

THE WASTE LAND
At 100.
With a Gallery for Mr Eliot



T.S. Eliot, Author of *The Waste Land* (1922)
Hulton-Deutsch Collection, via Getty Images

**Special to Rare Book Hub,
San Francisco**
**By Maureen E. Mulvihill,
Guest Writer**
November 1st, 2022



For *Marie Colvin* (NY, 1956 – Homs, Syria, 2012),
brave war correspondent, London Times, who knew
much about waste lands. (*A Private War*, 2018 film)

In 1922, a fussy and erudite Harvard graduate from St Louis, Missouri, employed by Lloyd's Bank, London, published an unusual poem: *The Waste Land*. This was the work of one Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965). Mr Eliot had achieved some notoriety in avant-garde literary circles in London with his *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915); and he had kept busy as a writer in London and Paris. *The Waste Land* was first published in a literary journal, founded and edited by Eliot himself: *The Criterion* (see [Gallery](#), below, Image 2). As Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Eliot's masterwork was a self-published wonder: he had full artistic control of content and printed presentation.

We are not surprised by the poem's critical reception. Its first review was a scathing assessment by distinguished Cambridge University scholar -- and World War I veteran -- F. L. Lucas (*The New Statesman*, London; 3 November 1923). This spectacular media event was a predictable clash between generations: between opposing literary traditions and loyalties; ultimately, between Classicism and the rising new Modernist Movement in the arts. Lo! the victor was Eliot. His poem soon became the very signature of Modernism: it affirmed a new aesthetic, a new way to create and present one's work.

In 2022, enthusiasts of Eliot's poem are honoring its centenary and continuing resonance. Today's readers can readily see that Eliot's "unreal city" in the aftermath of World War I is a metaphor for all cities horrifically hit by internal and external forces: Dublin, Easter Rising, 1916; Detroit riots, 1967; Derry, Ireland, 'Bloody Sunday,' 1972; the sack of Homs, Syria, 2012; the battle for Kyiv, Ukraine, 2022; and on and on. Never has Eliot's poem been timelier and more accessible.

Public readings of Eliot's *The Waste Land* have been organized in the UK and New York to honor the poem's continuing relevance. Benedict Cumberbatch opened the 2022 Charleston Festival, East Sussex UK, with readings accompanied by Britten Sinfonia and soprano Anna Dennis. Ralph Fiennes will read from the poem in December, 2022, at The 92nd Street Y, New York (Eliot himself read from the same stage in 1950). A much earlier, superb reading by Alec Guinness is preserved online (YouTube); likewise, a BBC Radio 4 broadcast of an Eileen Atkins-Jeremy Irons reading. In due course, we hope to welcome an entire opera inspired by *The Waste Land* in view of its busy sonic landscape (all those confused, disembodied voices). We have recently admired adaptations of literary works to the operatic stage, such as the repurposing of Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, featuring Renée Fleming, Kelli O'Hara, and Joyce DiDonato (Metropolitan Opera, NY, November 22-December 15, 2022; see schedule, online).

For additional content, visit the following

[Gallery](#)

A GALLERY for Mr Eliot

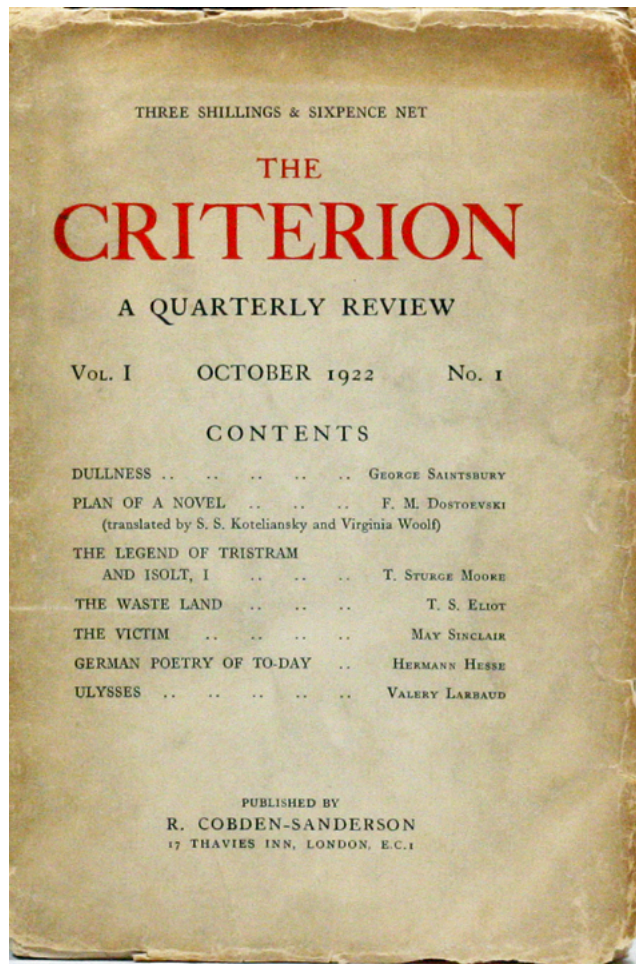
Curated by Maureen E. Mulvihill



(1). T.S. Eliot, Author of *The Waste Land* (1922)

Hulton-Deutsch Collection, via Getty Images

This portrait photograph is displayed in “How Did T.S. Eliot Go From Young and Wild to Old and Stodgy?” by Andrew Epstein (*NYTBR*, online, September 2, 2022; updated September 4). For other recent essays, see Louis Menard, “Practical Cat: How T.S. Eliot became T.S. Eliot,” *The New Yorker* (Sept. 12, 2011); and an excellent overview, with images, by Charles Brown, editor, Florida Bibliophile Society newsletter, online, Oct., 2022.



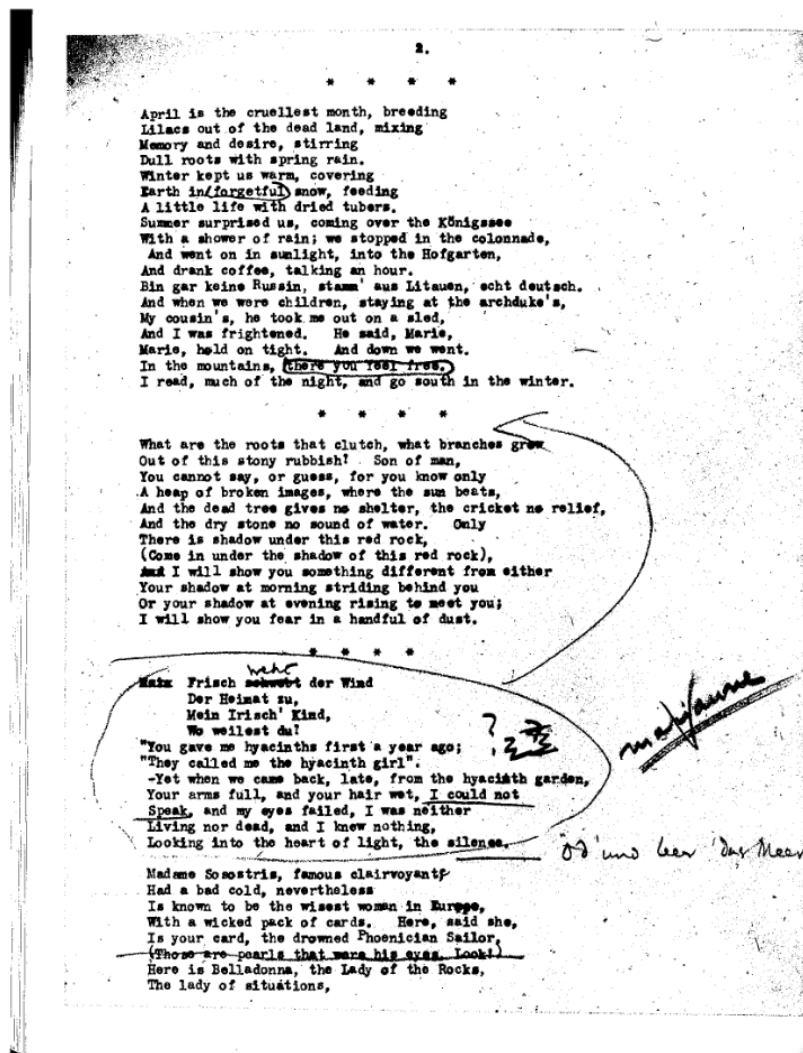
(2). *The Criterion: A Quarterly Review*

Volume I, Number I. Roughly, 100 pp. 600 copies.

Image: Manhattan Rare Book Co., NY

Before T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* appeared in book form, it was published in the inaugural issue of *The Criterion* (October, 1922), a literary journal and Modernist forum, founded and edited by Eliot himself. It enjoyed a 17-year run. Eliot's poem is printed on pages 50-64. For a view of the entire issue, see T.S. Eliot Foundation Interest: < <https://tseliot.com/the-criterion/vol-1> >. See also YouTube video, by Manhattan Rare Book Co., whose copy of this rarity was on offer, \$8,500; visit < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vF1HDF8dE1Q> >.

Criterion's first number also included a lecture by Valéry Larbaud on Joyce's recently published Irish epic, *Ulysses*, another Modernist achievement. The journal would also feature excerpts from Marcel Proust's great novel, *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Modernism, rising!

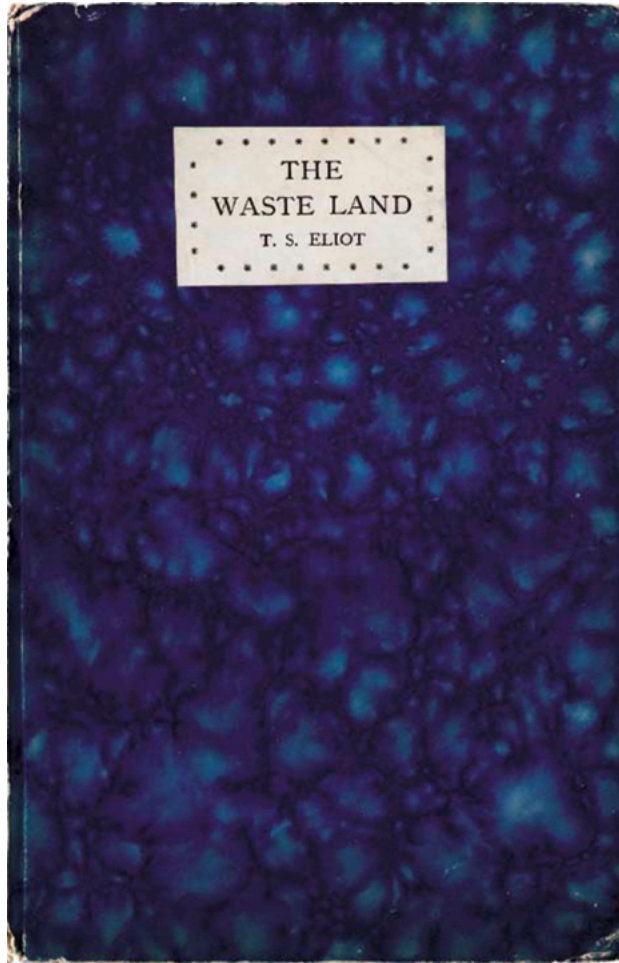


(3). Specimen Page, Opening Section of *The Waste Land*, displaying changes and annotations by Ezra Pound.

The editing history of Eliot's poem is a documented instance of literary collaboration between two important American poets: T.S. Eliot and his good friend, Ezra Pound. For Pound's astute editing of the original typescript, he was made dedicatee of *The Waste Land*, receiving the highest compliment from Eliot: "**For Ezra Pound / il miglior fabbro**" (the superior artisan).

Pound's changes and excisions were extensive: he halved the original typescript, refining it down from some 800 typed lines, thus protecting and preserving the poem's structural 'bones'. In 1971, Eliot's second wife, Valerie Eliot, published a facsimile of the original drafts, with Pound's annotations (specimen, above, p. 17 of 40). For the entire facsimile, view:

< <https://blogs.commonsgorgetown.edu/engl-484-spring2016/files/2016/01/TheWasteLandManuscripts.pdf> >

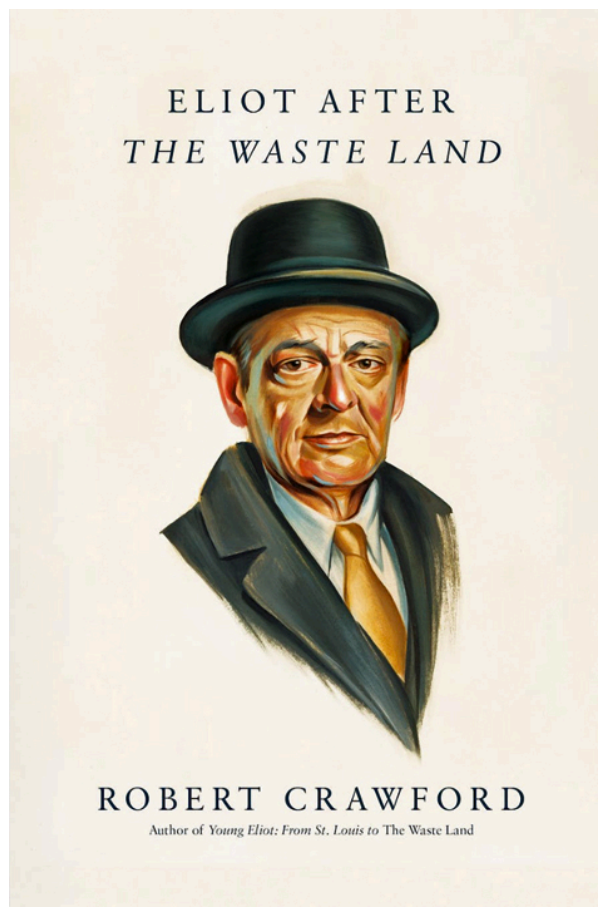


(4). First English Edition, in Book Form, of *The Waste Land*

Blue mottled boards, printed paper label on cover. Distinguished provenance: French poet, Paul Valéry. Live auction 1098, Rechler Library, Lot 66, Christie's NY, Oct.11, 2002. Image, Christie's, NY

Printed and published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Hogarth Press, Surrey UK, 1923. Text handset by Virginia Woolf. Print run, some 460 copies.

Eliot much preferred the Woolfs' presentation of his poem to its first American edition by Boni & Liveright (NY, 1922). Eliot was still working at Lloyd's Bank at this time, and was now greatly encouraged to leave his day job and move forward with a literary career. Eliot visited the Woolfs, who found him something of a 'sealed envelope'. Visit < <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-3983951>>



(5). Robert Crawford's Biography of Eliot, Vol. II

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2022. 609 pages. Illus. \$35.

(Image, Mulvihill copy)

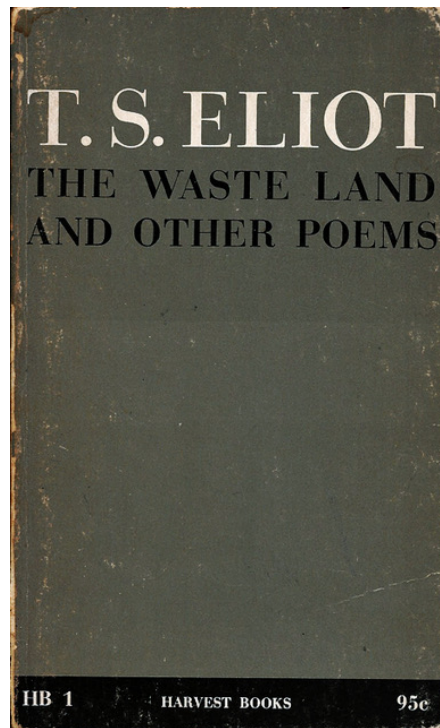
Crawford's reconstruction of Eliot's life and literary activity after the success of *The Waste Land* (1922) was given important new content -- and a biographer's supreme advantage -- by the recent unsealing at Princeton University in 2020 of a twenty-year correspondence from Eliot to Emily Hale, evidently the love of his life, though he would abruptly betray her in 1957 to marry his young secretary, Valerie Fletcher (the second Mrs Eliot). In this trove of 'new' letters, Eliot reveals a range of unattractive qualities, including an extreme and ugly anti-Semitism, as well as continuing turbulence with sexuality and masculinity. (If he disappoints as a man, he's great on the page!) Recent reviews of Crawford's *Eliot*, with photos:

Andrew Epstein, "How did T.S. Eliot Go from Young and Wild to Old and Stodgy?," *NYTBR* online, September 2, 2022; updated, September 4, 2022:

< <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/02/books/review/robert-crawford-eliot-after-the-waste-land.html> >

Michael Dirda, "T.S. Eliot Wrote of Waste and Woe: His Private Life Provided Material," *Washington Post* online, September 28, 2022:

< <https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2022/09/28/eliot-wasteland-private-life/> >



(6). From the Mulvihill-Harris Home Library

A treasured classic from the 1960s (88 pp.). Eliot's poems and literary criticism were often on college syllabi then: *are they now?*



Acknowledgments For their contribution to this essay, the author thanks Bruce E. McKinney and especially Michael Stillman (Rare Book Hub, San Francisco); the gifted Daniel R. Harris (Brooklyn, NY; Sarasota, FL.), the best reader of my work; Brandt Buell, Nicholas, Deenie, and Dana, Getty Images (Chicago); Charles M. Brown (University of Florida, Gainesville; President and Newsletter Editor, Florida Bibliophile Society); Margaret Stetz, University of Delaware; a colorful crowd of usual contacts in the book trade and auction circuit; and a faithful network of family, friends, and colleagues. All that we achieve is collaborative.

Author Note Maureen E. Mulvihill is an Early Modernist scholar and a rare book collector. The Mulvihill Collection includes mostly pre-1800 women writers (Celtic, English, Dutch) <[Profile](#), *Rare Books & Collections*, Autumn, 2016>. She studied at Monteith College, Detroit; Wisconsin (PhD '82); The Yale Center for British Art; Columbia University Rare Book School, NY; and, as NEH Fellow, The Johns Hopkins University. In addition to many scholarly essays, she has published first editions of 'Ephelia' and Mary Shackleton Leadbeater; also an online multimedia archive, *Thumbprints of 'Ephelia'*; and she was recently Advisory Editor, *Ireland And The Americas* (3 vols., ABC-Clio). Her publications on Modernist figures include essays on Jack Yeats, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce. Her exhibition reviews include Margrieta van Varick (Bard Gallery, NY); Rubens (Ringling Museum, Sarasota, FL.); Veronese (Ringling); Jane Austen (Morgan Library, NY); and the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection (2008; Grolier Club, NY). She is a member, Princeton Research Forum, NJ; formerly, Associate Fellow, Institute for Research in History, NY. She is at work on Irishwomen writing politically, c1603-1801.