The Waste Land Study Guide

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot

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Introduction

Because of his wide-ranging contributions to poetry, criticism, prose, and drama, some critics consider Thomas Sterns Eliot one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. *The Waste Land* can arguably be cited as his most influential work. When Eliot published this complex poem in 1922—first in his own literary magazine *Criterion*, then a month later in wider circulation in the *Dial*—it set off a critical firestorm in the literary world. The work is commonly regarded as one of the seminal works of modernist literature. Indeed, when many critics saw the poem for the first time, it seemed too modern. In the place of a traditional work, with unified themes and a coherent structure, Eliot produced a poem that seemed to incorporate many unrelated, little-known references to history, religion, mythology, and other disciplines. He even wrote parts of the poem in foreign languages, such as Hindu. In fact the poem was so complex that Eliot felt the need to include extensive notes identifying the sources to which he was alluding, a highly unusual move for a poet, and a move that caused some critics to assert that Eliot was trying to be deliberately obscure or was playing a joke on them.

Yet, while the poem is obscure, critics have identified several sources that inspired its creation and which have helped determine its meaning. Many see the poem as a reflection of Eliot's disillusionment with the moral decay of post—World War I Europe. In the work, this sense of disillusionment manifests itself symbolically through a type of Holy Grail legend. Eliot cited two books from which he drew to create the poem's symbolism: Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) and Sir James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890). The 1922 version of *The Waste Land* was also significantly influenced by Eliot's first wife Vivien and by his friend Ezra Pound, who helped Eliot edit the original 800-line draft down to the published 433 lines. While *The Waste Land* is widely available today, perhaps one of the most valuable editions for students is the Norton Critical Edition, which was published by W. W. Norton in 2000. In addition to the poem, this edition also includes annotated notes from editors and from Eliot, a publication history, a chronology, a selected bibliography, and a collection of reprinted reviews from the 1920s to the end of the twentieth century.

An attempt to examine, line by line, the specific meaning of every reference and allusion in *The Waste Land* would certainly go beyond the intended scope of this entry. Instead, it is more helpful to examine the overall meaning of each of the five sections of the poem, highlighting some of the specific references as examples. But first a discussion of the poem's title *The Waste Land* is necessary. The title refers to a myth from *From Ritual to Romance*, in which Weston describes a kingdom where the genitals of the king, known as the Fisher King, have been wounded in some way. This injury, which affects the king's fertility, also mythically affects the kingdom itself. With its vital, regenerative power gone, the kingdom has dried up and turned into a waste land. In order for the land to be restored, a hero must complete several tasks, or trials. Weston notes that this ancient myth was the basis for various other quest stories from many cultures, including the Christian quest for the Holy Grail. Eliot says he drew heavily on

this myth for his poem, and critics have noted that many of the poem's references refer to this idea.

Author Biography

Eliot was born September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri. He was a bright and hardworking student, who experienced a classical, wide-ranging education. Eliot studied philosophy and French literature at Harvard. He also joined the staff of the university's literary journal, the *Harvard Advocate*, in which he first published parts of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." In 1909 he graduated from Harvard with a bachelor's degree in philosophy, and he finished his master's degree in philosophy a year later. Over the next six years, he pursued further graduate studies in philosophy at a number of institutions in the United States and Europe, including Harvard, the Paris Sorbonne, Marburg in Germany, and Merton College, Oxford, ultimately completing his dissertation in 1916.

During the period of his studies, he met two people who would prove to be influential to his writing. The first was fellow poet Ezra Pound, who became Eliot's friend, mentor, and editor. The second was Vivien Haigh-Wood, whom he met and married in 1915 while studying in England. He and Vivien settled in London the same year, but they experienced a troubled relationship from the start, due in a large part to Vivien's neurotic illnesses. The dark tone of Eliot's poetry during the 1910s and 1920s is often attributed to his marriage. In 1915 Eliot started teaching at a London boys' schools, High Wycombe Grammar School, and continued his teaching the next year at Highgate Junior School, also in London. In 1917 Eliot left teaching to work in the Colonial and Foreign Department at Lloyds Bank in London, a position he held until 1925. At the same time, he became assistant editor of the *Egoist* (1917—1919), in which he published *Prufrock, and Other Observations* (1917).

In 1921 the combined strain of his marriage, his bank job, and his writing and editing pursuits led Eliot to have a nervous breakdown. He recovered at a sanitorium in Switzerland, where in 1922 he completed his poem *The Waste Land*. Upon his return to London the same year, Eliot became the founding editor of the literary journal *Criterion*, at which he remained editor until 1939. At the suggestion of Pound, who also helped him in the endeavor, Eliot edited *The Waste Land* from about 800 lines to 433 before publishing it in late 1922, first in *Criterion*, then a month later in another literary journal, the *Dial*. The poem, which is largely credited with helping to launch the modern literature movement, shifted Eliot from a poet who was only moderately in the public consciousness to a poet who was alternately praised and vilified.

In 1925 Eliot left Lloyds to work as a literary editor at the publishing firm of Faber and Gwyer (later Faber & Faber). In 1927 he became a naturalized British subject and a member of the Anglican Church, at which point, his work began to change thematically, addressing more religious issues. During the 1932 to 1933 academic year, Eliot was invited to Harvard as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry. This physical separation from his wife, who stayed behind in London, ultimately led to their divorce.

During the 1930s Eliot began devoting much of his writing time to lectures and literary criticism, publishing such landmark works as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of*

Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England (1933) and *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (1934). Just as *The Waste Land* and Eliot's other works in that era helped to usher in the modernist period of literature, his critical work in the 1930s and 1940s is commonly acknowledged as a major catalyst for the rise of the New Criticism movement in England and the United States.

Also in the 1930s, Eliot wrote several plays. One of his first plays, *The Rock: A Pageant Play* (1934), was commissioned by the church and was overtly religious in its themes. His next play, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), was also commissioned by the church, and it is widely considered Eliot's most successful play.

Eliot wrote his last four major poetic works in the 1940s: *East Coker* (1940), *Burnt Norton* (1941), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), and *Little Gidding* (1942). Collectively these works were published as *The Four Quartets* (1943). In 1947 Eliot's life underwent another profound change, when his ex-wife died after having spent several years in an institution. Eliot met Valerie Fletcher, who became his secretary and eventually, in 1957, his wife. Unlike his previous marriage, Eliot was notably happy in this relationship.

In 1948 Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature and the English Order of Merit. These and many other awards, along with Eliot's general popularity as a dramatist, made the author a noted literary and public figure until his death and beyond. Eliot died January 4, 1965, in London, England, of emphysema and related complications.

Plot Summary

I. Burial of the Dead

The first section, as the section title indicates, is about death. The section begins with the words "April is the cruellest month," which is perhaps one of the most remarked upon and most important references in the poem. Those familiar with Chaucer's poem *The Canterbury Tales* will recognize that Eliot is taking Chaucer's introductory line from the prologue□which is optimistic about the month of April and the regenerative, life-giving season of spring□and turning it on its head. Just as Chaucer's line sets the tone for *The Canterbury Tales*, Eliot's dark words inform the reader that this is going to be a dark poem. Throughout the rest of the first section, as he will do with the other four sections, Eliot shifts among several disconnected thoughts, speeches, and images.

Collectively, the episodic scenes in lines 1 through 18 discuss the natural cycle of death, which is symbolized by the passing of the seasons. The first seven lines employ images of spring, such as "breeding / Lilacs," and "Dull roots with spring rain." In line 8, Eliot tells the reader "Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee." The time has shifted from spring to summer. And while the reference to Starnbergersee□a lake south of Munich, Germany□has been linked to various aspects of Eliot's past, to Eliot's readers at the time the poem was published, it would have stuck out for other reasons, given that World War I had fairly recently ended. During the war, Germany was one of the main opponents of the Allied forces, which included both the United States and England□Eliot's two homes. By including German references, which continue in the next several lines and culminate in a German phrase, Eliot is invoking an image of the war. Who are the dead that are being buried in this section? All the soldiers and other casualties who died during World War I.

The German phrase leads into a conversation from a sledding episode in the childhood of a girl named Marie. The season has changed again, to winter. Marie notes, "In the mountains, there you feel free," implying that when she is not in the mountains, on a sledding adventure, she does not feel free. In other words, Marie feels trapped, just as humanity feels trapped in its own waste land. In line 19 Eliot starts to give some visual cues about the waste land of modern society. "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?" the poet asks. In response, Eliot refers to a biblical passage, addressing the reader as "Son of man." The poet tells the reader that he or she "cannot say, or guess" what the roots of this waste land are, because the reader knows only "A heap of broken images" where "the dead tree gives no shelter." These and other images depict a barren, dead land. But the poet says in line 27, "I will show you something different." In lines 31 to 34 Eliot reproduces a song sung by a sailor in the beginning of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Eliot is inviting the reader to come on a journey, a tour of this modern waste land. The song□which asks why somebody is postponing a journey, when there is fresh wind blowing toward a homeland□indicates Eliot's desire to regenerate this barren land. In fact his use of the word "Hyacinths," which are symbolic of resurrection, underscores this idea.

In line 43 Eliot introduces the character of Madame Sosostris, a gifted mystic with a "wicked pack of cards," or tarot cards. She pulls the card of "the drowned Phoenician Sailor," another image of death and also a direct reference to a fertility god who, according to Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, was drowned at the end of summer. Again these images collectively illustrate the natural cycle of death. Following the Madame Sosostris passage, Eliot, beginning in line 60, introduces the "Unreal City, / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many." These lines suggest a similar description of the modern city by Baudelaire. The image of brown fog is dismal, as is the next line, which notes "I had not thought death had undone so many." Eliot here is describing a waking death. These people are alive in the physical sense, but dead in all others. It is a sad city, where "each man fixed his eyes before his feet."

In line 68 Eliot notes there is "a dead sound on the final stroke of nine," which refers to the start of the typical work day. In other words these people trudge along in a sort of living death, going to work, which has become an end in itself. Within this procession, however, the poet sees someone he knows, "Stetson," who was with the poet "in the ships at Mylae!" Mylae is a reference to an ancient battle from the First Punic War, which by extension evokes an image of death on the civilization scale. The poet asks his friend if the "corpse you planted last year in your garden" has "begun to sprout?" Here again Eliot is invoking the idea of resurrection, and of the natural cycle of death and life. First, when dead people decompose, their organic matter fertilizes the ground, which loops back to the first line of the section, in which April, "the cruellest month," is breeding flowers, which presumably are feeding off this decomposed flesh. But in a more specific way, this passage refers to Frazer's book, which details a primitive ritual whereby in April these primitive civilizations would plant a male corpse, or just the man's genitals, in order to ensure a bountiful harvest. This harvest, which can be interpreted symbolically as the rebirth of civilization, is potentially threatened by "the Dog," which has been interpreted as the lack of meaning in life.

Critics interpret the dog this way largely because of the final lines of the section, a quote from Baudelaire, which indict the reader for his or her part in creating the waste land by sucking all meaning and, thus life, out of society.

II. A Game of Chess

In the second section Eliot turns his attention from death to sex. The title of this section refers to a scene from Thomas Middleton's Elizabethan play *Women Beware Women*, in which the moves of a chess game between two people are linked onstage to the seduction played out by another pair. In the first lines of the section, Eliot creates a lush image of a wealthy woman, who sits in a chair "like a burnished throne." The scene also includes "standards wrought with fruited vines," a "sevenbranched candelabra," and "jewels." On the woman's table are "satin cases poured in rich profusion." Inside these cases are "strange synthetic perfumes," which "drowned the sense in odours." In other words aphrodisiacs (artificial substances used to create or enhance sexual desire). Since sex is linked to procreation, and thus fertility, the fact that aphrodisiacs are

needed is telling. In this room there is also a painting above the mantel that depicts "Philomel," a reference to a classical woman who was raped (indicated by the words "rudely forced") by "the barbarous king" Tereus. Eliot notes that "other withered stumps of time," or figures from history, are depicted on the walls. Then he launches into several disparate passages, the first of which is a hysterical plea by the woman in the room to her lover. "My nerves are bad to-night," she says, and "Stay with / me." She also asks the man what he is thinking, and repeats the word "think" several times in both question and statement form, ending with a one-word sentence, "Think." Eliot is trying to get his readers to think about the modern waste land, which is clearly indicated by his multiple emphases of the word "think" and the fact that he sets it off on its own.

Eliot repeats this pattern in another snatch of dialogue, in which he emphasizes the words "noise," "wind," and "nothing." He sets off "nothing" in its own one-word sentence like "think," although as a question: "Nothing?" The wind and the noise evoke an image of activity and life, but the final "nothing" again underscores the lack of meaning that Eliot is trying to convey. Following this passage, Eliot includes a passage that talks about remembering the "pearls that were his eyes," which refers back to the dead Phoenician sailor from the first section. Finally, in the last passage that refers to the wealthy woman and her lover, Eliot has them talking to each other, asking what they should do. Ultimately they decide "we shall play a game of chess, / Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon / the door." While this game of chess refers back to the sexual game from Middleton's play, the rich couple literally play a game of chess, since their relationship is sterile.

The next passage switches relationships, from the idle rich to the dirt poor. This scene, which continues until the end of the section, concerns "Lil" and her husband "Albert," who has just been "demobbed," or released from the military. The line "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" is a reference to the last call at the pub, or bar, and indicates that they must hurry if they wish to drink. The poem talks about Albert, who has "been in the army four years" and who "wants a good time." In other words he wants to have sex with his wife. He has also given his wife money to buy "new teeth," because he cannot stand looking at her bad teeth. And, as Lil is warned, if she does not give Albert a good time, "there's others will." The line "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" is used again, reinforcing the importance of alcohol in the relationship. The woman's appearance is described as "antique," even though she is only thirty-one, and she attributes this to "them pills I took, to bring it off," a reference to abortion. As the next line notes of her previous children, "She's had five already," a testament to Albert's immense sexual appetite, which is discussed further when Eliot says Albert will not leave the woman alone. But Lil is asked, "What you get married for if you don't want children?" This line refers back to the fertility thread in the poem and the fact that modern sex is not always about procreation. The section ends with several more references to "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME," showing that drinking has taken on more importance in the relationship than anything else. So, as with the first section, Eliot is showing the loss of meaning□in this case during sex, and through images of loveless sex□by showing that this is true for both the rich and the poor. Just as the king from Weston's book is wounded sexually, so is all of human society. It has lost the vitality and procreative focus of sex, and instead sex is a meaningless□and in the case of abortion, fruitless□act.

III. The Fire Sermon

The third section also addresses sex. The title refers to one of Buddha's teachings about desire and the need to deny one's lustful tendencies. The images with which Eliot chooses to open this section underscore this idea of lovelessness. For example, "the last fingers of leaf / Clutch and sink into the wet bank." The dying vegetation is a sign of the death of fertility, as is the brown land and "The nymphs" who have departed. Also the fact that the river bears no litter, such as "empty bottles," "Silk handkerchiefs," or "cigarette ends," all of which are a "testimony of summer nights"□in other words, signs of a raucous party□the image of lifelessness is enhanced. There is no youthful passion anymore. This feeling of despair is noted further through such phrases as "A rat crept softly through the vegetation / Dragging its slimy belly on the bank." From here on, Eliot includes images and references to sex and death, including talking about "my father's death" and "White bodies naked on the low damp ground."

After a brief, four-line stanza in which he once again invokes the rape of Philomel, Eliot returns to the "Unreal City," the modern city, where he is propositioned by a "Mr. Eugenides" to have "luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel / Followed by a weekend at the Metropole." These two locations, famous for clandestine meetings, indicate that Mr. Eugenides wants to have a homosexual affair with the poet.

Following this interlude, Eliot introduces the character of Tiresias, a mythological, prophetic figure who was turned into a hermaphrodite□indicated by the phrases "throbbing between two / lives" and "Old man with wrinkled female breasts." The fact that Tiresias is a prophet is important, since Tiresias can see the true nature of things. In Eliot's notes he calls this character the most important one in the poem. Tiresias witnesses a sex scene between a "typist home at teatime" and "A small house agent's clerk." The woman prepares food until the man arrives, and they eat. After the meal, "she is bored and tired," but he nevertheless starts to "engage her in caresses." Although these advances are "undesired," the woman makes no attempt to stop the man, so "he assaults at once," oblivious to the woman's "indifference." After the man leaves, "She turns and looks a moment in the glass / Hardly aware of her departed lover," her only thought being, "Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."

At this point Eliot includes a long montage of scenes from London interspersed with many literary references to failed relationships through the ages. The indented passage that begins with the line "The river sweats" invokes a Wagner poem that describes the downfall of ancient gods. The section concludes with a quotation from St. Augustine's *Confessions*: "O Lord Thou pluckest me out / O Lord Thou pluckest." St. Augustine was a noted lecher in the days before he embraced religion. This passage is placed directly before the last line of the section, "burning." This one-word line refers to the Buddhist sermon that gives the section its title, and which encourages men to douse the fires of lust.

IV. Death by Water

The brief fourth section, the shortest of the five, starts off with a reference to "Phlebas the Phoenician," the dead sailor who was first mentioned in the second section. Eliot is again focusing on death, and in this section he gives a thorough description of the sailor's body being torn apart by the sea: "A current under sea / Picked his bones in whispers." The section ends with an address and warning to the reader to "Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall / as you."

V. What the Thunder Said

The poem's final section builds on the images of death and sterility, but attempts to offer hope that these can be overcome, as they are overcome in the waste land of Weston's book. The title of the section is derived from an Indian fertility legend in which all beings□men, gods, and devils□find the power to restore life to the waste land by listening to what the thunder says. The section begins with a long discussion of Jesus Christ, "He who was living is now dead," which leads into scenes from Christ's journey to Emmaus following his resurrection, where he joins two disciples that do not recognize him: "Who is the third who walks always beside you?" one disciple asks the other.

Following the images of Christ, Eliot alludes to scenes of battle, "hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth." The dry earth refers back to the waste land. Eliot includes more images of war and destruction, noting the "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air / Falling towers." The image is one of a castle being destroyed, and Eliot follows this image with a list of historical cities that were destroyed or that fell into ruin and decay: "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London." By including London at the end of this list, Eliot implies that the modern city is also falling into decay, a moral decay. From this description Eliot moves on to discuss "the empty chapel," a reference to the Chapel Perilous, which Weston's book describes as the final stage on the hero's quest to restore life to the waste land. At this point, "a damp gust" brings rain to the dry and cracked land, and then the thunder speaks, "DA." According to the Indian legend, men, gods, and devils ask the thunder the same question, and each is given a different answer□give, sympathize, and control, respectively. After each response, Eliot includes several lines that respond to the thunder on these topics. Critics disagree on whether these responses are meant to be pessimistic or optimistic, but many feel they are Eliot's solution to restore life to the modern waste land.

In the last stanza of the poem, the Fisher King from Weston's book speaks: "I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?" The king wonders what the solution is, how he can bring life back to the waste land again. Eliot follows this passage with a line from an English nursery rhyme: "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling / down." These words take the work from the mythological world back to Europe, which also in Eliot's view is a waste land that is falling down. The poem ends with several phrases from different languages,

which give a mixed message. Some discuss rebirth, while others discuss violence and death. The final line consists of the same words repeated three times, "Shantih shantih shantih," which Eliot and others have noted can loosely be translated as the peace which passes understanding, and which seems to be Eliot's final pronouncement□only through peace will humanity ultimately be able to restore its vitality.

Themes

Disillusionment

There are only two master themes in the poem, which in turn, generate many sub-themes. The first of these major themes is disillusionment, which Eliot indicates is the current state of affairs in modern society, especially the post—World War I Europe in which he lived. He illustrates this pervasive sense of disillusionment in several ways, the most notable of which are references to fertility rituals and joyless sex. First Eliot draws on the types of fertility legends discussed in Weston's and Frazer's books. For example, in the beginning of the first section, he uses an extended image of a decomposing corpse lying underground in winter, which "kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow, feeding / a little life with dried tubers." A tuber is the fleshy part of an underground stem, but here it is human flesh, feeding new plants. Human society is so disillusioned that it has undergone a moral death, an idea on which Eliot plays throughout the poem. In fact, in the second stanza Eliot offers a contrast to the first stanza, which at least offers "a little life." In the second stanza, however, the land is all "stony rubbish," where roots and branches do not grow, and "the dead tree gives no shelter," and there is "no sound of water."

Eliot also expresses disillusionment through episodes of joyless sex, such as through the example of Philomel, upon whom sex is forced. In fact Eliot employs a litany of joyless sexual situations, including the rich couple who would rather play chess than have sex, and the poor couple for whom sex becomes a way only of pleasing the husband, and even then, only if the wife has "a nice set" of teeth. There is no love in any of these unions, and in the case of the poor couple, the wife has started having abortions because she "nearly died of young George," one of her children. This purposeful killing of new life is another way Eliot shows how people are disillusioned regarding sex and how procreative power in many cases is lost. But perhaps the most prominent example of meaningless sex comes during the scene between the typist and the clerk. Following this joyless sexual encounter, in which the man satisfies his lust, he leaves the woman, who is "Hardly aware of her departed lover." Her indifference shows in her simple actions: "She smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone." Her hand, like the sex itself, is "automatic," without emotion, merely a routine act.

Restoration

The other major theme, restoration or rebirth, is the opposite of disillusionment. If modern society can somehow overcome its disillusionment, it will be restored back to a state in which life once again has meaning. This refers to the Fisher King myth from Weston's book. Yet throughout the poem, when this idea is referred to, it is generally handled in more subtle ways than the references that underscore the idea of disillusionment. For example, in the first section, "the hyacinth girl" speaks. Hyacinths

are often associated with the idea of resurrection, which in the context of this poem is looked at as the goal. But as soon as he introduces the idea, Eliot counters it with an image of disillusionment: "I could not / Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing." The idea of restoration, in the form of resurrection, is not explored in detail until the final section, with the introduction of Christ. The final section begins with talk of Christ's betrayal and death and of "The shouting and the crying" of Christ's followers at his death. With Christ's death, "We who were living are now dying." Lost without their savior, Christians feel morally dead. But all hope is not lost, for Christ is resurrected, and joins his disciples on the road. Unfortunately, just as with the blindness in the hyacinth girl passage, Christ's disciples do not recognize him. Ultimately, through his use of complicated and conflicting foreign quotations, Eliot ends his poem on this same noncommittal note. Restoration is possible, but so is disillusionment.

Style

The most important aspect of the work, and the one that informs all others, is the literary movement to which it belongs, modernism, which this work helped define. Modernism is the broad term used to describe post—World War I literature that employs techniques Eliot uses in *The Waste Land*. These techniques, and all the techniques associated with modernist literature, expressed a rebellion against traditional literature, which was noted by its distinct forms and rules. For example, in traditional poetry, poets often sought uniformity in stanza length and meter. Those poets who could work within these sometimes challenging rules and still express themselves in a unique or moving way were considered good poets. But particularly after World War I, as literature and other art shifted from a traditional, romantic, or idealized, approach to an approach that emphasized gritty realism full of discontinuity and despair, artists began to experiment with nontraditional forms, ideas, and styles.

Disillusioned by the war, artists and writers such as Eliot rebelled against the logical, traditional thinking□which they believed helped start and escalate the war. Eliot's poem, in all of its complexity and obscurity, was like a catalog of modernist poetic techniques, including free verse, odd stanza lengths, snatches of dialogue, quotations from other works, phrases from other languages, indistinct transitions, conflicting ideologies such as Christianity and paganism, frank discussions and depictions of sexuality□and the list goes on. Each of these devices ran counter to the traditional. Collectively, as many critics have noted, the staggering modernistic effect of this one work set off a bomb in the public consciousness.

Historical Context

World War I

While Eliot published *The Waste Land* in 1922, it was widely acknowledged as reflecting the disillusionment in Europe following World War I. This global war started from a regional tragedy. On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, made a fateful trip to Sarajevo, capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina—two provinces under his family's control—where he and his wife were assassinated. These murders reflected a regional tension among some residents of the two provinces, which wished to become part of Serbia once again. Serbia, which also wished to reclaim Bosnia and Herzegovina, helped stage the assassinations. When this fact was realized by Austria-Hungary, the leaders of this nation state declared war on Serbia on July 28, exactly one month after the assassination. In times past this might have been a localized battle between two countries. But due to an extensive system of pre-existing alliances, most other European countries were pulled into the war, which escalated the conflict. Eventually the list of combatants grew to include the United States and parts of Asia, all of which aligned themselves with either the pro-Serbian "Allies" or with the "Central" powers, who supported Austria-Hungary.

When fighting began in August 1914, each side believed its modern weapon technologies such as hand grenades, tanks, long-range artillery, and poison gas would lead to a quick and efficient war, with minimal casualties. The reverse was true, and the war raged on for four years along two main lines, or fronts, of fighting. The Western Front, which ran through France, experienced some of the bloodiest battles in the war. The front was defined by an extensive trench that ran along its entire length, on both sides. Allied and Central soldiers occupied their respective trenches—which were often close to each other—and with a series of battles, each side attempted to drive their opponent out of his trench and force the line back with a flurry of grenades and machine-gun fire. The results were horrific. For years the battles in the trenches held at a virtual stalemate, and the body count rose as each side added reinforcements to maintain the trenches.

The Lost Generation

By the time the war officially ended in 1918, an estimated eight million people were dead and countless more wounded. For the generation of men and women who came of age during or shortly after the war, life seemed bleak, and many of these young men and women became disillusioned or hopeless about their own futures and the sanctity of humanity. While this entire group was coined the Lost Generation, most critics today associate this term with a group of American writers who translated their disillusionment into a social protest, and in the process produced some of the greatest works of twentieth century literature. Many members of this group, which included Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, became expatriates living in Europe. Paris became

a particularly noted hot spot where several budding authors benefited from the influence of more experienced authors such as Eliot and Ezra Pound.

Critical Overview

From the time it was published until the twenty-first century, *The Waste Land* has inspired both passion and hatred. Jewel Spears Brooker sums it up best in her entry on Eliot for *Dictionary of Literary Biography*: "*The Waste Land* was taken by some critics as a tasteless joke, by others as a masterpiece expressing the disillusionment of a generation. As far as Eliot was concerned, it was neither." As many critics have cited, Eliot viewed the poem as a catharsis, a way to release much of his frustration and stress that had ultimately led to his nervous breakdown.

Yet, while this is what Eliot said, his decision to include extensive notes with the poem, which identified the source of many of the poem's obscure or confusing references, seemed to ascribe great meaning to the poem. The author notes also invited negative criticism. Many critics, like Conrad Aiken, felt that Eliot's notes□and indeed, many of the references in the poem itself□were unnecessary. As Aiken notes in his now-famous 1922 review in *New Republic*: "Mr. Eliot's sense of the literary past has become so overmastering as almost to constitute the motive of the work." Aiken sees this approach as involving "a kind of idolatry of literature with which it is a little difficult to sympathize." As testament to the complexity and controversy of the poem, however, Aiken's overall review is positive. He notes that Eliot's focus on all of these references "has colored an important and brilliant piece of work." Yet, Aiken says that, when these "reservations have all been made, we accept *The Waste Land* as one of the most moving and original poems of our time."

In fact, the originality of the poem is key to understanding the divided reactions that it received. The poem is largely credited with helping launch the modern literature movement, a fact that cannot be understated and about which many critics speak in grand terms. For example, Nancy Duvall Hargrove says in her entry on Eliot for *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, the poem's "originality shook the foundations of the literary world." Likewise, in *America* James S. Torrens says, "A bombshell burst upon the world of modern poetry 75 years ago." And in his *New York Review of Books* review of the 1971 restored and expanded version of *The Waste Land*, Richard Ellmann says of Eliot, "Lloyd's most famous bank clerk revalued the poetic currency" with the initial publication of his poem.

Yet the aspects of the poem that make it "modern" also have led to the greatest amount of confusion and conflict among critics. As Helen Vendler says in her *Time* article on Eliot, the poem's many references focus on the past, but it is "a past so disarranged□with the Buddha next to St. Augustine, and Ovid next to Wagner□that a reader felt thrust into a time machine of disorienting simultaneity." This focus on the past seemed to be intentional, as John Xiros Cooper discusses in his book *T. S. Eliot and the Politics of Voice: The Argument of 'The Waste Land.'* Cooper says

Unlike the older generation, who saw in events like the Great War the passing of a golden age, Eliot saw only that the golden age was itself a heap of absurd sociopolitical

axioms and perverse misreadings of the cultural past that had proved in the last instance to be made of the meanest alloy.

In other words, Eliot was rebelling against the tendency to glorify the past. He wanted to demonstrate that the past was gritty and real, especially the recent past events of World War I. By demythologizing the events of the past, Eliot forces his readers to focus on the grim realities of his postwar present.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses the structure of the poem.

When Eliot first published *The Waste Land* in 1922, it caused a colossal stir in the literary world and in society in general. Eliot's use of nontraditional techniques, his gritty imagery, and the sheer incoherence of the work as a whole mystified, enraged, and enthralled readers and critics. As Helen Vendler notes in her 1998 *Time* article, "Modern poetry had struck its note." In fact, readers had never seen anything quite this modern before. The poem seemed to have a little bit of everything, and was much meatier than the other literary offerings of the time, and not just in Europe. Vendler notes that "Whether or not Eliot had written down the Armageddon of the West, he had showed up the lightweight poetry dominating American magazines." But even though every reference in Eliot's apocalyptic opus has since been documented, and one can begin to draw parallels among the poem's many pieces, most critics agree that these pieces will probably never be assembled into one cohesive whole. The poem's structure defies that type of interpretation.

When one discusses the structure of a modernist work like *The Waste Land*, it helps to break it down into two types, structure on a large scale and structure on a small scale. On the large scale, the poem has a clear structure. It is organized into five sections, each of which is numbered and labeled, almost in the style of a traditional poem. Yet, in her entry on Eliot for *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Jewel Spears Brooker says that these five sections, "by traditional standards, seem unrelated." The key word is "traditional." Part of the joy involved in modernist writing was in not playing by the traditional rules. Still, Eliot did not choose his structure on a whim. In fact, when viewed from a modernist perspective, one that emphasizes the rough sense of the poem, rather than its specific, objectifiable meaning, one can offer up an interpretation for Eliot's choice of large-scale structure.

The first section is "The Burial of the Dead" deals mainly with issues of death. The second section "A Game of Chess" deals mainly with issues of sex. The third section "The Fire Sermon" also deals with sexual issues. The fourth section "Death by Water" deals with issues of death. The final section, "What the Thunder Said," is mainly about resurrection or restoration, which may or may not be attainable. So, if one were to write out these general themes in order, it would go: death, sex, sex, death, possible restoration. One of the first noticeable aspects about this order is that the first four sections are symmetrical. The two sections on death bookend the two sections on sex, almost as if the second two sections are a mirror image of the first two. When a poet deliberately juxtaposes thematic material like this, it usually means something. This is especially true when a modernist poet imposes a distinguishable form on his or her poetry. This ordering of themes becomes even more suspicious when one looks at the length of the fourth section. When compared to the others, this is almost not a section at all. If Eliot had left it out, however, it would have destroyed his symmetry.

So what does this mean? Why is Eliot interested in this symmetry? To answer this question, it is first necessary to examine the small-scale structural techniques that Eliot uses in the poem. Again, if traditional analysis techniques were used, this reader would examine the poem line by line and stanza by stanza, searching for the connections among them. As James S. Torrens notes in his 1997 article on the poem in *America*: "How many undergraduates since 1922 have sweated their way through this labyrinth and come out dazzled, or completely dazed." The fact is, applying traditional analysis to the poem is a fruitless effort, for the poem exists not in the logical world, but in a world of indefinite reality, which disorients the reader.

But from Eliot's point of view, the reader needs to be disoriented. Society has become too stale and exists in a state of living death, where crowds of these walking dead file off to work, exhaling "Sighs, short and infrequent." Even the sighs of despair and disillusionment are "infrequent," because this society is lost and does not even have the energy to sigh. Eliot is attempting to shake up society and get people to, as he notes during the second section, through the mouthpiece of the rich woman: "Think." To do this, to shake up people and force them to think about the current state of society, Eliot structures his poem in episodes. On the small scale, these episodes help him hook readers, even as he disorients them. Within each section, Eliot divides the narrative into episodes that invoke aspects of the past, the present, and in many cases both. Time and place shift with little or no transition, like the clicks of a camera shutter. And as the poem progresses, Eliot clicks his poetic shutter rapidly, populating his bizarre landscape, his waste land, with a litany of historical and mythological figures. In this surreal, constantly changing setting, Vendler notes that Buddha is juxtaposed "with St. Augustine, and Ovid next to Wagner," illogical placements that defy traditional modes of thought.

This leads back to the reason behind Eliot's conscious choice to include a symmetrical large-scale structure. In the long scope of human history and experience, Buddha and Augustine are linked, as are Ovid and Wagner and the countless other seemingly contradictory pairings in the poem. By choosing Weston's myth of the Fisher King□a seminal myth that is thought to have ultimately influenced many religious stories, including the Christian quest for the Holy Grail□Eliot is indicating that they are one and the same, mirror images of each other. Likewise, Eliot's modern society and the other past societies refered to in the poem are also mirror images of each other, which is why he juxtaposes "Jerusalem" with "London," for example, and ultimately, why he chooses to make the first four sections reflect this mirror image concept.

However, the final section does not fit this symmetry, which makes sense too. This final section is also the most ambiguous. The first four are clearly about either death or sex. The fourth is about restoration, but it leaves the question of possible restoration open-ended, by providing mixed commentary at the end in the foreign phrases. Eliot offers some insight into this with the line directly before these foreign phrases: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." Some critics say that this statement is Eliot's introduction to the foreign phrases themselves, which are just fragments of thoughts. Others say that this is Eliot's commentary on the fragmentary nature of the entire poem itself. The latter interpretation seems to make more sense.

In his 1923 review of the poem for *New Republic*, Conrad Aiken sees the fragmentary, incoherent nature of the poem as its greatest strength and says that the work must be taken as

A brilliant and kaleidoscopic confusion; as a series of sharp, discrete, slightly related perceptions and feelings, dramatically and lyrically presented, and violently juxtaposed, (for effect of dissonance) so as to give us an impression of an intensely modern, intensely literary consciousness which perceives itself to be not a unit but a chance correlation or conglomerate of mutually discolorative fragments.

In other words, while readers familiar with traditional, neatly ordered poetry might look for the poet to tell them what they need to know, Eliot very shrewdly conceals his true thoughts behind his fragmentary structure, which ultimately reflects the chaos of the poet's modern, disillusioned society, even as its links it to humanity's shared past through its use of mirror image. Like the mythical quest hero who must undergo trials and assemble information to earn restoration, Eliot's readers must review the various, fragmentary pieces of the poem and pull from it the ideas that make the most sense to them. The important thing, as Eliot indicates, is to be engaged in this process in the first place. Because when people wake up from their moral stupor and start thinking about the current state of society, then maybe they will also be motivated to work toward improving it.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "The Waste Land," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Adaptations

Eliot's *The Waste Land* and several other works were adapted as an unabridged audiobook in 2000, featuring narration by the author. *T. S. Eliot Reads: The Waste Land, Four Quartets, and Other Poems* is available from HarperAudio.

Topics for Further Study

Find a painting, movie, or other visual artwork you think could serve as a companion piece to the poem. Explain why you think this pairing makes sense.

Research what life was like for soldiers during World War I. Imagine that you are a soldier in the trenches along the Western Front. Write a journal entry that describes your typical day.

Imagine that through time travel Eliot is able to visit your town for one day and that you have been assigned to give the poet a tour. Based on what you know of Eliot and what you know about your own society, write a story that describes Eliot's reactions to modern life.

Read another work by a different author who became disillusioned by World War I. Compare this work to Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Compare and Contrast

1920s: In the aftermath of World War I, which introduced modern weapons and the psychological horrors of trench warfare, some people in the United States and Europe become shocked and disillusioned and turn away from religion.

Today: In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C, on September 11, 2001□which introduced commercial airliners as a new type of airborne explosive□some people turn to religion to cope with the horror and disbelief.

1920s: Although major military operations in World War I ended in 1918, the United States and the world continue to deal with the physical, financial, and psychological costs of the war. The U.S. Congress does not declare World War I officially over until July 2, 1921.

Today: Although U.S. President George W. Bush declares major military operations in Iraq over on May 1, 2003, the United States and the world deal with the physical, financial, and psychological costs of ongoing battles against terrorists and other insurgents in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other areas of the Middle East.

1920s: Women embracing personal liberation, known as "flappers" in Britain and the United States, engage in many previously scorned activities, such as drinking and smoking in public, wearing provocative clothing, participating in wild dancing, and having promiscuous sex. Social critics become concerned about the effect on the family of this behavior along with the general relaxing of social morals.

Today: Critics become concerned about the social and psychological effects of the rise in teenage sex activity. In addition, incidents of school homicide, such as the massacre at Columbine High School, spark a national debate about the safety of America's children, as well as what parents' roles should be in dealing with these issues.

What Do I Read Next?

Many critics highlight the fact that Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* while he was suffering a nervous breakdown. Another group of post—World War I writers disillusioned by the war, the surrealists, attempted to create literary works while their minds were in alternative states, a condition often reached by deliberate attempts to affect their consciousness, such as through hypnosis. *The Magnetic Fields* (1920), a series of prose poems by French poets André Breton and Phillipe Soupault, was created during one of these mental experiments, a marathon project that lasted eight days.

Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," first published in the magazine *Poetry* (1915) and later collected in *Prufrock, and Other Observations* (1917), is considered one of Eliot's most important works. Like *The Waste Land*, the poem mixes classical references with other modern images. The poem details the ramblings of the title character, a self-doubting man who is pessimistic about his future and the future of society.

In 1971, Eliot's estate authorized the release of a facsimile edition of the poet's original 800-line version of the poem, entitled, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile of the Original Drafts, Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. As the title implies, the book includes the original revision notes from Pound, but it also includes notes from Eliot's first wife and Eliot himself. This landmark edition, which includes an introduction by Eliot's widow, his second wife Valerie Eliot, gave critics and readers insight into the process used to create the 1922 version.

In his original notes to *The Waste Land*, Eliot states that he was inspired by Sir James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, which Frazer released in two volumes in 1890, then revised into a one-volume edition in 1922. Although popular in its day, this book, which attempts to explore the origins of magic and religion and their relevance to his modern world, came under critical fire in later years.

Ernest Hemingway is probably the best known of the Lost Generation group of American writers. Like *The Waste Land*, Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) explores the post—World War I sense of disillusionment. In the novel, the protagonist, Jake Barnes, a World War I veteran, suffers from physical and psychological war wounds that greatly affect his life and view of the world.

While Ezra Pound is considered one the twentieth century's great writers, he never had a wide reading audience, in part because he spent much of his time helping nurture the fledgling writing careers of Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Robert Frost, and others. Yet Pound did produce one series of works, his *Cantos*, published in various pieces from 1917 to 1968 (for a total of 117 sections), which some consider a masterpiece. Like Eliot's *The Waste Land*, however, this ambitious work relies on chaotic, disparate techniques that turned off some critics and readers.

In his notes on *The Waste Land*, Eliot also cites the influence of Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), a book that explores the Grail legend of King Arthur and its relation to the recorded myths of ancient mystery cults and their fertility rites.

Further Study

Bloom, Harold, ed., *T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land (Modern Critical Interpretations)*, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.

Bloom collects criticism on *The Waste Land* from the 1950s to the 1980s, some of which was published here for the first time. In addition, the book includes an introduction by Bloom, a chronology, and a bibliography.

Conrad, Winston Stuart, *Hemingway's France: Images of the Lost Generation*, Woodford Publishing, 2000.

While this photo-essay book focuses on Hemingway's life, by extension it also encompasses many of the influential figures from the Lost Generation, including Eliot. Conrad's modern-day color photographs of France are juxtaposed against vintage black-and-white photos of the background and various writers and artists who lived and worked in France after World War I.

Fitch, Noel Riley, *Sylvia Beach and the Lost Generation: A History of Literary Paris in the Twenties and Thirties*, W. W. Norton, 1983.

The influence of Sylvia Beach and her Paris bookshop on the writers of the Lost Generation is well known. Fitch's history draws from the Beach family papers to chronicle her experiences with these authors, including Eliot.

Keegan, John, *The First World War*, Knopf, 1999.

While many books have been written about World War I, Keegan's is widely acknowledged as one of the most comprehensive, accurate, and non-biased versions. Keegan, a noted historian, draws on original records to create a narrative that guides readers through the complex causes and events of the war.

Moody, A. David, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Moody's book offers a comprehensive overview of Eliot's life and work. Contributors examine everything from Eliot's philosophical background to his impact on twentieth-century poetry, offering both critical and biographical insights in the process. The book includes a chapter on *The Waste Land*, a chronology, and a list of suggested further readings.

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Torrens, James S., "T. S. Eliot: 75 Years of 'The Waste Land,'" in *America*, Vol. 177, October 25, 1997, pp. 24—27.

Vendler, Helen, "T. S. Eliot," in *Time*, Vol. 151, No. 22, June 8, 1998, p. 108.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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