

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Number 29

Summer 1996

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Introducing Marianne Thormählen, 1996 Memorial Lecturer

Marianne Thormählen, the T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecturer for 1996, is known to many members of the Society as the organizer of the colloquium "T. S. Eliot at the Turn of the Century," held at Lund, Sweden, in September 1993, and as editor of the book which resulted from that colloquium.

Born in Stockholm in 1949, she was educated at Lund University, where she received the M.A. in 1969 and the Ph.D. in 1979. She was recently appointed to occupy the Chair of English Literature at Lund, having served in other positions since 1979. In 1987 she received a British Council Fellowship to Oxford, and in 1988-90 the Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellowship to Hamburg.

In addition to the volume previously mentioned, her publications on Eliot include *The Waste Land: A Fragmentary Wholeness* (1978) and *Eliot's Animals* (1984), both available through Lund University Press. She contributed an essay on wind imagery to Shyamal Bagchee's *T. S. Eliot A Voice Descanting: Centenary Essays* (Macmillan 1990) and published an article on Eliot and

Ezekiel in *English Studies* (1984).

Other publications include articles and a monograph on John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester, articles (and a forthcoming book) on the Brontës, and reviews for *English Studies* and *The Modern Language Review*.

In addition to her academic posts, Marianne Thormählen has worked as a professional translator and interpreter for 20 years. She has served in positions in local government and on the Immigrants' Council in her municipality.

Her interests include classic juvenile literature and detective fiction (the latter leading to an article on *Gaudy Night* contributed to a Sayers Society *festschrift*).

Professor Thormählen will be accompanied to St. Louis by her husband, Axel Thormählen, a writer of novels and short stories published in German and Swedish. The Thormählehs have two daughters--Asa, who is married and works as an administrator, and Imke, who has published a historical romance, studies history at Lund, and is at work on her second novel.

T. S. Eliot Society in Japan Continues Active

Word has been received of the election of new officers for the T. S. Eliot Society in Japan, which makes it a rule to elect its president alternately from Eastern and Western Japan.

The new president is Prof. Shoichi Yamada, of Atomi Gakuen Women's College, Tokyo. The secretary general is Prof. Hikaru Endo, of Jissen Junior Women's College, Tokyo.

Serving as vice-president is Prof. Tatsuo Murata (Baika Women's College, Osaka). Murata, a member of the T. S. Eliot Society (U.S.), has presented three papers at annual meetings in St. Louis. Persons wishing to communicate with the Eliot Society in Japan may do so through Tatsuo Murata by FAX at 775-22-0666 or at the following address:

20-6 Takasago-cho
Otsu, Shiga 520
Japan

Korean Eliot Society Grows, Publishes Journal

The T. S. Eliot Society of Korea, founded in 1991 with 22 members, has grown to a membership of more than 100. The Society holds twice yearly meetings, in May and October.

Officers of the Korean Eliot Society serve for terms of two years. The first president and vice president were Professors Chang-Bea Lee and Myung-Ho Shim. They were succeeded in office by Professors Chang-Ho Choi and Jung-Ho Lee. The current officers are Professors Chigyu Kim and Young-Il Kim, the latter a member of the T. S. Eliot Society (U.S.).

The organization has sponsored symposia on T. S. Eliot and Religion and T. S. Eliot's Literary Background. Additionally, it has published two journals and plans to publish a third this year.

In a letter included in the first journal of the T. S. Eliot Society of Korea (1993), Mrs. Valerie Eliot writes, "... May I say that it is a great pleasure to know that my husband

is being honored by a Korean T. S. Eliot Society, and I trust it will flourish in every way."

The 357-page journal also contains an article by Young-II Kim ("The Poetry of T. S. Eliot and Christianity") as well as reviews of books by two other members of the T. S. Eliot Society (U.S.): *T. S. Eliot and Indic Traditions: A Study in Poetry and Belief*, by Cleo McNelly Kearns, and *T. S. Eliot and Dante*, by Dominic Manganiello.

Persons wishing to communicate with the T. S. Eliot Society of Korea may address their correspondence to:

Prof. Young-II Kim
Hyundai Apt. 105-907
Hong-je-dong, Sudemun-ku
Seoul, Korea 120-090

Book Review

Brooker, Jewel Spears. *Mastery and Escape. T. S. Eliot and the Dialectic of Modernism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

This deeply satisfying collection of essays published over a span of approximately fifteen years conveys a complex yet highly unified understanding of modernism and one of its major figures, the mysterious Mr. Eliot. Brooker characterizes the dialectic of modernism in terms of "the tendency to move forward by spiraling back or refiguring the past." A corollary of this tendency is what Brooker evocatively describes as the impulse toward "mastery and escape"--a pattern of movement between opposites which seeks to transcend dualistic thinking through a liberating and redemptive spiraling back to the past. Thus Brooker insists, for example, that in Eliot's oft-quoted statement about poetry as an "escape" from emotions and personality, "escape" should be understood in the sense of "transcendence": poetry does not so much escape from emotions as escape to a broader perspective or understanding that transforms the purely personal into something universal or commonly shared. Such transcendence, moreover, is achieved only after the poet has come to a profound understanding or "mastery" of his emotions.

Brooker's notion of the modernist dialectic is especially compelling in its ability to persuade us that Eliot speaks to late-twentieth-century readers in urgent, liberating ways, if only we were willing to do the work it takes to understand him. Brooker's essays are persuasive because they challenge, one might say deconstruct, the dualistic, inevitably reductive, critical framework that has dominated the study of Eliot's work. Needless to say, Brooker's Eliot is not the reactionary elitist and misogynist whose response to the social and epistemological crises of his time was to long, nostalgically, for a feudal, patriarchal past in which women and the masses were safely restored to their subordinate social roles. Indeed, when Brooker depicts

Eliot's dialectic thought in terms of a "rejection of synthesis and [an] insistence on a 'both/and' logic of complementarity," readers might, for a moment, wonder if she is trying to enlist Eliot for the postmodernist camp.

Brooker's analysis, however, is more complex than that: she shows that Eliot, inspired by his study of Bradley's philosophical work, anticipated the Derridean "revolt against Dualism"--a revolt against Descartes' and Kant's boundless faith in analytical thinking. Yet unlike many Derridean thinkers, Eliot was a sceptic, not a nihilist; along with Bradley, he believed that it is both necessary and possible to transcend the limitations of language and analytical thought. For Eliot, discursive intellect is the "villain" because it organizes experience into binary categories, such as present and past, object and subject, self and other. Once reconnected to what Bradley defined as "immediate experience" ("a knowing and feeling and being in one prior to the development of logical or temporal or spatial categories"), however, discursive intellect becomes "a partner in achieving wholeness," a partner in transcending its very own limitations.

The book's major sections, focused on the emergence of this modernist dialectic in the fields of history, psychology, and philosophy, are energized by the same "revolt against dualism" that Brooker detects and admires in Eliot's work. Brooker's concept of "dispensationalism, for instance"--a term that she borrows from theology to signify "the compulsion to analyze history and to associate possibility in art with one's movement and context in history"--is very effective in both problematizing and humanizing the proverbial elitism and disdain for readers expressed by major symbolist and modernist poets such as Mallarme, Hulme, and Eliot. In Eliot's case, this reputation as elitist obscures a crucial feature of his work--his search for a "common ground" with his readers. Extending her questioning of the dichotomy between the "elite" and the "common," Brooker uses terms reminiscent of Wolfgang Iser's reader-response criticism to propose that "many problematic aspects of form in Eliot's poetry" (e.g., allusiveness, juxtaposition, fragmentation, multi-perspectivism) are not, as many critics have supposed, reflections of an aesthetic elitism but "comprehensible stratagems for forcing collaboration from a reader."

An impatience with reductive critical approaches also fuels Brooker's insistence on greater critical rigor and precision. Her own compellingly high standard of rigor and precision is both apparent most impressively in illuminating discussion of Eliot's "mythical method" and of his debt to Bradley's idealism. The Eliot who emerges in Brooker's book is demanding in his claims upon the reader, and thoroughly human. Brooker calls on us to heed the invitation extended in Eliot's poetry to become collaborators for a common ground or culture that does not exclude difference but provides, to use the words of Adrienne Rich, a "common language" for symbolizing them.

Elisabeth Däumer
Eastern Michigan University

More Thoughts on *Tom and Viv*

Tom and Viv distorts the facts about Eliot's first marriage as it rushes to sympathize with Vivienne and to condemn Eliot. The film is dedicated to Vivienne and depicts her as a high-spirited, brilliant woman afflicted with nothing more than menstrual problems. According to the film, Vivienne was the brains behind Eliot—she feeds him an answer at a party, edits his poetry, and tells her brother, "I am his mind." Eliot is depicted as an intensive cad who uses Vivienne and then puts her away once he becomes famous.

But the film undermines its own thesis. Vivienne never tells Eliot, prior to their marriage, about her "condition" or her ether addiction, and thus she seems to be using him. Late in the film, Vivienne's mother condemns Eliot, although she and her son had agreed to have Vivienne put away. The mother also condemns Eliot for using Vivienne to create *The Waste Land*, but the film depicts Vivienne as knowingly contributing to the poem. And once they all decide to put Vivienne away, her symptoms magically disappear.

Tom and Viv relies heavily on fictionalized private conversations slanted toward its thesis. Those who know Eliot and his work will winnow the truth. Those, like these filmmakers, who find Eliot's poetry pretentious and obscure will feel vindicated.

Bruce Hayman

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 *The T. S. Eliot Society Newsletter*, please contact the vice-president, who edits the *Newsletter*:

Linda Wyman
621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO 65101
(573) 681-5233 (office), (573) 634-5431 (home)
FAX: (573) 681-5209

- To pay dues, inquire about membership, report a change of address, or report failure to receive the *Newsletter*, 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 M. Boaz
603 Radliff Rd., Bloomington, IL 61701
(212) 424-6256; FAX: (217) 424-3993

Furthermore . . .

Additions to the Spring 1996 Issue

Robert F. Fleissner (Central State University) is the author of a note on Eliot's "Sweeney among the Nightingales" in *Explicator* 54.1 (Fall 1995).

David M. Thompson (University of Chicago) is among the Society members who presented papers at the London conference on Eliot in July.

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**MEMBER'S BALLOT FOR ELECTION TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
OF THE T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY**
(Term ending 1999)

The person named below is the only recipient of the five nominations necessary for including a name on the ballot:

Shyamal Bagchee

Signature _____ Dated _____ 1996

Mail by **September 1** to the secretary: Mildred M. Boaz, 603 Radliff Road, Bloomington, IL 61701-2121
FAX: 217-424-3993

T. S. Eliot Society Annual Meeting -- September 27-29, 1996

Program of Events

Friday, September 27

- 4:00 p.m. **Board of Directors Meeting**
The Inn at the Park
- 7:00 p.m. **Registration**
Empire Room, Park Plaza
232 N. Kingshighway
William Charron, Treasurer
- 7:30 p.m. **Welcome**
Sanford Schwartz, President

Presentations:

Grover Smith, *Duke University*
"T. S. Eliot: The Ghost and the Girl: Eliot's 'Suppressed Complex'"

Holly Norton, *Bowling Green State University*
"The 'Murmur of Maternal Lamentation': Women and the Apocalypse in *The Waste Land*"

Colleen Lamos, *Rice University*
"T. S. Eliot and Literary Authority: Paternal Citations and Maternal Interests"

Saturday, September 28 *Empire Room, Park Plaza*

- 9:45 a.m. **Greetings**
Sanford Schwartz

Presentations:

Linda Wyman, Chair

Michael Coyle, *Colgate University*
"Eliot on the Air: 'Culture' and the Genres of Mass Communication"

Robert West, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*
"Eliot as 'Dead Master': The Case of John Ashbery"

- 10:45 a.m. **Interlude**
Book Display, arranged by Larry Melton

- 11:15 a.m. **Seventeenth Annual T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecture**

Marianne Thormählen
University of Lund

- 12:30 p.m. **Lunch**
Tenderloin Room, Park Plaza
Reservation and payment required in advance of the annual meeting (see registration form).

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- 2:30 p.m. Depart Inn at the Park for Fathmans' Farm (transportation provided), where the rest of the day's activities will take place.

- 5:30 p.m. **Open Forum of Society Members**

- 6:30 p.m. **Dinner**
Reservation and payment required in advance of the annual meeting (see registration form).

Sunday, September 29

First Unitarian Church
5007 Waterman Boulevard

Persons attending the annual meeting are urged to make travel plans which will allow them to take part in all of Sunday morning's events.

- 9:30 a.m. **Sermon**
Rev. Earl K. Holt III

- 11:00 a.m. **Forum**
William Charron, Chair

Chris Buttram Trumbold, *Sam Houston State University*
"Faith, Ethics and Evangelism: Eliot's Unpublished Religious Prose"

Kathleen Ricker, *Loyola University (Chicago)*
"Fair Fields and Waste Lands, 1348-1942: William Langland, T. S. Eliot, and the Rebuilding of Christian Community"