

Only Time Will Tell
Redefining Meaning in
Othello, Bleak House, and
“The Waste Land”

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LIT-480-001

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4/26/10

This project analyzes the relationship between time and literature, particularly how fictional time functions differently from real time. In fiction, time has the opportunity of digressing from a linear model, which is not feasible in day to day reality. In real life, one's perception of time does not alter the concrete reality of the kitchen clock ticking away the seconds, minutes, and hours in the traditional model of chronological progression. I argue that authors use not only conventional literary devices, such as formal structure and plot, but also time to create meaning. The most fertile examples of such temporal experiments can be found precisely when fictional time departs from a realistic model. In this project, I examine moments of time in several works of literature which run against the linear narrative. In these moments, time apparently stands still and frustrates forward progression. I use the terms horizontal time and vertical time to designate these different categories of time.

I loosely base my terminology of horizontal and vertical time on Gilles Deleuze's philosophy in *The Logic of Sense*. Although I do not attempt to employ his radical epistemological model, I am indebted to Deleuze for his redefinition of time in spatial language. His remarks have enabled my notion of time as running horizontally and vertically. Horizontal time is the linear chronological progression from one event to another or the sequential order of a narrative. Although stories do not always progress in a chronologically linear format (e.g. flashbacks, flash-forwards, stream-of-consciousness, etc), the actions or events occur in a certain order with relationship to each other. Something must happen first, and this leads to something else, which reaches some conclusion. Horizontal time may be subdivided into the traditional categories of

beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle articulates this perspective in his foundational work of literary criticism. He writes:

...Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it (Aristotle 8).

Although a philosopher would be more concerned with the cause and effect of particular actions (or “causal necessity”), Aristotle’s categorizations rely on a sequential temporal order. Horizontal time is a necessary category because it defines the narrative’s temporal structure. The story occurs in a certain order, and horizontal time enables the unification of a plot’s many intricacies under one name.

Vertical time is a moment of time that departs from the horizontal order because its user is prevented from progressing forward to the next event. In other words, the victim of vertical time becomes stuck in a moment from which they cannot escape for various reasons. The critical moment which signals the departure to vertical time must involve a collapse of the traditional temporal order. So instead of living in the present, remembering the past, and looking forward to the future, as is the norm, vertical time involves the simultaneity of past, present, and future. This temporal trap prevents regeneration or progressive movement. Vertical time can be subtitled as the time-sense of eternity since in that moment, the user longs for an existence outside of temporal progression. In eternity, there is no movement because past, present, and future are conflated, like in vertical time. Vertical time links eras that are separated by centuries and geographic locations that are thousands of miles apart. This category is useful

because it allows for analysis of those paralyzing moments which prevent forward progression.

The tension between horizontal and vertical time represents the struggle extant in our own lives between reality and fiction. Humans desire permanence, and this hope is apparently satisfied in the realm of vertical time. However, this temporality is never generative and is continually frustrated in literature as a trap for the unsuspecting. This perspective on vertical time is only possible from a distanced bystander. The actual individuals involved in vertical time long for temporal suspension and their desire for this temporality often reveals an otherwise subconscious thread in a work of literature. In other words, an analysis of horizontal and vertical time in literature redefines meaning, which is usually only garnered at the level of plot. My analysis proposes to examine the conventional interpretations of three representative texts from Western literature using time as the catalyst for action or inaction. An examination of moments of vertical time in literature reveals how time is the most powerful factor in ordering human experience.

I will use horizontal and vertical time to analyze William Shakespeare's *Othello*, Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, and T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" on three different levels. In *Othello*, an individual character demonstrates how Otherness and identity are constructed through one's time-sense. Othello is the Other in the play and also gets stuck in vertical time through his obsession with Desdemona's betrayal. The handkerchief links Otherness with time and demonstrates how Othello is forced into an alternate time sense. Ultimately, the play chronicles the tragedy of the Other.

In *Bleak House*, I analyze time at the level of public institutions to conclude how the personal act of recreating one's own time sense must occur in the public domain of

writing. The court system of Chancery becomes the figuration of vertical time in the novel since both the victims and agents of the court are trapped in temporal stasis. Chancery acts as a vortex sucking in various characters throughout the novel with the exception of the narrator-protagonist, Esther Summerson. Esther is able to resist the vertical trap because she is engaged in the act of writing her own history and time-sense through her narration.

Finally, in “The Waste Land,” horizontal and vertical time operate to fragment the poem and demonstrate that history is fundamentally disjointed. Unlike the previous two works that I have discussed, horizontal and vertical time are not easily distinguishable in the poem. This temporal confusion defies narrative coherence and ultimately prevents a redemptive reading of the poem. Eliot does not provide a way in which Modernity can either be unified with historical experience or completely divorced from it. He objects to the categorization of time that insists upon unifying the past with the present.

In all of these works, moments of vertical time provide a generative paralysis. In other words, vertical time necessarily involves a state of inaction or stasis, but this temporal trap does not prevent reflection or interpretation for the reader. Of course, the individuals involved in vertical time—like Othello or Richard Carstone—are not able to use vertical time productively because they are ignorant of their sense of time. These characters are unaware that they are trapped in vertical time and so cannot benefit from the illusion of permanence. However, this project hopes to alert the reader to a closer relationship with time in literature so that the reader may understand the stakes of trying to live with an opposing sense of time. All of the characters and narrative forms (e.g.

Eliot's poem) stuck in vertical time are ultimately destroyed or are prevented from achieving coherence. Although vertical time may provides a comforting illusion of permanence or even a temporary moment for reflection, one cannot survive in this other time in the real world.

“We Must Obey The Time:” Time and Othering in *Othello*

In *Othello*, William Shakespeare situates Othello outside of the horizontal temporality of the other characters in order to demonstrate the destructive effects of Othering. Shakespeare chooses to complicate time in the play because it is a categorization of events that all humans supposedly share. However, Othello's sense of time actually excludes him from participating in the reality of the other characters. Othello is the Other because of his blackness and foreignness, which become temporal through the figuration of the handkerchief. This object links Othello's orientalism with the past and therefore forces the Moor into a time-sense that is separate from that of Venice. Othello becomes trapped in vertical time, which consequently forces him into a destructive cycle of obsessive vengeance. In short, Othello's blackness defines his time-sense, which in turn causes his obsessive behavior.

Othello's racial identity is an integral and inseparable part of the play fully titled “The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice.” Othello's race is a paradox: he is a Moor and racially African yet he is “of Venice.” Before any action has even occurred, Othello is already being forced into the apparently unnatural confines of the predominately white Venetian state. Indeed, before Othello is ever named in the play, he is referred to as “the Moor” no less than ten times (1.1.32, 39, 57, 118, 127, 148, 165, 178; 1.2.58, 47). He is

finally called “valiant Othello” by the Duke, who represents the official head of the Venetian state. Millicent Bell suggests that Othello’s acceptance into Venetian society stems entirely from his military achievements. She discusses how in this play Shakespeare explores the “instability of personality” and how identity is socially constructed (Bell 11). Bell argues that Othello “has overcome the handicaps of being foreign and black in the white Venetian world,” but he cannot maintain this identity throughout the play and eventually his “Otherness” condemns him to death (2).

At the beginning of the play, Othello is apparently accepted into Venetian society and exists horizontal time. He has achieved the rank of general in the Venetian army and is popularly accepted as a capable leader. When the Duke gives Othello his commission in Cyprus, the Venetian says “though we have there a substitute of most allowed / sufficiency, yet opinion, a more sovereign mistress of effects, / throws a more safer voice on you” (1.3.222-224). Public opinion is in Othello’s favor perhaps because of his military prowess. Othello claims he has acted for the State several times, although the benefits of his actions remain vague. He defends himself against Brabantio, saying “my services which I have done the signory / Shall out-tongue his complaints” (1.2.18-19). Yet when he proposes to list these services and supposedly defeat Brabantio’s accusations, Othello relates the most alien of his adventures. He says:

“I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
To the very moment that he bade me tell it;
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field
Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence
And portance in my travels' history:
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven

It was my hint to speak,--such was the process;
 And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
 The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
 Do grow beneath their shoulders.” (1.3.131-144).

Othello's travel experience is fantastic and irreparably alien not only to his first listener, Desdemona, but also to the other Venetian nobles. He has encountered humans who act as animals, like the Cannibals, and creatures who are not physically human, like the Anthropophagi. Indeed his experience of slavery alone is enough to situate him outside of Venetian nobility. Importantly, in this long list of deeds, Othello never once attributes his actions for the good of Venice. We have only his repeated avowal of services to the state as proof that he has done anything at all for Venice. Rather than allow for membership in the elite Venetian social hierarchy, Othello's military past actually serves to distance him from inherited nobility.

In contrast with his admirably heroic military actions, Othello is portrayed as an animal throughout the play. These racial slurs are mostly spoken by Iago, but their effectiveness is reflected in Othello's brutal murder at the end of the play. At the very beginning of the play, Iago says to Brabantio “even now, now, very now, an old black ram / is tupping your white ewe” (1.1.88-89). Not only is Othello black, but he and Desdemona are copulating in an entirely bestial fashion. Iago continues to insult Othello in this extremely vulgar manner and says “you'll have your daughter / covered with a Barbary horse” (1.1.112-113). Once again, Othello is portrayed as an animal, but this time, he is geographically relegated as African and Arabic. Finally, Iago specifies that the animal is Othello when he says “your daughter and the / Moor are now making the beast with two backs” (1.1.117-118). Iago is extremely heavy-handed in his description of Othello as an animal because he wants to emphasize the primitive quality of the

Moor's nature. Shakespeare's emphasis on Othello's status as a foreigner undoubtedly relegates him as the Other in the play. The most dramatic example of Othello's Otherness occurs with his sense of time.

In his book *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*, Jonathan Gil Harris discusses how material objects in Renaissance texts become temporal. He says "in some instances, Shakespeare and his contemporaries use objects to theorize a supersessionary temporality according to which the present or future differs and distances itself from the past" (Harris 4). Harris' notion of a "supersessionary temporality" is linked to the figure of a palimpsest, on which he basis his entire argument about the handkerchief. He defines palimpsest as "a common medieval practice—scraping and washing the pages of an old manuscript so that they may be written on anew...(derived from the Greek *palimpsestos*, meaning 'scraped again')" (15). He argues that the handkerchief is one such palimpsest. Harris's conclusions support my notion of vertical time as running against horizontal time because they detail how Othello is stuck in a different temporality from the other characters. Othello is trapped in vertical time because of his Otherness, and Harris's analysis enables the foreign to become understood in terms of temporality.

Harris grounds his discussion of the handkerchief by firstly addressing Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said identifies how the orient is a palimpsest to the occident, but, according to Harris, he "neglects the ways in which writers from Herodotus to Hegel have repeatedly constructed the orient as not just a present *space* but also a past *time* superseded by a west that embodies the present and the future" (23). This consideration is the crucial link which places Othello outside of the play's horizontal temporality.

Othello is obsessively characterized as foreign: he is black, he is an animal, he is a Moor, he is African, he is pagan, he is a barbarian etc. Therefore, his Otherness becomes a distinct temporality. Othello is literally not current with the other characters and the events of the play. However, before I get ahead of myself, we must consider exactly how Shakespeare accomplishes this. Harris concisely provides the answer when he says “the handkerchief hints at how *Othello* refuses temporal as much as racial purity” (170). Harris’s remark hints at the questionable agency that the character of Othello has throughout the course of the play. Since Othello both recognizes his Otherness and attempts to force himself to conform to Venetian standards, he effectively negates his own control of his temporality. A closer analysis of the handkerchief reveals how both that object and Othello seek to inhabit two opposing temporalities simultaneously.

A handkerchief is ostensibly a common household object, but in *Othello* it is imbued with magical properties. Othello first demands to see it because “a salt and sorry rheum offends” him and he needs to wipe his eyes (3.4.48). Desdemona does not have it, of course, and this leads Othello to recount the magical and mysterious origins of the napkin. He says:

“That handkerchief
 Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
 She was a charmer, and could almost read
 The thoughts of people: she told her, while she kept it,
 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
 Entirely to her love, but if she lost it
 Or made gift of it, my father's eye
 Should hold her loathèd and his spirits should hunt
 After new fancies” (3.4.53-61).

According to Othello, the handkerchief is a magical agent. It caused his father to love his mother and conveys the same marital properties for Othello and his wife. Since the

handkerchief has such agency, it transforms from an object to another actor or character in the play. Importantly, this actor is involved only in effecting temporal change. As the above quotation demonstrates, the handkerchief not only causes love between Othello's parents, but also enables the reversal of that love and a temporal transition to "other fancies." Furthermore, although the handkerchief's properties are discussed in the past as relating to Othello's parents, they also have the power to cause future problems for Desdemona and Othello himself. Therefore, the handkerchief begins to link different temporalities together in the method of Harris's palimpsest.

The handkerchief parallels Othello himself in that both character and object originate in a foreign setting. In the same scene, Othello continues to describe the handkerchief's origins to Desdemona. He says:

"Tis true: there's magic in the web of it:
A sibyl, that had numbered in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sewed the work;
The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk;
And it was dyed in mummy which the skilful
Conserved of maidens' hearts." (3.4.67-73).

The handkerchief was sewn together by a female prophet, and this fact already furthers the temporal properties of the object in question. The sibyl was two-hundred years old when she made it, which is another clue that the handkerchief does not obey horizontal time. The handkerchief was dyed in the fluid from mummified maiden's hearts. This description of the handkerchief links it with an ancient past that has become mysterious by virtue of its inaccessibility. Harris summarizes the conclusions drawn from this particular passage when he states "what may initially seem to be merely a fashionable European trifle increasingly acquires the semblance of an antique African fetish or

fetisso” (Harris 185). The handkerchief, like Othello, is Other and African. Superficially, it appears to be a normal European handkerchief, yet its mystical nature is revealed through its fantastic origins. Like Othello, the handkerchief is forced into Venetian culture but remains temporally separate.

Othello’s time-sense becomes corrupted like that of the handkerchief’s once he becomes obsessed with finding “ocular proof” of Desdemona’s betrayal. Othello’s status as a foreigner provides him with the potential to experience time differently than the other characters. His fixation with the handkerchief effectively realizes that potential and traps him in vertical time. After describing the origins of that object as discussed above, Othello demands that Desdemona find the handkerchief. She tries to counter Othello’s demand with different replies framing Cassio’s suit, but her husband is inexorable. He demands “the handkerchief” four times in succession to her requests (3.4.87, 89, 90, 93). Othello cannot move beyond the handkerchief; he is trapped in that moment of time. The fact that Desdemona does not have the handkerchief confirms her guilt in Othello’s mind. He is now convinced that Iago is honest and his wife is not, and his belief causes her death.

It may seem contradictory that the moment in which Othello remains trapped for the remainder of the play is the awful moment of his discovery of Desdemona’s guilt. As has been discussed, that moment is symbolized by the handkerchief. The handkerchief motivates Othello’s transition into vertical time because of the possibility that Desdemona is not guilty. The napkin was his first gift to her as a lover and it therefore represents the love and confidence each of them had in the other. Perversely, the handkerchief has also come to symbolize Desdemona’s adultery with Cassio. Othello

remains trapped in the moment of the handkerchief because he is torn between desiring that her betrayal never took place and seeing the indisputable “ocular proof” of its occurrence. Furthermore, Othello realizes at the end of the play that he is inherently foreign and cannot conform to Venetian culture. He has been trying to inhabit two mutually exclusive worlds at the same time. Othello’s resulting madness at the end of the play stems entirely from this tortuous binary of possibility.

The handkerchief is the catalyst for Desdemona’s death, which Othello treats in an a-temporal manner. In other words, since he is trapped in a vertical time-sense, the remaining events of the play do not occur for him in their sequential, horizontal temporal order. After seeing Cassio apparently confess his guilt, Othello says “I would have him nine years a-killing” (4.1.171). The sheer hyperbole of this line demonstrates in part Othello’s collapse of horizontal time. As he plans out Desdemona’s death with Iago, Othello speaks of her as if she were already dead. He says “ay, let her rot and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live” (4.1.174-175). He is already considering her rotting flesh in Hell while she is still alive. Paradoxically, Othello also considers Desdemona to be alive once she is dead. In his opening soliloquy of 5.2, Othello bends over the sleeping Desdemona and says “be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee / And love thee after” (5.2.18-19). These lines represent Othello’s confused sense of time stemming from his confinement in vertical time.

Before turning to Othello’s last speech, I want to mention a comment by A.C. Bradley in his analysis of the play. Bradley warns against a “mistaken view” of the play and says “I do not mean the ridiculous notion that Othello was jealous by temperament” (Bradley 138). I wish to entertain that possibility merely to demonstrate what is lost in a

reading of *Othello* if temporality is ignored. In *Shakespeare's Philosophy: Discovering the Meaning Behind the Plays*, Colin McGinn performs a philosophical analysis of several of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies. McGinn defines "the cause of the tragedy is...the *mismatch* of character and situation" (McGinn 194). In order to establish *Othello* as a true tragedy, McGinn considers Othello's character. He states "Othello is credulous and jealous, but also lacking in sophistication, and susceptible to racial insecurity" (193). Given the overwhelming amount of racial prejudice that is demonstrated towards Othello throughout the play, McGinn's latter comment seems hardly a fair euphemism. McGinn categorizes the tragic situation as follows: "Othello had been doing just fine before he encountered the scheming and insidious Iago—at the precise moment that he, a soldierly black man, won the heart of a beautiful and sophisticated white girl" (194). Without questioning McGinn's assertion about Iago's character, can we really conclude that Othello "had been doing just fine"? There is no evidence in the text for either interpretation and since Othello exists only in the text, such an argument does not follow.

McGinn's assertion relies on the belief that Othello is jealous through and through. However, the text does not support this claim. In his analysis of Scene 3.3, Bradley examines how Iago tempts Othello and the latter's responses. The critic concludes "even then, however, and indeed to the very end, he is quite unlike the essentially jealous man" (Bradley 144). As Othello says, "it is the cause, it is the cause, my soul" (5.2.1). Othello is not jealous of Cassio in the sense of revenging himself upon that man; indeed, he does not even seek to kill Cassio himself but delegates it to his

ensign. Othello demands justice. Robert Wilson Jr. discusses how Othello wishes to embody the entire legal apparatus in punishing Desdemona. Wilson writes:

Othello wishes to transform the bedchamber...into a courtroom where he will question and condemn his supposedly erring wife. Othello's blindness leads him to assume a role that in fact disguises his true nature. Just as no actor can take on the three parts of accuser, judge, and executioner, no honest or impartial judge can assume these mutually contradictory roles...Othello desires to control, in unnatural fashion, all phases of the finale. He wishes, in the theatrical metaphor, to play all the parts (Wilson 23).

Othello does want to "play all the parts" in this legal interpretation, but Wilson does not explain the cause of this desire. Othello wants to control the finale because he wants to disassociate himself from the Other. As the Other, Othello is always the victim, but if he becomes accuser, judge, and executioner, then he has the agency and Desdemona is his victim. McGinn's and Wilson's interpretations of the play have only strengthened the argument that Othello is nothing more than a noble savage. Such limited viewpoints do not do justice to Othello's final soliloquy.

As soon as Othello realizes the false murder he has committed, he needs to separate himself from his identity. Lodovico walks on-stage and asks, "Where is that rash and most unfortunate man?" to which Othello replies "That's he that was Othello. Here I am" (5.2.289-290). In this line, Othello voices his desire for oblivion. He does not merely seek to be free from the responsibility of having murdered Desdemona. Othello wants to be trapped forever in vertical time and within that realm of possibility represented by the handkerchief. "He that *was* Othello" is a personage in the horizontal time of love, betrayal, and murder. The "I" person can enjoy the unchangeableness of infinity. Harris's conclusions on the handkerchief support this view. He says "Othello's napkin participates in multiple networks that crumple time, superimposing seeming

distant points so as to make what is elsewhere distinguished as “old” and “new” preposterously close and coeval” (Harris 186). Othello’s last speech is particularly indicative of the act of “crumpling time.”

Othello’s final soliloquy is an injunction to Montano and Lodovico on how they should portray his last actions to the Venetian state. In a way, Othello is writing his obituary and therefore his speech represents the chronicle of his life. He begins by alluding to the vague military deeds he has performed for Venice. He says “I have done the state some service, and they know’t. / No more of that” (5.2.348-349). In the beginning of the play, Othello defined himself around those services that he had rendered the state. Now he rejects that construction of himself as a successful public servant. He asks the officers to “speak of me as I am” (5.2.351). The first quotation above is in the past tense, but Othello wishes to be remembered in the present tense “as I am.” However, in order to describe this present self, Othello relies on anecdotes and events that occurred in the past. He does not say “I am like this,” but lists his past actions. He says “then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely but too well; Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought / Perplex'd in the extreme” (5.2.352-355). The first attribute that Othello gives himself is love but loving too much. He appeals, therefore, to an essential part of human nature that all people, Venetians and Moors alike, share, much in the same way that they share time. In the last half of his speech, Othello’s status as a foreigner is once again linked to his sense of time.

As has been discussed, the handkerchief acts as a palimpsest in linking the ancient Egyptian origins of its creation with the current trouble it is causing Othello and Desdemona. The temporal connections of the handkerchief parallel the connection that

Othello himself makes as a character between his oriental past and his occidental present. In his last speech, Othello categorizes himself as both foreign and domestic. He continues:

“of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus.” (5.2.355-365).

Othello likens himself to “the base Indian” but does not actually definitively say that he is oriental. He recounts an anecdote that is vaguely situated in time as occurring “in Aleppo once.” Once again, the east is linked with the past. Initially Othello is unclear about the identities of the “turban'd Turk” and the Venetian. One reading suggests that Othello himself is the Turk and Desdemona the Venetian. Or Iago could be the Turk and Othello the Venetian. The racial identities of the figures remains undefined since Othello claims that he took the Turk “by the throat” “and smote him, thus,” at which point he stabs himself. This moment defies temporal as well as racial categorization. If Othello were the Turk, then he stabbed himself in Aleppo, and so it does not make sense that he is still alive to stab himself again in Cyprus. However, if Othello is the Venetian, then he still stabs the Turk in Aleppo, but it remains unclear why the method of death should be similar. The ending of the play, in short, remains a puzzle if it is only considered in terms of race and not in terms of temporality.

Many critics have suggested a reading of *Othello* that is limited solely to a racial interpretation of Othello's actions. This viewpoint diminishes the tragedy in Othello's death and ultimately negates part of the Moor's own explanation for suicide. The final section of Othello's last speech is temporally confusing in that Othello's present action of stabbing himself in the play apparently occurred once upon a time in Aleppo as well and shall be related to the Venetian nobility at some point in the future. This organization of events cannot occur horizontal time but neither can Othello remain in the vertical time-sense that he so desires. His very last words in the play are "I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this: / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" (5.2.368-369). In the act of kissing Desdemona, Othello would once again return to the world of their innocent love before chaos. Importantly, Desdemona's murder occurs in the horizontal time-span of the narrative and not in Othello's extraneous verticality. Therefore, Othello must subject himself to horizontal time in the act of his suicide because he kisses the dead Desdemona. He recognizes that she is dead and that he has killed her. The only way for Othello to rejoin her is through death.

At the very end of the play, Othello commits suicide because of the recognition that he cannot exist in vertical time. In his final anecdote "in Aleppo once," he emphasizes that he is originally foreign and this identity cannot be changed. Even if he is speaking of himself as the Venetian in that section, he is still a Venetian in Aleppo and not in Venice. Because Othello is racially separate from the other characters of the play, he experiences a different time-sense than any of them. Desdemona expresses the clearly linear sequence of the days of the week when she intercedes on Cassio's behalf (3.3.61-62). Iago also pays close attention to the time as his manipulations depend on appointed

meetings and “chance” encounters. Othello, however, remains fixated on the handkerchief and Desdemona’s guilt even after he has murdered her. The handkerchief has become a temporal object that links antiquity with Othello’s current reality. Furthermore, the handkerchief enables Othello to inhabit vertical time until his eventual demise.

Othello’s suicide must be regarded in terms of temporality or else the greater tragedy of *Othello* is lost. The play is not merely an account of discrimination toward the ever-threatening racial Other. Shakespeare is chronicling the effects of a surreal time-sense on an individual who must, like all people, survive in the real world. The fact that Othello is racially separate only heightens and emphasizes the temporal distancing at work in the play. Shakespeare is experimenting with the individual’s struggle against his own time. As a by-product of the temporal experiment, Shakespeare is demonstrating the catastrophic consequences of forcing someone to be the Other and then forcing them to conform to a temporality from which they have been excluded. Time is the common denominator among all people and it should not be used as a discriminatory factor.

“Overturning Monuments: Esther Summerson v. Chancery”

Public institutions may often seem overwhelmingly controlling to the citizens who have need of their services. Such control becomes inescapable when public power is figured in terms of time. In his novel *Bleak House*, Charles Dickens demonstrates how the legal system as represented by the Court of Chancery becomes temporally confining for all of the individuals seeking justice. Chancery and the representative case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* embody vertical time because they trap both the victims and

agents of the court in temporal stasis. Chancery acts as a vortex sucking in various characters throughout the novel with the notable exception of the narrator-protagonist, Esther Summerson. Esther remains in horizontal time because she is engaged in the act of narrating her own life-story. For the majority of the novel, Esther believes herself to be an orphan and so must re-create her own temporality. Through Esther's narrative journey, Dickens reveals the power of writing to define one's relationship to reality.

The macrocosm of Chancery is symbolized in the microcosmic case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*. Both the case and the court system are temporally confining because they trap their victims in an endless present moment of waiting for a settlement that will never come. Dickens writes:

Jarndyce and Jarndyce drones on. This scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated that no man alive knows what it means...Innumerable children have been born into the cause; innumerable young people have married into it; innumerable old people have died out of it. Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* without knowing how or why; whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit. (16).

This description continues with further images of whole lives that have been consumed in the duration of the court case. The most telling categorization of Chancery is the metaphor connecting it to a scarecrow, which implies that the case is devoid of significance. The case is so vast that "innumerable" births, marriages, and deaths have occurred in the interim. An entity that can encompass so many human life-spans does not seem to conform to normal categorizations of time. Chancery is so massive that "innumerable" lives cannot be added together to calculate its total length. Furthermore, there remains no one living who understands the case, which hints at the sheer duration of the proceedings. The cause of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* has passed out of living

memory and has approximated legend. Chancery's size is figured in terms of time and so the legal system rejects a horizontal chronology.

The case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* has at its root a disputed inheritance that occurred in some hazy past long removed from the current memory of the characters. The case and indeed the legal system are completely obsessed by the act of inheritance. As quoted in the above passage, *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* is an inherited evil. Since one cannot control one's inheritance, Dickens makes Chancery entirely inescapable. One is trapped from birth in a deviant temporality. This temporal confinement is demonstrated through the specific victims of Miss Flite and Richard Carstone, who both have inherited their claims in different cases. Although Richard is an orphan like Esther, he and Ada immediately become the property of the court as soon as they are left parentless. When Esther meets Ada and Richard for the first time in the court of Chancery, she observes "they were both orphans" (44). Immediately following this observation, the three of them meet with the Lord Chancellor, who effectively approves their move to live with Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House in Hertfordshire (45). After this "inheritance," Ada, Richard, and Esther meet Miss Flite, who hails the former two people as "the wards in Jarndyce" (47). In this greeting, Flite catalogues Ada and Richard as court property; they are wards in the legal case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*. They have been defined as members of the court system, and so Richard's struggle against Chancery and its dominating temporality is essentially a suicidal struggle against his own identity.

Before discussing Richard's downfall in the novel, I turn to the most representative victim of Chancery, the lunatic Miss Flite. She is described as a "madwoman," and a pathetic remnant of an unresolved court case. Alexander Welsh

writes “no character in *Bleak House* has a more fixed, emblematic role; and no character is more closely associated with the court, or with *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*” (Welsh 122). Miss Flite embodies the psychological destruction that Chancery can inflict on a human consciousness. In her own words, “I expect a Judgment. On the day of Judgment” (Dickens 233). Through Miss Flite, the “Judgment” of Chancery acquires an apocalyptic quality, which serves to strengthen its vertical temporality. Miss Flite goes to court daily in expectation of her judgment, and she explains this morbid fascination in a conversation with Esther. The latter woman logically points out that perhaps Miss Flite should not go to court since she is expecting an outcome that will never occur. Miss Flite disagrees and says, “There's a cruel attraction in the place. You *can't* leave it. And you *must* expect” (566). Miss Flite cannot leave the court; her language is indicative of physical confinement. What Flite does not articulate, and perhaps is unable to recognize because of her madness, is that she is actually stuck in an alternate time-sense through her obsession with Chancery. The court has sucked her into itself and she cannot get out.

The false hopes that Chancery brings have a paralyzing effect on Miss Flite's daily behavior as well as Richard's personal growth and development. Throughout the course of the novel, Richard wanders from profession to profession, including medicine, the law, and the army. He remains unsettled because he consistently clings to a settlement from court. Richard is unable to live in horizontal time with Esther at Bleak House since he becomes obsessed with the legal case. His cousin and guardian, Mr. Jarndyce of Bleak House, describes how Richard's indecisiveness is a direct result of Chancery malpractice. He says “it has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off—and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance—and

dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused” (197). Richard is aware of the powerful attraction that the case has over him, but he does not realize that he is being sucked into another sense of time. He tells Esther that “others have only half thrown themselves into it. I devote myself to it. I make it the object of my life” (599). Richard believes that he has agency in choosing to devote himself entirely to the case. He remains ignorant of the temporal power that Chancery has over his life and that he is ultimately trapped in vertical time until his death.

Since Chancery is so expansive and multi-generational, the court case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* has become an inescapable present moment. The system is temporal in that it links past and present with no future progress. Chancery is not only a legal system, but also the physical place in which the law is enacted. Therefore, characters like Richard can become physically trapped within its confines. Esther describes Richard toward the end of his life in his unflagging dependency on court. She says “Richard, more worn and haggard, haunted the court day after day, listlessly sat there the whole day long when he knew there was no remote chance of the suit being mentioned, and became one of the stock sights of the place” (936). Richard is drawn to Chancery much in the same way that Miss Flite described earlier in the novel. He has become disembodied; he is a ghost and needs the support of Chancery to sustain himself. The dissolution of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* into costs finally kills Richard. Ada describes how her poor husband is found on that fateful day. Esther writes:

Allan had found him sitting in the corner of the court, she told me, like a stone figure. On being roused, he had broken away and made as if he would have spoken in a fierce voice to the judge. He was stopped by his mouth being full of blood, and Allan had brought him home (976).

Richard has figuratively become stone and is therefore fixed into Chancery. The destruction of his physical body is such that he can no longer speak because of the blood in his mouth. *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* traps Richard in vertical time, but also provides a time-sense with which he understands the world around him. Once that case is dissolved, Richard lacks this fundamental component of a human relationship with reality. He renounces time altogether in death.

Chancery's power is that of vertical time, and this control includes not only the victims of the court but also its supposed agents. The legal population in the novel believe themselves to be propagating some desired result, but they also do not realize that they are stuck in vertical time. In his article, "Will and Society in *Bleak House*," Joseph Fradin discusses the failure of the legal system. He describes Chancery as "a stagnant and inhuman social will," and the adjective "stagnant" efficiently renders the idea of temporal suspension (Fradin 46). Although Fradin does not recognize temporality as the cause for Chancery's stagnation, he identifies the process by which the case has continued for so long. He writes "Chancery, of which *Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce* is the test case, is life-destroying because its energies go into the perpetuation of itself rather than the protection of the human lives in its care" (47). In other words, the agents of the court strengthen and perpetuate vertical time because they are unconscious of the temporal trap which they themselves inhabit and force upon their plaintiffs. Mr. Kenge describes the court case and says "this has been a great cause, that this has been a protracted cause, that this has been a complex cause. *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* has been termed, not inaptly, a monument of Chancery practice" (Dickens 975). As a monument, the legal system is mammoth and irreducible. The apparently benevolent characters in

the novel, like Kenge, are proud of the behemoth of which they are a part and do not acknowledge the human destruction the system causes. More sinister characters, like Mr. Vholes and Mr. Tulkinghorn, perpetuate a system for no apparent benefit to themselves. Like the victims on which they prey, the agents of Chancery are also stuck in vertical time. They cannot escape their machinations or their incapacity to exist in horizontal time.

The only character that escapes the verticality of Chancery is Esther. She manages to do this because for the majority of the novel, Esther believes herself to be an orphan. Therefore, she has no inheritance. In her short account of her childhood at the beginning of the novel, Esther describes how she first questioned her parentage to her godmother. Her godmother's reply hints at illegitimacy since the elder woman cryptically says "your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers" (30). She continues "you are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart" (31). This conversation establishes that Esther is a special character in the novel and also that there is some unresolved mystery surrounding her birth. Both these conclusions provide the impetus for Esther's quest of discovering her identity and personal history. Esther discovers her parentage through the course of narrating the novel. Alexander Welsh argues that Esther is the heroine and states "in no way can the reader or critic do without Esther Summerson" (Welsh 19). Her narration chronicles the process of recreating one's time-sense and effectively prevents her incorporation into Chancery and vertical time.

Esther discovers her parentage in the course of the novel but not through an active process of inquiry. She does not seek out information and question sources in the

manner of a detective. Instead, facts are imposed upon her. In an especially revealing conversation with Mr. Jarndyce, Esther does not ask him about her background, but he introduces the subject of her history. Mr. Jarndyce says “I have reflected that your having anything to ask me, and my having anything to tell you, are different considerations” (Dickens 275). He then explains how he became her guardian shortly after her birth. In perhaps one of the most dramatic scenes in the novel, Lady Dedlock spontaneously volunteers her true relationship to Esther. The scene is particularly melodramatic since Lady Dedlock begins with a polite request to speak to Esther in private, but then dissolves into tears. Esther writes “she caught me to her breast, kissed me, wept over me, compassionated me, and called me back to myself; when she fell down on her knees and cried to me, “Oh, my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! Oh, try to forgive me!” (579). Esther recounts this discovery; she does not discover it herself. As these passages demonstrate, Esther’s role as a character is one of passive acceptance of events and the world around her. If Esther remained simply a character in the novel, she may also have been sucked into the deviant temporality of Chancery. However, Esther’s main function is to narrate and in this process, she self-consciously and actively constructs a time-sense for her self.

Despite her activity as narrator, Esther attempts to disguise her central role in the novel through numerous protestations of incompetence and self-denial. Such self-effacement does not achieve the desired end, but rather emphasizes Esther’s importance in the text. At the beginning of her first chapter, she writes “I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever” (27). However, the orderliness of her account belies her professed stupidity. In her first

chapter, entitled “A Progress,” Esther describes some memories of her early childhood but only to introduce the above quoted conversation with her godmother. Then, Esther describes her quotidian life in Bleak House including the revelations about her birth which become clear to her as the novel progresses. The information about her birth is only imparted to her in the daily happenstance of the usual chat with Mr. Jarndyce or the casual visit to Lady Dedlock’s neighbor, Mr. Boythorn. In short, Esther’s narrative seeks to disguise the center around which it is constructed. Esther stuffs her account full of details about minor characters and subplots only to hide her organizational power over the narrative. In another section, Esther says “I don't know how it is I seem to be always writing about myself...I hope any one who may read what I write will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them and can't be kept out” (Dickens 137). Esther’s self-effacement is necessary because it emphasizes the act of narration and the process of creation, which is how her time-sense triumphs at the end of the novel.

At the end of *Bleak House*, the momentous *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* dissolves into nothingness in the triumph of horizontal time. For the bystanders involved, the end of the case is quite hilarious. Esther describes the crowds, “they were all exceedingly amused, and were more like people coming out from a Farce or a Juggler than from a court of justice...Even these clerks were laughing” (973-974). The absolute public disconnect from Chancery’s failure is representative of the law’s complete removal from useful human life. Mr. Woodcourt describes the end of the case as he says “thus the suit lapses and melts away” (975). The verbs he uses are inoffensive and separate from the human suffering that Chancery has caused throughout the novel, to which he has often

been a first-person bystander. The dissolution of the court case also represents the intersection of horizontal and vertical time. The case finally reaches an end because of the discovery of a definitive will, which identifies the heirs of the Jarndyce fortune. In short, Chancery is forced to confront a historical document which is situated in a linear time frame and not in vertical time. The system implodes upon itself when faced with horizontal time and this is further emphasized through Esther's participation in the end of the case.

At the end of the novel, Esther once again alludes to her role as narrator and describes the outcomes for most of the characters involved in the novel. She begins the chapter entitled "The Close of Esther's Narrative" with the following: "full seven happy years I have been the mistress of Bleak House. The few words that I have to add to what I have written, are soon penned; then I, and the unknown friend to whom I write, will part for ever" (985). Only at the end of the novel does the reader learn that the events Esther is chronicling occurred seven years ago. The fact that Esther is narrating the past strengthens her location in horizontal time since she must have ordered her account in a chronological fashion to situate it in historical time. Furthermore, Esther's selectivity as narrator is revealed once the reader is aware that seven years have elapsed that are not included in her story. Esther is not writing a diary or acting as archivist for her Victorian reality. Her narrative contains only the necessary details of her life that serve to recreate her identity and time-sense. At the end of the novel, Esther is happily ensconced in domestic bliss because she is fully matured into a woman comfortable with her place in society and in time.

Although *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* has come to an end, the system of Chancery is not destroyed and will apparently continue to perpetuate itself and more human suffering. With all of the deaths at the end of the novel and Esther's happy seclusion in Bleak House, Dickens appears to shy away from giving a solution to the societal problem he has so vehemently portrayed. In the words of Fradin, "while the novel may call for social action, it at the same time everywhere denies the possibility that any action arising from corporate society will better man's condition" (Fradin 63). Such a conclusion is bleak indeed, but that is not what Dickens offers. Fradin recognizes that reversal and writes "hence Esther Summerson" (60). Many critics have already identified Esther's individual narrative as the prescription against Chancery-like institutions. Case and Shaw conclude "[the problem of Chancery] therefore also highlights the need for a counterfigure like Esther, whose focus is so determinedly localized that the debilitating scale of the problem never becomes evident" (Case 126). Chancery is never debilitating for Esther because she refuses to be sucked into its vertical time trap. She clings to her sequentially ordered life. Fradin elaborates further on Esther: "her actions are all individual encounters between her goodness and others' need; perfect in being selfless and self-contained, they carry no larger hope in them, no hope that Esther or anyone else can restore the sun to the blighted landscape or halt the drift toward fragmentation" (Fradin 61). Fradin recognizes that Esther is not trying to save the world; she is merely doing the best she can on a very small scale. Although the triumph of the individual is comforting at the end of the novel, Dickens is more specific in his solution.

Esther's narrative triumphs at the end of the novel because she represents horizontal time. She maintains a strict chronology throughout the text, with which Dickens concludes his novel. Welsh writes that "a single human consciousness can provide not only thought and feeling but continuity through time and space" (Welsh 19). Esther continues, unlike Chancery, she progresses forward. Welsh says further "Esther Summerson's narrative quietly subsumes the other; its clever self-aggrandizement attains a modest apocalypse of its own, while the grand apocalypse awaited by the satire turns out to be a joke" (xv). Her narrative embodies the rational response that the individual must exhibit in the face of Chancery-monsters. Esther's is the task of narrating; she tells again events that have already occurred and in so doing, she must transform actions into words. She must order these words one after another so that they convey meaning. Her role as narrator demands her complete existence in horizontal time. Esther's example is the model that Dickens upholds at the end of the novel. Her irreducible function as narrator ultimately outlives the behemoth of Chancery.

The social problems that Dickens exposes in *Bleak House*, particularly in the system of Chancery, have been defined and redefined by various generations of scholars. The satire is so dense in the novel that the reader cannot ignore the monstrosity of the court system nor its cruel inefficacy and treatment of its human victims. However, few have identified the opposing temporalities at work in the novel. To dismiss time in *Bleak House* is to underestimate the pervasiveness of Chancery and diminish the role of the individual in combating its poison. Chancery and *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* are massive and undefeatable because they represent a variant temporality. The system traps its victims not only in a bureaucratic nightmare, but also in vertical time from which they

cannot escape. Esther and her narrative represent the power of the individual to take chaos and create order. The method of *Bleak House*, although dependent on Chancery, is not limited in time to Victorian England. The threat of social institutions continues to this day, as Andrew Sanders discusses. He says of Dickens “his malodorous London is contiguous to ours, and our London is a world-city, a working epitome of how the world works and fails to work” (Sanders 16). Therefore, although the novel is situated in a particular historical period, the juxtaposition of time is useful in our own reality. Dickens is fundamentally interested in the act of interpretation and the function of narration as remedies against the forced conformity of society. In *Bleak House*, the author suggests then that the work of creating fiction is an indispensable role in society, without which the individual may be obliterated.

“A Heap of Broken Images:”

Eliot’s Temporal Experiment in “The Waste Land”

A reader’s desire to interpret a work of literature is fundamentally a desire for coherence and synthesis in that particular text. However, certain works, especially since the Modernist movement, specifically defy synthesis in order to represent disordered reality. T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” is one such Modernist poem. “The Waste Land” is constructed through a series of fragments situated in various historical periods and alluding to other literature, history, anthropology etc. There is a strong impulse, and indeed critical argument, to view the poem as a historical sweep from the past to the present to demonstrate how the crisis in Western civilization coalesces in the modern moment. However, such a reading insists on a fundamental unity between the past and

the present which is not evidenced in the text of the poem. My categories of horizontal and vertical time demonstrate that “The Waste Land” resists temporal coherence because historical periodization is neither realistic nor a solution to cultural stagnation. In other words, Eliot’s poem testifies to how destructive the imposition of unity can be on historical time, which is necessarily fragmented. He writes against the very act of forcing temporal categorization on reality.

I will use horizontal and vertical time to make some analytical sense of Eliot’s temporal confusion. I am aware that my use of these categories apparently contradicts my earlier statement regarding Eliot’s own rejection of temporal categories. However, rather than suggesting that Eliot entirely discredits categories of time, I argue that the poet realizes that categorization is not a solution to the crisis facing Western civilization. The problem cannot be neatly boxed and organized in the method categories seek to impose. Instead, the cultural sterility evident in the West is a problem of temporal categorization and the poem obsessively insists on fragmentation as a representation of cultural crisis.

One of the primary difficulties in reading “The Waste Land” occurs in the act of interpreting the various threads of the poem. The poem is densely populated with allusions and footnotes which are inseparable from the contemporary narrative. I situate these allusions in vertical time since the motion of always returning to the past apparently traps the narrative from progressing. “The Waste Land” does not tell a story in the traditional sense in part because the allusions keep interrupting narrative flow. Simultaneously, however, Eliot includes voices which speak from his contemporary London world. These voices constitute the horizontal narrative of the poem. The work is

unlike both *Othello* and *Bleak House* because horizontal and vertical time are inseparable and extremely hard to distinguish. The reader is constantly jumping back and forth between past and present and horizontal and vertical time-senses. This time-travel that is forced upon the reader makes the poem panoramic, but does not actually unify past and present. Instead, the combination of horizontal and vertical time emphasizes the gaping holes between historical periods.

Before examining the poem, I would like to introduce the scholarly argument mentioned earlier in my paper. In his analysis of “The Waste Land,” B.C. Southam asserts:

Eliot’s immediate Waste Land is the world, as he saw it, after the First World War. The ‘waste’ is not, however, that of the war’s devastation and bloodshed, but the emotional and spiritual sterility of Western man, the ‘waste’ of our civilization. Eliot does not regard this as a single moment in history, particular to the West in the twentieth century, and the poem is organized to present an inclusive, comparative vision; a perspective of history in which (by succinct allusions and references) twentieth-century forms of belief and disbelief, of culture and of life, are kept in a continuous and critical relationship with those of the past.

The theme of the poem is the salvation of the Waste Land, not as a certainty but a possibility: of emotional, spiritual and intellectual vitality to be regained. (Southam 94).

Eliot’s relationship to post-WWI Europe is undeniable as is his recognition of Western cultural sterility. However, Southam’s argument regarding the succinctness and continuity of the allusions detracts from the intentionally fragmented nature of the poem. The twentieth-century is indeed related to the past, but not in harmonious unity; rather, the past and present are painfully juxtaposed. Southam’s conclusion regarding the theme of the poem suggests that the “comparative vision” of the temporalities provides the possibility for redemption. In other words, the “vitality to be regained” in the twentieth century exists in the past. This argument depends on an interpretation of the allusions as

a link between past and present. As such, the allusions would provide temporal unity. I hope to demonstrate that this is decidedly not the case and that a redemptive reading of the poem is frustrated by its inescapably fragmented nature.

The poem begins with an epigraph from a work by a first century writer, Petronius Arbiter. The passage in Eliot quotes from this work which is based on Greek mythology. In translation, Eliot writes “For once I saw with my own eyes the Cumean Sibyl hanging in a jar, and when the boys asked her: ‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ She answered, ‘I want to die’” (Eliot epigraph). Both the identity and the historical habitat of the speaker are unclear. The sibyl is “hanging in a jar,” and this state of being suggests suspension between two extremes. The sibyl is between the lid of the jar and the bottom of the jar, but she is also between two states of being. As editor Michael North’s footnotes clarify, the Sibyl “had asked for as many years of life as there are grains in a handful of sand, but she forgot to ask for eternal youth as well” (North, 3. n.1). Therefore, the Sibyl is the first in a series of characters who are caught between life and death. The quality of in-betweenness is critical to the temporality of the poem. As mentioned earlier, the reader constantly has to shift between the narrative and the allusions, or the past and the present. The fragments of the poem remain in this undefined, between state and prevent a unified temporality.

I. The Burial of the Dead

The famous opening lines of the poem allude to the beginning of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. Unlike Chaucer’s celebration of the natural rebirth that occurs in springtime, Eliot perverts such hopeful imagery. “April is the cruellest month” because its “mix[es] memory and desire” (Eliot l-3). The speaker longs to forget the past, as

demonstrated in the escapism of “I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter” (18). However, the speaker’s personal past seeps into the narrative. The speaker describes the summers spent in Germany and the winters “at the arch-duke’s.” These anecdotes apparently refer to the same group of people, including the speaker, since the third person pronoun “we” is used in both cases. Between these memoirs, Eliot introduces the voice of another person speaking in German and in the present tense. That person says “I’m not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a true German” (North, 5.n.5). The relationship between the Lithuanian, the “we” group, the speaker telling these anecdotes, and the “I” named Marie is undetermined. All of these voices participate in a cacophony of different time periods. The majority of the first stanza occurs in horizontal time because, despite the temporal uncertainty between the present moment and some past childhood experience, the speakers are located in Eliot’s contemporary world and not in ancient history. The poem demonstrates how the narrative in horizontal time is fundamentally fragmented and this disjointedness will merely be strengthened in the interruptions of vertical time.

The next stanza introduces the physical landscape of the waste land, but is constructed on allusions to the Bible. Eliot cites directly from Ezekiel and writes “Son of man, / You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images” (Eliot 20-22). The biblical allusion apparently confines the waste land to the ancient deserts of the Old Testament. The next lines allude to Ecclesiastes and the image of the waste land transforms into a metaphor for spiritual decay. These allusions demonstrate how Eliot forces the reader to constantly inhabit both the world of the poem and various external sources. The crucial point is that these worlds do not share the same time-sense. This

stanza does not refer back to the speakers of the first stanza nor does it address the initial concern with memory. The stanza demands individual attention and refuses to smoothly transition from the previous fragment. This section also introduces a major component of the Modernist experiment, which involves the poem's self-awareness of its formal innovations. "The Waste Land" references its fragmented nature in its various descriptions of pictures and images. In this stanza, Eliot describes "a heap of broken images," which may be interpreted as a meta-discursive reference to the construction of the poem itself (22).

Thus far in the poem, Eliot has used some allusions but the structure has not yet demonstrated how horizontal and vertical time become interlinked. As the poem continues, the allusions in vertical time increase and try to stretch the reader even further between the present narrative and the poem's past sources. Editor Michael North recognizes this sense of stagnation in his Preface to the Norton Critical Edition of "The Waste Land." He writes "the sheer breadth of reference within the poem was often overwhelming for its first readers, and it still rather frequently overwhelms attempts to account for it, afflicting even the simplest passages with a kind of annotational elephantiasis" (North ix). North has not mentioned temporality in his comment, but instead describes the difficulty he faces as an editor to explain Eliot's references without reproducing the entirety of the works from which the poet alludes. North's definition of this problem further strengthens my argument regarding the trap posed by vertical time. According to North, critical scholarship on "The Waste Land" has maintained that knowledge of Eliot's source material is crucial for interpretation. The act of trying to account for all his sources and indeed to familiarize oneself with all the material is

“overwhelming,” as he says, exhaustive for the extremely learned, and potentially impossible for the casual reader. I argue that Eliot is not propagating this struggle, but rather engaging in a fundamentally temporal experiment to reveal his opinions on methods of temporal categorization.

With a slightly clearer idea of Eliot’s method, I now turn to the next section framed by Wagnerian opera about the Hyacinth Girl. This fragment provides the first dramatic evidence of the manner in which Eliot stacks allusions on top of each other so that temporalities become confused. Lines thirty-one to thirty-four are a direct quotation of Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde* and Eliot maintains the original German. The reader must simultaneously translate the quotation as well as question how this epic love story is related to the contemporary narrative. The story of the opera itself was composed during the Middle Ages and alludes to Arthurian Grail legend (North, 6.n.1). Therefore, the poem makes a historical arc beginning in the Middle Ages, continuing to Wagner’s nineteenth century, and ending in Eliot’s twentieth-century world. Although these various periods are juxtaposed in the poem, they are not unified. The quotation from Wagner is floating on the page in its own distinct paragraph and has no particular speaker. The poem then moves to the story of the Hyacinth Girl, which alludes to a Greek myth about the hyacinth flower and the god Apollo. Greek mythology can now be added to the list of historical eras mentioned above. The section ends with another quote from Wagner. All of these allusions act as vertical time and they surround the horizontal narrative of the Hyacinth Girl.

The story of the Hyacinth Girl is set apart from the other allusions in this section through the use of quotation marks. The punctuation designates that a conversation is

occurring between two speakers who do not contribute the passages from Wagner nor the previous biblical section. Eliot writes

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

The first two lines are spoken by the Hyacinth Girl who is addressing another person, presumably her lover. The em dash introduces the response of the lover and recounts a particular moment in their relationship when he was overwhelmed by the Hyacinth Girl. Exactly what overwhelms the lover is open to interpretation: it may be lust, the Hyacinth Girl's beauty, or the lover's failure to act upon his passion because of impotence. The Wagnerian frame chronicles a melodramatically tragic love story about extreme passion. The Greek allusion refers to Apollo's divine love for a mortal and how that love had tragic consequences for the youth Hyacinth. However, the grand love stories of the past are entirely removed from the world of the Hyacinth Girl since the lover does not act upon his passion, whether or not it exists. Instead, the lover is in-between life and death and he is also located between a dramatic past and his unfulfilled present. The juxtaposition of allusions and contemporary reality emphasizes the irreconcilable distance between past and present.

The next section of the poem is a dialogue between the contemporary speaker and the clairvoyant Madame Sosostris. According to Cleanth Brooks, "she is reading in reality, though she does not know it, the fortune of the protagonist. She finds that his card is that of the drowned Phoenician Sailor, and so she warns him against death by

water” (Brooks, 189). The validity of her prediction is called into question during this section, and later in Part IV of the poem as it directly relates to the protagonist. This section exemplifies the stagnant motion of the poem as a whole since the act of telling the future is filtered through the past. Madame Sosostris turns to the Tarot Deck, but some of the cards that she reads from are not traditional. Instead, these non-Tarot cards allude to other cultural and literary works that have occurred in the past. For example, “here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,” alludes to da Vinci and Walter Pater (Eliot 49). The allusions are once again trying to force the narrative into vertical time while the contemporary anecdote is trying to predict the future. The sheer breadth of historical detail appears to be sucking the contemporary world into the past. The warring past and present temporalities essentially frustrates any possibility of future prediction that Madame Sosostris might have had. Her final prediction is “I see crowds of people, walking in a ring” (56). However, these people are not located in the future as would be necessary for her words to be a prediction. The next section of the poem fully develops the failure of her prediction as a description of future events.

The final section of Part I explicitly combines historical allusions in vertical time with Eliot’s contemporary London world in horizontal time. The previous four sections of this segment have hinted at or only partially demonstrated the incompatibility of past and present in the poem. The final fragment acts as a microcosm for the entire poem in its temporal experiment. Eliot begins this section with an adaptation of Baudelaire in the line “unreal city” (60). Whereas the city was Paris for Baudelaire, Eliot transforms the reference to designate the city of London. He then writes “A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many. / I had not thought death had undone so many” (62-63). These lines

allude to two different parts of Dante's *Inferno* (North, 7.n.1). Therefore, vertical time continues to interrupt the narrative through this allusion, and, because these lines are echoing Madame Sosostris's prediction, forward progression seems impossible in Eliot's contemporary world. The past is not generative because of the very fact that it is past and gone. The future holds no regrowth either since what can be seen of the future is actually the historical past. Finally, the present moment is equally paralyzed because it lies in-between life and death and horizontal and vertical time. Eliot emphasizes the tangibility of this present time through his references to London place and street names that would have been (and still are) familiar to London readers. The final lines of this section involve a conversation between the protagonist and an acquaintance which firmly solidifies the conclusion of Eliot's temporal experiment.

The last few lines of Part I painfully superimpose the present on the past but without forming an actual connection between the two. Eliot writes:

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying 'Stetson!
 'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
 'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
 'Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
 'Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
 'You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!' (Eliot 69-76).

Given the historical context of this poem, the reader might at first suppose that the initial conversation is occurring between two fellow soldiers after WWI. However, Eliot alludes to the First Punic War with the reference to “the ships at Mylae.” Cleanth Brooks writes that Eliot “is making the point that all the wars are one war; all experience, one experience” (Brooks 191). In fact, Eliot's poem urges the opposite conclusion. If all experience could indeed be unified into a single experience, “The Waste Land” would

have been a much more cohesive poem. Eliot instead introduces the experiences of a variety of people and places and these do not combine with each other to create a single experience. The conversation between the speaker and Stetson about the corpse in the garden strengthens this point. The corpse can be interpreted as the past and the narrator is trying to make it grow in his present time. However, growth is frustrated because of the distance between the past and present; or, in the language of the metaphor, the corpse is too far removed from life to ever bloom again. The past and present experiences are not one; they are separate, disjointed, and fragmented.

After concluding “The Burial of the Dead,” the reader understands the full force of Eliot’s temporal experiment. The allusions do not clarify the contemporary narrative and neither does the contemporary narrative extract meaning from the past. Past and present and horizontal and vertical time are inextricably linked yet they do not communicate. The construction of the poem parallels the action of two people standing next to each other and speaking at the same time without communicating. “The Waste Land” is essentially and fundamentally a fragmented poem. My brief analysis of Part I has demonstrated that each stanza does not build on the previous one nor directly contribute to the following one. The sections are disjointed and resist unification. Without exhaustively tracking down each allusion and demonstrating the fragmentary nature of every stanza in the rest of the poem, I hope to simply have outlined Eliot’s general method. As one reads further into the poem, the fragmentation becomes extreme, particularly as songs and inarticulate sounds are introduced into the language of the poem. The debasement of the nightingale’s song in Part II to “‘jug jug’ to dirty ears”

represents the general collapse of coherence (Eliot 103). An analysis of the final stanza of the poem finally demonstrates the conclusion of Eliot's temporal experiment.

As mentioned earlier, Eliot's poem cannot be divorced from the post-war context of its creation. Anne Wright discusses Eliot's historical era and posits that his writing participates in the literature of crisis of the period from 1910 to 1922. She analyzes "The Waste Land" along with other Modernist works and concludes the following:

...*The Waste Land* may be read as the culmination of the literature of crisis. It articulates crisis as imminent but suspended apocalypse, by escaping from the constraints of narrative realism into its own poetic method. It both refuses linearity, and tantalizingly refers to it. It posits narrative closure and thematic apocalypse, and leaves both open, suspended in a continuous present. Its controlled contrasts and juxtapositions move the poem through, but not beyond, the wasteland. The poem establishes for us a dimension of crisis, and leaves us locked within it (Wright 198).

Wright recognizes how Eliot's poetic method involves temporal suspension, in the manner of my vertical time. For Wright, the poem does not move beyond the realm of crisis and apocalyptic suspension, but leaves the readers "locked" inside its temporality. However, I argue that "The Waste Land" does not perform any such confining action as locking. The poem resists the confinement of time as well as of "the dimension of crisis." Wright's earlier assertion of how the poem "posits narrative closure and thematic apocalypse, and leaves both open" is entirely more descriptive of the poetic experiment. The final motion of "The Waste Land" is extremely open and further detracts from the act of temporal categorization with which it has been struggling throughout.

The last stanza of the poem combines horizontal and vertical time in a final demonstration of temporal fragmentation. The poem concludes with an appeal for peace located outside Western periodization. Eliot writes:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s'aspose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam ceu chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
 These fragments I have shored against my ruins
 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih (Eliot 426-433).

The first line of this passage references the collapse of Western civilization or perhaps chronicles the destruction of the recent War. However, the line is taken from a popular children's song and so satirizes the achievements of the culture that is "falling down." The next several lines again manifest the imposition of vertical time on the narrative. Line 429 in French repeats the notion of fragmentation, since the tower is not whole but ruined. In this stanza, the poet makes the most overt reference to his own method in the line "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" (430). As has been discussed, the entire poem is intentionally composed of fragments. Eliot returns to the interpretations of the "Da" syllable explored at length earlier in Part V. In this motion to Eastern culture, he both foregrounds the last line of the poem and suggests how the very act of interpretation can also be fragmented. One's understanding of "da" varies with one's identity group (North 18, n.3). Finally, the poem ends with an invocation of peace in Sanskrit "shantih shantih shantih" (Eliot 433). The word does not translate into English, but Eliot provides the equivalent as "the Peace which passeth understanding" (North, 26). However, the context of the Upanishads frustrates even this apparent conclusion.

Many critics seek to unify the various fragments of "The Waste Land" or the remainders of Western cultural crisis into "the peace which passeth all understanding." However, in his article "'Shantih' in 'The Waste Land,'" K. Narayana Chandran discusses how Eliot has intentionally separated the word "shantih" from the syllable

“om,” which would have provided the blessing of peace. Chandran writes “*Śāntih* in fact becomes a benediction only when *Ōm* precedes it” (Chandran 682). Therefore, the ending of the poem is not actually a blessing since it has been divorced from the necessary religious syllable. Chandran writes how Eliot would have been aware of this fact and has intentionally prevented the poem from achieving closure. Chandran continues “Eliot’s propriety in severing *Ōm* from ‘shantih’ rests on the fact that in a poem that offers little more than non-essences in ‘broken images,’ *Ōm*, the quintessential source of all order and harmony in life according to the Upanishads, does not and cannot find a place” (683). Therefore, the poem ends with a frustrated desire for harmony in a world that is inherently fragmented and divided.

T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” resists coherent unity at every level of discourse. The poem is broken into disparate images that are strung together in a hodge-podge of literary and cultural allusions. The horizontal narrative of the speaker is constantly interrupted by these allusions, which act as vertical time. These temporal juxtapositions pull the reader in two different directions simultaneously and prevent a single temporality from unifying the narrative. Fragmentation permeates every level of “The Waste Land.” However, in true Modernist style, Eliot’s fragmented structure reflects the theme and message of his poem. He demonstrates that historical time is not one unified category of human experience. The difficulty in interpreting “The Waste Land” rests on Eliot’s belief that the past is inherently separate from the present and attempts to forcefully unify the two result in the fragmentation of meaning.

“Hurry Up Please It’s Time”

Literature is constantly struggling to challenge and reformulate apparently fixed boundaries. This may occur at the level of language and form, plot, or, as I have demonstrated, time. In the realm of fiction, time is malleable to a certain extent, which is a luxury the author may enjoy but is not available in our daily lives. Through my categories of horizontal and vertical time, I have imposed some structure on temporal flexibility in order to enable a more fundamental level of analysis in my chosen works of literature. In *Othello*, Otherness is represented as a temporality and therefore becomes a permanent identity for the Other. Othello’s tragedy is that he tries to force himself into two exclusive categories and he is ultimately destroyed. In *Bleak House*, the victims of Chancery inherit vertical time and, like Othello, remain trapped. Esther navigates around the black hole in the novel because she must actively recreate her own temporality. Finally, in “The Waste Land,” Eliot uses both horizontal and vertical time to fragment his poem and mirror reality. He demonstrates that forced temporal unification ultimately prevents coherence. All of the victims of vertical time are connected by their ignorance of their sense of time. The conclusions I have reached show that temporality is often the unknown cause of a seemingly unstoppable trajectory of events. Literature facilitates the recognition of the importance and power of one’s sense of time. In short, one of the values of literature lies in its capacity to imaginatively engage our sense of time and thereby provide a temporal model for the way in which we live every day.

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