

# T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

Number 32

Summer 1997

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### Eighteenth Annual Meeting to Feature James Longenbach as Memorial Lecturer

James Longenbach, Joseph H. Gilmore Professor of English at the University of Rochester, will deliver the Memorial Lecture at the eighteenth annual meeting of the T. S. Eliot Society, to be held on September 26-28 in St. Louis. Longenbach is the author of several books about modern poetry, including *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot, and the Sense of the Past* (Princeton, 1987), *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism* (Oxford, 1988), and *Wallace Stevens: The Plain Sense of Things* (Oxford, 1991). Among his forthcoming books are *Modern Poetry after Modernism*, a study of postmodern American poetry, and *Threshold*, a book of his own poems.

The complete program for the annual meeting appears elsewhere in this newsletter. A registration form is also included.

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### T. S. Eliot Society and the ALA: An Update

The T. S. Eliot Society sponsored two well-attended sessions at the American Literature Association meeting on May 23-25 in Baltimore. The two sessions, chaired respectively by Jewel Spears Brooker and Sanford Schwartz, included papers by David Chinitz, Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Michele Tepper, Robert Abboud, Lois Cuddy, and William Blissett. Abstracts of the papers by Chinitz, Dettmar, and Tepper appear elsewhere in this issue.

At the Baltimore meeting, the presidents of several modern author societies, including Sanford Schwartz of the T. S. Eliot Society, met to discuss the possibilities of a bi- or tri-annual summer conference on modernism. Burt Hatlen of the National Poetry Foundation at Orono has already secured his board's consent to run an inaugural conference in 1998; details will be announced in the *Newsletter* as they develop.

For its 1998 meeting, the ALA will return to San Diego, where the Eliot Society will again sponsor papers.

Members may want to make note of the ALA website: <http://english.byu.edu/cronin/ala/html>.

### Announcements

◆ A long-time practice of the Society is to hold the closing sessions of its annual meeting at First Unitarian Church, the congregation founded by William Greenleaf Eliot, the poet's grandfather. Rev. Earl K. Holt III, minister of First Unitarian, bases his sermon for "Eliot Sunday" on a text from the poet; a collection of Mr. Holt's Eliot sermons is forthcoming. Services often include responsive readings from Eliot and musical works set to Eliot texts. First Unitarian has generously given over its "Sunday forum" hour to the Society for the representation of papers. Persons making plans to attend the annual meeting are therefore strongly encouraged to stay through the conclusion of the meeting on Sunday, as the sessions at First Unitarian often prove to be highlights of the year's events.

◆ Larry Melton will once again prepare a display of Eliot books by Society members. Persons planning to attend the meeting are also invited to bring off-prints of articles about Eliot to share.

◆ The Jeannie Kittrell Trio, which will provide music on Saturday evening at the annual meeting, is well-known in the St. Louis area, specializing in ragtime and early jazz.

◆ Members of the Society who publish books on Eliot or related topics are invited to have their publishers send book announcements to the editor for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. An announcement of a book by Grover Smith appears in this issue.

◆ Thanks to Grover Smith for pointing out the mis-numbering of a previous issue of the *Newsletter*, thus enabling the editor to provide an accurate number on the current issue.

◆ The secretary of the Society, Grover Smith, asks that members send him the names and addresses of prospective members of the Society so that he may write to them. His address is 215 W. Woodridge Drive, Durham, NC 27707.

Jaidka, Manju. *T. S. Eliot's Use of Popular Sources*.  
Lewiston: Mellen, 1997. viii+173 pp.

Manju Jaidka's work (originally called *Clown, Chorus, Gumshoe: T. S. Eliot's Popular Sources*) is invaluable in covering much hitherto unpublished Eliot material--and not only from the Houghton Library papers at Harvard, where she spent part of her Post-Doctoral Fulbright Research Grant a few years ago. As a native of India, she is fascinated by a poet who, in turn, revealed much interest in her part of the world. What inspired Dr. Jaidka here was Eliot's use of popular culture, a broad topic certainly deserving of more study. Her focus is specifically on three general matters: nonsense poetry (as with Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear), music hall and vaudeville shows, and the popular detective novel. Not all of Eliot's citations to Conan Doyle, notably in unpublished Houghton papers, are favorable, e.g., "Holmes is so heavily weighted with abilities, accomplishments and peculiarities that he becomes almost a static figure." Jaidka's aim, as explicitly cited in her Afterword, is to cut the "steadily growing distance between Eliot the poet and the common reader." In striving for this goal, she asks how one can explain "the existence of contradictory strains, the popular and the elitist, in Eliot's work." How indeed?

Her laudable endeavors are crammed with factual parallels and much documentation, citing the best contemporary scholarship. Certain items which caught my eye may also interest the specialized reader. For instance she identifies the "hooded hordes" in *The Waste Land* as positive, not negative: "If the solitary silent figure in mocha brown stands for the detective, then the 'hooded hordes' represent the truth that is initially hidden from the detective--the reality that he must seek in order to solve the problem" (p. 123). Although she revels in comparisons which have also intrigued me, for example links between "Portrait of a Lady" and "Prufrock" (pp. 75-78), she does make some parallels which happen to differ from my own conclusions; e.g., she compares J. Alfred with young Hamlet (presumably meaning the Bard's own version, not a later adaptation, rather than Walter Pater on Richard II--my own preference). Her finding the reference to "Hieronymo's mad again" an allusion to supposed Danish royalty ("the crazed prince") strikes me as a bit windward. (But then *Hamlet Studies* is published in India.)

Still, the book is so full of intimately hitherto unglossed echolalia that an Eliot scholar can ill afford to miss it. Thus the poem starting "How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot" clearly derives from Lear's own "How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear," ironically enough. It is finally gratifying, not merely pleasant, to learn that she acknowledges permission from Mrs. Valerie Eliot to report many of these matters.

Robert F. Fleissner  
Central State University

## Seminar in Literature and Religious Experience Focuses on Eliot's Spirituality

In 1997's Spring semester, on any given week, 10-12 undergraduates (majoring in philosophy, literature and business), and 2-4 auditors (graduate students in art, psychology and history) would attend a seminar titled "T. S. Eliot: Poems, Plays, Essays." Whether fortunately or not, the class fell to a professor just completing a nine-year manuscript called *Eliot's Middle Way: Contemplative Spirituality and the "Four Quartets"*. Like the manuscript, the course pivoted on the significance of Eliot's 1927 intra-religious conversion to the Anglo-Catholic church.

This semester, I decided to end the first class meeting in a new way. To illustrate the seminar's conversational and dialogized pedagogy, I distributed copies of Eliot's self-parody in which he writes, "How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!/(Whether his mouth be open or shut)." Then I read a sentence from *Tracing T. S. Eliot's Spirit* in which A. D. Moody speaks about concentrating "on articulating the way in which the poetry articulates you" (138). After first reading Eliot's lines aloud, I asked each person to write a self-parody and then to read what he or she had written. This activity generated a discussion of poetic voice: the relation between Eliot and the speaker in the poem, how that voice is heard and understood, and the relation between poetic voice and reader's voice.

**Course Description:** With the recent publication of his 1926 Clark lectures, and 40 poems, written in his youth, that Eliot wanted to keep hidden, and with the movie "Tom and Viv," new questions arise about the modernist poet T. S. Eliot. To address them, we will study the life and writings (critical essays, plays, poetry) of Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) whom Paul Murray, in *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, calls "a skeptic with a taste for mysticism." To that end, we will view the video "Tom and Viv," listen to Eliot reading his own poetry, and view a mixed-media slide presentation on the *Four Quartets*.

From the religio-literary standpoint, life-attitudes embodied in literature may be of more religious significance than dogmas or doctrines. Our approach to the meeting of religion and literature is not simply an examination of literature for its explicitly religious content. Rather we will employ a dialogized hermeneutic based on Martin Buber's "poetics of dialogue" and Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogic imagination," to listen for *human* meanings and values. Eliot's philosophical poems will be read as intertextual exchanges between (1) author and text; (2) author/text and reader; and (3) a reader's dialogized self-formation. While critical issues like religious language, symbol, metaphor, myth, and imagination will be discussed, this seminar will primarily focus on the *mystical sensibilities*, what A. D. Moody calls the "music, word, meaning and value" of Eliot's poems and plays.

Kenneth Kramer  
San Jose State University

## A Glimpse of Fiona Shaw in *The Waste Land*

[The two paragraphs which follow are part of a long review which Paul Sonnenburg wrote for *The Newsletter*.]

First it must be said that Ms. Shaw is a superlative "instrument" for poetry. Manifestly intelligent and with a profound grasp of the text, she meticulously articulates every consonant, each vowel (even when shifting swiftly among diverse dialects) so that the ear misses nothing the poet provides. Individual words take their places in phrase or sentence, allowing rhythms stately, swift, or ponderous by turn to elevate the thought and emotion of the poetry into vibrant immediacy. Every punctuation point accomplishes its exact purpose, but never obtrusively. Even as the hearer's analytical brain subliminally notes the craft, the poem's power is freed to soar and seize the intellect and heart. So superb is this woman's command of her art that she becomes at times functionally transparent, only her supple voice and immaculate diction proof that the poetry is actually "happening" before the mind's eye.

Throughout the performance, I felt myself to be not so much listener as participant. Line after line, I was swept into the scenes, could feel der Wind on my cheeks, walked with the crowds over the bridge, recoiled at the rattle of the dog dug dirt above the sprouting corpse. With disarming surety, Ms. Shaw slipped into one character, then another, filling them with quickness or despair. Down the alp she flew, dispensed Madame Sosostri's wacky wisdom, interrogated Stetson, combed out her shining hair, one moment radiating exquisite femininity, then no sexual valence whatever, occasionally pungent with testosterone. Among her peculiar gifts is Ms. Shaw's ability to render abstract notions plastic, to manipulate not only the poet's concrete images, but the ideas they signify. It's one thing to inhabit characters, or even churches, mountains, and deserts. But what is it to float Time into the space above an audience, waft Fear into another's nostrils, loft History and Hope into your hearer's heart?

Paul Sonnenburg

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### "Able to make use of the fox trot": Eliot and Popular Music before *The Waste Land*

*Abstract of a paper for the American Literature Association*

Contrary to the commonplace view of Eliot as an uncompromising champion of high art, the young Eliot overtly tied his own fortunes to the rise of American mass culture, and specifically of American popular music. In his poems and prose of 1910-1921 we find the expression of a profound ambivalence in which Eliot deliberately yet reluctantly ranges himself with modern popular culture against an unpalatable and moribund high tradition.

"Cousin Nancy," for example, expresses Eliot's ambivalence toward the craze for "social dancing" that struck the U.S. in 1912 and migrated with Eliot to England shortly thereafter. The poem's narrative seems caught between

admiration for and discomfort with Nancy's participation in the nascent culture of the "Jazz Age." Yet Eliot himself rather enjoyed "all the modern dances" and was willing to defend such American cultural exports against conservative British opposition.

Moreover, during the early phase of his career Eliot freely incorporated American popular influences into his art. The recently published poems in *Inventions of the March Hare* illustrate the importance of jazz-inflected popular song to the formation of Eliot's verse style. "Suite Clownesque" (1910), for instance, is essentially a vaudeville-comic staging of Prufrock's urban wanderings done in a Tin Pan Alley pastiche, replete with Broadway and minstrel allusions, American slang, and, most interestingly, the cadences of ragtime lyrics. The *March Hare* poems enable us to see how the acknowledged influence of Jules Laforgue was complemented by the nearly suppressed, yet indispensable influence of American jazz. It was the convergence of these elements that produced the masterpieces of the Prufrock period. Laforgue showed Eliot how to adapt his voice to the popular material around him, and jazz gave Eliot a way to bring Laforgue into contemporary English; that is, a way to incorporate the inflections of his own language in a musical form of verse derived from another.

I end with a reading of "The smoke that gathers blue and sinks," a *March Hare* poem of February 1911, which, I argue, makes the confluence of Laforgue's modernism with the experience of jazz all but explicit: it even enacts the process by which Eliot put them together. The second stanza of "The smoke that gathers blue and sinks" is essentially jazz poetry *avant la lettre*. And the explicit references to popular music in such early poems foreground an element that is no less significant, only better assimilated, in Eliot's later work.

David Chinitz  
Loyola University (Chicago)

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### Fear of a Muzak® Planet: T. S. Eliot's Manic Pop Panic

*Abstract of a paper for the American Literature Association*

Recent criticism -- most notably the writing of David Chinitz -- has tried to suggest that Eliot's relationship to popular culture has been misunderstood. While Eliot clearly does mix the voices of high and popular culture on the printed page of *The Waste Land*, I argue that those voices are mixed in the confidence that the right kind of reader will be able to make the right kinds of distinctions between them.

An argument against the rehabilitated Eliot that Chinitz proposes might proceed along a number of different paths. One would be to discuss the role of Eliot's notes to the poem; they serve, in one of their functions, as price tags on Eliot's ostentatious display of cultural capital. Another way to get at Eliot's opinion of the poem's popular culture references would be to analyze the high culture quotations as Aroldian "touchstones" which betray the inferior quality of the poem's pop culture detritus.

"touchstones" which betray the inferior quality of the poem's pop culture detritus.

More importantly, however, the "pro pop. cult." line of argument overlooks an important piece, or class, of evidence: the fact that Eliot used the opportunity afforded by sound recording technology to add diacritical markers to *The Waste Land's* various voices. Many different voices, from different social and cultural registers, inhabit the pages of *The Waste Land*, and a bad reader -- a reader unable to "do the police in different voices" -- might make the mistake of blending them all together.

As often as we speak of Eliot's "voice," or the "voice" of *The Waste Land*, voice is always a metaphor: it's always "voice" in quotation marks. But when Eliot agreed to cut a record, the impersonal poet suddenly became all too personal, all too audible. While *The Waste Land* as verbal icon is a polyphony of voices, Eliot with his own voice, on his recording of *The Waste Land*, tried sharply to demarcate them. If the printed text of *The Waste Land* inclines toward the textual condition of postmodernism, Eliot with his voice attempted to exercise a purely modernist authority over the poem's reading. Muzak, invented in the year *The Waste Land* was published, raises the awful specter of art without artists. If ever there was a music which was "not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality," Muzak is it; it's perfectly "impersonal" music. Muzak represents the ultimate swallowing and leveling of all voices and the erasure of all markers of class, "Culture," and cultural capital.

Kevin J. H. Dettmar  
Clemson University

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### T. S. Eliot and the Modernism of Detective Fiction

*Abstract of a paper for the American Literature Association*

T. S. Eliot may be best remembered for his defense of high culture, but a close examination of his work shows him to be a writer deeply engaged with the popular culture of his day. These two positions are not, for him, contradictory ones: in Eliot's theory and practice, the health of high culture depends on its close interrelation with an equally healthy and broadly engaging popular culture. In particular, detective fiction -- a form of popular modernism -- has a privileged place in Eliot's understanding and use of popular culture. Detective novels in general, and the world of Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in particular, were sources from which he drew in his own writings throughout his career and were the recipients of his sustained critical attention. Eliot's criticism proposes, and his poetry attempts to enact, a unified literary culture in which popular and high culture work together and influence one another.

The theory behind Eliot's practice was laid out in the 1927 *Times Literary Supplement* leader, "Wilkie Collins and

Dickens," and in a *Criterion* review of detective fiction the same year entitled "Homage to Collins." In the *TLS* piece, Eliot postulates a role for detective fiction in the maintenance of the English literary tradition: Dickens's drama and Collins's melodrama each need the pressure of the other to remain interesting and innovative. Without ever losing sight of his belief that Dickens's was the greater genre and the greater genius, Eliot posits Collins and the detective novel tradition he inspired as a source of literary tradition that must be maintained not just for itself but so it can be drawn upon. In the *Criterion* piece, he attempts, a year before any critic usually cited by scholars of detective fiction, to set up standards and canons for the detective novel in order to protect its artistic integrity. In doing so, I argue, he sets up detective fiction as a mediating force between the 'protoplasm' of mass culture and the 'ideal order' of the high cultural tradition that can allow ideas and forms from each side of the cultural divide to find their way across it. It is as much the middle-class art form that the 1921 "Marie Lloyd" essay claimed could no longer exist, and our reading of that essay -- and indeed, of the entire course of Eliot's career -- must be tempered by an understanding that this apparently 'minor' art form has, for Eliot, a major role to play.

Michele Tepper  
University of Michigan

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### 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:  
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# T. S. Eliot Society Annual Meeting — September 26-28, 1997

## Program of Events

### Friday, September 26

- 4:00 p.m. **Board of Directors Meeting**  
*The Inn at the Park*
- 6:30 p.m. **Registration.**  
*Empire Room, Park Plaza*  
*232 N. Kingshighway*  
William Charron, Treasurer
- 7:00 p.m. **Welcome**  
Sanford Schwartz, President
- Presentations:**
- Session One: Background, Sources,  
and Allusions
- Nancy Hargrove, *Mississippi State*  
"The Cubist Ballet *Parade* and  
Eliot's *The Waste Land*"
- Carol Gilbertson, *Luther College*  
"A Poem I Have in Mind":  
Reading *The Waste Land*  
Composition Through the  
Letters"
- Brief Interlude
- Joseph Baillargeon, *Seattle, Washington*  
"Typography and *The Waste Land*"
- Jayme Stayer, *University of Toledo*  
"Wagner, Bakhtin, and *The Waste*  
*Land* Scholarship: A New Frame-  
Work for the Interpretations of  
Allusions"

### Saturday, September 27 *Empire Room, Park Plaza*

- 9:00 a.m. **Greetings**  
Linda Wyman
- Presentations:**
- Session Two: Influences and Appropriation
- Kevin J. H. Dettmar, *Clemson University*  
"Institutionalizing *The Waste*  
*Land*"
- Sonja Streuber, *Univ. of California (Davis)*  
"Hyacinth Girls and Uncanny Cyborgs:  
*The Waste Land, Metropolis, and Star*  
*Trek: First Contact*"

Charles W. Pollard, *Calvin College*

"HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME Again  
for a Poetic Revolution: Dialect and the  
Renewal of Poetry in Eliot's *The Waste Land*  
and Kamau Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage*"

- 10:30 a.m. **Intermission**
- 11:00 a.m. **Eighteenth Annual T. S. Eliot Memorial  
Lecture**  
  
James Longenbach  
*University of Rochester*
- 12:00 p.m. **Lunch**  
*Tenderloin Room, Park Plaza*  
Reservation and payment required in  
advance of the annual meeting (see  
registration form).
- \* \* \* \*
- 5:00 p.m. **Reception** *St. Louis Woman's Club*  
  
Jeannie Kittrell Trio  
  
David Chinitz, *Loyola University (Chicago)*  
"The High-browed Rhymes of his  
Syncopated Linse": Popular Song in  
*The Waste Land*"
- Michael Coyle, *Colgate University*  
"That Shakespearian Rag: A  
Refinement"
- 7:00 p.m. **Dinner** *St. Louis Woman's Club*  
Reservation and payment required in  
advance of the annual meeting (see  
registration form).

### Sunday, September 28 *First Unitarian Church* *5007 Waterman Boulevard*

- 9:30 a.m. **Sermon**  
Rev. Earl K. Holt III
- 11:00 a.m. **Session Three: What the Thunder Said**  
  
William Harmon, *Univ. of North Carolina*  
*(Chapel Hill)*  
"DA: The Career of a Syllable"
- Henry M. W. Russell, *Franciscan University*  
*of Steubenville*  
"The Isaiah Palimpsest"
- Benjamin Lockerd, Jr., *Grand Valley State*  
*University*  
"The Fifth Element in Part V of *The*  
*Waste Land*"



# BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

## T. S. ELIOT AND THE USE OF MEMORY

GROVER SMITH

This book explores poetry of T. S. Eliot and three plays, *Sweeney Agonistes*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Cocktail Party*, in the light of his responses to his cultural tradition.

The concept of memory, as an acknowledgment both of a cultural heritage and of its availability for original works of mind and imagination, unifies this study by Grover Smith. Eliot was tradition-oriented, drawing upon various cultures—primitive, Indic, European, and American—for poetic inspiration and models. By education, he was multicultural in a thoroughly legitimate sense.

In separate chapters, Smith, though commenting on a few verbal sources of types familiar from Eliot's practice of stylistic borrowing, focuses on thematic concerns. Included are the psychological labyrinth of death-in-life of Poe's tales and poems; transfigurations of Hamlet from Shakespeare to Goethe, Coleridge, and Freud; popular stage entertainment in nineteenth-century America; poetic stimuli from James Barrie, Arnold Bennett, and Aldous Huxley; twentieth-century speculations on time and serialism; the world of occult phenomena in W. B. Yeats and, later, the novelist Charles Williams; and Eliot's obsessive critiques of primitive myth and ritual.

In various ways, all of these interests intersected. Smith shows in Eliot's dedication to diverse traditions a practical imperative, and to a great extent a moral one, for a poetic art grounded in traditional American reverence for inherited values. One significant topic of the book addresses the bond between the nineteenth-century American democratic heritage, with its ethic of self-reliance and personal accountability, and Eliot's idea of tradition and emphasis upon the poet's "doing a good job." This topic relates to further critical allegiances, including a transitory moral appeal to classicism.

In one of his nine chapters, Smith examines Eliot's partial relinquishment, in plays and the later *Quartets*, of crafted unity of thought and feeling in favor of "rumination," earlier disapproved of.

Smith's circle of demonstrations concludes with an appendix on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," discussing the importance of that poem and its protagonist to the exploration of Eliot's commitments to tradition and to the "unified sensibility."

Chapters of this work that have previously appeared as isolated essays have been revised, and in several cases rewritten, for book publication. The volume makes new and original contributions to Eliot scholarship.

**About the Author:** Grover Smith received the B.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Columbia University. From 1989 to 1991 he was president of the T. S. Eliot Society. For forty-seven years he was a university teacher. His two previous books on Eliot, *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (1956; 2d edition, 1974) and *The Waste Land* (1983), are widely known. His edition of the secretarial account of the Harvard University graduate seminar on scientific methods, in which the young Eliot participated, was published as *Josiah Royce's Seminar, 1913-1914: As Recorded in the Notebooks of Harry T. Costello* (1963). He also compiled and edited the volume *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (1969). Smith has produced monographs on Ford Madox Ford and Archibald MacLeish and essays on W. B. Yeats and others.

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