

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Number 47

Summer 2002

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

MARJORIE PERLOFF TO GIVE 2002 MEMORIAL LECTURE

The Memorial Lecture at this year's meeting will be given by Marjorie Perloff. In the course of her distinguished career, Dr. Perloff has taught at a number of institutions, including Catholic University, The University of Maryland, and the University of California, Irvine. She is Sadie Dernham Patek Professor of Humanities Emerita at Stanford University. She has written and lectured on a remarkably wide range of topics. A few of her books:

- Rhyme and Meaning in the Poetry of Yeats*
- The Poetic Art of Robert Lowell*
- Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters*
- The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*
- Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*

Dr. Perloff's recent book, *21st Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*, argues that contemporary poets still have much to learn from the avant-garde poets who were writing a century ago. The book includes a chapter on Eliot, which argues that although his commitment to avant-garde poetics declined rapidly after 1922, Eliot's early poetry introduced something radically new that is just now being more fully understood. She writes that "the imagination continues to be startled by the sheer inventiveness of the early poems, in which metonymy, pun, paragram, and the semantic possibilities of sound structure are exploited to create verbal artifacts, characterized by a curious mix of immediacy and complexity, of colloquial idiom and found text in the form of foreign borrowings." In a statement that has some resonance with Denis Donoghue's recent book on Eliot, Perloff claims, "Not linearity or consistency of speaking voice or spatial realism, but a force-field of resonating words—this is the key to Eliot's early poetic."

The title of Dr. Perloff's Memorial Lecture is "Cunning Passages, Contrived Corridors: 'Gerontion' and the Limits of Language."

THE 2002 ANNUAL MEETING WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

"... this wobbliness of words is not something to be deplored."—TSE (1950)

It is my privilege again to invite all members, old and new, to our annual gathering around and about valuable, wobbly words. They provide much instruction, these "shabby" things of poets, and they provide also a large measure of pleasure. Once more we will meet in St. Louis to celebrate and recite, to examine and understand, and to remember and to re-mind ourselves of the life and works of Thomas Stearns Eliot. No less specially will we reinvigorate ourselves with the sight and sound of our friends and colleagues doing all the activities I have listed, and more, much more. For fellowship and sharing are among the few real avenues of hope left to the students and professors of words—hardly a sturdy lot. Right words release vital energy in their the wake of their whirling progress. This energy we seek and need in the very different unsteadiness of a rigid and partitioned world.

So, once more to St. Louis, I say.

Shyamal Bagchee

BOARD ELECTION

Dr. Jayme Stayer has been nominated to retain his position on the Society's Board of Directors. As no other member received enough nominations to stand for election, no election will be needed. Dr. Stayer will continue for another three years on the Board. We thank him for his willingness to serve another term and note that his posting of our calls for papers on electronic services has brought many paper proposals and new members.

Twenty-third Annual Meeting
The T. S. Eliot Society
St. Louis, MO
September 27-29, 2002

Friday, September 27

- 3:00 p.m. **Board of Directors Meeting**
The Inn at The Park
- 6:00 p.m. **Registration**
William Charron, Treasurer
- 7:00 p.m. **Opening Session**
- Welcome**
Shyamal Bagchee, President
- Presentations**
Chair and Moderator: Leon Surette, *University of Western Ontario*
- Nancy Hargrove, *Mississippi State University*
- David Huisman, *Grand Valley State University*
- Aaron Jaffe, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Saturday, September 28

- 9:00 a.m. **Second Session**
- Greetings**
Benjamin Lockerd Jr., Vice-President
- Presentations**
- Kinereth Meyer, *Bar-Ilan University*
- Jayme Stayer, *Texas A&M University at Commerce*
- Lee Oser, *College of the Holy Cross*
- 11:00 a.m. **Twenty-third T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecture**
Marjorie Perloff, *emerita, Stanford University*
- 12:30 p.m. **Lunch**
(advance registrants only)

Saturday, continued

2:30 p.m.

Special Seminar on *Four Quartets*
Chair and Moderator: Ronald Schuchard, *Emory University*

Lesley Higgins, *York University*

Alexandra Leader, *Princeton University*

Rebecca Sutton, *Emory University*

6:00 p.m.

Cash Bar

7:00 p.m.

Dinner
(advance registrants only)

9:30 p.m.

Special Presentation
David Chinitz, *Loyola University at Chicago*

Sunday, September 29

9:45 a.m.

Third Session

Greetings

Eliot Aloud Allowed . . . and Encouraged!
Readings by attendees

10:30 a.m.

Presentations

Y. M. Ching, *Chinese University of Hong Kong*

Russell Murphy, *University of Arkansas at Little Rock*

Rev. Andrew Hawthorne, *University of London*

ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS
AMERICAN LITERATURE ASSOCIATION
MAY 2002

William Blissett

The Cocktail Party: Mediocrity and Manichaeism

When the other guests have left the first cocktail party, Edward says to the Unidentified Guest, three times, in identical words, "don't go yet." This constitutes a dramatic commitment. It has reverberations in folklore and common experience: anyone who gives three cheers has really cheered; when the auctioneer has said "going, going, gone," the deal is struck; a bill passing third reading becomes law. At this point the action of the play gets under way, and there is no stopping or going back.

In his encounter with Celia, in which both are given speeches of dark poetic force, Edward says

The self that can say 'I want this—or want that'—
The self that wills—he is a feeble creature;
He has to come to terms in the end
With the obstinate, the tougher self; who does not speak,
Who never talks, who cannot argue;
And who in some men may be the *guardian*—
But in men like me, the dull, the implacable,
The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.

The rhetorical emphasis on the word "mediocrity," to which the adjective "dull" is attached, is very heavy. Mediocrity in modern languages is regularly associated with the humdrum, and that sense is present in most classical Latin uses of *mediocritas*, with two exceptions—as a translation of the Greek *meson*, the mean between excess and defect in Aristotelian ethics, and in a single phrase in a universally known poem—*aurea mediocritas* (Horace, *Odes*, book II, 10). Any word so emphatically placed by Eliot must allow all its reverberations, and the play itself moves, as the Chamberlaynes resolve to "make the best of a bad job," from a dull leaden condition at the beginning to a golden aura of contentment and mutual consideration at the end.

The "golden mean" in classical ethics can be transcended by the greatness of soul (magnanimity) and great achievement (magnificence); so too in the Christian context the saints are enabled to do more than to "make the best of a bad job." When news of Celia's death is brought in the last act, Edward exclaims, "All for a handful of plague-stricken natives who would have died anyway." After a few moments Reilly answers with a question: "Who knows what difference [her staying] made to the natives who were dying / Or to the state of mind in which they died?" As the fragile and tentative golden mediocrity on stage withstands the first shock and begins the heart-work necessary to come to terms with it, the question arises irresistibly: What is a "native"? It turns out to be the same question as "Who is my neighbour?" Acts of heroic virtue have always been done

for the world, considered as "a handful of plague-stricken natives who would have died anyway." If some members of the audience of *The Cocktail Party*, many or few, are brought to see themselves as "natives" in this sense, that would be "recognition," the heart of the dramatic experience, and the final act would be in no sense a mere epilogue.

As for Manichaeism, the playwright at no time allows for the existence of an equal independent force of evil, and the references to the devil have a purely comic function. The special calling of Celia points to heroic virtue, not to any status of pure spirituality; and the Guardians are best equated, not with the Manichaean Cathars, or with an occult conspiracy or mafia, but simply with parishioners in a state of grace.

Virginia O. Craighill

The Conscription of T. S. Eliot: Images of World War I in Section V of *The Waste Land*.

Prior to his trip to Lausanne in November of 1921, T.S. Eliot envisioned *The Waste Land* as a city poem about London, according to Hugh Kenner in "The Urban Apocalypse," "guided by norms and decorums of an Augustan view of history." But after Eliot's journey from London to Paris and finally to Lausanne, he sat down and, as part of his psychiatric treatment, wrote "What the Thunder Said" in one sitting, according to Lyndall Gordon. This section of the poem, the only section left intact by Ezra Pound, changed the course of the rest of the poem. Eliot's physical journey through France and his psychological journey at Lausanne brought forth the most powerful images of the poem.

The imagery in Section V of *The Waste Land* is strikingly similar to literal images of World War I and the landscape that war created. Using photographs and excerpts from diaries of soldiers at the front to illustrate the parallels, I argue that Eliot's memory of the stories he heard from World War I and the media images from newspapers and newsreels play a major part in his creation of Section V. Traveling, as he must have, through the still war-ravaged landscape of France on his way to Lausanne propelled these memories into his consciousness, and these literal pictures of the war's landscape became the nightmare visions of "What the Thunder Said."

Since *The Waste Land* was first published in 1922, four years after the end of World War I and before any of the major literature about the Great War was written, and since it is not overtly a war poem, most criticism has overlooked the connection between the images in Section V and the pictorial and verbal images of the war from 1914 to 1918. I suggest the reason most critics see the connection between this imagery and World War I as oblique or non-existent is because they see the landscape of the poem as symbolic rather than literal. While not denying the obvious and im-

portant symbolic nature of the poem's vision, my work points out the correlation between "What the Thunder Said," the visual landscape of waste created by the new technical machinery of war, and the fragmentation of the soldiers' syntax and beliefs as shown in some of their journal entries.

Matthew Hofer
Eliot in Hell

In his 1933 Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia, T. S. Eliot declared, with seeming confidence, that Ezra Pound's notorious Hell Cantos (which had been drafted, significantly, early in 1922), depict "a hell for the other people . . . not for oneself and one's friends." And yet when Eliot suggested that Pound could rectify the problem by putting him in this hell, he must surely have already known that his "friend" had done just that. In point of previously-unknown fact, of the many anonymous denizens of hell in these two poems—virtually all of whose names I have recuperated through extended archival research—Eliot alone appears in both. That is, he is found both at the end of Canto 14 and the beginning of Canto 15 as "Possum Episcopus," an appellation Pound had recently begun using in their correspondence, though the word *Possum* in the poems is elided as a series of ellipses that retains only the final letter, "m" (for a variety of reasons, all the proper names in the Hell Cantos were similarly treated). Moreover, eight lines of Canto 14 clearly echo Eliot's well-known description of postwar London that concludes the first section of *The Waste Land*, "The Burial of the Dead." This resonance, which is, I think, quite striking but has received absolutely no critical attention, further strengthens the formal link between the poems even while it gestures toward the divergent cultural perspectives of the poets.

Pound's having drafted the Hell Cantos as he was working as a kind of literary agent to place Eliot's monumental modernist masterpiece is far from coincidental, as is Eliot's ironic offer to consider publishing Pound's Hell Cantos in the first issue of *The Criterion* (despite the unease he registers with "the rape of the bishop"). The reasons for Eliot's inclusion among Pound's damned are complex and enlightening; no less so, for that matter, is Eliot's vexed relationship to these poems, which can be traced profitably through over a decade of correspondence and criticism, revealing a very real literary rivalry concurrent with a very real and enduring friendship.

Shannon McRae

Glowed into Words: Madness, Vivien, and Eliot's Desiring Text

It has become a critical commonplace to hold T. S. Eliot up as the exemplary reactionary modernist. Before he could convincingly play the role, however, he had first to distance himself from the instability that had beset him prior to his religious conversion: the nervous breakdowns he suffered while writing *The Waste Land* and the even more spectacular disorder of his wife Vivien. This essay argues that the difficult circumstances of his marriage provided for Eliot the necessary conditions for his writing of *The Waste Land*, and that both Vivien's illness and her intelligence were essential to its making. The poem is thoroughly imbued with Vivien's presence—as an object of the poet's terror and a figure for his desire.

I do not mean to suggest that the poem is purely biographical, nor that it is ultimately about his marriage. Rather, she is a central, metaphoric node in the complex matrix of mythic, literary, and libidinal cross-references from which it is constituted. Although separating himself from Vivien may have been necessary to his emotional survival, *The Waste Land* exists because of Eliot's identification with her suffering.

In many of Eliot's early poems, the speaker suffers from desire that is unspeakable because it is unfulfillable, but so intense that it produces a visionary state similar to madness: that state which is, according to tradition, the condition of poetry. *The Waste Land* chronicles the poet's attainment of that poetic condition, with Vivien as the immediate, living figure for that process. By simultaneously serving as a model of dysfunction, an essential anchor, and perhaps on some level, for a while, a figure of desire, Vivien, as Eliot's most immediate and significant model of suffering femininity, embodies that vision: a living and damaged muse.

Contemporary psychoanalytic critics, most notably Roland Barthes and Leo Bersani, describe desire-driven disintegration of the self into art as *jouissance*. Building from this theoretical standpoint, as well as other contemporary theories of gender and sexuality, I retrace various mythic sources that inform *The Waste Land*, particularly the Celtic precursors to the Grail Legend and several Classic stories of poetic making to which the poem alludes. I demonstrate that these sources served, for Eliot, as the basis for his theory of difficulty and the related doctrine of Impersonality. These theories, customarily interpreted by contemporary critics as authoritarian prescriptions for appropriate reading, represent instead a poetics of self-shattering. *The Waste Land* chronicles the poet's attainment of that condition, with Vivien as an exemplary model.

Christopher R. Miller
Eliot's Pervigilium: A Poetics of Evening

As we know from Christopher Ricks's edition of T. S. Eliot's juvenilia, the poem that would become "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was originally entitled "Prufrock's Pervigilium." Eliot was referring to a poem from the Latin Anthology called the *Pervigilium Veneris*—a hymn to be sung on the eve of the spring festival of Venus, a lover's prayer of vernal renewal. While this background gives us a better idea of why Eliot ultimately called his poem a "love song," it does not entirely account for his choice of a twilight setting, which is featured in five of the poems in *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). My premise is that evening—as symbolic threshold between day and night, as privileged time of meditation, as site of beauty—is a poetic invention inherited by Eliot; and my argument is that in invoking this setting, Eliot is engaged in a complex play with literary tradition, one that includes both English and European models.

Eliot's settings are perhaps most obviously indebted to the Parisian tableaux of Baudelaire, who virtually created the genre of urban nocturne, the walk through a city at dusk. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" carries Baudelairean traces: the juxtaposition of vespertinal serenity with images of the unsavory, the metaphor of night as an animal, the lingering at a temporal threshold, the relation between the solitary, observing self and the goings-on of a darkening world. What is most striking about Eliot's borrowing is the way in which Baudelaire's sociological data of human suffering are abstracted into an imagist framework. In *Le Crepuscule du Soir*, the end of the day provides the occasion for thoughts on the sighs of the sick in hospitals, but Eliot displaces this detail into a startling image of the evening sky: "Like a patient etherised upon a table."

There is, however, a deeper layer of evening poetry behind both Eliot's and Baudelaire's urban twilights. The idea of evening was originally invented, as Erwin Panofsky once suggested, in Virgil's *Eclogues*, several of which end when a shepherd looks up from his song to notice the gathering darkness. Here, the end of day is rewritten as formal closure, and the inner impulse toward perpetual song is limited by the external phenomena of day and night. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton turns the Virgilian evening into a space of uncertainty, in which the aesthetic desire for temporal dilation conflicts with the ethical responsibility to rest for the next day's labors. The post-Miltonic tradition of evening poetry is symbolically inaugurated by the opening of Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," in which the meditative poet departs on his walk just as the pastoral laborer is heading home: "The plowman homeward plods his weary way, / And leaves the world to darkness and to me." In this chiasmus, two literary traditions—the eclogue and the Romantic nocturne—pass in the night. The rustic

laborer's work is over, but the poet's has just begun.

Eliot's evening scenes borrow from both Baudelaire's urban vignettes and from earlier English traditions of pastoral description and Romantic meditation. On this premise, I read the opening scene of Eliot's "Preludes" as a parody of the lyric moment of pastoral and Romantic tradition, and I read the evening tryst between the typist and the "young man carbuncular" in *The Waste Land* within a similar generic context, as Eliot's post-Romantic nocturne, a dystopian evening filtered through the sensibility of Baudelaire; and after the conventional beauty of the "violet hour" is drained away with the tawdriness of the typist's assignation, it is given an apocalyptic overtone at the end of the poem. The twilight of the final section of *The Waste Land* evokes the spirit of evening poetry: it is a threshold, a site of destruction and potential renewal, of ambiguous endings and beginnings, as Eliot's enigmatic statement suggests: "Only at nightfall, aetheral rumours / Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus." Thus Eliot revitalizes the seemingly exhausted poetic topos of evening.

BOOK REVIEW

Words Alone: The Poet T.S. Eliot, by Denis Donoghue. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. xvi + 326 pp. \$26.95 cloth.

Students of T. S. Eliot may feel called upon to defend Denis Donoghue against one reviewer's unguarded claim that "in *Words Alone*, he has given us the best book written so far about Eliot." But it would be a reluctant undertaking, for this is a compelling reading—primarily of the poetry, as the first half of its title (from Yeats: "Words alone are certain good") indicates, but also of the man, as the second half suggests.

Donoghue could have entertained no illusions about the academic reception of his book, for it is a singularity in the post-modern universe: a vigorous apologia by a self-declared Catholic Christian in behalf of a co-religionist. Donoghue counters the resistance both man and work have met with since Eliot's conversion, and gives an account of his submission to the "irrefutable" authority of Eliot's words. This is an intellectual memoir, protracted through a lifetime of grateful engagement with poems which from the outset struck him as more *memorable* than those of other modern poets, lines which "sounded as unquestionable as if they issued from a burning bush."

Readers alert to Donoghue's sympathy with Eliot's emergent religious outlook may be surprised to find that his greatest admiration is of the earlier poetry—*The Waste Land* above all—though he denies, contra Geoffrey Hill and others, "that the poetry of his Christian years shows a

falling off." As Eliot himself confessed, the enthusiasms of youth are often decisive in fixing one's tastes, and Donoghue's argument may, without prejudice, be regarded as a finding of present reasons for what the heart has known of old. His formative reading of "the lighter Yeats," combined with his secondary college avocation of music, led him to respond to Eliot's poems "As if they were music become speech." If, as then, he feels today that "[Eliot's] ways with the English language will continue to be opaque, no matter how much time and concern I spend on them," he has also complicated the Yeatsean "words alone" formula with the help of R.P. Blackmur: "Shelley's insight was Eliot's task as a poet; he has in his images to remind reason of its material, to remind order of its disorder, in order to create a sane art almost insane in its predicament." Donoghue's gloss on Blackmur mitigates the indecorum of "almost insane," sparing Eliot, as it were, juxtaposition with Shelley in such terms. It also shifts the emphasis from "images" as such to Eliot's "perturbations of words that can't rely on an authentic syntax. The predicament to which Blackmur refers is that of diction with only unofficial relations to grammar; poetic rhythms enforcing themselves by fiat; phrases cut adrift from sentences."

Thus "Prufrock" began not with a theme, or a character, but gradually coalesced into the poem we know as "some energy or reverberation" stirred when fragments of rhythm were combined: "Eliot's language here and in the early poems generally refers to things and simultaneously works free from the reference." The reader is kept "among the words and their internal relations We are not allowed to escape from the words to another place." It is not, Donoghue insists, that the early poems are "merely verbal," whatever that may mean, but that what Eliot said in detraction of Swinburne helps to identify the genius of Eliot's own poetic. Eliot's charge—that Swinburne's "uprooted" language "has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment" to produce "the hallucination of meaning"—betrays something richer and stranger in his own early poems: "The hallucination of meaning is another meaning, a more occult one." Similarly, Donoghue sees in Eliot's Laforguan phase not so much a "refusal of syntax" as a release of diction from (in Symon's words) "the old bondage of rhetoric . . . [and] exteriority."

Eliot's need for such a poetic was, in Donoghue's view, "acute." It was behind the Impersonal theory of "Tradition and the Individual Talent," whose "escape from emotion" dictum Donoghue reads "literally": "I'm convinced that in his early years he had been a man of exceptionally intense and dangerous feelings. He feared for his sanity, and had cause to fear for it I see him as a character in a novel by Dostoevsky"—a character, one might say, provided not with an ax but with a pen taken up in acts of public penance rather than secret atrocity. Thus Donoghue stands on its head the sometimes gleeful response to revelations about

Eliot's biography: far from burying his emotional crisis, Eliot's Impersonal poetic gave relief by putting it on full view. By such a device Eliot "evaded the claims of emotion to the extent of their achieved style This device would . . . sustain a life like the early Eliot's, beset on all sides by panic and fright." So understood, the Impersonal theory was, in its reference to tradition and classicism, a reaching out for, a way of respecting, "the feelings of others": it was also "a first step toward humility," toward the Anglican communion, and away from the Bradleyan isolation of self.

Donoghue's assessment of the man who suffered notwithstanding, it comes with a bit of a jolt to find him apparently sympathetic to Eliot's reported "grouse against life" dismissal of his masterwork. *The Waste Land*, Donoghue says, "has nothing to do with the alleged breakdown of Western civilization or any other Spenglerian excruciation," but rather with the unhappiness of his first marriage. "[T]he dominant feeling in the poem is not universal despair but particular guilt, and . . . the specific movement of feeling through the words corresponds, however obscurely, to the act of penance." It is, moreover, an American romance, in the sense that, unlike European writers who can confidently represent "the life of feeling in terms of man, nature, and society," American writers rarely entrust feelings to that relation, "or indeed, any other There is a remainder of feeling which cries out for release in dream, nightmare, and fantasy." And while Eliot had embarked on "an enterprise capable of producing, in the long run, the magisterial achievement of making himself a European" by assuming the burden of history, his resources for that enterprise are chiefly American: "The relations that the words of an American poem enact are not prescribed or predictive but experimental. Around each word is a space or a void in which nothing is anticipated, nothing enforced. Every relation must be invented, as if the world had just begun."

At once "memorable and void," the words of *The Waste Land* "are not obscure But they are Sibylline because of the darkness between them: they challenge us to provide them with a continuous syntax and they mock our efforts to do so—that is not what they meant at all." The poem is haunted by a passion for form and by the memory of lost forms, by "an absent theme . . . of which only the variants are known." Here Donoghue supersedes Blackmur's "sane art almost insane": Eliot had not only to confront the rational with the irrational, but the irrational with the rational—"a double confrontation, the violence going both ways": "The horror! the horror!" (Eliot's original epigraph) confronts Shakespeare, Spenser, and St. Augustine, and vice versa. Tiresias combines complete knowledge afforded by both confrontations, of the City of God as well as of the Unreal City. His is the "higher perspective" of which Eliot wrote in his dissertation, his "the painful task of unifying . . . and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include

and transmute them, . . . an all-inclusive experience outside of which nothing shall fall."

Yet Tiresias's perspective is not ultimate, according to Donoghue. "It is necessary to think of language . . . as issuing from a perspective grander even than Tiresias's, since Tiresias can see the world only as one alienated from it. . . . It is necessary . . . to go beyond the phase of consciousness which Eliot calls Tiresias. The 'going beyond' has no name; it is the action of the poem. Instead of common words in common places there is language, construed now as a great treasury of images and figures and, increasingly in Eliot, identified with the word of God." Why Tiresias should be excluded from the dual epiphanies of the journey to Emmaus and Shackleton's traversal of South Georgia is not clear, however; indeed, his inclusion would seem to be entailed by Donoghue's "great treasury." If, as he says, Tiresias is the Unidentified Guest in *The Cocktail Party* until transcended in Celia's mystical "way of illumination," may he not be associated with—until transcended by—the Invited Guest at Emmaus and Shackleton's "fourth person," in lines (WL 359-65) whose style anticipates, according to Donoghue, that of the play? Such a transcendence would be well within the poem's "formal and linguistic procedures [which] are designed as desperate expedients to drive us . . . toward the recognition that truth is embodied in the Word of God, the Logos of revelation Against the heap of broken images, there is every token of revealed order, 'the heart of light, the silence.'"

Donoghue's "heart of light" allusion points the way Eliot's poetic would take from *The Waste Land* toward the vision of "Burnt Norton," "the silence" more immediately toward the Lady of Silences of "Ash-Wednesday" and the speech unspoken of "Marina." Having laid out the architectonic of Eliot's *magnum opus*, Donoghue takes up the variations which most successfully employ words alone in articulating Eliot's converted life. "Ash-Wednesday" is championed in response to Donald Davie, who believed "that the crucial factor in poetry is syntax . . . because it indicates the way a poet stands toward the world." The Symbolist assumption, as Davie saw it, that "physical or metaphysical reality *out there* could be turned into 'a psychological reality *in here*, inside the artist's head'" was pernicious, rendering Eliot's work susceptible to incantation, to "subjective syntax" and "syntax as music." Donoghue argues that in "Ash-Wednesday," Eliot's liturgical and literary diction achieves a "critical perspective" beyond its sources, the perspective of "Language, a force of expressiveness prior to any particular expression it allows." "Ash-Wednesday" critiques worldly pleasures, "not to shame them but to submit them to more exacting discriminations": the poem may be thought of as "the redemption of *The Waste Land* and 'The Hollow Men.'"

"Marina" is about the redemption of Eliot himself. In a brief and lyrical chapter, Donoghue celebrates "one of

Eliot's most incandescent poems and one of his most elusive": it is his Recognition Scene, "his waking up to find himself a Christian and wondering what to make of it all." For Eliot, the Incarnation grounds the hope that time is redeemable, and in "Marina" he tests "common words . . . to see how far they can also suggest states of beatitude and the obstacles to such states. He is seeing these words too, in a light greater than that of daylight and ordinary denotation." The result is a poem which "seems to proclaim its closure," but whose language renders it "porous to ambiguity" at every point. It is a Recognition Scene in which Eliot "fulfilled his poetic temperament by making the scene remote and ghostly even to himself."

Donoghue's next chapter, on the Enlightenment and its discontents as exemplified in the project of its modernist poet-priest, Wallace Stevens, extends the point about the ambiguity of Eliot's religious experience. Stevens, disappointed like Emerson and Thoreau before him by the failure of reason unaided by religious belief to deliver on its promises, nevertheless "retains the hierarchical terms of Christianity but 'translates them down,'" replacing revelation with a Supreme Fiction, its version of a theology "the validity of which he no longer accepts." By contrast, Eliot, though as skeptical of the knowledge produced by reason as any Transcendentalist, turned to orthodox Christianity for what reason could not supply, but resisted the temptation to turn belief into a product of reason. Stevens scolds Eliot (in "The Creations of Sound") for failing to "make the visible a little hard / To see," for not transfiguring the world as a subjective idealist would. Donoghue counters that "in Eliot's poems the visible is made very hard to see There is always a shadow, for thought and desire, between mind and the thing seen." Eliot's Christianity, "the profound doubting belief it is," is the more "ghostly to himself" for being grounded in the dogmas of the Incarnation and Original Sin.

It was when Eliot, in growing despair of the prospects for European civilization in the thirties, tried to articulate the social and cultural implications of his hard-won convictions that words alone gave way to troublesome deliverances in prose. In a consciously ambivalent chapter on the books that surrounded *Four Quartets*, Donoghue insists that it is not their being troublesome that troubles him: they were *meant* to be troublesome, not primarily to a civilization adrift in the "doldrums between opposing winds of doctrine" (i.e. liberalism and totalitarianism), but to complacent Christians who were concealing from themselves the necessity of a choice between Christianity and paganism. Rather, the problem arises as a by-product of Eliot's move toward what Donoghue terms the mythical imagination. Following Plato and the Coleridge of *On the Constitution of Church and State According to the Idea of Each*, Eliot attempts to articulate "the idea of a pattern laid up in heaven," "a higher system of values by which the immedi-

ate event or situation may be judged." While this "appeal to the higher if more abstract terminology of reason . . . marks the fundamental character of [Eliot's] imagination," it entails risks that the turn toward syntax brings to light. From the perspective of the mythic idea, "immediate events are likely to appear merely contingent." Conversely, Donoghue regrets that "Eliot allowed himself to be led—by Maritain, on several occasions—into explicitness far beyond need."

Nevertheless, Donoghue defends Eliot against those like Blackmur, who as an avowed unbeliever, "made no serious attempt to imagine what Eliot [in *The Idea of a Christian Society*] was doing," and against those who unjustly persist in charging Eliot with anti-Semitism. Harold Bloom's recent salvo against the "incessantly anti-Semitic T.S. Eliot" (scaled back from the lecture version heard by this reviewer: "compulsive and incessantly") Donoghue finds "as spurious as if I accused Eliot, citing his reference to 'Apeneck Sweeney,' of being prejudiced against the Irish." (An earlier chapter on "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar" goes a good way toward showing that the perceptions and prejudices of the poem are Burbank's, not Eliot's; far from implicating Eliot in anti-Semitism, "Burbank" incriminates the speaker, in much the same way that James incriminates Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors*.) Donoghue dismisses the protracted assault of Anthony Julius as "an essay in the imputation of guilt by association," one that "holds Eliot personally and morally responsible for every anti-Semitic prejudice in Europe in the twentieth century," largely because Julius is insensitive to intellectual discourse in which seemingly "lethal ideological differences" could be accommodated among friends.

Yet, despite his vigorous defense of Eliot's attempt to "annoy his readers and to demand that they question their certitudes . . . within the highest perspective and the most demanding articulations," Donoghue "sometimes wish[es] he had never written a line" on social, political, and religious themes, that "he had written only poems and handed them over to his readers," who might well "have intuited from [them] a vision, a pattern, all the better for not being explicit." Nowhere in the three concluding chapters on *Four Quartets* does Donoghue express a similar wish about the poems that parallel the prose of the thirties and forties, but an echo of Arnold's faint praise of Dryden and Pope—"classics of our prose"—hovers over his reading of them, attentive and sympathetic as it everywhere is. Contrasting *The Waste Land's* concern over the question of authority in language with "Little Gidding's" "appeal to the idea of a decently composed sentence," Donoghue reveals his preference for the former's "apocalyptic or demonic" terms. The discursiveness of *Four Quartets*, the tendency toward abstract diction at times strikes him as "whistl[ing] in the dark, warding off ghosts"—presumably the ghosts Donoghue celebrates in the earlier Christian poems. Still, he finds in

the *Quartets*, as in the best work as a whole, a redemptive struggle, a "tension between . . . the ineffable meaning and the temporal approach; between the Logos and the mere words, the dialect of the tribe . . . a purified dialect [which] then becomes the expression of joy as well as pain." It is perhaps Donoghue's most valuable insight that such joy is to be found in sufficient excess of words alone to bring readers willing to endure with Eliot the intolerable wrestle back to the *Quartets* for another approach to the meaning.

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Editor's Note: Again the Society is deeply indebted to Nancy Goldfarb for preparing this year's bibliography. Members who have bibliographic information are encouraged to send it to Dr. Nancy Goldfarb, P.O. Box 934, Neah Bay, Washington 98357.

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Printing of the *T. S. Eliot Society Newsletter* is sponsored by Grand Valley State University. Production and Design by Ginny Klingenberg.