

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

The Editor apologizes for the late appearance of this issue, and for the inconvenience caused to Members.

Number 40

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Carl Phillips
2000 Memorial Lecturer



We are delighted to announce that the distinguished poet and scholar Carl Phillips, who teaches at Washington University, has consented to deliver the 21st Eliot Memorial Lecture at the Society's Annual Meeting in September. Winner of the 1992 Morse Poetry Prize, Phillips has also been a finalist in the National Book Award and National Book Circle Award competitions. This year's Memorial Lecturer holds an MA in creative writing from Boston University, as well as degrees in Classics from the University of Massachusetts and Harvard University. His work has been described as an "honest, respectful approach to subjects that are inherently mysterious and subjective." Phillips' fourth book, *Pastoral*, has recently been published by Graywolf Press, and his translation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is forthcoming later this year.

Nominations for the Board Position: As no valid nominations were reported by the Supervisor of Elections, Members are being invited again to make nominations to the Board. Members may make multiple nominations; a person must be nominated by at least five members of the Society for her or his name to appear on the ballot. Members of the Board are eligible to succeed themselves.

Nominations are to be sent, by July 15, 2000, to the President, Linda Wyman, 621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO 65101.

**The 21st Annual Meeting of
The T.S. Eliot Society**

St. Louis, MO, 22-24 September 2000

Call for Papers

The Society invites proposals for papers or presentations to be selected for the 2000 Annual Meeting in St. Louis. Papers on all aspects of Eliot Studies are welcome. Proposals articulating clearly the central aim or direction of the paper or presentation, should be forwarded to the

President, Linda Wyman, 621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO 65101, USA. *Please bear in mind that our panel format allows no more than 20 minutes to each participant.* To be considered, proposals must reach the President by July 1; notification of acceptance will be sent by July 21. The Society has a small fund to help defray expenses of graduate students and new PhDs whose papers are selected for presentation.

**American Literature Association
11th Annual Conference
Long Beach, CA., May 25 – 28, 2000**

As in other years, the Society has arranged for two interesting Eliot sessions at the 2000 ALA Meetings. Details follow:

Panel I: Chair: Shyamal Bagchee (University of Alberta). Panelists: Robert West (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), "T.S. Eliot, Harold Bloom and the Politics of Critical Authority"; and William Harmon (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), "T.S. Eliot and John Gould Fletcher".

Panel II: Chair: Shyamal Bagchee (University of Alberta). Panelists: Shannon McRae (University of Washington), "The Police Do Him in Different Voices: Vivien Eliot and the Politics of Surrender"; Jonathan Nauman (Usk Valley Vaughn Association), "Eliot on the Seventh Terrace: Modern Concupiscence and 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service'"; and Sangsup Lee (Yonsei University), "After What Knowledge, Why Not Forgiveness? – Towards a New Reading of 'Gerontion'".

Information from ALA

Program Information: As in years past, the ALA has again attracted distinguished scholars of American Literature, and an interesting program has been planned. The easiest way to find out more about the conference and about the Ala is to go to their new website www.americanliterature.org

CHARNEL AND CARNAL IN "WHISPERS OF IMMORTALITY"

Grover Smith

Ralph Waldo Emerson, after Hawthorne, is the most illustrious of the New England writers. His stature as a moral philosopher was unrivaled for nineteenth-century America. His pertinence to Eliot's work has never been in doubt. I propose to address here a possible Emersonian component of "Whispers of Immortality," in combination with analogous material from a poem by D. H. Lawrence. I have recorded these details previously, but in no extended way. I am referring to Emerson's first book, *Nature*, issued in 1836, and along with it to Lawrence's poem "Constancy of a Sort," first printed in the *English Review* of September 1917, and collected in *Look! We Have Come Through!* the following November, with the new title "Hymn to Priapus." Both texts may shed on "Whispers of Immortality" what Dickens, in *Our Mutual Friend*, called "a bony light." The time relation is exact. In the month Lawrence's poem came out, Eliot, as he wrote to his mother on September 19, 1917, was "busy reading Emerson." If Eliot read that number of the *English Review*, the texts may have affected "Whispers of Immortality" jointly. The piece was begun in 1917, by best estimates; it was still being drafted in mid-1918. As everyone knows, there are eight successive typescripts, including carbons, compactly presented in *Inventions of the March Hare*, edited by Christopher Ricks.

"Whispers of Immortality," though an intensely personal skit, keeps its author masked as an observer of metaphysical poets and Grishkin's tarty exuberance until he insinuates himself wormlike crawling "between dry ribs." It is not clear whether those ribs have conjugal character as in the case of Eve, but in draft typescripts A, B, and C they companion references to Pipit and then to a wife-figure, each doomed to die in the palpable future. They are probably Eliot's wife of two and a half years, Vivienne, who in fact lived almost thirty years more. From a letter of Conrad Aiken printed in Ronald Bush's book, you may see what she was like in 1930, the year of the dedication of *Ash-Wednesday*. Pipit appears in "A Cooking Egg," too. In the draft version of that, the poet says he had hoped for peace and love with her. The childlike Pipit of "A Cooking Egg" is, I assume, the dream Pipit he found and lost in some kingdom by the sea.

Lawrence in his poems rarely masked his personal affairs, but he did so in "Constancy of a Sort." Like Dowson's "Cynara," the poem strains toward fidelity to an old love, with more than superficial regret. The persona, a young man, confesses that *with* other women he has been unfaithful to his best beloved, who lies in her grave, her face upturned as when, with their "last long kiss" her life ended like his own. His tumbles with country lasses obey reflexively a male categorical imperative. He is sorry; but I ask, isn't he too sorry? The only woman Lawrence ever felt this way about was his mother, whose death and posthumous kiss one may read about in Chapter 14 of *Sons and Lovers*. I put the case that "Constancy of a Sort" is a sequel to that episode. In the first draft of "Whispers of Immortality" there may be a sort of constancy to Pipit, into whose grave the poet would have his own bones flung. A mother, a wife, bones – but what says Ralph Waldo Emerson?

Emerson, in a rhetorical question on the opening page of *Nature*, acclaims the perpetual invigorating newness of the world as against the "dry bones" of its past, its traditional usages and beliefs. His metaphor of bosom and bones images very different meanings from Eliot's. No breast fetishism here: Emerson's metaphysical wit declares for the maternal nourishment in celebrating floods of life streaming from nature, in whom we are "embosomed." In Eliot the contradictory maternal images in Emerson and Lawrence vanish; busty, uncorseted – *unbony*-corseted – Grishkin replaces bountiful nature and urbanizes the country wench, and Pipit replaces the bones and then bones replace Pipit, or are her residue – or else a metonym. Privately, like John Webster's bony judy, Grishkin wears *her* skull beneath the skin.

For Eliot dry bones prevail over these different gifts of life, and poetically he gropes, in defiance of Emerson, among them for this grotesque art. But innovatively, self-reliantly – with Ezra Pound's help.

The shared imagery is nevertheless an imagery of death *versus* life. But Eliot chose to contemplate the death that metaphysical poets discern in love – the famous Thanatos-Eros equivalence. In "Whispers of Immortality," carnal knowledge acquaints Webster with a death that, as Donne is assumed to know, fails to still the sensuality of the bone, what I take to mean at least overheated thought. The poem discloses both an unassuaged longing and a despair that, in the closure, turns constancy into resignation. But tranquillity is withheld.

Which works of Emerson, Eliot read in September 1917, in preparation for his extension lectures, should have depended partly on past readings. In 1919, after his father's death, he would suggest to his mother that, in moving from St. Louis to Gloucester she should include among the books she carried away "anything to do with Emerson and his circle." His long familiarity with Emerson as essayist may be assumed. He echoed "Self-Reliance" in "Sweeney Erect" in 1917. He probably did so again in "Ode on Independence Day, July 4th,

1918," a frightful skit acknowledging, allusively, *Leaves of Grass*, a declaration of literary independence that was first published on July 4, 1855, and was greeted with Emerson's congratulations. In "Ode" Eliot spoke of poetry "Misunderstood." – the phrase recalling wryly a much quoted remark in "Self-Reliance": "Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? . . . To be great is to be misunderstood."

It can be yawning work reading Emerson even selectively; but if Eliot was conscientious the way to get a wide sampling was to choose from the twelve-volume Emerson Centenary Edition, of 1903-1904. He could find *Nature* in volume one, "History" and "Self-Reliance" in volume two; and if he got so far as "Immortality," in volume eight, he could receive a nudge, a fillip, for the title "Whispers of Immortality" from an editorial note by Emerson's son. Misquoting his father's poem "Good-bye," Edward Waldo Emerson spoke of "the voice of the Holy Spirit" that "Still whispers in the morning wind." The line properly refers to "The word unto the prophet spoken," which "Still floats upon the morning wind, / Still whispers to the willing mind." Or maybe Eliot misread Pound's marginal suggestion for the title of the poem, "Night Thoughts on immortality."

In *Nature*, in the chapter on Beauty, Emerson wrote, "There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful . . . Even the corpse has its own beauty." In February 1831, his nineteen-year-old wife, Ellen, had died of tuberculosis. He preached at his church in Boston just twelve days later on the topic of "Consolation for the Mourner." It is a pity Eliot had no access to that sermon, unpublished before 1937. In it Emerson speaks pathetically of wondering "how the grave was ever frightful to us . . . we return with an eagerness to the tomb as the only place of healing and peace. It seems to us that willingly . . . we would, if permitted, lay down our head also on the same pillow." For more than a year after Ellen's death, Emerson walked daily from Concord to her father's family vault in Roxbury, where her body lay entombed. Then, on March 29, 1832, Emerson wrote in his journal: "I visited Ellen's tomb and opened the coffin." Eliot could read the entry in volume two of the ten-volume *Journals*, published in 1909.

A look at Eliot's draft typescripts shows that "Whispers of Immortality" emerged with considerable emphasis being put on Pipit, whom at the initial stage it posed against the cushiony Grishkin, pneumatic in physical and maybe in metaphysical possibilities. (In the seventeenth century "pneumatics" meant the metaphysics of the spirit world, latterly "pneumatology.") The original of Grishkin, as Donald Gallup noted thirty years ago, was a person socially displayed by Pound as a likely poetic stimulus to Eliot. Grishkin corresponds to the surreal females, the skeletons of Webster's and Gautier's x-ray vision – breastless and lipless, and also grinning and breathless – maybe from exertion. And in draft A-B, Pipit, imagined dead, benefitted from the poet's resolute constancy, being his intended partner in the ultimate

bed, the grave. But when Pound decreed, "no pipit," the motif of constancy languished. Eliot's marriage continued.

In draft typescript C, Eliot visualized the pieties of husbands leaving dead wives to heaven; but then, in a distortion of the extraordinary sixth chapter of Genesis, he invoked the example of the Sons of God, who he said, "descend / To entertain the wives of men," and who are prepared to "embrace the grave" – when those are dead. Are such wives living graves? Constancy is menaced by adultery. Unless Sons of God resemble the sacerdotal "Abstract Entities" orbiting Grishkin, I cannot place them, though I sniff Bertrand Russell, maybe. In Genesis 6 the Sons of God become the fathers of the "men of renown," having in fact impulsively taken to wife certain of the daughters of men. D. H. Lawrence was much possessed by the daughters of men and the Sons of God, and in Chapter 10 of *The Rainbow*, published in 1915, he had shown his heroine Ursula meditating on Genesis 6, in church.

If, hypothetically, "Whispers" was to travesty and reverse Emerson's preference for nature's lushness, over dry bones, then the "dry ribs" of Pipit, or whoever, had to be preferable to the "friendly bust" of Grishkin; but the Webster imagery established the like of Grishkin as dry ribs too, though her whalebones were off. So why not clasp the uncorseted Grishkin – assuming her co-operation? Eliot says only, in drafts D-E and following, that she is as malodorous as a jungle cat. This is a good dissuasive point, but it lacks moral flavor, like sour grapes.

In committing Webster and Donne to dusty graves (in draft typescripts D-E only), Eliot abandoned the overt motif of constancy. Those poets he said had "their Ethics of the Dust" and "crawled at last between dry ribs"; it was hardly by their choice. He would presently however undertake the "dry ribs" crawl himself. If this destiny was a matter of fate, the stench of the jaguar (at first unaccountably a male) was superfluous. If it was a matter of choice, with no attention to constancy. Grishkin was still metaphysically an embraceable skeleton, though contingently vile to one's nose.

The subtext of the fantasy-lectures of 1860 entitled *The Ethics of the Dust*, by John Ruskin – namely his unfulfillable lifelong passion for such young girls as crowd those pedantic pages – could have some metaphysical import; I cannot guess what.

By the end of 1917, Eliot's marriage was showing its bones through its skin. As lately as the preceding June, Aldous Huxley, after calling on the Eliots at their flat, had confided to Ottoline Morrell: "I met Mrs. E[liot] for the first time and perceive that it is almost entirely a sexual nexus between Eliot and her; one sees it in the way he looks at her – she's an incarnate provocation . . ."

But Eliot could not have forgotten a certain Buddhist legend he encountered probably in his Oriental studies at Harvard, the parable of the holy man and the walking skeleton.

It is found in a book cited for "The Fire Sermon," among the Notes to *The Waste Land*, namely H.C. Warren's collection *Buddhism in Translations*. The holy man, it appears, begged alms of a woman met on the highroad, but she only laughed at him. Glimpsing her teeth at that moment, he realized the essential impurity of the body, a bag of bones. Whereupon, he instantly attained to enlightenment and sainthood. I brought up this legend fifty years ago, in commenting on "What the Thunder Said." Evidently it suits the metaphysics of "Whispers of Immortality." It even prophesies Pipit, poor creature.

The winner of the 2000 T.S. Eliot Prize for Poetry, awarded by Truman State University Press, is H.L. Hix, Professor of Philosophy at Kansas City Art Institute. He receives \$2000 and his collection, *Rational Numbers*, will be published by the Press and should be in bookstores now.

Society People

Three members of the Society are providing leadership for the T. S. Eliot Society in Japan. In November, **Tatsuo Murata** was elected president of TSE/Japan. **Father Shunichi Takayanagi** assumed the office of vice-president. **Sakiyo Yamanaka** is planning the 2000 meeting of the Society (Japan), which will be held at Seinan Gakuin University in Fukuoka--where she teaches. 🍀🍀🍀 *T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Evolution: Sub/Versions of Classicism, Culture, and Progress*, by **Lois A. Cuddy**, has just been published by Bucknell University Press and Associated University Presses. 🍀🍀🍀 On May 2, 2000, **Melanie Fathman**, long-time member of the Board, was honored for Cultural Enrichment at the 45th Women of Achievement luncheon held at the Chase Park Plaza Hotel in St. Louis. Over 800 distinguished St. Louis citizens were present at the impressive ceremony. 🍀🍀🍀 We report with regret the death of **Professor James W. Tuttleton**, who passed away in November 1998. 🍀🍀🍀 **Stefano Maria Casella** has been awarded a Bogliasco Fellowship by Fondazione Bogliasco--Centro Studi Ligure per le Arti e le Lettere (Bogliasco Foundation--Ligurian Study Centre for Arts and Letters). Casella will be in residence at the Centre on the Riviera near Genova--located in three ancient villas overlooking the Ligurian Sea--as he works on his edition of an annotated selection of Ezra Pound's letters. This edition, prepared in collaboration with the poet's daughter, Princess Mary de Rachewiltz, is to consist of a selected number of letters from Ezra Pound's correspondence with his parents, Homer Pound and Isable Weston. Out of about about eight hundred letters Casella expects to publish about two or three-hundred letters. 🍀🍀🍀 **Grover Smith's** article, "T.S. Eliot and the Fragmented Selves: From 'Suppressed Complex' to *Sweeney Agonistes*", has recently appeared in *PQ* vol 77 (1998).

Society Bibliographer Nancy Goldfarb's 1999 list of published Eliot material will appear in the Summer 2000 issue of this *Newsletter*.

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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