

Time Present

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Eliot and Dante in Florence

Stefano Maria Casella

The International Symposium “T. S. Eliot, Dante, and the European Tradition” took place at the end of January in the splendid setting of a mild Florentine “Midwinter spring,” with the river Arno placidly flowing under Ponte Vecchio, the breathtaking perfection of Piazza del Duomo and Piazza della Signoria, and the extraordinary treasures of art collected in the Galleria degli Uffizi and in other unique Florentine museums.

The Symposium, under the impeccable supervision of professors Temur Kobakhidze (University of Tbilisi, Georgia) and Paul Douglass (San José State University, California), was organized by the Del Bianco Foundation, a cultural institution founded in Florence some ten years ago, with the specific mission of putting in contact scholars in various disciplines (scientific, literary, and artistic) from Eastern and Western Europe and from the United States, and of promoting cultural exchanges and specialist seminars and workshops—for young people in particular—in order to establish strong intellectual and cultural links, and to overcome the differences and divisions of the past.

This year, in a successful blending of both well-known critics and up-and-coming younger ones, some thirty scholars from various countries (Russia, Georgia, Serbia, Italy, Spain, U.K., U.S.A., and Canada) met to discuss the manifold aspects of Eliot’s work as poet, critic, essayist, thinker, and dramatist in connection with Dante and his influence on other modernist writers, such as Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Wallace Stevens. The program included keynotes and notable presentations delivered by internationally recognized Eliot scholars: Jewel Spears Brooker on the troubled theme of experience and knowledge in Dante, in F. H. Bradley’s philosophical system, and in Eliot’s poetical rendering; Sri Padmanabham on the spiritual and mystical imagery of the rose and the lotus in Eliot’s poetry and in Eastern symbolism; Dominic Manganiello on Dante and Eliot as models for Wendell Berry’s novels *Jayber Crow* and *Remembering*, which portray a journey into sin, suffering, atonement and recovery shaped on the descent-ascent pattern of Dante’s masterpiece.

Following these remarkable lectures, a rich variety of other talks focused on Eliot’s three essays on Dante (1920, 1929, and 1950–51); on his poetics of allegory and impersonality derived from the Florentine; on the roles of guides such as Virgil for Dante and Dante for

Eliot; on the more or less successful completion of the journey to Paradise in *Four Quartets* and their mystical (and initiatory) imagery; on Eliot’s far-sighted radio broadcasts on European unity and union delivered in 1946 on German radio; on his critical relationship with Romanticism, Matthew Arnold, Bernard Berenson; on his and Pound’s renderings of Dante’s poetry in “Little Gidding” and in the “Italian Cantos” (as regards style, music, imagery, and meaning); and on similarities with Ana Akhmatova’s *Poem without a Hero* and David Jones’s *Anathemata*. A few papers took interdisciplinary approaches, embracing poetry and painting or focusing on different translations of Dante and Eliot in various languages.

The Symposium was a perfect opportunity to become acquainted with promising young scholars (mainly Spanish, Serbian, American, and Georgian) whose fresh and enthusiastic voices are undeniable and comforting evidence that the ideal of Tradition and of a community of learning as envisaged by Eliot is strong and alive, and is being passed on to succeeding generations. Manifest throughout the Symposium were the scholars’ deep seriousness, intelligence, and love of their subject as well as of the inexhaustible richness of Eliot’s works and ideas.

Public Sightings

“Rats crept, bells tolled, bones rattled.” (Patrick T. Reardon, in the *Chicago Tribune*, 5 Nov. 2007.) Reviewing a dramatic reading at Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, the author writes: “More than three-quarters of a century after its publication, T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’ retains its power to shock and enthrall, confuse and amaze.

“Hearing the poem read by four actors under the direction of Bernard Sahlins was akin to watching a kaleidoscopic film rollercoasting through the guilts and dreads of the 20th century—indeed, of all centuries. Rats crept, bells tolled, bones rattled.

“Afterward, Sahlins told the audience that he viewed ‘The Waste Land’ as a linguistic version of Cubism. ‘It’s an Odyssey, and it’s Ulysses encountering a lot of different perils and dilemmas,’ he said, adding that the ‘whole poem deals with coming to terms with your destiny, with your religion and ultimately with your death.’”

“They have measured out their love in coffee spoons.” (Anthony Lane, in *The New Yorker*, 31 March 2008.) Thus concludes Lane’s summary of David Lean’s film *Brief Encounter*: “The couple first meet at a station and, unbearably, part there for the last time, with Alec’s hand resting briefly on Laura’s shoulder in the refreshment room.” The paraphrase of “Prufrock” follows without attribution.

Mr. Bad Example. (Tom Carson in the *New York Times Book Review*, 6 May 2007.) “Never the voice of a generation, [Warren] Zevon was a recognizable figure to one of its subsets: the would-be hard-boiled eggheads who dreamed of being the son Ernest Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald had never had. Luckily for him, just about every other rock critic in the male-dominated 1970s had spent college nursing ambitions of melding T. S. Eliot and Raymond Chandler, with ‘April is the cruelest month’ engraved on the long barrel of an imaginary .44.” From a review of Crystal Zevon’s *I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead: The Dirty Life and Times of Warren Zevon*.

And the Fullfed Beast Shall Kick the Empty Pail. (Michael Blumenthal in the Spring 2007 issue of *Salmagundi*.) The title of this poem is credited to Eliot’s “Little Gidding.” The poem itself has to do with the happiness of small birds in mating season, whose feelings the speaker shares thanks to his current relationship. It ends: “the pail / I kicked, later on in the dark, bounced all the way up to heaven / and back, and it gave itself to the night, and was full, and slept.”

Society Notes

David Chinitz has been promoted to full professor of English at Loyola University Chicago. With a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, he is currently working on a book on Langston Hughes. He is also editing *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, to be published next year by Blackwell.

Man Sik Lee has recently published a translation of James Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice* into Korean.

This spring Gabrielle McIntire published *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* with Cambridge University Press. This is the first book-length study in English to consider Eliot and Woolf together as a pair, in dyadic conjunction. Relying on extensive archival research, Gabrielle argues that despite political, gender, religious, and national differences, striking correspondences exist in Eliot and Woolf’s poetic, fictional, critical, and autobiographical texts, particularly in their recurring turn to the language of desire, sensuality, and the body to render memory’s processes. The study includes a chapter on Eliot’s bawdy Columbo and Bolo poems, and it reconsiders Eliot’s pre-conversion verse in relation to several modernist philosophers of memory, including Freud, Nietzsche, and Bergson. Gabrielle has also begun research on a new project that will explore Eliot and other modernists in relation to the sacred and the secular in a post-Nietzschean cultural climate.



Unveiling of Historical Marker in London

A commemorative plaque at T. S. and Vivien Eliot’s 1916–1920 residence, 18 Crawford Mansions, Westminster, London, will be unveiled April 23, 2008, at 1:00 pm. With generous donations from its members, the T. S. Eliot Society is a sponsor of this new marker. Members of the public are invited to attend the ceremony and the reception that will follow. The Lord Mayor of London, poets Craig Raine and Sean O’Brien, and possibly other dignitaries will be present.



Erratum

David Huisman’s name was misspelled in the Fall 2007 issue of *Time Present*. The editor regrets the error.

Call for Papers

The Society invites proposals for papers to be presented at the annual meeting in St. Louis. Clearly organized proposals of about 500 words, on any topic reasonably related to Eliot, along with biographical sketches, should be forwarded by June 15, 2008, to the President, William Harmon, 2330 Bedford St., Apt. 18, Durham, NC, 27707; or preferably by email to wharmon03@mindspring.com.

Papers given by graduate students and scholars receiving their doctoral degrees no more than two years before the date of the meeting will be considered for the Fathman Young Scholar Award. Those eligible for this award should include the fact in their submission.

Peer Seminar: Eliot and Internationalism

This year's seminar will be led by Englishman David Ayers and American Michael Coyle. David Ayers is Reader in Modernism and Critical Theory at the University of Kent, and Michael Coyle is Professor of English at Colgate University.

The idea of internationalism points to the process of overcoming national boundaries, whether geographic, psychological, cultural or simply linguistic. Eliot sensed that international connections, like national traditions, can be achieved only by great labor. Nations are not transparent to each other. We invite papers that consider how thinking of Eliot in an international context opens up his work in new ways. The topic is deliberately open, as we hope that papers will take us in unanticipated directions, but areas that would seem to be immediately pertinent might include Eliot's response to European politics in the interwar years, Eliot in translation, the nature of Eliot's participation in American journals after establishing himself in Britain, intertextuality and interculturality. We mean for this list to be suggestive rather than prescriptive.

The seminar is open to the first 15 registrants; registration will close July 1st. Seminararians will submit 4–5 page position papers by e-mail, no later than September 1st. To sign up, or for answers to questions, please write Jayme Stayer (jayme.stayer@gmail.com).

Memorial Lecturer: Grace Schulman

Grace Schulman, Distinguished Professor of English at Baruch College, CUNY, has published several books of original poetry: *Burn Down the Icons: Poems* (1976), *Hemispheres: Poems* (1984), *For That Day Only* (1994), *The Paintings of Our Lives* (2001), *Days of Wonder: New And Selected Poems* (2002) and *The Broken String* (2007). She is editor of *The Poems of Marianne Moore* and author of a critical study of Moore as well as an article on Eliot's "Marina." In addition to three Pushcart prizes, she has received the Aiken-Taylor Award for poetry, the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Award, a Guggenheim fellowship, and New York University's Distinguished Alumni Award. For many years she was the poetry editor of *The Nation* as well as director of the Poetry Center at the 92nd Street Y. In 1973, by a bold and beneficent synthesis, she combined prizes given by the magazine and the center into the Discovery/The Nation Award.

"Delicacy of mind and ear, and gentleness of spirit, emerge together with quiet assurance."
—W. S. Merwin

"Like Donne, Herbert, and Hopkins, Schulman is an astonishing poet of faith, whose poems wrestle strenuously in gleaming conceits with the necessity and impossibility of a belief that is no less compelling for being, if not entirely secular, not confined by any one theology."
—Marilyn Hacker

"Grace Schulman has developed into one of the permanent poets of her generation."
—Harold Bloom

Other Conferences

American Literature Association San Francisco, May 22–25, 2008

Sessions sponsored by the T. S. Eliot Society

T. S. Eliot: World Poet

Friday, May 23

5:00–6:20 pm

1. “‘I Was Neither Living Nor Dead’: Trauma and Affect in *The Waste Land*.” Richard Badenhausen, Westminster College
2. “‘The Sea-Bell’s Perpetual Angelus’: ‘The Dry Salvages’ as a Poem of Place and Transcendence.” Von Underwood, Cameron University
3. “The Return of the Flâneur in ‘Eeldrop and Appleplex—I.’” Carol L. Yang, Nat’l Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

T. S. Eliot: Medieval, Renaissance, and Modern Poet

Saturday, May 24

12:30–1:50 pm

1. “T. S. Eliot and Edmund Spenser.” William Blissett, University of Toronto
2. “T. S. Eliot, Lancelot Andrewes, and English Hebraism.” Kinereth Meyer, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel
3. “T. S. Eliot and Santayana’s Dante.” Shun’ichi Takayanagi, Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan

Both sessions will be chaired by William Harmon, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Art, Culture, and Religion: A Conference on T. S. Eliot Michigan, August 14–16, 2008

Call for Papers

Co-Sponsored by Grand Valley State University (Grand Rapids, MI) and the Russell Kirk Center (Mecosta, MI), this conference will mark the reprinting of Russell Kirk’s book *Eliot and His Age*. Also, selected essays from the conference will be included in a forthcoming book on *T. S. Eliot and Catholicism*.

Proposals are invited for 20-minute conference presentations on any topic related to T. S. Eliot. Preferred topics will include the following:

- Russell Kirk and Eliot
- Eliot and Catholicism (Roman or Anglo-)
- Eliot’s cultural and political thought
- Roman-Catholic and Anglo-Catholic influences on Eliot: Maritain, D’Arcy, Dawson, More, Santayana, Andrewes, Julian of Norwich, Elyot, Ferrar, Browne, Burke, Coleridge, Chesterton, Maurras, St. John of the Cross, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Dante, etc.
- Eliot’s influence on Catholic writers: Flannery O’Connor, David Jones, Allen Tate, etc.
- Classicism and popular culture
- Royalism and democracy

Please send an abstract of approximately 500 words and a brief c.v. by June 1, 2008 to Dr. Benjamin G. Lockerd, Department of English, Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI 49401. E-mail submissions: lockerdb@gvsu.edu.

Abstracts

FROM THE 28th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY St. Louis, MO, Sep. 28–30, 2007

(continued from *Time Present* 63, Fall 2007)

“Eliot and the Literature of Fascism”

In the December 1928 issue of the *Criterion*, Eliot published a lengthy review of five contemporary studies of Fascism—*The Universal Aspects of Fascism* (J. S. Barnes), *The Pedigree of Fascism* (Aline Lion), *The Fascist Dictatorship in Italy* (Gaetano Salvemini), *Italy and Fascism* (Luigi Sturzo), and *The Fascist Experiment* (Luigi Villari), the last two of which were published by Faber in 1926. Significantly, none of the books met with his approval. For Eliot, the authors—at both ends of the political spectrum—give in to the hysteria that attended the rise of the Fascist phenomenon. Fascism exploits the modern “craving for a regime which will relieve us of thought and at the same time give us

excitement and military salutes,” a symptom of the decay of liberalism and the ensuing “spiritual anemia.”

While his thought evidently intersects the phobic anti-Fascism of Salvemini and Sturzo, Eliot nonetheless finds their indictments suspect. The Italian dissidents have “suffered too much” under Mussolini to remain objective. That said, Eliot is far more troubled by the pro-Fascist polemics of Barnes, Lion, and Villari. Above all, he dreads the spread of Fascism’s aestheticized brand of neo-Pagan *mythos* and mass politics.

Drawing upon the reviewed texts, this paper explores Eliot’s rendering of the “fascist revolution” as a danger-fraught dialectic between political *idea* and political *praxis*. His review, I argue, seeks to synthesize and move beyond the extreme positions adopted in the discourse of Fascism. It lays bare the movement’s Machiavellian political economy and its Erastian alliance with the Church. More important, the review positions Eliot firmly against Fascism and its

(continued on p. 10)

John Xiros Cooper. *The Cambridge Introduction to T. S. Eliot.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Reviewed by Benjamin G. Lockerd
Grand Valley State University

The Cambridge “Introductions” series claims that its works are intended for both students and teachers, that they are “accessible and lively,” and that they are “concise yet packed with essential information.” These are impossible standards to achieve when introducing a complex and difficult writer, but John Xiros Cooper’s introduction to Eliot measures up very well indeed. This thin volume is a penetrating overview by a brilliant and learned scholar. The reviewer reserves the right to carp and quibble, of course, but the book is a remarkable achievement that should prove quite helpful to its intended audience.

The book is divided into chapters entitled Life, Contexts, Works, and Critical Reception. The biographical chapter gives an insightful and balanced account. Cooper is fair and sympathetic toward Eliot. The test case is, naturally, Eliot’s first marriage, which Cooper describes in a judicious manner: “Without a doubt, Eliot was not an emotionally demonstrative person and this has sometimes been interpreted as a debilitating remoteness that shut his wife, and others, out of his inner life. Yet it cannot be said that Eliot was without emotions; he was a man of profound feeling and, in many respects, a man of passion. He was also highly concerned about his wife’s ill health on a day-to-day basis” (6). Many call Eliot a heartless man, but Cooper’s description of him squares with the one given by people who knew him well, and I believe it is quite accurate to say, as he does, that Eliot “was not a selfish man, and although not generous in sharing his feelings with others, he was generous in many other ways” (6).

On the other hand, one might object to Cooper’s treatment of Eliot’s sense of connection to his English ancestry, which he traced back to Andrew Eliot of East Coker: “East Coker was primarily an imaginary origin; a genealogical fact, to be sure, but not, for all that, any the less a self-defining fiction” (2). Here one catches a whiff of existentialist and new historicist notions of “self-fashioning.” Eliot’s ideas were different: when he rejected the Unitarianism of his parents, he considered that he was acting in loyalty to an older family tradition of adherence to the teachings of the Church of England. In doing so, he sought not so much to define himself but to allow himself to be defined by a larger community. He sought to escape from the solipsism of self-definition.

The chapter on contexts offers important background information for readers of Eliot. Cooper is particularly good in describing the influence of the French writers and in exploring Eliot’s ideas concerning religion and culture. Cooper argues (rightly, I think) that “Eliot’s interest in religious be-

lief and questions of faith were not of recent birth, nor were they motivated by mercenary self-interest.... Indeed, his migration to the Church seems in retrospect a wholly logical camber in the trajectory of his intellectual development” (26–27). In the final section of this chapter, entitled “A Sense of the Past,” Cooper points out that Eliot’s idea of traditional values was far from being a justification of the status quo in England: “Eliot was not only out of step with contemporary thought, especially the dominant liberalism, but, paradoxically, he was also ahead of his time” (35). He highlights Eliot’s critique of industrialism, with its accompanying environmental degradation and mercantile materialism. In this, as Cooper implies, the champion of conservatism makes common cause with some important strains of modern liberalism against a mindless *laissez-faire* conservatism.

A concise and yet meaningful treatment of Eliot’s philosophical concerns is probably impossible, and the section on philosophy does no more than drop a few names. Yet Cooper’s explications of Eliot’s poetic works are incisive and subtle. He points out the importance of the dramatic monologue in Eliot’s poems, where “The persona can be simple or very elaborate, but it is always at a distance from both author and reader” (49–50). He pushes readers to go beyond the obvious. For example, “Prufrock’s problem is not a bad case of self-consciousness but a more deeply philosophical dilemma.... The poem silently laments the absence of an external or historical measure or standard for human agency” (51–55). “Gerontion” is placed convincingly not so much in a social context as in a scientific one: “Gerontion has arrived at a place where experience will be held up for scrutiny like a lab specimen but minus the ruling illusions about its validity” (57). In explicating *The Waste Land*, Cooper again takes the view that “Hindsight shows us that [Eliot] was, in fact, moving toward an affirmation of Christian belief” (68). He demonstrates that the silence and nothingness encountered in this poem are not wholly negative but “point us in another direction,” to be explored more fully in later poetry. The passages explicating the end of the poem are very fine (78–79).

At times, however, these readings become slightly too idiosyncratic and speculative for such a work. For instance, Cooper takes up “The Hollow Men” immediately after “Prufrock.” He finds a legitimate connection between the two, but I suspect the new reader would still find it more helpful to keep the poems in chronological order. A two-page digression on the “metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul” interrupts the section on *The Waste Land*. Not only is this discussion overly esoteric, but a careful analysis of the enigmatic phrase from “Tradition and the Individual Talent” would have to place it in ancient and medieval philosophy. The words “abject” and “abjection” are repeated a little too often, and Julia Kristeva is more prominent than

The section on Four Quartets is worth the price of the book.

necessary. Barely more than a page is devoted to the plays, which surely undervalues them.

The section on *Four Quartets* is worth the price of the book. Contradicting those critics who profess to see a decline in poetic power in this last major poem, Cooper judges it "Eliot's highest achievement as a poet." He finds in it the maturity Eliot identified as the hallmark of a classic. An analysis of the poem's rhetoric leads to an important conclusion: "The language of paradox points us to ways of authoritative thinking that have been marginalized or displaced in an age of science and positivism" (97). Here again, Cooper shows many postmodern readers something they have in common with Eliot. To go beyond rationalism, the poet must go beyond language, so Eliot "goes below articulate language, to a prelinguistic as well as a prelogical state, reaching downward and back to wordless rhythm" (102). Similarly, Eliot's "meditation on history" in *Four Quartets* opposes "all those concepts of history that emphasize its chronological, empirical, progressive, and ameliorative character" (102). These few pages touch the essence of the poem.

In various places, Cooper explains carefully and sympathetically Eliot's idea that religious belief is central to a vital culture: "Religion grounds the values that Eliot endorsed, not religion as transcendence but religion as woven into concrete existence *via* institutions, historical practices, sacred texts, and those specially trained in the maintenance of the faith. Human society was both material and spiritual at the same time, very much like the concept of Incarnation in Christian belief" (31). However, Cooper suggests that Eliot's "emphasis on communal solidarity" has also "its toxic side, as evidenced by the *volkish* nightmare of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s" (30). Cooper hastens to point out that "Eliot was as horrified by the Nazi perversion of conservative ideology as anyone else" (31), but one is still left with the impression that Eliot's traditional culture (founded on religious belief) tends toward intolerance and persecution, even toward the holocaust. There is a somewhat slippery logic at work here, and it will tend to encourage people who like to think that religion is the root of all evil. In fact, Eliot denounced the Nazis as one version of modern secularist ideology, masking as neo-paganism. "If you will not have God," he writes just before the outbreak of the war in 1939, "you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin."

Similarly, Cooper explains well Eliot's critique of liberal humanism: "It was liberal humanism, by exalting the individual above all else, that opened the gate for the arrival of the low and vulgar on the historical stage" (59). However, some pages later, Eliot's attacks on liberal humanism are translated into a more general position: "Eliot was no humanist and we must beware of hoping against hope that he was" (67). It is not wishful thinking to say that Eliot was a humanist. Along with several other twentieth-century writers, he sought to revive a Christian humanism that had been transformed by the Enlightenment into the individualistic,

rationalistic, secularized humanism he opposed. On this subject, I recommend Lee Oser's book *The Return of Christian Humanism* (2007).

These issues concerning Eliot's political and intellectual commitments are serious ones, and I do think Cooper muddies those waters in a few places. I also think the book is at times pitched rather high for many undergraduate students. Still, it does on the whole achieve its aims. Both teachers and students will find it interesting and enlightening.



Patrick Collier. *Modernism on Fleet Street*. Burlington, Ashgate, 2006.

Reviewed by Deric Corlew
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Modernism on Fleet Street begins with an historical coincidence: the death of Alfred Harmsworth, Viscount Northcliffe in modernism's golden year of 1922. This opening proves propitious, for no event better represents the intersection of modernism and journalism that forms the heart of Patrick Collier's book. Harmsworth represented a new type of journalism emerging in the early twentieth century that had successfully catered to a broad audience but also, to some, showed a decline to "an intellectually bankrupt, profit-driven pursuit of ever-increasing circulations." The reactions to this change will sound familiar: the degradation of language as publishers attempted to reach a mass audience, a crisis in identity as newspapers grew increasingly detached from their social and political function, the balancing of intellectual freedom with the necessity of commercialization, a move towards sensationalism as newspapers incorporated emotional content to attract a growing female audience. Although journalism might be a "negative mirror image" of modernism, Collier shows that modernist authors interacted with the news media in ways that colored and complicated their views of language and mass culture. This interaction makes journalism a valuable framework with which to consider the use of language in modernist texts and the complex relationship between modernism and mass culture, and it makes *Modernism on Fleet Street* an important contribution to the discussion on modernism.

Eliot scholars will be interested in Collier's cogent analysis of Eliot's later works on culture and language, as well as his contextualization of Eliot's position as editor within the historical debates over the role of journalism. The chapter on Eliot, "T. S. Eliot, the Journalistic Struggle, and the 'Dialect of the Tribe,'" connects the poet's views on journalism to his concerns regarding the dilution of language and culture: "Eliot worked his own variations on a cultural discourse that associated journalism with an excessive emphasis on personality and emotionalism and posited journal-

ism a threat to the English language and its literature.” Eliot responded to this threat by attempting to isolate literature from mass culture, placing hope in a literary elite that would “purify the dialect of the tribe” and prevent the dilution of language and culture. Collier shows that Eliot consistently opposed the dispersing effect of popular newspapers to the centralizing tendency of literature, leading Eliot to place his hopes in objective critical standards developed by a well-informed and educated elite rather than “the belief in broad, social progress through free expression.” Although this argument leads Collier to emphasize Eliot’s later prose works, particularly *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, Collier also demonstrates how Eliot’s concerns about the decay of language and culture can be traced to his earlier essays. Despite Eliot’s skepticism regarding the promise of mass journalism, Collier shrewdly observes that Eliot also used journalism to establish his reputation.

This play of journalistic opportunism and cultural elitism becomes central to Collier’s discussion of the *Criterion*. Eliot’s concerns about the financial success of the paper conflicted with his literary interests, leading him to “a pessimistic view of the public sphere” and thus contributing to his later conservatism. Unearthing a fascinating letter by Eliot to the *Daily Mail*, Collier shows Eliot’s active participation in “the journalistic struggle” and provides a suggestive alternate genealogy that traces Eliot’s increasingly conservative views on language and culture. This historical research and Collier’s readings of *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* are the highlights of Collier’s short chapter on Eliot. Unfortunately, the broader focus of the book restricts the discussion of Eliot, forcing Collier to move rapidly between topics and limiting his engagement with Eliot’s poetry. Although Collier does provide brief readings of a few poems, he chooses to stick to poems directly dealing with journalism. This decision effectively supplements his readings of the prose, but leads him to focus on earlier and more obscure works such as “Ballade Pour Grosse Lulu” and discarded fragments from *The Waste Land*. Whereas his explication of Eliot’s prose expands into a fruitful discussion on language and culture, his reading of the poetry is constrained and leaves much fertile intellectual ground unharvested. A longer chapter would have allowed Collier to complement his discussion of Eliot’s prose with an equally rich discussion of the poetry.

Collier organizes his book along a spectrum, placing authors into positions that indicate their particular outlook on the role of journalism and their relationship to mass culture. Thus, Eliot plays his traditional role as arch-conservative, contrasted with Rebecca West’s more hopeful vision of the public and the press. Although Collier frequently cites David Chinitz’s work, which reveals the complexity of Eliot’s interaction with popular culture, Collier’s vision of Eliot emphasizes the poet’s elitism and detachment from the public sphere. In this way, Collier’s spectrum risks oversimplifying the political positions of his authors, a danger not limited to

his discussion of Eliot. The chapter on Virginia Woolf speaks in detail of her desire for a “common reader,” but ultimately concludes that Woolf viewed book reviewing as an elitist enterprise to further the literary interests of her coterie.

The other chapters of *Modernism on Fleet Street* discuss novelists who had varying relations with journalism. Without the historical and biographical burdens that weigh down the Eliot chapter, Collier has space to explore how Joyce’s incorporation of newspaper articles “evinces a serious engagement with the question of how, and under what conditions, the press might be used in the interests of liberty or repression.” This exploration, in turn, leads to new insights on Joyce’s struggle with censorship and a complex discussion of Joyce’s notoriously slippery involvement with Irish politics.

Whereas Joyce’s lack of writing on the press serves to increase the depth and scope of Collier’s analysis, the chapters on Rose Macaulay and Rebecca West are more focused and nuanced because of their lifelong involvement in the news media. Both Macaulay and West show a consistent belief in the political and social power of the free press and thus stand at the opposite end of the spectrum from Eliot. Of all the authors Collier discusses, West was the most actively involved in journalism and thus spoke as an insider. West criticized Eliot’s view of specialized literary publications as “islands of sanity in the midst of a sea of degenerate print,” and sought to bring to modernism the objectivity, democracy, and political engagement of journalism. Presenting extensive evidence from West’s novels, essays, and articles, Collier crafts West as an anti-modernist who simultaneously tried to reform journalism and literature, bridging the “great divide” between experimental literature and the public sphere.

Collier’s extended historical exploration of each author’s interaction with print journals offers new insight into rarely explored topics like Eliot’s editorial goals at the *Criterion* and Woolf’s ambivalent position as book reviewer. He is at his best when discussing the secondary texts of each author, uncovering previously ignored comments on mass journalism that make important contributions to understanding their politics and aesthetics. However, because so many authors are covered and the references to journalism in their fiction and prose are (he admits) scant, Collier has little space left for readings of primary texts in his short chapters already loaded with historical and biographical evidence. Although the quality of Collier’s historical analysis is consistently high, the level of his interaction with poetry and fiction varies depending on the author. Ultimately, the value of the book may depend on the critical goals of the reader and his or her author of interest. For Eliot scholars looking to understand his interactions with journalism or searching for a new perspective on Eliot’s attitude towards language and culture, Collier’s book will be a valuable and entertaining read.

Howard, Thomas. *Dove Descending: A Journey into T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets.* San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006.

Kramer, Kenneth Paul. *Redeeming Time: T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets.* Chicago: Cowley, 2007.

Reviewed by James Matthew Wilson
East Carolina University

As Kenneth Paul Kramer observes in the introduction to his remarkable study of *Four Quartets*, the poems emerged as part of an effort to create what Eliot described to Paul Elmer More as “a new type of intellectual, combining the intellectual and the devotional” (9). Insofar as the poems are simply poems, literary works, they have received extensive, even overwhelming attention from literary critics. These two new books on the poems, however, raise the question of whether they ought also be considered as devotional works and studied as such. Or rather, they raise the question initially because their publishers are not the usual academic presses that once could be counted on to produce five-foot shelves’ worth of books on Eliot. Has that venerable industry at last been extinguished, leaving scholars no alternative but to seek publication within the Christian publishing industry?

The short answer is “no.” But each of these books, for different reasons, inspires one to consider not merely under what material conditions scholarship on Eliot ought to be published, but what are the appropriate methods for that scholarship, and toward what end does it strive. To begin with Howard’s *Dove Descending*, one observes that Ignatius Press has distinguished itself as one of a very small handful of leading publishers of serious theology and devotional reading in the United States. It sponsored translations of the major Catholic European philosophers and theologians of the last century, including Etienne Gilson, Yves Congar, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger. Two decades ago, Ignatius also published an annotated edition of the Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton, for which it was accused by the sometime Chestertonian, full-time controversialist Gary Wills of being “pseudo-learned.” Be that as it may, if one has any interest in modern Catholic thought, one must eventually turn to Ignatius’s extensive catalog.

Dove Descending sets out not to offer scholarship on or interpretation (in the professional sense) of the *Quartets*. It gives us simply a “reading.” Howard tackles the poems line by line, accounting for every choice of phrase and striving to set forth the narrative of meaning that occurs as one forages through the poems. To establish a loose taxonomy of criticism, we might say that an “interpretation” succeeds in understanding a work sufficiently well that it can abstract general themes and formal principles to set before its reader. A

“reading,” in contradistinction, sets forth a knowledge of the poem, staying close to its particular details. Interpretations succeed when they crystallize the essence of a work in abstraction, readings when they draw us most closely to the contours of the work itself.

If one can accept this dyad, then one can gratefully assent to Howard’s efforts with the poem. He clearly knows the historical and literary source material on which *Four Quartets* draws, and above all it is clear he knows the Augustinian theology and Thomistic metaphysics that inform the work. He deliberately refrains from making mention of these things, save for occasional slips where he seems to think it impossible not to confess Eliot’s allusive practices. Hence, one does learn that Eliot translates St. John of the Cross and quotes Dame Julian of Norwich. Howard also tells us—mistakenly—that the archaic lines on matrimony in “East Coker” come “whole cloth” from Lancelot Andrewes, rather than from Thomas Elyot’s *The Governour*. Such an error, in Howard’s reading, seems beside the point. His ambition is to aid the novice reader to find a path through the poems in order to discover what they say. On the whole, Howard achieves this aim well. His reading is clear and diligent, providing the kind of information about the poems that one hopes the lay reader would find satisfying.

Mention of the “lay reader” does lead one to question, even doubt, Howard’s procedure, however. His book is not intended as an undergraduate’s guide to the poem; the undergraduate, when electing not to read an assigned text,

My own sense is that staying so close to a text that line breaks feel like the edge of a precipice is staying too close.

reads some précis that highlights major themes and skips the troublesome details. Howard relishes and lingers in details, sometimes digressing for a page to bring home to his reader just what is so brilliant, difficult, or beautiful about a particular line. So closely does he press the flesh of the poem (rather than

mounting the skeleton) that I found it difficult to grasp his argument from time to time without the poem open before me. The audience Howard intends to reach is that lay reader who, having heard of Eliot’s great poem, and having heard that it was a great Christian contemplative poem, desires to hazard what would otherwise prove a treacherous journey. Even Howard’s prose style insists that one has to *want* to read Eliot in order to read this book about Eliot. He is chatty and parochial, anticipating as best he can the confusions a reader may experience coming to the end of one line and afraid to dive into the next.

My own sense is that staying so close to a text that line breaks feel like the edge of a precipice is staying too close. Howard is far from unique in erring on the side of melodrama in his efforts to reproduce, dramatize, and eventually resolve the troubles that confront one on the first reading of a poem. Also, his interest in the poems clearly rises in part from their status as the great Christian poems of modern times. His ideal reader likely will come to the poems from a

similar devotional interest. Therefore, his reluctance to introduce theological concepts and language seems like a failure to gauge his audience. The average undergraduate and trained academic may struggle with the “hypostatic union,” but Howard’s most probable readers will have come precisely because they are after further detail about the “hint” and “guess” that is “Incarnation.”

Cowley Publications—run by the same Episcopalian monastic order that ran the church where Eliot attended liturgy during his residence in Boston in the early 1930s—produced Kramer’s *Redeeming Time*. In most respects, Kramer’s study reads like a typical scholarly monograph on the poems. His research is thorough, including substantive discussion of the whole history of *Four Quartets* criticism in the endnotes. Moreover, it is original research. Kramer’s archival work, his familiarity with the places that provide the toponyms for the poems, and especially his interviews with Eliot’s friend and sometime spiritual advisor, George Every, provide rich insights into the possible meaning of the poems that are not readily available elsewhere. Kramer’s interpretation of the poems provides helpful and informed schematics of their origin as well as of their iterated form. One comes away from the study with a vastly enriched sense of how well constructed the *Quartets* are individually and, especially, in their shared structure.

Unfortunately, what most distinguishes this study as one of scholarly interpretation—the deployment of Martin Buber’s theological account of interpersonal and “interspiritual” encounters as a hermeneutic lens—furnishes its weakest moments. Kramer spent his academic career as a professor of Comparative Religious Studies at San José State University. His interest in comparative religions and above all in inter-religious dialogue rooted in Buber’s dialogical theories encumbers his otherwise elegant and convincing interpretation of the poems. Kramer situates the poems helpfully in their proper, larger intellectual context, attending to the Aristotelian, Augustinian, Indic, and other sources on which Eliot drew. Moreover, he frequently describes the spirit of Eliot’s work with great rhetorical power. But his use of Buber creates two weaknesses of interpretation. The first, and easier to explain, is that Kramer’s use of Buber seems merely to inflect familiar (and just) explanations of the poems with words like “reciprocity” and “dialogical,” which do not fundamentally affect those explanations. They seem tacked-on enthusiasms rather than earnest perceptions.

The second weakness occurs in those moments of the poem where the Western tradition of mystical theology intersects with the *Bhagavad Gita*, or where the poet seems to be entering into dialogue with some less certainly identifiable Other (e.g., the “compound ghost”). Kramer reads such sections of the poems as exemplifying Buber’s *I-Thou* spirituality in general, and an ecumenical spirit of inter-religious dialogue in particular. While such a claim does not utterly want foundation, it distorts rather than clarifies the meaning of Eliot’s work. Eliot became interested in Catholic and Anglo-Catholic theology in the aftermath of the crisis of

theological modernism—during a time, in other words, when serious religious thinkers were turning to metaphysics and objectivity rather than psychology and subjectivity for the answers to longstanding theological disputes. Eliot’s “escape from personality” in his poetry and criticism was closely modeled on such anti-modernist (sometimes called “Integralist”) trends. Buber was Jewish and, therefore, outside the conventional province of the controversies over Catholic theological modernism, but his thought derives from, and echoes the work of, Catholic modernists like Maurice Blondel and Baron von Hugel. Eliot’s quest for a sound intellectualist, metaphysically grounded mysticism—of which *Four Quartets* is the realization—would have found Buber’s theology uncongenial, even if, as Kramer observes, Eliot thought Buber himself a truly great man. This final objection does not negate the value of Kramer’s study, however. The synthetic and well theorized interpretation of *Quartets* he offers should prove of great interest to scholars. Because Kramer’s prose is well crafted and insightful, and because it expresses a passionate admiration for Eliot’s work, it may prove—more than Howard’s reading—to be an enduring guide to the poem for the lay reader as well.

A Good Poet

Ted Richer

T. S. Eliot said it, so:

(a good poet) *must not only have something to say*

a little different from what anyone has said before

(a good poet)

must also have found the different way of saying it which expresses

the difference in what (a good poet, too) is saying

T. S. Eliot said it, so.

...

I, myself, read it, so:

(a good poet) *must not only have something to say*

a little different from what anyone has said before

(a good poet)

must also have found the different way of saying it which expresses

the difference in what (a good poet, too) is saying

I, myself, read it, so.

...

T. S. Eliot said it, so.

I, myself, read it, so.

About myself.

About myself.

Abstracts

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cultic *mussolinismo*, while cautiously qualifying his Maurrasian politics. In the end, moreover, he even seems willing to slough off the *Action Française* movement for a yet-unrealized, home-grown political system in England, which might supersede lackluster Fabianism and “learn from political thought abroad, but not from political practice.”

Anderson Araujo
University of Western Ontario



“Rereading the Yeatsian in *Four Quartets*”

While many masters inform Eliot’s poetry, the only one explicitly referred to as such is the ghost of “some dead master” encountered by the speaker of “Little Gidding.” Sabine Roth depicts their meeting as a dismissal of Yeats, offering the end of Eliot’s essay on him as proof of their ultimate disconnect. However, the essay as a whole supports the assertion of Helen Gardner that the ghost scene represents reconciliation. The qualities that Eliot praises in Yeats—his willingness to express the difficulties of aging, his innovations with drama, and his blending of autobiography with allusion—are the same qualities that can be seen gradually introduced into the character of the ghost over successive drafts of this heavily revised passage. This comparison shows Yeats as a transformative influence on a passage that represents Eliot’s rendering of Dante, one of the most personally significant achievements of his career.

Introducing Yeats’s essay “Modern Poetry” into the discussion makes Yeats seem not just one of many masters, but a primary force in the latter three quartets. Those poems, published after the essay, show the personality and lyricism that Yeats accuses Eliot of purging from English poetry. This acceptance of Yeats’s mastery puts the two poets’ critical and poetic dialogue into a new context, where the presence of a master is as essential as it is complex.

Chad Parmenter
University of Missouri, Columbia
Winner of the Fathman Young Scholar Award for 2007



“Ovid’s Tiresias in *The Waste Land*”

This paper examines T. S. Eliot’s use of Ovid’s Tiresias in *The Waste Land* as a commentary on female sexuality in the Modern era and contrasts this usage to Guillaume Apollinaire’s portrayal of female sexuality in the contemporaneous surrealist play *Les Mamelles de Tiresias*. As women became responsible for repopulating post-War nations, and their reproductive organs became property of the state, soci-

ety, and the medical community, recreational sex for women became a clinical and empty function. Apollinaire’s work creates a surrealistic world in which women realize the ridiculousness of professional life and are happily relegated to baby-producing machines for the state’s repopulation.

Eliot’s extensive footnote quoting Ovid in near entirety makes his usage of Tiresias as a symbol for sexual pleasure, and most especially *female* sexual pleasure, clear. Ovid’s Tiresias is blinded for insisting that the capacity for female sexual pleasure is vast and exceeds the male’s. Tiresias as narrator mediates the reader’s experience by limiting empathy for the typist and describing the sexual participants in terms of occupation only. Eliot’s repeated emphasis on the “Breasts of Tiresias,” despite his clear reference to Ovid’s story of sequential, not simultaneous, hermaphroditism, suggests an allusion to the title of Apollinaire’s play as translated into English. His use of Tiresias suggests that rather than being misogynistic, Eliot is exploring sexual alienation as a result of capitalism.

Adrianna E. Frick
San Francisco State University



“God, Man, and Machine: The Balancing Nature of Eliot’s Ecologic Poetics”

Although reams of critical analysis have sought to explore all of the fertile aspects of Eliot’s life, poetry, prose, and drama, specific analysis of Eliot’s environmental statements remains uncharted territory. While the field of ecocriticism is relatively nascent, accounting for some of this neglect, I assert that a more significant reason for this paucity is the tendency to perceive Eliot as a “difficult” poet. For example, in the critical commentary on *The Waste Land*, a poem inextricably built upon nature imagery, nature is treated as predominantly symbolic. This symbolic reading of nature becomes problematic, however, for the nature imagery is perceived as merely cluttering the poem and blocking the reader in her quest to grasp the “true meaning.” When read from an ecocritical perspective, however, Eliot’s ambivalent portrayal of nature as both malevolent (as in *The Waste Land*) and benevolent (as in *Four Quartets*) lead toward understanding something important about man and his environment: man coexists with his environment, and contributes to its fertility or its desolation.

In this essay, I hope to begin a dialogue between ecocritics and Eliot scholars concerning Eliot’s significant oral and ethical statements regarding nature and the environment. I present a brief overview of the field of ecocriticism before looking at Eliot’s portrayal of the dynamic relationship between the elements as set forth in *The Waste Land* and *Four*

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Abstracts

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Quartets, focusing on the implications of their disharmony in the former contrasted with their harmony in the latter.

Chad B. Cripe
Grand Valley State University



“*Ash-Wednesday* Remade: Masa’aki Tachihara’s ‘Holy Ash-Wednesday’”

Masa’aki Tachihara (1926–1980) is a well-established writer in the Japanese literary world, not only as an author, but also as editor of well-known literary magazines. While his works are mostly prose, he did publish a collection of poems, *Light and Wind* (1977). His “Holy Ash Wednesday,” included in this

collection, was written in awareness of Eliot’s first major “post-conversion” poem.

“Holy Ash Wednesday” alludes to Tachihara’s prose pieces, such as his short stories *Rain in April*, and his novel, *Estate of Rose*, which in turn allude to Eliot. The content of Tachihara’s poem, apart from its first two lines, has nothing to do with *Ash-Wednesday*, but the influence of Eliot’s other early poems is obvious. Furthermore, one notes Tachihara’s indebtedness to the vegetation cult of which Eliot makes so much in *The Waste Land*. Ennui and languid passivity in response to the eternal cycle of life mark the poem throughout. Tachihara’s focus in this poem is not penitence and renunciation, but, rather, the sterility of modern civilization in contrast to the rhythms of human birth and death.

Shun’ichi Takayanagi
Sophia University, Tokyo

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