

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

Number 59

Summer 2006

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5007 Waterman Boulevard; St. Louis, Missouri 63108

T. S. Eliot Society
27th Annual Meeting: Sept. 22-24, 2006

Friday, Sept. 22

10:00 - 12:00

Board of Directors Meeting, *Garden Room,
Inn at the Park*

*St. Louis Woman's Club (4600 Lindell
Boulevard)*

10:00 - 12:00

Peer Seminars

1: Eliot and the London Scene, 1914-1939

Leader: Vincent Sherry, *Villanova
University*

2: Eliot in the Theatre

Leader: Sarah Bay-Cheng, *SUNY-Buffalo*

1:30 - 3:00

Conference Session I

Chair: Russell Elliott Murphy, *University of
Arkansas at Little Rock*

Nancy K. Gish, *University of Southern
Maine*

"Pierre Janet's *desagrégation* in 'Gerontion'
and *The Waste Land*"

Hee-jin Bae, *Sunkyunkwan University,
Korea*

"Jungian Individuation in *The Family
Reunion*"

Jewel Spears Brooker, *Eckerd College*
"Crime, Sex, and Blood in *The Elder
Statesman*"

3:15 - 4:45

Conference Session II

Chair: Lee Oser, *College of the Holy Cross*

Hazel Atkins, *University of Ottawa*
"Ragged Rocks in Restless Waters: The
Importance of Place in the Poetry of
T. S. Eliot"

Timothy Sutton, *University of Miami*
"T. S. Eliot: A Provincial Catholicism"

Keiji Notani, *Kobe University*
"T. S. Eliot's Idea of a Church: His Possible
Indebtedness to the Tractarians"

7:30

Reception

Home of John Karel, Tower Grove Park

Saturday, Sept. 23

St. Louis Woman's Club

9:00 - 10:30

Conference Session III

Chair: David Chinitz, *Loyola University, Chicago*

Robert Miller, *Churchill Fellow, 2006*
"Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship
and T. S. Eliot Society [England]"

David Ayers, *University of Kent*
"T. S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis:
Convergence and Contrast"

Thomas Dilworth, *University of Windsor*
"T. S. Eliot and David Jones: Biographical
Intersections"

11:00 - 12:00

Memorial Lecture

"T. S. Eliot and David Jones: Rats, Romans,
and Trees"
William F. Blissett, *University of Toronto*

12:30 - 2:15

Lunch

Presentation: "The Poetry of Provenance"
Joseph Baillargeon, *University of
Washington*

2:30 - 4:00

Conference Session IV

Chair: William Harmon, *University of North
Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Leah Pate, *Arizona State University*
"The Curse of the Poet-Prophet in *The
Waste Land*"

Matthew Bolton, *New York University*
"Manchild in *The Waste Land*: Innocence,
Autism, and Eliot's Dickensian
Narrator"

John Morgenstern, *Oxford University*
"Discerning the 'Other' in *Other
Observations*: T. S. Eliot as Cultural
Anthropologist in 1910-1911 Paris"

6:00 - 8:00

Dinner (*St. Louis Woman's Club*)
Presentation: "T. S. Eliot and the Parisian
Art World of 1910-1911"
Nancy Hargrove, *Mississippi State
University*

Sunday, Sept. 24

*First Unitarian Church (5007 Waterman
Boulevard)*

9:30 Service

11:00 - 12:00

Eliot Aloud: Readings of Eliot's Works
Chair: Linda Wyman, *Lincoln University*

Presentation of Awards Benjamin G. Lock-
erd

T. S. Eliot Bibliography 2005

(If you are aware of any 2005 citations that do
not appear here, please contact Jayme Stayer
at jayme.stayer@gmail.com. Omissions will
be rectified in the 2006 listing.)

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—Jayme Stayer
Loyola University Chicago

Book Review

William Marx, *Naissance de la critique moderne: la littérature selon Eliot et Valéry*, (Artois Presses Université, 2002); pp. 411; 20€.

In this study, William Marx demonstrates what previous Eliot scholarship has frequently suggested on a far less extensive scale: the history of ideas on which Eliot's critical and poetic theories are founded remains a patchwork of fragments if one ignores the ferment of philosophical, cultural and political debates in France during the early-twentieth centuries. Eliot perhaps more than any modernist author invites speculation about the reading and misreading on which he founded a life in poetry; this is so precisely because such an extraordinary number of his statements seem to be not mere modifications or reversals of those of his professors at Harvard or his contemporaries in England, but *translations* of ideas gleaned from the far side of the English Channel. As Marx is first to remind us, however, there are no "transparent" translations, and Eliot's appropriation of French symbolism, or its belated antagonist, French "classicism" resulted in strikingly new pronouncements, compelling new critical notions, that differed from their French sources and yet remained tacitly dependent upon them for coherence. Eliot was aware, for example, his claim to write from a perspective that was "monarchist in politics" bordered on meaninglessness in the English realm, but derived an ambiguous but potent charge in an international context.

The work as a whole provides a detailed account of the rise of formalist literary criticism during Valéry and Eliot's lifetimes. Drawing generously on French, British and American contexts, Marx limits his primary focus (sometimes to his argument's disadvantage) to the critical texts of the two authors as they articulated theories of writing as autonomous, internally coherent, and emphatically *literary*. Marx proceeds by investigating four "crises." That is, he considers the centralization of the literary text in criticism (displacing biographical and philological academic traditions); the arrival of symbolist poetry and con-

sequential foregrounding of literary language as a genre apart; the movement of criticism from romantic presuppositions to those we would identify as formalist, classical or meta-physical, and the reconstitution of the canon that followed from this; and finally, the institutional conquest of formalist criticism and its development as a discipline that simultaneously privileged the poet-author and aspired to an objectivity usually “reserved” to the sciences. Each chapter offers a diachronic narrative of how these transformations occurred, and synchronically holds up Valéry and Eliot’s relevant texts for investigation.

The final two chapters offer “test cases” that explore the limits and contradictions of Eliot’s and Valéry’s critical programs. The first considers their practice and theory of translation. For both poets, translations became a kind of archetype of the literary, because romantic claims of creative genius could not intrude on the interpretation of a translator’s work. And yet, as Marx details, problems or at least complications to such a theory emerge on close examination of the authors’ different critical texts. The second, and more revealing, considers how the manuscript for Valéry and tradition for Eliot became absolutes within which they could breach their otherwise close adherence to the principle of the formal autonomy of the artwork. The manuscript provides a palimpsest of the genesis of the artwork, claimed Valéry, and leads to a recovery of the author’s creative process. Tradition, for Eliot, serves as the complete order within which the individual work takes its place and is judged. Eventually, the term “culture” displaces “tradition” in his criticism, signaling a shift where the artwork comes to stand not only within literature but within society, past, present and future. Without abandoning the principle of literature as autonomous, both poets find means of violating it, which, we may speculate, prevented “autonomy” from becoming a euphemism for isolated, useless or obsolete.

For the Anglo-American reader, the erudite filling-in of particular literary-historical lacunae is probably the most important contribution Marx’s study makes. While the whole argument is rewarding, it essentially

proves on the strict basis of Valéry and Eliot’s texts what other surveys of modernism have already acknowledged (if not demonstrated). I should like to introduce just four of Marx’s many smaller points that are of particular historical interest.

First, he outlines in both an institutional and poetic-theory context the invention of a literary patrimony now taken for granted. Valéry and Eliot both claimed to be heirs of a tradition that runs from Edgar Allen Poe to Charles Baudelaire, on to Stéphane Mallarmé before meeting the present in Valéry or Eliot. Valéry was moved to claim Poe as a point of origin in order to escape the “sterile” debate in France between Classicist and Romanticist tastes, by inventing a “symbolist” tradition. By finding a foreign (American) reference point, he set himself outside that debate and, in the long run, positioned himself to be revered by the most Classicist and Romantic dispositions. Eliot, viewing Poe in the same alcoholic and minor light as his Anglophone contemporaries, was swift to downplay this point of origin by shifting his attention to Baudelaire. Marx argues it was Baudelaire the critic, more than poet or translator, whom Eliot adopted as his personal progenitor, whereas Valéry in fact looked to Baudelaire simply as having made possible more important poets like Verlaine, Mallarmé and Rimbaud. Valéry and Eliot adopt a similar genealogy for similar ends, but the distinctions between them shed light on both the incommensurability of the French and Anglophone literary milieux as well as on their constant parallels.

Second, Marx provides a helpful account of the emergence of “romanticism,” “classicism” and “symbolism” in France in ways that explain Eliot’s own use of those terms. Given that the French classical renaissance specifically reviled figures like Baudelaire and Laforgue, one might initially wonder how Eliot could claim to be a “classicist” in aesthetics at the very moment his poetry betrayed all the markings of French symbolism. The answer is twofold. Definitions of classicism and symbolism shifted rapidly in the first decades of the twentieth century, so that before long, in France, classicism amounted

primarily (by no means exclusively) to a retention of meter and rhyme. As Valéry emerged as a major poet in the 'twenties, his dual heritage of retaining the Alexandrine and rhymed stanzas and cultivating obscure concrete imagery in keeping with the symbolists, entitled him to be called a "classical symbolist." In turn, this bare compound of disparate, indeed antagonistic, traditions merged in Eliot under the simple term "Classicism," and with this simplification a new sort of sensibility arose that Eliot would embody as the patron saint of high modernist poetry.

A third point: we are all of course familiar with the famed ambitions of modernism to attain an autonomous and purified art, freed of didactic or other practical "uses." The comparative conservatism of Anglophone modernism, however, often goes overlooked. The most radical manifestos and practices of Wyndham Lewis or Ezra Pound, for example, were effectively imported – or translated – from movements on the Continent. Marx does not himself consider this fact, though he does provide a wide-ranging if cursory history of the Arnoldian moral tradition in Anglo-American criticism that generally inflected and (happily?) tempered much modernist writing. Marx *does* recount the debate over pure poetry (1925-26) waged by, amongst others, Fr. Henri Bremond and Valéry. The first of these conceived a theory that poetry, shed of its impurities, rises to a kind of mystical or contemplative prayer. The last merely described "pure poetry" as a limit point toward which the workman-poet labors. The names

and ideas of the luminaries of this vigorous debate sometimes appear in Eliot's own pages and provide him occasion to reaffirm the modest autonomy of the literary. Moreover, it also gave him chance to further his reflections on the connection of this autonomous art with religion by refusing Bremond's only ostensibly pious claims. As Eliot appreciated, Bremond's theory of a mystical poetry conflated the religious and the aesthetic and therefore created a modern, secular *equivalent* to divine inspiration.

Finally, Marx cogently observes how Eliot rejected "imperfect critics" whether Matthew Arnold or Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More or I. A. Richards because of their "Platonism." These critics followed Plato's *Philebus* in identifying the transcendentals of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful within Being. Eliot, in contrast, adhered to Pascal's (and T. E. Hulme's) strict separation of the absolute (the religious) from the vital (the human), and so also insisted on the separateness of the literary. On this score, the Pascal of Eliot's later prose meets the Aristotle of *The Sacred Wood* as geniuses of a pure, unconfused and objective literary criticism. Marx notes that Jacques Maritain's neo-Thomism served as a midwife between the two. If there are several difficulties in these claims, Marx's outline offers an excellent point of departure for continued work on Eliot's philosophical positions and influences. The volume as a whole is itself a permanent contribution to modernist studies.

—James Matthew Wilson
University of Notre Dame

Stayer Re-elected to Board

Dr. Jayme Stayer was nominated for re-election to the Board of Directors, and as there were no other nominations, he is re-elected. Congratulations, Jayme, and thanks for your willingness to serve another term.

Call for Nominations

The Board of Directors will be electing three officers at its meeting in September: Historian, Treasurer, and Vice-President. The Historian will be elected to a two-year term, beginning January 1, 2007. The Treasurer and Vice-President will be elected to three-year terms, beginning January 1, 2007. The Vice-President automatically becomes President at the end of three years and Supervisor of Elections after that. All members of the Society are welcome to make nominations for this position, and any member of the Society is eligible to be nominated. Please send your nominations to the Supervisor of Elections, Dr. Shyamal Bagchee (shyamal.bagchee@ualberta.ca), and to the President, Dr. Benjamin Lockerd (lockerdb@gvsu.edu). Nominations must be received by August 15, 2006.

Members may also make nominations for honorary membership and for distinguished service awards. These nominations should be made to the president by August 15, 2006.

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 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 received the Newsletter, please contact the Treasurer. Those having business with the Secretary are advised to contact him directly. The Society maintains a website at www.luc.edu/eliot. The Society historian is David Chinitz, Loyola University Chicago, 6525 N. Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60626; (773) 508-2241; email: dchinit@luc.edu.

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