Litera: Dil, Edebiyat ve Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi
Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies

İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Litera 2023; 33(1): 1-21
DOI: 10.26650/LITERA2022-1099679

Research Article

Mythopoeic Image of the City in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

Ketevan JMUKHADZE[1]

[1]Ph.D. Candidate in English Philology, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Humanities, Tbilisi, Georgia

ORCID: K.J. 0000-0001-5320-606X

Corresponding author:
Ketevan JMUKHADZE,
Candidate of English Philology, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Humanities, Tbilisi, Georgia
E-mail: Ketevan.Jmukhadze359@hum.tsu.edu.ge

Submitted: 06.05.2022
Revision Requested: 20.07.2022
Last Revision Received: 04.08.2022
Accepted: 25.04.2023

Citation: Jmukhadze, K. (2023). Mythopoeic image of the city in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. *Litera, 33*(1), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.26650/LITERA2022-1099679

ABSTRACT

This paper is devoted to a discussion of landscape as a symbolic and suggestive artistic space in *The Waste Land*. The setting of the poem was urban. With all their symbolic and allusive complexity, the centers of the poem - a pub, churches, gardens, rooms, and desert - could be seen as separate subjects of discussion. The paper briefly discusses the influence of the urban environment on Eliot's poetry and argues that the poet makes use of material from urban daily life to construct a mythopoeic image of the city. Eliot's "mythical method" was characterized by composing a multilayered and faceted, cubistic structure ordered and given a shape through the mythical schemes. The multidimensional mythical situation in the poem was created by a multi-voiced narrator, while the city was the relevant environment, an "objective correlative," where many different voices could be heard simultaneously. The paper discusses prophets as central figures of the poem. Tiresias, who witnessed the creation and destruction - the entire life circle of Thebes, actualized the topic of the cyclical time in the poem, while the Sibyl of Cumae, who could move from this world to Hades in Aeneid, enacted the main mythopoeic quality in the poem: to transmit the reader through London to every city of the world.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, city, time-place, mythopoeia

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Introduction

The image of certain cities evoke specific associations that are embedded in humankind's memory: Rome gained the name of the "Eternal City," Jerusalem was referred to as the center of the world and a heavenly city on earth. While Babylon was associated with chaos in the human imagination, Sodom and Gomorrah were synonyms for depravity, perversion, and deteriorating one's soul with sins. The names of Troy and Carthage are connected to destruction. James Joyce chose the epithet "paralyzed" for his hometown Dublin and described it in the same way in *Dubliners*. The theme of a city gave way to the metonym of the crowd and noisy place where the pulse of life was strongly felt. However, the urban setting served as a synonym for sterility in *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot.

"The city always speaks, and with many voices," notes Burton Pike (Pike, 1981, p. IX). *The Waste Land* could be seen as an embodiment of Pike's statement. It is notable that the first and the second parts, "The Burial of the Dead" and "In the Cage" (the original title for "A Game of Chess"), were united as sub-chapters under the title "He Do the Police in Different Voices" in the original version of the poem, before "Ezra performed the Caesarean Operation" (Paige, 1971, p. 170). By giving the poem a Dickensian title from the novel *Our Mutual Friend,* Eliot directed the reader's attention to the multipaneled narrative. Sloppy the orphan was introduced as a young man having a remarkable talent: "Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices" (Dickens, 1998, p. 246). Dickens's man-child was praised for his ability of voice imitation and performance while reading the newspaper. Therefore, the allusion to the novel functioned as an inspiration for Eliot. He congregated and vocalized many different voices in his poem. A crowded urban environment, to say in the author's words, was an "objective correlative" to achieve the polyphonic effect. Eliot's initial decision of using a Dickensian title made the reader think that the narrator used multiple imitated voices of different people. Along with the voices of Marie Larisch, the typist, the shrewish woman - "the lady of situations," Madame Sosostris and others, the reader could hear various city voices: the ringing of the church bells, the sound of horns and motors, howling of city dwellers as "human engines," "the pleasant whining of a mandoline / And a clatter and a chatter" of fishmen.

Hardly any character in *The Waste Land* was at home. While the house was the setting where all the important events took place in traditional English literature, the locus of

modernist prose and poetry shifted from home to the street. The house, representing "the continuity of tradition, family, social class, and conventional order" (Wirth-Nesher, 1996, p. 18), was no longer a clearly demarcated place in Eliot's poem as it occurred outside. The dwellers of the rooms, which appeared only momentarily, are observed by Tiresias. Moreover, the exterior urban world intruded into a wealthy woman's boudoir: "'What is that noise? / The Wind under the door. / What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'" Hence privacy was violated and the clearly defined boundary between private and public space of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel entirely disappears in modernist literature. Julian Wolfreys remarked in reference to the motif of homelessness in *The Waste Land*: "There are no more homes, no longer any intimation of being at home. Certainly, one is never at home in a city where there is always something at one's back, where streets are 'ghastly,' and something calls to one, reminding one of mortality, or some ghostly manifestation of another time" (Wolfreys, 2007, p. 237). The intrusion of the city to such a great degree and the absence of the private space where one could have been separated, alone with him/herself, made the urbanite "never alone but deserted" (Ellul, 1970, p. 125).

The Influence of Urban Landscape upon T. S. Eliot

"If we opened people up, we'd find landscapes," Agnes Varda stated in her autobiographical film "The Beaches of Agnès," in which the filmmaker revisited the places that inspired and shaped her. In Varda's words, it could be assumed that the landscape corresponding with T. S. Eliot was the cityscape. Hugh Kenner referred to him as a city poet: "He was always a city poet, not a country poet, his affinities rather with Baudelaire than with Wordsworth" (Kenner, 2015, p. 27).

In his famous lecture "The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet" Eliot affirms that he was influenced by a "composite" of the landscapes where he had spent his lifetime: "my personal landscape is a composite… My urban imagery was that of St. Louis, upon which that of Paris and London have been superimposed" (Eliot, 1997, p. 355). While they are ideal places and looking at the beaches was a pleasure for Varda, observing the cityscape was not a source of delight for Eliot. As Richard Lehan remarks: "Both Baudelaire and Eliot saw modern man caught in an essentially self- enclosed urban process: the commercial/industrial city became the modern equivalent of Dante's Inferno. Salvation depended upon breaking the circle of materialism" (Lehan, 2009, pp. 62-63). While Eliot found the city as a pioneer in the deprivation of values, the cityscape still greatly inspired the poet and incited him to

find material in everyday urban life. He rebuilt the city through fragments of urban life: the streets, buildings, districts, public spaces, and occupations related to urbanity (the typist, the barmaid). Most importantly, by using allusions and references to the set of cities, layers of urban imagery coexisted in the poem. While discussing the relation between modernist text and the city, Sharpe and Wallock accentuated how the urban landscape and modernist form were interwoven into each other:

> City and style, object and evocation quickly take on aspects of one another as the urban environment shapes an aesthetic perception, which in turn pro- duces a new form of vision of the city. The city is the locus of modernism, and each aspect of city life seems to generate or demonstrate a characteristic of this artistic movement—multiplicity of meaning, loss of sequential or causal connection… (Sharpe and Wallock, 1987, p. 5, as cited in Gurr, 2015 p. 24)

The Waste Land attained features of the modern city - fragmentality, multiplicity of meaning, and spatial superimposition. The reader discovered multiple hidden cities in the poem. The urban settings of Eliot's early poetry were not exactly named. Both St. Louis and London could be sources of the thick "yellow fogs" and therefore loci in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. According to drafts of *Preludes*, the first and the second episodes were entitled "Prelude in Dorchester" and "Prelude in Roxbury." In the final version, Eliot removed the names of both locales from the titles, thus the borders were eliminated, and the artistic space of the poem was expanded, which created a symbolic image of the city. In *The Waste Land* Eliot unfolded a map of London in front of the reader and allowed him/her to observe its streets, river banks, churches, and gardens. "Unreal City" could be identified as London, but it encompassed references to Baudelaire's Paris and Augustine's Carthage. London was the center of the poem but it also represented Rome - the center of an empire and Jerusalem - the center of the world (Cook, 1979, pp. 341-342). The poem was not merely a naturalistic image of London, but it became a palimpsest. As Richard Lehan correctly pointed out, "Eliot makes use of an archaeology of history, the superimposition of one layer of time upon another. One can reconstruct the history of the city from Athens through to modern London. There is first the cast of characters: Tiresias (Athens), Christ (Jerusalem), Cleopatra (Alexandria), Marie Larisch (Vienna), and Queen Elizabeth (London)" (Lehan, 2009, p. 130).

Eliot experienced the urban environment not merely as a poet, but as a banker as well. Joseph McLaughlin suggested that his carrier did not negatively affect him as a

poet but fed his poetry. The scholar represented Eliot surrounded by tons of papers received from all around the world, who like a fisherman fishes out what was valuable and what was not:

> At Lloyd's Bank… the world comes together and Eliot is the one responsible for composing the text. He cuts and pastes (collocates) information from all over the world in order to compose a single world text - the daily "sheet of extracts" from the foreign press. As opposed to the unifying narrative of a summary or report, the technique used by Eliot in this composition is the modernist one of pastiche or collage (McLaughlin, 2000, pp. 174-175)

McLaughlin's assumption, that Eliot found inspiration from his daily routine and borrowed the "cut and paste" method while composing *The Waste Land,* appeared to be quite presumable. Eliot stated himself in "The Music of Poetry": "Of course, we do not want the poet merely to reproduce exactly the conversational idiom of himself, his family, his friends and his particular district: but what he finds there is the material out of which he must make his poetry" (Eliot, 1975, p. 112). Thus, by observing objects and events of daily city life, Eliot conceived more than describing merely a naturalistic and historic image of London in *The Waste Land*.

Mythopoeic Image of the City in *The Waste Land*

The concept of a city is ambivalent. Samuel Johnson's famous description of London might also refer to every city: "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life" (Pike, 1981, p. 7). This phrase represented a city as an endless source of life, whereas Eliot's urban picture suggested the contrary. The first chapter, "The Burial of the Dead," is imbued with the feeling of springtime lethargy when a human's body experienced a state of weariness and lowered energy caused by winter drowsiness. April was the cruelest month as it insisted on the world's awakening. However, the narrator implied not having enough strength for it and was quite nostalgic for winter: "Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow." The desire for inactivity was also reflected in the lyrical drama *Murder in the Cathedral* published in 1935:

> We do not wish anything to happen.
> Seven years we have lived quietly,
> Succeeded in avoiding notice,
> Living and partly living

In the last passage of "The Burial of the Dead" the narrator described people walking on the London bridge who reminded the reader of the partly living humans wasting their lifetime. To depict the setting of the poem as a phantasmagoric city, Eliot drew a picture of a misty winter morning in London. The brown fog, the city was covered with, created an illusionary view and London became "Unreal." The crowd of people walking on the bridge were hurrying to fall into a daily routine. They looked like a Dantean train of tortured shadows, which did not do any good or bad in their life, so they were not allowed either in heaven or in hell. In regard to the same idea Eliot pointed out: "So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good: so far as we do evil or good, we are human: and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist" (Eliot, 2016, p. 225). Symbolically, people crossing the London Bridge walked past Saint Mary Woolnoth located in the financial district of London, which in is referred to as the English Wall Street. Robert A. Day considered it as a church for employees working in a commercial establishment, as Saint Mary Woolnoth was open "at unusual hours so that the members of the financial community may be refreshed in any spiritual dryness that may visit them" (Day, 1965, p. 289). Nancy Hargrove also correctly noted that a church a symbol of timelessness, in the modern world became a symbol of man's imprisonment in a profane time (Hargrove, 1978, p. 67). The complex relation between the city and the church is also depicted in *Choruses from 'The Rock,'* in which Eliot represented London as "the timekept city":

> I journeyed to London, to the timekept City,
> ... There I was told: we have too many churches,
> And too few chop-houses. There I was told:
> Let the vicars retire. Men do not need the Church
> In the place where they work, but where they spend their Sundays.
> In the City, we need no bells:
> Let them waken the suburbs

Along with a city, a temple is equivalent to the "Centre of the world," the point at which the act of the Creation took place according to Mircea Eliade. By the symbolism of the Center, it was possible to abolish the profane spatio-temporal continuum, transcend the temporality of the secular world and enter a mythical time-space. Eliot depicted a completely different picture in *The Waste Land*. The temple was no longer the symbol of the transition from the profane to the precosmic mode of being. It could be considered as a metonymy of the modern world emptied from sanctity. For Eliot,

the church became an empty chapel which formed a contrast to the chapel perilous of the Grail legends, as it was deprived of any danger and sacrality. There was no ordeal for a questing hero in the vacant chapel and therefore no guarantee of spiritual renewal was expected: "There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home. / It has no windows, and the door swings."

St. Magnus the Martyr represented the opposite of St. Mary Woolnoth. In "The Fire Sermon" it astonishes the reader with dazzling grace: "Where the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendor of Ionian white and gold." Robert Day noticed that white and gold were liturgical colors reminiscent of Easter and the joy of the believers (Day, 1965, p. 290). It is also symbolic that the church of St. Magnus the Martyr was built on Lower Thames Street, near the river, while St. Mary Woolnoth was placed in a spiritually deserted area of London. According to Jessie Weston, in the Arthurian romances the Holy Grail was kept in a castle near the life-giving water - be it the river or sea. The lines mentioning St. Magnus the Martyr were preceded by the scene depicting fishermen's squabble and joy. The symbolism of fish played a significant role in linking two passages and formed a sharp contrast between them. On the one hand, fish are a symbol of life in various religious doctrines, while on the other hand, fishermen remind the reader of the Fisher King who once lived, but he was dead in the poem. Therefore, two churches erected on Eliot's waste land confronted each other, as St. Mary Woolnoth represented commerciality, inner sterility, and the empty chapel, whereas St. Magnus the Martyr is associated with the vitalizing water, Easter, and rejoicing, however, its liturgical white and gold lost their function. Eleazar Meletinsky suggested, that the mythologeme of death and resurrection paradoxically "becomes the motif of impossibility and refusal to resurrect" in Eliot's world turned into the waste land (Meletinsky, 2000, p. 330).

The artistic space of *The Waste Land* represented much more than a setting or a metaphor for moral decline and an old, exhausted world. The poem at first glance, consisted of disconnected fragments, "broken images." However, the urban landscape, characters, objects, and situations are ordered in a way that created an emotional background and aroused specific feelings in the reader. The beginning of the third episode is an example of how Eliot brought the theory of "objective correlative" to life. To emphasize the spiritual emptiness the author built up a cold and gloomy winter atmosphere of London and described the place which was haunted by the wind (*Cf*. Part V - "There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home").

> The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
> Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
> Crosses the brown land, unheard

The poetic imagery of the unheard wind crossing the brown land composed an inaudible cinematographic scene. An absolute silence gave the utmost dramatic effect to the passage as the muteness concurred with a bare and bleak environment. The line could provoke the reader's unintended attempt to imagine the depicted visual image accompanied by the audible wind. Portrayed vacant lots and dead trees without leaves created the severe image of the empty city where nothing was expected. Eliot used the word "nothing" several times in the poem. As well as there is no seed found in the barren land that could be fertilized, correspondingly, complete desolation conquered the characters' inner and surrounding worlds. Therefore, two planes, inner and outer, intertwined as one dimension. (*Cf.* I chapter - "I knew nothing," II chapter - "You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing?," III chapter - "I can connect / nothing with nothing,""My people humble to expect / Nothing"). The passage depicting despair was followed by an excerpt from Spenser's *Prothalamion*, which in contrast described an idyllic summery day. Apart from the general perception of summer as a lively season, whereas winter is harsh and associated with death, winter scenery of the poem was connected with the eschatological beliefs of various cultures. According to Norse mythology, three successive winters, without intervening summer, precluded Ragnarok, the last battle of the gods. This event is called "Fimbulvetr" - great winter. Furthermore, Videvdad narrated that the highest god, Ahura Mazda, punished humanity with freezing cold and frosty winter for their sins: "Over bad humanity (*ahūm astuuaṇtəm ayəm*) winter will come, and with them the strong ruinous frost ... so that the flying clouds will bring lots of snow" (Oettinger, 2013, p. 170). Thus, the description of the wintry landscape foresignified eschatological events in the poem.

The following winter evening scenery was set in a filthy and moldy district near the gashouse, inhabited by the lower classes of society. Aside from a protean narrator's diverse voices, city noises are heard that resound as the rattling of the bones and chuckling of dead bodies. The narrator was fishing, but instead of rivers mentioned in the Grail legends, where near them the holy grail was kept, water ran through "the dull canal" of the city. The unpurified water emphasized once again that it has lost its vitalizing power.

In the next passage, the artistic space of the poem focused on another symbolic urban setting. Meeting with the Smyrna merchant Eugenides, the prototype of the one-eyed merchant depicted on Madame Sosostris's tarot card, accentuated the topic of sterile sexual encounters. In that passage, the artistic space of the poem focused on another symbolic urban setting. The narrator, propositioned by Mr. Eugenides for a homosexual liaison, was symbolized by the Cannon Street Hotel and the Metropole. Having had a notorious reputation for dubious gatherings, both places represented the hollowness and perversion of sex (Hargrove, 1978, pp. 74-75). While Madame Sosostris was telling a fortune, the reader found out that the one-eyed merchant hid a blank card behind his back. The blankness of the card symbolized one of the foremost subjects of the poem: the spiritual vacancy of a modern city dweller.

The exterior of the city is temporarily changed by the interior spaces. It is noteworthy that passages from "A Game of Chess" and "The Fire Sermon" thoroughly described the room interior and atmosphere, but there are no descriptive details of the typist and the woman surrounded by exquisite furnishings. Mentioning women's hair in both cases was an exception (*Cf.* I Chapter - the hyacinth girl's wet hair). By covering the characters' features, they became a part of a faceless crowd, a description of whose personal appearance had no essential meaning. These two scenes are interconnected with the existence of stairs in the rooms. The young man carbuncular descended the stairs: "And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit. . .." These descending stairs connoted the negative spiritual effort of a visitor to the typist's room. The narrator walked into a wealthy woman's boudoir using the stairs as well: "Footsteps shuffled on the stair." All things denied nature here, as Hugh Kenner pointed out. The fruited vine leaves are carved in metal, Cupidon - in gold. The air is filled with the odor of synthetic perfumes. The aquarium is empty and only a carved dolphin, an ancient symbol of fertility, created an imitation of swimming. There is no sunlight, but "the flames of sevenbranched candelabra" in the room. While discussing the chess symbolism in the episode, Hugh Kenner observed that according to the rules, the game is led by the Queen and pawns, while the weakest and most passive figure on the board is the King that remained in a passive state in this episode as well and did not answer the woman's questions. However, "the fate" of the game in the opening passage of "A Game of Chess" depended on the welfare of the narrator, the King (Kenner, 1959, pp. 152-153). This is one of the connecting dots between the poem and the myths of fertility, in which the Fisher King was that fragile figure, whose weakness led to the ravaging of the land. As Nancy Hargrove remarked, by recalling the Greek myth of Tereus and Philomela, narrating the

cutting out of Philomela's tongue by King Tereus, *The Waste Land* suggested "the inability of the old fertility myths to speak to the modern world" (Hargrove, 1978, p. 71).

The garden is also a significant locus in the poem. For the first biblical humans, the garden was the primary microcosm, a place of knowledge. The very first associations related to it are innocence, serenity, and gullibility. Eliot chose the garden as a literary topos for several passages of the poem. In "The Burial of The Dead" the narrator and the hyacinth girl met each other in the garden in April. The hyacinth girl's wet hair and arms full of hyacinths resembled the mad Ophelia with flowers, who drowns herself in the water. In her desperate monologue distracted Ophelia sings: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts" (Shakespeare, 1994, 4.5.172-173). The hyacinth girl is meant to say the same in that Ophelia's fears come true in Eliot's poem: What possessed the narrator was complete oblivion and inner emptiness ("I was neither living nor dead, and I knew nothing").

Edenic serenity and harmony are replaced with the silence, indifference and half-dead condition in the garden of *The Waste Land*. While discussing the Hyacinth garden, Jewel Brooker noted that in the original draft of the poem in response to the woman's question ("Do you remember / nothing?") the narrator answered: "I remember / The hyacinth garden." The phrase was cut from the final version. Also, in *Facsimile* drafts the woman's question: "What are you thinking about?" was followed by "I think we met first in rats' alley." Afterward, the stanza was replaced by "I think, we are in rats' alley." As Brooker observed, the change from "we met first in" to "we are in" rat's alley emphasized the interweaving of the hyacinth garden and rat's alley as the narrator considers that they are and always have been walking in rat's alley. Thus, the hyacinth garden transformed into rat's alley (Brooker, 1990, pp. 107-108). It is interesting that in Greek mythology the discus thrown by Apollo hit Prince Hyacinthus, the son of the Spartan King Amyclae, wounded him fatally and a hyacinth grew from the place where his blood spilled. According to James Frazer, a flower grown after the death of the divine hero represented a herald of spring and resurrection. Therefore, the use of capital H in "Hyacinth garden" denoted revival after death. In Eliot's garden the reader predicted the death of the hyacinth girl that resembles the death of Ophelia. On the other hand, the narrator was half-dead: "I was neither / Living nor dead." By placing contrastive images of mythologized past and modern decrepitude in the literary diptych of the poem Eliot created "anti-myth" in *The Waste Land*. There was no moral ideal in the modern waste land - the god is dead, and the search for the Grail, the symbol of man's

search for spiritual truth, became a futile abstraction. In the city, where unending consumeristic needs reigned, every attempt to restore spiritual integrity with divinity is doomed.

The passage addressed to Stetson was a demonstration of how vegetation myths turned into "anti-myths" of sterility and inability to resurrect in the urban waste land. Like Dante who recognized an acquaintance among the shadows in the *Inferno*: "When some among them I had recognised" (Canto III, Line 58), the narrator met Stenson in the crowd walking on the London bridge. The dead body buried in the garden that could bloom in spring is a metaphor for the vegetation god risen from the dead. The missing card of the hanged man from Madame Sosostris's tarot, so-called Frazer's "hanged god", symbolized the dead body buried by Stenson. Thus, the symbol of fertility - the garden - became the place where the dead god dwelled. It represented an image of infertility and the dead god's sarcophagus.

Nancy Hargrove comprehended an indirect affirmation of the garden serving as an infertile land in "The Fire Sermon". Nevertheless, Eliot did not describe the garden scenery in the third part of the poem, the reader discovers the implied garden setting in the episode. She referred to the large parks of Richmond and Kew located on the banks of the Thames. Both are famous for their beautiful settings, especially Kew with its botanical gardens. "Richmond and Kew undid me." - this is how the Thames daughter described her sexual experience. Ironically, this idyllic, Edenlike scenery symbolized humans' lust and sterile relationships rather than innocence and fertility (Hargrove, 1978, p. 78). The garden is also an implied setting in "A Game of Chess". A picture placed above the mantel in the wealthy lady's room is compared to the window depicting the sylvan scene that in its turn could be considered as an allusion to *Paradise Lost* by John Milton and the garden of Eden. The picture portrayed not an Edenic idyll of harmony, but the violence of the Tereus and Philomela myth.

The symbolism of the garden also appeared in "What the Thunder Said" which conveyed the narrator's afterlife transcendental experience. The reader heard two voices in the final part of the poem: one was the narrator's and the second was the voice of the thunder. The narrator's voice was still polyphonic. He represented Christ's apostle, a hero seeking the Holy Grail and the Fisher King himself. Symbolically, the beginning of the fifth part described the ending of Christ's earthly life. It started with the reminiscence at night before Christ's crucifixion and ends with his tortured death.

Christ spent the night before his crucifixion with his three apostles in the garden of Gethsemane, which represents a symbolic locus in its turn. If a human sinned for the first time in Eden, the garden of Gethsemane is the place where Christ started the trail of Golgotha to atone for mankind's sins. The first two lines of "What the Thunder Said" directly referred to the Hyacinth garden: "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces / After the frosty silence in the gardens." Therefore, Gethsemane and Hyacinth became linked to each other. The frosty silence recalled the narrator's silence in the Hyacinth garden: "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed." The narrator's muteness referred to the treachery of love. On the other hand, as stated in the Gospel of Mark, Christ asked his apostles to pray with him in the garden of Gethsemane. However, they did not understand the importance of praying the night before Christ's crucifixion and sleep fell upon them. The disciples did not know what to say when Christ found them sleeping and were silent in response to him. Nancy Gish noted that the silence in the Hyacinth garden representing the denial of humane love transformed into the betrayal of divine love in the garden of Gethsemane (Gish, 1988, p. 92).

An allusion to Gethsemane is also associated with the element of water and reminded the reader that the biblical garden is located at the foot of the mountain, near the Gihon spring in the Kidron Valley. The search for water begins from the passage of "What the Thunder Said." Meanwhile, the landmark of the poem - the garden - is followed by its opposite - the desert land. When discussing the close connection between the city and the desert in *The Rock,* Priscilla Martin argued that *"the traditional dichotomy between city and desert is an illusion"* (Martin, 2018, p. 4*).* Martin's assumption could be expanded to include *The Waste Land* as well. Apart from being the metaphor for the spiritual emptiness of the modern world, the desert could also be considered as a symbol for recurrence: the creation of the city from "non-being," the vast nothingness, could end with ineluctable destruction and utter desertion. Thus, the desert represented a potential city, so the city of *The Waste Land* was bound to be a desert again.

The setting of the desert land perfectly communicated the vanity of the quest heroes' journey. The arid and barren land became the delusive landscape, and the boundless desert created a mirage. The narrator raised the question: "Who is the third who walks always beside you?." A stranger hooded in a brown mantle walked with the two companions in the desert. Eliot identified the unknown figure as the resurrected Christ, who could not be recognized by his two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The stranger was like a shadow, an optical illusion caused by the delusive setting of the

desert land. These lines referred to the prophecy of Madame Sosostris. Not only were the fellow travelers walking in the desert not able to communicate with the vanished god, "the Hanged Man," but they did not even recognize him.

The ambiguity of the sexual identity of the hooded figure could be a sign of gender confusion in the poem: "I do not know whether a man or a woman / —But who is that on the other side of you?." It could be said that the whole poem is imbued with this motif. As Eliot stated in the notes enclosed about the poem: "all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias." Hence multiple voices heard throughout the poem belong to mythic Tiresias having ambivalent sexuality. Madame Sosostris was also an example of sexual ambivalence. She is named after both the Egyptian pharaoh Sesostris and A. Huxley's *Crome Yellow*. It is interesting, that Mr. Scogan, a character of Huxley's novel, impersonated a female at a country fair and convinced people he was Madame Sosostris, a female fortune-teller (Brooker, 1990, p. 180).

Symbolically, the passage about Madame Sosostris followed Ezekiel's prophecy. Unlike Tiresias, Ezekiel, and the Sibyl of Cumae, the female fortune-teller of *The Waste Land* represented the spiritual and moral decay of Eliot's modern city and the whole of Europe. As Hugh Kenner pointed out, "she is also "the mind of Europe"' (Kenner, 1959, p. 159). The wisest woman in Europe suffered from a bad cold and could not fully predict the future as she was not able to see what the one-eyed merchant was hiding behind his back. She did not know where the hanged man on the tarot card was. From a traditional perspective, the prophet must serve as negotiator and interpret god's will to humans, however, the god cannot be found in her wicked pack of cards. By describing the portrait of Madame Sosostris in the foreground and implying the Old Testament prophet in the background, by replacing the biblical prophet with his parodic embodiment - the impostor fortune-teller, Eliot depicted the spiritual sterility and decline of the modern world.

While discussing the utmost impoverishment and moribundity, the epigraph of the poem and oracle, the Sibyl of Cumae mentioned in it cannot be evaded. The manuscript of the poem began with the last utterance of Kurtz from Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. Taking Ezra Pound's opinion into consideration, that Conrad was not an influential enough author, Eliot replaced the initial epigraph with an excerpt from *The Satyricon* by Petronius: "I myself with my own eyes saw the Sibyl hanging in a cage; and when the boys cried at her: 'Sibyl, Sibyl, what do you want?' 'I would that I were dead,'

she used to answer.'" Both, the initially intended and the one that had left irreplaceable, perfectly conveys the spirit *The Waste Land* is imbued with. This is a transitional state from empiric to transcendental experience, the very moment when a dying person comprehends the horrors of being. Although, there was one essential characteristic that distinguished them. Marlow's preface and Kurtz's final words[1] described the completed act of death, whereas the excerpt from *Satyricon* showed the continuous process of dying. According to Trimalchio, he saw the Cumaean Sibyl as having eternal life without eternal youth. The infinite life of the Sibyl, shriveled with age, was confined within the finite border of the jar. Thus, the endless unbearable state of being so close to death perfectly communicated the fundamental idea of *The Waste Land*. The same atmosphere pervaded the opening passage of "The Burial of the Dead," for the narrator longed for winter and the forgetful snow. The infinitely extended process of dying was also described in "What the Thunder Said": "He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying / With a little patience." London, affected by the fate of the Cumaean Sibyl, became a moribund city. It reminded the reader of Leopold Bloom's thoughts of the extinct Jewish cities: "Now it could bear no more. Dead: an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world" (Joyce, 1946, p. 61). The fact that the Sibyl could not die eliminated the possibility of resurrection and renewal. The assumption intersects with a quite interesting rite described in *The Golden Bough*. In accordance with Frazer, there was a custom of "Sawing the Old Woman" spread homogeneously among the European peasantries. The ceremony, which took place at Mid-Lent, was used to find a figure representing the oldest woman of the village or city in order to saw her in two. It was believed, that performing the rite would fertilize the local land and bring spring joy into the village or city. For example, as Frazer described, "In Barcelona […] boys run about the streets, some with saws, others with billets of wood, others again with cloths in which they collect gratuities. They sing a song in which it is said that they are looking for the oldest woman of the city for the purpose of sawing her in two in honout of Mid-Lent" (Frazer, 2012, pp. 240-241). The boys also asked the Sibyl: 'Sibyl, Sibyl, what do you want?.'

The artistic time found a very interesting representation in *The Waste Land.* By giving voices to the prophets and oracles (Ezekiel, Tiresias, The Sibyl of Cumae) and clairvoyant (Madame Sosostris) in the poem, Eliot brought in a perception of future time and gives

1 "Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad, 2002, pp. 177-178).

the reader the ability to foresee the immediate future. Madame Sosostris and Ezekiel warned the reader about the forthcoming death. The Sibyl of Cumae, "fear in a handful of dust" symbolized a horrific image of death and the inability to renew. Tiresias, who witnessed the creation and destruction of Thebes, confirmed he knows what will happen: "And I Tiresias have foresuffered all / Enacted on this same divan or bed; / I who have sat by Thebes below the wall / And walked among the lowest of the dead." As oracles, both The Sibyl of Cumae and Tiresias represented the past and present along with the future. In *The Waste Land* Tiresias embodied Eliot's hypothesis of "the ideal order of myth". "The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence," stated Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and thus urged the reader to perceive the entire literary tradition as a simultaneous system (Eliot, 1920, p. 44). Eliot gave Tiresias a binary perspective, therefore the mythological oracle gained a vision of the past and future through the present moment. As Jewel Brooker remarked it is necessary to mention P. H. Bradley's concept of the Absolute while discussing the character of Tiresias. In contrast to the Hegelian Absolute connoting a metaphysical substance, Bradley considered the Absolute to be the sum of experiences. Tiresias gained an experience of several realms of being. The same can be said about the Cumaean Sibyl. In the *Aeneid* she could envision Rome's past and future in a single picture, she could move from this world to Hades and thus be aware of both worlds belonging to life and death. As Brooker pointed out, "Mythic seers have a binary perspective; that is, they enjoy both a mythic and a relational mode of knowing and being and, moreover, enjoy both at once. They can see from the inside, part to part, but also from the outside, part to whole" (Brooker, 1990, pp. 47-53). Tiresias and the Sibyl constructed to a great extent the artistic time of the poem, which represented an extended present moment of dying, mixing memory and desire, the past and future. As Eliot said, Tiresias was the central figure "uniting all the rest… What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem." If Tiresias represented "the all-gathering memory," as Grover Smith referred to him, then he was a point where the past, present, and future align. The reader should expect Tiresias to witness the destruction of many other cities as he was the one to see the rise and the fall of Thebes. This is exactly what happened in the fifth part of the poem: "Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London." In the final chapter, the narrative takes place in a timeless dimension, where chronological time abolishes. Thus, the narrator's rhetorical question: "What is the city over the mountains / Cracks and reforms" conveys the image of every city mixed with a mirage of the desert.

Hugh Kenner gave the title "Urban Apocalypse"[2] to his well-known essay about *The Waste Land*. The eschatological events could be clearly perceived in the poem. The second passage of "The Burial of the Dead" represented an echo of Ezekiel's prophecy foreboding the complete destruction of Jerusalem: "In all your dwellingplaces the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished" (Ezek 6:6). In the fifth chapter, the reader could see through the narrator's eyes how ancient cities fell simultaneously: Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, and, the capitals of European empires - Vienna and London. The barmaid's reminders of closing time represented parodic eschatological alarm in "A Game of Chess": "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME." The ending lines of the episode could be perceived as a parody of an apocalyptic image where the pub represented a micro-world that must be closed and its inhabitants are asked to leave.

The apocalyptic events are caused by the elements of water (or its absence) and fire in *The Waste Land*. Madame Sosostris announced in the very beginning: "Fear death by water." In "Death by Water" her vision came true and Phlebas the Phoenician "enters the whirlpool." Water which is a symbol of cleansing and refreshing becomes desacralized as it is not life-giving, but a destructive force in the poem. Similarly, in *Our Mutual Friend* the river is doubly destructive to the people who drowned in its bosom. Both the city and the river were a source of commerce in Dickens' novel. One must fear death by water as the drowned bodies, left high and dry by the Thames, would fall into the hands of the hunters after dead bodies.

In "What the Thunder Said" the urban landscape was replaced by rocks and mountains, where the narrator was in search of water:

> 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

2 Kenner, Hugh (2015). "The Urban Apocalypse", *Eliot in His Time: Essays on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of 'The Waste Land'*. Ed. Litz, A. Walton, Princeton University Press.

According to cosmogonic beliefs of advanced mythologies, the sky and the earth correspond to male and female principles, often suggested as a married couple (Meletinsky, 2000, p. 167). "Dry sterile thunder without rain" – could be perceived as one of the series of examples of a sterile sexual relationship. Thunder claps and echoes in the mountains, but it failed to bear rain. The masculine function of the sky to fertilize the earth mother was long deprived. Dry holes of the rocks referred to as the "dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit" reminded the reader of Lil's rotten teeth mentioned in "A Game of Chess." Similarly, in *Ulysses* Stephen talked about: "My teeth are very bad… Toothless Kinch, the superman" (Joyce, 1946, p. 51). Dedalus compared his teeth to shells that in its turn symbolized an empty dead shape. He used the following word collocations: "human shells, "hollow shells,""idle shells,""silly shells." The idea of depicting human as an empty vessel in Eliot's poetry was further developed in *The Hollow Men* published in 1925.

The element of fire has an ambivalent nature on one hand as it is linked with sin and the fire of passion, while on the other hand, it bears a purifying function. The states of a human and the land, and their physical and spiritual renewal are closely related to each other in fertility myths as well as in *The Waste Land*. The barren state of the land was conditioned by sterile human relationships and vice versa. Relationships drained from any emotional and spiritual connections were one of the fundamental issues of the poem. Paradoxically, the leading element of "The Fire Sermon" was not the fire itself but the water. The meadow by the Thames River and the peacefully walking nymphs described in *Prothalamion* were replaced by the suburbs of modern London and prostitutes. The Thames witnessed the nymphs with baskets collecting flowers for the brides, whereas the same river bore the 'attributes' left by the modern Thames daughters and "the loitering heirs of city directors": "The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights" (empty bottles, cardboard boxes - signs of emptiness). At the end of the episode, Spenser's nymphs are followed by a reminiscence of "Rhine daughters" by Richard Wagner. The modern women's stories conveyed the same thing. They spoke of violent sexual experiences. There were only facts and few names of London suburbs in the narratives/songs as if these locations determined their fate: "Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew / Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees,""My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart / Under my feet," "On Margate Sands. / I can connect/ Nothing with nothing." This denoted that there was no fiery feeling in their sexual relationships: emotional connection, regret, or the fire of lust, which according to Buddha, accompanies

the physical world and the only way to escape from it is asceticism. Nancy Gish noted that the words women chose to describe the scenes of violence make their passive state obvious. They were not the ones who acted, but they told of what was done to them. The first daughter mentioned: "Highbury **bore me**," "Richmond and Kew **undid me**," she lies "supine" in the canoe. The second daughter had nothing to say after sex: "I made no comment. What should I resent?." The reader noticed the word "nothing" twice in the song of the third woman. She did not wish to remember anything, and she expected nothing (Gish, 1988, p. 81). The theme of sterile sex is depicted in the relationship of the typist and young man carbuncular. The woman, like the Thames daughters, was passive and indifferent: "Which still are unreproved, if undesired." As Brooker pointed out: "Eliot's secular city is a place where people cannot imagine transcendence of any kind. They are incapable of spiritual transcendence, but also they are incapable of physical transcendence. They are bound upon the wheel of relational consciousness, as incapable of lust as of mystical experience" (Brooker, 1990, p. 124). The third episode is summed up by the phrase: "To Carthage then I came". As stated in Eliot's annotation, the line is a reminiscence of *Confessions* by Saint Augustine ("to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears"). The phrase, in its turn, invoked the imagery of fire in the reader's mind. Meanwhile, we are transported from modern London to Augustine's Carthage. The artistic space of the poem - modern London - was replaced with Augustine's Carthage. The mentioning of the ruined site of Carthage once again recalled the image of the destructed city that threatened all cataloged spaces in the poem. Spencer Morrison suggested: "*The Waste Land* as a poem of modern ruin-gazing, where the act of seeing ruins – characteristically understood as an act that elicits both terror and pleasure in the viewer – transpires in a literary form attentive to the new speed of urban destruction" (Morrison, 2015, p. 29).

The Waste Land is referred to as "the ruin poem" as well in the essay "Ruins of Rome: T. S. Eliot and the Presence of the Past" by Charles Martindale. A ruin manifesting decay, transience and weakening and destroying power of time, could also be perceived as "the site of recovery" (Martindale, 1995, p. 121). The double significance and binary perspective of the ruin were perfectly conveyed by Hegel: "What traveller among the ruins of Carthage, of Palmyra, Persepolis, or Rome, has not been stimulated to reflections on the transiency of kingdoms and men, and to sadness at the thought of a vigorous and rich life now departed…, But the next consideration which allies itself with that of change, is that change, while it imports dissolution, involves at the same time the rise of a new life - that while death is the issue of life, life is also the issue of death" (Martindale, 1995, pp. 121).

The Waste Land, the ruin poem, is composed of separate fragments and pieces. At the end of the poem the narrator stated: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." However, it is a matter of interpretation whether Eliot's urban landscape could be "the site of recovery." In the end, the protean narrator is seen transformed for the last time. He was the Fisher King, who turned his back on his land. At the same time, the artistic space of the poem moved to the city again: "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down". The line was a reference to an English nursery rhyme. The use of this phrase conveyed a symbolic meaning. While children sang to the resurrection of vegetation deities and the Fisher King in fertility rites narrated in *Golden Bough* as well as in the Grail legend, the nursery rhymes were chanted to death and disability to gain a new life in *The Waste Land*.

Conclusion

Mythopoeic space of *The Waste Land* was confined with boundaries and represented an enclosed time-space. The structure of the poem from "April" to "Shantih" resembled Ouroboros - an ancient symbol of eternal cyclicality. The artistic rhythm in the poem was cyclic and constantly repetitive, suffering from which the narrator longs to evade. The artistic space of the poem was circumscribed within the framework of a symbolic locus. The topos of the poem was urban and implied all cities of the past, present and future - Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria, Thebes, Carthage, London, Vienna, and Munich.

The poem traversed time and space. Each prophet's voice represented the cornerstone of perceiving Eliot's city as a mythopoetic image. The function primarily rested on Tiresias and the Sibyl of Cumae as they were the ones who shed light upon the essential characteristics of the mythopoeic outlook that was called the vision from the moment to eternity.

The Waste Land is a poem of broken images, and the reader will find it difficult to put the pieces together: "I can connect / Nothing with nothing." Eliot used mythical schemes of fertility, death, and resurrection to organize the created chaos. By using the mythical patterns Eliot allowed the reader to perceive clashing images of the past, present, and future simultaneously. The "anti-myth" of the poem reflected the spiritual sterility of modern times. Thus, in accordance with Eliot's words, "the ideal order of myth" was achieved: each character took the place of another and in the end, all of them became the face of everyman – Tiresias. In like manner, every river (the Tames,

the Nile, the Ganges, the Rhine, etc.), church or chapel (St. Mary Woolnoth, Magnus the Martyr, the chapel perilous of the Grail legends), the garden (Hofgarten, Hyacinth, Stetson's garden, Gethsemane, Eden) were unified in London, which in turn represented every other city and transformed into symbolic, mythical topos - equivalent to the jar where the Cumaean Sibyl dwelled, where time stood still and space represented the world's parodic model similar to the circular body of Ouroboros.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

References

Alighieri, D. (1867). *The Divine Comedy*. London: George Routledge & Sons. Translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Brooker, J. S., & Bentley, J. (1990). *Reading 'The Waste Land': Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Conrad, J. (2002). *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*. Oxford University Press.

Cook, Eleanor. (1979). "T. S. Eliot and the Carthaginian Peace." ELH, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 341–55. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2872618. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

Day, R. A. (1965). The "City Man" in The Waste Land: The Geography of Reminiscence. *PMLA,* 80(3), 285-291. Doi:10/2307/461276

Dickens, Ch. (1998). *Our Mutual Friend*. London: Penguin Books.

Eliade, M. (1954). *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. NY: Pantheon Books.

Eliot, T. S. (1920). *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Methuen & Co.

Eliot, T. S. (1963). Murder in Cathedral. New York: A Harvest Book. Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.

Eliot. T. S. (1964). Selected Poems. New York: A Harvest Book. Harcourt, Inc.

Eliot, T. S. (1971). The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound. Ed. Valerie Eliot. London: Faber & Faber.

Eliot, T. S. (1975). The Music of Poetry. Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot. Ed. F. Kermode, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Eliot, T. S. (1997). The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet. Daedalus, 126(1), 352–352. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027421

Eliot, T. S. (2016). The Letters of T. S. Eliot Volume 6: 1932–1933. London: Faber & Faber.

Ellul, J. (1970). The Meaning of the City. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Frazer, J. G. (1894). *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*. Vol. 1. New York and London: Macmillan and Co.

Gish, N. (1988). *The Waste Land: A Poem of Memory and Desire.* Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Gurr, J. M. (2015). The Modernist Poetic of Urban Memory and the Structural Analogies between "City" and "Text: The Waste Land and Benjamin's Arcades Project, In: Recovery and Transgression: Memory in American Poetry. Ed. Kornelia Freitag. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 21-37. Retrieved from: academia. edu

Hargove, N. D. (1978). *Landscape as a symbol in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Joyce, J. (1946). *Ulysses.* New York: Random House.

Kenner, H. (2015). The Urban Apocalypse. *Eliot in His Time: Essays on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of 'The Waste Land.' Ed. Litz, A. Walton, Princeton University Press.* pp. 23-50.

Kenner, H. (1959). *The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot.* New York: Ivan Obolensky, Inc.

King James Bible: The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10/10-h/10-h.htm

Lehan, R. (2009). Literary Modernism and Beyond. Louisiana State University Press.

Martin, P. (2018). T. S. Eliot: Cities and the City. In: Tambling, J. (eds) The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62592-8_73-1

Martindale, C. (1995). Ruins of Rome: T. S. Eliot and the Presence of the Past: *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics,* 3(2/3), 102-140. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163575

McLaughlin. J. (2000).Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot. University Press of Virginia.

Meletinsky, E. (2000). *The Poetics of Myth.* New York: Routledge. Translated by G. Lanoue, A. Sadetsky.

Morrison, S. (2015). Geographies of Space: Mapping and Reading the Cityscape. In: Mcintire, G. (eds) The Cambridge Companion to The Waste Land. Cambridge University Press.

Oettinger, N. (2013). Before Noah: Possible Relics of the Flood-Myth in Proto-Indo-Iranian and Earlier. [in:] Proceedings of the 24th Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference, ed. S.W. Jamison, H.C. Melchert, B. Vine, Bremen: Hempen. pp. 169–183. Retrieved from: http://academia.edu

Paige, D. D. (1971). Ed. *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*. New York: New Directions.

Pike, B. (1981). *The Image of the City in Modern Literature.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shakespeare, W. (1994). *Hamlet, prince of Denmark. The Tragedies of William Shakespeare*. New York: The Modern Library.

Smith, G. (1971). *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Weston, J. L. (1957). *From Ritual to Romance*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Wirth-Nesher, H. (1996). City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wolfreys, J. (2007). Writing London Volume 3: Inventions of the City. Palgrave Macmillan.