

## ***Dare Ye Enter “The Waste Land” of Your Own Imagination?***

### **The Poem**

What would “The Waste Land” look like if written today—by you? Would it even be a “waste land” poem or something else? This final project of the semester asks you to try your hand at the Eliotic imagination by choosing one section of “The Waste Land” as your model, imitating Eliot’s poetics, and writing your own contemporary version.

**Choose a subject, theme, or motif** in the poem that you would like to explore further from our point of view in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Some thematic questions to consider:** What does a recurring theme add up to by the end of the poem? Does it suggest a way out of the waste land, or does it suggest the opposite? What do you see in our culture that suggests Eliot is right (or wrong) about the waste land? Does it accurately portray us and our cultural inheritance—for example, our beliefs, our morality, our jobs, our art, our everyday lives—here and now in 2011? How will you respond to Eliot with your own waste land poem?

**Other questions to consider:** What themes or motifs does Eliot explore? What theme or motif would you like to explore (write about)? What kinds of imagery does he employ to convey that theme? What kinds of imagery would you like to try out? And remember that visual is only one kind of imagery; Eliot relies on all the other senses, most especially hearing. When reading the passage aloud, can you hear a recurring rhythm or other auditory echoes that you would like to try? Can you describe the speaker of Eliot’s lines? How would you describe your speaker?

And remember chapter 8 on sound is very important, especially the “Writing Effectively” section that quotes none other than Eliot himself on pages 160-161.

A sense of sound is crucial not only to your success on the final project but your survival in the class.

Do not hesitate to investigate all sorts of possibilities for applying Eliot’s vision of the waste land, published in 1922, to your vision in 2011. This is your opportunity to show how great work (Great? Or just good? Maybe mediocre? What do you think?) communicates across time and how you too can transcend time through a rich, textured and genuine “reading” of this poem by writing your own.

### **The Rationale**

Your poem is to be accompanied by a well-organized, formal, three to four-page essay explaining 1) the theme you choose, 2) the poetic devices you use, and 3) and the way those two work together. Finally, the rationale should clearly explain 4) your poem as a response to Eliot (see thematic questions above).

Final note: While the length requirement for the rationale is easy to determine, it is not so easy to determine for the poem. Let’s say it must be a reasonably substantial and substantive length—no haiku of course, but, on the other hand, you are not required to write 400 lines either. See me if you have a concern about the length of your poem.