

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

NEWS & NOTES

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Eliot Society to Present Sessions at ALA Meeting

The 1995 conference of the American Literature Association (ALA) will include two sessions featuring papers by members of the T. S. Eliot Society. The conference, to be held on May 25-May 28, will take place at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore.

A session to be chaired by William Charron will include three papers on Eliot's philosophy and poetry: "Pre-Socratic Enantiodyromia and Eliot's *Four Quartets*," by Benjamin G. Lockerd, Jr. (Grand Valley State); "Eliot and Heraclitus," by William Blissett (University of Toronto); and "Eliot as 'Imagist': A Philosophical Perspective," by Ethan Lewis (Sangamon State).

Sanford Schwartz will chair a session with papers by Robert Abboud (Rutgers), "America Erect: Eliot and Emerson"; Lee Oser (Yale), "Poe, Eliot, and the Unreal City"; and Virginia Phelan (Princeton), "Play It Again, Tom: Comic Re-Vision in *The Confidential Clerk*."

Readers are asked to refer to the Fall 1994 issue of *News & Notes* for further details of the ALA conference.

A Note on the Make-Up of the Society's Membership

From its founding in 1980 as a St. Louis literary discussion club, the T. S. Eliot Society has truly become, in words from the program for the annual meeting, "an international community of scholars and others interested in the mind and work of Eliot." Currently there are members in ten countries: Canada, England, Germany, Japan, Korea, India, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

As might be expected, Missouri has the most members (21), followed by Illinois (15), New York (12), North Carolina (7), and Indiana and New Jersey (6 each). No other state has more than five members.

What may come as some surprise is that there are more members (7) in Japan than in all but three states, as many members in England as in Florida, Massachusetts, or Ohio, as many in Canada or Korea as in Georgia, and as many in India as in Connecticut or Minnesota. About one-sixth of the Society's members live outside the United States.

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

16th Annual Meeting

St. Louis, September 23-25

Deadline for proposals for 20-minute
papers extended to June 15

Send to:
Sanford Schwartz
465 Park Lane
State College, PA 16803

Full details of the annual meeting
in summer issue of *News & Notes*

Editor Seeks Addresses of TSE Societies Abroad

Some members of the Society who do not live in the United States are members of Eliot societies in their own countries. The editor would like to establish a directory of T. S. Eliot societies throughout the world and invites readers having pertinent information to send it to Linda Wyman, 621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO, 65101, USA. If possible, please include the name of a contact person, a mailing address, and an e-mail address and/or FAX number.

Dues

Members who have not yet paid their 1995 dues are reminded to send them to the treasurer:

William Charron
709 S. Skinker, #401
St. Louis, MO 63105

A Call for Notes on Teaching Eliot

Recognizing that the future of Eliot studies and the future of the Society depend on students' learning to read Eliot, the editor intends to publish a series of notes on successful teaching practices for Eliot's poetry and plays. The first such note, by Professor Elisabeth Däumer of Eastern Michigan University, appears below.

The editor invites submissions of about 500 words. Submissions received by June 15 will be considered for the summer issue; others will be considered for later issues. Please indicate for whom the course which includes Eliot is intended (e.g., general students, undergraduate English majors, graduate students), and please give a telephone number where you may be reached.

Letting Students Loose on *The Waste Land*

[Ed. note: The class Professor Däumer describes was Modern British and American Poetry, an upper-division undergraduate course taken by English majors whose emphasis is literature. Many of these are first-generation college students who plan to become teachers.]

For years I thought my task in teaching *The Waste Land* was to guide students through the intricacies of its structure, symbolism, and allusions. But despite my best intentions, despite the care I took to be a superior guide, I invariably lost a good number of students along the way, even those that were initially excited about the task of studying what I described to them as one of the most challenging poems of this century.

So last semester I tried something new. Instead of guiding students through *The Waste Land*, I let them loose on it. I allocated three class sessions to the poem, two for group work and a third for performing and discussing the poem. Students were divided into four groups, each of them focusing on one part of *The Waste Land* (group four did parts 4 and 5). In preparation for group work, I asked students to read the whole poem. (They gasped.) To soften the blow, I told them to think of the poem as a montage of voices from the wasteland of contemporary, post-World-War London and from history and literature. This instruction, along with the little they knew about Eliot from our reading of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," was all the initial preparation students received.

Then, during our first class session on the poem, students were asked to distinguish between different voices in the part assigned to their group. They were to imagine who is speaking, from what actual or spiritual place, with what emotion. By the end of class, each student had chosen a voice for further in-depth study and performance. (Many students, at this point, confessed that the poem still "did not make any sense" to them, but

they were intrigued by the task of performing a particular voice.) For the next class session, I asked each student to fill out a worksheet, identifying and characterizing the voice they were to perform. I also encouraged them to memorize their voice and to practice speaking it. Then, in class, they discussed their individual voices with group members and jointly planned the performance of their part of the poem. When I walked from group to group that day, I sensed a growing mood of anticipation, even giddiness among students. They were deeply immersed in planning their performances (all the groups, I found out later, scheduled separate times for rehearsals) and unwilling to tell me about them. They wanted to surprise me.

And they did. The experience of listening to the poem performed by so many different and engaged voices was so moving, both to me and the students, that after the last "shantih" we sat in stunned silence. I had planned to have a discussion of the poem in class that day, but somehow none of us was in the mood to analyze or dissect what had just stirred us so deeply. When students wrote about the poem and its performance in a brief essay later, one thing struck me: they all wrote about *The Waste Land* with the confidence and perceptiveness that comes from experiencing the poem first-hand.

Elisabeth Däumer
Eastern Michigan University

For Help with Society Matters . . .

- To submit papers for any reading session sponsored by the Society or to make suggestions or inquiries regarding the annual meeting or other Society activities, please contact the president:

Sanford Schwartz, Department of English
22 Burrowes Building, University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-3069, FAX: (814)-863-7285

- For all matters regarding the content of *News & Notes*, please contact the vice-president, who edits *News & Notes*:

Linda Wyman
621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO 65101
(314) 681-5195 (office), (314) 634-5431 (home)
FAX: (314) 681-5566

- To pay dues, inquire about membership, or report failure to receive *News & Notes*, please contact the treasurer:

William Charron
709 S. Skinker, #401, St. Louis, MO 63105
(314) 863-6550

- Persons having business with the secretary are advised to contact her directly:

Mildred Boaz
603 Radliff Rd., Bloomington, IL 61701
(212) 424-6256, FAX: (217) 424-3993

BOOK REVIEW

Lentricchia, Frank. *Modernist Quartet*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. xiii + 305.

Lentricchia's quartet features Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot. As he declares in his preface, his "taste is hopelessly canonical," for which he offers "no apologies" (ix). His aim is to guide the reader through the historical (i.e., "literary, philosophical, gender, relations, the business of capitalist economics") geneses of (American) modernist poetics: of the escape from the genteel and/or popular likes of poets such as Richard Watson Gilder: "The wind from out the west is blowing / The homeward-wandering cows are lowing" (xi).

In addition to a five-page preface and epilogue, one-and-a-half pages of bibliographical notes (in which he names only a few works that he "could not have done without," i.e., Raymond Williams' *The Politics of Modernism*; 292), and an eleven-page author and title index, Lentricchia presents six chapters: "Philosophers of Modernism at Harvard, circa 1900"; "Lyric in the Culture of Capital"; "Robert Frost"; "Wallace Stevens"; "Ezra Pound"; and "T. S. Eliot."

Readers familiar with the polemical Lentricchia of *Ariel and the Police* (1988) or *After the New Criticism* (1980) may be somewhat surprised: what he delivers here is less a radical, anti-aestheticizing, Foucauldian "act of power" than the even-tempered views of the gentleman scholar, that "other" from whom, in a 1986 interview, Lentricchia claimed to be as far removed as his Italian-American, working class roots could keep him.¹ Any "outsider" status, any radical stance, any openly defiant challenges are gone. The reader hears a seasoned, historical scholar presenting an abundance of biographical, cultural, and intellectual data.

Thus chapter one begins:

When George Santayana was appointed to the philosophy department at Harvard in 1889, just a year after finishing his doctorate there, he became the junior colleague of William James and Josiah Royce, and the three together, over the next two decades--in relationships supportive, competitive, and critical--collectively defined the shapes and limitations of what would come to be understood as modernism in the United States: its desire and values, its literary, social, and philosophical genesis and ground, and the sometimes stinging antithetical force of its cultural and social commentary (1).

Only the increasing number of parenthetical remarks (the chapter on Eliot contains the most) remind readers that they are not in the non-fiction section of the library, that as Dominick LaCapra would remind, they should "beware" this Jabberwock and brandish their Quellenkritik

against Lentricchia's seemingly self-evident narrative. Discussing "Prufrock," for example, as a poem of "feeling and sensibility masquerading as an observation" (243), Lentricchia "observes":

Traditional texts (always looming) pressure and get inside the voice, capturing its rhythm, turning it into someone else's writing, diminishing and debunking its puny urges. The famous alienation of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is grounded in a young man's fear of impotence, sexual and literary (what could possibly, for him, be the difference?) (244).

Lentricchia's Americanist training is, of course, grounded in his favorites: Frost and Stevens. The chapter on Eliot, however, proves in several ways the most interesting, for in addition to the parenthetical comments, which themselves lend great insight into Lentricchia's own "masquerade," the chapter offers insightful remarks of the kind that come from standing outside of the Eliot school and challenging some of its trends to canonize (in Bakhtin's sense) Eliot's own outsider status. Such we find, for example, when Lentricchia refuses to entertain any kind of notion that *Four Quartets* represents a culmination of career:

The Waste Land will remain the singular aesthetic event of modernist poetry in the English language: and its stance, however we construct it, seems one we can live with because, however we construct it, it seems one that suits our sense of ourselves. But Eliot after *The Waste Land* will continue to be another matter: an event unabsorbed because, in the context of advanced Western values, it is unabsorbable (286).

In the final analysis, of course, we wonder if such premises about modern poetry lead to--or indeed stem from--a particular ideology about post-modern poetry. Here we find Lentricchia's "Epilogue," a tribute to DeLillo (Lentricchia's most recent critical subject):

The agreement, from Pound to DeLillo, is this: that the human equivalent of the commodity is now fully in being. We now witness the well-lubricated [!] production of the faceless mass man [or woman?], who happily unburdens himself of any inclinations toward free will and independent thought, who wants to lose his name and signature (288).

Our suspicions are confirmed: Lentricchia has willfully or subconsciously suppressed modern poetics to fit the Marxist history of the postmodern novel--using the sanction of the historical "method" to do so, along with the three to whom he dedicates his book, thus forming his own "quartet": Anthony DeCurtis (*Rolling Stone*); Dan O'Hara (Temple University); and Don Pease (Dartmouth). The result is a seemingly autonomous text that, however "reasonable" in its historicity, reminds us of the ongoing

clash of such scholarship with the "other" branch of American literary scholarship: the linguistic/literary school. If Gerald Graff is correct in his sense that now is the time for literary scholarship to openly air its debates, perhaps a more interesting text might be a side-by-side Lentricchia and de Man reader--edited, of course, by a feminist.

NOTE

¹Imre Salusinszky. *Criticism in Society: Interviews with Jacques Derrida, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, Edward Said, Barbara Johnson, Frank Lentricchia, and J. Hillis Miller.* New York: Methuen, 1987. 176-206.

Jo-Anne Cappeluti
California State University, Fullerton

Candidates for Election to the Board

Two members of the Society have received five nominations required to appear on the ballot.

Joan Fillmore Hooker, of New York University, is the author of *T. S. Eliot's Poetry in French Translation: Pierre Leyris and Others* and contributed an essay to *T. S. Eliot: Man and Poet*, edited by Laura Cowan. She read papers on related topics at the Eliot Centenary Conference at Orono and at the Society's 1992 ALA session in San Diego. She regularly attends the annual meeting of the Society.

John A. Karel is director of St. Louis' historic Tower Grove Park, where he hosted a dinner at the Society's annual meeting a few years ago. Prior to assuming his present position, he was director of the Missouri State Parks system, with responsibility for 74 parks and historic sites. He describes T. S. Eliot as the principal focus of his avocational reading and book collecting, and he regularly attends the annual meeting of the Society.



**MEMBER'S BALLOT FOR ELECTION TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
OF THE T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY**

(Terms ending 1998)

YOU MAY VOTE FOR TWO:

Joan Fillmore Hooker

John A. Karel

Signature _____ Dated _____ 1995

Mail by June 1 to the secretary:
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603 Radliff Road
Bloomington, IL 61701-2121
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