

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

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Call for Papers
ALA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 2006

The T. S. Eliot Society will organize two sessions at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Literature Association, to be held May 25-28 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Francisco. Members wishing to read papers are invited to send proposals or abstracts (between 300 and 500 words long), along with a curriculum vitae, to the President, Professor Benjamin Lockerd, Department of English, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI 49401. Electronic submissions are preferred and should be sent to him at lockerdb@gvsu.edu. Submissions must be received no later than January 15, 2006.

Individual presentation time is limited to twenty minutes. Readers and presenters must have current membership in The T. S. Eliot Society. Note: it is a general conference rule that no one may present more than one paper at the ALA conference. Further information about the conference is available at the ALA website: www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/ala2.

Little Gidding Restoration Appeal

When the Society visited Little Gidding in June 2004, our host Canon Bill Girard invited us to participate in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of Eliot's visit. Subsequent correspondence with the Friends of Little Gidding has revealed that a major restoration of the church is in the planning stages, including repair of the nave windows, which date from the Hopkinson restoration of 1853. At its recent meeting in St. Louis, the Board of Directors voted to contribute £1,000 toward the restoration of the Nicholas Ferrar window, to be raised by an appeal to members for donations, with any balance (up to \$1,000) to be supplied from Society funds. This contribution will be publicly acknowledged in the church. The Society will be officially represented at the dedication of the window, Sunday 21 May 2006; members in England at that time are invited to attend as well. Tax-deductible donations, payable in (in dollars) to "T. S. Eliot Society--Little Gidding Fund," may be sent to John Karel, Treasurer, 4256 Magnolia Avenue, St. Louis MO 63110.

THE WASTE LAND: A MUSICAL DRAMA

A highlight of the 2005 Annual Meeting was the world premiere of three sections of “*The Waste Land: A Musical Drama*” by Craig Benjamin. Dr. Benjamin lectured and conducted an ensemble of vocalists and instrumentalists from Grand Valley State University. The composer’s program notes and a biographical note follow.

The Waste Land as Libretto

For the composer intent upon setting the poem to music, *The Waste Land* offers both unbounded possibilities and immense difficulties. On the one hand the poem provides a libretto rich in dramatic and historical contrasts that make it possible to employ a wide range of compositional techniques appropriate to the symbols, themes, and characterizations represented in its monologues and dialogues. On the other, the sheer diversity of themes and images requires careful handling of structural devices to ensure that the composition does not degenerate into a suite of unrelated flourishes.

In the same way that a reader who becomes aware of the quotations and allusions Eliot employs will find the poem a richer experience, the composer must represent these allusions in a musical manner that enriches the listening experience for the educated ear. For example, Eliot’s Wagnerian quotations must be echoed in the music, and yet the contemporary context in which he employs the lines from *Tristan and Isolde* must be matched, not by quoting directly from the opera, but by filtering Wagnerian motifs through a twentieth-century sensibility.

The poem also abounds in other musical allusions: ragtime, Elizabethan song, the voices of children singing, the song of the nightingale, the “pleasant whining of a mandolin,” even Indian ragas. Eliot’s appreciation of composers from Scott Joplin to Stravinsky is well known, and his subtle references to music add yet another layer of complexity to a work already dense in possible interpretations.

All of this must be considered by the composer intent upon setting every word of this vast literary tapestry to music that will both reflect the poem’s themes and increase appreciation of the extraordinary creation that is *The Waste Land*.

The Music

“*The Waste Land: A Musical Drama*” is a large-scale composition for expanded orchestra, choir, and soloists. Part Oratorio, part music drama, it incorporates a variety of twentieth-century techniques, including dissonance, serialism, asymmetrical rhythm, *Klangfarbenmelodien*, *Sprechstimme*, vocalizing and narration, tone clusters, microtones, bird song, simultaneity, modern jazz and improvisation, exotic music (particularly Indian ragas), and electronics. The composition is structured according to the organization of the poem, Eliot’s five-part division equating to five “acts” in the score. Although some limited instrumental sections had been publicly performed, none of the vocal parts had been performed prior to this world premiere.

The Composer

Dr. Craig Benjamin is Assistant Professor of History at Grand Valley State University, specializing in Ancient Silk Road Studies. Before taking up an academic career, he worked as a professional musician, composer, and music educator in Sydney, Australia. As a performer he played saxophone and flute in modern jazz ensembles; as an educator he taught private students and conducted student bands and orchestras. As a composer he has been awarded grants by the Australian Arts Council, one of which was used to set *The Waste Land* to music. Craig has also composed symphonic suites, pieces for chamber ensemble, and settings of texts by Shakespeare, William Blake, and Dylan Thomas. He remains active in music performance and composition in Michigan.

AN ENTERTAINING COINCIDENCE AT LEAST

[I first encountered Robert Bridges' "Poor Poll" fifty-odd years ago in *Modern Poetry: American and British* (1951), edited by Friar and Brinnin. The editors note that "Throughout his poem Bridges seems to be mocking the polylingual style of *The Waste Land*." "Poor Poll," which features a richly signifying bird, literary allusions and quotations in lots of foreign languages (Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian), a specific reference to Paul's "peace which passeth understanding," and its own Notes supplied by the author, does indeed look like a travesty, burlesque, caricature, or parody of *The Waste Land*. Now and again in graduate courses I have suggested as much, and was doing so during the fall of 2005 when I noticed that I (and Friar and Brinnin) could be mistaken. The dates do not quite work: Bridges refers to his poem in letters dated 1921, and he dated it specifically "June 3, 1921," even using that American style of writing dates, as though to mock Eliot's native idiom. The first book publication of the poem was in *New Verse Written in 1921* (1925). A pamphlet version of the poem published in 1923 has an introduction and fourteen Metrical Elucidations not included in other publications of the text. Since that pamphlet is held by only six libraries on earth, I substantially reproduce that version here. In *New Verse Written in 1921*, "Poor Poll" is followed by "The Tapestry," subtitled "*Sequel to the foregoing*" W. W. (a device used more than once by Wordsworth). "The Tapestry" ends:

Now, bean, button, or boterfly, pray accept of me
for my parrot verses this after apology:
making experiments in versification
I wrote them as they came in the mood of the day
whether for good or ill—it was them or nothing.

—William Harmon]

Robert Bridges

POOR POLL

This poem is printed privately for a few friends who wish to examine the pretensions of the experiment. It is but a slight advance on the original experiment described in the notes to three poems in my "October" volume. They were in twelves with a mid-break, indistinguishable therefore from sixes and conveniently printed as such. To make the hemistich optional, as I have done here, is no innovation: Milton would always have had it so; but this liberty when extended to my development of his system gives a result as new and as rich as the earlier experiment gave. The value of it is the consequent freedom of diction; no syllable encounters any metrical demand that interferes with its inflexional value as part of the spoken phrase in which it occurs: hence, as was foreseen, prosaic words, which resent the emphasis of metrical position, come in without any feeling of incongruity. In order to test this, the subject chosen is on a low plane and moreover allows the introduction of other languages, thereby making it possible to illustrate how certain well-established and unmistakably alien forms blend comfortably; their variety far from interrupting the general scheme serves to confirm it.

I saw it all, Polly, how when you had call'd for sop
and your good friend the cook came & fill'd up your pan
you yerk'd it out deftly by beakfuls scattering it
away far as you might upon the sunny lawn
then summon'd with loud cry the little garden birds
to take their feast. Quickly came they flustering around
Ruddock & Merle & Finch squabbling among themselves
nor gave you thanks nor heed while you sat silently
watching, and I beside you in perplexity
lost in the maze of all mystery and all knowledge
felt how deep lieth the fount of man's benevolence
if a bird can share it & take pleasure in it.
If you, my bird, I thought, had a philosophy
it might be a sounder scheme than what our moralists
propound: because thou, Poll, livest in the darkness

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which human Reason searching from outside would pierce,
but, being of so feeble a candle-power, can only
show up to view the cloud that it illuminates.

Thus reason'd I: then marvell'd how you can adapt
your wild bird-mood to endure your tame environment
the domesticities of English household life
and your small brass-wire cabin, who sh^{dst} live on wing
harrying the tropical branch-flowering wilderness:

Yet Nature gave you a gift of easy mimicry
whereby you have come to win uncanny sympathies
and morsell'd utterance of our Germanic talk
as schoolmasters in Greek will flaunt their hackney'd tags

φωνάντα συνετοῖσιν and κτήμα ἐς ἀεὶ
*ἢ γλώσσ' ὀμώμοχ', ἢ δὲ φρήν ἀνώμοτος*¹
tho' you with a better ear copy ús more perfectly
nor without connotation as when you call'd for sop
all with that stumpy wooden tongue & vicious beak
that dry whistling shrieking tearing cutting pincer
now eagerly subservient to your cautious claws
exploring all varieties of attitude
in irrepressible blind groping for escape

—a very figure & image of man's soul on earth
the almighty cosmic Will fidgeting in a trap—
in your quenchless unknown desire for the unknown life
of which some homely British sailor robb'd you, alas!
'Tis all that doth your silly thoughts so busy keep²
the while you sit moping like Patience on a perch
—*Wie viele Tag' und Nächte bist du geblieben!*³

La possa delle gambe posta in tregue—⁴
the impeccable spruceness of your grey-feather'd põll
a model in hairdressing for the dandy-est old Duke⁵
enough to qualify you for the House of Lords
or the Athenaeum Club, to poke among the nobs
great intellectual nobs and literary nobs
scientific nobs and Bishops *ex officio*:

nor lack you simulation of profoundest wisdom
such as men's features oft acquire in very old age
by mere cooling of passion & decay of muscle
by faint renunciation even of untold regrets;
who seeing themselves a picture of that wh: man should-be
learn almost what it were to be what they are-not.

But you can never have cherish'd a determined hope
consciously to renounce or lose it, you will live
your threescore years & ten idle and puzzle-headed
as any mumping monk in his unfurnish'd cell
in peace that, poor Polly, passeth Understanding—
merely because you lack what we men understand
by Understanding. Well! well! that's the difference
*C'est la seule différence, mais c'est important.*⁶

Ah! your pale sedentary life! but would you change?
exchange it for one crowded hour of glorious life,
one blind furious tussle with a madden'd monkey
who would throttle you and throw your crude fragments away

shreds unintelligible of an unmeaning act
*dans la profonde horreur de l'éternelle nuit?*⁷ 70
 Why ask? You cannot know. 'Twas by no choice of yours
 that you mischanged for monkeys' man's society,
 'twas that British sailor drove you from Paradise—
*Εἶθ' ὤφελ' Ἀργούσ μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος!*⁸
 I'd hold embargoes on such a ghastly traffic.
 I am writing verses to you & grieve that you sh^d be
*absolument incapable de les comprendre,*⁹
*Tu, Polle, nescis ista nec potes scire:*¹⁰—
 Alas! Iambic, scazon and alexandrine¹¹
 spondee or choriamb, all is alike to you— 80
 my well-continued fanciful experiment
 wherein so many strange verses amalgamate
 on the secure bedrock of Milton's prosody:
 not but that when I speak you will incline an ear
 in critical attention lest by chance I might
 possibly say something that was worth repeating:
 I am adding (do you think?) pages to literature
 that gouty excrement of human intellect
 accumulating slowly & everlastingly
 depositing, like guano on the Peruvian shore, 90
 to be perhaps exhumed in some remotest age
*(piis secunda, vate me, detur fuga)*¹⁴
 to fertilize the scanty dwarf'd intelligence
 of a new race of beings the unhallow'd offspring
 of them who shall have quite dismember'd & destroy'd
 our temple of Christian faith & fair Hellenic art
 just as that monkey w^d, poor Polly, have done for you. June 3, 1921

METRICAL ELUCIDATIONS

¹ l. 29. A Greek iambic line shown.
² l. 41. From Milton's Hymn: An early example of his neglect of the hemistich in the alexandrine.
³ l. 43. One line from a poem by Goethe who was childishly pleased with the invention, viz. a penultimate accentual "dactyl" among accentual "trochees." See Eckermann, 1829, Ap. 5 & 6; where it is thus set out,
 Wīe | vīelē | Tāg' ūnd | Nāchtē | bīst dū gē-|
 blīebēn.
⁴ l. 44. A line of Dante's *terza rima*, showing same rhythm as Goethe's line. The only synalœpha, being in the penult^e slack, stands out and carries trisyllabic value in that place.
⁵ l. 46. Dandiest. Making a full trisyllable of this word is a liberty allowable perhaps here. It serves to keep *officio* in countenance four lines lower down.
⁶ l. 64. This modern French alexandrine from Jammes is *libéré*, and violates the old French prosody: the feminine inflexion in *seule* must be disregarded.

⁷ l. 70. A fine line from St. Amand: which Racine altered when he borrowed it.
⁸ l. 74. The first line of Euripides' *Medea*, echoed in the English verse following.
⁹ l. 77. Another of Jammes' lively lines, neglecting the hemistich. To scan in this English scheme *comprendre* must be read as a disyllable: and that is more comfortable than giving full syllabic value to the final *re*.
¹⁰ l. 78. A scazon from Martial. The proper name is changed.
¹¹ l. 79. An English quantitative scazon.
¹² ll. 80, 82. An English quantitative choriambic line.
¹³ l. 81. An English elegiac pentameter, quantitative, between the choriambic lines.
¹⁴ l. 92. A Latin iambic line from Horace; the original is pure throughout, having *datur* for *detur*.

June 3, 1923

ABSTRACTS FROM 2005 MEETING

“Le monde moderne avilit”: Eliot, the French Intelligentsia, and the Death of Blasphemy

Published in London on February 22, 1934, Eliot’s *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*—“that most illiberal of all his books,” as C.K. Stead puts it in *Pound, Yeats, Eliot and the Modernist Movement* (1986)—remains one of his most controversial works. Eliot’s preface opens on a modernist commonplace: “Le monde moderne avilit,” (loosely “the modern world degrades”) (11). The phrase comes to Eliot by way of French poet and philosopher Charles Péguy’s *De La Situation* (1907). A passionate Dreyfusard like Zola and Clemenceau, Péguy engages contemporary discourses of decadence and articulates a grim prognosis for twentieth-century western culture and civilization. Yet Péguy, like Eliot, slams liberal capitalist democracy not only for its alleged nihilism, philistinism, alienation and atomization of the individual, but above all for its renunciation of Christian revelation. Spiritual apostasy, Péguy maintains, lies at the rotten core of western decadence. He casts the modern condition as a pathology.

Eliot also deploys tropes of decay and disease in *After Strange Gods* to illustrate the spread of ethical and moral anarchy. But he has more specific targets in mind. He associates secular permissiveness with cultural decadence, describing a society that has become, as he puts it, “worm-eaten with Liberalism” (13). Liberalism, he fears, subsumes the “strange gods” of secularism, materialism, corporatism, and miscegenatory cross-culturalism and cosmopolitanism. More darkly for Eliot, the freewheeling nature of liberalism can blur boundaries. And here lies the crux of his polemic in *After Strange Gods*—without orthodoxy there is no heresy, without tradition no taboo, without the devil no evil, without God no blasphemy.

The traffic of ideas between Péguy’s theological-political economy and the reactionary political prescriptions of the French *intelligentsia*, in particular those of Georges Sorel and Charles Maurras, I contend, inform Eliot’s Christian cultural project in *After Strange Gods*. And as many of the forces that animate Eliot’s prose ventures also converge in this text, I situate it in this discussion as the nexus of his cultural politics in the 1930s. I seek to outline a few of the intersections between Eliot and the spectrum of French radical thought in the

interwar period. My presentation also stresses a few of the cultural trends, political postures, and mass movements (in particular Fascism) that signify for Eliot the desecration of Christian sanctity and its totalizing hegemony. The concluding part of my talk revisits *After Strange Gods* to examine Eliot’s exclusionary agrarian alternative to industrial decadence—a segregated, arguably anti-Semitic, Christian utopia that he envisioned in the American deep South. I propose to engage primary sources and recent critical studies to demonstrate that French thought, here as elsewhere, underlay Eliot’s sectarian political philosophy.

Anderson D. Araujo

“Not Known, Because Not Looked For:” Eliot’s Debt to Browning

Robert Browning has a presence in T. S. Eliot’s unpublished poems from *Inventions of the March Hare* and in the drafts and manuscripts of *The Waste Land* which Eliot subsequently effaces through the processes of revision and publication. After identifying the obviously Browningsque elements of such poems as “The Love Song of Saint Sebastian” and the draft version of “Death by Water,” one begins to find them—albeit attenuated, muted, or encoded—in the poems Eliot saw through to print. Browning is one of the voices in Eliot’s poetry “not known, because not looked for / But heard, half-heard.”

Such an argument runs counter both to Eliot’s own critical estimation of Browning and to subsequent critics’ formulations of the relationship between the two. In his essays, Eliot tends to dismiss or minimize Browning. He further distances himself from his predecessor by talking about Browning in reference to his twentieth-century “disciple,” Ezra Pound. Over the past twenty-five years, the work of Carol Christ, Tobin, Howe, and Bornstein, among others, has established a critical commonplace of associating Pound with Browning and Eliot with Tennyson. This construct arises not merely from stylistic commonalities within the poetry of each respective pair—the fractured syntax, exuberance, and obscure historical references of the former, the mellifluous, elegiac refinement of the latter—but from, paradoxically, accepting as sincere Pound’s effusions over Browning and suspecting as insincere Eliot’s excoriation of Tennyson. In this way, Eliot’s own criticism, through simple reverse psychology, continues to obscure his debt to Robert Browning.

Throughout his career, Eliot adopts and reworks formal and thematic elements of

Browning's poetic monologues. According to Eliot, "no one can be influenced by form or by content without being influenced by the other, and the tangle of influences is one which we can only partially resolve." This is particularly true for two poets who are concerned with how the individual consciousness represents both itself and its situation. For Browning and Eliot alike, form and content are bound up in the exigencies of subjectivity and the threat of solipsism, in the processes by which the psyche constructs the phenomenal world of which it is a part and reaches for some transcendent reality beyond that world.

Reading Browning's "Childe Roland" alongside "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," demonstrates Eliot's debt to Browning for his melding of psychology and geography in a speaker's self-illuminating descriptions of landscape and architecture. In Prufrock's city, as in Roland's wasteland, one's self and one's surroundings are inextricably bound. Yet while Browning and Eliot alike are preoccupied with the individual man's quest for transcendent vision and for a concomitant escape from the prison of the self, that quest for transcendence ultimately leads them in two opposite directions. For Browning, transcendence of the self and of the finite always leads to a renewed sense of self and a renewed engagement in temporality and materiality. For Eliot, the man who once transcends the confines of the finite and of his own ego can never again be wholly satisfied with the world beyond which he has briefly seen.

Browning's dramatic monologue is therefore important not as a form Eliot imitates, but as one he subverts, for through this subversion Eliot breaks from the Victorian poetic tradition which he knew to be central to his own work.

Michael Bolton

The Parrot's Cry: The Problem of Other Minds in "Portrait of a Lady"

Building on material presented at the T. S. Eliot Society panel at the ALA, this paper follows the parrot of Manet's "Woman with a Parrot" from Eliot's 1909 sonnet "On a Portrait" to "Portrait of a Lady." The recovery of Manet's painting as the source of the parrot image in Eliot's earlier poem helps us to understand its meaning in "Portrait of a Lady," where it appears with two other animals that mimic human

behavior, the bear and ape. Not only is the parrot a mark of multiple borrowings or repetitions (Eliot's from himself and from Manet; Manet's from Courbet), but also stands as a limit case of the problem of other minds, a philosophical puzzle of great interest to Eliot, which he first explores in "On a Portrait." The parrot uses our language, but we can conclude nothing about its thoughts from what it says. The speaker of "Portrait of a Lady" finds himself in the position of the parrot in two ways: his language is borrowed (particularly from Matthew Arnold's "The Buried Life"), and his interlocutor misinterprets that language by attributing a friendliness to him that he does not feel. What if all human communication should be thought of along the lines of the "parrot's cry" rather than the conversational give-and-take that the lady tries to sustain and which the multivocal form of the poem suggests? What if other people's minds really are inaccessible to us, and our conception of others is merely a "*cauchemar*," a dream (nightmare or otherwise)?

Not only does the parrot pose a set of epistemological questions, it also comes to Eliot carrying a cultural significance which this paper explores and relates back to the problem of other minds. An exotic trophy of the aristocracy in the early ages of conquest, the parrot became a favored domestic pet for the Victorians, and was particularly represented as the sympathetic confidante of women. Native "other" (able to learn to speak but still essentially an animal) or caged spirit coaxed into submission by affection? The adaptable figure of the parrot thus registers problems of knowing others on several levels, which, I argue, are present in Eliot's "Portrait of a Lady." I use the figure of the parrot to connect issues of literary borrowing and language use with philosophical questions of other minds, and these with turn-of-the-century anthropological questions about the possibility of understanding people from alien cultures. In aligning himself with the parrot in "Portrait of a Lady," Eliot imagines himself as the native other who cannot be understood by the lonely Victorian woman who nonetheless thinks she has made a pet of him. Through this identification, Eliot raises questions about the relationship between thoughts and speech, asking what we can know of another's mind just from how he talks. This is an important question that reflects back skeptically on the assumption built into the form of dramatic monologue: that a speaker reveals himself through his speech.

Frances Dickey

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. For matters regarding the annual meeting or other Society activities, please contact the President. For matters having to do with the T. S. Society Newsletter, please contact the Vice-President and Editor. To pay dues, inquire about membership, report a change of address, or report failure to receive the Newsletter, please contact the Treasurer. Those having business with the Secretary are advised to contact him directly. The Society website is at www.luc.edu/eliot. The Society historian is David Chinitz, Department of English, Loyola University Chicago, 6525 N. Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60626. (773) 508-2241.
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