

# T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Number 44

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## ELECTION RESULTS Board of Directors

The following society members have been elected to the Board of Directors for three-year terms:

Christie Buttram  
Michael Coyle  
Melanie Fathman  
William Harmon

Congratulations to these, and thanks to all who offered to serve the Society as members of the board.

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## THE 2001 ANNUAL MEETING WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

I first attended these gatherings when the Society was exactly half of its current age, in 1991 at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. Since then, of course, I have been drawn back to St. Louis—and to our one special Annual Meeting held in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1999—pretty much every year. What attracted me most about a dozen years back, and continues to impress me to this day, is the nearly unique combination of rich experiences the Society makes available to its members: of warm fellowship, academic excellence, imaginative and often impromptu cultural adventures, and an unmistakable impression of T.S. Eliot's lasting relevance for our times. Here, I have been fortunate to form deep friendships, and profit from generous and invaluable scholarly camaraderie. And I know that my experience is very widely shared by others who come to these meetings—often from distant parts of the globe.

Close to its quarter-century of existence, it will perhaps not be inappropriate to speak of the Society's legacy as its "tradition"; through the many years the various officers of its Board have worked hard to create and nurture that tradition. It needs to be said that none of their actions would have succeeded without the affection, loyalty and wise counsel of our members, indefatigable volunteers, caring benefactors, and the friendly and helpful citizens—in-

dividual and corporate—of St. Louis. Today, as I extend to you all my invitation to join us in the festivities in St. Louis during the last weekend of September, I am reminded of all previous Presidents of this Society who have said similar words of welcome in past years. The only doubtful distinction I can claim for myself as the new occupant of that position is that I will probably travel a greater distance to get to St. Louis than any of my predecessors.

Let me invite you warmly, then, to three days of congenial and collegial celebrations. As always, the heart of our activities is the Memorial Lecture on Saturday morning; this year we are very fortunate to be able to listen to Geoffrey Hill giving that special talk. Join us for the academic events, and also for the convivial ones. Please make sure to bring your favourite Eliot passage for Sunday's "Eliot Aloud Allowed" at the First Unitarian Church. Please reserve your hotel accommodation early, and send in your registration as soon as possible. I look forward to seeing you in St. Louis.

*Shyamal Bagchee*

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## GEOFFREY HILL TO GIVE 2001 MEMORIAL LECTURE

The distinguished poet and critic Geoffrey Hill will be the Society's 22nd Memorial Lecturer. Regarded by many, including Harold Bloom and John Hollander, as the most powerful living English poet, Hill is the author of such celebrated books of poems as *Mercian Hymns* (1971), *Tenebrae* (1978) and more recently, *Canaan* (1997), *The Triumph of Love* (1998) and *Speech! Speech!* (2000). Hill's critical prose includes the following books: *The Lords of Limit* (1984), and *The Enemy's Country* (1991). Geoffrey Hill is University Professor and Professor of Religion and Literature at Boston University.

MEETING REGISTRATION FORM IS  
ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER

Twenty-second Annual Meeting  
The T.S. Eliot Society  
St. Louis, MO  
September 28-30, 2001

Friday, September 28

3:00 p.m.

**Board of Directors Meeting**  
*The Inn at The Park*

6:00 p.m.

**Registration**  
*Brown Lounge, Washington University*  
William Charron, Treasurer

7:00 p.m.

**Opening Session**  
*Brown Lounge, Washington University*

**Welcome**  
Shyamal Bagchee, President

**Presentations**

David Chinitz, *Loyola University, Chicago*  
"Mr. Eliot and the Cheese"

Cerena Pondrom, *University of Wisconsin, Madison*  
"Unexpected Synonyms: Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Marianne Moore's  
*Marriage*"

Yisrael Levin, *Tel Aviv University*  
"Revisiting Eliot and Swinburne"

Saturday, September 29

9:00 a.m.

**Second Session**  
*St. Louis Woman's Club*

**Greetings**  
Benjamin Lockerd Jr., Vice-President

**Presentations**

Brad Bucknell, *University of Alberta*  
"Eliot in Visual Voices: Martin Rowson's Re-make of *The Waste Land*"

Ronald Schuchard, *Emory University*  
"Did Eliot Know Hulme? Final Answer"

Leon Surette, *University of Western Ontario*  
"Eliot and Sidney Schiff: Account of a Friendship"

- 11:00 a.m.           **Twenty-second T.S. Eliot Memorial Lecture**  
 Geoffrey Hill, *Boston University*
- 12:30 p.m.           **Lunch**  
*St. Louis Woman's Club* (advance registrants only)
- (Afternoon free for exploring the many attractions in St. Louis)
- 6:00 p.m.           **Cash Bar**  
*St. Louis Woman's Club*
- 7:00 p.m.           **Dinner**  
*St. Louis Woman's Club*

**Sunday, September 30**

- 9:45 a.m.           **Third Session**  
*First Unitarian Church of St. Louis*
- Greetings**  
 Linda Wyman, Immediate Past President
- Eliot Aloud Allowed . . . and Encouraged!**  
 Readings by attendees
- 10:30 a.m.           **Presentations**  
*First Unitarian Church of St. Louis*
- Tom Day, *University of Warwick*  
 "Geoffrey Hill: Atonement, Betrayal and the Criticism of *Four Quartets*"
- Leonore Gerstein, *University of Michigan*  
 "The Hebrew Bible, Eliot, and Israeli Modernists: Comparing Allusive Practices"
- Jenny Leden, *St. Louis*  
 "'When the wind blows the water white and black': Enigma and Cosmological Imagery in Eliot and Bob Dylan"
- Henry Laufenberg, *Cascadia Community College*  
 "Changes in Eliot's Mytho-poetics from *The Waste Land* to *Four Quartets*"

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. 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.

## SWEENEY AMONG THE BANJO-PLAYERS

David Chinitz

A young American artist, determined to see what headway he and his banjo could make in the Old World, set sail for London. He opened there with the Sands Great American Circus Company on January 23, 1843. His act delighted the British, and within two years he had given a command performance for Queen Victoria and returned to the United States a wealthy man. His banjo had, if anything, an even greater success: it inspired numerous imitators, helped establish the minstrel show as a major genre of popular entertainment in Britain, and launched a banjo craze that lasted into the early twentieth century. This episode, in fact, constitutes the first occasion when U.S. popular culture produced an appreciable effect on the culture of Europe. The name of the American trailblazer was Sweeney.

Joel Walker Sweeney (1813-60) has not endured in the annals of American culture as have Dan Emmett and T. "Daddy" Rice; he did not compose "Dixie" or invent Jim Crow. Still, Sweeney was an influential figure. The legend persisted for many years that Sweeney had given the banjo its fifth string—the "thumb string" that gave the instrument its distinctive rhythmic character. Although historians now discount this claim, the notion that Sweeney added the fourth or bass string to the original African-American form of the instrument is still considered viable, and his importance as the first popular virtuoso of the banjo is beyond question, not least because many of the key early minstrel performers learned their banjo technique directly from him. Yet Sweeney made his greatest *direct* impact in Britain.

Dan Emmett's Virginia Minstrels (whose principal banjoist, Billy Whitlock, had studied with Sweeney) landed in England shortly after Sweeney in the spring of 1843. The group's performances in Liverpool that May represented the first organized minstrel show in Europe. The company soon dissolved, only to regroup gradually around Sweeney, who was still in the midst of his British tour. This troupe carried the minstrel show throughout England as well as to Scotland and Ireland. By the time Sweeney returned home in 1845, he had left an indelible mark. The first native English banjoist, Joseph Arnold Cave, who got his start by imitating Sweeney's technique and covering his songs, even performed on a copy of his master's instrument. George Swayne Buckley, a Sweeney pupil who played with the Congo Melodists, a notable troupe of English émigrés, was billed for several years as "Young Sweeney"; and so it went.

Is "Joe" Sweeney the missing link in the evolution of T. S. Eliot's Sweeney? Other ancestors have been identified: a

Boston pugilist; a London pub-keeper; a St. Louis physician; King Suibhne, the mad hero of a Middle-Irish romance; Sweeney Todd, the "demon barber" of English melodrama; the brute Irish stereotype of the British and American comic stages. But only Joel Walker Sweeney links Eliot's creation with the prominent minstrel show elements in *Sweeney Agonistes*, and his audacious assault on fortress England would have made this figure a natural object of Eliot's empathy. By 1919, Eliot was representing himself to his British friends as an American jazz-banjoist, an aesthetic interloper in London drawing rooms (*Letters* 357).

The transformation of Eliot's Sweeney character between 1917 and 1926 has been noted before, e.g. by Carol Smith ("Sweeney" 92). It is clear that by the time he wrote *Sweeney Agonistes* Eliot had developed a certain affection for Sweeney and even a tendency to identify with him. One would not have anticipated this from, say, "Sweeney Erect," where Sweeney appears to illustrate the human beast. But in *Sweeney Agonistes*, Sweeney has come to speak for Eliot; he is the one character in the play with spiritual insight—an insight gained through sin and suffering. According to Eliot's own account, Sweeney's speeches address the "most sensitive and intelligent members of the audience" (*Use* 147). That Sweeney's alleged sin is the murder of a woman, a crime which obsesses Eliot throughout his oeuvre, reinforces their kinship. By April 5, 1933, Eliot could sign a letter to Pound "F. X. Sweeney." And in 1957, Victor Purcell's *Sweeneyiad* lampooned Eliot as "Loyola Sweeney," indicating that Sweeney, displacing Prufrock, could now be taken for his creator—a conflation that would have been unthinkable in 1920. Joel Walker Sweeney, whose history Eliot, as an American with a lingering enthusiasm for minstrelsy, may well have encountered in England, completes the chain that links the callous ape of the "Sweeney poems" of the teens to the musical martyr of the twenties.

### 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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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*, by Ronald Schuchard. Oxford University Press, 1999. 268 pages, appendix, notes and index.

The overriding and unifying concern of these essays is to trace how Eliot's affective and devotional life determined his poetic choices. Of course! one exclaims, after a few chapters of Schuchard, that vaunted "impersonality" in Eliot's criticism is a red herring. The "objective correlative" derives not from any "negative capability" such as Keats might have recognized in Shakespeare (the novelist's ability to enter other skins) but is a projection from an intense subjective state. This is why Eliot as a reader and commentator of other poets focused so intently on the poet's sensibility, "the personal emotional tone beneath the surface" (73). His interest lay in how "the passions and desires of the creator may be satisfied in the work of art." Freud's essay, "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," and Matthew Arnold's touchstone method seem much more germane to him than any principles of the New Criticism.

Taking a cue from Dante's *Vita Nuova*, Eliot engaged in self-expression via a formula that skirted autobiography. He never denied that his own life—his "dark angel," or thorny and bewildering erotic history—was the key to his poems. One can understand why Eliot held on to the key, insisting, for instance, that his brilliant pastiche, *The Waste Land*, can be universalized to the rest of us—"You! hypocrite lecteur!"

Eliot expressed some philosophic doubt about unity of personality. Was this because so many mental influences fed into him? In his opening chapter, Schuchard lays out the tremendous course of reading Eliot set for himself and his hard-pressed students in the London Extension Lectures, 1915-19. Schuchard does well in gauging the respective magnitudes of many stars in Eliot's constellation of authors—the poets of *The Yellow Book*, Laforgue, Baudelaire, Bergson, Babbitt, Donne, Dante, George Herbert, St. John of the Cross. Eliot was no random reader; his own burning questions pointed him.

*Inventions of the March Hare* includes Eliot's "First Debate between Body and Soul." He did well to call it "first." Schuchard's thesis and his unfolding story is that this debate, this "drama of spiritual consciousness under sensual assault" (13), went on in successive transformations right to the end of "Little Gidding." The specifics of this drama, where a sensitive and self-scrutinizing person reaches for moral and religious order, give us a better grasp of that major but elusive concept of Eliot's, "the discipline of the emotions."

It is hard to imagine anyone in the future reading "Ash Wednesday" without Schuchard's chapter ready to hand. The same goes for the Sweeney quatrains, "those difficult stripped-down poems of sexual grotesques" (90), to say nothing of the abortive play, *Sweeney Agonistes*. Schuchard devotes three chapters to the stream of influences that fed into Eliot's creation of Sweeney, the fleshly man par excellence—Elizabethan drama, with its "controlled horror" (120); "the ferocious English humor" (90) of Marie Lloyd and the music hall; above all, Baudelaire's anti-romantic preoccupation with original sin and the problem of evil. In his quatrains and Sweeney poems, Schuchard makes pretty clear, Eliot attempted the role of "savage comedian."

Schuchard devotes one chapter to Eliot's interest in St. Ignatius of Loyola and Jesuit spirituality. Eliot was not exactly won over. He faulted Ignatius, along with St. Teresa of Avila and no doubt the whole Counter-reform and the Baroque movement, for giving too free a rein to religious emotion. The charge, as Schuchard phrases it, is "emotional laxity" (164). What put Eliot off? Was it the urging of Ignatius in *the Spiritual Exercises* that we pray not so much to realize as to "feel" (in Spanish, *sentir*) the truths of the faith and the mysteries of Jesus Christ? Was it "the visual imaginative method of St. Ignatius" (173), which has long been recognized as distinctive of the *Exercises* and to which Eliot alluded in the Clark Lectures?

The real discrepancy between Eliot and Ignatius may lie in this, that Eliot's experience of the "dark angel" led him to a way of detachment and renouncement, to the *via negativa* of the mystical life, that emptying of the senses and of the spirit as described by St. John of the Cross. Ignatius, on the other hand, though he hopes for the exercitant to attain complete detachment (see his meditation *The Three Degrees of Humility*), definitely favored the *via affirmativa*. One can tell this from his *Contemplation for Obtaining Love*, the keystone of the *Exercises*, and from the kind of daily prayer he favors, that of "finding God in all things." Ultimately, to be sure, Ignatius and Eliot "are folded in a single party."

Ronald Schuchard, in these "separate chapters ordered not by linear progression but by events of significance and intensity in Eliot's life and work" (22), impresses us, first of all, with his mastery of all the quotable but uncollected Eliot materials. They make his Notes fascinating to read. And he convinces us in that daunting task of Eliot scholarship, the arrangement and assessment of stellar influences; only Matthew Arnold, as critic, seems to deserve brightening. These essays, composed "to fill glaring gaps on an intellectual grid" (22), are anything but scattershot; they initiate us to a poetic *oeuvre* colored at each stage by instinct and frayed affectivity. Schuchard's title, *Eliot's Dark Angel*,

not only provides a good epithet for Bertrand Russell and a vivid projection of the shadow side of Eliot, it allows the author to quote, one stanza at the head of each chapter, from Lionel Johnson's remarkable poem, "The Dark Angel." Read as a whole after reading the book as a whole, Johnson's poem can be seen mirroring the psychomachia not of a reluctant hedonist but of a pilgrim with baffled affections drawn to the divine.

Rev. James Torrens, S.J.

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*T. S. Eliot's Orchestra: Critical Essays on Poetry and Music*, edited by John Xiros Cooper. New York: Garland, 2000. \$75.

If you were to look this book up on "Amazon.com" and check for the consumer's reports that Amazon uses to stimulate further sales, you would find the following anonymous profession: "Nearly everyone who addresses T. S. Eliot's imaginative and critical work must acknowledge the importance of music in thematic and formal terms. This collection of original essays thoroughly explores this aspect of his work from a number of perspectives." I confess to personal annoyance at any instance of critical imperative—all future readers *must* etc.—after all, readers are never *compelled* to do anything. No writing has that kind of power in and of itself. But it's not the imperative alone that here catches me so much as the implication that everyone has always known "the importance of music" in Eliot's poetry. On the contrary, although Eliot's retrospective framing of the celebrated sequence that followed after "Burnt Norton" implicitly encouraged such assumptions, as editor John Xiros Cooper observes in his *T. S. Eliot and the Ideology of "Four Quartets"* (1995), most critical approaches to Eliot "suggest the analogy" but "don't really do very much with it. They go about the business of interpretation in traditional ways that could have very easily proceeded without the drawing out of the musical parallel in the first place." Incidentally, David Barndollar, one of the contributors to this volume, cites this very passage from Cooper in setting up his own work (181). That he does so is just one example of the critical self-consciousness characteristic of this innovative volume. Cooper's contributors are generally aware that, in order really to do their work, they must treat music as something more than a vague metaphor for poetic textures that could be described or treated in other ways.

*T. S. Eliot's Orchestra* is not the work of a coterie, or even of a "new generation" of scholars: Cooper's contributors range from new Ph.D.s still without a tenure-stream appointment to long-established experts to emeriti. That

diversity is one of the most cheering things about this volume because it suggests a fundamental change in the orientation of Eliot scholarship: an orientation that characteristically involves renewing our *relation* to Eliot's poems by grasping them in historical contexts that are often as unfamiliar as they are complex in their socio-cultural dynamics. That there are disagreements among its contributors, especially in Part 1 ("Eliot and Popular Musical Culture") where the body of previous scholarship is still small, strikes me as another of the volume's strengths. Again, Cooper does not purport to lay down any kind of critical orthodoxy, but there does seem to be a general split between those of his contributors who believe Eliot was out of his depth in treating popular culture or music, and those who think he understood what he was about perfectly well. Thus it is that the groundbreaking work of David Chinitz, who generally celebrates Eliot's attentions to popular music as playful and knowing, continues to serve as a reference point for several of the contributors, at least two of whom overtly challenge him. Sometimes these challenges open up discussion by submitting a different perspective, as when Jonna Mackin argues that Eliot's take on Marie Lloyd was "more romanticized than realistic." At several points, however, it seems clear that the authors know a great deal more about Eliot than they do about early jazz and the popular culture 1910-1930. Permit me two examples that I hope will not seem uncharitable: George Harriman (69) was of mixed race—not "black"—and that distinction was no less important to him than it was, say, to Jean Toomer or Nella Larsen; and the music performed at the Cotton Club was most decidedly *not* "directed specifically toward black audiences" (34) for the simple reason that, while the entertainment and help at the club was not white, the patrons—almost without exception—were. Without doubt, the kinds of "cultural studies" approaches to canonical texts that we find in this volume raise the bar on what counts as sufficient scholarship. But despite individual errors, *T. S. Eliot's Orchestra* collects work that is as illuminating as it is diverting.

There is no way to do justice to a volume as rich and as large as this one in a short review. Let me dwell momentarily on the editor's own contribution: Cooper's "Thinking with Your Ears: Rhapsody, Prelude, Song in Eliot's early Lyrics." This is a splendid essay that offers both historical sweep and theoretical depth. Cooper begins by describing a 1921 concert program of Strauss waltzes organized by Arnold Schoenberg. Cooper describes how Schoenberg found "an inner structure of dissonances" in Strauss' sprightly compositions—compositions that contemporaneous Viennese audiences would inevitably have associated with the imperial splendor of their recent, but vanished forever, Hapsburg past. Setting up an analogy for what he

hears happening in Eliot's early lyrics, Cooper surmises that Schoenberg

must have captured the mood of a Vienna that could not forget the past, yet needed to hear the brave new tone-world of the future as well. Schoenberg discovers in the luscious melodies the coming clatter of modernity; it is as if the grandiose Vienna of the past already contained within it the noise of its own final, fizzling deflation. If one listens attentively enough, one can hear the future in embryo, but muted in Strauss's originals by the ravishing sonority of Empire. Only the arrival of the proper external conditions could bring the unborn to life. Schoenberg is, to quote Hugh Kenner's shrewd name for T. S. Eliot, the "invisible poet" of these waltzes. He merely "arranges" the given musical artifact to show that it contains—that it *must* contain—the ghastly colorings of its photographic negative image.

If, in his attempt to represent the quality of Schoenberg's (and so Eliot's) deconstruction of received forms, Cooper here resorts to photographic metaphors, it only goes to show how difficult it is to write about music in strictly "musical" terms. Other contributors to the volume, especially in Part 3 ("Eliot and the Composers") actually reproduce musical notations and attempt to integrate prosodic and metrical analysis. But what Cooper is after with his Viennese anecdote is what Ezra Pound might have called a "luminous [historical] detail"—an analogy to propose something of the key and tone with which Eliot takes up the historical materials so ineluctably joined into his own poetic texts.

The difficulty of making sense of music explicitly informs the two essays that make up the volume's unusual second section: "You Are The Music." Here as elsewhere, Cooper's project shows courage and imagination in taking on questions that hitherto have been avoided not just because they might have seemed inappropriate to a "literary" criticism but also because they are quite simply difficult to address—at least in any sense that might be meaningful for many of Eliot's readers. Brad Bucknell accordingly sets aside any discussion of analogies between "the 'way' music means, and the 'way' Eliot's poetry means," and takes up instead "the notion of music itself as a cultural signifier" (111). John Adames pursues a "history of ideas" approach in his "Eliot's *Ars Musica Poetica*: Sources in French Symbolism."

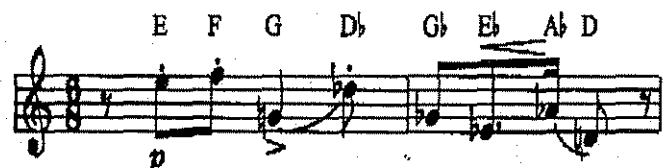
In Part 3, various contributors explore the relations between Eliot's work and the work of Tippett, Beethoven, Ives, Britten, Wagner, and Stravinsky; and David Banks explores "Two Ways of Hearing a Poem"—reading aloud and composing. There are other composers (like Alan Rawsthorne) who have set some part of Eliot's *oeuvre*, but

this is a good sampling, and in any case the volume closes with Brent E. Whitted and Andrew Shenton's checklist of musical settings of Eliot's work. That checklist strikes me as another example of Cooper's admirable thoroughness.

One might close by offering to judge this book by its cover. Cooper's title, "T. S. Eliot's *Orchestra*" might ordinarily suggest a body of "serious" musicians, but the cover photo instead offers a picture of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band (probably from 1923, though the photo credit doesn't say). Half the band, including Joe Oliver himself, is wrapped around onto the back cover. On front, we see piano player Lil Hardin (later to be Louis Armstrong's first wife), sitting center stage and showing a well-turned ankle as well as an elaborate coif, into the back of which Oliver aims his muted trumpet; clarinetist Johnny Dodds hams it up atop the piano, making a show of the soles of his shoes and so performing the transgression that contemporaneous audiences learned to associate with jazz; trombonist Honoré Dutrey is on his knees on the floor behind Hardin, his profile to the camera and also the profile of his fully extended "big long sliding thing"; and banjo player Bill Johnson stands behind the piano looking like the designated straight man: a tuxedo-wearing, African American, banjo-playing straight man in a comedy whose conventions we by now only half-remember, and half-understand. The choice of this image is, of course, significant, and explaining its semiotic play on the cover of Cooper's book might make for an interesting essay in itself. For me, the choice suggests an analogy with Eliot's music almost as rich as the one Cooper draws from Schoenberg's performance of Strauss. That is, our relation to the signifying in this photo is rather like our relation to Eliot's ideas about popular music, if not about music in general. We miss much by not recognizing the historical drift between our contemporary ideas and those that Eliot developed nearly a century ago. This carefully-considered and imaginative volume does much to remind us of things we've forgotten, and teach us things we never knew.

But really that is fun that the book invites us all to claim for ourselves. This is a serious collection of essays on a serious topic, but given how many literary people cherish music as their almost guilty pleasure, I'm fairly confident that Eliot Society readers will also find much in it to enjoy.

Michael Coyle  
Colgate University



*T.S. Eliot's Bleistein Poems: Uses of Literary Allusion in "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" and "Dirge,"* by Patricia Sloane. London: International Scholars Publications, 1999. 400 pages, index.

Patricia Sloane's book is the first of a proposed trilogy of studies concerned with five Eliot poems: "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service," "The Hippopotamus," *The Waste Land*, and "The Hollow Men." She intends to look at the poems from the relatively rare vantage of each as an absurdist fable and suggests that there might be a greater absurdist fable that they are all party to. With "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" in the opening volume the reader is immediately curious as to how she will handle and react to Anthony Julius's much-read book, *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form*. Such a curiosity is well met by Sloane's book. Her intention with the book is not a defense of Eliot from charges of anti-Semitism but rather an exegesis of the poems from a very deep study of their sources and of their allusions. Even though much of Julius's argument is destroyed en passant, the question of Eliot's alleged anti-Semitism is left open to the reader, who is now a reader much more conversant with the context of Eliot's references to Jews.

Central to Sloane's understanding of Eliot are three literary aspects of his personality. He was, according to Sloane, a satirist who loved to make words play one with another, and he was an unrepentant punner. Using this as her foundation, she looks at many of the passages routinely labeled anti-Semitic and demonstrates how a deep understanding of the sources and allusions that Eliot uses can point to a much different and, by the way, more interesting reading of his poems.

Sloane reveals Eliot's major sources for "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" and "Dirge" to be Dante's *Inferno*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Shakespeare, John Ruskin and the Bible. The final two chapters of the book are dedicated to an extremely fine and detailed analysis of the title poem's debt to Dante. This discussion and her other numerous references to Dante reveal Sloane to have a scholarly appreciation of Dante and, most interestingly, Eliot's understanding of Dante, which gives a refreshing dimension to the study of his poems.

Sloane's book is an immense treasure trove of the most detailed information on Eliot's sources and how he used them. No detail is so small that it is not thoroughly investigated and pondered. Word and line counts reveal texture in the poems hidden prior to Sloane's analysis. It belongs in every Eliot library, public and private, but it especially belongs alongside Julius's book where it will provide a valu-

able, thorough, rational, and logically argued counterbalance to Julius's passion.

F. Richard Seddon

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ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS  
AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION  
MAY 2001

Shyamal Bagchee

"Habeas Corpus: 'The Indigestible Portions': The Reader and the Necessary Abject in Eliot's Poetry"

In this paper I attempt to formulate a poststructural reading strategy involving the selves and consciousnesses—and, therefore, the choices or the relinquishment of choices—of the poet and the reader of the Modernist lyric. I take T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) as my logical and primary subject. The early poems of Eliot are remarkable for their often strident and direct address to the reader, and for extending an invitation to him or her to accompany the shifting narratorial/authorial persona through vivid and disgust-evoking terrains. Beyond, say, the "you and I" in the opening line of the trend-setting "Prufrock" (1915), Eliot's speaker in his pivotal work, *The Waste Land* (1922), labels the reader—via a line from Mallarmé—as "You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!" thereby implicating the act of reading and writing into a complex, overlapping and untrustworthy yet cross-creative relationship. At a later point in his career Eliot sought to move away from this Modernist mode into a mystical one. Especially in his post-conversion poem "Ash Wednesday" (1930), he decides to journey it alone—note the five repetitions of "I" in the brief opening stanza—preferring to describe the earlier perambulations as the necessary traversing of Inferno. Although the salvation-seeking speaker invites mystical "white leopards" to "feed to satiety/ On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained/ In the hollow round of my skull," not all can be consumed even by these supernatural partakers, and the speaker/poet is left with the awkward task of accounting for "My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions/ Which the leopards reject." I propose that having earlier imbricated his self into a composite with that of his reader, and thereby produced a communal whole, the speaker cannot now have enough ownership of his self to dissolve it all. This forces him to recognize the "indigestible portions" of the self, which he cannot totally disown as the Other. Adapting the notion of the abject, defined by Julia Kristeva and refined by other feminist theorists, I suggest that neither the reader nor the whole self can



be discarded by the poet either as the Other, or as the dissolved self, for each inhabits the boundary of the writerly self—as its non-self, though not as any knowable Other. The power that might accrue from the salvationist impulse cannot be enacted in the absence of this knowledge. The poet's reader-implicated self cannot be othered.

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Mary Grabar  
"T.S. Eliot: Environmentalist"

The 1966 paper, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in which Lynn White, Jr., claimed that modern science and technology are "permeated with Christian arrogance towards nature," is frequently cited as marking the beginning of the environmental movement, when a "revolution in consciousness" from one of anthropomorphism to ecocentrism occurred. George Sessions, in an anthology on environmental ethics, presents the standard fare of ecocentricism—"ecofeminism," "deep ecology," and animal rights—and ignores writers like T.S. Eliot, Richard Weaver, and the Southern Agrarians.

However, the "ecocentric" position has proven to be detrimental to its own goals. While ecofeminist Carolyn Merchant asserts that "the conjunction of conservation and ecology movements with women's rights and liberation has moved in the direction of reversing both the subjugation of nature and women," the reality has proven to be different. The ideal of cooperation and harmony with nature is in conflict with feminist aspirations of independence and material success.

The sexual revolution, which Wendell Berry refers to as an "industrial phenomenon" in which the body was turned into a kind of "pleasure machine," has culminated in the heralding of such developments as cyborgs and "sex work" as a way to assert female autonomy and power. Sessions wonders that ecofeminist Donna Haraway "encourages women to reject their organic origins and become 'cyborgs': a merging of humans with machines and megatechnology."

The blindness to this inevitable result arises from a historical short-sightedness and philosophical limitation. A philosophy based on materialist premises logically culminates in materialist results. The untenable ecocentric view, by abdicating human responsibility or dominion, has paved the way for domination—by technology.

A more realistic view is presented by T.S. Eliot in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. Going back to the spiritual roots of the problem, he warns that the "organization of society on the principle of private profit, as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humans by un-

regulated industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources." Rightfully aware that environmental preservation requires more than a concern for the biological, he presents a "social-religious-artistic complex" that would effect a more substantial change in environmental practices. The rejection of a materialistic ethic is necessary. For Eliot, "a wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God."

The outlook is also evidenced in his poetry, which evolves from the cynical perspective of an agnostic speaker in a harsh urban environment, or from the presentation of a clerk and a typist who join as two "pleasure machines"—to "East Coker," where a union between man and woman is a sacrament of two connected to God, earth, community, and future generations.

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William Harmon  
"T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Nineteenth-Century Prose"

In any number of details, Eliot's poetry owes a word here or a phrase there to prose fiction by Hawthorne, Poe, C. Brontë, E. Brontë, Dickens, George Eliot, Lewis Carroll, Stevenson, Conrad, Hardy, Kipling, Conan Doyle, and others. In an uncommonly large and complex number of cases, a lineage can be traced back to fantasies by George MacDonald, who originated "heart of light" years before Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and decades before the appearance of the phrase in both *The Waste Land* and "Burnt Norton," as well as the repeated collocation of fire and rose. The most engaging exemplar, however, remains Thackeray, for certain isolated words ("estaminet," "salvolatile"); for a woman named "Belladonna" associated with jewelry; and for a charade that juxtaposes Agamemnon and Nightingale seventy years before "Sweeney Among the Nightingales."

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Ethan Lewis  
"Eliot and Akhmatova"  
-mon semblable, -ma soeur

This essay treats the authors mentioned in an effort to confirm the validity of the dicta in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," concerning reading relationally. Much of my text addresses D.M. Thomas' allusion to *Four Quartets* as *Poem Without a Hero's* "English double." Yet I begin by observing that Eliot's early epochal work likewise resonates with *Poem*. In two respects especially, Akhmatova's waste land of St. Petersburg casts *The Waste Land* in relief. That "all the women are one woman," all cities one "Unreal City," is counterposed by speaker and Petersburg in *Poem* serving

as representative figures suffering what so many individuals (people and metropoli) have endured. The horrors of Stalinist collectivism resemble those of "Eliotic meltdown." Yet that resemblance underscores disparate notions of the one and many—of, for Eliot, the many in one; for Akhmatova, the one symbolizing many. But the *Poem/Waste Land* pairing likewise brings to light Eliot's implicit critique—in the "Coriolanus" passage and occasionally intimated elsewhere in the work—of congenital isolation.

As perceiving Eliot through Akhmatova helps us gage his difficult pilgrimage closing in *Four Quartets*, wherein he genuinely corresponds with others to form part of a greater whole, so *Quartets* underscores Akhmatova's only limited success in *Poem* at discerning meaning from experience. At the outset of their crowning works, both artists despair of redemption. By "Little Gidding," however, intricate patterns of meditation and recollection have, structurally as well as semantically, contended for a viable unity wherein history plays an important role. Yet *Poem Without a Hero* can never mine from history this otherworldly permanence. History at worst bars any vision beyond the present; at best, charts a convoluted path to an uncertain future. Like Eliot's, Akhmatova's message is inscribed within her structure. But—consistent with the paradoxical relationship 'twixt doubles—this similarity highlights difference: in this case, between *Quartets*' "all shall be well" and *Poem's* indeterminacy.

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Cyrena N. Pondrom

"Sex, Gender and *The Waste Land*, or T.S. Eliot and the Performativity of Gender"

One of the most influential ideas developed as American feminist theory and women's studies grew into disciplines is the assertion that gender is socially constructed. This theoretical position may be located in a context of post-structuralist theory that sees meaning constructed and deferred in language, and the speaking subject itself as constructed in discourse—positions variously elaborated by Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva. At the beginning of the last decade this idea received a powerful re-interpretation in the work of Judith Butler, who argued that gender is performative, asserting that "the performativity of gender revolves around . . . the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself" and that "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body . . . ."

And it is here that one can see T. S. Eliot profoundly anticipate what was to be a fundamental cluster of concepts taken, for much of the latter part of the century, to be *T.S. Eliot Society Newsletter*

post-modern. That Eliot's work contains a play of dramatic voices has long been well-understood, but critics have not fully recognized that a founding part of the drama is the performance of gender. Indeed, this poet, sometimes flagrantly positioned as the epitome of male poetic/sexual hierarchy, is one of the first twentieth-century figures to depict "the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions." To illustrate the way Eliot uncovers these structures of the self as performances and as socially constructed in discourse, I reexamine two crucial emotional scenes from *The Waste Land*: the Hyacinth girl, and the first conversation in "A Game of Chess," and allude to a third, the silent confession to the friend in "What the Thunder Said." Each of these scenes is drawn, I believe, from memories of intense moments from Eliot's personal life, with three different persons with whom his relationship was deeply personal. Though such attributions may never fully escape from the speculative, recently published documentary evidence makes somewhat less arbitrary the association of the first of these scenes with Emily Hale, the second with Vivienne Eliot, and the third (though a more contested one) with Jean Verdenal. It is not insignificant that each of these scenes involves markedly different performances of gender and social situations in which expectations of performance are clearly, sometimes traumatically, imposed. In understanding the full ramifications of these scenes, the biographical allusion is enriching; in the language of Butler's later book, they are *Bodies That Matter*.

Moreover, recognizing the performative elements of Eliot's understanding of gender can help us get past some disputes in Eliot criticism and perhaps help us make sense—possibly only for our own satisfaction—of some of Eliot's more abrupt decisions in his personal life. Both the first and last of the three examples are contested sites among those who wish to claim Eliot exclusively for worlds in which gender is clear and unambiguous. Significantly, each contains textual qualities which foster gender ambiguity. Such underdetermination forces a construction of gender in discourse even to read the poem or speak about it. Moreover, recognizing Eliot's understanding of gender as performative highlights the extent to which competing critical claims to assign Eliot's own gender, through these scenes, are themselves ultimately a refusal of the very portrait Eliot offers of the self as a performance actualizing some among its many fluid possibilities. Ever the creator in words, Eliot understood life itself as performance.

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