

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

NEWS & NOTES

Number 3

Fall 1987

Published by the T.S. Eliot Society (incorporated in the State of Missouri as a literary non-profit organization), 5007 Waterman Boulevard, Saint Louis, Missouri 63108

WHAT THE 1987 MEETING BROUGHT OUT

Last spring this newsletter prophesied record attendance for the Society's 1987 meeting; and lo, the prophecy came true. What nobody could have foretold was that the program in St. Louis this year would hang together so well, when no one had dictated a theme for all the participants to address. On the contrary the Memorial Lecturer, James Olney, chose his own topic and it turned out to be "Memory and Imagination in T.S. Eliot's Reconstruction of the Past." And Russell Murphy, also without any foreknowledge that memory (as Jewel Spears Brooker points out below) figured largely in all the talks, made the honoring of traditional values the main point of his talk—what but the due application of memory? And Allen J. Koppenhaver brought before his audience a sequence of vivid pictorial glimpses, in a slide talk, of Eliot's memories of place. And finally, on Sunday morning, Grover Smith and Earl K. Holt III, without concerted intention, talked respectively about a play (*The Family Reunion*) that makes a correct understanding of the past a prerequisite for right action in the future, and about a passage in *Four Quartets* ("We shall not cease from exploration") that makes right action in the future a return to the truth of the past. What extraordinary coincidences!

Not at all. For memory (not exactly to coin a phrase) is the name of the T.S. Eliot game. Indeed one might almost legislate that if a writer or speaker is to interpret Eliot properly, the element of memory must enter into the interpretation. Or that if anyone is to witness as Eliot witnessed, and not as the philistines, it must be with the eyes of memory, which do not becloud the past with smart ideologies, false even for the present, or misapprehend the present with notions that the past has shown to be absurd. We are most familiar with the imperatives of memory in the form of that warning phrased by Eliot's teacher Santayana: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." But from Eliot himself we derive something else as well, the fortifying power of memory when it joins us into communion with the eloquent dead, to whom wonderfully our lives give new life.

The Centenary meeting of the Society in 1988, though it will articulate a broader subject-matter than the

meeting of 1987, can hardly hold greater cogency. But make no mistake: it will be good, for we can maintain the standard we have already set. —*Editor*

"THE COCKTAIL PARTY": A REVIEW

T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* was performed on the poet's birthday night, September 26, by the Magic Circle Ensemble of Minneapolis under the direction of its founder and artistic director, William Randall Beard. Mr. Beard, who thinks Eliot's poetry at times impedes the drama, cut the play by twenty minutes, principally from the third act, without violating the spiritual and dramatic integrity of the work.

Describing his interpretation of *The Cocktail Party* as "unabashedly Christian," Mr. Beard sees the "Guardians" (Julia, Alex, and Reilly) as a kind of "dotty Trinity," hovering, steering, cajoling the four other principals (Celia, Lavinia, Edward, and Peter) into their respective salvations. The first act establishes this pattern in the stage direction. The Guardians remain stationary while the characters in need of salvation move about in nervous agitation. As the action moves forward, the dynamic characters change costume, while the static maintain their original dress as a badge of office: Julia in her basic black with red fox shoulderpiece looks the Mayfair socialite; Alex in his impeccable grey pinstripe, the sophisticated diplomat; Reilly in his respectable beige vested suit adorned with a large watch chain, the eminent psychiatrist.

The entire production was executed with care and precision, and what could only be called loving attention to detail. This young company, founded two years ago, has a grasp of T.S. Eliot as well as Old Possum, and made a charming blend of the sublime and the ridiculous in this Mayfair comedy.

The Magic Circle Ensemble performed in St. Louis on tour from a four week engagement at the renowned Children's Theater in Minneapolis (September 18-October 11). The company has already started work on their performance of *The Elder Statesman* for their return engagement at The T.S. Eliot Centenary in the poet's native city, September 1988.

ANN P. BRADY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS CONVENES

At its September 27 session the Board of Directors learned that the membership drive early this year had led not only to increased enrollment, according to Mr. Holt, but to a notable rise in attendance as recorded by Dr. Hargrove during the annual meeting.

The treasurer has received from the Internal Revenue Service a certificate designating the T.S. Eliot Society, for Federal income-tax purposes, as a non-profit organization. The status is periodically subject to normal review under IRS regulations.

Members' dues for 1988 are payable January 1. *Any unpaid dues for 1987 or earlier are payable immediately.* The categories of contributors remain as follows:

\$100 and above	Patron
\$50-\$99	Sustaining
\$25-\$49	Supporting
\$15-\$24	Regular (or Institutional)

The Society has balanced its budget for the calendar year 1987 (its fiscal year), but it must receive significant outside funding for next year's program. The president and vice-president have collaborated on an application, still pending, for major funding; and Linda Wyman, a member of the Society from Jefferson City, MO, has been delegated to prepare applications relative to play-production and music.

For the Centenary the Society plans to extend its meeting to four days, September 22-25, 1988, and to draw together some of the liveliest and most authoritative Eliot specialists. They will celebrate the Centenary by bringing into sharper focus the mind and art of the poet. A production of *The Elder Statesman* by the Magic Circle Ensemble and one of *Murder in the Cathedral* by Washington University are also in prospect. The Missouri Historical Society and the First Unitarian Church of St. Louis will again co-sponsor the Society's events.

A history of the T.S. Eliot Society continues to be researched and, according to the Society's historian, will be finished by the end of 1988. Meanwhile old members with verifiable memories of the creation are invited to impart them to Allen J. Koppenhaver, Wittenberg University, P.O. Box 720, Springfield, OH 45501.

The treasurer reported to the Board that five members had inadvertently been left off the list furnished for NEWS & NOTES on August 1. These were: Howard Derrickson, Russell Murphy, Stanislaw and Margit Vincenz, and Fr. Joseph Somos, of whom the first four are Supporting Members and the fifth a Regular Member. The treasurer greatly regretted the omission of their names. (The Editor will publish an updated list next summer, indicating current renewals and enrollments since the earlier tabulation. Several members who renewed too late for inclusion there have now been added, as have newer members.) The Editor too apologized for, and wishes hereby to emend, the misspelling of the surname of two Sustaining Members, Edith and Isabel Piczek.

Among additional business the Board confirmed the tenure of the present officers who were elected under the old By-Laws prior to Incorporation of the Society.

As a result of the election held in August, three newly chosen members joined the Board this year: Ann P. Brady, Melanie Fathman, and Peter J. Michel. Also attending their first Board meeting were officers elected within the preceding twelve months: Nancy D. Hargrove, secretary; Allen J. Koppenhaver, historian; and Grover Smith, vice-president.

SOCIETY PEOPLE

Leonard Frey, a Society member, is the headmaster of the Hutchison School in Memphis. He conducted to the 1987 meeting a large group of his students who had chosen to visit St. Louis and to attend our *Cocktail Party* performance on a senior-year cultural expedition. They also attended the Sunday-morning panel discussion of the play. A great deal of intelligent note-taking went on.

The advanced course "T.S. Eliot: A Centenary Overview," sponsored by the Duke University Institute of the Arts, Durham, NC, will include three Society members among its six visiting lecturers this spring. They are Jewel Spears Brooker of Eckerd College, William Harmon of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Earl K. Holt III of the First Unitarian Church of St. Louis. Dr. Brooker will lecture on Eliot and F.H. Bradley, Dr. Harmon on Eliot and the social sciences, and Mr. Holt on Eliot's religious development. The course is offered by Grover Smith of the Department of English at Duke.

William Harmon and Grover Smith have teamed together in a half-hour radio dialogue circling round Eliot's "Gerontion." The broadcast, taped this fall for the program "Soundings" emanating from the National Humanities Center, will be carried nationwide by Public Radio the week of April 10, according to Wayne Pond, the director of the series.

The conference planned by the editor of the *Yeats Eliot Review*, Russell Murphy, is tentatively scheduled to take place at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock the last week-end in April. Dr. Murphy's hopes for the *Review*, as revealed at the Society's meeting in September, involve not only the encouragement of literary scholarship but the re-assertion of traditional cultural values.

A.J. Montesi, one of several Society members at St. Louis University, writes that in the fall of 1988 his university will be in the T.S. Eliot swim with no fewer than four Events. These are, to wit:

1. A panel of papers with four critics discussing Eliot's work.
2. A college Drama Department production of an Eliot play.
3. A cabaret reading of Eliot's poetry with some dramatized sections.
4. A reading of Eliot's poetry, by leading St. Louis and Kansas City poets.

The cabaret bit has already been tried out, several years back, both on stage and before television cameras with Dr. Montesi directing. The schedule for the sequence has not been determined, but September-December is a likely span. Thus it is possible that at least one of the events may bracket the Society's Centenary meeting and be accessible along with it to members coming from a distance.

Meanwhile, Dr. Burton Wheeler of Washington University has also firmed up plans for an impressive event in recognition of the Eliot Centenary. *Murder in the Cathedral* will be presented the week-end of the Society's own commemoration, and a broad-based Eliot conference is in the making for the week-end following, September 30-October 2. Details later, as they become public.

The T.S. Eliot Society now has members on four continents. (Cf. NEWS & NOTES, Number 1, p. 3.)

All members of the Society are urged to notify the Editor (5007 Waterman Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63108) when they project conferences or publish articles or books on Eliot, or if they plan to do so in the near future. Any newsworthy item for this column will receive judicious attention. The copy deadline for the next number of NEWS & NOTES (Number 4, Spring) is March 31.

REMINISCENCES: WITH TSE AT HARVARD IN '32

(Editor's note: Besides being a member of the T.S. Eliot Society, the author of the following installment of an invited article is well known in St. Louis as a former art critic for the Post-Dispatch and, for 50 years, as an editorialist and educator. At the time he describes, he was a Harvard sophomore on scholarship, having spent four years at "a suburban Philadelphia charity trade school for underprivileged boys.")

T.S. Eliot held a prestigious Harvard chair in '32-'33, serving as Charles Eliot Norton Professor. When in town, he lived in Eliot House B-11, convenient if spartan ground-floor quarters across the quad from H-53, my own fifth-floor aerie. From there I enjoyed daily surveillance of the literary lion on whom town-and-gown curiosity then centered.

TSE's most frequent visitor was Theodore Spencer, pianist, poet and my own instructor in the survey course English 28. Months before I ever met TSE or Spencer, I bought a copy of *A Garland for John Donne*, a 1931 essay collection edited by Spencer to mark the 300th anniversary of the Anglican preacher-poet's death. Numerous professors lectured in English 28, great names appearing twice. For one hour per year, Spencer spoke on 17th-century metaphysical poets.

I realized how intensely Spencer shared TSE's interest in links between modern and Elizabethan metaphysicals when I tagged along with these two lecturers on a November walk from Eliot House to the Yard. Spencer

and I were headed for class. Introducing me to TSE, Spencer said I'd boarded at a school headed by an Episcopal clergyman. Had we read any Donne?—TSE naturally asked this question; they had been talking of *A Garland*. All I could recall was the devotion "No Man Is an Island," but I stressed my enjoyment of "Donne in Our Time," TSE's opening essay in Spencer's *Garland*. I added that I saw the book as doubtless invaluable for grasping TSE's Norton Lectures. "A fine start," said TSE. He was then 44. Spencer was 30; I, 19. We took the same walk together perhaps a dozen times, though I was in over my head far deeper than mere ages suggest.

In fact, I felt like one of the small boys who strayed into the New Lecture Hall when TSE was about to read one of the Norton addresses that, in due time, 1933, appeared as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. These talks he always began reading, in accordance with Harvard custom, at seven minutes after the hour. The small fry sat silent and intent for another seven before they left in a body as their leader audibly muttered: "Gosh, this ain't no basketball game!"

That incident is recorded on page 12 of "Talk of the Town" in the *New Yorker* of January 21, 1933. On page 11 two issues earlier there had appeared my own Eliot anecdote, misedited by a fellow student because of my own juvenility.

This story stemmed from a Wednesday afternoon tea in Eliot's study in December 1932. Only sophomores were invited; I was among 12 attending. First in line as Eliot sat ready to pour, however, stood a party-crashing freshman, unknown to the rest of us. Asked how he'd have his tea, the stranger spewed a torrent of irrelevant data on the growing and drying of tea. When he paused for breath, sophomore C.L. Barber (in his maturity an Eliot scholar), posed an apt literary query: "Apropos of tea, Mr. Eliot, don't you regard Katherine Mansfield as a most sensuous writer?" The host beamed and agreed as most of us sighed in relief. Perhaps only Barber and Eliot knew Mansfield as the author of the story "A Cup of Tea." But from then on the chat was properly literary.

Barber filled me in later, and an obliging *Harvard Crimson* candidate typed my *New Yorker* copy. To sharpen focus on TSE, this friend inserted an imaginative touch: that as the freshman droned on about tea, TSE grew nervous and *took to snapping the joints of his fingers*.

Within the magazine office, other embarrassing changes crept into my story, which I nonetheless showed to Ted Spencer in print. Shortly thereafter Ted displayed to me what I recall as a two-column *New Yorker* headline: "DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION AND AMPLIFICATION: Kin Defends Bard's Knuckles." The magazine had run a full letter from the poet's elder brother. Henry Ware Eliot protested that, under far more trying circumstances than any tea party, "Tom has never cracked his knuckles."

HOWARD DERRICKSON

NEW BOARD MEMBER TO BE ELECTED

An opening on the Board of Directors is expected to occur June 1, 1988, through the expiration of the current term of John Warren Owen. As is provided in the By-Laws, ballots will be mailed no later than May 2 to all members in good standing. The By-Laws stipulate that the ballot shall include the name of "any member of the Society who is nominated in writing sixty days in advance of the opening by five or more members of the Society." Nominations should be sent to the acting supervisor of elections, Jewel Spears Brooker, 501 68th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33705.

REFLECTIONS

(With this issue we inaugurate a "president's column," which will become a regular feature of NEWS & NOTES. —Editor)

The T.S. Eliot Society was founded in part to provide occasions for remembering a great poet and his work. Our annual program is a living memorial to Eliot, and one of our long-term goals is to cooperate with others in erecting a permanent memorial for Eliot in the city of his birth. The 1987 meeting, our most elaborate and best attended to date, did just what good memorials always do. It called (or recalled) Eliot and his poetry to our minds, it recollected past feelings and images and events, and it created a focal point for future memories.

The 1987 meeting also took "memory" as a major theme or subject. James Olney's lecture was about memory in Eliot's middle and later poems, and Randy Beard's production of *The Cocktail Party*, a play about forgetful lovers and mindful Guardians (notwithstanding forgotten umbrellas and spectacles), reminded us first of the comic effects of forgetting and remembering, and then of both the destructive and *salvific* potential of memory. Grover Smith's lecture touched on ghosts and memory in *The Family Reunion*; and Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," a poem about memory, was recited several times, at least once from memory. The program also included performances of Nunn and Webber's "Memory" from *Cats*.

On the eve of the 1987 meeting, a number of interested people met to begin discussions about creating a permanent tangible memorial to Eliot in St. Louis. These discussions were tentative and exploratory and may come to nothing; at the same time, they have encouraged those of us who believe that, as one of the century's greatest poets, Eliot should be honored in the city where he was born and reared, the city which impressed him more deeply than any other in the world.

In an important sense, there can be no such thing as a permanent (as opposed to a living) memorial. Like the poet and his work, like the persons who are reminded of him, any memorial will exist in time and thus be in process. Any memorial, whether a memorial lecture or a

memorial sculpture of stone or metal, will in part be constructed by the circumstances and the persons who at any moment experience it. It will remain forever in progress, forever in the making. Its meaning will always be a construction by the community or the individual who meets it. No memorial can replicate or recollect the past, but a good memorial can bring great poetry or a momentous event or noble vision to mind, and thus provide an occasion for an encounter between the past and present, between tradition and the individual sensibility, with consequences that can be neither predicted nor controlled. A memorial can also provide an occasion for community, for a convocation of minds in a focused consideration of issues at the heart of our civilization and its values. And a memorial, bringing different gifts to different people, can in numerous ways be a stimulus, can *inspire* us by *reminding* us of what we might otherwise forget.

September 26, 1988, is the 100th anniversary of T.S. Eliot's birth. The year itself will be a memorial, causing people from all over the world to pause and focus on St. Louis as a nursery of greatness. Students and scholars and journalists will come in great numbers to discuss his life and his art. His widow and many of his personal friends are also hoping to visit St. Louis. The main celebration will take place in September and will include programs by the Eliot Society, by Washington University (founded by his grandfather), and by many other local and state groups. There will be many occasions for conversation and for reflection on his life and his art. And perhaps, at this special moment of interest in Eliot and his origins, we will have some news regarding the creation of an appropriate memorial for T.S. Eliot in the city of his birth.

October 1, 1987

JEWEL SPEARS BROOKER

ERRORS AND GREMLINS

Not all of the errors that creep into NEWS & NOTES are caused by gremlins; the worst are caused (to quote Dr. Johnson), by "pure ignorance." In a matter of two issues merely, it has been possible for the Editor to mis-identify the daughter-in-law of W.B. Yeats as his "granddaughter"; to say that Andrew Osze's Eliot plaque, commissioned by Leslie Konnyu, was at Mr. Konnyu's house when really it is displayed at the St. Louis Public Library; and to predict that *unstamped* commemorative cachets, for optionally posting home, would be made available at the 1987 meeting. All of these pieces of misinformation originated in pure ignorance.

On the other hand the typos, which occur infrequently, result from untrustworthy eyesight; the Editor believes that the members should appreciate how few there are.

The only errors that can be blamed on gremlins have arisen in Mr. Holt's computer. The system has now been overhauled and the gremlins sent packing.