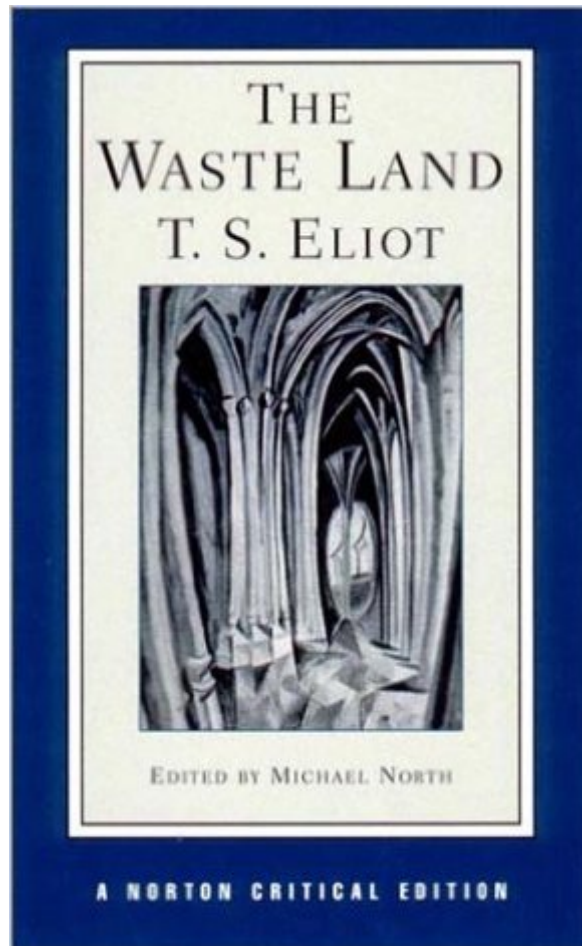


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# The Waste Land (Norton Critical Editions)



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Literature scholars universally recognize Eliot's "Waste Land" as one of the most influential poems of the 20th century. The poem draws on a wealth of images, everything from classics of Western literature to Tarot cards, from anthropology to Eastern sacred texts. The title refers to the barren land of the Fisher King in Arthurian legend; both the king and the land eventually find redemption

through the Holy Grail. Through a masterful use of language and symbols, Eliot brilliantly portrays the problem of meaning in the modern world --- and the way to deeper meaning! Unfortunately, many of Eliot's references are arcane, and not easy for the lay reader to pursue. For example, few modern readers happen to have a copy of Webster's play "White Devil" or excerpts from Shackleton's account of the Antarctic expedition readily available on their shelves. Hence, the virtue of this particular edition: in addition to Eliot's original poem and original notes, this book includes the relevant passages from every single work Eliot quotes in the "Wasteland", all translated into English. For the first time I have seen in print, this book allows the reader to understand this magnificent poem in light of the full scope of its allusions. A triumphant achievement!

Do I really need to say how important Eliot is? Simply put, this is the dividing line. Poetry has never been the same since. Beyond that, the Norton Critical edition does an excellent job assisting us by providing the reader with many of the sources this excellent poem was based on, as well as many responses to this poem in one neat and nifty book! Plus the poem is thrown in just for kicks. Buy the book! Love the book!

I found this edition by Penguin to be very useful for a casual reading. The notes on the poems, in particular "the Waste Land," are detailed enough to give the reader a perception of Eliot's vast literary knowledge and its effect on his poems. However, the notes are inadequate if your purpose is to deeply understand the background of Eliot's complex and difficult poetry. So if you are looking for deep insights, I would recommend the Norton Critical Edition. For the normal reader, this is satisfying and straightforward.

Simply put, THE WASTE LAND is one of the strangest, most complicated, and interesting poems ever written. Try reading an unannotated version of the poem and you will see why even TS Eliot scholars need a little help with some of the images and literary references Eliot uses. This NORTON CRITICAL EDITION of THE WASTE LAND is an essential book for any Eliot fan, new or old. It provides you with practically every single piece of literature, history, and music that inspired Eliot to write his manifesto of the Lost Generation. If you have any questions concerning THE WASTE LAND, this is the book you need...this is the book you want. Buy it and realize how well-read you are not.

It truly saddens me to see someone flaunt their idiocy like the previous reviewer ranting about how

writers cannot write about social ills; meanwhile, second rate philosophers turned literary Critics can whenever possible. Simply stated, the poem is one of the true benchmarks for twentieth century literature. It is rather difficult in that it is highly allusive, some allusions fall on the rather obscure side (Middleton, Weston) but mostly they are rather well known (Augustine, Dante, the Bible, Baudelaire, Wagner). The experience will prove to be as didactic as well as expressive due to all these allusions in the text. As far as the poem itself goes, it has a definite effect on you when you read it. I remember the first time I read the lines, "I think we are in rats' alley where the dead men lost their bones," and although I couldn't really understand what was going on just yet in the poem, that line as well as many other lines and images, had an affect on me. On the whole the emotional tone of the poem (not to do it injustice and say what it is about) is the spiritual alienation and degradation everyone felt after WWI. It's a quest of sorts, taken on by a persona of Eliot to find meaning amidst "the stony rubbish" that is the world. It sets the philosophy of Buddha and Augustine side by side as it does with the Rg Veda and the Bible in a collage of different voices and arresting images. A good guide though is imperative for undertaking this task and this edition is, to my knowledge, the best one out there. It gives many of the primary texts alluded to by Eliot in this poem as well as serving as a good introduction to the mountains of criticism that this poem has birthed. All in all, the book is a great buy for those who are interested in gaining a true appreciation and understanding of this poem and for twentieth century poetry which it influenced so much.

I study and write poetry for a living. I confess that I used to hate T.S. Eliot, because my inner conservative didn't like what I alleged as his rewriting the rules for poetic structure. Don't worry; I woke up, but I know many have not. This edition is wonderful--I've used Norton annotated version of this poem before in my teaching, but the background analysis and literary criticism is the crowning jewel of this text. The Wasteland is a poem that requires work; one cannot simply read it and understand--it is crucial to seek out the countless references within the text. And even with that in mind, the reader can only begin with what Eliot intended; the poem surpasses author's intention, and takes on a life of it's own. I am particularly grateful to the material on the Grail. The metaphor of King Arthur's pain begins with war, but is linked to the land--the myth allows for Arthur to heal, but Eliot does not hold out the same hope. This is another reason it is a post-modern masterpiece: it acknowledges the great poetry and mythology within history while creating another voice for our world. I also want to commend the editors for leaving out as much of the Derridian/Deconstruction/Lacanian criticism that mars any critique of this poem. On one hand, The Wasteland is perfect for the Derrida followers who claim that there is no text, as The Wasteland

plays with traditional forms of textuality. But that is as far as it goes. I am exceedingly grateful that this volume included critics who put literature first and recognize that a poem can go to many extremes in form and theme, but still remain a poem. Yes, Virginia, there is a text, just as there is a sign and a signifier. But let's not forget that language serves the written word and the artistic vision, not the other way around.

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