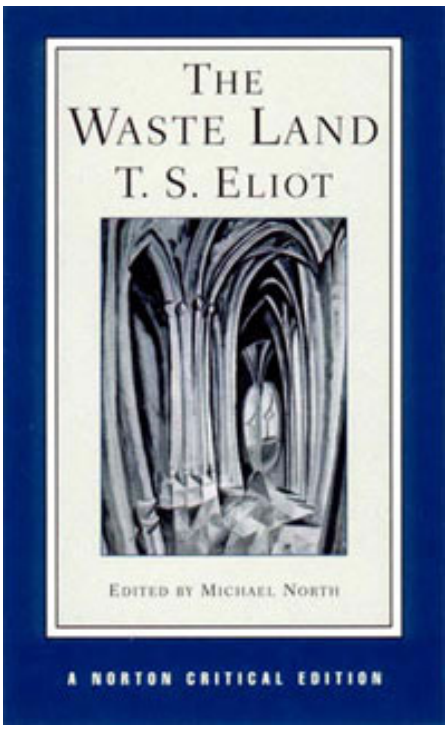

The Waste Land

T.S. Eliot , Michael North (Editor)

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The text of Eliot's 1922 masterpiece is accompanied by thorough explanatory annotations as well as by Eliot's own knotty notes, some of which require annotation themselves.

For ease of reading, this Norton Critical Edition presents The Waste Land as it first appeared in the American edition (Boni & Liveright), with Eliot's notes at the end. "Contexts" provides readers with invaluable materials on The Waste Land's sources, composition, and publication history. "Criticism" traces the poem's reception with twenty-five reviews and essays, from first reactions through the end of the twentieth century. Included are reviews published in the Times Literary Supplement, along with selections by Virginia Woolf, Gilbert Seldes, Edmund Wilson, Elinor Wylie, Conrad Aiken, Charles Powell, Gorham Munson, Malcolm Cowley, Ralph Ellison, John Crowe Ransom, I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, Cleanth Brooks, Delmore Schwartz, Denis Donoghue, Robert Langbaum, Marianne Thormählen, A. D. Moody, Ronald Bush, Maud Ellman, and Tim Armstrong. A Chronology and Selected Bibliography are included.

The Waste Land Details

Date	:	Published December 1st 2000 by W.W. Norton & Company (first published 1922)
ISBN	:	9780393974997
Author	:	T.S. Eliot , Michael North (Editor)
Format	:	Paperback 320 pages
Genre	:	Poetry, Classics, Fiction, Literature

From Reader Review The Waste Land for online ebook

Ken Moten says

[From 2012, I think]:
One of my early Goodreads reviews was of the anthology of Eliot The Waste Land and Other Writings where I reviewed the structure of the book more than I did any of the poems. I have looked back since writing it and am unsatisfied. This is one of my favorite poems, if not my favorite and it deserves better, so I will review it by itself.

Now this is a *cue sudden dramatic music* modernist work (which is to say, no "roses are read/violets are blue" here). It was released in THE year for literature 1922 (Ulysses anyone). I think all through Eliot's and his contemporaries careers they were sort of making the point that society as a whole had lost something in its understanding and appreciation of literature. So this wide assortment of writers decided they would employ some "tough love" to counter this trend. When I read Eliot, Joyce, Faulkner, some Ezra Pound, and others I really enjoyed the whole "breaking the rules" aspect of their work and I got a blast out of reading and deciphering their works. So now I am going to the land of the Dead and try to talk quickly about the first part of this poem now:

The Burial of the Dead is the first, most famous, and for some the only read section of this poem. The first line alone: "*April is the cruelest month*" has become legend (on a smaller note my b-day and my father's d-day happen to be the same month [and year] so I had a dark chuckle at this line). So the stanza goes on into a story which you have no idea what is happening (and you don't need an idea) because it is the rhythm of the poem that is key, and it is only when you realize that you should be (maybe) reading this aloud that it makes sense. Now for the next two stanzas it is more of the same: something is happening with some people and as soon as it looks like a coherent story is taking place--NEW STORY. All the while rhythm-wise ***nothing*** has changed, even the non-english lines keep the same pattern and rhythmic verse as the english.

Then the whole tempo changes when you get to 'Unreal City": *Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,*
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet,
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying, "Stetson!
You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
You! hypocrite lecteur!--mon semblable!--mon frère!"
Now we are in a apocalyptic/dystopian setting (complete with Dante quotes) and we see the narrator recognizing someone in "underworld London" and acquiring about both a corpse and gardening (a theme that is alive all through this poem) and more non-english. Like all of this poem nearly every line could be an

allusion to some obscure piece of literature that Eliot knows most of his readers won't get (jokes on him now, we have 'internets').

Though I could go through all of the sections of this poem thoroughly, the other section of this poem that is worth pointing out is the last section which is the section Eliot wrote to Bertrand Russell the whole thing was leading to. "**What The Thunder Said**" is my favorite section and it also showed the future direction of Eliot's poetry and ideas.

> *"After the torchlight red on sweaty faces*
> *After the frosty silence in the gardens*
> *After the agony in stony places*
> *The shouting and the crying*
> *Prison and palace and reverberation*
> *Of thunder of spring over distant mountains*
> *He who was living is now dead*
> *We who were living are now dying*
> *With a little patience"* - lines 1-9 of WTTS

The trick with Eliot (and all modernist poet's) is to not to get hung-up on the reading, but focus on the *recitation* of the lyrics. As crazy and out of focus as this poem may seem to sound, if you *listen* to it or recite it yourself, the beauty of it manifest itself. The allusions while interesting (Dante and the Fisher King are the main culprits) are not actually the focus of this poem, but the tools in-service to it.

> *"Who is the third who walks always beside you?*
> *When I count, there are only you and I together*
> *But when I look ahead, up the white road*
> *There is always another one walking beside you,*
> *Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded*
> *I do not know whether a man or a woman*
> *--But who is that on the other side of you?*
>
> *What is that sound high in the air*
> *Murmur of maternal lamentation*
> *Who are those hooded hordes swarming*
> *Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth*
> *Ringed by the flat horizon only*
> *What is the city over the mountains*
> *Cracks and reforms and bursts in violet air*
> *Falling towers*
> *Jerusalem Athens Alexandria*
> *Vienna London*
> *Unreal"* - lines 40-57 of WTTS

Another person who deserves credit for helping to shape this poem is Ezra Pound, who was its main editor. Looking at this large "facsimile/manuscript" edition, it is amazing to see how much longer this poem was suppose to be (it verged on "epic" status) and just how thorough Pound was with his red pen (Eliot's first wife also did some editing to the poem, but this was mainly Pound's judgment most of the way through). It is no wonder to me that Eliot dedicates the whole work to Pound who is given the title in Italian "The Better Craftsman."

"My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract,
By this, and this only, we have existed,
Which is not to be found in our obituaries" lines 84-88 of WTTS

One of the big influences in this poem and Eliot's subsequent works is South Asian religion (i.e. Hinduism and Buddhism). The magnificent third section of this poem is of course called The Fire Sermon, one of the most well-known of all Buddhist texts. In WTTS though, he turns decisively towards Hinduism and this section permeates with references to The Bhagavad Gita and The Upanishads. It is interesting to note that even after his conversion to Christianity when he writes his most religious-themed volume of poetry, Four Quartets, he still quotes the Gita at length for one entire piece of that work (one wonders why Eliot never thought to actually just become a Hindu, Ash Wednesday not withstanding). In any case, I always find myself listening to this poem on my iPod (Eliot's recording of it) and there is a very good fanedit of it on Youtube So to end this review I will quote the end of the The Waste Land itself:

"DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms his prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumors
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
DA
Damyata: the boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon--O swallow swallow
Le prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Da. Dayadhvam. Damyata. [from a Hindu fable: 'Give, have compassion, have self control']
Shantih shantih shantih [from a Hindu mantra: 'Peace...peace...peace']"

Huda Yahya says

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> *April is the cruellest month breeding*
> *lilacs out of the dead land ?*

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Winter Kept us warm, covering? ?
Earth in forgetful snow

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Gaurav says

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

The above mentioned lines mark one of the most profound onsets in the history of modernist literature; and perhaps with eruption of the highly dense, heart pounding effusion, a magical spell envelops the reader who would be kept shifting between time and space, embark and decay of civilization, prophecy and satire, philosophy and faith, life and death throughout the mind-clouding, breath- taking journey of around 433 lines; of which, some can stand on their own alone protruding their beings through the undulations of nothingness. The ghostly but spectral voyage starts with *The burial of dead* , takes one along through the graveyards, stony mystical landscapes to hyacinth gardens, up to the magical but heart poundings scenes exuded out of mystery of tarot cards. At times, one might feel lost as if something unknown but with mighty prowess is carrying one to nowhere but then a sudden clout strikes your consciousness with a colossal impact, you are taken aback by sudden surge of the intensity as you come to *Unreal City;* and out of nowhere, death strikes you, *Dante'* s *Inferno* emerges out of cloud of your memory. You are taken through threads of life emerging out from dead. The game of black and white squares, arranged in an alternate manner to give a checkered impression, brings you to the stark absurdity of life- *the change of Philomel* embodies the absurdness prevailed in the life of *Philomel* which (who) has been transformed by *gods*, but as a compensation, and who cries her heart out of agony yet the world is so deaf and insensitive to her anguish that it occurs a heart-rending song to *it*. You are blown further on gust of wind towards a nether world where the most potent questions, but disguised under the sheath of ignorance (or perhaps incompetence), surge up by opening grand (ferocious) arms, from the depth of being and nothingness.

The idea of *The Waste Land* (perhaps) seems to be sprouted out of modern problems—the war, industrialization, abortion, urban life—which the poet addresses in it and at the same time to participate in a literary tradition. Eliot once, famously, wrote his friend Conrad Akein: *"It's interesting to cut yourself to pieces once in a while and wait to see if the fragments will sprout"*, the imagination of Eliot resembles the decaying land that is the subject of the poem: nothing seems to take root among the stony rubbish left behind by old poems and scraps of popular culture. As the other poems of Eliot are, *The Waste Land* is highly symbolic and extensively use allusions, quotations (in several languages), a variety of verse forms, and a collage of poetic fragments to create the sense of speaking for an entire culture in crisis. It's a poem of radical doubt and negation, urging that every human desire be stilled except the desire for self-surrender, for restraint, and for peace. The poets has blend satire and absurdity so well that it looks probably a superhuman task to determine whether the use of some themes/ rhymes, in way which cajoles a seemingly comic effect, is deliberate or accidental as surfaces up. The poem is quite meticulously, but effortlessly, written in fragments- not like traditional verses- which would give altogether different effects to the reader when they are read in fragments or in entirely.

The poem concludes with a rapid series of allusive literary fragments: seven of the last eight lines are

quotations. As one moves through these quotations, it might occur as if the poem becomes conscious of itself, the being of the poem emanates from the verbose kingdom of words and the poem itself stands in front of the reader- staring straight into the eyes of reader; and a sudden shiver runs through his/ her spine to realize what has just traverses through the scanner of 'conscious' eyes.

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge in falling down falling down falling down

Poi s'ascose mel foco che gil affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon- O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Acquitane a la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fir you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata
Shantih shantih shantih.

It's a great achievement in modernist art but one needs to be patient to truly feel the shivers of its magical existence; as it's a characteristic of modernism, the appreciation of the poem demands devotional labor as well as a sympathetic imagination. Beneath these meticulously crafted poetics lay assumptions about art that were curiously religious, and that fostered theories of poetry as a liturgy for the elect.

Excerpts

The Burial of Dead

Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living or dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
O'ed und leer das Meer.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

Who is the third who walks always beside you>
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gilding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded

I do not know whether a man or a woman
-But who is that on the other side of you?

Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful dancing of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed.

Manny says

You know, one of the greatest poems of the 20th century and that kind of thing. I must know a fair amount of it by heart.

Here's a story about "The Waste Land" that some people may find amusing. Many years ago, when I was an undergraduate in Cambridge, a friend of mine asked me for advice on how to impress female Eng Lit majors. Well, I said, you could do worse than use The Waste Land. Just memorise a few lines, and you'll probably be able to bluff successfully.

We did some rehearsals, and eventually agreed on the following script. He would start off by quoting the first few lines:

"April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain."

And then he would say, But that's not my favourite bit! and quote the following:

"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess."

He tried it out a couple of times, and it worked! Female Eng Lit majors, I apologise for assisting with this deception. It wasn't very nice of me.

Bill Kerwin says

I would not presume to offer anything approaching a definitive judgment of this unique and influential poem, a poem which presents us—in early modernist fashion—with a provocative *collage* of voices and scenes, fragments which Eliot has collected from the "heap of broken images" that litter the desert of our culture, but which he presents in a way that grants them new terror and new poignancy, in a way that shows us "fear in a handful of dust" and hints--if only by its absence--at the possibility of a greener world to come.

First off, let me say I was disappointed in this little edition. I picked it up initially because it contained an introduction by Paul Maldoon, an Irish poet with a reputation for allusiveness and obscurity—just the sort to illuminate this fragmentary and cryptic masterpiece.

But his introduction is brief and not terribly helpful, and his enthusiasm for Irish literature leads him to see literary connections where they do not exist. For example, although I believe he is correct when he says the "Nighttown" episode of *Ulysses* is a major influence on the poem, he is mistaken when he speculates that Eliot's working title for it,"He Do the Police in Different Voices" is also derived from this episode. (It is actually a quotation from a character in Dicken's *A Mutual Friend*, who is describing the oral reading technique of her precocious foster child, how he brings to life the crime stories published in the sensational magazine, *The Police Gazette*.)

I was also disappointed in the lack of notes. I was looking for more extensive annotations, because I need them to help me unmask many references in this often obscure poem. But when they said "notes," I guess the editors just meant Eliot's original notes, which are almost invariably appended to the poem anyway, whatever the edition.

I'll end by reproducing a few passages which illustrate something I noticed for the first time this reading: the large number of gothic and decadent images in this poem. In spite of its classical allusions, modernist structure and tone, we are still not that far from the decadent '90's here:

> *"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,*
> *"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?*
> *"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?*
> *"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,*
> *"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!*
> *"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"*
>
> * * * * * * * * *
>
> *In vials of ivory and coloured glass*
> *Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,*
> *Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused*
> *And drowned the sense in odours…*
>
> * * * * * * * * *
>
> *Above the antique mantel was displayed*
> *As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene*
> *The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king*
> *So rudely forced...*
> *And other withered stumps of time*
> *Were told upon the walls; staring forms*

Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.

* * * * * * * * *

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank...
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.

* * * * * * * * *

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?

* * * * * * * *

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

I read a lot of poems as an English major back in the day.* Not many have stuck with me over the years, but *The Waste Land* is one of them: T.S. Eliot's lamentation of the spiritual drought in our day, the waste land of

our Western society, lightened by a few fleeting glimpses of hope. It's fragmented, haunting, laden with symbolism and allusions, and utterly brilliant.

A diverse cast of characters take turns narrating the poem, or having their conversations overheard by the narrator, including:

🛥 a Lithuanian countess, reminiscing about her childhood and life ("I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter")
🛥 a prophetic voice, like Ezekiel, examining the barrenness of civilization ("Son of man, You cannot say, or guess, for you know only A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, And the dead tree gives no shelter ...")
🛥 Madame Sosostris, a famous but fake clairvoyant, telling a fortune with tarot cards ("I do not find the Hanged Man. Fear death by water. I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring. Thank you.")
🛥 a bored woman of leisure, talking to her husband, who answers in his mind ("What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think. / I think we are in rats' alley Where the dead men lost their bones.")
🛥 Two women talking in a bar about sex and abortion ("Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart. He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you To get yourself some teeth.")

... and many more. Those are just the main ones in the first two (of five) sections). Symbols of drought and fertility, spiritual waste and renewal, surface and resurface, showing a different facet each time. I'd forgotten that the Holy Grail (cup) and Holy Lance (spear) doubled as a nifty set of female/male sexual symbols!

This is a poem that deserves to be read, taken apart and studied, and then simply read again and appreciated.

"These fragments I have shored against my ruins..."

*I still have my 2600 page The Norton Anthology of English Literature, which has extensive analysis and footnotes. It also has my helpful handwritten margin notes from 30+ years ago, written in the most amazingly lovely, minuscule handwriting imaginable (seriously, the letters are about a half a millimeter high) that I could never in a million years recreate now.

Foad says

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aPriL does feral sometimes says

T. S. Eliot, who was a literary man who previously had faith in literary wisdom and social norms, I think discovered during World War I how useless lessons of wisdom and defined social mores were against processing the experience of massive wartime deaths and maiming. His personal tragedy of a very damaging marriage was also very difficult.

In 'The Waste Land', I think Eliot was ranting at literature, society, religion and culture for failing to stop the

'collapse' of civilization. Eliot also rages at the ultimate impotence of classic literature to warn the individual or society about the utter devastation and cruelty of war. The poem is full of allusions to those myths and wiseman sayings which reflect the darkness in humanity rather than the wisdom. He includes bits of memory in his poem which emphasize the cluelessness and obtuseness of people.

In my opinion, most Westerners suffer at a certain point in their lives a sudden feeling that civilization is collapsing because they think society has moved away from the classic ideals which maintained the life they imagine they grew up in. In most cases however, civilization is actually continuing on as it always has; it's the veils of classic idealism that the educated observer was looking through that were ripped way. To a child, Reality is a description which he has been taught to believe in. Grownups do their best to live ideally, but I think true wisdom is accepting that we often fall short of what we aspire to, but we need to get on anyway. Eliot's poem, though, is a wail of despair.

I read that hundreds of thousands of young male aristocrats, many of whom were officers and the next generation of leaders, died in WWI along with millions of 'ordinary' people. I guess that this massive die-off of millions hastened the end of centuries-old medieval-class relationships which probably had given comfort, continuity and stability to most European people of the early 20th century. But the generation educated to rule by maintaining class divisions beneficial to that upper class died.

I think wars before WWI used to have long pauses in the conduct of war, which was no longer possible in WWI due to the advances of war mechanization. Adding to the psychological turmoil, for a soldier surviving ongoing warfare it means you get sent to the front on multiple tours. In addition, the aftermath of every war fought close to home is a huge upheaval because of the resulting shortage of young men, a spread of disease vectors, transfers of and new concentrations of wealth, and disrupted markets.

But added to the usual wartime disruptions, I think, WWI was the first war which had massive long-distance killing, not the more honorable warrior to warrior battle. Fighting sword to sword probably feels different emotionally than being killed by invisible shrapnel or powerful percussions that come out of nowhere without pause, from hearing the sound for hours of constant shelling, or dying from a gas which suffocates you invisibly. I can only imagine it.

I've heard accounts from Vietnam fighters, and I guess among the usual horrors that cause PTSD, in particular, was not being able to see anything because of the thick jungles combined with the distances bullets could travel invisibly. I think the change from single face-to-face combat to sudden mass mechanized death on any army unprepared by training or TV or movies or video games (I'm not being flippant) was exponentially devastating. I know everything about war is bad, but I'm guessing if you can't see, hear, or feel the distant soldier who is killing your friends sitting 1 inch from you is a more searing experience, even with mental preparation.

I think random death makes the ideals of unquestioned patriotism and honor more difficult to hang onto. Among the few rewards of being a warrior is that 'mano y mano' victory - I believe it's biology-based for many men. However, when a person's strength and intelligence and value is made moot simply because of where you accidentally happen to be standing or sitting when shrapnel strikes, it probably feels unjust, wrong, unfair, whimsical, more pointless, more meaningless, and random than you can mentally prepare for. You'd have to be shocked by the randomness of dying! It would raise questions about everything you believed about the protective 'shields' of religion, societal mores and expectations; and about being a good person as a strategy for deserving to stay alive, and about the having a purity of purpose to be deserving of winning, even being too educated, thus too smart or valuable to be killed, etc.

For most Americans, the closest experience of the possibility of death comes from car or sport accidents and illnesses. Many people, of course, rely on the normal life patterns surrounding them for reassurance that they are magically protected from death. In war, though, there are no normal life patterns around them. Soldiers become aware that anyone can die and no one has magical immunity. No prayer, no amulet, no ritual, no strength or skill, no powerful person or strategy, nothing can protect you from a sudden act of warfare in the physical space around you. In the days of battle you see perfectly decent, good, family men chopped mercilessly into pieces despite their utilizing every bit of training and good fortune.

I feel like having a bit of a rant myself.

Hannah Eiseman-Renyard says

This Pisses Me Off and Makes Me Feel Like a Moron

I've had to read this twice in the course of my education, and I don't like it one bit, though I thoroughly appreciate its status and importance. Sort of like my attitude to atomic weapons. You wouldn't dismiss atomic weapons as 'crap', but you could legitimately say 'I appreciate their significance but I don't like them at all.'

I don't think there has ever been more literary masturbation about any other piece of writing than *The Wasteland*, and I personally found it charmless, aloof and with nothing to engage my wish to push through that first impression.

Yes, it's all the pieces of the 'shattered' classical world, thrown together in a different and hideous mixture to reflect the modernists' belief that the world as they knew it, and all previous literary forms, weren't up to the task of reflecting their contemporary world - but I really don't like the result. It doesn't engage me and it doesn't illuminate me. Maybe that was the point. Still don't like it, and I'm not in university anymore, so I don't have to try to keep up with the intellectual dick-swinging which surrounds this piece. Thanks but no thanks.

Anything this determinedly difficult just puts my back up, and the more I learn of Eliot himself the less I feel like tackling it. Okay, Eliot, you're a misogynistic, anti-Semitic elitist who doesn't think anyone without a classical education is worthy of reading your work.

Well, fine. Fuck you. I'll take my comprehensive-educated Jewish arse elsewhere.

Ahmed Ibrahim says

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Shaikha Alkhaldi says

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Håkon says

I must confess. I have no idea what I just read. But it was the most beautiful thing.

Rakhi Dalal says

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience.

Nahed.E says

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Bookdragon Sean says

This is the hardest poem I've ever read. Certainly, the difficulty experienced when reading something is not enough reason to leave a bad review. I'm currently reading *Ulysses*, a notoriously difficult book, but I am enjoying it nonetheless. This, however, is an entirely different creature.

Despite being an English student I do find poetry difficult. It may be because of my background. I transferred from sciences into English, so I had very little experience beyond a few poems I read at school. So when I entered the world of poetry at degree level I was way out of my depth. It took me a long time to catch up on what I'd missed, and it took me even longer to actually enjoy poetry. The point is reading poetry is different to reading novels. It's harder to do, and I have to concentrate greatly to do it. But, every so often, when you find the right poem for you, it takes you away as you become lost in a mirage of words, images and metaphors. And sometimes, it strikes a chord within you and you feel everything the poem is saying.

The Waste Land does none of these things. Instead it bombards you with countless intertextual references and information. In order to gain a thorough a succinct understanding of this poem, a poem that takes no longer than thirty minutes to read, I would likely have to spend five-six hours researching the meaning of the terminology, phrasing and historical mentions. That's how difficult it is. Perhaps if I was a white middle class, highly educated man from the nineteen-twenties then I might be able to appreciate this poem more. But, as it stands, I'm not!

The worse thing about the poem for me is its lack of coherency. This in itself is not a bad thing. It's a modernist text; this is what modernist authors did. But, when combined with the fact that the surface level of the writing is near incomprehensible to me, it became rather a painful experience to read it. There are some obvious things to take from the poem. It is post world war one and the content is an image of the destruction that followed, the deprivation, the sadness, the darkness and, of course, the actually wasted land ruined by war. But these images aren't enough for me to enjoy the poem.

It would be like reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and coming to the conclusion that it is a play about the follies of revenge. This is true, but it is also about many other things that combine to form a piece of artistic brilliance. When I read *The Waste Land* I feel stupid. I feel like I'm reading something that I cannot quite

understand, and this annoys me. I feel like at times T.S Elliot is being pretentious, inserting references just do demonstrate his intellect rather than contribute something meaningful to the poem at large. And I don’t like it. I don't want to find out what they mean.

For me this poem is everything great poetry shouldn’t be. But this is just my opinion. For the right reader this poem would be excellence itself. However, it’s not something I’d personally recommend. And, if that wasn't enough, as a side note, T.S Eliot is highly critical towards Shelley- we could never get on!

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Waste Land, T.S. Eliot
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Madeline says

I'm trying to write a term paper on this poem (key word is "trying") and then I realized, hey, I should waste some time by writing a review of the poem on Goodreads! So here we are.

Here's my thing about T.S. Eliot: the man is ungodly brilliant and I love almost everything he's written. Does this mean I understand a single goddamn word of it? Of course not. But (and this is the great part) *that doesn't matter*. Eliot has been quoted as saying he's perfectly aware that no one has any idea what his poems are about, and he's perfectly cool with that. *Understanding* Eliot's poems is not the point; the point is to recognize that he writes with incredible skill and to just lose yourself in the words. My Lit book, *How to Read a Poem*, said it best:
"Eliot is often see as an intellectually difficult, fearfully elitist writer, and so in some ways he was. But he was also the kind of poet who put little store by erudite allusions, and professed himself quite content to have his poetry read by those who had little idea what it meant. It was form - the material stuff of language itself,

its archaic resonances and tentacular roots - which mattered most to him. In fact, he once claimed to have enjoyed reading Dante in the original even before he could understand Italian...In some ways a semi-literate would have been Eliot's ideal reader. He was more of a primitivist than a sophisticate. He was interested in what a poem did, not what it said - in the resonances of the signifier, the lures of its music, the hauntings of its grains and textures, the subterranean workings of what one can only call the poem's unconscious."

Translation: in Eliot's eyes, we are all uncultured idiots, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

So, for those of you struggling to get through the wordy, allusion-tastic, multiple-language maze that is *The Waste Land*, I can only tell you this: Relax and just enjoy the ride. You have nothing to fear. T.S. Eliot loves you.

Read for: Perspectives on Literature

Steph says

i think this might make me an anti-intellectual, but i enjoyed this poem so much more when i read this outside of the classroom and infused it with my own tenuous understanding of what was going on in the poem. in class, explicating every single obscure reference effectively killed it. still such a powerful opening though. his poems have lines you want to taste in your mouth, and repeat over and over like magical intonations, or write down covertly in a secret book of quotes.

Chiara Pagliochini says

“Ho i nervi a pezzi stasera. Sì, a pezzi. Resta con me.
Parlami. Perché non parli mai? Parla.
A che stai pensando? Pensando a cosa? A cosa?
Non lo so mai a cosa stai pensando. Pensa.”

Penso che siamo nel vicolo dei topi
Dove i morti hanno perso le ossa.

Mi sento sola stasera. Le lacrime premono sulla punta degli occhi. E c’è un piccolo nodo di nausea là in fondo, che non si vuol sfogare in nessun modo. Forse è la stanchezza, è tutto il giorno che sto sui libri con questo piccolo entusiasmo frenetico. O forse è tristezza. Una tristezza piagnucolosa e indefinita, che viene da tanti pensieri sciocchi, inutili, astrattissimi.
Eliot si è aggiunto a tutto questo come un sommario, una coroncina, un regalo premio coi punti dell’Agip. Non è colpa sua, o almeno non solo. Ma sono sicura che non se la prenderà se gli attribuisco un po’ della colpa.
Ho cominciato La terra desolata alle diciotto e trenta di questo pomeriggio. Alle dieci e trenta, ho alzato bandiera bianca. Non c’è dubbio, sono troppo piccola, troppo poco intelligente, ho studiato troppo poco per capirla. Eliot non è un poeta gentile, non vuole farsi capire, non ti presta le battute su un piatto d’argento perché tu possa farle tue e recitarle innanzi a un pubblico. Eliot sta lì, dice le sue battute, parla di antropologia, di cristologia, di tarocchi, di mitologia, e senza le sue note neanche il Padreterno nella sua onniscienza lo avrebbe probabilmente inteso. Ma non si tratta di questo. Ho fatto i miei sforzi, una corsa

frenetica dai versi alle note, dalle note ai versi, dall'introduzione ai versi alle note, i commenti dell'antologia, la pagina su Wikipedia. Qualsiasi cosa fosse a mia disposizione per penetrare anche un poco in questo labirinto tascabile. Nulla da fare, la profondità mi rifiuta. Ho intaccato solo di poco la superficie e mi sento come uno che cerchi di pulire il Titanic dalle incrostazioni usando uno spazzolino da denti.
Ma vedete, non è neanche questo. Non è la frustrazione. È il *sapore* della frustrazione, è quel che rimane in bocca alla fine, quando hai detto "voglio capire" e hai concluso "non ho capito". È angoscia, sgomento, ansia da prestazione, rammarico, contrizione. Vorresti far qualcosa, scrollare le pagine perché ne piova una polverina dorata di conoscenza. Niente da fare, non è così che si fa.
E allora, se hai percorso rigo per rigo cercando te stessa e non ti sei trovata, se hai scorso le sillabe perché si aprissero e loro hanno solo sbattuto le ciglia, cosa ti resta? Ecco, io penso che resti proprio quel che si promette. Una Terra Desolata, un nulla, un enigma, un vuoto, un intrico ineffabile, la tua miseria umana. *"In una manciata di polvere vi mostrerò la paura"*. Certo, Eliot, questo lo fai proprio bene.

"Sulle Sabbie di Margate.
Non posso connettere
Nulla con nulla.
Le unghie rotte di mani sporche.
La mia gente, gente modesta che non chiede
Nulla."

[…]

"Dayadhvam: ho udito la chiave
Girare nella porta una volta e girare una volta soltanto
Noi pensiamo alla chiave, ognuno conferma una prigione
Solo al momento in cui la notte cade"

[…]

"Sedetti sulla riva
A pescare, con la pianura arida dietro di me
Riuscirò alla fine a porre ordine nelle mie terre?
Il London Bridge sta cadendo sta cadendo sta cadendo
[…]
Con questi frammenti ho puntellato le mie rovine"

Io non voglio immaginare Eliot affacciato alla finestra. Non voglio sapere cosa vedeva. Questa terra apocalittica, arida, avida, atavica, allucinata io mi rifiuto di credere che fosse la sua. Ma era questo il suo sguardo? Era davvero questo il mondo? Il mondo dopo una guerra mondiale era così? Gli occhi che lo guardavano erano questi? O siamo di fronte al delirio di un pazzo, di un bislacco intellettuale, di uno scrittore egoista ed elitario che spende e spande citazioni a vanvera? Ed io che sono qui seduta al tavolo della cucina, che ascolto musica nelle cuffie a tutto volume per isolarmi dal volume della tv, che aspetto che la casa si svuoti e si acquieti solo per ritrovare una dimensione intima, spirituale, non corrotta, io ragazzina ignorante dell'anno duemiladodici, che si suppone vedrà la fine di questo mondo apocalittico, arido, avido, atavico, allucinato – io, che cosa ne so?
Niente. Io sono qui e posso solo essere triste. Sono triste perché non farò mai poesia. Non ho le palle per la poesia: il mondo non ha bisogno di altre scempiaggini sentimentaliste. Sono triste perché non vedo la cresta dell'onda, non faccio parte di qualcosa, sono una bollicina in isolamento, e non come questi scrittori modernisti che si conoscevano tutti, prendevano il tè insieme, scopavano insieme, si copiavano, si

correggevano e cercavano di andare da qualche parte. Noi stiamo andando da qualche parte? Io sto andando da qualche parte? Stiamo fotografando il mondo? Stiamo costruendo qualcosa? Qualcuno potrà leggere le nostre terre desolate?
A volte penso semplicemente che ci sia troppo squallore. Che ci sentiamo ripugnati. Che non sappiamo guardare perché non vogliamo vedere. E per questo non lasceremo niente che valga la pena leggere. Ma forse sono troppo intransigente. D'altronde io parlo per me. Gli altri, in qualche parte del mondo, qualcosa di buono lo staranno pur facendo.
Ma poi penso che non è così importante. Mio padre, ad esempio, dice che non è importante. Certo, c'è la fame nel mondo a cui pensare e pure i conflitti in Cecenia e anche le liberalizzazioni, certo. Dobbiamo pensare a queste cose, dobbiamo prendere una laurea, dobbiamo trovarci un lavoro. Non possiamo perdere tempo a pensare alla letteratura in astratto. No, la letteratura non si mangia, non mette niente in pancia e neanche salva il mondo. Come diceva Oscar Wilde, tutta l'arte è sommamente inutile.
Certo, non ci dobbiamo pensare. Non pensiamoci. Non serve.
La Terra Desolata non mi serve e non serve capirla. No.
Ma allora perché la voglio capire? E perché non poter capirla mi fa venire così voglia di vomitare?

"Che farò ora? Che farò?
"Uscirò fuori così come sono; camminerò per la strada
"Coi miei capelli sciolti, così. Cosa faremo domani?

"Cosa faremo mai?"
L'acqua calda alle dieci.
E se piove, un'automobile chiusa alle quattro.
E giocheremo una partita a scacchi,
Premendoci gli occhi senza palpebre, in attesa che
Bussino alla porta.

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peiman-mir5 rezakhani says

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