

T S ELIOT SOCIETY

OF THE UNITED KINGDOM



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Spring 2022

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The Notes which Mr. Eliot has written give definite clues to the framework and symbolism of the poem and include identification of certain quoted passages which have puzzled his readers. It was in accordance with the author's wishes that the poem was originally published without the Notes; but readers will be glad to have the unique pleasure of reading a poet's annotations on himself.

Eliot's 'Notes to The Waste Land' first appeared in the Boni & Liveright First Edition of 1922; in the above excerpt from an advertisement for the book, the publishers were keen to promote their merits.

Editorial

As Eliot's 'cruellest month' moves towards its close, this edition of 'Exchanges' celebrates the centenary of 'The Waste Land' of 1922. Rather than wait, purist at heart, until October, the actual centenary of publication, we are taking a more flexible view, as indeed have others. A quick survey of the 'Events' section of the Society's website makes the point: 'The Waste Land' is certainly creating a stir once more throughout this centenary year.

Newspapers, too, have been alert to the huge cultural significance of the centenary. In a second editorial which jerkily seemed to include references to as many aspects of Eliot's work as could be crammed into 500 words, 'The Guardian' opined that 'A century on, Eliot can seem an effete, politically unattractive character.' That will depend, of course, upon one's politics, but 'effete'? The vibrancy of Eliot's oeuvre surely remains, and 'effete' is the last word one could properly associate with him.

That word might in fact more commonly be applied to another poet from an altogether different tradition. In a letter responding to The Guardian's editorial, the Secretary of the Housman Society notes that for poetry lovers 'the great event' of October 1922 was the publication of AE Housman's 'Last Poems'. Eliot and Housman: what more divergent poets could there be?

Divergent, but not perhaps opposed. Our fondness for naming 'Modernism' as the movement which 'The Waste Land' exemplifies - even inaugurates - might mislead us into classifying Housman as somehow conventional, retrograde, effete. But poetry is an art form for which both truth and beauty count equally; and if Eliot's 'The Waste Land' offers profound insight into the truth of the post-world-war cultural condition, might, say, Housman's 'Loveliest of trees ...' not typify the kind of beauty offered by a very different poetic tradition? It surely isn't a case of Eliot or Housman....

Our celebration of Eliot's 1922 masterpiece begins with the responses of two Society members to the poem, and their ongoing experience of living with and alongside it. David Betterton reflects on his original edition of the poem, and how it has been a constant companion; and Committee member Christina Percy considers how escaping from hermeneutics has left her free to confront both poem and author. We have the first review with comparative images of the new full-colour version of 'The Waste Land Facsimile & Transcript'. And Journal Editor Scott Freer, trawling through the archives in a helpfully comprehensive way, revisits early responses to 'The Waste Land', some of which might surprise us, but all of which may well prompt us to review our own. The underlying question is: if that is what they made of it then, what do we make of it now?

This edition closes with a brief after-note. In the Winter edition of 'Exchanges', Society member Tony Yates had referred to: 'the correct assumption that Eliot's poetry is now incompatible with our age'. This has prompted a response from Dr Sandra Newton on the compatibility of Eliot with the present age - an exploration of the 'then and now' question set out above. Might we even conclude that Eliot, like Shakespeare (in Ben Jonson's estimation) '... was not for an age, but for all time'?

John Caperon

Editor

Exchanges is the quarterly newsletter of the T.S. Eliot Society (UK). If you would like to contribute or if you have queries or suggestions please contact the Editor direct at Exchanges@tseliotssociety.uk

‘A shared mystery’

My first copy of Eliot poems was the 17th impression of “The Waste Land and Other Poems”. It has a date written inside: 24th November ‘69. This marks it as a book I acquired early in my English Literature degree course. My early readings of the headline poem of this slim tome were fraught with puzzlement, not easily untangled in those Swansea University lecture halls. A shared mystery. And I promised myself in those early days that I would untangle all the references and be uniquely clever. No such luck. I took it to France where I spent an academic year supposedly focussing on French studies, but much of that time was spent trawling the critics to garner and master the esoteric knowledge contained within Eliot’s lines. How glad I was to learn many years later that Eliot had called them ‘rhythmic grumbling’ - a message to get us all off the hook.

This edition of ‘The Waste Land’ has made a few journeys since those days. It is with me still, a little worse for wear: sellotape vital. For reasons I cannot fathom, a part of me made a choice always to keep this slim volume with me with every change of home, and every overnight spent away from home, and even in the various iterations of briefcases I took with me to business meetings, when such meetings were my part in life.

When pushed to find a favourite line from the poem, I find most folk who have some acquaintance with ‘The Waste Land’ will recall the image:

‘Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge’

We know the crowd flowing over London Bridge is an image taken straight out of Dante’s Inferno Canto III:

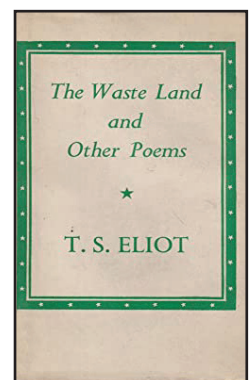
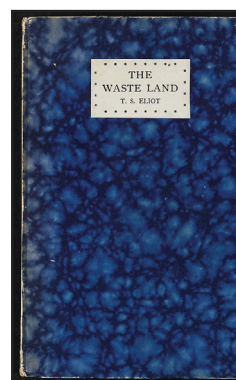
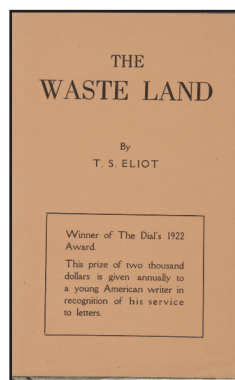
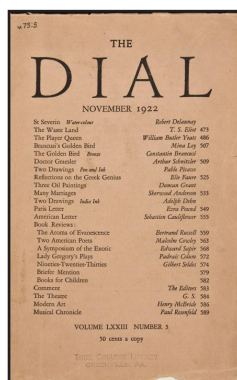
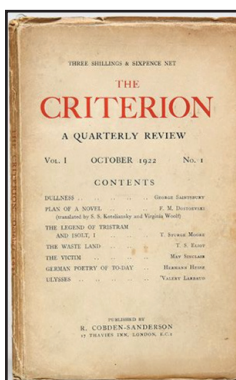
‘si lingua tratta
di gente, eh’io non avrei mai creduto
che morte tanta n’avesse disfatta’.

Eliot saw this crowd, and was himself part of it, in his commute to Lloyds Bank in Lombard Street, and the line was talismanic for me on my many similar commutes from Clapham Junction in days I’d prefer to remember as ‘formative’.

There is pathos and beauty in such a fragment, and there are many. The lines around the Hyacinth Garden, or the windward-looking sailors come to mind. Such bits from Eliot’s imagination, among his classical, cultural and philosophical excavations, create a ‘heap’.

I like the image of a ‘heap’. Looking at the heap, you can see the occasional glint of hope, a shard of light amongst the Waste. Over time with this heap, I have been glad to understand that the poem paradoxically stands uniquely and musically by itself. It lives not by an intellectual but by an emotional response, such as evoked by the idea of a ‘flow’ in those few London Bridge lines. They have their counterpoint in:

‘The pleasant whining of a mandoline

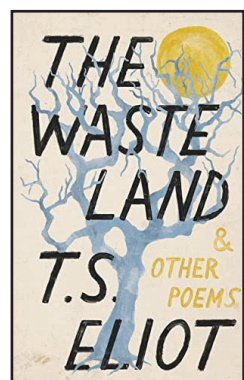
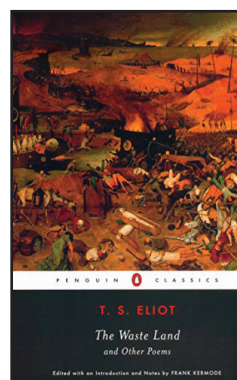
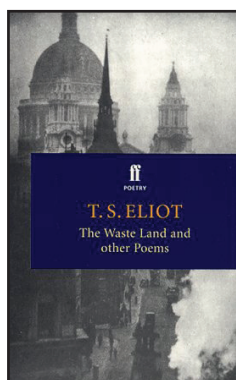
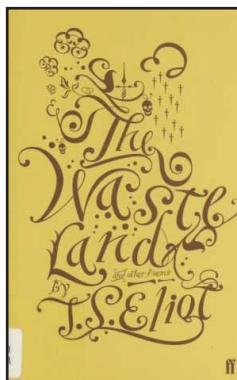
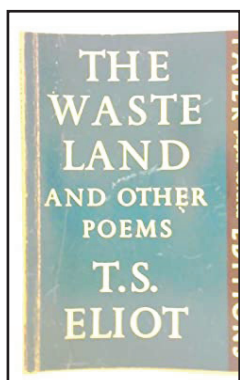


And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.'

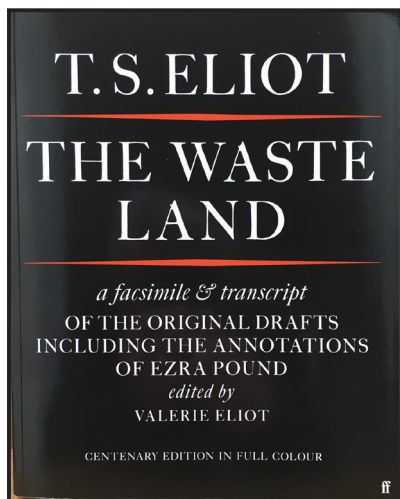
In the early 1990s I committed the poem to memory, quite by accident. On my many motorway travels I listened regularly to a cassette of Ted Hughes reading Eliot. The tape eventually gave up the ghost, but by then the rhythms of the poems became embedded. In recent years I have been known to time the dog-walking of my son's Labrador 'Bertie' to the time it takes to recite it all. I have not kept the dog far hence, and so perhaps he has foresuffered all.

I keep my half-century-old edition close, in case the memory fades.

David Betterton



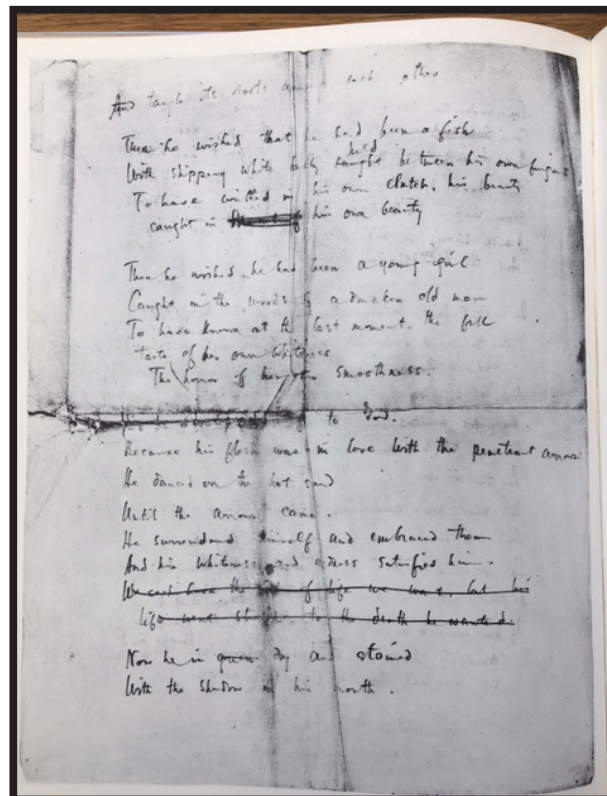
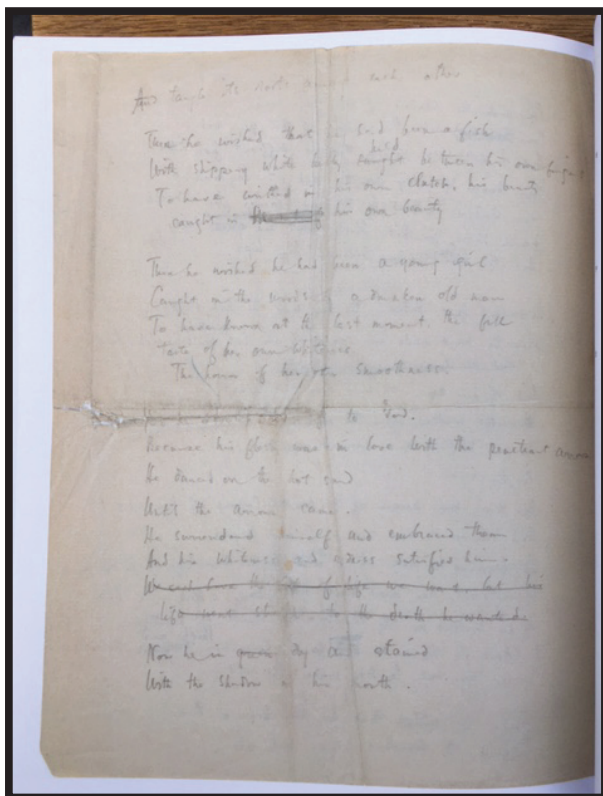
Restoring the experience: *The Waste Land* drafts in colour



Printed for the first time in what Faber describe as “the startling vivacity of full colour”, this is the Centenary Edition of *The Waste Land – A Facsimile & Transcript*, the reproduction of the drafts and typescripts first edited by Valerie Eliot, published in 1971, and marking its own fiftieth anniversary. Many of us will already possess earlier editions, and so will wonder whether another purchase is justified by colour reproduction, plus “an appendix of original materials not previously made available”. (By adding this new material at the back, the pagination of the original, which will be referred to in many critical works and indeed in this review, is usefully retained.)

The new material in this edition divides into two; editorial, and reprographic. Its additional editorial material is by Matthew Hollis, who explains that when researching his forthcoming book on *The Waste Land*, he asked the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, where the pages are kept, whether they would be prepared to photograph the original leaves once again, but this time in colour. “Paper stocks became instantly distinct,” he writes. “Pencil and ink separated discretely. Ribbon and carbon copies took on separate lives.”

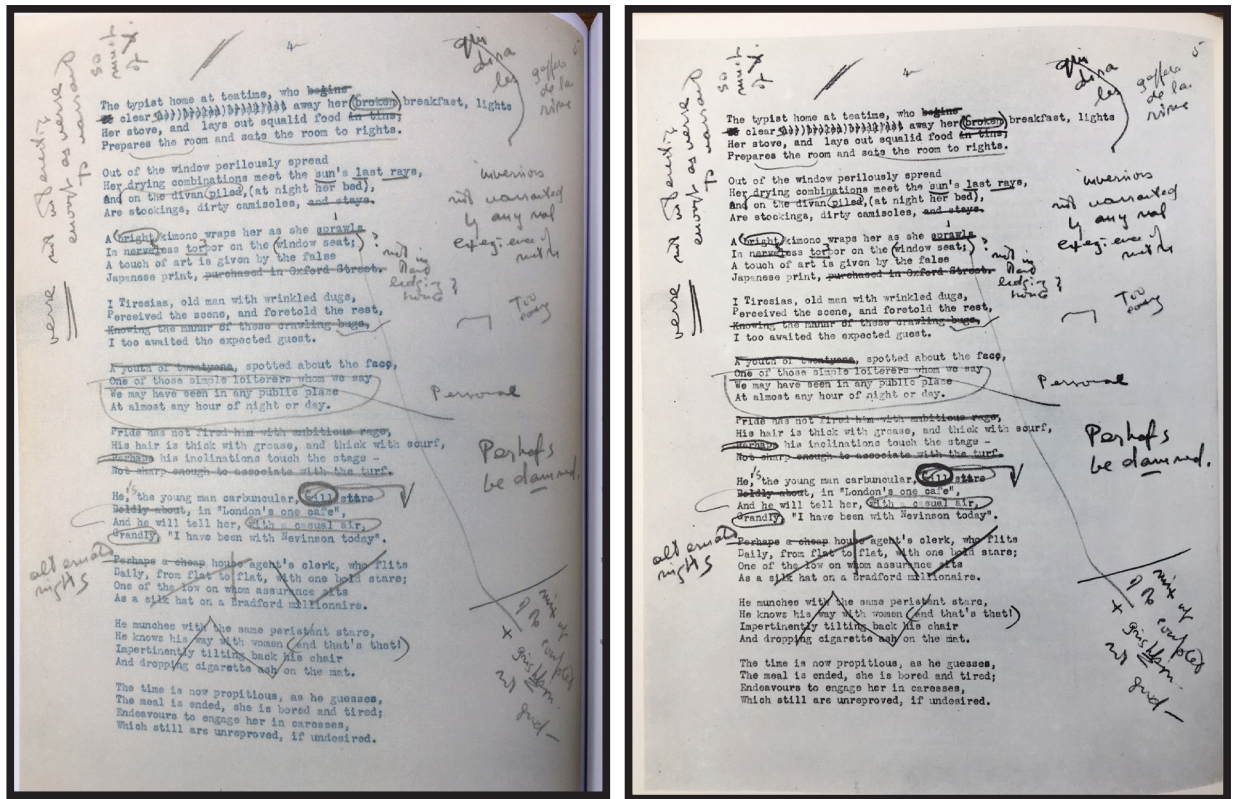
In terms of colour, it is the paper which first strikes the eye. The various shades of the different stocks brings Eliot’s pages vividly to life. This particularly applies to the handwritten pages, as if written on whatever paper was to his hand at the time. The opening of *Death by Water* (pp54-60) is actually on faintly violet-gridded paper; *The Death of the Duchess* (pp108-114) on blue-squared graph paper.



Page
92 from
the new
colour
edition
(far left)
and the
1971
edition
(left)

Ironically, the colour photography actually reduces the legibility of many of the pages, particularly those handwritten in pencil. Perhaps the pages have faded in the intervening fifty years – unlikely, given the archival care they must be given – or perhaps the contrast on the old monochrome photographs was

Page 44
from the
new colour
edition
(right) and
the 1971
edition (far
right)



enhanced so that the pages were made more legible. The new edition is clearly a more accurate representation, and the images more authentic, but they are sometimes harder to read. (Although of course the print transcript remains on the facing pages.)

Type on the drafts varies between black, blue and carbon copy; and while there are few amendments in anything but pencil or black ink, Pound's comment "O.K. echt" (p50) is actually in green – now notoriously regarded by the press as the colour of mad letter-writers.

The additional reprographic content is not of great significance. There are three typescript versos, which were only footnoted by Valerie in the original edition. (One is simply a short shopping list in Eliot's hand, for "1 Sunburn & salustia lotion 1 Smallest pot skinfood O." at the chemist; to which Hollis provides an entire paragraph of exegesis.)

And there are five images which were omitted from the original edition (although seen in a limited printing of 1971): a photograph of Eliot in an armchair from December 1922; three bills from the Albemarle Hotel, Margate ("Cheques not accepted in payment of account"); and, perhaps most emotive, the label from the packet in which the pages were sent, from 9 Clarence Gate Gardens to John Quinn in "New York City". The label declares its content to be "MANUSCRIPT ONLY" – how modest that "only" now seems.

This is an impressive publication, capturing as it does the drafts as they were composed. The absence of any artificial heightening of legibility is surely justified by the near-physical experience it offers of the original documents. In terms of further enlightenment there is little more we can gain from the drafts, but there is plenty to be gained by seeing the pages in their true character. It is as if this edition now shows us how we had the meaning, but missed the experience.

The Waste Land – A Facsimile & Transcript, Centenary Edition, published 28 April by Faber, paperback, 161pp, £25

‘Impressions, sometimes sublime ...’

I first encountered *The Waste Land* and *Other Poems* as an undergraduate at the wonderful UEA. My specialisms were Medieval and Modernist Literature. As different as these two canons appear, they have much in common: allegory and allusion ensure many hours, weeks, months of literary and philosophical tunnelling. I liked that.

Aware of controversy with the reading of Eliot at that time (‘antisemite’ and ‘misogynist’ were terms used frequently) I, armed with my newly forged Barthesian shield and my lance of perfect Hayden White, went in. And I loved it.

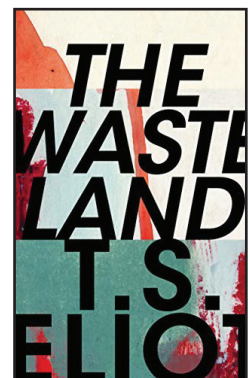
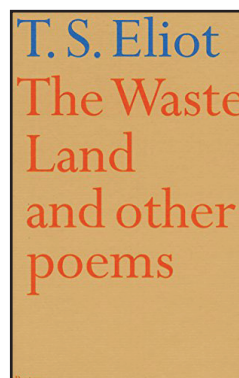
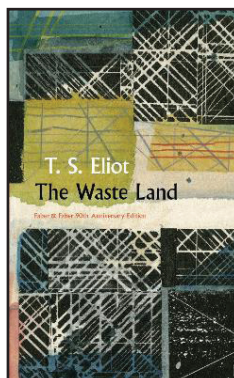
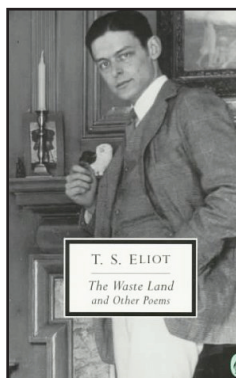
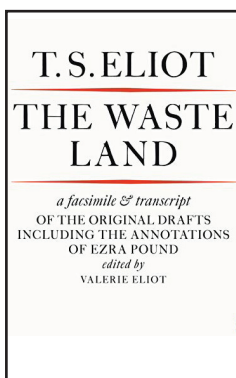
The dominant theme of those lectures and seminars was fragmentation: fragmentation of the self, of culture, of society itself. Two images from ‘The Burial of the Dead’ resonated when read through this lens. The first: ‘April is the cruellest month’ is as enigmatic an opening line as any I have read since. The dissonance between innocence and cruelty signified in this line invites many interpretations and relevancies. Still, read in conjunction with the epigraph and the title of the first section, the dominant reading, that of post-war disintegration, seemed convincing. The second was ‘A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, / I had not thought death had undone so many.’ Reading these lines, I imagined the ghosts of the fallen crossing over the river Thames to find their validation in the Elysian fields. Although I was also reading Virginia Woolf’s ‘Street Haunting’ at the time!

And these images resonate still. In my private experiences. And in my horror and helplessness watching the experiences of the people of Ukraine at the time of writing this piece. These lines, for me, at this time, encapsulate both the despair in the present and hope for the future. I find comfort in the acknowledgement of pain felt most cruelly.

I have been fortunate that through my association with The T. S. Eliot Society I have heard and read and learned so much more about Eliot the man. I no longer shy away from biographical interpretations and instead relish the greater insight this information brings to the poems. Eliot said ‘...when I wrote a poem called ‘The Waste Land’ some of the more approving critics said that I have ‘expressed the disillusion of a generation’, which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.’ (‘Thoughts after Lambeth,’ 5th March 1931). Eliot’s words are the perfect illustration that though the ‘Author’ may be dead, the author’s words are still very much alive.

Ultimately, for me, the opening section of ‘The Burial of the Dead’ reads as one of desire, of life in suspension, rather than death. Fashionable hermeneutics come and go and are immensely pleasurable exercises in their own right, but what matters most are the impressions, sometimes sublime, sometimes branded, that are left behind by a truly great poem.

Christina Percy



Revisiting Early Responses to 'The Waste Land'

2022 marks the centennial year of 'The Waste Land', which was first published, without the author's endnotes, in *The Criterion* in October 1922. The first appearance in the U.S. was in *The Dial* magazine (late October 1922) – again, without the endnotes. Subsequent editions – Boni & Liveright, Hogarth Press, and Faber & Faber – published and retained the endnotes that led to many a seasoned scholar following a crooked hermeneutic path (i.e., via Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*), and the possibility of redeeming order from out of the futility and anarchy. On the fiftieth anniversary of the publication (1972), A. Walton Litz stated that 'Eliot's notes are a parody of scholarship', implying they playfully augment the poem's modern nihilism in both form and theme.

It is therefore worth revisiting responses to 'The Waste Land', prior to I. A. Richards' appendix added to the 1926 publication of *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, in which he lauded it as a major literary work. The poem generated a variety of impressions and contrary views, with many reviewers not making head or tail of it (even after several attempts). Nonetheless, some observed a cynical and tragic voice:

'I was rather disappointed. It was good, of course, but so damned dead.' Hart Crane (November 1922)

'Certainly the man has dug the ground and buried hope as deep and direfully as it can ever be done.' Hart Crane (January 1923)

'I think Mr. Eliot conceived 'The Waste Land' out of an extremity of tragic emotion and expressed it in his own voice and the voices of other unhappy men [...].' Elinor Wylie (January 1923)

'This poem is [...] the disgusted outcry of a heart turned cynical.' Harold Munro (1923)

Some were baffled and bemused by Eliot's poetic technique and erudition:

'This poem of 430 lines, with a page of notes to every three pages of texts, is not for the ordinary reader. He will make nothing of it. [...] The thing is a mad medley.' Charles Powell (October 1923)

While readers struggled to make sense of the poem, Virginia Woolf enjoyed the sensory experience:

'I have only the sound of it in my ears, when he read it aloud; and have not yet tackled the sense. But I like the sound.' (October 1922).

For Conrad Aiken (February 1923), the poem succeeded 'by virtue of its incoherence', and the lack of a unifying voice, for others, only enhanced Eliot's vision of modern life:

'Mr. Eliot's poem is also a collection of flashes, but there is no effect of heterogeneity, since all these flashes are relevant to the same thing and together give what seems to be a complete expression of this poet's vision of modern life.' 'Times Literary Supplement' (October 1922)

'As an echo of contemporary despair, as a picture of dissolution of the breaking-down of the very structures on which life has modelled itself, 'The Waste Land' has a definite authenticity.' Louis Untermeyer (January 1923).

That said, Gilbert Seldes [editor of *The Dial*] said Eliot 'had laid a fire with infinite care but omitted to apply a match to it', suggesting it was left to the reader to illuminate the poem. For R. W. B. Lewis, the poem was a cold exercise in erudition: '...it was a poem, like Joyce's novel, ridden by theory rather than warmed by life.'

Prompted by the book-form publication of 'The Waste Land' that included the endnotes, critics soon identified an underlying pattern or meaningful scaffold:

'Mr Eliot uses the Waste Land as the concrete image of a spiritual drouth.' Edmund Wilson (December 1922)

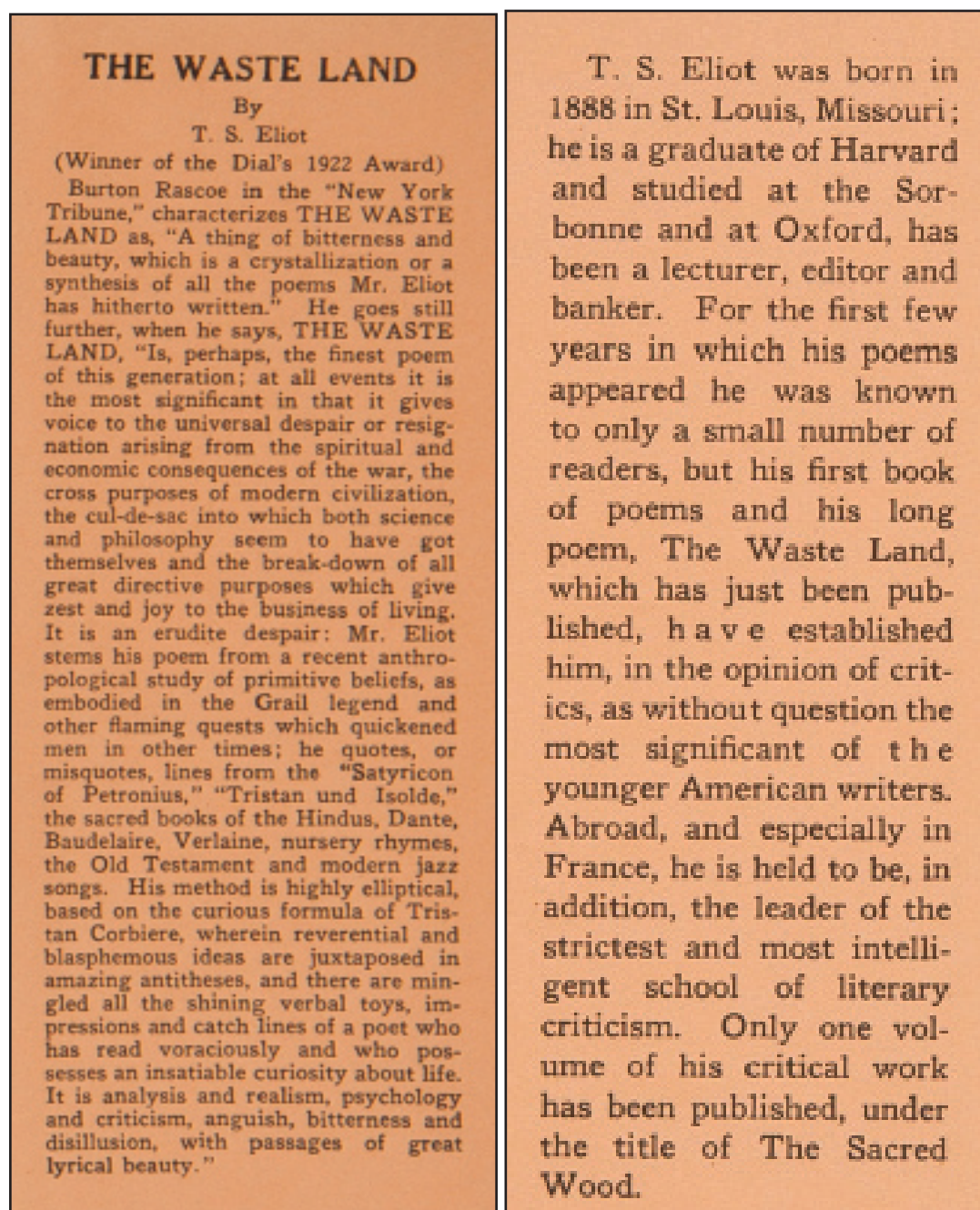
Yet, with or without the endnotes, certain contemporary authors, such as Ernest Hemingway, were 8

unable to take the poem 'seriously'. And for Malcolm Cowley, the addition of the endnotes compounded the sense that Eliot was an old-fashioned plagiarist rather than a poet speaking to a generation:

'When *The Waste Land* appeared, complete with notes, E. E. Cummings asked me why Eliot couldn't write his own lines instead of borrowing from dead poets The seven-page appendix [...] was a painful dose for us to swallow. But the truth was that the poet had not changed so much as his younger readers. We were becoming less preoccupied with technique and were looking for poems that portrayed our own picture of the world. [...] Eliot] was saying that the present was inferior to the past [...] and] we were excited by the adventure of living in the present.' (1922)

Over time and on reflection, authors, critics, and readers altered their view of the poem. Personally, the initial readings are a reminder that one should not neglect the sensory experience and what Maud Ellman, in 'The Poetics of Impersonality: T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound', refers to as the 'surface play' of the poem (as opposed to the density of allusions).

Scott Freer



From the First Edition

These are the flyleaves from the dustjacket of the Boni & Liveright 1922 First Edition of *The Waste Land*. The inside front (left) carried Burton Rascoe's enthusiastic description of the poem, "a thing of bitterness and beauty"; while the inside back (right) carried what now reads as an idiosyncratic profile of TS Eliot, "lecturer, editor and banker".

Eliot and our age: is there an incompatibility?

In a piece reflecting on some enthusiastic reviews of the dramatically-staged reading of 'Four Quartets' by actor Ralph Fiennes, and to the fact that some 'performances' of Eliot's poems are now interspersed with music, Tony Yates argued that Eliot's work should be able to stand on its own: if it can no longer do so, that may be because it is 'incompatible with our age'.

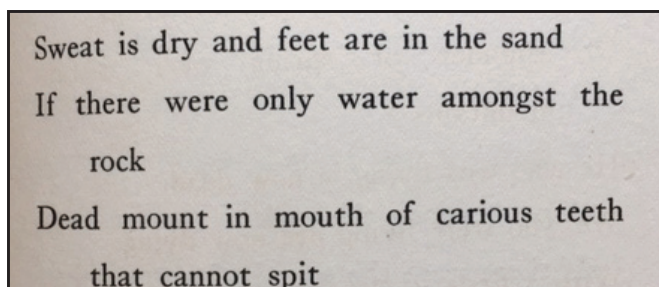
In response, Sandra Newton writes: 'I was a bit taken aback by Tony Yates' reference in his recent piece ('Exchanges', Winter 2021-2) to: '... the correct assumption that Eliot's poetry is now incompatible with our age ... Correct assumption? Incompatible? If, in fact, our current 'wasteland' is 'bigger and more toxic' than it was to Eliot, it makes his work not 'incompatible,' but doubly relevant and significant. I do not deny that there will be other voices in our present and our future, but they are built upon – not divorced from – Eliot's voice (and the other voices of his time), for as he, himself, observed, each new voice joins the established chorus and enriches it, just as it enriches him or her.'

It's hard, of course, to compare directly two 'ages' a century apart. The variety of contemporary responses to 'The Waste Land' is beautifully set out in Scott Freer's piece above: could we categorise any one of those as more typical than others of 1922? Could we even say that the poem was remotely 'compatible' with 1922? Whilst seeing the point Tony Yates is making about the cultural distance between 1922 and 2022, and accepting that actors and musicians might be seen as 'cashing in' on the centenary of 'The Waste Land', it's hard not to agree with Sandra Newton's estimation of the relevance and significance of the poem today. Readers are invited to discuss among themselves!

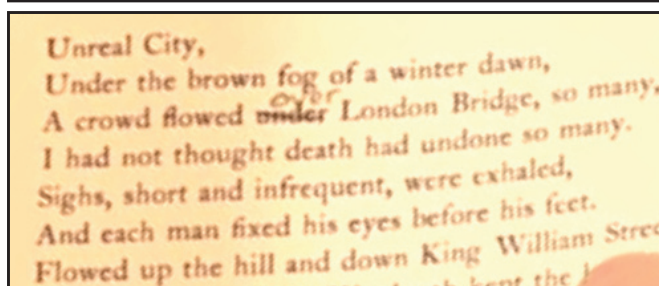
John Caperon

And finally...

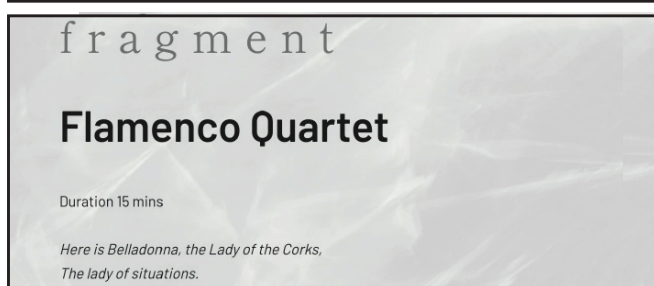
It has been said that we all make mistakes – which applies even to masterpieces like 'The Waste Land':



From the Boni & Liveright First Edition 1922



From The Hogarth Press First UK Edition 1923



From 'The Waste Land' Fragments festival 2022