T.S. ELIOT SOCIETY

NEWS & NOTES

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AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION
SAN DIEGO 1994

The T.S. Eliot Society will again participate in the annual conference of the American Literature Association (ALA), which will run from Friday June 2 through Sunday, June 5 at the Bahia Resort Hotel in San Diego. This year’s Eliot session will be chaired by the President of the Society, Vinni Marie D’Ambrosio, and includes presentations by Jo-Anne Cappeluti (CUNY Graduate Center), “The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole.”

The ALA is a coalition of approximately forty American author societies. It has been sponsoring an annual conference since 1990. Members of participating author societies are automatically members of ALA and are entitled to attend its conference. The registration fee this year is $35 ($10 for retired persons, independent scholars, and graduate students), and should be sent c/o Alfred Bendixen, Executive Director, California State University, 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110. For reservations ($77 single, $82 double) call the Bahia Resort Hotel (1-800-288-8770) in San Diego.

ANNUAL SOCIETY MEETING
LAST CALL FOR SEPTEMBER PAPERS

The fifteenth annual meeting of the T.S. Eliot Society begins on Friday September 23 and continues through Sunday September 25. Once again most of the activities will take place at the Drury Inn at Union Station in St. Louis (314-231-9000). The Board is now issuing its final call for papers, the proposals for which should be sent by June 10 to Vinni Marie D’Ambrosio, 11 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10036. Papers should not have been published previously and should take no more than 20 minutes to read. The Board also welcomes recommendations for session topics and for other activities at the annual meeting.


A complete program of the 1994 annual meeting will appear in the summer issue of News & Notes.

ANNUAL STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST

The T.S. Eliot Society recently inaugurated an annual essay contest for the best graduate student essay on Eliot. The contest was conceived and sponsored by Dr. Anthony and Melanie Fathman, longtime Society members and hosts of its annual banquet. The winner will be awarded a prize of $500 plus a subvention for travel expenses to the annual meeting in St. Louis.

This year’s contest has been publicized by a flyer, designed by society member Chuck Crispin. The flyer was included in the Fall 1993 News & Notes and also mailed to all graduate institutions in the United States and Canada. The competition is open to all graduate students of English and related areas of study. Essays should be approximately 2000-3000 words long and focus on some topic related to Four Quartets. The deadline for submission to Vinni Marie D’Ambrosio is June 1, and the winner will be notified by July 15.

THE FUTURE OF ELIOT STUDIES
A CALL FOR HELP

T.S. Eliot will be one of seventeen American authors featured in a forthcoming volume, Prospects for the Study of American Literature: A Guide for Future Research. The book is designed to describe the current state of scholarship on major American authors, to indicate the archival, editorial, and biographical work still to be done, and to suggest possibilities for future historical and critical study. Edited by Richard Kopley (Penn State University), a well-known Poe scholar, Prospects is scheduled for publication in 1996 by New York University Press.

One of the largest stumbling blocks to new research on Eliot is the prevalent belief that there is nothing to be done, either because it’s been done already or because legal restrictions make it impossible to do. Although it is difficult to deny that such problems exist, Eliot scholars recognize that there is still much which lies ahead. The Prospects volume provides an opportunity to suggest aspiring as well as established scholars some possible directions for future research.

The editor of News & Notes, who has been invited to compose the Eliot section, is seeking information and advice from other members of the Society. He does not wish to squander your pet project; he is simply asking for suggestions that would help him announce to the scholarly community that the study of Eliot has a future and forecast what that future might look like. Please send your comments to Sanford Schwartz, Department of English, 22 Burrowes Building, University Park PA 16802 (814-863-3069; Fax 814-863-7285). Also indicate whether you think that the Society should devote some space in its own newsletter to discussion of the future of Eliot scholarship.
BOOK REVIEWS

In the previous issue, News & Notes began to run brief reviews of new publications related to Eliot. The review column is open to any member of the Society. If you are interested in reviewing a new publication, please contact the editor, Sanford Schwartz, Department of English, 22 Burrowes Building, University Park PA 16802 (814-863-3069; Fax 814-863-7285). In fairness to all members of the Society, the assignment of reviews will operate on a first come/first served basis, though every effort will be made to distribute assignments as widely as possible among the membership. The reviews should be approximately 500 words in length; they may be descriptive and analytical but not overtly judgmental. The aim is to provide members of the Society with a sufficiently ample description of the book to decide whether or not they wish to read it.


Herakles in Greek mythology was the man-god, indefatigable in his labors, physically overwhelming in battle, and Olympian in his appetites. In Greek drama, particularly in the plays of Euripides, Herakles was changed from the lustful and comical strongman into the ideal hero who suffered and sacrificed for his friends and the community. It is the central idea of The Refining Fire that Eliot recognized in the transformed Herakles myth a model for a Christian hero to the twentieth century. Eliot sought a hero able to suffer and sacrifice to achieve “illumination” and to benefit the community. He also sought a hero within the cultural tradition of Greece, the Greek concept of “physical courage, endurance, and energy, and above all success,” attributes which Eliot felt were still powerful in influence in contemporary society.

Niesen de Abruna resolves Eliot’s heroes and saints into four distinct phases, starting with his early poetry and ending with Four Quartets and the plays. In the first phase, major figures in the poetry are about as far from the Herakles model as is possible. Characters such as Prufrock, Gerontion, and the Fisher King are defined by negatives — heroical, indecisive, sexually impotent and spiritually unenlightened. The main second phase figure is “Sweeney,” who possesses certain positive characteristics, such as physical strength, but lacks spiritual sense, which prevents his showing any real concern for others. Despite some satirical insights, Sweeney is an isolated figure living a death-in-life existence without possibility of illumination or creative action. Occupying Eliot’s third level of the sacrificed hero are Shakespeare’s Anthony, his Coriolanus, and Virgil’s Aeneas. All were for Eliot positive and creative figures destroyed by flaws in their own characters, thus unfit to be Heraklean models or Christian heroes.

The Herakles motif comes to full fruition in Niesen de Abruna’s fourth phase, especially in The Cocktail Party, the centerpiece of her analysis. Behind Eliot’s writing of this play is his reading of Euripides’ Alesistis in which Herakles throws off his comic and drunken character and performs the heroic and selfless act of wrestling with Death to rescue Alcestis, the wife of his friend, from the grave. In The Cocktail Party, aspects of the Heraklean hero are divided between two people, Sir Henry Harcourt-Relly, the doctor/psychiatrist who saves the dying marriage of two characters in the play, and Celia Coplestone, who in suffering martyrdom by crucifixion in a foreign land, performs a Heraklean “sacrifice” and thus becomes Eliot’s complete Christian hero.

Eliot’s meticulous attention to the sources he reworked is emulated by Niesen de Abruna in her meticulous analysis of Eliot’s methods of achieving his transformation. Through the many scholarly allusions and points of discussion in her work, she provides the opportunity to approach Eliot’s writings, especially his later poetry and his plays, with fresh insights and new understanding. This study also serves to motivate the reader to seek out and read perhaps her many other sources mentioned in the text and cited in the bibliography.

F. X. Roberts
University of Northern Colorado


Ted Hughes’s book, published originally in England by Faber in 1992, prints three occasional tributes to T. S. Eliot, whom the author sees as having given a name and a voice to the “desacralized landscape” of the modern world—a voice that we “almost immediately” recognized as our own. The first tribute consists of Hughes’s remarks on unveiling a plaque to Eliot on the wall of 3 Kensington Court Gardens, where Eliot last lived (26 September 1986); the second, an introduction to a reading of The Waste Land (25 September 1988); the third, a toast to Eliot, an abbreviated version of which Hughes gave at the centenary dinner hosted by Valerie Eliot (26 September 1988). The first section, entitled “The Truly Great,” positions Eliot as “the grand master...of all the poetries of the modern world,” his culminating triumph being Four Quartets. The second section, “The Song of Songs in the Valley of Bones,” aims at defining the place and nature of The Waste Land, a musical “ritual of death and rebirth,” in which the repeated final blessing, “Shantih,” contains “all the anguished voices of the poem.” His longer and more analytical title piece, far too complex and subtle for adequate treatment here, sums up Eliot’s place as “not merely a great poet, but a poet who stands in English with maybe only one other name: a poet...of an utterly new species.” Informing this allusion to Shakespeare is more than a decade’s work that the Poet Laureate spent bringing forth Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being (1992).

While all three pieces are tributes to Eliot’s art, each attempts to assess his contribution to English literature and world letters in light of his centennial, which invited long views and overall critical assessments. In his title piece, Hughes sees William Butler Yeats as another incomparable poet, representing “a culmination of specific poetic traditions, the complex autochthonous traditions in these islands.” But Hughes values Eliot not just as the poet of the British Isles, but as “the prophet of a new world...which has already, in its soul, and throughout all its peoples, suffered the global holocaust, and must now, somehow, find in its own ashes the spiritual strength to resurrect itself.” In short, each of these poets has a unique role in twentieth-century poetry, but Eliot’s role is global. Hughes is specific in pinpointing, for example, “The Death of Saint Narcissus,” an early poem which he quotes in its entirety, as an instance of the voice of Eliot’s shamanistic persona that evolves throughout his oeuvre. “The final drama of his decision to reject the world publicly and become a dancer to God (completing the life-plan laid down in ‘The Death of Saint Narcissus’) rises through the parable of Murder in the Cathedral to the rose-window, many-petalled choreography of the dance before God in an English chapel, which is the pattern of Four Quartets.”

These tributes are more than tributes: they characterize and particularize.

Joan Fillmore Hooker
New York University

BOOKS RECEIVED

If you are interested in reviewing any of these books for News & Notes, please contact the editor, Sanford Schwartz, Department of English, 22 Burrowes Building, University Park PA 16802 (814-863-3069; Fax 814-863-7285).


BOOKS, MONOGRAPHS ON ELIOT 1987-1994

The following is a list of books and monographs devoted partially or entirely to Eliot for the years 1987 to the present.


