LANGUAGE OF THE NON-SPEAKING: STRUCTURE AS BIOPHILIC VOICE AND SOURCE OF HOPE IN T. S. ELIOT'S *THE WASTE LAND*

by

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(Under the Direction of Carl Rapp)

ABSTRACT

The fact that T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* presents an ecologically and culturally destitute world would appear to make the poem an obvious focus of attention for ecocritics, especially given our current growing environmental problems. This has not been the case, however. I argue that by using the principles of ecology and biophilia, it becomes possible to read the structure of *The Waste Land* as being a voice in and of itself, a long neglected voice that speaks to the potential redemption of civilization through the recognition of the integral interconnectedness of all things. The structure of *The Waste Land* is a very intricate web of fragments that mimic the interconnections that form a healthy ecosystem. This structure is in direct contrast to the emptiness and desolation of the poem's content, reflecting the effects that human conceit has on civilization when a civilization regards itself as being separate from the rest of the natural world.

INDEX WORDS: T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, ecocriticism, biophilia, poetic structure, form

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to my wife, Cresse, who motivated me to get out of my rut and back into academia to pursue this study. I also dedicate this work to my daughter, Natalie Kate: A lover of the outdoors and all things natural, it only seems fitting that Natalie be a source of inspiration in my pursuit of ecocritical studies. And finally, I dedicate this to my mother-in-law, Julie Horne, who made this venture into graduate school possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Ecocritical Framework for *The Waste Land*

The enormous influence of *The Waste Land* on Western culture over much of the twentieth century cannot be disputed. Since the waning of the Age of Eliot around the middle of the century, however, much of the criticism surrounding Eliot and *The Waste Land* has centered on Eliot's politics and prejudices and how his ideas influenced the work itself. The actual power of the poem as speaking to a civilization in jaded times has long since waned, especially in our contemporary world. Shifting away from current trends to analyze Eliot's work in terms of his politics and gender portrayals, I would like to give *The Waste Land* a fresh look, one that might be able to reestablish the relevance of the poem in our contemporary world.

That *The Waste Land* presents a bleak world that is infertile, lifeless, and rife with disconnected, sterile relationships is all too apparent in a literal reading of the poem. Such bleakness should, however, heighten an awareness of its potential to speak to contemporary readers afresh given the current environmental concerns ranging from the rapidly decreasing loss in biodiversity worldwide to the growing awareness of global climate change. In fact, since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently concluded that the current warming is created by human activity, concern for the environment is quickly becoming a central issue for everyone in the industrialized world.[1] Even though such a heightened awareness is only now

1 I say the industrialized world because many developing nations are currently striving to attain the same comforts and lifestyles that people in industrial nations currently enjoy. While such desires are justified, such lifestyles are simply not sustainable for the current world population. This is an entirely separate and controversial issue, one that I do not wish to go into detail in this discussion.

really gaining force in public discourse rather than being on the sidelines trying to make itself heard, a number of literary scholars have been working in the background to raise such an awareness for the past twenty years. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the literary critics to place literature and the environment in the mainstream of academic study, is forthright in defining ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). I argue that using an ecocritical approach in reading *The Waste Land* can provide new insight into its significance, heightening the sense of hope present in the midst of such a bleak world in the poem.

Given the bleakness of both the natural and urban landscapes in *The Waste Land* and the effects that that bleakness has on the human characters in the poem, it is extremely surprising to see such a dearth of ecocriticism in Eliot studies.[2] Further compounding the lack of ecocritical study is the very situation of the poem, the fact that Eliot wrote the poem in direct response to the environmental and emotional devastation wrought by World War I. Eliot toured the battlefields of France shortly after the war ended and was aghast at the ruination of the land. The ruin was not without irony or hope, though, as Paul Fussell astutely argues in *The Great War and Modern Memory*: All the rotting corpses lying between the trenches actually caused the rodent and (blood red) poppy populations to soar. Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley, drawing on the psychology of Jean Piaget, conclude:

> Nothing indicates that Eliot said to himself, "I must now write a poem about the troubles of secular life without myth, make it a hodgepodge, and use immediate experience or the infantile mind as the perspective from which it has *organic*

2 There are but two articles taking an ecocritical approach to reading *The Waste Land* to date, each published in *The Journal of the T. S. Eliot Society of Korea.*

> *unity*." Many things suggest, however, that that is precisely what he did. (222, my emphasis)

Brooker and Bentley contend that the angst and bleakness of *The Waste Land* is the result of the lack of a unifying myth for Western civilization and I agree with them that the poem does have an organic unity. I disagree, however, that the poem is merely a discourse on life without myth and I will argue instead that the organic unity of the poem's structure, in contrast to the literal barrenness and bleakness of the content of the poem, exposes an ecological separation present in the technological world in which humanity is largely unaware of its relationship with the silence of the nonhuman. By using the basic concepts of ecology, it becomes possible for readers to view the structure of *The Waste Land* as using elemental fragments composing an organic unity that then becomes a whispering voice in the midst of all the other empty echoes resounding in the poem. The deceptive silence of the organic unity acts to magnify the hope present at the end of the poem, hope that arises when the organic voice of the poem's structure is recognized and received by readers. For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on the natural and urban imagery and the effects that those environments have on the characters in the poem. I will argue that the bleakness of these environments creates a drastic tension when the structure of the poem is seen as having an organic unity in which all of the individual, separate fragments merge together to create its own, organic ecosystem. When such a tension is recognized, the bleakness and anxiety can be explained and the hope for civilization can be found in that organic unity, recognizing that there is a beauty in realizing that all things, both the human and the nonhuman, are intricately connected. Before directly discussing *The Waste Land*, however, I would first like to provide a theoretical overview of the field of ecocriticism to establish its relevance in Eliot studies.

As previously mentioned, ecocriticism has been absent in readings of *The Waste Land* and in Eliot studies as a whole. The fact that the poem constructs its own unique ecosystem through its fragmentary, yet interconnected, structure invites readers to read it through an ecological lens, potentially reestablishing the relevance of the poem similar to its initial reception when published in 1922. The fragmentary nature and the self-referentiality of the poem parallels that of an ecological wholeness and that the anxiety present within the poem arises from a separation not only among people, but also from people's separation from the natural world, triggering a biophilic anxiety that exacerbates the already prevailing anxiety arising from the isolation of the self from community.

Because of the growing contemporary concern about the environment mentioned above, the field of ecocriticism in literature has grown quite considerably over the past couple of decades.[3] The fact that the human species is now in a "bottleneck" (to use Edward O. Wilson's term) is driving this advancement of ecocritical literary studies. Wilson presents an overwhelming case for the impact that humans have had on the natural environment, particularly since the advent of the industrial revolution.[4] To unite humanity with the common goal of

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3 Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm provide an introduction to the field of ecocriticism in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Glotfelty and Fromm collect essays from within the discipline to provide theoretical basis for the field before entering directly into the application of ecocriticism in general literature and nature literature. More recently, Lawrence Buell and Ursula Heise have written on the current status and direction of the ecocriticism movement. Each critic believes that the field of ecocriticism is going in the direction of exploring urban environments in literature through the lens of ecojustice, a theoretical stance that examines the accessibility of wilderness places and spaces for unprivileged groups of people. Although ecojustice can be potentially valuable in its application, I tend to use the other ecocritical approach mentioned by Buell and Heise, the approach that uses scientific discourse in ecology, Darwinism, sociobiology, and evolutionary psychology to explore how literature presents the natural world within its cultural situation and how that portrayal might have an impact on contemporary attitudes about the environment. This latter school of ecocriticism founds much of its insight on the works of Edward O. Wilson, particularly *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*. Wilson advocates for a merging of the disciplines to put diverse minds together to explore the human condition. He claims that the sciences and the humanities cannot remain apart and that each can learn from the other as these long disparate disciplines work to explore human culture. Such an approach has the promise of bridging the gap between the humanities and the sciences to work united in the common goal of exploring the human mind and how culture arises from the mind. As more is learned about the human mind and culture, humanity as a whole has a greater potential to unite itself in working to preserve the environment.

4 For more detail on the overwhelming evidence that we are indeed in this bottleneck, see Edward O. Wilson,

preserving of the natural world, Wilson also advocates for the consilience of all the different discourses of knowledge to discover more of the human mind and what motivates our actions and behaviors, to try to discover why we appear to be so separated from the natural world and seemingly suicidal in the face of such grim predictions for our world in the near future. Wilson chastises advocates who laud the uses of technology in saving us from this current predicament:

> To the extent that we depend on prosthetic devices to keep ourselves and the biosphere alive, we will render everything fragile. To the extent that we banish the rest of life, we will impoverish our own species for all time. And if we should render our genetic nature to machine-aided ratiocination, and our ethic and art and our very meaning to a habit of careless discursion in the name of progress, imagining ourselves godlike and absolved from our ancient heritage, we will become nothing. (*Consilience* 326)

Placing faith in technology alone and to try to remain intellectually separate is, from Wilson's perspective, to cause our own extinction. Coming together in all disciplines of knowledge to work together in the exploration of self, motivation, and behavior is one step in the direction to rediscover our own connection to the living, nonhuman planet, thus increasing our long-term chances for survival.

Critical to Wilson's advocacy for a consilient approach is his idea of biophilia, a concept that is also critical in my new reading of *The Waste Land*. Simply defined, biophilia is the "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (*Biophilia* 1). It is a genetic predisposition in all humanity to have an affinity to the natural world. Despite its being a genetic predisposition, however, it is not a hardwiring (if that were the case, then we would not have the ecological crisis already mentioned), but is merely an echo of longing given certain

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The Future of Life.

environmental stimuli.[5] What makes biophilia so crucial to *The Waste Land* is the very nature of the poem, the fact that it presents an urban and natural world void of anything fertile whatsoever and presents a human species fraught with the anxiety of living in such an isolated, lifeless world.

Even though it is highly unlikely that Eliot had much concern about how culture and nature interacted or about humanity's attitudes toward the natural world in the early twentieth century, the imagery and the content of *The Waste Land* invite readers to view the poem in these regards. The concept of biophilia has its genesis in sociobiological and evolutionary psychological studies, fields that were not present during Eliot's lifetime. Joseph Carroll, however, addresses the concern of critics of such discourse by claiming that even pre-Darwinian artists have a greater intuition to account for these genetic predispositions and capturing them in their art:

> We need to be aware of one large and problematic assumption built into the [use of literary Darwinism]: the assumption that literary authors represent human behavior in ways that correspond to our current understanding of evolutionary psychology. To a remarkable extent, I think authors do in fact do this. *Beneath and apart from their structure of conscious beliefs, authors, like people in general, are instinctively attuned to evolutionary psychology. It is the psychology by which they actually operate. If people behave in ways that illustrate evolutionary psychology, and if authors offer reasonably realistic portrayals of human*

5 For more on the biophilia principle, see the following works by Edward O. Wilson: *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species*, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, *The Future of Life,* and *In Search of Nature*. Although biophilia has not been conclusively proven scientifically, Wilson did throw his idea of biophilia out to the scientific community to either be disproven or confirmed. The results came back inconclusive at the time, but with the consensus that although unprovable to date, there is also nothing to disprove it, that biophilia, in fact, appears to be a viable concept that simply cannot be conclusively proven with the knowledge and tools current at the disposal of the scientific community.

> *behavior, then no matter what the authors' own belief systems might be, the stories they tell would tend to illustrate evolutionary psychology.* But at times they do not, and the deviations are at least as interesting as the normative instances. (38, my emphasis)

In other words, artists intuitively and instinctually capture basic human behavior in their creations, and it is particularly interesting when character portrayals and behaviors deviate from the norm. Carroll continues this discourse later when discussing the connections between literary Darwinism and ecocriticism, referring to E. O. Wilson specifically, inviting an entry point for the uses of such criticism all of literature:

> As the evolutionary epistemologists and cognitive ethologists tell us, the necessities of survival have adapted us to find our way in the world; as E. O. Wilson and the other nature writers remind us, those adaptations carry with them an instinctive sense of emotional connection to the world. The writers of fiction have always intuitively understood that connection. In one aspect, they are like ethologists reporting on the behavior of animals in their natural habitats. *They present us not simply with social and moral agents acting out plots but rather with human organisms intricately enmeshed in their environments.* The challenge for theorists and critics is to formulate explanatory concepts and interpretive methods that are adequate to account for these primary observations. (100, my emphasis)

It is our job as critics now to explore these interactions that artists of the past exhibit in their work. If artists truly are astute observers of human nature and of humanity's interaction with the natural world (or lack thereof), then we can conclude that this intrinsic gift only invites for such readings. I believe that T. S. Eliot does just this with *The Waste Land.*

Ecocritical work on modern texts in general is actually quite scarce. Cynthia Cantrell notes this in her study on Virginia Woolf and place, remarking that despite many of the aspects of Modernism that make it difficult for ecocritics to enter, some of the central concepts underlying Modernism are actually quite inviting:

> Key elements of modernism—the attack on dualistic thinking, the foregrounding of backgrounds, the exploration of the relation of language to alterity, and the self-referential nature of symbol making—are vital areas of inquiry for those of us who are interested in the relationship between literature and the natural environment. (Cantrell 34)

All of the elements listed specifically by Cantrell describe much of T. S. Eliot's work, particularly *The Waste Land.* As I have already stated, the very structure and form of *The Waste Land*, with its reliance on allusions to tradition and its self-referentiality between different moments in the poem, can be read ecocritically.

Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley continue this invitation even further. In discussing the modern condition in the early twentieth century, Brooker and Bentley maintain that there was an overwhelming rejection of dualism and a movement toward monism. They note the self-referential nature of literature and how this causes "a collapse of the object into the self" (30). They continue by noting that

> The no-longer-separate subject and object are deemed to be part of a single system, an idea which is thoroughly idealistic. This systematic coupling of the subject and object means that any action or movement on the part of the subject changes the system of which both subject and object are a part. (39)

The interconnected nature of the relationship between the subject and the object, the fact that one cannot act without subsequently changing or influencing the other, reflects the very core of ecological principles in that all things on this planet are complexly interconnected. Although these ideas were largely abstract and confined to art and literature during the early twentieth century, the concepts alone beg for the ecological connection.

Eliot, too, invites such readings by the very nature of F. H. Bradley's influence during Eliot's graduate studies at Harvard as well as Eliot's own stated views on art and the artist in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." By placing all artists together in time by the very conversability between texts and traditions, where the poets of the past inevitably influence the poets of the present and the poets of the present inevitably transform the poets of the past, Eliot applies his Bradleyian philosophy to art and literature, evoking the future language of ecology. The most notable moment in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is the moment when Eliot states,

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. . . . The existing monuments for an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this conformity between the old and the new. (38 – 9)

Although Eliot is specifically claiming that all artwork is created with all of history and all other artworks acting on the new and that all new artworks act to reform all that which was in the past, he is also implying that because the Absolute, to use F. H. Bradley's term, the realization of the Whole, can never be fully realized by any individual, artists, too, cannot fully know all that their work fully encompasses. Each artwork, by itself, is but a fragment connected with the all-encompassing whole, an idea that echoes the underlying concept of ecology in that every organism is interconnected with all other organisms, all struggling for survival and fitness within the world of nature. Some texts naturally build off of and influence each other while others conflict with each other. Yet all are interconnected in the ever-changing ecology of tradition.

The views expressed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" derive directly from the philosophy of F. H. Bradley, a philosophy that many criticized for being overly idealistic and solipsistic. At this point, however, I am not going to get into the criticism of the philosophy itself, but, rather, focus on the underlying principles of the philosophy as it greatly shaped Eliot, his poetry, and his views on art in general. In addition to this, the philosophy itself, like much of what I have already mentioned previously, resonates with the language of interconnectedness upon which the entire field of ecology is founded.

The philosophy of F. H. Bradley was founded on the idea that all experience is but a fragment of the Absolute experience. Bradley's Absolute resides outside the realm of actual experience, though, because it is an ideal and any apparent knowledge of the Absolute is only ever a fragment of the abstract, imagined whole where each fragment is interconnected to another fragment, which then builds off another, eventually leading to the Absolute.[6] As Brooker explains,

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6 One of the best images for visualizing this concept is in Bradley's own words here:

> Experience, Bradley claims, is all-inclusive; everything that exists is included simply by virtue of being. It follows that every judgment, every perception, every object, every thing in the universe, is a part rather than a whole, a fragment moving within a system; and that system, according to Bradley, is reality or experience. Each fragment of experience is self-transcendent, i.e., each fragment reaches beyond itself and is taken up into successively greater fragments until it reaches reality. In other words, every fragment has a context, which in turn has a context, which in turn has a context that finally is reality or experience. And experience, Bradley insists, is one. It follows that these fragments do not simply coexist; they are necessarily and systematically related. (84)

Synonymous with the notion of experienced knowledge and the fragmentary nature of knowledge is Wilson's explanation of different concepts of biological time and how the human species is limited in its modes of perception within these concepts of time. Although Bradley maintains that the entirety of the Absolute cannot be fully conceived in anyone's consciousness, it exists nonetheless. E. O. Wilson, initially in *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species* and later in *Consilience:The Unity of Knowledge*, defines four ways of perceiving time: biochemical time, organismic time, ecological time, and evolutionary time (*Biophilia* 40 – 5; *Consilience* 88 – 91). Biochemical time is the scale at which biochemical processes occur,

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> Let us fancy ourselves in total darkness hung over a stream and looking down on it. The stream has no banks, and its current is covered and filled continuously with floating things. Right under our faces is a bright illuminated spot on the water, which ceaselessly widens and narrows its area, and shows us what passes away on the current. And this spot that is light is our now. . . . We have not only an illuminated place, and the rest of the stream in total darkness. There is a paler light which, both up and down stream, is shed on what comes before and after our now. And this paler light is the offspring of the present. Behind our heads there is something perhaps which reflects the rays from the lit-up now, and throws them more dimly upon past and future. Outside this reflection is utter darkness; within it is gradual increase of brightness, until we reach the illumination immediately below us. (Bradley, qtd. in Brooker 85)

usually in nanoseconds. Organismic time is the time scale in which we exist. Ecological time takes place over decades, where years and decades are parallel to seconds and minutes in organismic time. Evolutionary time, then, takes place over centuries and millennia. The differences in these time perspectives places the onus on perceiving in the present, as that present changes depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. A lifetime in organismic time is but a blip of time in evolutionary time; the fragment of a single life in organismic time is part of a greater, unified whole in evolutionary time.

For greatest survival, however, the human perspective is all but locked in organismic time, only able to comprehend anything tangible over the course of a couple generations.[7] As a result of this limitation, anything beyond that grasp into the future or past is generally nothing more than an abstract, intangible, imagination like that of Bradley's definition of transcendent experience and the abstract Absolute. As Brooker and Bentley describe,

> Transcendent experience, however, is available only in isolated moments and only to a limited extent; both as a concept and as a hope, Eliot considered it highly problematic. At any rate, moments of transcendence are too unconscious and too fleeting to serve as positions from which to gain the comprehensive view that would reveal unity. Immediate experience remains, on the other hand, not as something to hope for but as something known and lost and yet not lost. It was

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The stream is the whole of knowledge and existence and the flotsam and jetsam are experiences that are only known as they pass through the illuminated portion of consciousness.

7 This is what makes environmental awareness and predictions on things like global warming so difficult. The human mind has such great difficulty grasping what might happen generations in the future that all of the predictions of environmental destruction occurring by the end of the century is nothing more than an abstract reality. Wilson summarizes a wealth of research that indicates that when homo sapiens arose as a new species, the amount of foresight and planning necessary for survival was merely on a day-to-day basis, spanning weeks and months at best. Such behavior was so crucial to survival that it eventually became embedded genetically into the species, making it that much more difficult to naturally override such behavior and methods of planning. Although it is possible to consciously override such tendencies, it is nevertheless difficult to act beyond such primordially ingrained behaviors. Hence, the difficulty of actually getting meaningful, long-term legislation in

> from the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. It manifests itself over and over again in instances of coming to awareness, and although it is constantly being lost as the intellect assumes dominance, it remains throughout as the foundation and the judge of conscious life. (209)[8]

The fleeting nature of moments of transcendence are like the sudden glimpses and realizations of life from within the other perspectives of time—they are momentary, fleeting, and abstract so that people cannot fully grasp and hang onto their apparent realizations. Likewise when trying to comprehend the passage of time from the distant past; it is but an abstraction in our minds. The fact that it is only an abstraction, however, like Bradley's and Eliot's moments of transcendence, does not negate their existence within the unity of the whole, precisely how the fragments function in *The Waste Land* in creating a unified, ecologically and poetically stable, whole.

At this point in my discussion, I will refer to Eliot's structural and thematic unity to set up a close reading of the text based on the principles already outlined. The basic entry into the text beyond its overall construction can be found in the notes supplied by Eliot, specifically the one pertaining to the importance of Tiresias. Eliot maintains that Tiresias is both inside and outside the poem, a character that unifies many of the other personages in the poem (*Waste Land* 53). The character of Tiresias lives in ancient Greece, but sees into the future, into the present of the poem, unifying all parts and personages into a single moment. The imagery, too, becomes unified where the natural imagery of the Wasted Land and the barren urban imagery becomes descriptions of one, unified place. All of the seemingly separate fragments come together to create a single, abstract unity, a unity that distorts time even in the act of reading as the reader

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which tangible benefits may not be noticeable for several years passed in many contemporary governments.

8 Brooker and Bentley use the influence of F. H. Bradley to establish their argument that *The Waste Land* can be better understood by being read with an understanding of Piaget's theories of infancy. Though Brooker's and Bentley's use of Piaget provides a highly insightful reading, I am building my own reading based on their

must also return to the poem after having read it to reread it with the entirety of the poem being read simultaneously with each fragment of the poem, conflating time and perspective in the way that Bradley's philosophy describes experience and Wilson's differentiation of perceived time operates in the human mind. Anthony Johnson views the poem in a similar fashion:

> Eliot's success as poetic innovator was not due simply to his discovery of the technical possibility of arranging various kinds of fragmentation between discursive units, but, more radically, to his capacity to link paradigms on the plane of signified or signifier in a way that fixes them in memory as sets whose members silently convey a surplus of meaning to each other. A subtle *Gestalt* is recomposed. Paradigms are repeatedly recast to yield a paradigmatic "story," whose deepest sense must be drawn from awareness of the relationships binding a paradigm's enactments. (401)

Not only are the physical fragments unified in the creation of a whole, but the ideas, too, are linked to create the abstract, thematic unity presenting a world in the throes of lost community.

I do not wish to stray from the already established theme of *The Waste Land*, as B. C. Southam states: "The theme of the poem is the salvation of the Waste Land, not as a certainty but a possibility: of emotional, spiritual and intellectual vitality regained" (126), but to expand it through the concept of biophilia to show that salvation from a barren, destitute world can occur through a rediscovery of one's connection with the natural world, that the anxiety present in the poem is a direct product of humanity's separation from the natural world as well as from each other. Brooker and Bentley claim that the poem is also,

> in a basic way, a lament for lost community. Its allusions are probes sent in search of that community in past traditions. The allusions guide the reader toward those

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insights and construction of argument.

> lost communities as reference points against which to understand the degree and the nature of contemporary loss. . . . The poem's central subject, then, is loss, displacement, deprivation. In a profound way, the loss it evokes is not just a twentieth century urban condition. The poem's references reveal that this sense of loss has been pervasive throughout history. (211)

It is not only a loss of community in terms of human culture, but the loss of an awareness of an ecological community where human culture is destitute because of its mental isolation from the natural world. In showing that this loss and separation have been prevalent throughout history, the poem evokes the notion that culture has always been isolated from nature. This separation is also noted by Max Oelschlaeger when he claims that humanity has been apart from the natural world since the learning of agriculture, that before this phenomenon in human history, human beings lived with nature and that the onset of the agricultural revolution coincided with the development of philosophy theology and, hence, culture as we know it (24 – 30).[9] Again, this notion of separation and loss of community and the ensuing anxiety that develops echoes the principle of biophilia.

By reading *The Waste Land* with the idea of biophilia in mind, it is possible to see that the emotional and intellectual decay of the human condition as portrayed by Eliot is also a direct result of humanity's separation from and neglect of the natural world. What develops from this neglect and separation, then, is a wasteland not only within human culture, but among the entire world itself, a condition that we are now only beginning to fathom and realize in our

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9 Although Oelschlaeger makes a persuasive case for some aspects of the perceived separation of humanity and nature, I disagree with his foundational premise that the human species lived "in tune" with the natural world in the hunter-gatherer state. E. O. Wilson all but destroys this notion in the chapter "The Planetary Killer" in *The Future of Life* where he uses the fossil record to show how where ever the human species has migrated, a rapid extinction of the native animals and plants occurred, all but destroying the idea of the noble savage. Just like any other invasive species, homo sapiens, too, drastically affect ecosystems when immigrating to areas in which it was previously absent.

contemporary age. What truly magnifies the despair in the poem, however, is its very organic structure, a structure that on its surface appears constructed of a bunch of isolated fragments from disparate scenes and sources from throughout tradition, but is in reality intricately interwoven both within the poem through each of the fragment's conversations with each other, and outside the poem as various fragments evoke moments from tradition. What is then produced is an evolved and healthy structural ecosystem within which the actual content and messages communicated through that structure reside. The tension created between the robust and ecologically healthy structure and the equally malignant desperation and anxiety within the literal content of the poem can then be explained by the lack of recognizing such interconnectedness in all aspects of life, in not hearing the voices of the nonhuman, the parts of our world long thought irrelevant with respect to the needs of building healthy civilizations. The organic unity of the entirety of the poem mimics the potential salvation that can occur if humanity simply acts and rediscovers a sense of connection with the natural world, just as the Fisher King at the end of *The Waste Land* could potentially restore fertility to his land should he simply get motivated, emerge from his own apathy, and stop fishing (*Waste Land* lines 424 – 6). With a close reading of the text itself, I hope to establish this premise that there is actually an environmental voice present in *The Waste Land*, a voice that provides a new vision of hope that has been overlooked for too long, a vision that reestablishes the relevance of the poem and T. S. Eliot in our contemporary world.

CHAPTER 2

Fragmented Echoes: Poetic Structure as Unified Voice

It makes sense that if *The Waste Land* is a great work of literature, then its form and content should work in conjunction with each other, these two aspects of the poem residing symbiotically within the frame of the poem's entirety. In *Making Literature Matter in the 21st Century*, Mark William Roche argues that great art is a successful hybrid between form and content, that it has an organic integrity unifying the work as a whole:

> Beauty has two moments, truth and sensuousness, content and form. In its moment of truth art imitates not reality but the ideal. The essence of its form is not simply to be grasped within the rubric of form but must be taken to mean an appropriateness in the relation of content and form. Great art integrates these two moments organically, that is, in such a way that to separate the universal meaning and the concrete shape would be to violate the integrity of the whole. (30)

The truth of *The Waste Land* is its bleakness and emotional detachment. Its sensuousness is in its organic unity of form. Where these two components of the poem seem to conflict with each other, it is possible, instead, to view the two not in opposition to each other, but as each working in conjunction together. Referring back to Anthony Johnson's notion of a certain sense of "Gestalt" emerging from the poem's structural unity (401), it is possible to begin recognizing the intricate relationship between the poem's form and content in the same manner that Roche claims to be requisite of great literature. Though Johnson is focusing on the philosophical unity

of being created through the interaction of the fragments that compose *The Waste Land*, the interactions that he highlights are congruent with the ecological model that I am proposing. In fact, he concludes by equating the poem's unity to that of a genetic code:

> That "heap of broken images" and those "fragments" were tough and sharp enough to crumble and satisfyingly devour the compact, monolithic structures of discursive word and connective world, and to set up a higher-level, secretive inner order which makes the Eliotan poetic crystal clear, once its organizational system—its "genetic code"—has been identified (or should I say "cracked"?). (416)

The fragments that construct *The Waste Land* are its DNA, individually separate molecules that each carry information. Acting alone, each molecule can do very little; it is how each molecule, each fragment, works together and is interconnected with each other that leads to the fruition of a living organism. Likewise with an ecosystem: every living organism and all inorganic materials in that environment are very weak when isolated, but the ecosystem as a whole gains strength in how all these separate factors interact. With all of the ecological metaphors being used to describe the structure of *The Waste Land*, it seems all too glaring an omission not to use these metaphors in a more critical manner rather than as mere descriptors.

Introduced by an impersonal voice, the very beginning of the poem establishes the barrenness and lack of fertility and its effects on civilization:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.

Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding

A little life with dried tubers. (1 – 7)

The irony of the opening lines resides in the fact that, rather than being a time of rejuvenation and rebirth, in the wasted land of the poem, Springtime does not bring that rejuvenation. But to whom is this reality cruel? By calling April cruel because of the lack of hope for any rejuvenation, the barrenness of the land projects itself onto the human characters of the poem, making the fact that they are alive in such a world just as meaningless as a Spring without life. All that is present in this initial setting are memories of what was and the desire for that past to return, the memory and desire being conflated into a single moment because that is all there is. The fact that the only sustenance is the preserves, the "dried tubers" indicate that there is nothing to be reaped, that the land is barren; they are all that is left of the past. Simultaneous with the image of the tubers being dried preserves, though, is the notion that, rather than being preserves from the previous Fall's harvest, the tubers were shriveled upon being harvested in the ground, that with the emerging wasteland, that environment sucked the life out of all that it once supported. Simply stated, all life is desiccated and not even able to rot.

As the stanza continues, the character of Marie is introduced as the speaker, someone who is detached from her past and separated from the natural cycles of nature. A certain shift occurs between the first sentence of the poem and the rest of the stanza, a shift that shows a consciousness detached from the present moment:

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee

With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,

And went on in the sunlight, into the Hofgarten,

> And drank some coffee, and talked for an hour.
>
> Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Lituaen, echt deutsch.
>
> And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
>
> My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
>
> And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
>
> Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
>
> In the mountains, there you feel free.
>
> I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter. (8 – 18)

With April being cruel, winter providing warmth, and summer being surprising, Marie is portrayed as an adult, while reminiscing of her innocence and childhood, as someone who is out of touch with the seasons and other natural cycles. Brooker and Bentley argue that the focus on the past is precisely what leads to a vacuum of existence in her adult life living in the civilized world:

> She sees paradoxes as openings onto the vistas of chaos. Like all inhabitants of the waste land, she interprets April as cruel because it breeds life from death, because it brings endless circularity and unavoidable paradox. The opening voice suggests that Marie's interpretation issues from mixing memory and desire, past and future. Memory is vividly presented in the image of a childhood experience, but desire is left vague. Marie is portrayed as stretched between a past which was in special ways unconscious and carefree and a future which may in some way correspond to that childhood condition. She perceives the dualistic and paradoxical present as cruel because, in remembering the past and intuiting the

> future, she is left in a vacuum in the present moment, an absence in the middle of her life. (62)

Not only is she living a detached life as an adult, someone disengaged from the natural cycles of the seasons, but such a detachment has arisen because of a neglect of her relationship with those very cycles. Marie has forgotten the freedom found in the mountains, the freedom found in the natural world. In other words, Marie has neglected her own biophilic tendencies, leading to the emptiness of living in her present described by Brooker and Bentley.

Just as Marie detaches herself from the present, constantly reflecting on the past, so too, does the Hyacinth girl who arises at the end of the next section of "The Burial of the Dead." Unnamed, the Hyacinth girl could easily be assumed to be a return to Marie, but the very fact that the Hyacinth girl is never named makes such an assumption fallacious, creating an ambiguity in female character that serves to unite the many female voices throughout the poem, both literal speaking characters and the alluded characters of Sybil, Cleopatra, Philomel, and Ophelia. The passage opens in similar fashion to Marie's recollections of the pleasant past, but quickly regresses into the detachment of the present:

> "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
> "They called me the hyacinth girl."
> --Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
> Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
> Lying nor dead, and I knew nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence. (35 – 41)

Not only does the Hyacinth girl regress into an apparent undead figure after returning from the garden, but she also makes explicit the absence of the former fertility and wetness of the landscape, of the environment. As soon as she returns from that fertile and wet environment into a new present, her detachment from her present and the natural cycles immediately begins, her senses failing and her inability to speak reflecting the emotional detachment mirroring the desiccated landscape immediately preceding the Hyacinth girl.

The sterile and cruel April soon becomes the literal landscape of the wasteland, a desertscape that provides support not even for the cricket. There is no possibility for any life in this desertscape:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
> There is shadow under this red rock,
> (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
> And I will show you something different from either
> Your shadow at morning striding behind you
> Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
> I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (19 – 30)

Interlaced with the literal barrenness of the landscape are the images of decayed and broken icons from tradition and religion. The narrator is speaking to a general, unnamed audience who

has given up on tradition, calling that audience "Son of man," a twist on the well-known phrase "Son of God" to emphasize the detachment from religion when civilization places its sole focus on itself. The result of this turn from religion and tradition is that of only fragments and "broken images" that create a harsh and unforgiving landscape. If the speakers come in under the shadow of the rock, they then realize that desire and memory are nothing more than delusions masking the reality of the wasteland; all there is to be had and to feel is but "fear in a handful of dust." Combined with the opening of the poem, this scene presents the physical barrenness that will soon emerge in the urban places of the poem.

"The Burial of the Dead" closes with the presentation of the "Unreal City," literally that of London, but simultaneously using allusions from Dante's *Inferno* to equate the urban scene with the previously described wasteland. The description of the city is that of a faceless and emotionless crowd:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street, (60 – 66)

The brown fog evokes the industrial smog that clogs the city and all of its workers are but empty shells that "death ha[s] undone." The sighs evoke a sense of futile desperation, unheard by anyone else as all they can do is simply stare at the ground before their feet as they trudge to and from work. The omission of the subject in the second sentence of this passage indicates the lack

of conscious presence or agency of anyone in the crowd; they simply flow, keeping time "With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine" (68). The literal desertscape has now been transposed onto the cityscape of London, and the desiccated tubers from the opening poem have become the residents of the Unreal City who are stuck in the mechanized routines of modern life. Not only does this original presentation of the Unreal City merge the urban and the natural, but it also merges the literal, reading present moment with past tradition—to that of Dante—as well as the future as the Unreal city will return as an abstract image of the idea of city from throughout Western civilization. This final stanza/fragment of "The Burial of the Dead" subtly alerts readers to the emerging organic unity of the poem as a whole, showing how no single fragment merely stands alone in isolation, as opposed to the human residents of the waste land.

"A Game of Chess" then provides a snapshot of specific lives within this wasteland, within this Unreal City. Composed of two dramatic scenes, this section shows how people in the modern world are detached from each other, unable to communicate. The opening scene begins with a description of a woman home alone, waiting for someone who may be her lover, but in an obviously sterile relationship. The descriptions of the apartment deflect agency from her onto all the kitsch surrounding her; she merely sits while all the objects in the room acted on her. Even the myth of the rape of Philomel is reduced to a cheap adornment decorating the wall above the mantle. When her lover does arrive, the two do not speak with each other, but merely at each other. By saying "I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their bones" (116 – 7), the lover is equating himself and the rest of his human peers to the masses that are but empty shells of people, also evoking imagery from the trenches of the Great War, imagery that is literal in "The Fire Sermon." This inter-referentiality acts to merge these separate scenes, historical

events, and literary allusions into a single moment, showing their relationships with each other and how they each act to influence each other.

At this point, it is possible to see the interconnectedness of the various fragments and scenes in the poem, but the scope of such interconnectedness is not yet complete. As *The Waste Land* progresses, it becomes ever more fragmented, composed of narrative scenes with snapshots interspersed between segments. The voice of Philomel thrusts itself in between the desolation of war-torn France and the return of the Unreal City (203 – 6). Immediately following the fragmented second description of the Unreal City is the second depiction of loveless relationships, portraying sex as nothing more than mechanized action that does not produce offspring. The entire episode is void of emotion; the only character to feel anything is Tiresias, as he/she/he has "foresuffered all" (243). In speaking in the present moment, from the past, about the present moment, Tiresias represents the conflation of all the fragments of the poem into a single moment, unifying them all as a collective and interconnected whole. Eliot makes note of the significance of Tiresias in the notes to poem, stating that

> Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage of the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currant, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all of the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem. (52)

Tiresias unifies all the characters together into one body, one consciousness, bringing all the characters together so that they are simultaneously individuals and connected with each other. All of the human depictions are thus unified, all of the urban scenes linked together to illustrate

the connectedness that everyone has with one another. This connectedness, however, is not realized by any given character within the poem itself: instead, the connectedness can only be recognized by astute readers, leading to an awareness of the effects that such isolation has on life and civilization.

The shortest and seemingly most isolated fragment of *The Waste Land* is "Death by Water," a section consisting of a mere eight lines. In its brevity, however, "Death by Water" acts to unify the poem in similar fashion as that of the Unreal City and the desertscape. The Phlebas character returns the reader to the Madame Sosostris scene in "The Burial of the Dead." The section also connects back to the Cleopatra reference in "A Game of Chess," to Ophelia's death by water "good night, sweet ladies, good night" at the closing of the bar scene, and alludes to all of the literal water references occurring both before this section and later in the poem. The loaded title also forces readers to think of resurrection occurring in the act of death by water common throughout mythology. Such a resurrection does not occur, though, as Phlebas is literally decomposing in the eddies. Again, however, there is a disconnect with the literalness of the natural processes and cycles raised in the opening of the poem, a lack of the realization that the actual decomposition process eventually leads to future life. By reflecting on this scientific fact as well as the manner in which "Death by Water" acts as a central hub unifying all of the other water moments in the poem, the emerging structure and unity of the poem's ecosystem gains tremendous strength.

The literal landscape of the wasteland presented in "The Burial of the Dead" has been explicitly absent from the middle three sections of the poem, but it returns in "What the Thunder Said" where the urban imagery merges with the natural. All that has been described previously in *The Waste Land* is now drawn together in this final section:

Here is no water but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road

The road winding above among the mountains

Which are mountains of rock without water

If there were water we should stop and drink

Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think

Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand

If there were only water amongst the rock

Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit

Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit

There is not even silence in the mountains

But dry sterile thunder without rain

There is not even solitude in the mountains

But red sullen faces sneer and snarl

From doors of mudcracked houses (331 – 45)

The desertscape has returned, this time with the residents from the city sneering and snarling, the buildings from the city turned to but mere primitive, sun-baked dwellings. As stated in "The Burial of the Dead," in being sons of man placing all of their beliefs in the powers of humanity alone, separating themselves from natural world, all they can return to is a natural world that can no longer support them. Without water, nothing can survive. Without water, there can be no death by water. Without water, there can be no resurrection.

The rest of the poem becomes fragmented snapshots referring back to earlier moments and previous allusions, thrown together in a collage-like fashion without transition from one to

the other. The Unreal City now transcends that of just London, but becomes all cities, both past and present, all crumbling in to the Unreal:

Falling towers

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria

Vienna London

Unreal (373 – 6)

All cities of great cultural heritage at one point or another in history are now conflated into the single Unreal City, a city decaying and dying. Merged into the single Unreal City, it is becoming the wasteland, nothing more than dessicated ruins turning to dust among the mountains. There is hope, though, as there is a "flash of lightning. Then a damp gust / Bringing rain" (395 – 6). The fact that this observation is left grammatically open-ended, however, implies that the rain is too distant over the horizon, that when the rain will come is not known. There are no cities left, but the people are still separated from the natural because the natural will not support them.

The poem finally ends with the most fragmented, yet the most hopeful lines:

I sat upon the shore

Fishing with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s'ascoce nel foco che gli affina

Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih (424 – 34)

The Fisher King is sitting on the shores ignoring the barren lands that his realm has become, merely contemplating whether or not he should restore those lands. The rest of the stanza is composed of seemingly random fragments thrust together without transition, each evoking images occurring previously in the poem. Thrust in the middle of these fragments is the statement of shoring those fragments against those ruins. A complicated line, yes, but one that does imply that the desiccated fragments of which *The Waste Land* is composed might be used as a foundation for a new civilization to be built. Just as a healthy ecosystem is built upon the decaying matter and fragments of species that lived before, so civilization can be rebuilt through the realizing that tradition is not decaying and dying, but merely evolving, merely becoming something new. Not realizing this connection is what creates the perceived wasteland, the emotional detachment from each other, and the emotional and physical detachment from the sustaining physical world.

Despite this interconnectedness and organic unity in *The Waste Land*, Peter Howarth argues that the fragmentation of *The Waste Land* does not achieve full unity because the potential redemption is so vague. Everything is connected, but those connections are merely left up to chance:

> The form of *The Waste Land* is less chaos than chaos theory in its popular sense: a system with no cultural organisation, but where the minutest flap of the hermit-thrush's wings on one side of the poem is connected to the collapse of Western civilisation on the other. (Howarth 443)

In claiming that *The Waste* Land lacks cultural organization, Howarth is ignoring the fact that the unity that the poem achieves arises precisely from this lack of organization, that each individual element or fragment speaks with each other to create that unity. A complex web is created in which all of the individual fragments are intricately connected to create a unified whole. He continues, though, by claiming that the potential hope that faintly echoes in the poem is too distant for anyone to ever be sure of what that redemption might be:

> The wrong mixture of closed openness produces the city of the living dead, the undying Sybil, the sprouting corpses and the spiritualist melancholia of the poet as medium, channeling the voices of the past so that the private pain becomes only the endless, unresolved repetition of disaster. The right sort of openness *through* satisfactory closure, the possibility of decision or moving on, emerges in the hope of Osiris or Emmaus references. How we judge the politics or ethics of Eliot's fragmentary form will depend on what kind of resurrection we think the poem accomplishes. But true to its fragmentary nature, there is no way of knowing which kind of eternal life is ironising which. (Howarth 458)

Howarth focuses on some sort of metaphysical salvation that may arise out of the wasteland, claiming that because of the enormous ambiguity latent in how the fragments speak with each other, there is little if any hope of finding out how those fragments truly work together. What Howarth does not take into account, however, is the idea that the actual organic structure of the poem can be seen to be equivalent to the organic unity of the natural world. Taking this idea into account, then, it is possible to recognize that the angst and desolation present thematically in *The Waste Land* arises not so much from simply a disconnect with tradition, but a separation from the natural; biophilia is being ignored.

Referring back to Edward O. Wilson's definition of biophilia, that it is the "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (*Biophilia* 1), if the structure of *The Waste Land* is viewed as the nonhuman ecosystem supporting all that is human within that system, then it becomes possible to see that the source of anxiety in the poem derives from a blindness to such a rich, diverse, and healthy environment. The organic unity of *The Waste Land* causes the unconscious triggering of biophilia in that the structure of the poem mimics the natural environment. Where the natural world is desolate in the literal descriptions of the poem, the structure explains that desolation in its unity: When everything is seen as detached fragments acting in isolation, when people cannot feel or communicate with one another or with tradition, they become empty shells of people and civilization decays. If interconnectedness is realized, though, the possibility for rejuvenation returns, not only for civilization, but for the world as a whole. Civilization is linked with the natural world and *The Waste Land* shows what happens when that linkage is lost: The world becomes a wasteland and its inhabitants become those rejects not accepted into either Heaven or Hell.

Reading *The Waste Land* through the lens of biophilia then merges the culture/nature binary, showing the power and health that emerges when interconnectedness is acknowledged. Though Eliot never expressed much concern with the environment in either his work or his critical theory, such ecological views are present. The relationship between the poet and tradition is one of interconnectedness and of constant evolution. The previously cited passage from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" asserts the inherent interconnections between past and present tradition, the connections between the artist and tradition, and to the constant evolution that occurs in past, present, and future art/tradition. *The Waste Land* adheres to these principles through its fragmented, yet unified form, equating poetry to the structures of the natural world.

Reading the poem in this way, it is then possible to elevate the status of *The Waste Land* once again so that it has truly meaningful value in our contemporary world. As Mark William Roche argues:

> In the technological age we suffer from being in an unduly inorganic environment; our relation to art differs because of its organicism, much as our experience of the intrinsic value of art counters the functionalism of the technological age. . . .Through a richer awareness of organic connections, as is cultivated through literature and the study of literature, we are also more likely to recognize the connections between our actions and threats to the environment, which tend to be severed in the splintered frames by which we live. (220 – 21)

The Waste Land, because its organic structure is juxtaposed with its inorganic content, only heightens an awareness of this disconnect between culture and nature. By acknowledging the biophilic echoes that arise from the structure, the poem then becomes a bright beacon of hope in a world in which the environment is an ever-growing concern.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Potential Reconciliation Between the Nature/Culture Divide

Although critics have long argued that *The Waste Land* does have a purposeful, unified structure, the actual significance of the structure is all too often ignored. Brooker and Bentley begin the process of explaining such a significance, but focus on the reading process and acts of interpretation that *The Waste Land* requires by using the child development theories of Jean Piaget. In establishing their argument, they react against other critics who have sought to find unity in narrative voice:

> The argument that the poem is unified by the presence of a single voice or persona is, again in our view, doubly misguided. It is misguided, first, because the poem makes so many shifts in scene, tonality, and language that the effort to defend the notion of a single voice forces the critic into unseemly mental gymnastics. Some of Eliot's oldest and best critics (Grover Smith, for example) argue that a single narrator, such as Tiresias or Perceval or Marie, narrates the entire poem; some of Eliot's more recent critics (Calvin Bedient, for example) argue that a single eccentric projects all the voices in the text, that he or she does "the police in different voices." These critics appear to be working from an assumption that a poem cannot be a good work of art if it is not unified in this way. In our view, that assumption is one of the conventional expectations Eliot is at most pains to root out, make conscious, and destroy. From a perspective within

> the poem, and from a perspective within any contemporaneous reading process, *The Waste Land* consists of many messages from a variety of sources. From an imagined mythic perspective that synthesizes the straight time line of subjectivity and the cyclical time line of objective nature, the characters and their interpretations melt into each other. A reading from either perspective is mistaken; only the process of taking note of their rapid oscillation allows a reading experience of the text as it stands. That experience is a notation of the difficult and yet necessary awareness of the interpretations and transcendental experience. (88-9)

I agree that trying to find a unified voice in character is misguided and that the reading process of *The Waste Land* does require an oscillation between moments and types of reading, but that readers must also oscillate between reading the content of the poem and reading the structure of the poem, an oscillation that I very similar to Richard Schechner's concept of selective inattention where it becomes necessary to take mental breaks from a performance to fully grasp all that the performance has to offer (222 – 34). Just as many of Schechner's experimental stage productions force selective inattention onto an audience, Eliot, too, forces such an oscillation of attention between structure and content of *The Waste Land*, albeit in a much more subtle fashion as conventional readers tend to read through the elemental structure of language, reading only the content: In other words, language's genotype, its structure, is often invisible to readers, who tend to read only the phenotype of language, its expressed visible meaning of its genotype. The conventional mode of reading, too, mirrors much of Western culture's reading of the natural world versus the cultural world in that nature is often the silent Other and culture, that which is created by humanity, is what grabs people's attention. *The Waste Land* breaks down the

nature/culture divide when its structure is given a voice. Ignoring the structure grievously disenfranchises the non-speaking Other, the non-speaking voice of the natural. By recognizing and listening to the voice of the structure, the tension and desolation that arises from such deafness becomes glaring, leading to the potential awareness of a beneficial union between nature and culture.

Cultural desolation in *The Waste Land* ensues not only from the detachment from myth and tradition, but from the binary conceptualization of nature and culture. Reading the structure of *The Waste Land* as a parallel to nature explains why there is such desolation in the poem itself; the human world has isolated itself from the robust natural world, depriving itself of the psychologically necessary connections to the natural as dictated through human biophilic urges. Not only does are the poem's characters unaware of the sources of their angst, but so are readers who do not recognize the significance of the organic construction of the poem. Being aware of the poem's ecosystem and realizing that the seemingly disparate fragments are actually composing an intricately and interconnected web allows for readers to recognize just how empty life becomes in being isolated from the cycles and constructions of nature.

I mentioned earlier in my discussion that if the Fisher King would simply act rather than sit around fishing, then the revitalization of his land just might happen in his wasted kingdom. Most critics have argued that the hope for the rejuvenation of Western civilization that Eliot was advocating was for a rediscovery of tradition and myth in contemporary culture. Although myth and tradition is important, I add to this rediscovery of humanity's, of culture's, connection and relationship with the natural, with the non-speaking members of our world. Poetic structure is commonly viewed as a silent partner to the actual content of a poem, but I maintain that the organic interconnectedness of the structure of *The Waste Land* is parallel to the silent ecosystem

that supports all life on Earth. Recognizing that this structure, far from being silent, actually speaks and has something to say in response to what is happening in the human world of the poem can lead to a greater awareness of our own relationships with our surrounding environment. In addition to reading *The Waste Land* in such a way, I am hopeful that more literature can also have its non-speaking elements listened to in ways that can enhance humanity's relationships with the nonhuman and we as a society can better understand that we are not necessarily better than or separated from the natural world, but are actually intricately interwoven into Nature's web of life. Only with such an awareness can we hope to escape the cultural ennui and anxiety when ignoring our biophilic tendencies.

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