ABSTRACT

WEST, RANDEE DAX. Mapping the Metropolis: London After Catastrophe in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and H.D.'s *Trilogy*. (Under the direction of Dr. Jon Thompson)

The twentieth century is strife with the overwhelming horror of physical disaster due to numerous wars and political uprisings. This project considers modern poetry's response to catastrophe through analysis of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and H.D.'s *Trilogy*. While both of these poems receive varying amounts of criticism – *The Waste Land* a great deal and *Trilogy* considerably less – this thesis investigates place dynamics, an area that attracts little attention. Using Leonard Lutwack's *The Role of Place in Literature* as a starting point, this inquiry focuses on the horrors of placelessness following catastrophe in each text.

The horrors of placelessness emerge in numerous ways in these two texts: destruction threatens the physical stability of buildings, the constant implosion of the human frame, and the maintenance of individual and cultural identities. *The Waste Land* follows the metamorphosis of London after WWI from a center of cultural and historical significance to a disjointed realm of fragmented language, personal relationships, and identity. Written during WWII, *Trilogy* begins in the throes of placelessness and moves toward the possibility of reclaiming a sense of place. While *The Waste Land* ends with the hopelessness of placelessness, *Trilogy* leads us to the need for psychological landscaping instead of solely mapping the metropolis in the modern world.

Mapping the Metropolis: London After Catastrophe in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and H.D.'s *Trilogy*

by

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BIOGRAPHY

Dax West was born on June 8, 1979 in Raleigh, NC. She received her B.A. in English and Chemistry from North Carolina State University in May 2001, graduating Magna cum Laude. After undergraduate, Dax continued her studies at North Carolina State University where she will graduate with a M.A. in English in December 2003. Her literary interests include American literature, modern poetry, postcolonial literature, and literary theory. She currently lives in Greenville, NC with her husband, Stuart Jennings, and plans to pursue a Ph.D. in English.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

-- "The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind / Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed"
    – *The Waste Land* (III.173-175)

-- "Now my right hand, / now my left hand / clutch your curled fleece; / take me home, take me home, / my voice wails from the ground"
    -- *Trilogy* (527)

Introduction

The twentieth century was extremely violent with numerous wars and revolutions: World War I (1914-1919), World War II (1939-1945), the Bolshevik Revolution, the Vietnam War, violence in Communist China, and numerous civil wars in Africa. In the twentieth century, war takes on a newfound horror due to technological advancements, allowing for trench warfare, protracted bombing campaigns, and, after WWII, the deployment of nuclear warfare. Therefore, the fear of death goes beyond immediate danger; that is, the threat of annihilation is now almost globalized.

Literary criticism contends with the rapid alteration of form in modern poetry as a response to the disruptive changes, often violent, that are the hallmark of the twentieth century. Many poets discard traditional forms and narrative poetry as a primary form of communication. Instead, poetry, as well as fiction in general, gradually moves toward contending with the disruptive qualities present in the century. Much twentieth century poetry deploys multiple voices, fragmentation, and a willingness to use time and history in innovative ways. These qualities often complement modern poetry's content by suggesting that definitive truth and resolution is not easily attained in an era marked by disaster. Indeed, "this sense of the impossibility of closure, or of creating a form which will do the work of the epitaph or the elegy, and thus enable an adequate representation of the experience of war, either at the front or among the bereaved at home, remains at one and the same time a liberation and challenge to poetry" (Campbell 73).

Therefore, within the twentieth century, we see the appropriation of thematic and formal concerns in response to catastrophe. Critics point to poetry's wide range of response to modern disaster through thematic and formal elements. For instance, Stephen Sicari suggests that in *The Cantos*, Pound "assigns to poetry a most ambitious role, to lead its readers away from a present state of cultural corruption and toward a new order based upon the poet's own visionary experience" (ix). For Sicari, then, one way that modern poetry can respond to the contemporary world is by employing time and place flexibly; thus, poetry does not necessarily confine itself to its current situation. While still flexible in terms of time and place, modern poetry interacts with the world through unflinching confrontation. In other words, modern poetry can respond to disaster by situating itself within a particular time and place and by exploring its horrific boundaries.

This project explores modern poetry that responds to a disastrous century through an exploration of place. The driving critical impetus for this project is what I call the dynamics of place; I draw extensively on Leonard Lutwack's theories of place in *The Role of Place in Literature* as a critical context for reading Eliot and H.D. Lutwack explains that his "primary responsibility" is the exploration of "a common literary element" (i.e. place); however, this text ultimately contends with the necessity for ecocriticism in considering the "condition of mankind's total environment" (viii). Throughout this text, Lutwack provides numerous propositions about place dynamics which he supports through an extensive survey of literature. Lutwack emphasizes the importance of place as a critical concern in literature. He claims that place dynamics are inescapable since "accommodation to man-made changes in the environment would alone be a serious enough challenge, but now little doubt exists that the issue is the survival of

mankind" (2). Beyond establishing the immediacy of place concerns, Lutwack's theory

of the presence of placelessness in the twentieth century are especially crucial to this

project. Given the degree of catastrophe in twentieth century Europe, place and

placelessness are entangled with one another inescapably. And, as we shall see,

placelessness profoundly shapes identity formation in the modern world. Although it is

difficult to succinctly condense his suggestions about modern placelessness, he offers the

following claim:

> Place loss, place devaluation, has been without question one of the principal
>
> motifs of literature over the last one hundred years, and from one point of view
>
> modern literature is a dialogue of opposed positions regarding the individual's
>
> relation to the emerging new world as a place. The despair of deracination is
>
> countered with the hope of restoring attachment to remnant places, expatriation
>
> alternates with return to the impaired homeland, disaffection is answered with
>
> accommodation to the new places of our time (184).

As Lutwack's claim suggests, place and placelessness necessarily involve individual

interaction with surroundings. Furthermore, this overwhelming "despair of

deracination," or the fear of uprootedness, centers on the mutability of identity in

response to a constantly changing world.

   While Lutwack's ideas of place dynamics provide a foreground for this thesis, he

gives the following as the central cause for placelessness: "the disappearance of familiar

places and the proliferation of a more and more limited set of uniform places" (183).

Although I investigate the "disappearance of familiar places" in the following chapters, I

concentrate on the individual response to an abruptly changed landscape as a result of disaster.

This project analyzes place dynamics within T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and H.D.'s *Trilogy* as a means of understanding the change in individual and cultural identity in the modern world. Although these poems have received varying amounts of critical attention – Eliot a great deal and H.D. less - they are rarely considered together. I am using these texts to explore the metamorphosis of place dynamics in literature set in London after disastrous events. *The Waste Land*, written from 1921 to 1922, showcases the aftershocks of WWI in London. Even though London did not receive physical damage during WWI, the poem dwells on the dissolution of individual and cultural identity. *Trilogy*, written in parts from 1942 to 1944, responds directly to the London bombing raids during WWII. The transformation of individual and cultural identity also manifests in this text by confronting the physical and psychological terror of destruction. By looking closely at two poems that share London as a common primary setting, it is possible to trace the metamorphosis of place dynamics from the centrality of place to placelessness in the first half of the twentieth century. London is the prototype of a modern urban city that exudes the promise of progress through technology and civilization. Furthermore, London is a symbolic place as it is not only infused with historic significance, but also serves as a central, defining locale in these two influential examples of modern poetry. As a result, in both *The Waste Land* and *Trilogy* London becomes a central breeding ground for turmoil and instability as the assurance of unending progress appears fictional in the wake of catastrophe.

The first chapter, "Living Among Fragments in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*," explores the speaker's reaction to London after WWI. The speaker does not witness the physical destruction of buildings due to war, yet he witnesses a procession of corpses as if London is nothing more than an upended graveyard. The speaker, as well as the rest of the poem, seems paralyzed in London and forced to absorb the sterility and decay in Eliot's vision of the modern world. Individual and cultural identity falters as London can no longer provide the assurance of stability with regard to place and placement. I argue, then, that the speaker must abandon London as a place-marker for identity and confront the fragmentation of place, language, and identity.

In the second chapter, " 'We Know Not Nor Are Known': The Horrors of Placelessness in 'The Walls Do Not Fall'," I explore the first third of H.D.'s *Trilogy*. I suggest that this part of the poem constitutes H.D.'s vision of the horrors of placelessness directly following the London bombings of WWII. Therefore, while the speaker picks her way through the physical remnants of disaster, she interacts with a London that is no longer familiar or useful as a marker of individual and cultural identity. However, *Trilogy* attempts to take a dramatic turn away from the horrors of placelessness; I explore this phenomenon in Chapter 3, " 'Her Book is Our Book': The Struggles to Reclaim Place in *Trilogy*." This chapter incorporates *Trilogy*'s hopeful desire for the restoration of place within modern place dynamics. Modern destruction, however, irrevocably changes the landscape of individual and cultural identity as survival involves negotiating the balance between actively remembering and moving beyond disaster. While the horrors of placelessness plague the restoration of place, the poem ultimately suggests that the formation of stable possibilities is again possible. *Trilogy* implies that we must

forego the centrality of urban locales after WWII and, instead, order our own construction of place.

In my conclusion, I argue that *The Waste Land* and *Trilogy* both explore the horrors of placelessness. Ultimately, however, each ends with a different vision of modern London and the implications of placelessness. I conclude that *The Waste Land* ends in placelessness, where London does not project what Eliot sees as a useful cultural vision, foster identity, or suggest any ties to humanity. *Trilogy*, in contrast, implies a surprising possibility in "The Flowering of the Rod." While *Trilogy*'s speaker also abandons London as a referential identity marker, the text continues to shape identity away from London. Thus, I argue that the ending of *Trilogy* decentralizes the need for physical place after WWII but opens the possibility of a psychological landscape.

Chapter 1: Living Among Fragments in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

The Waste Land, written by T.S. Eliot from 1921 to 1922, is a five-part poem that illuminates Eliot's perception of modern alienation. World War I is the "determinant absence" in the poem. Although the war escapes direct reference, it haunts the poem in the corpses that populate the London streets, the references to the living dead, rats, and the general aura of trauma. In general terms, World War I transforms society's previous understanding of the world from the assurance of progress and civilization to the despair of barbarity and destruction, notably illuminated via trench warfare and mustard gas attacks. Thus, through the speaker of *The Waste Land*, Eliot explores how his contemporaries are set adrift among this dissolution of cultural identity. While the horrors of WWI do not comprise the entirety of Eliot's sorrowful cultural vision, the war serves as a literary and cultural marker of time and sentiment for this depiction of cultural collapse.

WWI did not physically affect London as WWII does with the London bombing blitz. Nevertheless, Eliot uses London as the poem's primary setting for the speaker to realize the despair of the modern situation and the decentralization of place importance. Perhaps this distancing from the direct effects of disaster contributes to the text's fragmented and dreamlike disposition. In other words, if the poem had to address imminent and physical disaster, it might lose its freedom to explore disparate yet complementary dimensions of despair and decay, especially cultural breakdown and spiritual crisis.

This chapter examines *The Waste Land*'s depiction of cultural dynamics of place and placement in London after WWI. The poem avoids straightforward denotations, and its treatment of London is no different. The ordering, or maybe disordering, of events within the poem prompts Marshall McLuhan's to propose "le paysage interieur or the psychological landscape." McLuhan contends that *The Waste Land* moves beyond the physicality of setting by proposing that "landscape is the means of presenting, without copula of logical enunciation, experiences which are united in existence but not in conceptual thought" (Lutwack 72). Therefore, for McLuhan, the poem seeks correlation among experiences "united in existence" and places them on an interior landscape created in the mind.

I agree that within *The Waste Land* we see the power of thought to arrange experiences for comparison. However, it is also necessary to address the physical element of landscape in *The Waste Land*'s London since the speaker desperately seeks remnants of cultural identity in London streets before abandoning the assurance of place. Through the ruined physical and psychological landscape of London, the speaker uses the symbols of modern civilization to realize the seeming inescapability of despondency. At the same time, *The Waste Land* reflects the metamorphosis of cultural identity as it moves from a paralyzed yet stable London to the disruption and fragmentation of placelessness. Ultimately, we are left with the struggle to move beyond the overwhelming despair of placelessness where any semblance of cohesion suffers fragmentation. In other words, language, experience, and history fragments into disjointed phrases, the cultural experience suffers alienation, and individual and cultural identity cannot depend on the assurance of place.

The poem's opening functions as a reasonable starting point for examining the role of place and placement because it identifies the overarching movements within the text. In this chapter, I do not analyze every detail of *The Waste Land*; instead, I illuminate the parts most illustrative of modern "place-dynamics." In addition, my investigations do not necessarily follow the poem chronologically. Although there is certainly structure and purpose to the composition of the five parts, the poem also speaks to the chaos of fragments, suggesting their willingness to stand in any order with each other. Despite this fragmentation, the opening functions as a disjointed guide to the rest of the poem.

Most of Part I, "The Burial of the Dead," does not explicitly occur in London. Instead, the poem first offers a panoramic view of *The Waste Land*, which seems to encompass the entire modern world. By providing a sort of panoramic opening, Eliot defines key terms in his representation of London. For the purpose of exploring London as a place representative of cultural identity, I see the opening as an introduction to the conflicting pulls of stasis and movement. Therefore, in a similar manner to how the opening's constant pull toward movement is aborted by the sterility of *The Waste Land*, the speaker's repetitive attempts to shape his identity are stunted by London's sterility. This sense of imminent movement in the opening is overwhelming. For instance, "April is the cruelest month, breeding" refers to the opening line of *The Canterbury Tales*, "Whan that April with his showres soote" (Chaucer). This comparison suggests that some type of journey is pending, much like the characters who set out for a pilgrimage to Canterbury. Immediately, *The Waste Land* includes another reminder of movement by pointing out the passage of time. Beyond the movement through seasons, the text

pinpoints the exact length of time between the described memory and the present state: " 'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;'" (I.35). Interestingly, reality seems crucial here since hyacinths are indeed "in flower from early in April till the end of May" (botanical.com). Finally, shifting occurs in geographic and identity terms, beginning with the speakers in Germany. As the speakers drink coffee in the Hofgarten, they seem to overhear the statement: "I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, I am a real German" (I.12). Then, in the hyacinth garden, different speakers are in Ireland. By establishing these different forms of movement through time, place, and identity, the poem implies the beginning of a journey. By correlation, then, we see this hope for a beginning of a journey internalized in the speaker in London as he hopes to uncover meaning in the modern world.

The opening ironically involves the pilgrimage motif in connection to the modern world. This unexpected use of *The Canterbury Tales* resides in a journey halted before it truly begins. As evidenced throughout the poem, most significantly through the speaker's interaction with London, stasis and sterility overwhelm the temptation to move beyond present despair. Denying the meaning behind such images of movement negates any semblance of cohesion and results in a "heap of broken images" (I.22). Even in the hyacinth garden, full of growth and youthful love, the sinister nature of Eliot's reality infests our expectations of place. In Greek mythology, after Apollo accidentally kills Hyacinthus, he "raised from his blood a purple flower on which the letters 'ai, ai,' were traced, so that the cry of woe might for evermore have existence on the earth" (botanical.com). As a result, just the presence of hyacinths denies the possibility of hope that the scene implies. Again, this garden scene does not include London as a place

reference. Instead, Eliot initially depicts the "cry of woe" that infuses his vision of the modern world after WWI. Thus, this scene provides an introduction to the sinister nature of the poem and forecasts the despair that resonates through London.

Furthermore, entering Eliot's *The Waste Land* means leaving behind expectations and preconceptions of nature. Instead of growth and rebirth, even the environment rejects the modern world by offering only sterility and death. The opening implies that recognizing the implications of this sterility is crucial before witnessing the speaker in London. Through this recognition, the speaker's hopelessness has greater significance since the very ground beneath his feet fertilizes turbulence and despair. An unidentifiable speaker identifies this rejection by asking "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?" (19-20). In this image, roots no longer sustain but seize flowers, as if taking them to some sort of underworld. Nature becomes an uninhabitable place by actively denying people's needs, as sterility and exposure replace sustenance and protection. The sterility of nature compounds as "the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief" (I.23). If the very ground that people walk upon rejects them, a stable identity that can move beyond the despair in London seems ultimately unattainable for the speaker.

This scene emphasizes the changing role of the environment in the modern world. Lutwack explains the centrality of place dynamics for formation of identity: "from one point of view modern literature is a dialogue of opposed positions regarding the individual's relation to the emerging new world as a place" (184). As this quotation suggests, when analyzing place dynamics, it is crucial to investigate the role of the individual within the place. How does the individual perceive place? How can the

individual construct identity from his or her relationship with this place? In the opening, we see already that *The Waste Land* intimates the extreme desolation of place; that is, if a place cannot offer even immediate use, the likelihood that it can support stable identity is minimal.

The text's opening reinforces this notion of a bleak interaction between individuals and the environment. The poem suggests the possibility for protection and compels the reader to "Come in under the shadow of this red rock" (I.26). The speaker makes a promise to the unidentified respondent:

> . . . I will show you something different from either
>
> Your shadow at morning striding behind you
>
> Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you,
>
> I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (I.27-30).

This passage discards the individual's past – "your shadow at morning" – and his future and inevitable death – "your shadow at evening" to situate him inescapably in the present. However, all that the speaker offers in this single, inescapable moment is "fear in a handful of dust." This line alludes to John Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*. In this prayer, Donne asks, "What's become of man's great extent and proportion, when himself shrinks himself and consumes himself to a handful of dust" ("Meditation"). This line indicates a bigger concern within the prayer; that is, Donne speaks to the positions of humanity since humans can recognize the magnificence of the body yet not have control over its demise. Therefore, by taking this part of Donne's meditation, Eliot points to our uncomfortable placement even within our own body. Furthermore, this literal dissolution of the human body into a "handful of dust" implies

that notions of individual identity and importance are unattainable after WWI. Also, in terms of the text's progression, this interest in the body's placement prepares us for the focus on the speaker's search for identity in London.

The opening, then, forgoes early promises of a redemptive journey and categorizes the world as existing in isolation, stasis, and despair. To exemplify the desolation of place and the individual in the modern world, *The Waste Land* memorably focuses upon London in parts II ("A Game of Chess") and III ("The Fire Sermon"). By magnifying the hopeless situation of London, Eliot suggests that even a place defined by its technological progress and urban civilization cannot escape despair and societal collapse.

In *Unreal Cities*, William Sharpe speaks to the sterility and paralysis that categorizes Eliot's vision of modern London. He proposes that "the absence of vital contact and stimulating encounters among the citizens of *The Waste Land* bespeaks the extent of Eliot's despair over the brutalizing monotony of urban existence" (102). Despite Sharpe's accurate depiction of the inescapable paralysis found in even interpersonal communications, the city still is a recognizable environment, even if transformation is the chief principle within it. In other words, in roughly the first half of *The Waste Land*, the speaker derives a form of cultural identity, albeit hopeless, by observing interactions within London. Although this treatment of London occurs several times, I explore a few scenes that significantly encapsulate the place dynamics within the poem. Afterward, I will analyze the attempt for "journey" within the poem as a means of confronting placelessness after abandoning London as a defining locale for fashioning identity and confronting placelessness.

Instead of a vibrant and civilized place, London becomes a nightmarish, "unreal city," populated with walking dead. In "The City in *The Waste Land*," Marianne Thormahlen aptly describes Eliot's London as a "huge, decaying receptacle which holds millions of people unable to reach across to one another" (237). Through this depiction, the poem presents a place that is completely opposite from perceptions of London as a thriving metropolis before WWI. Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of Eliot's vision is that his speaker pinpoints the faint staleness of death in the most mundane occurrences. As the speaker watches people walking to work, he reels from "A crowd [that] flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many" (I.62-63). By referring to Dante's *Inferno*, the poem blurs the line between the living world and an immaterial world after death. Thus, this perception erases our most basic foundation of identity, which is the need to ignore the inevitability of death in order to live in the present. In addition to a reversal in the expected treatment of death, this passage emphasizes an inability to escape the city's ritual of live mummification. For instance, Lutwack suggests that Eliot borrows from twentieth century literature where "streets became a bewildering maze filled with the grotesque horrors of a world dying of war, crime, and racial hatred" (234). Indeed, as we see in this passage, the very act of stepping into the street presents perilous danger since the "crowd" can overwhelm the distinctiveness of personal identity and envelop the human body.

Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize the prominence of place; London is not a randomly chosen backdrop for this phenomenon and, instead, signals its complicitness with the daily death march. Adding to the almost musical processional, ". . . Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke at nine" (I.68-69).

While poetry often employs the landscape as a reflection of the speaker's outlook, this particular use implies that London knowingly marks its own collapse by witnessing the death of its inhabitants. Therefore, the poem emphasizes the current cultural decay of London through the speaker's perception and what seems to be an acknowledgement by the city itself. Death, then, like an insistent cancer, invades the streets of London and casts its image into the surrounding architecture. By calling out to Stetson, a soldier from the first Punic war, the speaker reinforces death's invasiveness in London: " 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?'" (I.71-72). This inquiry sounds like everyday conversation, much as Londoners' walk to work is a daily occurrence. The poem, however, masks the horrific within the mundane and implies deduction of London's present state is possible through closer inspection. In addition to walking the streets, corpses can replace flowers in a garden and threaten to overrun beauty with death. Therefore, death overwhelms nature and reconfigures London's atmosphere from a site of civilization to a ghost city.

By investing everyday scenes with sinister undercurrents, *The Waste Land* denies London as a place engaged in the ever greater march to civilization. This insistence within the text means that the aftershocks of WWI cannot be ignored by retreating to London. The despairs inherent in war, such as the relentless threat of death and disruption in personal relationships, lengthen their infectious pathway into London. While the speaker's observation of the daily commute reveals the prominence of death, the conversation at the café suggests that the cultural corruption of London can also manifest itself subtly. This scene includes a rare direct reference to WWI, "when Lil's husband [Albert] got demobbed" (II.139). Even though Albert is not home yet, the taint

of WWI's death and decay precedes him. We learn that Albert wants Lil to get fake teeth and tells her, "I can't bear to look at you" (II.146). Lil's "friend" reinforces this image of bodily decay by referring to Lil as "so antique" (II.156). This depiction slyly gestures toward WWI as Lil's body seems to literally fall apart around her, suggesting the modern disdain for the past. This scene also emphasizes the decay of personal relationships in a setting that should be assuring and familiar. Not only does Albert exhibit disdain for his wife, Lil's friend threatens to take over Lil's relationship with Albert, thus denying the personal concern, and even humanity, that should provide the foundation for relationships. Moreover, the repetitive plea, "Hurry up please it's time," from the café does not receive a response from the speakers; instead, this phrase is distanced and ominous which only reinforces the disjointed content within the conversation. Such distancing among interpersonal relationships magnifies London's cultural decay and also places the individual in isolation.

The café scene exemplifies London's cultural despair through the distress of personal relationships and the debilitation of the physical body. An arguably more severe form of this despair erupts in the sexual encounter between the typist and the "young man carbuncular" (III. 231). He is described as "one of the low on whom assurance sits / As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire" (III. 233-234). This description suggests that he is newly rich, which would have a negative connotation in Eliot's view. Furthermore, since he is newly rich, his "assurance" is unstable, implying he has not real standing or place. The scene also describes the typist as "bored and tired" (III. 236) – a woman characterized by her "indifference" (III. 242). Therefore, these two actors in the scene are marked by an air of indifference and disdain. The sexual encounter, however, goes

beyond mere detachment as "Flushed and decided, he assaults at once," arguably pointing to our equivalent of date rape (III. 239). Despite the horrid nature of this encounter, the man's actions invoke an indifferent response from the narrator: "Well, now that's done: and I'm glad it's over" (III. 252). This scene, then, functions by emphasizing the severity of depersonalization in human interactions. Also, the human body has a passive and negative place in this scene as it exists only as a site of violation.

The next scene that I want to consider as illustrative of the current state of London after WWI is the room in "The Game of Chess (II)." This room functions as a microcosm for Eliot's vision of modern London in that there are hints of decay and decadence scattered throughout the surroundings. The two listless inhabitants appear to have freedom to leave, yet the text reads as if they are imprisoned in the room and, by correlation, London. The only way to escape the suffocating room is through the decoration. The room's décor seems to function as a gateway to other times and places. Although magnificently embellished, the walls only point to horrific stories. The furniture, ceiling, and pictures absorb sorrow to the saturation point – "And drowned the sense in odours" (II.89) - and reflect stories of the sighting of Cleopatra, Dido directly before suicide, Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the rape of Philomel. All of these stories suggest the fall of Western civilization, and London as a part of that civilization is also the inheritor of this legacy of despair.

In one sense, this room symbolizes the current state of London as the center of the English empire by thinly disguising death and decay under a seemingly beautiful setting. In another sense, the quiet interaction between the unknown observer and the room points to the growing despair found in using place as a marker for identity. Although the stories

the poems refer to are famous moments in past literature, they halt any process of identification. Since these stories all end conclusively in sorrow and horror, the observer witnessing this room cannot create positive meaning from his immediate surroundings (i.e. the room) or the signified (i.e. London). The text echoes the disconnection between place and the individual in the room's final description: "And other withered stumps of time / Were told upon the walls; staring forms / Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed" (II.104-106). These lines attribute participation to the surroundings as indicated in the active verbs, such as "staring," "leaning," and "hushing." Therefore, like St. Mary Woolnoth's death toll, place settings do not remain passive in the poem. Instead, London as well as this room furthers our understanding of place decay by recognizing its own demise. This room functions, in my view, as the epitome of Eliot's horrific vision of the world after WWI; he displaces the creation of meaning through beauty, time, or literature with a grotesque house of mirrors that infinitely projects and reflects the negation of such a possibility.

The characters' debilitating interaction in the room punctuates the increasing demise of London as a place to search for concrete meaning or establish identity. The repetition of words forms a cadence echoed by the "Shakespeherian Rag" playing in the background. This constant repetition of words along with the sheer amount of unanswered questions in this scene implies a complete lack of communication. For example, she pointedly asks: "Do / You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember / Nothing?" (II.121-123). Although there are answers to her questions, they are not supplied by the man present but the unnamed speaker, most likely Tiresias. Furthermore, this emphasis on "nothing" not only indicates decomposition in personal

relationships, but also foreshadows a break at the level of language. As Denis Donoghue suggests in "The Word Within a Word," words within *The Waste Land* are "Sybilline because of the darkness between them: they challenge us to provide them with a continuous syntax and they mock our efforts to do so" (221). In other words, much like the pictures on the walls, language becomes yet another medium useless for communicating meaning. Simply, *The Waste Land* imprisons the speaker in a horrific diorama where he faces death on the street, terror on the walls, and isolation in the midst of other people. These situations halt any individual attempt to form a sense of positive identity in London after WWI.

Thus far, we have seen the poem's early indications of a definitive split between the individual and the environment. Therefore, instead of gaining sustenance from nature, the individual sees only drought, sterility, and decay. The poem then imprisons the speaker in a paralyzed state in London, where he becomes a helpless observer of WWI's saturation of the city with death and decay. From the scenes I chose to analyze, we find an increasing realization through place dynamics that London offers only desolation instead of encouraging the cultivation of individual and cultural identity. Thus, there is an incongruous split in the relationship between the individual and the environment, the individual and the city, and even from one individual to another. Although the metamorphosis of place dynamics within the text is gradual, the speaker must eventually abandon London as a means of forming meaning and identity. Ultimately, *The Waste Land* abandons the fictional nature of place as a means of assurance and surrenders to the fragmentation of placelessness. This abandonment ultimately takes form because the speaker cannot find any solace. While the speaker

looks for assurance and stability after WWI, London offers back only cultural decay. Even when the speaker uses literary passages to seek a connection with London as a place of cultural meaning, he finds nothing.

As the poem progresses, it explores placelessness by fulfilling the opening's implied promise of a journey. However, instead of an epic quest that shapes the hero's identity, the speaker travels slowly away from London transfixed by the destruction of place and the impossibility for stable individual and cultural identity. Significantly, the Thames River weaves through the crux of this journey:

> Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
>
> Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
>
> But at my back in a cold blast I hear
>
> The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear. (III.183-186)

In this passage, Eliot's reference to Spenser's "Prothalamion" indicates his bittersweet use of the Thames River; while the Thames is the site of inspiration for famous works of literature, it becomes, in *The Waste Land*, a physical and psychological place from which to witness the abandonment of London as a cultural center. By replacing Marvell's playful lines with ominous overtones, this passage further pinpoints the speaker's increasing inability to distance himself from London's threat to his fragile existence. Many critics explore the purpose of Eliot's allusions to literature; for example, Ronald Bush gives a succinct diagnosis in "Unknown Terror and Mystery." Bush claims that "the feeling of desolation which had called up the line swells out into the bitterness: even the cherished texts of the past cannot charm away the bleak realities of life" (253). This

inescapable tension between surrendering to nostalgic memories of London and exploring the abandonment of place fuels the poem's movement.

Although the speaker alludes to artists such as Dante, Wagner, and Shakespeare, he cannot form a comprehensive understanding of such references. Through these references, London becomes a site of intertextual signifiers with an almost infinite extension of negative representations. Sharpe interprets Eliot's response to the city as recognition that it is "*already written*, as a figure already displaced into quotation, pastiche, collage, poetic text. Eliot destabilizes time, space, and mimetic effect so that his metropolis becomes a polyphonic, multivoiced, unabashedly literary artifact" (118). Since the metropolis functions merely as a "literary artifact," we now see a more extreme form of the disconnect between the individual and the creation of meaning. Meaning and language suffers fragmentation as the speaker admits, "I can connect / Nothing with nothing. / The broken fingernails of dirty hands" (III.301-303). A traditional search for meaning collapses after WWI as places, allusions, and even words become only disjointed fragments.

Again, in a similar manner to the descriptions of Lil's body, bodily contamination – "broken fingernails of dirty hands" - functions as an indicator of the dissolution of meaning within modern London. Maud Ellman also speaks to this occurrence in her compelling reading of *The Waste Land*, "A Sphinx Without a Secret":

Abortions, broken fingernails, carious teeth, and "female smells" signify the culture's decadence as well as bodily decrepitude. The self is implicated in the degradation of the race, because the filth without insinuates defilement within (260).

Ellman approaches these examples by using Kristeva's theory of the abject to suggest that ingesting the "culture's decadence" can cause the human body to, in some ways, devour itself. If I can loosely term abjection as an explanation of the human body's *placement* within its surroundings, then we can situate Ellman's ideas within considerations of place dynamics. Thus, as the poem abandons London as a place for fashioning identity and moves into the horrors of placelessness, the human body seems to mirror this metamorphosis through physical fragmentation. Therefore, the individual quite literally and horrifically loses his place in London through physical fragmentation.

If we can see the human body as an indicator of *The Waste Land*'s progression into placelessness, "What the Thunder Said" (V) opens with the instability of place and individual placement. Such instability suggests that place markers can no longer offer the assurance of individual and cultural identity since the immediate future offers only disjunction and fragmentation. The sterility of nature is absolute and overwhelming as places are divorced from human use: "Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit / Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit" (V.339-340). Since "one can neither stand nor lie nor sit," nature rejects human presence and the desire for stable identity formation. Moreover, bodily decay seems to magnify accordingly as human teeth give way to "dead mountain mouths of carious teeth."

As the poem pushes toward its end, this physical fragmentation becomes generalized to allude to the fragmentation of the environment. Therefore, in a similar manner to the fragmentation of the human body, physical remnants of place implode around the speaker. "Falling towers / Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London / Unreal" (V.373-376) and cries of "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling

down" (V.426) mark the final metamorphosis into placelessness. Physically, then, these places can no longer support people's actual presence or serve as markers of human identity. These cities are no longer central locales for civilization, as each figures merely as part of a roll call for destruction. In other words, the chaos of fragmented chants overwhelms any possibility for civilization. Moreover, for Eliot, places suffer fragmentation in the significance of their cultural presence as well as physical presence. For instance, we first learn that "upside down in air were towers / Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours" (V.382-383). Soon after, the poem targets an "empty chapel, only the wind's home. / It has no windows, and the door swings, / Dry bones can harm no one" (V. 388-390). In both of these examples, there is no longer social significance found in the towers or churches. Tower bells typically function as time markers for people and a chapel only maintains importance through the cultural significance placed upon it by society. Since this cultural significance seems irrevocably lost in *The Waste Land*, urban places lose their role as markers of humanity. Indeed, Ellman claims that "*The Waste Land*" can mean "Jerusalem or Alexandria or London – any ravaged centre of a dying world – and it foreshadows the dilapidation of centricity itself" (260). While Ellman does not use the term "placelessness," she points to the same underlying fracture of place importance that I see in the poem.

Therefore, throughout the course of *The Waste Land*, we see a metamorphosis in the use of place. In roughly the first half of the text, London after WWI projects images of decay, sterility, and hopelessness. Citizens, then, cannot gain physical sustenance from place surroundings. Furthermore, cultural identity breaks from London's traditional ties to history, literature, and assurance of progress. Ultimately, *The Waste Land*

responds to all of these instances of cultural division by abandoning the security of place to confront placelessness.

From *The Waste Land*, then, we can see that placelessness results in much more than an individual break from physical place. Instead, as the speaker's actions illuminate throughout the text, the interpretation of place intersects the development of individual and cultural identity. Edward Relph proposes a similar complexity in his explanation of placelessness:

> It reaches back into the deepest levels of place, cutting roots, eroding symbols, replacing diversity with uniformity and experiential order with conceptual order. At its most profound it consists of a pervasive and perhaps irreversible alienation from places as the homes of men (qtd. in Lutwack 183).

Accordingly, *The Waste Land* collapses into placelessness during the journey away from London. Cities, along with the physical markers of place, dissolve before the speaker's eyes; moreover, cultural attachment formed through "places as the homes of men" falters. As a result, placelessness becomes the new environment for people after WWI that is, tragically, uninhabitable.

Chapter 2: "We Know Not Nor are Known": The Horrors of Placelessness in "The Walls Do Not Fall"

"O to blot out this garden

to forget, to find a new beauty

in some terrible

wind-tortured place"

-- "Sheltered Garden"

H.D.'s *Trilogy* is a three part long poem detailing life during and after World War II. *Trilogy* uses the London blitz as a departure point to examine the individual response to catastrophe. The poem asks the question: how do we determine our identity placement when what we know of place surrounds us in ruins? Increasingly, H.D. receives attention from critics who espouse her merit as a modern poet alongside T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Criticism of *Trilogy* focuses on certain aspects of the text, such as psychoanalytic symbolism, dream interpretation, and feminist writing. However, the bulk of these readings ignore the horrors of placelessness and the narrator's struggles to reclaim place as in identity marker.

While psychoanalytic criticism can be useful and justifiable in analyses of the poem, such an approach runs the risk of returning H.D. to Freud's couch and denying her poetic agency. Norman N. Holland and Joseph N. Riddell inadvertently display the extreme of this type of work in "H.D. and the 'Blameless Physician'" and "H.D. and the Poetics of 'Spiritual Realism.'" As Susan Friedman points out, their criticism, although useful, is ultimately misguided by giving credit to Freud for "rooting out her penis envy, in teaching her to accept her 'feminine incompleteness,' in giving her 'the ability to live in her wingless self' and to discover her 'woman's role'" ("Who" 50).

More recently, Albert Gelpi's "Two Ways of Spelling it Out: An Archetypal-Feminist Reading of H.D.'s *Trilogy* and Adrienne Rich's *Sources*" contains a hint of this direction. Although much of this article is revealing, he argues that "the shared initial letter of the names Hilda and Hermes signifies that the animus holds the key to her hermetic definition as poet and mage and healer." This type of reading assumes that H.D. engages in a Romantic image of the artist. In addition, because of the emphasis on Hermes, this reading suggests reaching an appropriate female discourse via male discourse.

Readings of *Trilogy*, then, often fall into two general trends. Holland, Riddell, and Gelpi consider and evaluate how the text illuminates psychoanalytic symbolism. Feminist readings of *Trilogy* typically comprise the other major trend in criticism. Susan Friedman's "Who Buried H.D.? A Poet, her Critics, and her Place in 'The Literary Tradition'" sets the pace for feminist criticisms of the text. Friedman distinctly separates herself from the other trend in criticism by asking:

> Do they bear out my contention that H.D. has set herself outside the established literary tradition by her exploration of human experience from a woman's perspective and that conventional male categories of literary criticism must be abandoned if her work is to be understood? (57).

Critics such as Georgina Taylor, Alicia Ostriker, and Rachel DuPlessis offer varied interpretations of *Trilogy* but share the view that it functions in some manner outside of "male categories of literary criticism." For instance, Taylor describes *Trilogy* as a "healing vision" (175) and Ostriker claims that "H.D. has written something like a new Gnostic Gospel" (490). Therefore, feminist critics often view *Trilogy* as an endeavor to

elevate the position of women in mythic lore from bystanders to inspiring leaders. While I see feminist interpretations as generally consistent with Mary Magdalene's story within *Trilogy,* the insistence on a definitive social resolution in the wake of catastrophe denies the text's complex struggle with its ending.

Overall, psychoanalytic and feminist criticisms are useful in understanding aspects of *Trilogy*, such as the inclusion of mythic figures and Mary Magdalene's story. However, I propose that such readings would benefit from analyses that focus on the narrator's and poem's struggle with social resolution. While not overriding criticisms that detail the definitiveness of the poem's progression and ending, it is crucial to consider the ongoing conflict between the narrator and her surroundings. Instead of approaching the poem psychoanalytically, I am focusing on *Trilogy*'s relationship with place as a means of fleshing out its underlying uncertainty. Other readings point to small instances of H.D.'s use of place; however, a full reading of *Trilogy* with place at the forefront is missing from the body of criticism.

This chapter uses Leonard Lutwack's hypotheses on place as a critical framework for understanding identity after disaster. Lutwack provides causes for placelessness in general such as "the disappearance of familiar places and the proliferation of a more and more limited set of uniform places" (183). Therefore, for Lutwack, placelessness involves both alienation from familiar places and the homogenization of the modern landscape. My focus varies from Lutwack in that I am interested in how the speaker responds to her world after an abrupt episode of placelessness caused by WWII. My interest remains specifically in the speaker's reaction to the suddenness of place loss and the aftershocks of attempting to reclaim place.

Trilogy's interaction with, and treatment of, place and placement is multi-faceted and mutable. The poem contends with the horrors of placelessness in a war-torn London, which gives cause for the exilic displacement of the narrator. Significantly, *Trilogy* suggests that the dynamics of place and placelessness are interconnected; that is, placelessness echoes on the individual, community, and environmental levels. Therefore, the horror of catastrophe pervades individual identity as well as the surroundings. Gradually, *Trilogy* investigates the restoration of place through organic integration of the individual and her surroundings and moving mythic figures, such as Jesus and the Lady, into the realm of the familiar. While many critics might argue that the ending ultimately transverses the horrors of placelessness because of its assured resolution and renewal, I contend that details of the ending need further investigation based on questions of place and placement. Although the poem works to establish workable personal and social identities by reclaiming the familiarity of place, the speaker subtly warns that a post-disaster world is constantly divided and inconclusive. Specifically, *Trilogy* forces us to recognize the limitations of viewing place in only physical parameters and depending on a fixed identity after disaster.

In order to examine the text's movement to regain place as an assurance of personal and cultural identity, it is useful to begin by looking closely at placelessness' terrifying reach. While readers often point to the sense of isolation in "The Walls Do Not Fall," it is important also to view this isolation in terms of place and placelessness. By specifically teasing out the individual's spatial relationship with her environment, this horrific alienation filters through even the most visceral and physical interactions. Second, investigating the use of place allows us to analyze *Trilogy*'s underlying argument

for the interconnectedness of the individual, society, and the environment. The effects of this assertion cannot be overvalued; notably, *Trilogy* initially suggests that personal and cultural identities are interdependent during disaster.

Trilogy's opening puts placelessness at the forefront by exploring the overwhelming destruction of London. The speaker's thorough investigation of the destruction forces us as readers also to confront the city's debilitation. The opening, then, causes almost a sensory overload for the speaker as she physically moves through a once familiar place. A modern city such as London would usually offer the assurance of stability and impenetrability from outside forces. However, the promise of impenetrability is undercut by the narrator's ability to walk among the ruins of buildings. If the actual walls that uphold a structure are lost, then recognition of the immediate uselessness of place is unavoidable.

Furthermore, the opening expands to demonstrate the effects of destruction and placelessness are not only inescapable, but also all-enveloping:

> There, as here, ruin opens
>
> The tomb, the temple; enter,
>
> There as here, there are no doors:
>
> The shrine lies open to the sky,
>
> The rain falls, here, there (510).

This description centers on sacred places, such as tombs, temples, and shrines, to reinforce London's inability to protect itself from the destruction of WWII. Since there are "no doors" and "the shrine lies open to the sky," the physical safety of enclosed space is denied. Beyond the destruction of physical protection, this passage also emphasizes

the precarious state of spiritual salvation. In essence, the destruction reduces a shrine to just another building devoid of spiritual and physical protection. Thus, much as the dissolution of walls does, the denial of faith instantaneously threatens personal identity.

Since it would seem physically easier to enter, instead of remaining sequestered from its surroundings, the shrine is on display for visitation by the city's inhabitants. The language within this passage, however, subtly undercuts the likelihood of hope by emphasizing the bleak nature of placelessness. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard proposes that language has the ability to designate space in much the same way as walls within a building. For instance, poetry often uses words such as "here" and "there" to create a relative demarcation of presence and exclusion. Although Bachelard argues that such distinctions are ultimately fictional, he explains that "the dialectics of here and there has been promoted to the rank of an absolutism according to which these unfortunate adverbs of place are endowed with unsupervised powers of ontological determination" (212). If this passage used "here" and "there" in the same manner that Bachelard describes, then maintaining the illusion of structure and distance from destruction would remain. In other words, under this schema, a designation of "here" allows the individual to occupy a space separate from the disaster, which is "there."

Within this passage, however, the phrase "there as here" repeats twice but does not function as a divisive dialectic. Instead, the word "as" links "there" and "here" so that both designations of space have equal stature. In both of these instances, a destructive act follows the phrase "there, as here"; that is, "ruin opens the tomb" follows the first instance and the detail "there are no doors" follows the reiteration. The final use of these words, "the rain falls here, there," is slightly different structurally. Again, "here"

and "there" are equally exposed to the rain. Furthermore, "here, there" gives the implication that such a phrase would be followed by "everywhere," further emphasizing the totality and inescapability of destruction. Thus, the all-enveloping destruction described through the specificity of language echoes the literal dissolution of walls and ceilings within the buildings of London.

During this opening scene packed with images of placelessness, few details suggest that such desolation could be overcome. The narrator spots "Samuel: / trembling at a known street corner;" this purposeful detail implies a possibility for restoring recognition within the city square. However, after this acknowledgement, the narrator berates her hopefulness with the admission: "we know not nor are known" (510). By raising the possibility of escape from alienation and then immediately undercutting this hope, the text emphasizes the sense of directionless following destruction.

This small detail also hints at the primary fear of placelessness in *Trilogy*. As the examples thus far indicate, a horrifying factor of placelessness is the *confusion of place*. Therefore, when the narrator enters the city square following the bombings, she feels the immediacy of destruction. Beyond the physical closeness of destruction, however, lies the horrific realization that a well-known place is now unfamiliar and even alien. This alienation, or what I am calling *confusion of place*, detaches the participant from the comfort of her surroundings. The result of this alienation is the fracturing of personal and cultural identity. Since London's landscape is radically bereft of place markers, cultural identity suffers. Furthermore, this change in the landscape causes the individual to lose her sense of placement. Without the assurance of place, personal and cultural identities have no reference for their existence. The admission "we know not nor are known"

clearly demonstrates the confusion of place because it splinters the narrator from the comfort of recognition. Furthermore, this phrase mirrors the text's emphasis that alienation overwhelms the individual and the city. In other words, as participants "we know not" our surroundings, "nor are [we] known" by our surroundings.

In conjunction with confusion of place, *Trilogy* suggests that *uselessness of place* results in dire consequences for the modern world. Although Lutwack refers repeatedly to the potential for alienation in his examples of placeless environments, concerns with uselessness are not at the forefront of his investigation. In my reading of the poem, this condition describes H.D.'s most fearful vision of the modern world after WWII. This situation creates a state of being where the city is not just alien but is also without purpose. Perhaps we see a hint of the uselessness of place in the example, "we know not nor are known." If we accept the statement as true, then the next question is: "what are we going to do?" In the most unbearable version of this scenario, *Trilogy*'s answer would be "nothing." Placelessness, then, causes an epistemological crisis. The individual exists completely detached from identity and purpose. By "not knowing," we lack the ability to identify the external world. Completing the crisis is the situation of "not being known," meaning that we are purposeless without acknowledgement of our placement from the external world. The importance of uselessness of place to the text is also apparent when the narrator moves "to another sliced wall / where poor utensils show / like rare objects in a museum" (510). In this example, the destruction of the city renders objects useless that are typically defined by their utility. The narrator views the consequence of a rapid transformation from utensils that have a purpose to objects frozen and purposeless.

If the text uses London as a placeless environment, divorced from familiarity and purpose, to represent the destruction of WWII, then the individual becomes the medium who must move among this horrific scenery. The opening's imagery indicates the uncanny resemblance of the effects of placelessness on London and the individual. Lutwack offers an explanation of this "geomorphic anatomy" or the "analogy of parts of the body with earth and its various forms" (77). He proposes that "in identifying himself with the earth, man both aggrandizes his finite body and humanizes the world, or brings vast amorphousness into relation with a limited, well-known form" (79). Horrifically, however, *Trilogy*'s opening destroys Lutwack's explanation of the connection between man and the world. Instead of using the human form as a measure for the world, the opening employs parallel descriptions of people and buildings to indicate their similar plight. The bombing blitzes threaten the assurance of building structures by ripping off roofs and walls; in a similar manner, destruction invades the human frame. Seeing the destruction again causes "pressure on heart, lungs, the brain / about to burst its brittle case" (510). The physical destruction of WWII affects body and surroundings with indiscriminate terror. As a result, there is no part of the landscape, whether human or structural, granted immunity from the catastrophe. Destruction ignores our carefully constructed identities, intimating that notions of individual importance are fictional.

Again, H.D. flirts with the sanctity of borders by continuously emphasizing the potential for explosion and implosion. Therefore, the bombings implode the border structures of the buildings, causing them to fold inwards. As a result, we are left with the markings of placelessness since the structures become both alien and useless. Paradoxically, the human body experiences a similar yet opposite process. The

"pressure" mentioned here is ambiguous; however, it could refer to the fear of inescapable destruction or the alienation and uselessness left after such terror. This feeling of placelessness overwhelms the individual with the threat of explosion. Subtly, this implied possibility points to a literal displacement (i.e., that which is "within" becomes "without"). Much as erasing wall boundaries intimates a building's uselessness, showing the human body's porous susceptibility denies any guise of protection from external danger.

Logically, the threat of death suggests an inescapable form of placelessness for the human body. We learn, however, that explosion does not occur; instead, H.D. answers the reader's unasked question: "the flesh? It was melted away, / the heart burnt out, dead ember, / tendons, muscles shattered, outer husk dismembered" (510). Initially, the knowledge that the heart is now a "dead ember" is unexpected. The absence of a heart graphically indicates the loss of life and symbolically suggests the communal loss of hope and courage. For H.D., though, a form of life continues, since the "frame held," albeit leaving only walking skeletons (511). Taking these two passages together, it is interesting that only skeletons, stripped of external flesh and exenterated of internal organs, remain, because skeletons are liminal boundaries between the external and the internal. If the poem's opening is imagined visually, then skeletons, the embodiment of boundaries, are moving among the destroyed boundaries of buildings. This boundary confusion shows that placelessness overwhelms previous dictates of place and placement. For instance, the speaker is lost amidst disaster:

> Over us, Apocryphal fire,
>
> Under us, the earth sway, dip of a floor,

> Slope of a pavement
>
> Where men roll, drunk (510).

This absence of place markers suggests that it is impossible to determine the difference between the self and its surroundings; consequently, this lack of place differentiation produces identity confusion.

"The Walls Do Not Fall" denies usual place designations since disaster sets the human body adrift in its surroundings. Disaster denies stability from above and below: "over us, Apocryphal fire, / under us, the earth sway, dip of a floor" (510). As indicated, this placelessness echoes on the skeletal level, confusing the boundaries between the inside and outside. However, the placelessness is not definitively complete. The text acknowledges the absurdity of the individual's predicament by asking "yet the frame held: / we passed the flame: we wonder / what saved us? What for?" (511). Perhaps the answer to this question is that placelessness is an inescapable state; therefore, people cannot experience departure from the disaster through annihilation. For H.D., then, placelessness is a form of death. Since the text does not allow escape via death, some type of physical survival must be crucial. As I discuss in Chapter 3, the text suggests that moving beyond disaster requires witnesses to destruction. *Trilogy* designates individual and collective survival as a precarious state; it simultaneously forbids escape from disaster yet tempts the individual with a future without disaster.

If witnessing is an inescapable part of moving forward from destruction, then the individuals who remain must contend with the inescapability of the witnessing presence. Along with the impossibility of escape within catastrophe, the witness realizes that she must allow for the instability of her own body within a destructive environment. The text

signals boundary confusion in the narrator's confession: "I sense my own limit, / my shell-jaws snap shut / at invasion of the limitless" (513). The focus on the "shell-jaws" points again to the permeability of a body's frame to danger. The narrator's admission serves a dual purpose. We see an attempt to construct boundaries between the environment and herself; simultaneously, the fear of a "limitless" environment suggests that such attempts could be futile.

These opposing forces, protecting the self from disaster and relinquishing the self to placelessness, are crucial to H.D.'s explanation of the individual's role in disaster. For instance, the narrator's claim that "my old self, wrapped round me, / was shroud" exemplifies such opposing forces at work (520). This doubling of a "new self" with her "old self" functions much like insulation, by softening the shocks of an overwhelming environment. Yet, at the same time, a "shroud" does not proffer a sustainable form of protection, suggesting vulnerability to irreversible placelessness. Through such examples, *Trilogy* offers a specific rendering of WWII's destruction. Thus, living after the war requires an assimilation process; against their will, survivors transform into witnesses and exert little control over their own bodies. Simply, individuals are physically present but cannot attain true placement within their surroundings.

At this point, we can see the effects of placelessness on the speaker and London. Placelessness erases the stability an assured identity offers. Also, placelessness targets the speaker and London indiscriminately, leaving alienation and uselessness in its wake. The environment in *Trilogy* reflects these same consequences of placelessness. Moreover, the environment functions like a holding ground which absorbs these

contaminants, becoming a cesspool for the despondency of the (post)modern era. For

instance, the speaker points to the contemporary era's despondent position by claiming:

> we are at the cross-roads,
>
> the tide is turning;
>
> it uncovers pebbles and shells,
>
> beautiful yet static, empty
>
> old thought, old convention (524).

While this imagery contains movement – "the tide is turning" – and beauty – "pebbles

and shells," the message is ultimately one of stasis – "we are at the crossroads" – and

despair – "empty / old thought, old convention." The environment's presentation of

stasis and despair reflects the undercurrents of modern despondency. This passage

emphasizes that we cannot isolate placelessness to the experience of a single individual

or relevant to only a specific time. Instead, disaster changes the modern landscape in

ways that may be irreversible.

Although H.D.'s textual use of the environment is partly symbolic, I cannot

escape the feeling that her fear is also literal. In the wake of the London bombings, the

destruction is not only physical but also emotional. In the poem, these bomb remnants, as

well as the collective distrust in salvation, contaminate to the core of London's bedrock.

H.D. seems to pose an ultimatum for her audience; that is, for the contemporary era to

move beyond WWII, a familiar and useful sense of place must be restored. However, all

parts within her panoramic scope must be integrated, from the soil to the buildings to the

individual. Significantly, the balance among these parts of her vision is represented as

precarious. The speaker's instinct for survival causes her, "gorged on vine-leaf and

mulberry," to "find nourishment: / when you cry in disgust" (515). While this line usually receives attention because it represents the speaker's constant referral to consumption, it can also be seen in terms of my argument: the speaker transforms into a parasite, which suggests that the environment's ability to provide "nourishment" is extremely lacking. This scene depicts the speaker's desire for interaction with the environment; yet, the speaker's vociferous appetite and the soil's depleted resources results in an imbalance.

Chapter 3: "Her Book is Our Book": The Struggles to Reclaim Place in *Trilogy*

As explored in Chapter 2, much of "The Walls Do Not Fall" focuses on the dilemmas of placelessness for the individual and for London as an environment. These personal and cultural identities, which maintain the promise of familiarity and purpose, fracture in response to the London blitz. Catastrophe alienates the individual and social from the familiar. "A Tribute to the Angels" and "The Flowering of the Rod" incorporate this fear of placelessness while exploring the dynamics of restoring place. Of course, for example, London still physically remains, albeit altered from the damage. However, reclaiming place is a complex process that involves establishing a cultural identity for London as well as a workable personal identity for the speaker. Initially, attempts to regain a sense of place center on reversing the horrors of placelessness through the acquisition of familiarity and usefulness. Ultimately, however, *Trilogy* must contend with the likelihood that using place to define identity is impossible in an era defined by disaster. In the text's ending, then, we see this difficulty realized. The speaker's position signals the advent of the postmodern era by facing place and placelessness simultaneously and by playing prophet for a hopeful future and witness to present disaster. Since disaster changes the mapping out of place and identities, *Trilogy*'s ending is necessarily divided and inconclusive.

Before exploring the speaker's involvement in reclaiming place, I want to take a step back and consider the writing of place. Near the beginning of *Trilogy*, H.D.-as-speaker defends the role of writers in the contemporary era. Writers become guardians and reporters for the lost secret of attaining hope in the wake of despair. Why does H.D.

spend so much space defending the writer's position? One answer is that she must prove that writing is not obsolete after disaster but, instead, crucial to moving beyond disaster. Yet this answer implicitly signals the text's subtle recognitions that disaster alters the course of writing.

The question of how to write after disaster is not a new one, as evidenced by Theodor W. Adorno's comment about the impossibility of poetry after WWII. However, it rarely receives attention in reference to H.D. Carolyn Forche in *Against Forgetting* explains that fragmentary language can manifest itself in writing after disaster:

> The French call this procedure recit eclate – shattered, exploded, or
> splintered narrative. The story cannot travel over the chasm of time and
> space. Violence has rendered it unspeakable (42).

In a similar manner, H.D. must fashion a way to produce meaning through writing after an event that eclipses human comprehension. Consequently, there is a subtle meta-text in *Trilogy* that addresses the difficulty of writing after disaster. Before the speaker and London can regain a sense of place, writing itself must establish its own territory as proof that some form of writing can develop after catastrophe. For H.D., writing is often a learning system which filters chaotic observations of the external world in a search for knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial for the text to re-establish the importance of writing by confronting the placelessness of the writer and writing.

Early in the text, writers rarely appear as singular, resolved entities; instead, they have "twin-horns" (516), use a "double-plume" (516), and are the "latter-day twice-born" (521). This doubling suggests that writers must contend with the change in identities from before the blitz to after. This process of reconciling battling identities is even more

complex for writers than for typical bystanders. First, writers undergo the same process as individuals in catastrophe's wake. In Chapter 2, I explored the speaker's hindrance in using her "old self" as a "shroud" to wrap around her "new self." While the speaker tries to adapt her former self to a useful purpose as a protective shield, she realizes that the innocence of an identity before disaster is vulnerable to its destructive force. The writer's doubling that we see in the above examples similarly suggests the potential futility implicit in reconciling identities. The writer, however, must experience another type of fracture. In H.D.'s outlook, writers bear the responsibility for continuing the sanctity and purpose in writing. Therefore, writers must find a way to establish writing's relevancy despite their own knowledge of the hopeless disaster in the surroundings. Thus, writers are the "latter-day twice-born" as they want to regain a personal identity for themselves as well as a conceptual identity for writing.

This meta-text tracing writing's evolution after disaster to still convey relevant meaning begins with such establishment of the writer's position. In other words, a writer cannot stand distanced from and impervious to disaster's effects. Instead, writers, like other individuals, must signal the painful precariousness of reconciling a stable identity before disaster and a placeless identity after disaster. The next step in this meta-text is quite subtle. As H.D. tries to prove writing's relevancy to enact useful change after disaster, language becomes a cohesive force for integrating individual and cultural identity. We have already seen the blending of identities in the text's opening in response to indiscriminate disaster. The blitz destroys buildings and individuals, suggesting that both are potentially subject to equivalent fates. The meta-text ties together the individual and surroundings; however, in a different manner from the opening, language binds these

aspects to show the possibility for gaining a sense of place. If language can intertwine individual and cultural existence, each regains a referential place marker. The individual, then, can picture herself as existing in relation to her surroundings, which enables the restoration of identity.

This use of language to integrate the individual and her surroundings emerges in the speaker's claim that "the kingdom is a tree / whose roots bind the heart-husk / to earth" (529). This passage uses tree imagery to connect an otherwise intangible heaven to the individual and to daily life. The imagery is of particular interest because the tree's roots intertwine the human heart with nature in a visual representation. Therefore, through language, the seemingly separate states of the individual, nature, and the otherworldly can at least symbolically come into contact. H.D. uses this textual play to foreshadow the integration of the individual and London in place restoration. Again, H.D. tests the role of place in language in the passage: "how imperceptibly the grain fell / between a heart-beat of pleasure / and a heart-beat of pain" (531). This scene uses heart-beats as detection gauges for the division between the horrors of destruction and the hope for recovery. Although the grain falls "imperceptibly," the human body is newly attuned to slight changes in nature. Since the individual can now monitor nature's processes, it may be possible for each to regain a sense of place in relation to the other.

It is important to note that H.D.'s reestablishment of place is never separate from the individual. Just as the individual must bear witness to the destruction following the bombings, reconstruction of place requires her presence also. The individual is simultaneously separate from and contiguous with her surroundings and environment. In other words, the individual is separate from her surroundings because she can experience

alienation from everything exterior to the human frame. At the same time, the individual is contiguous with the environment because, after WWII, she cannot isolate herself from impending destruction. The individual, then, figures prominently within the reestablishment of place. She must find a way to overcome, or at least exist alongside, alienation from her surroundings. Also, since she is contiguous with the environment, she tries to purge disaster from the environment so as to avoid its aftershocks.

While there are many details in the last two parts of *Trilogy* suggesting interest in the reinvigoration of place as a means of stabilizing identity, I am focusing attention on three representative examples. These examples, to varying degrees, receive attention from critics in their readings of *Trilogy*. The analysis of these examples is varied; that is, theoretical perspectives include symbolic, psychoanalytical, feminist, and religious methods of reading. Such readings are imminently applicable to the poem and do not necessarily exclude considerations of place. However, reconsideration of these examples from my outlook does allow for study of the dynamics of reclaiming place after WWII.

Although Stanza 29 of "The Walls Do Not Fall" is little more than a few lines, it demonstrates the need for establishing familiarity in a place currently lost to the individual. The speaker's fractured identity is apparent as she posits herself as a witness to London before the destruction of WWII as well as after the bombing raids. This former self "would feed forever / on the amber honey-comb / of your [Jesus'] remembered greeting" (532). Simultaneously, however, the self newly aware of destruction "cries out in anger, / I am hungry, the children cry for food / and flaming stones fall on them." The speaker's inability to claim placement within her own body and surroundings mimics earlier scenes of placelessness. For instance, she begins by

claiming that "the heart's alabaster / is broken," which reminds us of the porousness of the human frame after disaster. Therefore, any borders keeping the heart protected from exterior damage are lost. Beyond the loss of former boundaries of place for the human frame, the individual is also placeless within her surroundings. Continuing the imagery of a self divided, the individual after WWII is "still half at-home in the world." Since the speaker does not feel completely "at-home," the alienation following disaster trumps any semblance of familiarity.

The speaker, however, goes beyond the restrictions of placelessness by gesturing toward the possibility of reclaiming a sense of place. She makes a direct call to Jesus:

> O, for your Presence
>
> Among the fishing-nets
>
> By the beached boats on the lake-edge;
>
> When, in the drift of wood-smoke,
>
> Will you say again, as you said,
>
> *The baked fish is ready,*
>
> *Here is the bread?* (532).

Although these lines express the speaker's desire for salvation instead of reflecting the real presence of Jesus, this passage is a striking example of the speaker's need to reclaim place. Since she feels distinctly separate from religion after the bombings, this appeal involves physically positioning a religious figure within the speaker's immediate surroundings. This outcry for a religious figure on the outskirts of London demands salvation via recognition. Most apparently, Jesus' presence would signal that he too is a witness to London's disaster. For the speaker, however, Jesus can do more than witness,

because he may offer salvation from disaster. In addition, London citizens' recognition of Jesus' presence may instill the possibility of hope.

In a hopeful move, the speaker seeks Jesus in a familiar place "among the fishing-nets / by the beached boats on the lake-edge." The speaker goes a step further by subtly suggesting the type of help that London inhabitants need. Jesus' role expands from the story of Galilee as he comments, "The baked fish is ready, / Here is the bread?" Beyond simply offering large amounts of fish and bread, the speaker hopes that Jesus will provide "baked fish." Therefore, Jesus' original miracle at Galilee is no longer enough for survivors of WWII, who need immediate sustenance. Since the speaker's imagination conjures a familiar and useful visit from Jesus, it seems feasible to read this scene, then, as an attempt to regain cultural identity. Beyond the religious connotations of salvation, this particular image would grant London inhabitants the means for immediate survival. However, establishing placement and identity is strikingly difficult, as evidenced in the speaker's imagined demands to Jesus.

The next representative example of a desire to reclaim place involves regaining a sustaining relationship with the environment. This example is similar to the depiction of Jesus as a fisherman in that both involve situating a symbol of possibility and hope within London. The difference in this scene arises from the planting of a tree that suggests a continuous cycle of rebirth. H.D. initially situates us squarely within the despair of placelessness to insinuate London's dire predicament: "and I thought again of people, / daring the blinding rage / of the lightning, and I thought, / there is no shrine, no temple / in the city for that other" (556). These lines echo the opening by stripping the individual from the protection of place. This time, however, in a protection ritual the speaker calls

on seven gods. Even though the ritual is almost complete, the speaker hesitates: "we thought not to entreat her / but prepared us for burial; / then she sat a charred tree before us, / burnt and stricken to the heart" (558).

Much like the horrific scene in "The Walls Do Not Fall" when skeletons supplant humans, this passage intimates the flimsy border between life and death to intensify the horror of placelessness. Barely finished with their ritual, the worshippers "prepared [themselves] for burial." Such ready acceptance of death during a protection ritual indicates that death is never far away. The proximity of death inevitably overshadows any hope present in individual identity. Therefore, the "charred tree" represents the individual after disaster who is "burnt and stricken to the heart." In this connection between the individual and the tree, language is again a fusion device. As a result, the formation of individual identity is subject to the same destructive forces as this tree.

Again, we see this level of integration in the turning point of this section:

> Like a ghost,
>
> We entered a house through a wall;
>
> Then still not knowing
>
> Whether (like the wall)
>
> We were there or not-there,
>
> We saw the tree flowering;
>
> It was an ordinary tree
>
> In an old garden-square (559).

This passage centers on a quite literal form of displacement to heighten the horrors of placelessness. Beyond the fact that borders are no longer absolute ("we entered a house

through a wall," the reality of presence is in question also ("we were there or not-there"). Furthermore, the fluctuating state of reality seems all-encompassing as it blankets individuals and walls alike. My crucial point is that in *Trilogy* the individual, society, and nature are interdependent in the wake of catastrophe for creating identity. The effects of placelessness are devastating and indiscriminate to its victims. Never before could disaster spread over such a large area, poison the smallest of areas, and affect the most intimate areas. Therefore, in *Trilogy*, we see the speaker's inability to escape disaster's aftermath; that is, retreat from placelessness by usual means is impossible.

Despite the instability of reality, the text turns from the threat of enduring placelessness to reclaiming a sense of place. The "ordinary tree in an old garden-square" emphasizes the potential for transformation in the familiar and mundane. Due to the repopulation of such symbols like this tree, other London inhabitants, like the speaker, may encounter them and recognize the possibility for growth after disaster. The speaker claims that cultural metamorphosis is inevitable since "from the visible / there is no escape; / there is no escape from the spear / that pierces the heart" (560). Oddly enough, these few lines seem reminiscent of the paralysis throughout the opening. The destruction following the bombings demands visual recognition. This time, however, the inescapable nature of the visible pertains to the positive ritual for reclaiming place. The constant in these opposing processes is seeing, or perhaps more precisely, the inability to deny one's role as a witness. In the post-WWII era, the individual becomes entangled in her environment, forced to watch destruction or renewal.

The Lady's visit serves as the final representative example of reclaiming place that I am examining in *Trilogy*. Although not exactly identified, the Lady appears to be

the Virgin Mary; however, she is unlike any typical depiction of her. By merely placing her in the poem, H.D. conjures a myriad of signifiers. We expect that she will be somewhat distant and otherworldly in disposition; moreover, her presence suggests hope and salvation for *Trilogy*'s ending. Therefore, in both form and function, the Lady becomes a kind of mythical binding medium within the text. In a similar manner to the first example with Jesus as a London fisherman, the Lady's new-found ability to visit the speaker implies future recovery after disaster. Her visit resolves disparate worlds, namely the earthly and otherworldly, by positing them in sync. Beyond this type of resolution, this scene also integrates the text and the meta-text, thereby joining dual "plots" on the same track. The sense of resolution allows the speaker and the audience to believe in the likelihood of overcoming the horrors of placelessness. The text is quite clear in its movement toward resolution of despair. The speaker describes the moment after seeing the Lady as "when we gain / the arc of perfection, / we are satisfied, we are happy, / we begin again" (573). Yet, at the same time, this security is false, as it denies the ever-present threat of placelessness which reoccurs throughout the ending.

Understanding the text's movement toward resolving the horrors of placelessness is pertinent before delving into the ongoing struggle in the ending. Time markers abound throughout the Lady's visit to the speaker's house, as if to imply that a crucial event can occur at any moment. Some time references function simply by pointing out that the speaker is almost hypnotized by her concern with the passing time. For instance, when the speaker awakes from her "dream," she looks at "(the clock at my bed-head / with its dim, luminous disc)" (562). The clock entrances the speaker until she decides "this curious mechanical perfection / should not separate but relate rather, / our life, this

temporary eclipse / to that other . . ." (561). In *Out of Line*, Susan Edmunds also recognizes this moment of synchronicity but interprets it via gender so that "H.D.'s clock is triply coded as feminine" (57). For Edmunds, this triple coding results from the clock's relationship with the " 'pulse' of the maternal jewel," "the Lady's knock," and Phosphorus (57-8). Perhaps Edmunds' interpretation can serve as another level of synchronicity in addition to the conciliation of place. In the throes of placelessness, time would be a divisive barrier further alienating the individual. Instead, the synchronicity that time allows during the Lady's visit means that figures of salvation can enter this exact moment and place. In other words, a destroyed London is no longer subject to complete alienation because it receives external recognition from the Lady.

This lack of alienation means that the Lady may enter the speaker's house, which is the most personal place the speaker allows us to visit within the text. Perhaps this visit to the speaker's house indicates a move toward resolution of personal identity, much as Jesus and the tree in London signify the establishment of cultural and spiritual identity. The speaker involves the audience in this exercise by mentioning in several places where "we have seen her" before. However, she discounts each of these descriptions, since they do not describe the Lady at this specific time and place. This process results in a doubled reinstatement of place: (1) the Lady can discard others' attempts to place her as they wish (i.e. literally, "putting her in her place") and (2) the speaker can relate personally to a religious figure, thereby extending the possibility for salvation. The speaker's specific placement of the Lady within her surroundings denies the imagined audience any agency to fill in its own version of the Lady from the collective unconscious. Instead, we must pause and appreciate the distinctiveness of this particular moment; hence, the text enacts

another level of synchronization as the speaker exerts control by giving the Lady unique placement within London after WWII.

Moreover, the Lady's arrival joins the text and the meta-text, implying resolution of place for writing and the speaker. The speaker responds to the Lady's book with an uncharacteristic prognostication: "her book is our book; written / or unwritten, its pages will reveal / a tale of a Fisherman, / a tale of a jar of jars" (571). Although not explicitly identified, this book can be taken as *Trilogy* itself. Therefore, through the Lady's arrival, the story of London after the bombing blitzes synchronizes with H.D.'s struggle to write after disaster. But what does this orchestration mean? In one sense, it suggests resolution of both the speaker's alienation and H.D.'s tumultuous relationship with writing. Yet, in another sense, this realization only complicates the possibility for straightforward interpretation. Perhaps instead of conflating two ongoing struggles into one, the Lady's book signifies a concentric layering of texts: *Trilogy*, the speaker's dream, the book, and *Trilogy* again. This textual layering denies a singular form of reading.

Rachel DuPlessis arrives at a similar conclusion in *H.D.*; she proposes that "a woman offers a participatory textual plurality, the virginal page is not single, hieratic, authoritarian revelation" (93). Also, this textual plurality works within the schema of place since writers occupy a complex, doubled position. For instance, are the Lady's book and *Trilogy* the same text? Or, because the Lady's book may be "unwritten," is *Trilogy* only a first draft of the story? This gesturing toward a postmodern textual plurality signals a primary dilemma in overcoming placelessness. Textual plurality allows for a great deal of freedom in the exploration of place; that is, a constant

reevaluation of how to overcome placelessness can happen more easily outside of a singular, linear narrative. Yet, at the same time, textual plurality carries the danger of infinite references without an assurance that placelessness can be definitively overcome.

Structurally, this scene offers resolution on several levels but simultaneously allows for textual unfolding. Perhaps this paradox can serve as a model for *Trilogy*'s ending. "The Flowering of the Rod" marches briskly toward a resolution of the speaker's earlier terror in response to the London bombings while pausing to explore concerns of place and placement. Ultimately, I generally agree with readings that the ending itself is conclusive. By "the ending itself," I mean that Mary Magdalene takes her place within the ancient story that allows for H.D.'s version of "resurrection." However, the ending section raises questions about the ease and ethics with which we can move between placelessness and reclaiming a sense of place in the modern era. Can an individual truly reclaim her place within her surroundings without forgetting the horrors of placelessness? If we do remember the horrors of placelessness, can we ever completely move forward? *Trilogy* gestures toward the possibility of overcoming placelessness but also stresses through the speaker's actions that constant negotiation of remembering and forgetting disaster is crucial in the world after WWII.

The single act that raises these questions is the speaker's decision to leave the city at the beginning of "The Flowering of the Rod." The text is unclear as to whether the speaker is physically leaving the city or participating in a dream or vision. Since the speaker is probably not actually flying, it seems that the speaker experiences some type of vision. Despite the actual circumstances of her departure, the speaker pauses the text's movement toward definitive resolution of earlier despair. The speaker's departure

contains elements of abandonment: "It is no madness to say / you will fall, you great cities, / (now the cities lie broken)" (584). The reasoning behind abandonment is clearer when considering Lutwack's proposition that the apocalypse is one response to placelessness. He explains that "the feeling of place-loss may be allayed by indulging oneself in premonitions of a universal catastrophe when all places will be obliterated" (231). Initially, this response seems illogical, since an individual is, in effect, overriding alienation from place by destroying the possibility of ever connecting with place again. Yet, this approach tantalizes the individual with intransigent divorce from place concerns.

Such annihilation of possibility may function as the ultimate temptation for a participant in disaster. In her introduction to *Against Forgetting*, Carolyn Forche explores the struggle involved in being an unwilling witness to disaster. She elucidates the ethics of witnessing through her explanation that "it becomes easier to forget than to remember, and this forgetfulness becomes our defense against remembering – a rejection of unnecessary sentimentality, a hardheaded acceptance of 'reality'" (32). Therefore, for Forche, witnessing requires an active process of remembering the disaster so its reality remains known. If the speaker abandons London completely, then she is effectively turning her back on the reality of a destroyed city. Although the speaker may physically abandon London, she does not deny the horrors of disaster. The workings of disaster are complex. Often in disaster, the most intimately affected people die and cannot carry on the experience of catastrophe. Thus, witnesses to disaster – a secondary sort of victim – have the burden of shaping and acknowledging reality. In essence, through active memory, we affirm a past disaster's existence.

Although remembering remains crucial to validating the reality of disaster, H.D. seems to intimate in *Trilogy* that forgetting is necessary also. I am not suggesting that witnesses can truly forget, as if erasing all recollections of disaster. Instead, a vigilant form of selective amnesia must accompany the burden of collective memory. Thus, for *Trilogy*, moving beyond placelessness requires distancing from disaster's tangible effects. However, this distancing can only be slight because complete disavowal is dishonest or as Forche explains, "our defense against remembering." In *Trilogy*, the speaker participates in a constant balance between moving forward and looking back, between accepting the hope that religion offers her and recognizing the devastation of disaster. For instance, she cries: "O, give me burning blue / and brittle burnt sea-weed / above the tide-line, / as I stand, still unsatisfied, / under the long shadow-on-snow of the pine" (580). Seasonal imagery symbolizes this pull forward to "burning blue" while still standing "under the long shadow-on-snow of the pine." This balance between remembering and forgetting remains in constant negotiation. Again, stressing the need to counterbalance these forces, when the speaker is flying away from London, she can "see what is beneath me, / what is above me" (582). This struggle is crucial to understanding the speaker's position at the end of *Trilogy*. This balancing act is the last we see of the speaker before the closing story of Kaspar and Mary. This precarious state suggests that while the overall arc of *Trilogy* may be fairly complete, the speaker must contend with the conflicting and simultaneous roles of witness and prophet.

This ethical dilemma of trying to live amidst disaster informs existence after WWII. *Trilogy* points to the continuous underlying negotiation that such an existence requires through the speaker's conflicted nature. The poem, however, does not offer a

definitive resolution for this dilemma and, perhaps, rightfully so. Citizenry in the postmodern world does not allow for a simple relationship to disaster and, ultimately, society. Instead, as H.D. implies in *Trilogy*, we carry the earth-bound burden of Atlas while struggling to escape land through flight.

Despite the justifiable impossibility of a carefree existence after disaster, I believe that *Trilogy* does offer the possibility of relinquishing placelessness. We have seen through distinctive examples in the text that the desire to reclaim place is quite insistent. However, when we look at these examples retrospectively from the vantage point of the ending, the actual presence of place seems largely inconsequential. In other words, refashioning sustainable personal and cultural identities may be more crucial that ensuring that London is the setting. Thus, this hesitant removal from London signals the decentralization of urban locales. Perhaps this decentralization results from the increasingly unreliable nature of physical place in a century marked by horrific disasters. Urban centers often cannot tantalize with the assurance of protection and retreat as they seem increasingly fragile in response to disaster.

As a result, the speaker at the end of *Trilogy* attempts to reclaim a functional identity through the creation of what Lutwack terms "interior spaciousness." In other words, the relationship of place may become subject to the individual and her ordering of a mental landscape. For instance, the Virgin Mary's and Mary Magdalene's entrances into the poem suggest the usefulness of mythical and spiritual connections, especially when the present time and place is unreliable. Moreover, H.D. takes great effort to show us that these mythical personae are the speaker's rendition of them, not stereotypical versions. Perhaps, then, *Trilogy*'s suggestion for moving beyond placelessness functions

on an individual basis instead of promising a relationship between collective identity and

central places.

Conclusion

While T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and H.D.'s *Trilogy* both contend with place dynamics, they provide different interpretations of our relationship to place. Since *The Waste Land* is set soon after WWI and *Trilogy* covers much of WWII's timespan, we can consider them on a continuum exploring the importance of place. *The Waste Land* indirectly implies that in the Middle Ages, London and Europe offered an example of a marriage of spiritual and political values.

For Eliot, by the early twentieth century, London exemplifies the fall of western civilization, its nightmare vision, and spiritual corruption finds its objective correlative in physical chaos. Instead of hope and progress, the speaker cannot escape the growing insistence of despair and sterility. The rapid metamorphosis of the speaker's relationship to place is undeniable. In the beginning, he is physically able to inhabit London and observe cultural interactions. However, London becomes an almost active force by folding in on the speaker. In other words, every scene that he witnesses points to the inescapable decomposition of London and, by correlation, cultural identity. Ultimately, the speaker must conclude that, like aftershocks from an earthquake, London after WWI is culturally uninhabitable. Thus, we directly witness the journey away from London and descent into the horrors of placelessness. Although London does not suffer physical damage, the speaker's vision within the poem echoes London's cultural instability as he can only see "falling towers" and "empty chapels."

The Waste Land, then, ends in placelessness where everything exists in isolation: language yields to fragments, interpersonal relationships disintegrate, and places no longer mark the presence of humanity. *Trilogy*, however, begins abruptly within a state

of placelessness. While war seeps into the backdrop of Eliot's London, the bombing raids of WWII are virtually inescapable for *Trilogy*'s speaker. As a result, placelessness is more physically imminent in *Trilogy* as disaster collapses buildings and the human frame indiscriminately. Since catastrophe does not actively choose its victims or grant immunity, individual identity appears fictional in placelessness. Furthermore, placelessness fractures cultural identity because of London's instable environment for its inhabitants.

Although *The Waste Land* ends by emphasizing the inescapability of placelessness, *Trilogy* attempts to move beyond placelessness to reclaim place. As I suggest in Chapter 3, *Trilogy* opens the possibility for reclaiming a form of individual and cultural identity that previously accompanied place. Therefore, place can no longer attain centrality and, arguably, its necessity in the lives of people. Nevertheless, *Trilogy* implies that the form of individual and cultural identity is irrevocably different after WWII; that is, postmodern existence requires a constant negotiation to live in spite of disaster's inescapability.

Existence in placelessness, which is by definition uninhabitable, is anything but straightforward. For instance, Lutwack proposes four ways to escape placelessness: (1) motion (2) tourism (3) hallucination and (4) apocalypse. However, none of these forms of escape is sustainable as each provides only momentary release. Occasionally, critics allude indirectly to the freedom within placelessness. Peter Montgomery refers to this possibility in "Fragments Shored Against McLuhan's Ruin":

> The effect of this work was to make the poem a collection of resonant fragments
> that brought all times and places past to bear on the present and so caused the

present to alter the past irrecovably. This synchronicity, that, in effect

microscopes time and place to almost nothing, and that allows all times to exist

equally in the here and now, is very powerful.

Montgomery, then, determines that Eliot's final vision sees the destruction of landscape's

vitality. If place loses its physical prominence, then perhaps place can be established

psychologically without constraints to contemporary time and place.

Surprisingly, Susan Friedman offers a similar statement concerning *Trilogy* in

Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D. She claims, "This is no escape back into time;

rather, H.D.'s comparison foreshadows her insistence throughout the poem that the

ultimate reality of any single moment in history is contained in a pattern of essential

experience which informs all time" (103). These two passages make reverse causal

chains. Montgomery's explanation suggests that Eliot abandons the specificity of a

particular time and place to allow for all times and places to exist together. Friedman,

however, concludes that H.D. sees the workings of all times and places informing a

specific time and place. Both interpretations share a general conclusion that

placelessness can be positive.

Much of this project focuses on the horrors of placelessness because *The Waste*

Land and *Trilogy* provide introductions to the instability of identity in the twentieth

century. Yet, I also see the potential for moving beyond placelessness, but only in H.D.'s

vision. It is crucial, therefore, to pinpoint distinctions between responses to

placelessness. For instance, Eliot certainly moves away from the centrality of time

(directly after WWI) and place (London) at the close of *The Waste Land*. Whispers of

writers from previous times and visions of ancient civilizations cause the boundaries of

time and place to collapse. This separation from the centrality of place is not freedom; instead, the speaker suffers under the overload of all times and places. Instead of finding solace through the relevance of literary fragments, the speaker feels the weight of their distance from contemporary London.

The speaker's relationship to his fragmented surroundings in *The Waste Land* constitutes the horrors of placelessness. *Trilogy* also suggests that physical place no longer functions as a central identity marker. Thus, we see in *Trilogy* that the speaker begins by sorting through the debris, extremely close to the physical structure of London. At the end of the poem, the speaker abandons the physicality of London as she flies away. The poem shows the need to reconnect with place – both by asking for Jesus by the fishing boats and planting a tree in the town square – as an affirmation of cultural identity. However, it is not until the speaker abandons London that she demonstrates the possibility for forming an identity after WWII.

As Lutwack explains, this abandonment allows for "accommodation with placelessness":

> The character for whom the world ceases to matter or exists only in a minimal way always has recourse to an alternate world of imagination. Interior spaciousness substitutes for a world of depleted space and uninhabitable places (244).

Thus, *Trilogy* employs various mythological characters in an attempt to create an "alternate world of imagination." It is not until the speaker engages specifically with The Lady that this level of "interior spaciousness" is possible. This engagement is useful because the speaker can see even the most foundational story of creation as mutable.

Therefore, instead of existing in an overwhelming state of placelessness, *Trilogy*'s speaker can view the creation of truth and identity as fluid. Sharpe's explanation of the changing urban experience throughout modernity is also applicable. He proposes that "when city experience is perceived as becoming more and more fractured, when neither the whole of the city nor its social order seems amenable to a single discourse, the poem of private response creates its own public space from the inside out" (14). Certainly, near the end of the speaker's journey in *Trilogy*, she does not seem to find London or its "social order . . . amenable to a single discourse."

Since *Trilogy*'s speaker cannot reformulate her earlier perception of London before WWII, she participates in the creation of her "own public space." This creation requires careful population with mythic figures, such as the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, who are imbued with newly found familiarity. Perhaps the violence of the twentieth century results in a distinctive relationship with historic personae. In other words, these figures lose some of their immediate relevancy to address a war-torn world. In *Trilogy*, this distinction seems quite crucial. That is, the speaker receives solace from an immediately familiar past of her own creation, not through a distant, intellectualized application of the past's relevance. As Sharpe implies, this fashioning of place dynamics intertwines with writing or, perhaps, with a changing poetic landscape. *Trilogy* moves toward the possibility for reclaiming individual and cultural identity without London as a central locale by rewriting an interior landscape within poetry.

Through *The Waste Land* and *Trilogy*, then, Eliot and H.D. give us different interpretations of how to live in the modern world. As *The Waste Land*'s poetic landscape gradually decentralizes from contemporary London, the speaker increasingly

depends on other times and places as a method of constructing meaning. Trying to extract meaning from other times and places is a hopeless activity that suffocates the speaker, instead of providing the foundation for a psychological landscape. Thus, Eliot's apocalyptic vision of the modern world after World War I destroys London as a place of historical and cultural significance and places the individual indefinitely adrift in placelessness. As we have seen, however, *Trilogy* does provide the basis for creating a psychological landscape after abandoning London as a central locale for shaping identity. This ending means that while *Trilogy* sees the possibility for moving beyond placelessness, landscape is recast in individual terms. In *Trilogy,* then, separating from the assurance of physical place and creating a new psychological and poetic landscape simultaneously denotes hope for a stable identity and fear of unknown territories.

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