no water and the sandy road” (V. 331-32). The reader, according to Barthes, through her interaction with the poem, realizes that the speaker longs for water and imagines the water dripping song within the desert landscape: “If there were water we should stop and drink / But sound of water over a rock / Where the hermit thrush sings in the pine trees / Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop” (V. 335, 356-58). Scofield argues that the water dripping song in these lines creates an illusion of water and presents a sense of life amid “the human and natural aridity” (122). Additionally, the desire and longing for water, which is indicated by imagining the water dripping song, clearly represents a longing to “break out of the sterility of the desert” (Davidson 129). As is noticeable in lines 346-59, the speaker first imagines “a pool among the rock” (V. 352) and then “the sound of water” (V. 356). These lines then culminate in imagining the singing of the hermit thrush in the pine trees: “Drip drop drop drop drop drop drop” (V. 358). As Davidson asserts, “this magical metamorphosis” comes to a halt when the voice of desert insists, “But there is no water” (V. 359) (130).

Continuing the journey through the desert landscape, the reader, similar to the questing knight, who makes a journey to the Perilous Chapel to regenerate the Fisher King and his land, reaches to a road in which the men on the road are disillusioned by the presence of another man who is walking beside them: “Who is the third who walks beside you? / There is always another one walking beside you?” (V.360, 363). This scene evokes for the reader the scene of the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus where his disciples cannot recognize him (Chinitz 331): “And it came to pass, that while they communed and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him” (Luke XXIV. 14-16). Through this scene, Eliot aims to emphasize the fact that the waste land cannot be regenerated, since in the desert landscape no one is able to recognize Christ. Thus, the longing for water in the previous lines which was as an indication of the longing for rejuvenation becomes futile (Bloom 45). The land remains arid and waste as we hear the sound of a dry thunder which brings no hope of rain (Chinitz 331).

The spiritual aridity of the inhabitants of the wasteland, which was represented in their inability to recognize Christ, is more intensified by the images and scenes of terror and chaos in the following lines of the poem where the reader comes across the image of the “hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth” (V. 369-70). This image of streaming crowd echoes the vision of lost souls in Dante’s *Inferno*. As Bolton suggests, these lines portray the vision of Dante’s infernal world where people wear hoods in order to

cover their individual identities and to restrict their gaze. Their very act of wearing hoods implies their blindness and their turning away from life's spiritual concerns. Bolton goes on to say, these people have lost their very humanity, for the word "swarming" in line 369 suggests that they have been described in a language which is used for describing bees, flies, and insects (195). Apart from this image of spiritual aridity, the reader also traces images of apocalypse which follow after the scene of the risen Christ (Frye 51). The reader faces with falling towers and the destruction of civilizations such as Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Vienna, and London:

What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London. (V. 373-76)

As Weirick suggests, these lines which depict the chaos of modern civilization remind the reader of Hermann Hesse's (1887-1962) essay, "The Brothers Karamazov" or "The Downfall of Europe" (1922). Incorporating this material into his poem, Eliot aims to make parallels between the chaos of Europe and the chaos of modern civilization (74). Chinitz asserts that these lines point to the fact that Western civilization has come to an end, since we learn that all the towers fall in the end. However, he declares that the words "cracks," "reforms," and "bursts" suggest that Western civilization might be reborn since all civilizations have "organic life cycles;" they are born, they grow, and die and are reborn again. Accordingly, based on this fact, Chinitz contends that Eliot in these lines presented "the impending collapse of

his civilization . . . as a necessary precondition for the rebirth of culture" (325).

The images of terror and chaos in the preceding lines give place to the gothic images in the following lines which remind the reader of the horrors which the questing knight should overcome in order to regenerate the arid land. The images of "bats with baby faces," the upside down towers, a woman who drew her long black hair tight, and "the tumbled graves" are the images of horror which the questing knight should confront in the Perilous Chapel in order to rescue the land (Bloom 45). However, through the images of "empty cisterns" and "exhausted wells," the reader discovers that the journey of the questing knight for resurrecting the land has resulted in failure because the chapel is empty: "There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home" (V. 389). Based on this fact, we understand that any hope of salvation and regeneration of the arid land and its inhabitants remains uncertain (Ellis 47).

Amid the persistent despair and desolation of the arid land, the reader from time to time hears the sound of the thunder which again offers hope and regeneration for the land. The reader then can hear the thunder speaking. The word that is uttered by the thunder is not a word but a meaningless syllable, "DA," which is the primal particle of all Indio-European languages. Therefore, the syllable "DA" in the poem stands as the primal syllable for three Sanskrit words, "Datta," "Dayadhvam," and "Damyata" (V. 402, 412, 419). These words which are translated as "give, sympathize, control," respectively are taken from the fable of

thunder in one of the Hindu Upanishads, the sacred writings of Hinduism. Reflecting upon these words, the reader can understand that Eliot by using them intends to give a “moral injunction” to the poem (Bloom 45). As mentioned in this chapter, Eliot who is preoccupied with the decadence of Western civilization, which is like a waste land, turns to Eastern religions, i.e. Sanskrit and Upanishads in order to find spiritual solutions for West’s decadence and to revive the dead land. Eliot believes that the only way to revive the land lies in “self-less dedication to God” which is only achieved through sacrificing the self (Oser 53).

Through the Sanskrit words, Datta, Dayadhvam, and Damyata, which offer a solution for reviving the dead land, Eliot presents three views of the self in this section. In the first lyric which begins with Datta meaning “to give,” Eliot in a conversational tone addresses the reader and regrets his/her surrender to the destructive passion and desire (Davidson 131): “My friend, blood shaking my heart / The awful daring of a moment’s surrender / Which an age of prudence can never retract” (V. 403-405). Asking “What have we given?” (V. 402), Eliot believes that modern people have only given their time to rampant desire and directionless passion. He emphasizes, “By this and this only, we have existed” (V. 406) and advises the inhabitants of the land to dedicate themselves to God. Bearing in mind Barthes’s idea of the reader’s cracking of voices in the text to figure out its meaning, the reader, opening the intertextual thread of “spider” in line 408, which is taken from John Webster’s (1580-1634) play, *The White Devil* (1612), can realize that it points

to the theme of unholy love and underlines the fact that modern people instead of giving their time to God have dedicated themselves to unholy and automatic loves (Weirick 76).

The second idea expressed in the thunder’s speech is Dayadhvam which means to sympathize. Eliot by using this Sanskrit word aims to indicate that modern people are unable to sympathize, since they are confined within their own selves. The reference to “prison” in line 414 suggests that modern people have formed a prison for themselves within which their selves are suffering in confinement and thus, they are unable to sympathize and communicate with other people (Bloom 45): “We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison” (V. 414-15). The above lines are closely related to the problem of “solipsism” which we discussed in Chapter one relating to Prufrock’s inability to communicate with others. We mentioned that individuals experience the world from their own “finite centers” or individual perspectives. These finite centers are always in a changing state that makes it difficult for them to be unified or harmonized with other’s finite centers or individual perspectives (Moody 35). Opening the intertextual thread of “prison” in line 414, the reader realizes that it refers to the same finite centers or closed circles which modern people have created for themselves. Lines 414-15 also turn the reader’s attention to F.H. Bradley’s (1846-1924) *Appearance and Reality* (1916) in which Bradley asserts:

My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my

own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul. (qtd. in Weirick 76)

A happier perspective to the poem is suggested by the word *Damyata* meaning “to control.” This word which vividly suggests the destruction of lust and desire by control seems to promise a hopeful future. Believing that he can control his desires, the speaker “navigates” on the sea imagining its “responsiveness” (Bloom 45): “. . . The boat responded / Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar” (V. 419-20). As Davidson asserts, “the image of the sailboat both propelled by and controlling the wind and water combines the force of desire and control” (131). However, Bloom mentions that lines 421-22, “. . . your heart would have responded / Gaily, when invited . . .” have negative meaning, for the phrase “would have responded” in line 421 suggests that the controlling of desire is “delusional” and desire has not yet burned away (45). This fact is clearly depicted by the image of the Fisher King who is still waiting for a knight to rescue him: “Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?” (V. 425-26). This image is sometimes associated with Eliot himself who like Tiresias witnesses the decadence of Western culture and longs for its redemption. Nonetheless, lines 425-26 suggest that any idea of hope, regeneration, and renewal of an arid land remains uncertain because the poet is still waiting for his land’s regeneration. Hence, the reader leaves the land as dry and waste as ever. The poem finally ends with the repetition of the

word “*Shantih*,” a formal ending to an Upanishad. It corresponds to Christian blessing, “The Peace which passeth understanding” (Weirick 82).

Conclusion

Examining the utterances in “The Burial of the Dead,” “The Game of Chess,” “The Fire Sermon,” “Death by Water,” and “What the Thunder Said” reveal that *The Waste Land* is a tissue of voices, since it assimilates different discourses and speech genres into its structure. In the poem, there are not only the literary discourses of writers, but also the prophetic discourses and the characters’ utterances. In effect, *The Waste Land* is a polyphonic text as the voices in the poem are mingled together and flown into each other and thus, it is difficult to find Eliot’s voice. Accordingly, there is no monologic voice of Eliot in the poem. For this reason, the poem has a dialogic tendency, for the voices in *The Waste Land* are involved in a dialogue in which they address and respond to others’ utterances. The dialogue of voices in the poem indicates that the voices not only possess a dialogic disposition but also have an intertextual nature due to the fact that the utterances articulated by the voices echo the preceding utterances and relate to them. This fact points to the dialogic and intertextual essence of all language use, in the sense that the words that we speak in a dialogue resonate with others’ discourses and in this way, no utterance is regarded as monologic and independent from other utterances.

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Notes:

¹ A Roman prefect who gave the order of the crucifixion of Jesus. *The New Testament* represented Pilate as a weak and an indecisive man who found no fault with Jesus but ordered his execution.