

# Time Present

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Note: The T.S. Eliot Society is working to become an affiliate organization of the Modern Language Association. As an affiliate, we will be able to mount an Eliot-related panel at each of the MLA's annual conventions. To gain affiliate status, we must first sponsor an MLA session in each of two years. Thanks to organizational efforts of Elisabeth Däumer, the Society put on the first of our trials session, “Eliot and Transnationalism,” in December 2009. Here Kinereth Meyer gives an account of that event, which she kindly agreed to chair.

David Chinitz

## **T.S. Eliot and Transnationalism at the MLA Philadelphia, December 27<sup>th</sup> 2009**

Kinereth Meyer

“T. S. Eliot and Transnationalism,” the panel sponsored by the T. S. Eliot Society at the MLA Conference in December, succeeded in questioning and expanding the conventional contexts (English poetry, Modernism) in which we ordinarily read the work of T. S. Eliot. Although the session was scheduled for the first day of the conference, during a late time slot, attendance was excellent, and audience response lively and enthusiastic. All of the papers contributed to the ongoing conversation in contemporary Eliot criticism on his transnational poetics, a conversation that not only enriches our understanding of the poet’s oeuvre, but at the same time expands our conceptions of literary history.

Anita Patterson’s paper on “T. S. Eliot, St.-John Perse, and New World Modernism” examined modernist forms in New World poetry by looking at the connections between Eliot, St.-John Perse, and Whitman. Patterson argued that in translating Perse’s *Anabase*, a poem about frontier conquest largely indebted to Whitman, Eliot was able to reconsider his own ambivalent attitude toward Whitman. Patterson’s paper convincingly connected Eliot to postcolonial literature in the Americas through his links with Whitman, Perse, and Laforgue.

An equally surprising and unusual approach to Eliot was found in Sean Cotter’s paper on “T. S. Eliot’s Romanian Afterlife.” Cotter’s title is based on Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Task of the Translator,” which argues that the translation of an original work is in fact part of its unfolding, part of its fame, or “continuing life.” Cotter examined how translation can have a political function: Romanian poet Lucian Blaga translated Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi” as an early response to Romanian communism. In Blaga’s translation, the religious transformation that Eliot’s Magus undergoes works as a kind of allegory for the political takeover of Romania by communism, and for Romania’s ultimate ability to incorporate, and thus overcome, Soviet presence.

Matthew Hart closed the Eliot session with a challenging question: how does Eliot combine his striving for English particularity with his opposition to provincial nationalisms in Europe? In “The Grim Salmon: T. S. Eliot and Transnational Vernacularism,” Hart asked how we can square Eliot’s transnational aesthetics with Jed Esty’s characterization of the older Eliot as “an ancient, grim, and determined salmon, swimming upstream against the currents of modernity and diaspora in order to find his beginnings, and of course, his ends.” Hart’s provocative paper argued that Eliot interpreted Dante’s “universal European method” as a kind of “local universalism,” which allowed the poet to reconcile a transnational aesthetics with a more conservative vision of vernacular culture.

## Abstracts from MLA Panel, “T.S. Eliot And Transnationalism”

T. S. Eliot’s Romanian Afterlife: Translations under Communism

When we examine the afterlife of T. S. Eliot’s poetry in translation, we move, paradoxically, not further from but closer to one of Eliot’s, and Modernism’s, central concerns. Eliot consistently turns to translation in key contexts for his work, and he reads translations against their historical contexts. This paper offers a reading of his work in Romanian translation, against the context of the first decade of Communist rule. The translator is Lucian Blaga, a towering poetic and philosophical presence, a central figure for Romanian Modernism and an important focus for the disciplinary effort of the new regime. Eliot’s poetry “survives” in Blaga’s Modernist translations, living on the context of dramatic political change. My investigation of how Blaga used the czar of letters against the Soviet Russians gives insight into the conjunction of history, politics, and translation characteristic of Modernism.

Sean Cotter



The Grim Salmon: T.S. Eliot and Transnational Vernacularism

Writing in a long essay about Dante Aligheri, T. S. Eliot opined that the beauty of English poetry lay in the “opacity” of its language, which he attributes to its status as “the growth of a *particular* civilization.” He celebrates Dante’s Italian, by contrast, as the product “not of one European country but of [all] Europe.” This paper employs *Dante* (1929) in order to ask two questions about Eliot’s attitudes to vernacular language, the nation-state, and transnational culture: How does Eliot reconcile his love for English particularity with his desire to resist the division of Europe into provincial nationalisms? And how can we square Eliot’s transnational aesthetic—a feature of his poetics recently celebrated by postcolonialists like Simon Gikandi—with Jed Esty’s influential account of the older Eliot as “an ancient, grim, and determined salmon, swimming upstream against the currents of modernity and diaspora in order to find his beginnings, and of course, his ends”? The first step in resolving these paradoxes comes when we realize that, for Eliot, Dante’s “universal European method” is best described as a kind of local universalism. By building a transnational poetics on the back of a conservative vision of vernacular culture, Eliot makes

room for a “pre-political” cosmopolitanism that, in its exemplary insularity, resists being defined or managed by the modern nation-state.

Matthew Hart  
Columbia University



Also included in the MLA panel: Anita Patterson, Boston Univ., “T. S. Eliot, Saint-John Perse and New World Modernism” (for full text see *TP* Fall 2009, p. 4)

## Public Sightings

Compiled by David Chinitz

**“The greatest literary cat lover of all, of course,”** declares Robert Schnakenberg, “was T. S. Eliot, who wrote an entire book of light verse about felines, the basis for the love-it-or-loathe-it Broadway musical *Cats*. Eliot didn’t have a Rum Tum Tugger in his brood, but he did have a Tantomile, a Noilly Prat, a Wiscus, a Pettipaws, and a George Pushdragon.”

Schnakenberg’s chapter on Eliot (in *Secret Lives of Great Authors: What Your Teachers Never Told You About Famous Novelists, Poets, and Playwrights* [2008]) is sometimes amusing but often inaccurate; for example, it claims that “When [Eliot] failed to show up to defend his thesis, [Harvard] rejected his PhD application,” and, more disturbingly, that Eliot “also had kind words to say about Hitler and Mussolini.”

**Some serious gardening.** The program booklet of the Pilgrimage Garden Club Thirty-Second Annual Antiques Forum (Sept. 10–12, 2009, Natchez, MS) begins by quoting the opening lines of “Burnt Norton.” Within, it comments: “T. S. Eliot responded to the social disorder of his own time with an almost irrational rage for order and with a strong plea for the necessity of a remembered past ... a past represented by ritual, tradition, memory and even myths.... Eliot was the product of two cultures, one native and one adopted, both threatened by the dislocation and turmoil of war that drove him to his meditation on the personal and historical past.”

**The Elder Statesman.** “Born Under a Bad Sign,” by Clark Elder Morrow, a poem published in the June 2009 *Vocabula Review*, begins: “I have measured out my days / not with coffee spoons / but with the Big Dipper.” Morrow also contributes a monthly column to the *Vocabula Review* titled “The Elder Statesman.” *Vocabula* describes Morrow’s style as “Plato passed through the lens of Thurber.”

(continued on p. 4)

**The 31<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the T. S. Eliot Society**  
**St. Louis, September 24–26, 2010**

### Call for Papers

The Society invites proposals for papers to be presented at the annual meeting in St. Louis. Clearly organized proposals of about 300 words, on any topic reasonably related to Eliot, along with biographical sketches, should be forwarded by June 14, 2010, to the President, David Chinitz, preferably by email to [dchinit@luc.edu](mailto:dchinit@luc.edu).

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 mention the fact in their submission. The Fathman Award, which includes a monetary prize, will be announced at the final session of the meeting.

Eliot Society members who would like to chair a panel are invited to apprise the President of their interest, either with or independently of a paper proposal.

### Call for Participants in Peer Seminar: Eliot Among the Moderns

This seminar, led by Kevin Dettmar, will articulate a number of intra- and extra-modernist relationships—relationships of influence, homage, anxiety. How was Eliot's influence felt among his modernist peers? What would it mean to frame the period as The Eliot Era, rather than The Pound Era? How did Eliot's example—both as embraced and rejected, consciously and unconsciously—fluence his peers and inheritors? And how did those modernist peers affect Eliot's own work? A variety of approaches very welcome here: Eliot & Another Modernist Figure; the influence of Eliot's thinking on a small group of other modernists; Eliot's impress on the title and ideology of modernism itself.

Kevin J. H. Dettmar is W. M. Keck Professor and Chair of English at Pomona College. He has served as President of the Modernist Studies Association and the Midwest Modern Language Association, and has published widely on modernist literature and culture, especially on Joyce. With Mark Wollaeger, he edits the series *Modernist Literature & Culture* for Oxford University Press. He also writes often about the intersections of popular music and contemporary life; his column “Pop Life” runs bi-monthly in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Most recently, he edited *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*.

The seminar is open to the first 15 registrants; registration will close July 1st. Seminarians 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](mailto:jayme.stayer@gmail.com)).

*The Keynote Speaker for this year's meeting will be*  
**Professor Michael Levenson, University of Virginia:**

Michael Levenson is William B. Christian Professor of English at the University of Virginia and author of *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press), *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality* (Cambridge University Press), *The Spectacle of Intimacy* (Princeton University Press, co-author Karen Chase), and the forthcoming *Modernism* from Yale University Press (2011). He is also the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (2000). His many articles have appeared in such journals as *Modernism/Modernity*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Twentieth Century Literature*, and *ELH*. Recent publications include work on Eliot, Conrad, Joyce, James, and Dickens.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and raised in Trenton, New Jersey, Professor Levenson received his BA from Harvard College and PhD from Stanford University. His interests include nineteenth- and twentieth-century transatlantic literatures, the Broadway Musical, the history of literary theory, and global comparative cultures.

## Public Sightings, cont.

(continued from p. 2)

**Wire in the Blood.** The latest novel by Val McDermid, the Scottish crime writer, is titled *Fever of the Bone* (2009). Earlier McDermid works—also featuring her popular detective, Dr. Tony Hill—include *Wire in the Blood* (1997) and *The Mermaids Singing* (1995). The British TV thriller series *Wire in the Blood*, based on McDermid's novels, ran from 2002 to 2008 and included such Eliotian episode titles as “Still She Cries,” “Sharp Compassion,” “Time to Murder and Create,” “Wounded Surgeon,” “Unnatural Vices,” “Falls the Shadow,” “The Dead Land,” “From the Defeated,” and “Prayer of the Bone.”

## Note From Nermine Tadros: Eliot in Egypt

Dear Sir,

I was very glad to see that one of my professors at Cairo University has mentioned the Eliot Society newsletter in an Egyptian magazine (*El Hilal*, March 2010). The magazine is one of the oldest literary magazines in Egypt: it actually started in the 1890s.



Professor Maher Shafik Farid introduced the Egyptian reader to the newsletter by saying:

*Time Present* is a periodical published by the T.S. Eliot Society in the U.S. The newsletter offers the reader everything about Eliot: his life, work & philosophy. They publish short articles about Eliot, in addition to reviews of books that discuss him. They also tell the reader about any conferences, seminars, or symposiums that discuss Eliot.

In the last issue of the newsletter (No. 68, Summer 2009) we read about the annual meeting of the Society (from 25–27 Sep. 2009), in which lectures about Eliot were given. Also the newsletter reviewed some new books on Eliot & they offered an excellent bibliography that included all what was published on him in 2008 (books, articles, & theses) which is very useful to both scholars & Students.

Dr. Farid is a Professor Emeritus of Translation and Poetry in the English Language & Literature Department in Cairo University, he is also a well known critic in Egypt & the Arab World.

I am attaching a scan of the article in which you will notice a small typing mistake...sorry about that.

Best Regards,

Nermine Tadross  
Graduate Student  
American University in Cairo, Egypt

## Attending Eliot's “The Cocktail Party”

Friday March 12<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 pm  
The Beckett Theater, New York

Reviewed by Marianne Huntington

Director, Scott Alan Evans  
Co-Directors, Cynthia Harris & Simon Jones  
Stage Manager, Meredith Dixon  
Mark Alhadeff as Alexander MacColie Gibbs  
Jeremy Beck as Peter Quilpe  
Lauren English as Celia Coplestone  
Cynthia Harris as Julia Shuttlethwaite  
Simon Jones as The Unidentified Guest  
Jack Koenig as Edward Chamberlayne  
Erika Rolsrud as Lavinia Chamberlayne  
Celia Smith as Miss Baraway  
Ben Beckley as the Caterer's Man

It will not be easy to give an unbiased opinion of T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* as I knew I was going to enjoy it even before I bought the tickets. However, the performance left me elated and wanting to see it multiple times before it left New York on April 10<sup>th</sup>.

As I entered The Beckett Theatre, an appropriately chosen curtainless venue that seats approximately 100 people, we experienced the dimly-lit, “modern-classic” setting of the first party. Regency-inspired furniture with Art Deco lighting and accessories instantly conveyed elegance and the promise of higher things. House lights went black and then blindingly bright, and when our eyes could again focus there before us were the Black Tie dressed actors in their appropriate places: Edward looking tense in the foreground stage right; Julia and Celia framing the relaxed but otherwise stoic “Unidentified Guest” (UG) on the love seat; Alex sitting adjacently to the right in a wooden arm chair; Peter standing pensively behind an opposing chair

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to the left of the stage; and all making the scripted small talk.

Julia (played by Cynthia Harris)—sporting an Erte'-inspired sage green ensemble—was audibly keeping the party alive, vacillating between sharing half-told stories, interrogating the UG, and attracting attention from the rest of the guests. The UG, played by Simon Jones, set himself apart from all the others by being the least animated and refreshingly banal. Alex (Mark Alhadoff), a very young (ironically effeminate) Allan Quatermain character, enthusiastically fed the conversation. Peter (Jeremy Beck) was the perfect antithesis to Alex with the feeble tone of a young man quivering and pining for the most beautiful girl in the room. Celia (Lauren English) came across as Marilyn Monroe fresh out of finishing school, her execution of the role needless to say proving “spot on.” Edward (Jack Koenig) held what must have been a record breaking vexed look on his brow throughout the entire performance from the first cocktail party, all the while imbibing a variety of spirits. The tension in the first scene was finally broken when Julia and all the guests made their several departures, each one more awkwardly done than the last, momentarily leaving Edward alone with the UG to resolve the mystery of his uninvited attendance. The much needed heart-felt dialogue between the two men simultaneously clarified the confusion and created more questions as the first scene came to a close. One could feel the excitement in the theatre as the story began to unfold in thin opaque layers, leaving us yearning for more resolution, which we all obtained before the abundance of despair, despondency, intrigue, duplicity and epiphanies with a party “take away” of optimism and hope for all.

I was most impressed by Ms. English’s role as Celia, who in this performance particularly emerges as a pained, beautiful but hopeless romantic. But I was also amused by the conflicted character of Alex, with Mark Alhadoff’s sprightly entrances and merriment. I wouldn’t presume to say that this was Eliot’s intention, but it made for lively theatre. In the final, much more relaxed party scene, Alex leaps onto the stage like Baryshnikov, giving a jovial welcome to his hosts with tall tales of the jungle. However, just *moments* later, after being prompted by Julia, he callously (and to horrified ears) tells the tale of Celia’s martyrdom. It took the genuine remorse and heartbreak of Peter, Edward and Lavinia all to transform the cocktail party into the realm of tragedy. The UG (being the scapegoat) brought the moment to a balance, analyzing and rationalizing the event after Lavinia called him out for looking so indifferent about the tragic news, as if he knew all along (which he did along with Alex and Julia). After the first guests departed, Edward and Lavinia (with the help of some crafty work from the lighting technicians) lifted the mood to a new high, enjoying their newly restored, affectionate relationship and waiting for their “new” guests to arrive. The strong sense of hope imparted here feels available to us all.

During the play a few stray details sometimes distracted me: Celia’s dress not being zipped up all the way in the back; the oversize flat rectangular ceiling fixture illuminated

the stage as if *the scene* were “a patient etherized upon a table” (maybe that *is* intentional); the placement of a chair in the foreground blocking the view of the party guests; or the tendency of a *large* actor to repeatedly turn his back in dialogue giving us too much knowledge of a worn out suit. However, the performances generally contributed to a powerful production, and a sense in the audience of having been part of and learned from troubled but essentially blessed lives.

## Call for Nominations

The Supervisor of Elections calls for nominations for four positions of Board Member—those presently held by Chris Buttram, Elisabeth Däumer, Melanie Fathman, and Lee Oser. The terms will run from July 1, 2010: four years for the highest ranked candidate (in terms of votes received in the election), three years for the second and third highest, and two for the fourth highest.\*

Board members must attend the annual meeting of the Society, at which the Board meeting is held, and will also be asked to take on other tasks in service to the Society. Nominations and self-nominations should be sent to the Supervisor of Elections, William Harmon ([wharmon03@mindspring.com](mailto:wharmon03@mindspring.com)), by May 21st. To appear on the ballot, a candidate must have at least five nominations from members of the Society in good standing.

Members may also make nominations for honorary membership and for distinguished service awards. These nominations should be made to the President, David Chinitz ([dchnit@luc.edu](mailto:dchnit@luc.edu)), by July 23.

\*In order to reestablish “staggered” terms, the Board recently amended the Society’s by-laws to vary the terms of the elected Board Members in this way (see Article V, sect. 6). The varied terms will be used in this election only. A further rule change will perpetuate the staggered terms so produced (Article V, sect. 5). The by-laws are available on the Society’s website (see <http://www.luc.edu/eliot/who.htm>).

## BOOK REVIEWS

Burton Blstein. *The Design of the Waste Land*. UP of America, 2008.

Reviewed by Sarah Kennedy  
Oxford University

“Can a lifetime represent a single motive?” Eliot asked in 1941. For Burton Blstein, the answer is emphatically “yes.” His *The Design of the Waste Land* seeks to provide a “detailed, comprehensive explanation of T. S. Eliot’s enigmatic poem.” Blstein finds within *The Waste Land* a consistent narrative of individual spiritual transformation akin to the Grail Quest, wherein the callow protagonist experiences a moment of communion with the Divine, embodied by a feminine figure at once Beatricean lover and (more awkwardly) Holy Grail. The precipitate and momentary nature of this encounter with the Absolute ages the protagonist and renders the world of the everyday an impoverished waste land. As he wanders, he encounters other types of the wanderer, men and women all cursed to confinement within the world of the “sensible,” with varying degrees of consciousness as to the spiritual poverty of their condition. Even thus confined, this is a demanding project, but the scope of Blstein’s study in fact far exceeds even this ambitious goal. He argues for a view of Eliot’s poetry as a unified whole featuring a single, recurrent protagonist whose spiritual odyssey mirrors the poet’s own. Aspects of this thesis are illuminating and persuasive, but the attempt to unify the poetic corpus is overambitious and uneven, resulting in a tendency to skew poems.

Blstein takes as his point of departure Eliot’s comment in the *Notes to The Waste Land* that “[n]ot only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*.” It is indicative of the author’s approach to primary documents that he takes this statement at face value. Whilst there can be no doubt that Eliot read and was in some ways influenced by the work of Jessie Weston, Sir James Frazer, and the Cambridge Ritualists, the sheer volume of critical conjecture concerning Eliot’s intent in composing the *Notes* surely demand some explanation from Blstein as to why in these instances we must rely on the truth of Eliot’s statement, or assume his complete adoption of Frazer’s mythic schema.

In seeking to maintain his claim as to *The Waste Land*’s design, Blstein is in danger of overplaying the significance of the Grail symbolism and obscuring the rich complexity of *The Waste Land*’s own idiosyncratic mythology. He con-

tends that the moment in the hyacinth garden when the speaker looks “into the heart of light, the silence” is an instance of the protagonist drinking from the Holy Grail. In this, he takes literally Eliot’s comment that glimpses of the “heart of light” are instances of “communion with the Divine.” Aside from the author’s desire to construct the poems around the skeleton of the Grail legend, there is no reason given to think that Eliot’s revelatory moments relate specifically or exclusively to the Grail mythos. In later chapters the poem is given more subtle rendering as a chronicle of the spiritual wandering of an exile from Eden, cursed with the knowledge of his loss, through an earthly reality rendered as a barren wilderness in search of a point of re-entry into the “Garden /where all loves end.” This gives a striking narrative arc to the poem’s fractured voices and broken images, and integrates the imaginative journeys of Dante and St. John of the Cross, two sources more commonly considered in relation to Eliot’s later works.

The ability to perceive a whole composed out of a fragile pattern of symbols and echoes is Blstein’s great strength and his biggest weakness. According to the author, his background as a sculptor and artist gives him the ability to visualise the inter-textual allusions that make up the web of Eliot’s poetry “as a whole whose parts are not only successively, but also simultaneously present.”

So, “*The Waste Land* is not to be distinguished from the later poems, but is in fact continuous with them and illuminates them. And so we can legitimately look to the later for insights into the earlier” (xxxiv, xxxvii). Much could have been made of this idea had it been undergirded with a discussion of how the poems intersect across time. As it is, the tendency is to go beyond the project to define an underlying order in the seeming chaos of *The Waste Land*. Blstein is willing to conflate poems written in vastly different contexts into a single vault of memorable images and quotable phrases.

The early chapters of the book are weakened by a tendency toward repetition and assertion. Together with the ubiquitous internal cross-referencing, Blstein takes imaginative liberties with the texts without sufficient supporting evidence. This is a pity, as the latter sections of the book are more compelling. Most of the early structural problems are remedied in the detailed readings of the poems provided in the excursuses. Excursus 1 (on “Dans le Restaurant,” *Gerontion* and “Burbank”) is tightly written and stays close to the texts, except in the notable case of the author’s claim that Burbank and Bleistein mete out “abuse” to Volupine akin to “murder,” because in “Eliot’s view . . . [a]ny man has to, needs to, wants to / Once in a lifetime, do a girl in” (83–84). The strained and careless attribution of authorial approval does not do the poem, or the rest of Blstein’s analysis, any justice.

*Much of the book’s argument rests on Eliot’s rejection of the “sensible”... in its Gnostic guise as an illusory obstacle between human consciousness and its apprehension of divine reality*

Blistein's method involves the expansion, rather than precision, of meaning. He builds up a system of equivalences between images and symbols within and across poems so that at any given point he may refer to the accumulated word-strata through which we might trace a proliferation of significances relating to motifs such as the "Grail," the "*Lebens-Speise*" (Bread of Life), the "underworld" and the "heart of light." Much of the book's argument rests on Eliot's rejection of the "sensible" (the world of the senses, and sensual experience) in its Gnostic guise as an illusory obstacle between human consciousness and its apprehension of divine reality. Blistein tells us that "[f]or Heraclitus, for Plato, for the Neoplatonists generally, and in Indian religion water symbolizes the fluid, impermanent, ever-changing character of the sensible" (xix). All references to food, hunger, thirst, feasting, coffee, bread, eggs, crumpets, nectar, and rocks are impoverished allusions to the "Bread of Life." Such compacting of symbolism allows Blistein to assert that the protagonists of *The Waste Land* and *A Cooking Egg*, the diner and waiter in *Dans Le Restaurant*, *Gerontion's* withered narrator, Burbank with his Baedeker, and the "narrator" of *Four Quartets* are all analogous and undergo a nigh-on identical process of revelation and betrayal of a "hyacinth girl" (79, 85). So, whilst Blistein's characterisation of the sea as symbolic of material pollution is intriguing, it becomes strained when, without comment, it is construed as an agent of purification.

Blistein is stronger when dealing more directly and simply with imagery, and his passages relating Eliot's figure of "the heart of light" to Dante's Empyrean (112), and the "garden in the desert" to "la divina foresta" (40) are some of his best. Other useful analyses, such as his consideration of the motifs of guilt and pursuit, are pre-figured by Ronald Schuchard's excellent *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*. The author's construction of Eliot's restaurant as an analogue of Hell, for those who have "supped the milk of Paradise" but whose moral and spiritual cowardice now condemn to interminable hunger is of interest, as is his analysis of *Gerontion*. The value of this study is as an enthusiastic guide for the general reader desiring to enter imaginatively into the trials of *The Waste Land*, and to strain for the sense of "What the Thunder said." In this context, it provides a useful repository of sources and images for Eliot's elusive poem.



**William H. Pritchard. *On Poets & Poetry*. Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 2009.**

Leon Surette  
The University of Western Ontario

This collection of reviews and essays is his third. Pritchard has, in addition, twelve other publications – monographs and editions of poetry and letters. He has taught at Amherst col-

lege since 1958. *On Poetry & Poets* focuses on what one might call the Hardy-Frost school of poetry, that is poetry that reflects upon the human condition in a way that is accessible to readers without recourse to the "Companions" or Study Guides that sprang like warriors from the dragon's teeth in the fifties and after. Pritchard's canon of preferred poets includes Hardy, Frost, Randall Jarrell, Elizabeth Bishop, Donald Hall, Philip Larkin and Richard Wilbur.

If that sounds impossibly narrow, that is because it is. Although Pritchard's critical eye essay a broad range of twentieth century poets, it is these companionable poets with whom he is most comfortable. I cannot characterize his criticism better than the unidentified reviewer of Pritchard's selection of Randall Jarrell who noted his "predilection for a certain kind of literary life . . . 'the ordinary, bourgeois, academic life . . . a life rooted in reading, civil in its pleasures and dedicated to understanding rather than to change'" (I owe this remark to Pritchard himself. He cites it on page 223). Clearly the early modernist poets—Yeats, Pound and Eliot—do not fit that model. Nor do the poets of the Auden generation; still less the Beats or Black Mountain poets. The Beats receive no notice at all here; Auden and the Black Mountain poets get only asides. Apart from his preferred poets, only the early modernists receive much attention in this volume.

It is impossible to do justice to the commentary contained in the thirty reviews and seven extended essays collected here. They range in date from 1986 to 2009, and in length from three to twenty pages. Pritchard organizes them into three groups: "Essays on Older Poets" (Dryden to Hardy); "Reviewing Twentieth Century Poets" divided into "The Modernist Generation" (Yeats to Crane); and "The Middle Generation" (Betjeman to Donald Hall); and finally "Three Critics on Poets and Poetry" (retrospective essays on Eliot, Kenner and Donald Davie). Most of the reviews appeared in the *Hudson Review*, where Pritchard has been a regular contributor for many years. The fact that anyone with access to JSTOR can explore the entire archive of the *Hudson Review* renders collections such as this rather obsolete.

Still, to read these reviews and articles together allows one to become acquainted with Pritchard, who comes across as a genial, informed and intelligent reader of poetry. Whether reading poetry or commentary, Pritchard asks himself what reading it can do for him—or others, of course—as a sensitive, ethical and socially responsible human being. In short, he takes as a given that the function of literature is what Arnold said it was—to spread sweetness and light. Pritchard asks of literature that it provide solace for the ills of this world, and consolation for its losses and disappointments—a role once assigned to religion. The fundamental question once assigned to religion—"Why are we here?" "Whence have we come?" and "Whither are we tending?"—Arnold assigned to philosophers and scientists, not to poets. The literary critic's task is to repackage "the best that has been thought and said" into bite-sized chunks suitable for the inevitably less cerebral poets to pass on to the masses.

But Pritchard has no sense of himself as an Arnoldian repackager of big ideas. We find here no mention of the philosophical and scientific developments of the Twentieth Century—mercifully some might say. There is no mention of the double helix, globalisation, binary codes, the digital revolution or the World Wide Web. And the proper names that pepper much recent criticism—Saussure, Heidegger, Derrida, De Man—are nowhere to be found in *On Poets & Poetry*. Instead, we get assessments of to what degree a poet offers solace and consolation.

This lack of interest in big ideas accounts for the difficulty Pritchard has with the poetry of Yeats, Eliot and Pound. While impressed by their undoubted talent, he has no sympathy with their presumption that the function of literature is to address fundamental questions so as to create a new cultural dispensation. Although I have spent—perhaps misspent—my career examining poets who address those big questions, the careers of Yeats, Eliot and (most spectacularly) Pound are not reassuring for those who would look to poets for guidance. Eliot himself abandoned such a lofty view of poetry when he accepted the authority of the Anglican Church. Perhaps we would all be better off if we accepted Auden's caution that “poetry makes nothing happen,” and expected nothing more than solace and consolation from literature.

An example of the solace Pritchard finds in Larkin is found in his obituary for Larkin. Pritchard there describes him as a “particularly resourceful imaginer of the idea of death” (249), and praises the following lines from “Winter Palace,” Larkin’s 1978 meditation on age and failing memory:

It will be worth it, if in the end I manage  
To blank out whatever it is that is doing the\* damage  
Then there will be nothing I know.  
My mind will fold into itself, like fields, like snow.

“The recompense,” Pritchard remarks, “makes late Yeats or Stevens sound positively rosy by comparison. But like their work—if in no other respect—Larkin’s is a whole that hangs together and reveals a life . . .” (256-57). (\*Pritchard has “them” for “the”—rather distorting the sense of the passage.) Here we have a case of rather bleak solace and consolation, but solace and consolation nonetheless.

Larkin’s sentiment contrasts strongly with the less admired Pound’s defiance against old age, regrets and misfortune in the *Pisan Cantos*:

Les larmes que j'ai créées m'inondent  
Tard, très tard je t'ai connue, la Tristesse,  
I have been hard as youth sixty years (LXXX)

But, admiring Pound’s defiance, we need to remember his disastrous behaviour on the world stage. Larkin’s sentiment is similarly at odds with Dylan Thomas’ injunction to his dying father—a poet Pritchard completely ignores: “Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

And we can contrast Eliot’s take on recollection in “Little Gidding”:

This is the use of memory:  
For liberation---not less of love but expanding  
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation  
From the future as well as the past.

But these sentiments reflect an ethic dependent on some trans-personal view of human life, something Pritchard does not ask of poetry.

The only full-length piece devoted to Eliot is “Eliot’s Mischievous Prose,” first appearing in the *Hopkins Review* in 2008. It is essentially a defence of Eliot’s criticism against I. A. Richards’ negative assessment of it in a marginal note found in Richards’ copy of Ezra Pound’s *Selected Poems*. Richards complains of the “pontification, the impossible claims, the ridiculously too conscious humilities, the gauche misrepresentation of other people’s fairly obvious remarks” that he finds in Eliot’s prose. Pritchard does not reveal where he found Richards’ wonderfully catty note, but devotes nineteen pages to a rebuttal of it by describing “briefly some high spots in the uncollected prose” (275). The occasion for this—perhaps unnecessary—defence was the announcement of the forthcoming complete prose of Eliot under the general editorship of Ronald Schuchard.

## Announcements

Dear Colleagues,

The editors of volume I of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot* seek your assistance in identifying a fugitive, pre-autumn 1917 review of one of Pound’s publications, as quoted by Eliot in his *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry* (1917). While a reviewer discussing the principles of *Imagisme* in the *Nation* “dreads the impending anarchy,” writes Eliot, “Mr. William Archer was terrified at the prospect of hieratic formalisation. Mr. Archer believes in the simple untaught muse”: [quotes Archer below]

Mr. Pound’s commandments tend to make too much of poetry a learned, self-conscious craft, to be cultivated by a guild of adepts, from whose austere laboratories spontaneity and simplicity are excluded. . . . A great deal of the best poetry in the world has very little technical study behind it. . . . There are scores and hundreds of people in England who could write this simple metre (*i.e.* of “A Shropshire Lad”) successfully.

We will gratefully acknowledge your assistance in identifying the source of Archer’s remarks.

Ron Schuchard ([engrs@emory.edu](mailto:engrs@emory.edu))  
Jewel Spears Brooker ([jsbrooker@aol.com](mailto:jsbrooker@aol.com))

## **T. S. Eliot International Summer School 2010**

This year's academic programme will bring together some of the most distinguished international scholars of T. S. Eliot and Modern Literature, including Massimo Bacigalupo (University of Genoa), Jewel Spears Brooker (Eckerd College), Ron Bush (St. John's College, Oxford), David Chinitz (Loyola University Chicago), John Haffenden (University of Sheffield), Nancy Duvall Hargrove (Mississippi State University), Mark Ford (University College, London), Iman Javadi (Institute of English Studies, University of London), Hermione Lee (Wolfson College, Oxford), Jim McCue (London), Gail McDonald (University of Southampton), Marjorie Perloff (Stanford University), Stephen Romer (University of Tours), Ronald Schuchard (Emory University), and Wim Van Mierlo (Institute of English Studies, University of London).

The School will be officially opened on 10 July at 6.00pm in Senate House by Sir Tom Stoppard, OM, CBE, FRSL. Students and participants will then be welcomed at a reception and buffet for students, participants and special guests. On Sunday morning, students will be taken by coach to Burnt Norton, where we will have a picnic lunch and an intellectual programme on the grounds. During the following week there will be readings from Eliot's poetry by prominent actors and actresses of the Josephine Hart Poetry Hour and a reading sponsored by the Poetry Book Society.

From Monday to Friday, the School will present two lectures each morning in Senate House on all aspects of of Eliot's life and work, the first from 9:30 -10:30, followed by a tea / coffee break, the second from 11:00-12:00. Lunch is provided. Students then choose one from a variety of afternoon seminars (1:30-3:00) for a week-long, in-depth study under the guidance of a seminar leader. The seminars cover a range of subjects. To aid reading and daily preparation, students will receive temporary membership cards for the Senate House Library.

On Saturday, 17 July, members of the School will be taken by coach to Little Gidding, where we will have lunch and an intellectual programme on the grounds with members of the T. S. Eliot Society and the Friends of Little Gidding. We will return to London by early evening. For those who do not have to depart on Sunday, we will have an optional coach trip to East Coker, thus providing an opportunity to visit the third site of *Four Quartets*. In East Coker we will have lunch at a sixteenth-century English pub, the Helyar Arms, and an intellectual programme in St. Michael's Church, where Eliot's ashes are buried.

### **Course Credit**

While the School will provide Certificates of Attendance for all who require them, it cannot offer academic credit. How-

ever, if students enroll in an independent study course with a supervisor in their home institutions, the academic programme of the School may constitute a significant part of the home course. If arranged in advance, the School may request a seminar leader to provide written evaluation of student participation and performance to the home institution.

Further information is available at  
<http://ies.sas.ac.uk/events/TSE/2010/index.htm>



## **American Literature Association San Francisco, May 27–30, 2010 Sessions sponsored by the T. S. Eliot Society**

### Trauma, Mourning, and Belief

William Malcuit, Chair

Thursday, May 27, 9:00–10:20 AM

1. "Traumatic Loss and Absence in *The Waste Land*," Richard Badenhausen, Westminster College
2. "Eliot and Badiou: Sacrifice and Belief in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,'" Cameron MacKenzie, Temple University

### The Presence of the Past

Richard Badenhausen, Chair

Thursday, May 21, 10:30–11:50 AM

1. "'Backward half-looks': The Role of Memory in *Four Quartets*," Kate S. Flynn, T. S. Eliot Society
2. "Eliot's Notion of Tradition and Its Significance in the Age of Multimedia," Aburawi Elmajdoub, University of El-Fateh, Libya
3. "The Poetics of Political Failure: Eliot's Rejection of American Liberalism," William Malcuit, Loyola University Chicago

## **Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900: Abstracts**

### *T.S. Eliot Panel I: Myths and Metaphysics*

#### *The Waste Land* and the Virtual City

*The Waste Land* (1922) has been treated by many as the representative poem of the century, "a masterwork great enough to justify the whole 'modern experiment,'" a leviathan poem on the crises in Western culture and religion that is fraught with "hundreds of fragments of the Western present and of the Western past." However, *The Waste*

*Land* achieved a style of its own—the whole poem is composed of a mix of scenes and fragments which are organized in a way that is reminiscent of a cinematic montage, historical montage, or literary montage. *The Waste Land* turns away from the realism employed by other writers in their portrayals of London and instead offers an “Unreal city,” more governed by the principle of the grotesque. Eliot’s City is a city of extremes: a melee of localism and cosmopolitanism, of reality and fantasy, of decentering of perspectives and sense of excess that gives rise to an eclectic mélange of texts and styles, as well as to a sense of anachronisms that constitute a recognizable wasteland of virtual reality. The City—the cinematographic and phantasmagoric city with locatable topography of London streets—is also the Unreal City with cosmopolitan hyperspace. The poem is a grand city poem filled with traces of voices, histories, events, and experiences that unexpectedly interlace only to become undone before being recombined. The nature in the City is no longer associated with the first nature that represents the site of origin and being. Nor is the City surrounded by the “second nature” of artificial social constructs. It is, in my view, surrounded by a “third nature” in the form of copies of copies, the reproductions of simulacra. This article aims to explore Eliot’s writings on the experience of the city, and in particular his urban poetics, by reading *The Waste Land* as a model of the modernist/postmodernist text/textile. Arguably, *The Waste Land* can be considered one of the representatives of art in what Walter Benjamin might term the second age of mechanical reproduction with the development of information technology, as the poem is inscribed with the potential character of textual dissemination, textual flânerie, and the archiving of cultures.

Carol L. Yang



#### Modernly Metaphysical: Understanding the Sensibility of T. S. Eliot

*The Waste Land* demonstrates the most thoroughly developed poetic sensibility of the twentieth century. The longevity of this “piece of rhythmic grumbling” demonstrates a range of thought and feeling beyond the terms of any single critic or critical school. In order to move beyond the initial wonder that the poem produces and to grasp more concretely the nature and implications of its achievement, we must attempt to understand the progressive development of Eliot’s sensibility. The crafter of *The Waste Land* so thoroughly understood the living tradition of his poetic forebears that he was able to identify and assimilate their greatest strengths and turn them towards his own designs. By examining the development of Eliot’s sensibility leading up to *The Waste Land*, we may come to understand that Eliot is neither Cleanth Brooks’ academic formalist nor Harold Bloom’s closet romantic and open ourselves up to the possibility of a

new kind of reading. My paper contends that allusions in *The Waste Land* are actually not allusions at all but the direct sensory/mental experience of the poet/speaker/consciousness.

Martin Lockerd

#### From Our Bowl of Rose-Leaves



Presidents Harmon, Brooker, and Lockerd  
at the Eliot Society's 2009 Annual Meeting



Memorial Lecturer Ron Bush with Vince Sherry  
and Tim Materer at the 2009 Meeting

Photos by Frances Dickey

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The Society [Historian](#) is Frances Dickey (dickeyf@missouri.edu).

#### President

David Chinitz

Department of English / Loyola University Chicago / 6525 N. Sheridan Rd. / Chicago, IL 60626  
(773) 508-2789 / dchinitz@luc.edu

#### Vice President

Michael Coyle

Department of English, Colgate University, 13 Oak Dr., Hamilton, NY 13346  
315-228-7264/ [mcoyle@colgate.edu](mailto:mcoyle@colgate.edu)

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Tower Grove Park / 4256 Magnolia Ave. / St. Louis, MO 63110  
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Cyrena Pondrom

Department of English / University of Wisconsin / 7183 Helen C. White Hall / Madison, WI 53706  
(608) 263-3717 / [cpondrom@english.wisc.edu](mailto:cpondrom@english.wisc.edu)

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