

The Hurdles in Front of Women in Expressing Their Voice in Eliot's *The Waste Land*

Mariwan N. Hasan¹, Shamal A. Hussein²

¹English Department, University of Sulaimani, Sulaimani, Kurdistan

²English Department, Human Development University, Sulaimani, Kurdistan

Email address:

Mariwan152@live.com (M. N. Hasan), shamalinternet@yahoo.com (S. A. Hussein)

To cite this article:

Mariwan N. Hasan, Shamal A. Hussein. The Hurdles in Front of Women in Expressing Their Voice in Eliot's *The Waste Land*. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 3, No. 6, 2015, pp. 171-175. doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20150306.18

Abstract: For the past previous decades critics have been disapproving Thomas Stearns Eliot repeatedly for his misogynistic dealing of female in his poems. A limited number, though, have regarded his depiction of female roles in assisting the themes he was dealing with in his poetry. The narrative space of *The Waste Land* is conquered chiefly by female, both modern and mythological, who demonstrate the enduring ruthless connection between male and female. This deeply individual connection, though, is similar to the connection of the individual and society; like the individual, the females must decide to either express their opinions against their suppressors or become quiet and accept their conditions. Each of the two options puts female at danger of extra suppression. Thus, the wasted scenography of *The Waste Land* is like the background of a halting social world inhabited by dominant people fighting to discover their voice. Eliot depicts the voice of women as the conflict against the destroyed community and communication that typifies the modern world. Modern and mythical characters join in *The Waste Land*, illuminating the vanity of communication in an area where force hurdles exist between the men and women. By contrasting mythical females from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* against the modern characters from *The Waste Land*, this study will show to what extent the poem's theme of social collapse prolongs into the contemporary world, whenever such vanity is aroused, in the past and in the modern times, either.

Keywords: Oppression of Women, T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

1. Introduction

Different authors have said different things about being silent, for instance; Zora Neale Hurston, the African American writer has once stated, if you do not say anything about your agony, they'll execute you and say you appreciated it (Hurston). This says a lot about the estimation of having a voice; being heard guarantees a way of life and in addition a show, honest to goodness place in the public eye. Without a voice a man loses his substance, his quintessence, and any feeling of power. The ownership of a voice is one of the best guards and distinctions against the bedlam of the advanced world. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* investigates the part of the voice amidst this tumult trying to delineate the battle for individual characters against the flood of modern persecutions. *The Waste Land* is, in substantial part, around a general social and social breakdown; this breakdown takes its shape in demolished correspondence and barren human connections in an age of extreme utilitarianism. Eliot

arranges this breakdown fundamentally around ladies: a large portion of the characters in the account are ladies, and most of the suggestions made all through reference ladies and their relationship to men. These severe connections in the middle of men and ladies parallel the relationship between the individual and society; like the individual, the ladies must settle on the choice to take a stand in opposition to their male oppressors or keep quiet and acknowledge their circumstances. Either choice places the ladies at danger of significant wrongs and enslavement. The squandered scenography of *The Waste Land* goes about as the setting to a handicapped social world inhabited by enslaved people attempting to discover their voice.

2. Ladies in *The Waste Land*

With a specific end goal to highlight the enslavement felt by people in the present day world, *The Waste Land* preoccupies its attention on ladies; the discriminatory

relationship in the middle of men and ladies is similar to that between a solitary individual and his or her general public, and an outcaste and his or her waste land. Eliot depends on two unmistakable classes of ladies to loan their voices to his no man's land. The primary rises up out of mythic starting points: the ladies in this classification incorporate characters from established Greek and Roman myths, especially Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This gathering of Classic myths highlights the uneven relationship in the middle of men and ladies, and additionally in the middle of divine beings and mortals; the force structure in *Metamorphoses* is obviously portrayed, making the stories inside particularly helpful in considering the human connections in *The Waste Land*. The second classification of ladies in Eliot's poem is the contemporary ladies of post-World War I Europe. These characters possess a space of authenticity inside the poem all in all; their stories are every day and even paltry, however these straightforward encounters say a lot about the treatment and desires of ladies in progressive societies. The representations of ladies inside these two separate classes delineate the same thought with respect to the enormous impact of voice in looking after personality. An introductory thought of the two hugest legendary ladies will highlight the heart breaking contrasts in the stories of the modern ladies.

Woman firstly appeared in the epigraph of *The Waste Land*. Incidentally, Eliot originally selected a line from *Heart of Darkness* by the novelist Joseph Conrad, the dying words of the main character, Kurtz: 'The horror! The horror!' Here, one can argue that what Kurtz was more worried about was the horror of inhumane colonial practices of the British stations in Africa, rather than merely what his wife was eager to hear from him told by Marlow, as Kurtz's lady was figuratively portrayed to represent the queen or the national British common expectation from their colonies, which unfortunately was 'The horror! The horror!' Ezra Pound, Eliot's friend did not prefer the selection and a substitution was made (V. Eliot 3). The epigraph of 'The Waste Land' comes from *The Satyricon*, the satirical novel supposed to have been composed by Roman courtier Gaius Petronius. Incompletely translated, the extract reads: "I have seen with my own eyes the Cumaean Sybil hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked, 'Sybil, what do you want?' she responded, 'I want to die'" (Abrams 2147). The replacement of the classical for the contemporary ascertained appropriate: the Latin quote is critical for a feminist reading of *The Waste Land*. Although this epigraph comes straightly from *The Satyricon*, the Cumaean Sybil also appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the same way as other of the female assumes that he works with, Ovid puts Sybil in a space of male domain. As a young lady she had been offered an endowment of her picking by the sun god, Phoebus, in his persevering endeavours to obtain her virginity. By abusing her sexuality with an end goal to pick up force, Phoebus exemplifies the severe gendered chain of command under which ladies endure. Sybil requests the same number of years of life as grains of sand in a heap; tragically, she neglects to request unending youth also. The god gives her wish for close interminable life and guarantees to give

her everlasting youth just on the off chance that she sexually submits to him.

In spite of the offer, she protects her virtue, therefore punishing herself to a sluggish death. As centuries pass Sybil withers, losing her power and her body. Ovid's repeating of this legend finishes on a fairly high note though while she clarifies to Aeneas: 'But when I am no longer visible, / I will be recognized by my voice still, / According to the promise of the Fates' (XIV.226-8). When her bodily self becomes hidden, Sybil will still have an apparent attendance via her voice. The ownership of a voice signifies a practice of power; the capability to be known, and to say opinions and views through language signifies an obvious existence in society.

Despite the fact that this incorporation of Sybil was not first expectation, the suggestion loans itself entirely well to understanding the women's activist topical state of *The Waste Land* all in general. In 'Women in Waste Land,' Astrid Ensslin proposes that the epigraph is automatic to the whole poem (208); in spite of the fact that the suggestion is bound to two separate yet legitimate sources, each of these enlighten distinctive parts of the relationship between male and female. The immediate quote from *The Satyricon* portrays Sybil as caught inside of the limitations of a glass bottle, where she can only breathe without motion as an ornament and a jar's content of beauty and pleasure. She can see the field of her surroundings furthermore stays obvious to any pariahs. On the other hand, she can't get away; one of the hardest types of detainment is what strengthens the hostage to look upon the skyline of a future out of compass. Petronius' Sybil keeps up a restricted presence controlled by a male suppressor. This male partner, be that as it may, does not even obtain a face in the space of *The Waste Land*. The aftereffects of his moves make shape in the Sybil's circumstance in the epigraph, however this oppressor remains to a great extent immature by Eliot; this demonstrates valid for a considerable lot of the ladies' male partners all through the ballad. The ladies all through *The Waste Land* seem despondent and damned, however, what genuinely interfaces them is their delineation as detainees in confines, rendering them reliant on their male partners (Ensslin 208). Male mastery goes about as the confine that has trapped these ladies, driving them to depend on men's desire for their survival. In deciding to concentrate on the persecuted over the oppressors, Eliot as the voice of unspoken people underscores the base position of those people without a voice. At last, Sybil of *The Satyricon* would preferably deace than be a noticeable detainee to an inconspicuous male suppressor.

The allusion to Sybil, on the other hand, stresses the significance of voice. She recites her story to Aeneas with hints of gloomy: 'My better days have turned their back on me, and scant old age with palsied step draws near, which I must suffer for a long, long time' (XIV.211-13). Though, different from Petronius's representation of Sybil, who very visibly embodies the loss of independence triggered by the suppression of the female, Ovid demonstrates a female figure that has seized at the significance of her voice. Like an observer, Sybil of Cumae trusted her voice to share her

predictions; her voice performed an entrance to the power she appreciated as the most renowned of Sybils (Abrams 2147). Indeed, even as she confronts utter rot, Sybil pronounces that she will in any case be perceived by her voice, a disclosure that appears to serve as some little solace (Ovid XIV.227). It is a resonating ununderstood voice in silence in the jar. Sybil's rise of voice over body highlights the significance of the voice: it recommends that a man without a voice is just a body and a jar, and a body does not have the benefit of a personality. Rather, the personality turns into the property and the formation of those inconspicuous oppressors. A voice speaks to the ability to characterize and keep up a personality, a capacity that is particularly essential in the tumultuous modern world. In *The Waste Land*, the different ways that woman communicates and does not communicate with men reveal this power.

The second lady whose starting points are immovably established in traditional myth shows up in the second area of the poem. In the first scene of '*A Game of Chess*,' which happens in a vulgarly fancy boudoir, the unconcerned and anonymous lady of the story is conflated with a legendary make sense of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid's reciting of the myth, Philomela is assaulted by her brother by marriage, King Tereus, and when she undermines to enlighten all who will listen regarding this wrongdoing he has submitted against her, he is moved to remove her tongue. The 'change' comes when, in the wake of serving Tereus his very own child, Philomela and her sister get away from his wrath as though on wings; and to be sure, they each have been changed into songbirds. (VI.966-8). As often as possible Ovid utilizes transformation as a characteristic of discipline; on the other hand, in the myth of Philomela, it goes about as a reclamation of her immaculateness. Eliot's utilization and situation of this picture proposes that he purposefully encircled the snippet of her change (as opposed to her attack) inside of this room:

Above the antique mantel was displayed

As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale

Filled all the desert with inviolable voice

And still she cried, and still the world pursues, 'Jug Jug' to
dirty ears. (97-103)

The above lines very nearly say more in regards to the 'gendered desert' in which ladies end up than whatever remains of *The Waste Land*. The picture hangs over the 'object from olden times shelf' – the portrayal of which improves the flashiness of the room – taking a noticeable position in the scene. However shallow the lady may appear, whether her decision in stylistic theme was all around educated or not, the vicinity of this composition in the space of her room insights at trust in the female no man's land. For sure, the notice of a 'window' recommends relationship of voyeurism, a quality connected to Tiresias in 'The Fire Sermon.' This conflation of reader and prophet offers a capacity to see the result of the situation. The lady in the chair seems lost and caught in her profound sluggishness,

however when compared against the vivacity of Philomela-as-songbird the reader can foresee a conceivable escape, at least through her voice, going back to mother nature, as if she lacks sense of distinction, value, and recognition, rather than marriage of physical attachment. She is not in need of the opposite gender, but harmony and dignity.

The rape of Philomela by a king is symbolic on more than one level. Given his title, Tereus is portrayed as a literal figure of authority which puts him at a higher social position than Philomela. This power imbalance immediately marks her as a potential victim to oppression. Although the inclusion of this myth follows the pattern of under-represented male counterparts found elsewhere in the poem – Tereus, in this section at least, is never named, nor is his act of violence – his presence undeniably haunts the passage. Though he no longer actively holds dominance over Philomela, the effects of his torment resonate within her existence. As any individual or body with power might, Tereus traps his victim in her place of oppression so that she cannot escape to rise up and find freedom; to prevent her indictments becoming public; he cuts out her tongue, leaving her literally and symbolically silent. Ovid describes his relentless cruelty in *Metamorphoses*: 'And even after this – /One scarcely can believe it, but they say/That even after this, the man continued/to violate her mutilated body' (809-11). After denying his victim a voice, the oppressor does not pause in the subjugation of his inferior. In this way Tereus represents a figure of power, one who presides over disadvantaged populations and cannot bear the possibility of equality.

Throughout *The Waste Land* these two women out of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* haunt the shadows of Eliot's contemporary characters, underscoring the feminine voice lacking in the modern world. Presented in juxtaposition against Philomela, the unnamed bourgeois woman of '*A Game of Chess*' illustrates the ruined communication and coexistence that colour modern waste land. Before the intervention of Ezra Pound, this section of the poem was originally titled '*In the Cage*' (V. Eliot 17). Ensslin attributes the phrase to an early mistranslation of *The Satyricon*, placing Sybil in a cage rather than a jar (208). The difference in word choice between 'cage' and 'jar' is subtle, but important: 'cage' connotes the capture of prey with the intention to abuse or kill; 'jar' also suggests imprisonment, but that which results in preservation, resonance and delicacy.

The ruined communication that characterizes the modern world emerges in the dialogue between the upper-class woman and her under-represented male counterpart. The punctuation of this stilted conversation suggests that the woman's companion is the narrator of "*The Waste Land*" (or at least one of the authoritative voices of the poem):

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"

"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow? What shall we ever do?"

The hot water at ten. And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door. (131-9)

An exact examination of the exchange between the lady and her companion uncovers much about the state of the female voice in Eliot's no man's land. For instance, in spite of the fact that the speaker is never solidly resolved to be male, which is more about power and value rather than gender or sex, as the power he holds over the lady proposes the answer. She endeavours to talk with the man trying to make her character contrary to his; he gives her very little beyond a precise schedule of everyday occasions. Her talked lines are jostling and disorderly while his answers maintain a strategic distance from engagement with her and oppose discussion: this resistance is especially apparent in Eliot's recorded perusing of *The Waste Land*, in which the rhythm of these lines offers the picture of a totally disconnected accomplice weakly attempting to relieve alternate's worries. The man does not specifically address the things she says, mumbling appeasing expressions. Cyrena Pondrom places that this lady speaks to Eliot's first wife, Vivienne Eliot (426). The two wedded rashly after Eliot moved to England, and their relationship crumbled as her mental dangers got to be unmanageable. He saw their association with a feeling of commitment and blame, and in spite of the fact that he did love her, he had no yearning to live as her spouse (Gordon 118). Superimposing this historical data over the character of the common lady loans '*A Game of Chess*' another layer of significance. The relationship between these two individuals confronts ruination, contaminated by lack of concern and disparity. Trusting himself to be-somehow – over the lady, the man effectively rejects her tension without understanding what she is stating: her voice gets to be invalid as does her vicinity in their relations, as if the voice of suffering is not heard.

The conversation between Lil and her companion additionally goes about as a fizzling round of chess in light of the fact that neither completely grasps the other's point of view. Pointlessness hues the whole trade wherein the companion possesses a space of female accommodation and Lil speaks to imperviousness to male force. The companion plays a round of system influencing Lil to offer into the socially esteemed sexuality of the advanced lady. Such sexuality infers that the main objective in a lady's life is to look great and bear her spouse's kids. Sticking to this social desire has destroyed Lil's body and in this manner her presence: when her companion focuses out that Lil does not look as youthful as she once did, Lil reacts, 'It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said. (She's had five as of now, and almost passed on of youthful George)' (159-60). Uncovering the reason for her debilitated appearance – pills she has taken to prompt a premature birth – Lil enhances the sexually oppressed position of ladies in the advanced world. Until late in the twentieth century, lower-class ladies did not have entry to solid contraception so pregnancy happened as often as possible. In the wake of bringing forth five of her spouse's kids Lil more likely than not felt vomited: enough that she got pills that would free her of a 6th tyke additionally

wreaked ruin on her body. Her spouse – and also her companion – seems to have no respect for her humanity wishes and just need to keep on utilizing her as a sexual outlet; and on the off chance that she won't endeavour to be appealing to him he will evidently consider nothing discovering a substitution (149). In this connection, marriage turns into a kind of authorized assault, a circumstance where the man has the privilege to sexually persecute the lady, constraining her to submit to his yearnings. Thus, the relationship in the middle of Lil and her spouse is portrayed by sexuality without richness – the wife's dependence on her pills proposes the couple's sexual relationship to exist as an outlet for the spouse's longings instead of for reproduction – a relationship that 'has been bankrupted by the requests set upon the wife to serve as style, as reproduction machine, and as residential hireling' (Gunnink 3). In this enslaved position, Lil loses the flexibilities that should run with being a self-sufficient individual – the opportunity to represent the sexual utilization of one's body, for instance – and turns into a clear encapsulation of the consequences of male abuse in the modern world as a land that has been carelessly trodden, while it breeds seeds.

As this exchange develops, different voices as often as possible overwhelm the companion's appointment of Lil's, underlining a personality that has been annihilated by the encompassing social and social desires. The companion here assumes the part of storyteller, coordinating the discussion and in addition the group of onlookers' consideration regarding what she esteems the imperative issue: in particular, Lil's sexual association with her spouse. The scene gets to be obliged inside of the cut off points of male abuse, with each word articulated by Lil's companion adding to the debasement of Lil's character. All through the scene, another voice accentuates the trading of the two ladies, and the more it continues, the more the importance of the words movements: 'Hurry up please, it's time' (141). As the stigmatization of Lil's appearance proceeds with, the barkeep's cry withdraws from its unique and harmless aims and starts to connote a spur of the moment and fierce sexuality. Accidentally he supports the companion's assault against Lil, inferring that time is making up for lost time with [her], in the structure of dentures and rot (Ellmann 137); Lil will soon outlast her alleged convenience and character as a lady and will need to confront either demise or outcast to the gendered desert possessed by her companions. This provoking inspires Ovid's story of the Sybil, who confronted hundreds of years of physical rot yet clung to the guarantee of her voice as solace. Lil, be that as it may, does not have a voice outside of the male-overwhelmed social structure; as with the high society lady of the start of the area, Lil exemplifies the trademark lack of care of the cutting edge world. She has found that forsaking individual character and self-rule for abuse basic and much simpler than battling to have her voice listened. As the encapsulation of the sexually externalized lady, Lil loses her voice in the midst of the surge of social burdens that try to implement male mistreatment.

The last lady who embodies the oppressed position of

ladies in the modern world shows up in the third section of *The Waste Land*. The title of this segment, "The Fire Sermon," originates from the title of a sermon lectured by the Buddha against the flames of desire and different interests that devastate individuals and counteract recovery (Abrams 2152). Such a title sets the stage for an area vigorously populated by a cleaned sexuality that energizes sex without origination or dignity. Building off of the conduct started by Lil, the typist in "The Fire Sermon" encapsulates sexual externalization. The common labourer's depiction of her room battles against over the top portrayal of the boudoir in "*A Game of Chess*;" this restriction hoses the simple unresponsiveness and triviality ascribed to the high society lady of the prior segment. Such a change proposes, to the point that the typist, as an individual from a lower class, would have a less demanding time of discovering importance in her life: in a presence described by battle, splendid spots get to be less demanding to see. In any case, the particular lack of care hues the relationship between the typist and her sidekick obscures these brilliant spots and undermines the lady's presence.

3. Conclusion

Lyndall Gordon in her book, *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*, proposes that in real life females were frequently the receivers of Eliot's poetic revelations: the women in his life influenced more of him than his poetry (401); in *The Waste Land*, women in its place become the place of admission, representing the tough truth of the modern world. The poem plays like an investigation of modern relationships between the male and female. Placed beside the stories of mythical ladies out of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, these relations take on fresh fundamentals of destruction. Opposite to the heroic voices of Ovid's females, Eliot's modern women come up short, distressed with the modern situation of indifference. So, the subjugation of their individuality surpasses them, making them sufferers to control. As a result, also becomes the person in society: manly repressive power takes its final form in leading figures and communal officers. With universal indifference reaching the furthest places of society, individuals realize the comfort of reception. Similar to the typist, they become quiet and accept their conditions and practice their voice merely to admit the condition, reflecting only the voice of figure touches on a printer that are dictated by others, not her own voice.

The voice of the typist's fingers touching the printer, voice

of a lady in jar resonating, and voice of a land when it is trodden are all not understood, not valued and not esteemed, although they are the voice of suffering. It is the suffering of dictation and power game imposed by society, rules, and men. It is a silent grief, an unspoken story by a dehumanized creature called modern woman.

References

- [1] Abrams, M. H. "T. S. Eliot." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 6th ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton &, 1993. 2136-182.
- [2] Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- [3] Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- [4] Eliot, T. S. *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1963.
- [5] Ellmann, Maud. "The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound." *The Waste Land: Essays, Articles, Reviews*. Ed. Nick Selby. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- [6] Ensslin, Astrid. "Women in Wasteland: Gendered Deserts in T.S. Eliot and Shelley Jackson." *Journal of Gender Studies*. 14 (2005): 205-216.
- [7] Gordon, Lyndall. *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998.
- [8] Gunnink, Ben. "The Great Waste Land: Sexual Normativity in Two Works of Modernism." Sep. 27 2006. heliologue.com/pdf/the_great_waste_land.pdf. Web. 07 Aug. 2012.
- [9] Hurston, Zora Neale. "Zora Neale Hurston Quotes." *Zora Neale Hurston Quotes (Author of Their Eyes Were Watching God)*. Goodreads Inc., n. d. Web. 09 Apr. 2013.
- [10] Levenson, Michael. "Does The Waste Land Have a Politics?" *Modernism/modernity* 6.3 (1999): 1-13. *Project MUSE*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Web. 15 Feb. 2013.
- [11] Ovid, and Charles Martin. *Metamorphoses*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005.
- [12] Pondrom, Cyrena. "T. S. Eliot: The Performativity of Gender in The Waste Land." *Modernism/modernity* 12.3 (2005): 425-41. *Project MUSE*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Sept. 2005. Web. 14 Feb. 2013.