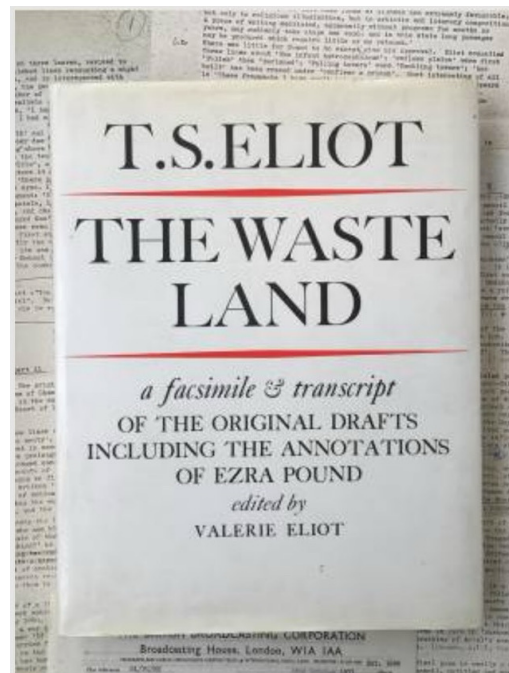


‘The awful daring of a moment’s surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract’

‘What the Thunder Said’
The Waste Land

This morning I spoke on BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme. The broadcast is running a summer holiday feature on treasured books and I wrote in to the programme with the sorry tale of my missing copy of the facsimile and transcript edition of *The Waste Land*.



Many of you will recall me banging on about this sad episode in my life each year in the ‘My Favourite Eliot’ slot of the Eliot Festival at Little Gidding. I read my chosen lines from the poem and then implore the audience once more to look inside any large, white editions of the transcript version of the poem, whether the book be in charity shops, secondhand bookshops, other people’s libraries, or online.

My father, who died twenty-five years ago, always told me that ‘Education would be the ruination’ of me. On my eighteenth birthday though, he joined my Mum in writing and signing in a book I had asked for as a present. I had studied ‘The Waste Land’ for ‘A’ level and I wanted the recently released big, white transcript edition of the poem, which my English teacher had pored over in lessons. It is the only book I have, or had rather, with that writing, that signing, that emblematic proof that my father did appreciate my passion for learning.

I became an English teacher for my career and in a large secondary school in Cambridgeshire, a young teacher was struggling to engage her class with Eliot, so I lent her all of my ‘A’ level books, covered in pencil comments and explanatory notes. And yes, I lent her my first edition, hardback copy of the transcript of ‘The Waste Land’.

The books were never returned to me.

I was promoted to another school, lost touch with the young teacher and since that date I have tried to track down my beautiful book with my late father's writing. In the film version of *Out of Africa* I recall the Karen Blixen character, Meryl Streep, shocked to hear that Denys Finch-Hatton never spoke to a friend again after he had neglected to return a book loaned to him. Denys's friend Cole relates how he asked Finch-Hatton, 'You wouldn't lose a friend over a silly old book would you?' Denys apparently responded, 'No, but he has.'

It is one of the regrets of my life, lending out that book. Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Katherine Rundell spoke recently on *Today* about their treasured books and the importance of the physicality of books and how they can become 'talismanic'. This book is that to me. It evokes feelings of love for my proud, working-class father; for the power of teaching and also my gratitude to Jane O'Neill who taught me Eliot at the Cambridgeshire High School for Girls. It also symbolises for me my love of learning and literature, leading me to study the subject, then teach it and then return to it, as a student in early retirement, to gain my PhD.

Please forgive me for my inability to move on from this loss. I remain hopeful that one day the book will find its way home, enlivening all my love for the work, my learning and my dear old Dad.

Di Beddow
5/8/2025