

# A Reading of *The Waste Land*

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## 2. “A Game of Chess”

For the Greeks, the dog represents a thorough absence of concern for *nomos* — a complete imperviousness to social or relational values.<sup>1</sup> This idea also underlies “The Burial of the Dead”. Moreover, in Eliot’s *The Family Reunion*, the dog is developed into the phantom of the Eumenides who are the bearers of a curse (the Eumenides are another name for the dog-like Erinyes): “let your necrophily/Feed upon that carcass”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in *The Waste Land*, the rite of the burial is a redemptive act to revere the dead human form against the dog, the world that desecrates everything. Žižek acknowledges that in *Antigone* and *Hamlet* there is a basic lesson drawn by Lacan: the plot of both plays involve improper funeral rites.<sup>3</sup> And with the two plays, Žižek believes, we can measure the path traveled by “Western civilization” which finally leads to the two great traumatic events of the holocaust and the gulag. For Žižek, the funeral rite exemplifies symbolization at its purest (*ibid.*, 23). The victims in the two events are those who cannot find their proper place in history (of course, we need to note the difference between the “return of the living dead” and “the return of the dead”). Žižek says, “the shadows of their victims will continue to chase us as “living dead” until we give them a decent burial, until we integrate the trauma of their death into our historical memory”(23).

Just as the dead body is easily exposed to desecration, sex also can be easily jeopardized by desecration, upon which “A Game of Chess” turns.<sup>4</sup> That the original title of “A Game of Chess” was “In the Cage”, a reference to the Cumaean Sibyl of the epigraph, already is a preliminary information. “The cage” not only suggests isolation, confinement, and entrapment, but it “is hell itself, the diabolical routines of marital powerplay”(Gordon, 179). Moreover, Southam also proffers us an evidence that the poem wears the shadows of the Grail Romances because in some of them is told a story that the hero comes to a chessboard castle where he meets a water-maiden (116).

Now, “A Game of Chess” begins with the dressing room description.

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,

Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines  
 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out  
 (Another hid eyes behind his wing)

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In this section, disparate experiences, Booker points out, are amalgamated, and the past literary images also are conjured up, especially from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and J. Milton's *Paradise Lost* (94). Moreover, the allusion to Exodus enhances the effect of the scene: the part of Exodus that the Lord spoke into Moses for making the most holy place for Israel.

But the opening scene (ll. 77-110) can be perceived as something obscene and esoteric. In Gish's words, it is "heavy, opulent, a little nauseating" (Gish, 62), and in Southam's words, it is a pastiche of the style of "wit and magniloquence" (Southam, 116). To borrow a phrase from J. Weston, the scene itself is just like "a cauldron of plenty (of images) carried by a maiden" (*From Ritual to Romance*, 73).

Here Eliot also simultaneously evokes the sacred and profane (Southam, 116). What we find initially is "both luxury and decadence, wealth and bad taste" (Gish, 62). But "she" who is at the center of the scene has no substance. In other words, she is an empty existence in amplitude. It is unknown even whether she is a young girl, Lady, or whore. Here "the feminine object is emptied of all real substance".<sup>5</sup> Brooker remarks, "Eliot's woman in the first half of 'A Game of Chess' is, like Conrad's Kurtz, the hollowness at the center of a field of hollow surfaces" (105).

Another notable feature in this scene, though is implied in the above discourses, is that the division between opposite things is blurred as is typically represented in the "drowned the sense in odours". Reeves says, "The more the visual detail accumulates, the less we can be sure of what we are seeing" (52). This effect, moreover, is enhanced by the confusions of linguistic and grammatical 'sense'. Reeves continues, "In fattening the prolonged candle-flames" and "Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling" show the plethora of verbs and adjectival participles...does not freshen or stir" (Reeves, 54). That is, time and space, and quality and quantity also, are "troubled and confused": "Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes, / *Unguent, powdered, or liquid*" [Italics are mine]. Even the distinction of the sea and wood as a larger frame of "a painting above the mantelpiece" in the scene is not clear: "a carved dolphin swam", and "the sylvan scene" which is the Miltonic allusion to Satan's reaching Eden with intent to corrupt Adam and Eve.

Here we can see the juxtaposed representation of motion and stability, present and past, in Brook-

er's words, of "tangible and intangible objects". Thus, all things in this scene are amorphous and fluid entities so that they are under suspicion, hence "the hierarchical relation of noun to adjectives is reversed" (Brooker, 103). Moreover, Eliot's philosophical idea of identity and its mutability, or subsequently of experience, supports his poetic diction: "the objects are constantly shifting"<sup>6</sup> and "And the world...exists only as it is found in the experiences of finite centres, experiences so mad and strange that they will be boiled away before you boil them down to one homogeneous mass" (*ibid.*, 168). This view leads to Prospero's larger scale of worldview: "all which it (the great globe) inherit, shall dissolve" (*Tempest*, 4.1.114)

Because of its designations of ornate affluence, Brooker senses some resemblance between the dressing room description and a painting (its name not mentioned) of Jean-Honore Fragonard, whose name is always associated with the paintings of love and voluptuousness (Brooker, 101). But carefully observing the detail of it, the scene, I feel, is closer to Duchamp's art in terms of the juxtaposed representation of stability and instability (Well, Fragonard also adroitly catches stillness in movement in *The Swing*). In a sense, Duchamp's art is the conflict and collaboration of movement and stillness. Likewise, in the scene we can see the confrontation between stable forms and forces to dissolve them.

Thus, Eliot and Duchamp are common in adopting in their works a more radical strategy for undermining the stability and coherence of their own identity (Jacques Lacan follows them with the proposition that self-identity is impossible). By accident, Eliot and Duchamp are common in having their complicated relationship with women in their life. Chess, for Duchamp, was a way to live in a universe where symbolic equivalents replaced objects instead of referring to them, that is, as a kind of language.

In such a context, the story of Philomela is introduced in the form of a painting. Though the scale and diversity of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* make it hard for us to grapple with, the unifying thread of the poem, we can suppose, is an interest in identity: that a thing is it, not the others and that a person is him or her, not the others. Ovid works throughout to animate the question of who we think we are and how we think about who we think we are. Denis Feeney says, "In particular, the metamorphoses in the appalling stories of rape often capture the sensation of being forced to conceive of yourself in terms totally different from the ones you had taken for granted, ...".<sup>7</sup> Eliot's reference to Philomela, depicting "the brutal acting out of lust and violation" (Gish, 63), shows his interest in identity and its forced change: "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,

...” Rape, as we can see in Caliban’s view of sexuality, is so serious because it deprives the victims of freedom and enslaves them to the world of things.

Here we can see the disruption of Philomela’s self-identity, as its result, transformation, and her resistance to it in her calamity. But the savage world still pursues to contaminate her. It means that to the last Philomel cannot be free whereas Ariel was finally able to be released from his transformations controlled by Prospero. And the phrase, “And other withered stumps of time/Were told upon the walls”, a kind of the Dantean speaking picture (Reeves, 57), would be suggestive of Eliot’s struggle to tell the untellable, because they, like language, can be surmised ‘smearly paints’ which are strained with impossibility to cover the whole of reality.<sup>8</sup>

The scene goes on to describe another type of transformation that is not so dramatic as the story of Philomel: “her hair/Spread out in fiery points/Glowed into words, then would be savagely still”. The fixity of things is here lost. Just as the combination of oxygen and sulphur dioxide, through a filament of platinum, changes to sulfurous acid, one thing can be easily changed into others, which would result from fluid or unstable state of consciousness (*Essays*, 18). The outside of the woman mirrors the inside of her. In short, the phrase expresses the outrageous change of her feeling. In Brooker’s view, whenever the distinction (between things and words) is subverted, as in the image of the woman’s hair, the dualism of signs and things signified coalesces, for brief moments, into unity” (103). But the unity cannot be completed and soon dissolved. What is worse, the character’s personality also is broken into pieces. The syntax used here strains with impertunity (Reeves, 57).

Here Eliot would have represented decadent sexuality which is epidemic in the modern world. And we here should remember Eliot’s own note: “all the women are one woman”. Therefore, all the women in “A Game of Chess” also are variations of one woman. The long description of the woman’s dressing room is ended by an allusion to a man’s appearance.

And before shifting our discussion to the next scene, I would like to browse through Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*, not only because it, as Eliot’s own note shows, is a literary source of “A Game of Chess”, but because I think that reading the work can alter our sense of “A Game of Chess”.<sup>9</sup> *Women Beware Women*, we can surmise, determines the whole mood of “A Game of Chess”, because it is a keystone connecting all the effects of several allusions used in the poem. For example, “a Golden Cupidon” and “another who hid his eyes behind his wing” are not merely the classical boy gods of love but may be mischievous and blindfolded beings just like the Cupids in *Women Beware Women* who shoot and plagued Hippolito with the deadly shaft. And in the theme of rape, the story of Philomel is common with *Women Beware Women*, which also leads to the theme of

love and betrayal in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Moreover, one of the side-issues of *Women Beware Women* has some concern with Exodus in terms of what the proper ritual should be: "holy ceremonies/Were made for, sacred uses, not for sinful" (152). And even a Brooker's finding that the woman's room becomes a parergon that displaces its central figure, the woman herself, can be seen in more primitive literary form of "the animated house parodies" in *Women Beware Women*.<sup>10</sup>

Now, according to Brooker, "A Game of Chess" develops Eliot's exploration of different ways of 'knowing', in particular, of what could be called 'female epistemology' and of the necessity that it be complemented by 'male epistemology' and, further, of the necessity that both be transcended" (96). So under this scheme, let's try to read the next scene.

'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.

'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.

'What are you speaking of? What thinking? What?

'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'

'I think we are in rats' alley

Where the dead men lost their bones.

'What is that noise?'

The wind under the door.

'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'

Nothing again nothing

'Do

'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

'Nothing?'

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'

But

OOOO that Shakespetherian Rag ——

It's so elegant

So intelligent

'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 to-morrow ?

'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.

Gish explains this scene, "the voices of the couple interact but do not connect : she demands ; he remains withdrawn and separate. In one sense, this is a replaying of the Hyacinth garden scene without the veil of innocence and wistful desire. In both scenes woman makes a claim to affection, communication, or response, and in both the narrator fails" (64). Here one-sided questions are incessantly repeated by "the neurotic woman" (Gish, 64).

Before following the stream of the dialogue, I would like to touch the two utterances which would come from the woman's mute listener : "I think were in rats' alley/Where the dead men lost their bones" and "I remember/Those are pearls that were his eyes". The former lines are a literary storage Eliot has inherited from Joseph Conrad, and the latter ones are Aerial's song taken from *The Tempest*. Both carry the image of death. From Conrad, Eliot learned the piercing insight to go beyond the limits of ordinary cognition and to sense the death that lurks behind everything : "...the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones" (*Heart of Darkness*, 13) and "And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets" (*ibid.*, 62).

Moreover, in the phrase "Those are pearls that were his eyes" taken from *The Tempest*, we can no longer hear the sound of the immortal that Aerial's song originally possessed, because we know that Sordido's parodies of feminine beauty in *Women Beware Women* show that the pearls are characterized as the "eye-disease of cataracts" (101). An echo of the "leprous inclination" in *Women Beware Women* also can be seen in the mention of Lil who has bad teeth, because in *Women Beware Women* the disease of scurvy leads to teeth loss (79). In this respect, the world depicted in "A Game of Chess" much deteriorated in contrast to that in *The Tempest*.

In order to grasp this scene well, I would like to attend to Lacan's idea of hysteria. Firstly, let's re-

member again the three fundamental dimensions of Lacan, the Real (the ‘hard, traumatic reality which resists symbolization), the Symbolic (the field of language, of symbolic structure and communication), and the Imaginary (the domain of images with which we identify, and which capture our attention). To make a further speculation on the interaction between the Real and the Symbolic, we have the Real as the foundation of the symbolization, in this point, the Real is what precedes the Symbolic. But at the same time the Real is what is left over by symbolization, appearing only as a failure or void in the Symbolic, in other words, the Real is in itself a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the Real is not a transcendent positive entity but absolute immanent to the Symbolic. It resists symbolization and, at the same time, tries to neutralize it, to integrate it into the symbolic order. Because of its immanence to the symbolic, the Real cannot be positively signified (*Fantasies*, 217).

In this process, the subject is nothing but the failure point of the process of his(or its)symbolic representation (*Sublime*, 173), because if we could apprehend the Real directly, we, as subjects, would disappear. The subject is, in other words, a void. Our status as subjects, as subjective beings, issues directly from our failure to integrate fully in the Symbolic. The failure of the Symbolic is, therefore, strictly correlative with the creation of subjectivity. The subject is precisely that part of us which dissociates itself from the big Other (i.e.,the communal network of social institutions, customs, and laws as our “second nature”) in the form of the hysteric’s “*Che vuoi ?*”, which in Žižek means “What does the big Other want from me ?”

To sum up again, the Real *par excellence* is *jouissance*. In this point, enjoyment is the manifestation of the Real. But the subject can never ‘subjectivize’, assume, integrate the traumatic Thing *jouissance*, because it is always-already here and, precisely as such, always-already lost. Then, the subject is the ‘decenterment’ not only to the big Other but to *jouissance*, always-already displaced, out-of-joint with regard to it. This is so-called “decentered subject”. Moreover, Žižek remarks, “What characterizes the fundamental subjective position of a *hysteric*...is precisely the ceaseless questioning of his or her existence qua enjoyment” (*Fantasies*, 49).

As Žižek says, Lacan’s starting point is that symbolic representation always distorts the subject (*Sublime*, 175). Therefore, the subject is denoted by S, the crossed, blocked S, a void, an empty place in the signifier’s structure (*Sublime*, 72). The subject denoted by these notations is the pure void with no positive substantial content, with no wealth of experiences to fill its void. Further, the crossed or barred subject is the correlate of  $\bar{A}$  (the barred Other) which is deficient in its relation to the Real.

Hysteria is one of the two forms of neurosis, because hysterical and obsessional neurosis make a symmetrical opposition (*Sublime*, 191). Žižek develops Lacan's idea of hysteria. The subject is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations (*Sublime*, 113). But the subject does not know why he is occupying this place in the symbolic network. In the network you demand something of me, but what do you really want, what are you aiming at through this demand? The hysteric is reluctant to assume desire as his or her own, and seeks instead to desire from the position of someone else. In other words, the hysteric is never clear what the Other wants and is therefore always plagued by a kind of self-doubt, manifest in a recurrent questioning. Thus, this split between demand and desire is what defines the position of the hysterical subject (*ibid.*, 111).

Žižek presents a feature that a hysterical neurotic cannot bear waiting. When the hysterical neurotic feels that he/she 'doesn't know what he/she really wants', he/she addresses the question concerning his/her desire to the other. In Žižek, hysteria is equated with 'failed interpellation'. The hysteric is uncertain in the face of interpellation: "I may recognize the mandate, but is it really meant for me? What we can see in this scene of "A Game of Chess" is this kind of pathology. Here is a different silence from that in the episode of the hyacinth girl. The woman repeats her neurotic utterances and asks the silent listener to speak with her, to tell her his thoughts. She demands and he remains withdrawn and separate (Gish, 64). This one-sided dialogue results in the woman's recognition that there is nothing at the heart of his subject.

Judging from the above, Brooker's conjecture that the woman in this scene may be a ghost is not curious at all. And if we push the conjecture a little further, her visitor also can be a ghost because the effect of the scene is recursive. In a sense, they are forced to share nothing with each other: "her echoing of the man's vacant thoughts (Reeves, 59). They together have no memories, ideas, feelings as the contents that could fill up the void of subject. Therefore, the effect of the whole scene can be, even if not a ghost itself, ghostly. If *Hamlet*, as Brooker points out, is a major subtext especially in this section, the scene surely reminds us of Hamlet who, startled by the spirit of his father, asks his mother if she sees it. Likewise, startled by wind, the woman asks her visitor what it is. As Brooker says, the wind may mean spirit or the absence of spirit, or may be only wind.

But it, to me, seems a specter who threatens the frontier(or the door) of the realm of our being, who lives in precisely the place "between two deaths", the forbidden domain of the Thing (hereafter I identify this notion with that of the Real). The Thing is the point just outside the scope of symboliza-



tion, where *Ate* lives. *Ate* denotes a horrifying limit which cannot ever be reached.<sup>12</sup> That is, specters appear in the horrific place where we cannot make 'real death' coincide with 'symbolic death'. Žižek says, "This place 'between the two deaths', a place of sublime beauty as well as terrifying monsters, is the site of *das Ding*, of the real-traumatic kernel in the midst of symbolic order (*Sublime*, 135). When we are excluded from the Symbolic, we can never endure the Real without fantasy, which is a construction allowing the subject to come to terms with its traumatic kernel (*ibid.*, 133). Fantasy both shields us from the Real and transmits it. Then we are forced to suffer a living death and to be exterminated from our subject positions because we no longer exist for the Other. In contrast with this, the subject acts ethically when she passes through the realm of desire which is symbolic and into that of the drive, especially the death drive which is anchored in the Real.

In Antigone's case, her exclusion from the symbolic community of the city, precedes her actual death and imbues her character with sublime beauty (*ibid.*, 135). And in Hamlet's case, his father is dead in the Real. However, he persists as a terrifying and monstrous apparition because he was murdered and thereby cheated of the chance to settle his Symbolic debts. Once that debt has been repaid, following Hamlet's killing of his murderer (Claudius), he is completely dead.

To return to "A Game of Chess", in "Shakespearean Rag", the word "Shakespearean" is the synecopation of Shakespeare, and 'rag' originally began as dance music in the red-light districts of American cities such as St. Louis and New Orleans, which is associated with lewdness, just as 'jig', popular music in Shakespeare's time, was. And it is informative for us to know that Eliot was thinking of 'The post-war ragtime world, the jazz world of 1920, restless, aimless, hectic, fearful, futile, neurotic (Southam, 119). And Southam points out that 'O,O,O,O' is Hamlet's last utterance. The lines, "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?" show that the characters in the scene are inactive. The phrase, "I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street/With my hair down, so", at a glance, seems to embrace a motive for action, but it is only the hysterical 'acting out'.

According to Žižek, in the hysterical acting out, the subject stages, in a kind of theatrical performance, the compromise solution of the trauma she is unable to cope with (*On Belief*, 84). Then, 'acting out' is a kind of pseudo-act. In this case, a divided subject cannot be the subject of an act. In other words, in an act, as discussed below, there is no divided or barred subject. In any case, they are involved in a kind of Hamletian impotence in action. Next, the topic touches "the boredom of an empty day" (Southam, 119): "The hot water at ten./And if rains, a closed car at four". And then "chess game" inset comes in. Gish remarks, "The last line, alluding to the game of chess in *Women*

*Beware Women*, links chess and seduction, reasserting the persistent background of sexual betrayal” (64).

The work of Middleton weaves a story of corrupted lives in a material and sensual time, when is “relevant to the generations between and after the two World Wars” (Richard Dutton, vii). Throughout the work, a perception of women as sexual possessions and playthings recurs. Therein women are described as negotiable commodities in the sexual market-place. In a sense, women are “locked up” or “caged in” by men. Men abuse women, but women are not only passive but active in liaison, conspiracy, and murder. In such a society, women are not only pawns but live for the advancement of the men who can manipulate them, so that they exist as objects for the gratification of men. This is clearly represented in the chess game that Livia and Bianca’s mother-in-law play while Bianca is betrayed. Eliot assesses that Bianca is a woman of the type who is purely moved by vanity (*Essays*, 166). On the other hand, Livia is a multiple bawd and murderer. Although she has free-thinking on the situation of women in general, she eventually is subject to the social system of patriarchy.

In *Women Beware Women*, chess is a game about power, therefore about life. The game finally leads to Hippolito’s bitter awareness: “Lust and forgetfulness has been amongst us,/And we are brought to nothing”. Thus, “A Game of Chess” is also dyed by Eliot’s interest in “a profound and permanent moral value and horror” which Middleton’s works have (*Essays*, p. 170). Like Middleton, Eliot here tries to be a realistic observer of a dysfunctional society. And the woman’s horror, being haunted by wind (or specters), can be duplicated by the allusion to the wind by which Paolo and Francesca are incessantly being driven around because of the sin of lust (“Inferno”, Canto V).<sup>13</sup> In any case, the drama of their mutual tension and isolation in this scene is played out without change or resolution (Gish, 64). The gap between the man and woman is not yet filled in.

The pub scene begins with the talk of Lil’s friend which is a truncated form of Lily, the flower of Easter (Brooker, 112): “When Lil’s husband got demobbed, I said —”. Gish’s explanation provides us with a relevant clue to understand the scene: “The background of rape, deception, and violence is moved to the fore as the sordid conditions of Lil and Albert’s relation” (64). In Brooker’s terms, the scene is a ‘diptych’ with a Shakespearean frame. But Eliot’s literary manner of ‘diptych’ cannot be restricted to *The Game of Chess* but spreads over the whole of *The Waste Land*; at least it is used in important parts. When I said that behind the image of dog the story of Antigone is hidden, what I meant is this notion of ‘diptych’.

Like a waste land in myth, Lil is a woman in bad health perhaps because of an abortion. Her reward is to be blamed for no longer being sexually desirable. Albert (it is already known that this

name is common for many boys born in Queen Victoria's reign) has come back brutalized by the war and feeling a right to some release and pleasure (Gish, 65). The Lil's friend warns that Albert, if meeting Lil again, may be disgusted with Lil's appearance and threaten her for someone who is still able to give him a good time. Moreover, her talk reveals the miserable reality of the modern desperate couple. Lil herself is dominated by her fear that Albert will leave her. And during the talk, the barman's calls for closing time are repeatedly interjected, by which we know this is just chat in a pub. Gish says that through her talk slices of modern life are characterized by tension and futility but unconnected to any deeper meaning (67). And in this setting what is more important is the role the friend plays there. She plays the role of a kind of bawd, just like the Mother in *Women Beware Women* unconsciously plays a bawd by providing her house for men and women.

The friend's impudent talk "What you get married for if you don't want children?" shows that the marriage between Lil and Albert cannot be considered for love but only for leaving their heirs, or for sustaining their biological genealogy, a vulgarized version of Erasmus Darwin's thought that had been a mainstay of British philosophy since the Georgian era. Then Lil is bound to feel her existence and health is contingent on male potency and continence. Lil is being destroyed by both fertility and an effort to avoid it (Brooker, 114). But in due time, Albert will vanish. And it is already specified by many critics that the last lines of the scene, repetition of "Goonight", are a reflection of the pathetic farewell words of Ophelia. As she was accused of being a whore by Hamlet, she is already dead in the symbolic order.

As Brooker points out, if Albert is the source of Lil's suffering and if she has become sick and perhaps barren by being treated as an adjunct of Albert's lust, Lil would best fit one of Lacan's formulae of sexuation, seemingly anti-feminist thesis: "Woman is a symptom of Man". To be sure, Lil is not merely a slovenly woman, but she is, we can say, just an effect of Albert's 'fault'. When Lil doesn't know how to answer for Albert's demand, she, like Kundry in Wagner's *Parsifal* as 'the symptom of man', is caught in a cataleptic torpor, moreover, is "caught in the hysterical game of demanding that he refuse her demand" (*Tarrying*, 186-7). The phrase "if you (Lil) don't give it him (Albert), there's others will" implies that Lil tempts Albert to do so. The thesis of Lacan seems little different from Otto Weininger's theory that "when man fails to fulfill his spiritual potential (his true desire), this failure manifests itself in the creation of woman (as a symptom)". Therefore, Eliot's depiction of Lil is close to both Weininger's and Lacan's view of woman. But, strictly speaking, quite the opposite is the case of Lacan.

According to Lacan, 'woman' and 'man' are not biologically givens but two modes of the failure of

Symbolization. The failure of Symbolization signifies that language cannot define a determinate category of ‘woman’. For Žižek also, the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are not biological distinction or gender roles. Following Lacan, Žižek discusses ‘woman’ as ‘non-all’, unlike ‘man’, falls short of being a universal concept. Therefore, all attempts to generalize woman into existence seem doomed to fail. In other words, she cannot be constituted as an object of knowledge. In a sense, woman’s non-existence actually represents the radical negativity which constitutes all subjects. The inability of the symbolic to account for woman confirms that she is the subject *par excellence*. In other words, this capacity on the part of the feminine to be the symptom of man is precisely what makes her the true subject. Unfortunately, Lil cannot reach this stage, unlike Celia in *The Cocktail Party*.

After all, our sexuality is the product of the entanglement of the living body in the Symbolic Order. Therefore, there is not a perfect fit between the two because if there were, the Symbolic Order could not actually exist. Thus, ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are presented as two conflicting and internally contradictory attempts that are neither the same as each other, nor yet complementary, but heterogeneous and incompatible. This absence of co-ordination between ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ positions is what gives rise to ‘the real of sexual difference’. It is only through this primordial condition of difference that we arrive at some universal idea of the human being.

Brooker also finds this feature in *The Waste Land*. Invoking the difference between mythical knowledge and epistemological one, Brooker observes, ‘In myth, female closeness (i.e., perception) and male remoteness (i.e., reason) form the complementary conditions for both health and knowledge. In *The Waste Land*, such complementarity does not exist, ...’ (116). And he goes on to say, ‘In ‘A Game of Chess’, the focus is upon the disconnection of men from women and upon all that such a rupture implies’ (116). Therefore, we need to fully aware of the lapse of this view from the harmonious view of male-female relationship. For Eliot also, the route to arrive at the universal begins only with the fundamental schism between sexes.

As Gish observes, Lil and other women in “A Game of Chess”, are “the lady of situations” as all the women characters in *Women Beware Women* are so. In contrast, Antigone, in order to preserve one thing, her fidelity to the Thing, is ready to give up on everything else (marriage, children...). Žižek says, “So Antigone is sublime in her sad enumeration of what she is sacrificing” (*Fragile*, 154). In this act, Antigone is not ‘divided’ or ‘barred’ subject but whole or ‘all’. Then she becomes the substance itself underlying all the symbolic identities, that is, not a wife, daughter, sister or mother but *a woman*.

According to Žižek’s *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, the sudden emergence of the figure of the

hysterical woman (in the works of Richard Wagner, Franz Kafka, Edvard Munch, and others) announced a crisis of sexual relationship in whose shadow we continue to live.<sup>14</sup> Thus, “A Game of Chess” also is in the shadow. All the works are common in expressing the horror of recognition — the recognition that at the heart of the subject there is nothing.

Žižek asserts, “The Real as the terrifying primordial abyss that swallows everything, dissolving all identities, well known in literature in its multiple guises, from Poe’s maelstrom and Kurtz’s “horror” at the end of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* to Pip from Melville’s *Moby-Dick* who, cast to the bottom of the ocean, experiences the demon God” (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 66). L. Gordon probed a mutual susceptibility to horror in the Eliots. She says, “For Eliot, horror mounted swiftly to a vision of hell”.<sup>15</sup> And this proclivity of Eliot to horror is evinced in his criticism as follows: “No doubt *The Jew of Malta* or *Titus Andronicus* would have made the living Seneca shudder with genuine aesthetic horror; but his influence helped to recommend work with which he had little in common” (*Essays*, 79) and “he (John Ford) is certainly double-stressing the horror, which from that moment he will never allow you to forget; but if he did not stress the horror he would be the more culpable” (*ibid.*, 197). For Žižek, the end of classical subjectivity is the very point of the emergence of the modern hysterical subject, and the end of the opera coincides with the emergence of psychoanalysis (*Tarrying*, 165).

Though Eliot’s enthusiasm for Wagner would not always be constant, Wagnerian dramas are deeply rooted in *The Waste Land*. Roger Scruton explains Wagner’s great experiment: “To reverse Jessie Weston’s famous thesis, Wagner devised a new task for art: to retrace the steps from romance back to ritual, to move backward from the open, self-explaining narrative to the rite in which the human truth can be shown but not told” (*op.cit.*, 195). And he adds, “*The Waste Land* opens doors into strange interior scenes, in each of which some ritual is being repeated without explanation” (*ibid.*, 195). Eliot’s sympathy, I think, is mainly with Wagnerian heroes who, through ritualization, express “the horror at being condemned to a life of eternal suffering”. Žižek considers that, from *The Flying Dutchman* to *Parsifal*, the fundamental matrix of Wagner’s universe is man’s redemption through woman’s self-sacrifice (*Tarrying With The Negative*, 182). What we can see behind the formula “Woman is a symptom of Man” would be this landscape.

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### Notes

1. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness : Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Updated Edition (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 414.
2. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 311.
3. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry : An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (MIT Press, 1992), p.23.
4. Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart : Sex and the Sacred in Wagner's Tristan and Isolde* (Oxford University Press, 2004). I adopted the word 'desecration' from Scruton.
5. *The Žižek Reader*, ed. By Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 151.
6. T.S. Eliot, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley* (Faber and Faber : London, 1964), p. 155.
7. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, tr. By David Raeburn with an Introduction by Denis Feeney (Penguin Books, 2004).
8. See Sarah Kay, *Žižek : A Critical Introduction* (Polity Press, 2003). I borrowed the idea of 'smeary paints' from Sarah Kay. And I am indebted for some discussions to Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (Routledge, 2003).
9. Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women and Other Plays*, ed. With an Introduction and Notes by Richard Dutton (Oxford World Classics, 1999).
10. *Women Beware Women*, ed. By J.R. Mulryne, Revels Student Edition (Manchesters U.P., 2007), 16.
11. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso : London New York, 1989). Hereafter cited as *Sublime*.
12. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying With The Negative : Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1993), p.115. Hereafter cited as *Tarrying*.
13. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Modern Library College Editions (Random House, 1932).
14. Slavoj Žižek, *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Duke University Press, 1996), p. 2.
15. Lyndall Gordon, *T.S. Eliot : An Imperfect Life* (W.W. Norton & Company : New York London, 1998), p. 180.