

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER

Number 35

Summer 1998

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

**CHARLES ALTIERI  
TO DELIVER  
19<sup>TH</sup> MEMORIAL LECTURE**

The Society's 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, to be held in St. Louis on September 25-27, will be addressed by this year's Memorial Lecturer, Charles Altieri, Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley. Widely known for his thoughtful and critically engaging studies of many aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature, especially poetry and poetics, Altieri is a highly productive and versatile critic. Among his many publications are such books as *Acts and Quality: A Theory of Literary Meaning* (1981), *Sense and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry* (1984), *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (1989), *Canons and Consequences* (1990), and *Subjective Agency: A Theory of First-Person Expressivity and Its Social Implications* (1994). A new book, *Postmodernism Now*, is to be published later this year. Charles Altieri is an effective and persuasive speaker. The title of his Memorial Lecture is "Eliot as Theorist of Emotions," and it will be delivered on Saturday at 11.00 a.m.

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

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**HELEN VENDLER:  
1999 MEMORIAL LECTURE**

Distinguished critic of modern poetry, Helen Vendler, A. Knigsley Porter University Professor of English at Harvard, has accepted the Society's invitation to be the 20<sup>th</sup> Memorial Lecturer at the 1999 annual meeting.

**Announcements**

- A long-time practice of the Society is to hold the closing session of its annual meeting at First Unitarian Church, the congregation founded by William Greenleaf Eliot, the poet's grandfather. Rev. Earl Holt III, minister of First Unitarian, bases his sermon for "Eliot Sunday" on a text from the poet. 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 presentation 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.
- The Society is grateful to Dr. and Mrs. Eric Richards, current owners of the Eliot Family Home at 4446 Westminster Place, for their generosity in allowing the Saturday Reception to be held at their home.
- 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.

**Five Elected to the Board**

As result of the recent ballot to fill empty places on the Society's Board of Directors, the following five members have been declared elected: Michael Coyle, Melanie Fathman, William Harmon, David Huisman, and Benjamin Lockerd. The term of office, in each case, is three years. We offer our congratulations to the newly elected members, and express thanks to them for volunteering to serve the Society.

## ELIOT IS *TIME* MAGAZINE'S MOST INFLUENTIAL POET OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

It is with much pleasure, and some amusement, we note what we have suspected all along: that T.S. Eliot is the most influential poet to write in the English language in this century. The recognition now comes in the form of a the-best-of-the-century list compiled by *Time*. In introducing the poet to the readers of *Time*, Helen Vendler—also see item below—astutely points out, "Eliot's vignette's of modern life (some sardonic, some elegiac), and his meditation on consciousness and its aridities, reclaimed for American poetry a terrain of close observation and complex intelligence that had seemed lost. The heartbreak under the poised irony of Eliot's work was not lost on his audience, who suddenly felt that in understanding Eliot, they understood themselves."

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### ABSTRACT OF ELIOT PAPERS, ALA 1998

The following papers were presented at the Eliot session organized by the Society during the American Literature Association meetings in San Diego:

**"Building a Modern Criticism: T.S. Eliot and the Aesthetic Sphere"** Jan Gorak, University of Denver.

The publication of *Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry* in 1993 has cleared a space for the reassessment of Eliot's criticism of sixteenth and seventeenth century literature, an inquiry that can open up debate about Eliot's critical procedures and rhetoric in the "great decade" between 1917 and 1927.

The aim of this paper is to begin this process by investigating Eliot's work as a reviewer in these years. I argue that Eliot's unique contribution can only be investigated the possibilities open to him: the analysis of "dramatic types" pioneered by Schucking and Stoll; the patriotic and civic tercentenary celebration commemorating "the member for Hull" that inspired Eliot's own "Andrew Marvell"; the reviews of expensive

luxury editions of metaphysical authors. In all these cases, as Eliot told Leonard Woolf, the essential critical activity is neither judicial nor interpretative. Instead, "a great deal depends on the way in which one tells people to read them."

In telling people how to read Elizabethan drama, Eliot emphasized its unnerving farcical structures; in guiding an audience through the complexities of metaphysical poetry, Eliot emphasized its figures and swerves from literal meaning. This is his way of countering the (to him) illegitimate claims on the national memory he sees made by appeals to a "new Elizabethanism" abroad in twentieth-century England, or a continuous legacy of liberty from the Norman Yoke through Marvel to Sir Henry Newbolt. At this stage, Eliot is a harsh domestic and foreign witness to the triumphalism of "an insurgent middle class. . .able to recognize no standards beyond its own."

But by degrees Eliot reverses this verdict. His Clark Lectures pull back from the challenging positions he worked out, on the run so to speak as a reviewer, and begin to map out a cultural decline Eliot sees a pervading Europe. Touchstones of verbal merit now transmute into symbols of cultural catastrophe, Baudelaire and Donne become object lessons in moral failure; Eliot's entire cultural landscape shifts bewilderingly in spiritual and ethical meaning.

**"Frost and Eliot: Forty Years of Interaction"**  
William Harmon, University of North Carolina,  
Chapel Hill.

Each was born in the last third of the nineteenth century, west of the Mississippi but in a family that traced itself back to a seventeenth-century immigrant from Wessex to Massachusetts; each met Ezra Pound during 1913-14, and each published his first two books of poetry in England during the second decade of the twentieth century. But they never met until 1928, and for many years their personal and professional association was sporadic and unfriendly, especially on Frost's side. From 1947 until they died during the 1960s, Eliot went out of his way to pay his respects to Frost, and Frost returned the compliment.

Their works, however, seem to engage in a robust dialogue beginning with *The Waste Land* (1922), to which Frost's *New Hampshire* (1923) seems to be an

answer; Eliot's "New Hampshire" may be an answer to an answer. In time, each would write a poem about a significant thrush, Eliot's saying "Go, go, go" and Frost's almost saying "Come in." During the 1940s, Eliot included at least three references to Frost in the beginning of "Little Gidding," and Frost returned to the setting and properties of *The Waste Land* in his Grail poem, "Directive."

Now at the end of the century we can see that Eliot and Frost were in many respects the only truly popular poets among the greater modernists—Eliot with more of a common touch than has been suspected, Frost with more of the true avant garde in ideas and techniques.

**"A New Type of Intellectual: Eliot's Contemplative Withdrawal" Kenneth Kramer, San Jose State University.**

On June 29, 1927, Eliot entered the sacramental life of the Church of England (or, as he preferred to call it, "The English Catholic Church"). Less than two years later, he wrote to his close friend Paul Elmer Moore: "What I should like to see is the creation of a new type of intellectual, combining the intellectual and the devotional—a new species which cannot be created hurriedly." In the context of recent adversarial views of Eliot (i.e., misogynist, anti-Semite, and crypto-fascist), I appeal to his counter cultural contemplative spirituality. I ground my remarks in his third Clark lecture, "Donne and the Trecento" (1926) in which he, like Dante, distinguished Richard of St. Victor as one who "in contemplation was more than man." Eliot focused on a long passage from Richard which distinguished between *cogitatio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*. For Eliot, as for Richard, contemplation was an attitude of mind, a proclivity of soul, a process of perceiving and communicating a "more penetrating gaze of mind, suspended with wonder concerning manifestation of wisdom."

To trace Eliot's spiritual sensibilities from his liberal Unitarian background, through philosophical skepticism and Indic metaphysics, and then to Anglo-Catholic, trinitarian sacramentality, a wide-ranging collection of biographical information is

needed. Based on what Eliot has said about himself, what friends have said about him in memoirs and personal conversations, and what biographers and critics have written, I briefly discuss four factors influencing his contemplative withdrawal: 1) Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutras*, 2) Vittoz's meditative psychiatry, 3) Andrewes' "Private Prayers," and especially 4) the Kelham monastic community.

Though tempting, it would be too simplistic to conclude that Eliot, himself, was "a new type of intellectual," or even to make the less risky assertion that "combining the intellectual and the devotional" remained a compelling possibility hinted at in the Four Quartets. Yet, how else can one respond to the poem's "raid on the inarticulate," "neither diffident nor ostentatious," that traces the immediacy of timeless moments? Running through these moments is an interplay of contemplative intonations: visionary silence, meditative openness, dialectical reflection, and dialogized imagination. To the extent that Eliot imagined himself a monk, it was without monastery, habit, or vestments, instead of institutional vows, his "co-ordination of thought and feeling--without either debauchery or repression" challenges the noise of scholarship and adversarial criticism with deep humility, and "humility is endless."

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**Starring: T.S. Eliot**

A brief news item in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* recently reported that Eliot is among eighty eminent people with St. Louis connection for whom memorial "stars" have been embedded in the St. Louis Walk of Fame. Brainchild of the owner of Blueberry Hill restaurant, the Walk is in University City section of the town. However, lamenting the slowness in placing proper plaques to mark sites related to the poet's life, the newspaper writes, "And who could deny the need for T.S. Eliot to have a star on the walk? No one; it's there. But why, oh why, has it taken so long for someone to decide to put a plaque where the poet grew up? This summer, markers are to be imbedded in the sidewalks in front of what used to be T.S. Eliot's boyhood home, at 2635 Locust Street (now a parking lot), and where his parents later lived (4446 Westminster Avenue)."

## Brief Notice

### Schwartz: Outline of Future Eliot Studies

In the view of Sanford Schwartz, there is still significant work for Eliot scholars to do, despite the poet's "sagging reputation" and despite various hindrances in doing the work. Schwartz, writing in *Prospects for the Study of American Literature* (edited by Richard Kopley; New York University Press, 1977), lists scholarly editions, research into Eliot's family life and cultural setting, and a reconsideration of Eliot's "place" among needs in Eliot studies.

Urgently needed, according to Schwartz, are scholarly editions of Eliot's published poems and plays and complete editions of the published prose and the unpublished prose. Recent developments such as Ronald Schuchard's edition of the 1926 Clark Lectures and Christopher Ricks's edition of the early poems in the Berg Collection give scholars "reason to hope that Eliot's executors will see the wisdom of continuing to unlock the archives and commissioning the type of comprehensive edition that a writer of his magnitude deserves."

Schwartz cites the work of Robert Abboud, David Chinitz, Elisabeth Dalmer, and Lee Oser, among others, as having helped to re-focus attention on Eliot as an American writer, a subject about which Schwartz expects to hear a great deal more in the coming years.

The "magisterial studies" by Helen Gardner, Grover Smith, and Hugh Kenner and the "mode of analysis" provided by Cleanth Brooks have not been superseded, but this work was conducted, after all, without benefit of the scholarship which it helped to make possible. Reinterpretation and reassessment, consequently, will occupy scholars and critics in the coming years. Furthermore, the plays need to have serious attention such as they have lacked for more than thirty years, the literary criticism needs reassessment of the sort which Richard Shusterman's recent research points to, and "the character of . . . [Eliot's] Christianity . . . has been insufficiently examined." Our understanding of Eliot's place in twentieth-century culture is--despite the recent judgement of *Time* magazine--incomplete, nor have the problematic aspects of his personal life and beliefs been adequately understood.

Finally, Schwartz writes, "Eliot remains a notoriously difficult and elusive poet. . . . As we continue to learn the formidable paradigms of earlier criticism and situate his work in new historical and cultural contexts, the students of the next generation may be viewing his poetry in a very different light." Sanford Schwartz' elegantly written assessment merits reading in its entirety. It gives Eliot scholars little time to rest and many reasons to get to work.

Linda Wyman

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### T.S. ELIOT MEMBERSHIP LIST July 1998

In this list of members of the Society, an asterisk (\*) indicates that dues for 1998 have been paid. Membership renewals, queries, or corrections may be sent to William C. Charron, Treasurer, T. S. Eliot Society, 709 S. Skinker Blvd, #401, St. Louis, MO 63105, USA.

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# T. S. Eliot Society Annual Meeting--September 25-27, 1998

## Program of Events

### Friday, September 25

- 2:30 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**  
Linda Wyman, President  
Eliot Aloud Allowed--and Encouraged!  
Attendees are urged to bring their Eliot texts and to read aloud favorite passages
- Presentations:**  
Shyamal Bagchee, Vice-President, Chair  
Patricia Sloane, *New York City Technical College of CUNY*  
"Eliot's Use of Literary Allusion in the Epigraph to Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar"  
Michael Stevens, *Cornerstone College*  
"Eliot's Attempt at a Political *Via Media*, as Revealed in his Journal *The Criterion*"
- Interlude**  
Jayme Stayer, *Owens Community College*  
"Allusive Practice as Political Theory: Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*"  
Cassandra Laity, *Drew University*  
"Eliot and the Erotics of Decadent Hellenism in *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*"

### Saturday, September 26

- Empire Room, Park Plaza*
- 9:00 A.M. **Greetings**  
Linda Wyman
- Presentations:**  
David Chinitz, *Loyola University, Chicago*, Chair  
Gail McDonald, University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
"Through a Window: Eliot's Female Readers"

- Miriam M. Chirico, *Emory University*  
"Dramatizing Multiple Temporalities: Rhythm and Ritual in *The Family Reunion*"  
Lorne Mook, *University of Cincinnati*  
"The River and the Sea: The Creation of Affect in *The Dry Salvages*"

### Interlude

- 11:00 a.m. **Nineteenth Annual T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecture**  
Sanford Schwartz, Chair  
Charles Altieri, *University of California, Berkeley*  
"Eliot as Theorist of the Emotions"
- 12:00 noon **Lunch**  
*Tenderloin Room, Park Plaza*  
Reservations and payment for Lunch, Reception, and Dinner are required in advance of the annual meeting (please see registration form)
- Reception at "The Eliot Home"**  
*Time to be announced*
- 7:00 p.m. **Dinner**  
*Place to be announced*

### Sunday, September 27

- First Unitarian Church, 5007 Waterman Boulevard*
- 9:30 a.m. **Sermon**  
Rev. Earl K. Holt III
- Forum**  
Grover Smith, Secretary, Chair  
Nancy Goldfarb, *Western Kentucky University*  
"Baptism Averted: Bodily Waters in *The Waste Land*"  
Matthew Childs, *University of South Carolina*  
"Deconstruction Deconstructed in Eliot's *Four Quartets*"  
Laurence Kriegshauser, O.S.B., *Saint Louis Abbey*  
"The Theology of *Four Quartets*"

# Who Was T. S. Eliot?

A group of eminent scholars of T. S. Eliot have heeded guest editor James F. Loucks's call to contribute to a two-part special issue of *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*. The resulting set of articles, "T. S. Eliot at 110: Fin-de-siecle Studies," emphasizes the biographical elements of Eliot's life—among them his career, intellectual influences, personal relationships, and relation to popular culture. Contributors will include:

- Kenneth Asher on Eliot and Charles Maurras;
- Ronald Bush on Eliot at Harvard;
- Anthony Julius on his book *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*;
- Roger Kojecký on Eliot and the *Lady Chatterley* trial;
- James E. Miller, Jr., on Eliot's letters to Jean Verdenal; and
- Christopher Ricks on Eliot's sources.

The Summer and Fall 1998 issues of *ANQ*, containing these articles, may be purchased at the special price of \$20.00 for *both* issues—more than 40% off the usual single-copy price. Please add \$13 for postage outside the U.S.

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