

# Time Present

The Newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society

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## Explicator in Chief

The Eliot Society takes no official position on American politics. When the Leader of the Free World ventures into literary criticism involving T. S. Eliot, however, the occasion seems worth noticing. This May, advance reports on David Maraniss's new biography, *Barack Obama: The Story*, revealed that the president, at age twenty, had written a paragraph of commentary on *The Waste Land* to a friend writing a college paper on the subject:

I haven't read *The Waste Land* for a year, and I never did bother to check all the footnotes. But I will hazard these statements—Eliot contains the same ecstatic vision which runs from Münzer to Yeats. However, he retains a grounding in the social reality/order of his time. Facing what he perceives as a choice between ecstatic chaos and lifeless mechanistic order, he accedes to maintaining a separation of asexual purity and brutal sexual reality. And he wears a stoical face before this. Read his essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," as well as *Four Quartets*, when he's less concerned with depicting moribund Europe, to catch a sense of what I speak. Remember how I said there's a certain kind of conservatism which I respect more than bourgeois liberalism—Eliot is of this type. Of course, the dichotomy he maintains is reactionary, but it's due to a deep fatalism, not ignorance. (Counter him with Yeats or Pound, who, arising from the same milieu, opted to support Hitler and Mussolini.) And this fatalism is born out of the relation between fertility and death, which I touched on in my last letter—life feeds on itself. A fatalism I share with the Western tradition at times. You seem surprised at Eliot's irreconcilable ambivalence; don't you share this ambivalence yourself, Alex?

This passage (which appears on 450–51 in the book) sent the media scurrying to literary scholars for comment. ABC News online reporter Chris Good published a column titled "T. S. Eliot Scholars Give High Marks to Obama's Analysis" (5/3/12), explaining that the passage came from a "letter written to Alex McNear, an undergrad at Occidental College with whom Obama had carried on a long-distance relationship from Columbia University in New York." To find out whether Obama's comments on Eliot were "intellectual showboating or mere puffery," he consulted two experts: the Eliot Society's own Secretary Tony Cuda and Historian Frances Dickey. Tony wrote:

I was impressed and delighted when a friend drew my attention to this passage yesterday. The young man who wrote those lines, I thought to myself, was not simply aware of Eliot's work, which is rare enough; he wasn't even regurgitating the standard college response to it, which is even more rare, especially given the difficulty of poems like *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. Instead, he was responding with verve and originality to one of the vital energies in Eliot's work, the ecstatic spiritual vision, and to the troubled social realities that helped to shape it. Who cares if it's opaque or mildly inflated? The prose of most intelligent young people is much worse. This is a student with whom I'd be happy to argue about Eliot.

And Frances turned in this brilliant dissertation:

Obama was an astute reader of *The Waste Land* and clearly understood Eliot's aims as a poet and public figure. I find it fascinating but not at all surprising that he was drawn to Eliot, who is a poet of exile and deracination. Obama writes in another letter from the same time that he feels "Caught without a class, a structure, or tradition to support me." The same was true of Eliot when he wrote *The Waste Land*. Kept from playing with the other children in his native St. Louis and considered a Southerner at Harvard, Eliot continued to feel like an outsider when he settled in London. This poem was his attempt to express (among other ideas) his complicated relationship to traditions that he did not really consider his own. Freedom to choose your tradition and way of life can be paralyzing: how to choose between Christianity and Buddhism, between French and English poetry (if you're Eliot), or among African, Indonesian, Hawaiian, African-American, and Anglo-American cultures (if you're Obama)?

Obama sympathetically sees that Eliot felt paralyzed by his cultural and political options. Eliot settled for a kind of principled conservatism that Obama says he respects more than bourgeois liberalism: rather than trying to invent himself from scratch, as Yeats or Blake did, Eliot tried to affirm some basic values rooted in history and tested by practice. At the same time, in his search for order, Eliot didn't go all the way down the road to fascism like his friend Ezra Pound. He looked for a middle way that would do the least harm and keep the most continuity with the past. Again, not at all surprising that Obama, always the pragmatist seeking compromise, felt an affinity with Eliot.

But Obama distinguishes himself from Eliot when he says "the dichotomy he maintains is reactionary"—in other words, Eliot perceived a starker divide between chaos and order than was really necessary. By contrast, Obama suggests that he can live with the contradictions and competing demands of modern life. The difference between them is very much a generational one. In fact, *The Waste Land* helped later generations of Americans see that they could integrate divergent beliefs and values without falling into chaos.

(<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/05/t-s-eliot-scholars-give-high-marks-to-obamas-analysis/>)

Meanwhile, Noreen Malone of *New York* magazine's "Intel" blog asked Columbia professors Matthew Hart and Sarah Cole how they would grade Obama's disquisition. Hart was relatively critical:

Considered as homework, I'd give the future President a B-minus. The reference to "an ecstatic vision which runs from Münzer to Yeats" (besides confusing *that* and *which*) sounds impressive, but it's more than a little opaque. I assume the first reference is to the 16th-century Anabaptist leader, Thomas Müntzer, and that Mr. Obama is trying to suggest that Eliot, like Yeats, didn't give up on the possibility of revelation. But the allusion is forced and the connection specious. You get this a lot when students try too hard. Still, I think that's the point here. This isn't so much literary criticism as flirtation. He's performing the role of young intellectual.

Mr. Obama's grade suffers still further with awful phrases such as "he accedes to maintaining a separation." Classic undergradatese. He's not wrong, though, that *The Waste Land* is very interested in themes of desire and sterility. There's nothing groundbreaking about these remarks, but they're hardly risible. And he's quite right that Eliot eventually moves towards a form of cultural conservatism that tries to retain "a grounding in the social reality/order of his time." Again, Eliot 101 stuff, but he seems to have paid attention in class.

The best part is at the end, when he asks: "don't you share this ambivalence yourself, Alex?" Which is to say: "Aren't you also torn between 'asexual purity and brutal sexual reality'? You should come join me in the middle." This is what the letter's really about. It takes a certain amount ofchutzpah to use *The Waste Land* as a come-on. He gets a B+ for that.

Cole was more positive:

In these brief musings, President Obama shows himself to be a sensitive reader of Eliot's great poem *The Waste Land*. There are really two ways to read the poem: emphatically and dogmatically, or with subtlety and generosity. President Obama reads in the second category, seeing the poem for what it is, an acutely self-divided work, which yearns for purification and order even as it creates its beauties and harmonies out of the chaos, waste, fragmentariness and litter Eliot associates with the modern world. Obama is certainly right to see in the poem a conjunction of ancient and inherited motifs with a mooring in the modern world.

Of all the topics on which the poem is divided, Obama selects perhaps the most central, overriding one: what he calls “fertility and death.” He is referring to the poem’s overarching principle, which Eliot had picked up in part from several famous anthropologists of his day, that life follows death, flowers bloom from dead land, after winter comes spring, after drought rain; out of these seasonal images, as Obama recognizes, we can generalize something about human experience: that the harshest, ugliest, most trying and most violent experiences generate beauty, accomplishment, and dignity. Obama is responding in personal terms to a poem that, despite its heavy literary apparatus (which Obama admits to having avoided) and its universalizing themes, nevertheless consists of many shorter sequences, even single lines, that invite a more emotional or personal response. ... It is a poem of local brilliance and intensities, to which Obama responds with appropriate personal intensity.

On the political commentary, I will only say that, though I was pleased to see him distance himself from the famously fascist leanings of some of Eliot’s peers and friends, I was surprised to find him admiring Eliot’s own conservatism (Eliot described himself as a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and an Anglican in religion). I guess it shows the power of great poetry to have some sway in the real world.

In sum, though I cannot grade such a short piece, I would praise it for its insights and sensitivity, would encourage the president to develop his ideas with close reading, and would, of course, require a thorough look at those footnotes.

(<http://nymag.com/daily/intel/2012/05/grading-obamas-classic-undergraduate-ese.html>)

Politico.com published several other comments of note:

If we talked about *The Waste Land* together when he was 22, we might disagree about some things. But insofar as he alludes to it here, there’s nothing that seems to me mistaken or untoward or indefensible. —Donald Hall

I’m pretty impressed. He seems to have understood *The Waste Land* better than I did as a 22-year-old. —Bill Kristol (editor of the conservative *Weekly Standard*)

It’s not bullshit. What he’s saying here, he’s read *The Waste Land*, he really has a good feel for the big issues, he can separate out the big issues from the little details, and yet he knows some details, too. ... It kind of makes the case for him being not religious in any organized way, but in a spiritual, philosophical way.... You could read this as pointing toward a strain in him that favors ambivalence. But basically it just makes him to me about four times smarter than most politicians. —Bob Perelman, U of Pennsylvania (poet)

He credits Pound with more rational choice in supporting Mussolini than recent scholarship would allow: it appears to have been more a case of infatuated hero worship, at least in the early years (from 1923 to 1930). Likewise, he assigns to the Eliot of *The Waste Land* (1922) the more theologically grounded conservatism of his post-conversion period (after 1927). But both these assumptions were fairly standard assumptions of the time, only modified in recent years. Given these limitations, he makes a sophisticated and astute analysis, one that shows an adventurous mind searching for ways to make sense of materials he’s only recently encountered. He is bold in trying out daring juxtapositions. —Lawrence Rainey, U of York

(<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0512/75861.html>)

## TSE CENTENNIAL PACKETS AVAILABLE

Former president and current honorary member Jewel Spears Brooker has discovered a stash of about 50 program packets from the T. S. Eliot Centennial celebration in St. Louis. Each packet includes a TSE folder, printed program, souvenir envelope, and commemorative postage stamp, and an image of the fire and the rose by an artist. The packets are quite lovely, and since Dr. Brooker no longer has room to store them, she is kindly offering them gratis to

Eliot Society members. If you would like a packet, please drop her a note at [JSBrooker@aol.com](mailto:JSBrooker@aol.com), and she will bring a copy for you to the annual meeting in St. Louis. If you’d like a copy but won’t be coming to St. Louis, please email Dr. Brooker first to check on availability; then send her \$2 to cover the cost of US postage (or \$3 for international postage). Her address is 7070 Key Haven Rd., #501, Seminole, FL 33777, USA.

**T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY**  
**33RD ANNUAL MEETING, 28–30 SEPTEMBER 2012**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28**

**Washington University in St. Louis**

**Board Meeting 9:00–12:00**

Coffee Room, 2nd floor, Duncker Hall

**Peer Seminar 10:00–12:00**

Sound in Eliot's Poetry

Chair: Lesley Wheeler, Washington and Lee U

Room 217, Eads Hall

*No auditors, please*

**Scholars Seminar 10:00–12:00**

Chair: Elisabeth Däumer, Eastern Michigan U

Room 120, Duncker Hall

*No auditors, please*

*Lunch ad lib.*

**Hurst Lounge, 2nd floor,  
Duncker Hall**

**Session I 2:00–3:30**

Chair: Frances Dickey, U of Missouri  
Nancy K. Gish, U of Southern Maine

Eliot and Virgil in Love and War  
Sandeep Parmar, Cambridge U

Unexpectedly Modern: Hope Mirreles's *Paris*

Timothy Materer, U of Missouri

Rewriting *Four Quartets*: Geoffrey Hill's *The Orchards of Syon* and John Ashbery's "The System"

**Memorial Lecture 4:00–5:00**

Daniel Albright, Harvard U

T. S. Eliot's Non-Euclidean Geometry

**Reception 5:00–6:00**

*Dinner ad lib.*

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29**

**The St. Louis Woman's Club  
4600 Lindell Boulevard**

**Session II 9:00–10:30**

Chair: Tony Cuda, U of North Carolina, Greensboro

Elisabeth Däumer and David Boeving, Eastern Michigan U

Gesture and Kinesthesia in Eliot's Poetry

Martin Lockerd, U of Texas, Austin  
Decadent Catholicism in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot

Elizabeth Micaković, U of Exeter  
"Where will the word resound?":

Eliot and the Politics of the Voice

**Session III-A 10:45–12:15**

Chair: Cyrena Pondrom, U of Wisconsin, Madison

Beci Dobbin, Cambridge U

A "Fake" and his Reader: Eliot and Nabokov

Christopher McVey, U of Wisconsin, Madison

"Feeble" Translations: Reconsidering the Textual History of the "Notes" to *The Waste Land*

Nancy Hargrove, Mississippi State U  
Eliot's Italian Trip, Summer 1911:

Cathedrals, Palaces, Museums, and Landscapes

**Session III-B 10:45–12:15**

Chair: Michael Coyle, Colgate U

Kinereth Meyer, Bar Ilan U

Marketing Eliot

Giuliana Ferreccio, U of Turin

*Sweeney Agonistes* and Eliot's Late Style in *The Elder Statesman*

Lee Oser, C of the Holy Cross

Prufrock as Fool

**Society Lunch 12:30**

**Special Presentation 1:30–3:00**

Michael Rogalski

*Four Quartets*: A Performance

**Home of Tony & Melanie Fathman  
4967 Pershing Place**

**Society Dinner 6:00**

**Special Presentation 7:00–8:00**

Award of Honorary Membership to

Jewel Spears Brooker, Eckerd C

Induction Address by Dr. Brooker:

"Always a Foreigner": T. S. Eliot's Exilic Imagination

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30**

**First Unitarian Church  
5007 Waterman Boulevard**

**Session IV 11:00–12:30**

Chair: Nancy K. Gish, U of Southern Maine

Cyrena Pondrom, U of Wisconsin, Madison

Cultural Contexts for Eliot's Understanding of Gender in the Early Twentieth Century

Malobika Sarkar, Basanti Devi C

The Phonograph as Aesthetic Component in *The Waste Land*

Jonathan Fedors, U of Pennsylvania

"Why ... is most religious verse so bad?": Poetry and Religion in Eliot's Criticism, 1927–35

**Eliot Aloud 12:45–1:15**

Chair: Chris Buttram, Winona SU

**Announcement of Awards**

Additional news about the annual meeting, including information on

- Registration
- Accommodations
- Transportation

is available on the Eliot Society's website (<http://www.luc.edu/eliot>).

**G. Douglas Atkins, *T. S. Eliot and the Essay: From The Sacred Wood to the Four Quartets*. Baylor UP, 2010.**

Reviewed by Martin Lockerd  
University of Texas, Austin

**G** Douglas Atkins loves the essay with a depth and sincerity that both surprise and please, and Eliot ranks high in his pantheon of essayists. Atkins' short apologetic study of Eliot and the essay attempts to clear the poet of charges of impersonality, rigid orthodoxy, and scholarly pedantry by emphasizing his "Incarnational art," which avoids the aforementioned follies by embodying truth in an inclusive manner that embraces impurity and paradox (ix). While I find myself in the comfortable position of generally agreeing with this favorable portrayal of Eliot, Atkins' insistence on "eschewing the thesis-driven nature of the usual scholarly monograph" presents distinct obstacles to the coherence of his study. Though I typically share his preference for Eliot's prose over much of the hyper-academic writing that "appears in the pages of the *PMLA*," his book often suffers from a lack of clearly articulated scholarly insight (3). Since Atkins views his work as more essayistic than academic, he might well dismiss any critique of his work that relies on typical standards of academic thoroughness. That said, most scholars should expect to find this work a bit unsatisfying.

Atkins divides this rather compact book (147 pp.) into eight chapters. The first presents a definition of the essay as an approach to "the ultimate" by means of "the particular or the small" (12). In other words, the essay must access the transcendent through the body. In this loose sense, Atkins asserts that the form expresses itself through "Incarnation." The true essayist explores the pure and transcendent through an inclusive encounter with impure, embodied reality. Eliot, according to Atkins, writes just such incarnational, impure, inclusive essays. Of course, the instability of such definition makes itself felt almost immediately. If Eliot writes impure, incarnational essays, which writers do otherwise? Shockingly, Atkins nominates G. K. Chesterton as an example of a pure writer, who disembodies his subjects of contemplation and forgoes "the mediation of the body that Incarnation insists upon" (13). One need not read Chesterton for long to realize the tenuousness of such a position, and this theoretical shakiness undermines Atkins' project at a crucially early stage.

Atkins' subsequent exclusion of Romantic writers such as Wordsworth and Thoreau makes more sense. Eliot

openly opposes Wordsworth's poetic process of emotion recollected in tranquility in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and he has little patience when it comes to the transcendent idealism of Emerson and Thoreau. I find little fault with defining Eliot's style in opposition to such figures, and many of Atkins' critiques are justified; however, his reading of Thoreau appears, at times, willfully antagonistic. For example, when he references the famous passage from *Walden*, which begins "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately," Atkins truncates his quotation just in time to avoid lines that, some would say, give the lie to his caricature of Thoreau as an artist of the "pure" school. He gets as far as "to drive life into a corner and reduce it to its lowest terms." I supply the omitted lines here: "and, if it prove to be mean, publish its meanness to the world." I, like Atkins, am no great promoter of the hermit of Walden Pond, but the omitted line reveals a thinker intimately concerned with the impure.

Despite the uncertainty of Atkins' incarnational essay form, the following chapters are rife with eloquent readings and much-needed correctives. Wishing to debunk portrayals of Eliot's prose as doctrinaire, Atkins, in chapter three, calls attention to the deep skepticism that Eliot inherits from Montaigne and incorporates into his own distinctly Christian aesthetic. He correctly avers that such skepticism, far from alienating Eliot from belief, plays an essential role in the sensitive believer's confrontation with dogma and articulation of faith. Chapter four is dedicated to "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Here, Atkins forcefully rejects caricatures of the poet's writing as pedantic. Eliot's prose, Atkins argues, "assumes both intelligence and knowledge derived from wide reading. We might call it civilized, if that term were not now an opprobrium" (50). Unfortunately, the keen insight of such an assertion comes off as somewhat hollow, since the author levels it against an unnamed straw man.

That is not to say that the author never names his opponents. Atkins speaks with the greatest clarity when he refutes his two most prominent antagonists, Graham Good and Geoffrey Hartman. His critiques come across as balanced, respectful, and reasonable. Like many Eliot devotees, he justly reacts to absurd criticism by jumping to the poet's defense, and, unlike some, Atkins does this exceptionally well. But – and yes there is another but – his readings of Eliot tend to lose focus when no obvious contenders present themselves for refutation. For this very reason, his final three chapters fail to live up to the expectations that he fosters in the preceding chapters. Chapter four highlights the similarities between Eliot's essayistic tendencies and those of Pope, one of his classicist forbears. Atkins' comfort and familiarity with Pope make his commentary both con-

vincing and engaging. His firm belief that some poems read like essays lends strength to his comparison of such texts as Pope's *Essay on Criticism* and Eliot's "The Perfect Critic." In Atkins' hands, such comparisons are fruitful and invaluable. Pope's nearly paradoxical description of the ideal man accentuates the self-conscious difficulty of Eliot's own task in describing the "perfect critic," and this comparison helps us to understand that Eliot "works hard to show just how difficult, indeed impossible it is to be such a figure" (63).

While Atkins' exploration of the essayistic poetry of Pope and Dryden shines, it also leads to arguably ill-advised readings of *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*. From the outset of the book, Atkins repeatedly reminds the reader that, for him, *Four Quartets* is an essay, so one anticipates the concluding argument from page one. Prior to his reading of the *Quartets*, however, the author devotes a small chapter to *Ash-Wednesday*, in which he argues that the poem works as a guide "to an understanding of Eliot and the essay" (81). Provocative though the idea appears, Atkins provides no clear close reading or developed theory to support it. The chapter does contain a somewhat tired, though no less true, recounting of the main action of the poem, but it never gets much further. The penultimate chapter, "Four Quartets: The Poem as Essay," presents a more clear and developed argument. For Atkins, this poem "which studiously shuns the thorough-going, this indirect, impure, and lovely creature, is the paradigmatic essay, Eliot's supreme achievement" (92). He goes on to compare the poem to an earlier essay in verse, Dryden's *Religio Laici*, which he identifies as an "exemplary instance of the incarnation the form is capable of, a reminder that the essay, rooted in particulars...can reach the extraordinary" (103). What Atkins means by "incarnation" remains too vague to summarize with any surety, but he goes on to contend that Eliot embraces the imperfection of this incarnational essayistic form.

For Atkins, the *Quartets* combine philosophy and poetry in an essay that "reads like good prose, if you type it out without the printed line breaks" (111). The skeptical reader will recall Pound's famous dictum that "Poetry should be at least as well written as prose," but the sympathetic reader will see the core wisdom in the author's seemingly simple statement. The *Quartets* do embody a complex but discernible wisdom that could almost be expressed in prose at times. No doubt, such an exercise could aid students in discerning some version of the poem's "meaning." Reading the *Quartets* as an essay could even encourage recognition of the poem's many confounding and inspiring paradoxes. Still, Eliot scholars will find little that is original in Atkins' admittedly limited reading, and those familiar with his treatment of the *Quartets* as an essay in his 2009 book *Literary Paths to Re-*

*ligious Understanding* will experience a similar anticlimax. Given his vast experience with and love of the essay, coupled with his laudable defense of Eliot as a master of the art, Atkins might have been better served by focusing his attentions on recuperative readings of the many essayistic masterpieces that go almost untouched in this volume.



Carol L. Yang, *The Development of T. S. Eliot's Style from Poetry to Poetic Drama: Dialogism, Carnivalization, and Music*. Edwin Mellen, 2011.

Reviewed by Joe Moffett  
Northern Kentucky University

In the past decade or so, interest in Mikhail Bakhtin's work, in the U. S. at least, has cooled considerably. After enjoying a surge of popularity in the eighties and into the nineties, today Bakhtin fails to be cited so frequently as he once was. Carol L. Yang amply demonstrates in her new book on Eliot, however, that there are still ways in which we might continue to use Bakhtin's ideas to analyze the work of canonical authors. Utilizing Bakhtin's concepts of carnivalization and dialogics, Yang takes the reader on a well-researched tour of Eliot's work, from his early poetry to his later verse dramas.

In his Foreword to Yang's study, William Harmon writes, "[The author] impresses me as someone who has taken pains to read everything that Eliot wrote as well as everything important written about him," and I am inclined to agree. I might add that Yang also understands deeply Bakhtin's oeuvre and demonstrates the same fluency with his work as Eliot's. Certainly, as Yang points out early in her introduction, Eliot's use of "voices" has been a persistent interest of critics up to the present time. In this way, Bakhtin's focus on overlapping discourses in his study of literature serves as a solid foundation from which Yang engages Eliot's poems, nonfiction, and plays.

Indeed, the book ambitiously reviews the breadth of Eliot's work. In her first two chapters, Yang analyzes "Dans le Restaurant" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," as well as "Mr. Apollinax" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night,"

among others. She then devotes separate chapters to *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. Finally, the book moves through a consideration of *The Rock*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *The Cocktail Party*. With this impressive roster of texts to be analyzed, the reader cannot help but be impressed by Yang's ambitiousness, yet also alarmed at the possibility that these complex works might not receive adequate coverage.

I should note, however, that the book, at over 340 pages, is more capacious than the average monograph, and thus Yang offers herself ample room within which to explore these multi-faceted texts. Overall, Yang contends that in Eliot's work, "we can find a kind of presentation of human voices or languages that does not reduce them to a single authoritative voice. Eliot's move to the theater is the result of pursuing a perfect medium for the intersection and uninterrupted dialogue of the centripetal with the centrifugal" (7). Thus, in Yang's view, Eliot's work demonstrates the multi-voiced discourse that Bakhtin sees as integral to the development of literary genres, especially the novel. Slightly later in her text, Yang amplifies the importance of theater and contends that "Eliot's poetic drama aims at undermining or dethroning solemnity and at upsetting general categories, so that a kind of poetic drama with its origins in folk culture may be renewed and restored to the modern popular theater" (21). Yang builds off of contemporary views of Eliot as a figure more in touch with folk or popular modes than he has traditionally been read; in addition, she seeks to assert the centrality of Eliot's verse drama to his oeuvre, thereby challenging long standing notions about the inferiority of his plays compared to his poetry. This approach works well with Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization where a subversive undercurrent in folk or popular culture continually works to challenge "high" or official culture. Similarly, Eliot's plays aspire to a level of public discourse that reveal the poet inhabiting anything but an ivory tower.

Among Eliot's early poetry, "Mr. Apollinax" assumes a place of importance in Yang's view. She writes, "'Mr. Apollinax' is a microcosm of Eliot's carnivalization .... Carnivalistic elements that penetrate into Eliot's subsequent works in a more or less muffled and reduced form are manifest in this poem in an external and visible way" (91). Yang argues that this Bakhtinian impulse of carnivalization finds an even greater expression in *The Waste Land* than in the earlier poems. Yang suggests that "The entire action of the poem is a series of scandals, eccentric escapades, mystifications, crownings / uncrownings .... Above all, the protagonist is deeply carnivalized: he is the eternal third person outside everyday life, the most privileged witness to private life yet he occupies no fixed position in life" (135). Yang has in mind

here Bakhtin's book on Rabelais, which presents his view of carnival as an outgrowth of Roman Saturnalia that continued on through medieval folk culture and persisted into the Renaissance. Bakhtin speaks of carnival as "the people's second life," and it was a time in which "all were considered equal" (8; 10). In this way, Yang suggests a very democratic, perhaps populist Eliot. This view contrasts sharply, of course, with traditional depictions of Eliot as an elitist.

Working her way toward her final chapters, Yang reads *Four Quartets* in the context of Eliot's efforts as a playwright. She feels the poem reflects Eliot's struggle to strike a public form of address then emerging in his plays (171). This desire for a public mode of utterance for Eliot reaches a new level in *Murder in the Cathedral*, which Yang regards as "the manifesto of Eliot's new poetic drama"; its combination of "levity" and "seriousness" recommends it in her view (217). Yang's final chapters find her reviewing *The Cocktail Party* in depth and other plays, including *The Elder Statesman* and *The Confidential Clerk*, more speedily. Through these works, Yang concludes, Eliot "inject[s] life into emasculated modern poetic drama through seriocomic genres in the folkloric tradition of carnivalization" (318).

The book is not without some blemishes. Some repetition appears as the study goes on, especially between chapters four and five where information on *Four Quartets* and *The Rock* seems needlessly shared. In fact, the fourth chapter's long digression on music and Eliot's late long poem might be the book's weakest link. Additionally, Bakhtin's work has been read by critics as a veiled critique of the stifling atmosphere of the Stalinist Russia in which he lived (see Holquist and Clark, for example). While considering Eliot's work in its political context is beyond the formalist approach of Yang, it would have been interesting to see her address the potentially political nature of Eliot's desire for multi-voiced poetry and drama.

Overall, there is abundant food for thought to be found in Yang's study, even for long-time readers of Eliot and the literature on him. Indeed, the reader can't help but be impressed with Yang's mastery of secondary sources on Eliot, as well as her ability to weave Bakhtin's sometimes recon-dite notions, such as the chronotope, throughout her discussion. I, for one, will be intrigued to see where Yang's work on Eliot goes in the future. One feels certain she has much more left to say on this poet and that we would all do well to listen closely.

Nancy Duvall Hargrove, *T. S. Eliot's Parisian Year*. UP Florida, 2010.

Review by William Harmon  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

T. S. Eliot was so responsive to places that a bare list of names can constitute poetry: “Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London” (*The Waste Land*), “Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney, / Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate” (“Burnt Norton”). Given his sensitive and impressionable nature, a busy year in Paris (the academic year of 1910-1911) at a crucial time of life takes on remarkable importance, and Nancy Hargrove has long made that year the focus of her impressive scholarly labors, which have now yielded a book of great value to Eliot’s readers. Eliot was in Paris for academic study in philosophy, but much of his time was dedicated to friendships partly connected with exposure to the world of art and culture, with Paris as the center of the traditional as well as the revolutionary. He was among those who heard Henri Bergson lecture, and he was among the early witnesses of avant-garde works by Picasso and Stravinsky, who were only a few years his senior. Chief among his personal acquaintances were Alain-Fournier, who led him to improve his French, and Jean Verdenal, a personal friend who lived in the same pension. (Nobody has made much of its name, Pension Casaubon, so I will abstain from mentioning another Casaubon chez another Eliot.) Paris was also an important center of technology, flourishing in the forms of aviation, motor vehicles, cinema, and photography. With the recent introduction of the Metro, Parisians could move quickly and easily to places where they witnessed new developments in stagecraft. Electricity gave new life to drama and opera in vivid ways that print literature and orchestral music could not exploit.

Nancy Hargrove seems tireless in locating and collating the innumerable details of life in Paris as it was in the years before the First World War. Theater programs, cartoons, and photographs add depth—one cartoon from the arts magazine *Comœdia* shows a fellow wearing a monocle and what looks remarkably like a zoot suit, fashionable in America in the 1940s. I judge that Professor Hargrove used some Fulbright time to browse through many issues of *Comœdia*, *Le Figaro*, *L’Action Française*, and other archives in many collections, and her browsing has paid off bountifully. (Sometimes when I look back at an old issue of a popular magazine I spend more time with the ads than with poems and articles I went

there for in the first place; I’m not alone.)

The bulk of the book presents scrupulously detailed chapters on whatever would have mattered to Eliot: the theater, visual arts, the dance, the opera, the concert hall, and popular entertainment. At each significant point, Hargrove gives an exhaustive historical account of an item and then suggests how Eliot may have reacted. This is a subjunctive process, to be sure, but the available evidence limits us to examining what Eliot could have experienced and then what he may have done with it in his own writing. Hargrove leaves the reader free to interpret the possibilities, and she wisely chooses to provide too much rather than too little. If she goes too far in suggesting that the Parisian boxing scene, for example, may have interested Eliot, based only on an account by Conrad Aiken, the reader can just say “Probably not.” Hargrove has to flatten things out in order to make them fit into a compartment, so that she may say too much about Pierre Janet and too little about Richard Wagner, but she leaves room for the reader to make whatever adjustments may seem in order. On the whole, she has an admirable sense of the major arts, giving useful details of the old and the new in the graphic arts and in serious music. A hundred years ago, the English-speaking world was patently behind the times and could offer little on the scale and at the pace of what was happening in Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. And for all this activity, no place could match Paris. Hargrove pays very careful attention to what Eliot could have seen and used in religious art, especially in what some may regard as bizarrely sadomasochistic depictions of martyrdoms. And, thanks to advances in anthropology and psychology—again with Paris as an important center—a person of culture could connect the materials of the fine arts with those from folk art and from the art of tribal societies, all of which contributed to a flourishing of primitivism and neo-classicism in all the arts.

Because of Verdenal, Eliot became acquainted with Charles Maurras, who was an important presence in Eliot’s life for more than forty years. It makes perfect sense that a bright, sensitive young American with a fair education would find much congenial in the Paris of 1910. It makes imperfect sense, however, that such an American would surrender all of his liberal Unitarian Harvard ideology to the forces of a range of reactionary conservatism markedly different from anything in America. American politics begins in a revolution, and very few have ever expressed any desire to return to the state of affairs before that revolution. In this respect, American politics differs from the French, since many influential French thinkers have argued for a return to the state of affairs before the French Revolution. What Eliot encountered in Paris in 1910 may have caused him some dismay. The Dreyfus Affair had finally been concluded a



few years earlier, but resentments continued on both sides. Maurras represented a register of reactionary thought that seems quite alien to anything ever found in America, and his ideology summed up as “classique, catholique, monarchique” would have to be radically adjusted to appeal to an American. (One American did accept a version of such a stance—classicist, royalist, Anglo-Catholic—but only after he had surrendered his American citizenship.)

Hargrove does not belabor such things, but she does marshal evidence so that we can make up our own minds. To me, Eliot’s situation has a good deal in common with what challenged Christopher Newman in Henry James’s *The American* some three decades before Eliot arrived in Paris. Mrs. Tristram asks Newman, “Do you know what a Legitimist is, or an Ultramontane?” Because the monde of such people is so remote from Newman’s, he is sadly powerless to conduct himself in their company.

Hargrove devotes a chapter to daily life in Paris, and that

life was certain to include a good deal of social ferment. It has been said that there is no *one* France but something like seventy-seven constituent Frances, each in conflict with all of the others in language, religion, landscape, art, philosophy, and even cuisine. France may be a Roman Catholic country, but it is less so than Italy or Spain, and it surpasses them in its tolerance for Protestants and non-Christians. Because of France’s alien ideologies, Eliot was led to befriend Maurras, even while calling some of his ideas “execrable” and “deplorable.” To me it remains unaccountable that Eliot forgave Maurras’s excesses, since Maurras persisted in his anti-liberal, anti-clerical, anti-parliamentarian, anti-Protestant, anti-Semitic, anti-feminine, anti-modernist, anti-democratic, and even anti-Dreyfus attitudes. When sentenced to life imprisonment in January 1945, he said, “This is the revenge of Dreyfus.” That Eliot could have any patience with such clownishly extreme behavior is the most puzzling thing in his life.

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## Abstracts from the T. S. Eliot Society, Paris, France, July 18-22, 2011

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### Eliot’s German Excursion

**A**s we celebrate the centenary of Eliot’s year in Paris, it is important to remember that he spent the summer of 1910 in Munich, and much of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” was written there. His excursion fostered cosmopolitan political and aesthetic views that countered the influence of Charles Maurras’s nationalist chauvinism as well as Ezra Pound’s Imagism. Instead, Eliot adopted the principles of French Symbolism and German Expressionism. Both avant-garde movements responded to the materialism of a secular culture by representing inner experience through ambiguous forms. Eliot had read Arthur Symons’s *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* with enthusiasm in 1908. Symons’s Introduction portrayed Symbolists battling “against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition” and creating “a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream.” Wassily Kandinsky articulated the same aim in his Expressionist manifesto *On the Spiritual in Art*, which was also written in Munich in 1910. He claimed that the “more obvious is the separation from nature, the more likely is the inner meaning to be pure and unhampered.” As Walter Sokol argues, Expressionist poems “do not represent general or public truths, but they are extended metaphors uprooted

from their context,” allowing them to represent something “subjective, dreamlike, visionary.” Reflecting the influence of Symbolism and Expressionism, “Prufrock” represents the intensity of personal emotion but not its cause. In contrast to Pound’s subsequent description of Imagism as “direct treatment of the ‘thing,’ whether subjective or objective,” Eliot’s method is to juxtapose arbitrary and startling images that evoke unspecified emotions. This Expressionist element in Eliot’s early poetry anticipates the spiritual yearning of his later work. After the war, he replaced the personal and idiosyncratic symbols of “Prufrock” with communal voices and beliefs.

*Joyce Wexler*  
*Loyola University Chicago*



### Bergson Resartus: Eliot’s 1913 Critique of Bergson’s Idealism

**I**n this paper, I will look at Eliot’s quickly evolving relationship to the work of Henri Bergson. In 1911, Bergsonism filled a religious void for him, and he

retrospectively considered himself as a convert. In 1913, it was an object of philosophical analysis, and he wrote of its inconsistencies and fallacies. In 1916, he referred to it as an “infection,” and considered himself as someone who had been cured. So although traces of his encounter with Bergson can be seen throughout his work, he moved from enthusiasm to analysis to rejection.

The focus of this paper will be “Inconsistencies in Bergson’s Idealism,” Eliot’s 1913 unpublished lecture to the Harvard Philosophy Club, of which he was then President. If time allows, I will relate his three positions to three poems illustrating the relevance of this to his poetry.

*Jewel Spears Brooker  
Eckerd College*



## T. S. Eliot and Culture Shock: Imagining an Audience for the Paris Poems

In my current book project, *Becoming T. S. Eliot*, I have been tracking the rhetorical struggles with voice and audience that Eliot works out in his notebook. In this presentation, I focus on the poems Eliot wrote in the fall of 1910, both before and after his arrival in Paris. In “Triumph of Bullshit,” I note the curious problem of the speaker’s rage at his uncomprehending audiences. Each stanza of the poem ends with a variation on the enraged exclamation: “For Christ’s sake stick it up your ass.” The putative objects of the poet’s fury are the uncomprehending “Ladies” who misconstrue his verse in every conceivable way. But why be so furious at imaginary readers?

Eliot’s displaced rage is a recognizable stage of culture shock: the first stage is the honeymoon, when the new country seems romantically Other. The second stage is anger: the humiliating experience of being a non-native speaker in a foreign country, an experience fraught with loneliness, frustration, and loss of control. Thus, the poem’s ire, while seemingly irrationally aimed at an undeserving target, crystallizes the very problems of audience anxiety that Eliot has been struggling with for over a year in the notebook poems. There, he often adopts defensive poses in order to counter the potentially hostile responses of skeptics. I then show how this dynamic works itself out more subtly in the other

1910 poems, enabling Eliot to move beyond such suspicion to imagine a sympathetic audience—a resolution that paves the way for “Prufrock.”

*Jayme Stayer  
Boston College*



## T. S. Eliot, Jean Epstein, and “L’Aristocratie Nevropatique”

This is an exploratory project. Jean Epstein, French avant-garde film maker and theorist, also produced an extensive monograph on Modern Literature—*La Poésie d’Aujourd’hui* (1921)—which T. S. Eliot read enthusiastically and referenced approvingly in his essay on “The Metaphysical Poets.” Critics interested in modernism’s relationship to cinematic technologies, have taken note of Epstein’s insistence that the aesthetics of movies and modern literature are similar; Trotter, in particular, cites Eliot’s reference to Epstein as a proof of his serious interest in cinema. It is noteworthy, however, that only one short chapter of the book is given over to the cinema—and that the rest develops a detailed commentary (drawing, in part, on modern authors and on the new technologies of automatization, from cars and airplanes to movies) of the physiological, psychological, and neurological requirements of modern literature—both for the writer and the reader.

In my presentation I intend to accomplish two things: I will begin with a brief synopsis of Epstein’s wide-ranging book (which I am currently translating with the help of a French scholar). Then I will explore his claim that modern writers and the people who read them form a “neuropathic aristocracy,” marked by a superior intelligence, a highly responsive nervous system (which he compares to a throbbing car!), and a peculiar erudition, which manifests itself in linguistic experimentation and play. Epstein’s comments help us understand what many readers of Eliot—and of other modern writers—experience as a strange paradox: the insistence on artistic difficulty, on the one hand, and emotional, sensory immediacy, on the other. Modern writers, as Epstein remarks, want to “feel before understanding.” Thus the neuropathic constitution required, and cultivated, by modern literature combines intelligence and emotional responsiveness; an intelligence, rooted in the emotions (sensations), which can, intermittently, paralyze itself in

order to respond more directly to sensory impulses. This, Epstein maintains, is “rare,” and the greatest intellectual effort imaginable.

*Elisabeth Däumer  
Eastern Michigan University*



## Cummings Rewrites Eliot

*“I have a very high opinion of Mr. Cummings as a poet, in spite of my dislike of his typography.” —T. S. Eliot to Charles Norman (1957)*

This talk will restore Eliot to a Cummings context (and vice-versa), to show how Eliot was a particularly appropriate poetic mentor for Cummings because both sought to widen and deepen the forms of expression available to modern poets and because both fought against the culture of their genteel upbringing. Although it is a mistake to separate a “high,” impersonal, learned, allusive, and classic Eliot from a “low” personal, spontaneous, idiosyncratic, and romantic Cummings, the two poets did differ in temperament, poetic technique, and political and religious views. And though both shared an obsession with finding new forms of expression, they differed also on how far a poet could push innovative techniques and still remain connected to the tradition.

Cummings rewrote Eliot into his own idiom and experience, both as poetry and prose. Cummings’s serious formal transformations of Eliot also almost invariably include elements of play, satire, and sly allusion. In his only published critical essay on any writer, living or dead, Cummings discussed the techniques by which Eliot creates an intense and vivid individuality in his work. He praised Eliot’s “directing” of the “thoroughly built thing” while also praising the “sensitivity” (28) of some very Cummings-esque lines about the moon from “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (Miscellany 28-29). Cummings and Eliot differ, however, in the ways they approach the dislocation of language: Eliot dislocates images, phrases, and emotions from a personal and traditional storehouse, creating sometimes parodic structures of allusion and metaphor, while Cummings dislocates not so much a tradition as the basic elements of language—syntax, words, and letters—to make imagist poems of life, death, and rebirth that are for the most part devoid of literary references.

*Michael Webster  
Grand Valley State University*

## “Have you seen Pope Eliot lately?” T. S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas

This paper will consider the connections between the work of T. S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas. It will suggest that in its relationship to the constraints of the poetry’s conservative forms, Thomas’s poetic practice represents an internalized, imploded Eliotic Modernism.

Defending his poetry in 1934, Thomas argued that “all good modern poetry is bound to be obscure. Remember Eliot: ‘The chief use of the “meaning” of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him.’” The echo (one of repeated references to Eliot’s work in Thomas’s) is, of course, of *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, in which is likened the phenomenal text of the poem to a bone used by a burglar to distract a guard-dog before he goes about his business—the lived materiality of the poem acting as a “cover” for, and authentication of, the operations of the ghostly discourse of the mythologies framing it. Conversely, in Thomas’s poetry, it will be argued, the local narrative of the poem appears to offer immediate coherence, unity and closure, but is frequently empty, or banal.

The paper will contend that whilst Thomas’s work was the closest of his generation to *The Waste Land* and essays on the Metaphysicals and Renaissance dramatists, it also acts as a surreal form of bodily punishment for High Modernist condescension, embodying, as it does, the fear expressed in *Sweeney Agonistes* that life is no more than “birth and copulation and death.” Central to discussion will be a consideration that the metaphysical was essential to Eliot’s construction of a Modernism that was antithetical to Romanticism, but that his reclamation of Donne, at the expense of Milton and Spenser, was carried out by ignoring the bodily aspects and linguistic materiality present also in Donne’s work. Indeed, it is these aspects of Metaphysical poetry that Thomas wants to foreground. The paper will conclude that, if it might be said that Eliot attempts to abject abjection in order to stage “the mind of Europe,” Thomas, it might equally be said, foregrounds abjection in order to reclaim the body as a site of subversion.

*Chris Wigginton  
Northumbria University*

## T. S. Eliot's Criticism: Modernity and the Classic

In this paper, I propose to look at Eliot's critical prose in connection to the question of the definition, status and function of the classic artist/artwork, which is in turn closely imbricated with crucial questions about the relation of history and tradition to the (modern) present. Apart from the specific 1944 essay "What Is a Classic?," nearly all of Eliot's major essays on art and culture resonate with the question of the defining qualities and social function of the classics, but the answers he gives to these questions are fraught with difficulty, which can be said to be related not just to aesthetic concerns but to the experience of modernity and the entwinement of art with history and politics in his thought. Eliot's "classicism" will also be compared with Virginia Woolf's views on the matter of the classic(s), as part of a wider project of inquiring into the responses of exemplary modernist writers to their artistic and socio-historical contemporaneity and the significance they attribute to tradition and the past within modernity, despite experimental modernism's programmatic break with tradition—a break which can be related, inversely, to the modernists' desire to acquire the status of a "classic."

Angeliki Spiropoulou  
University of the Peloponnese



## I Have Measured Out My Life with Coffee Spoons: J. Alfred Prufrock and the Everyday

Is modernism a quest for new languages adequate to contemporary realities, or does the modernist obsession with allusion and quotation reveal the deep indebtedness of modernist writers to tradition? Too often, this debate has taken place in the absence of what Clifford Geertz famously called a "thick description," in this case of modernity itself. This paper will look at how Eliot's poetry participates in one semantic field that must lie at the center of that description: everyday life. Since Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947), sociologists and philosophers have increasingly turned their attention to the everyday, and par-

ticularly to its characteristic elusiveness. "Le quotidien," as Maurice Blanchot has written, "ce qu'il y a de plus difficile à découvrir." In other words, the everyday is the semantic field in which the most profound changes associated with modernity are registered, and yet it poses a nearly intractable problem for literary representation.

The story of modernist experimentation with language, form, and genre is also the story of modernism's struggle with the everyday. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a *mise en abyme* of modernist poetics as a whole, and therefore an emblematic poem of the everyday. I will show that two of the most quintessentially modernist features of the poem have the effect of addressing this crisis in representation. First, the poem crosses genres in order to elude any single set of formal expectations. Second, Prufrock's stock of metaphors for interiority reveals a new relationship between the personal and the systemic. Inquiry into the everyday is already re-shaping scholarship on a host of major modernists. Reading the everyday in Eliot allows us to reposition the novelty of his work, and give a more nuanced account of how and why the modernists "Make it new."

Benjamin Madden  
University of York



## Savage Critics, Primitive Tools: T. S. Eliot, John Middleton Murry and "Primitive Religion"

In 1919 T. S. Eliot wrote an article for John Middleton Murry's *Athenaeum* entitled "War-Paint and Feathers" in which he commented that the artist is suited to the study of anthropology because they are "the last person to see the savage in a romantic light, or to yield to the weak credulity of crediting the savage with any gifts of mystical insight or artistic feeling that he does not possess himself." Throughout the 1920s both Murry at the *Athenaeum* and Eliot at *The Criterion* provided a platform for the study of "primitive religion," publishing anthropological contributions alongside debates upholding the tenets of religious belief in the face of secular modernity. Murry's mystical interests and Eliot's increasingly Christian agenda were not, however, curtailed by the progressive rationalization of religion being enacted in the these articles. Often in fact, quite the opposite. My paper seeks to understand how the two used their editorial

jurisdiction to sanction particular anthropological narratives in order to bolster their publications' spiritual policies.

Adam Trexler (2006) has looked with scrutiny at Eliot's interest in anthropology, and Jason Harding (2002) and David Goldie (1998) have explained the politics behind Eliot and Murry's rival editorship, but an assessment of these factors in the context of the papers' religious intentions remains to be seen. How does Eliot's arrangement of articles on tribe-specific traditions and beliefs, by field workers such as W. H. R. Rivers and Bronislaw Malinowski, relate to his concept of national culture and tradition pre-*After Strange Gods*? Does Murry's favor for R. R. Marett's "evolutionary" theory of religion tally with his own belief in the universe's rudimentary unity?

This paper comes from a chapter I am currently writing on the impact of "primitive religion" on modernist poetry and systems of belief.

Steven Quincey-Jones  
Queen Mary, University of London



## T. S. Eliot and Russian Culture: Paris Intersections

In my paper I intend to view Paris as the important locus of T. S. Eliot's intersections with Russian culture, the place of Eliot's first systematic reading of Russian literature, and the city where the Russian reputation of Eliot started. For many decades Paris remained the international cultural centre. For instance, in *A Moveable Feast*, Ernest Hemingway acknowledged the fame of Paris as the centre of cross-cultural interactions. Describing his first visit to a

famous bookshop, Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company, he showed that his reading in Paris centred on the great Russian writers.

For many English it was common to read Russian books in French. Although the first English translations of Dostoevsky, by Fred Wishaw, were published in the 1880's, until Constance Garnett's translations appeared, the educated English-reading audience preferred French translations of his novels. It is known that Arnold Bennett, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and others read Dostoevsky's novels in French. Eliot remembered that during his first visit to Paris in 1910, "Dostoevsky was very much a subject of interest amongst literary people." Under the instigation of his friend Alain-Fournier, he read *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. In 1910 Eliot also saw the first dramatization of *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Jacques Coupeau, at the Theatre in Vieux-Colombier. In a letter to J. C. Pope Eliot described the very profound impression that Dostoevsky's novels made on him. I am proposing that Eliot kept up this interest in Dostoevsky for many years. One of the goals of this paper is to examine the characteristics of Eliot's reception of Dostoevsky in his poetry, criticism, letters, and editorial activities in *The Criterion*.

Eliot's first introduction to Russian readers also took place in 1927 in Paris, the cultural capital of the Russian post-revolutionary wave of emigration. The second edition of the magazine *Viersty*, edited by Prince Svyatopolk-Mirsky (one of the Russian authors who appeared in *The Criterion*), contained some English materials, including Mirsky's review of Eliot's *Poems, 1905-1925*. This review could be taken as the starting point of Eliot's Russian reputation, which led to quite a dramatic and interesting story lasting many years.

Olga M. Ushakova  
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## Abstracts from the Louisville Conference on Literature & Culture Since 1900

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### "My Words Echo Thus": Self-Allusion in "Burnt Norton"

In a gesture by turns confrontational and ambivalent, self-aware and elusive, Eliot nods to the observant reader in "East Coker": "You say I am repeating / Something I have said before. I shall say it again. / Shall I say it again?" This statement of method must stand out to anyone who

has noticed Eliot's frequent self-allusions throughout his oeuvre and especially within *Four Quartets*—those moments when he revisits phrases or figures from past poems and literalizes his proclamation from the opening of "Burnt Norton," "My words echo / Thus, in your mind."

This paper addresses the question of why Eliot seems so determined to "say it again." Building on a close examination of the abundant self-allusions embedded within "Burnt Norton," I argue that Eliot's repetitions are

a mode of revision, second takes on utterances formerly deemed final. The revisionary nature of repeated phrases and figures creates a special relationship between the quoted poem and the quoting poem, allowing the poet to make a present-day intervention into his past work and bringing a seemingly fixed site of meaning once again into artistic play. This in turn becomes a crucial strategy for a poet who wishes to shape, and reshape, his ongoing career into a coherent, narratively unified art object.

Self-allusion merges personal history with literary history, rendering the sweeping claims of an essay like “Tradition and the Individual Talent” relevant to a more intimate and immediate set of texts—Eliot’s own. I argue that Eliot’s belief in the reciprocal modulation of past and present poems, his idea that “what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it,” is hermeneutically relevant to the kind of micro-tradition into which Eliot was attempting to shape his poetic career. Combining the simultaneity of past and present described in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” with the temporal links forged by self-allusion thus provides a way both to account for Eliot’s abundant verbal echoes and to discern his designs on the concept of literary authorship.

Andrew Karas  
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## Eliot’s Condition of Music

This paper uses as its starting point Walter Pater’s famous dictum from his *Studies on the Renaissance* (1888), “All art constantly aspires towards a condition of music,” and examines how this phrase can be read through the lens of absolute music (or pure instrumental music). By highlighting elements of nineteenth-century philosophy and musical reception, I question the context out of which Pater’s proclamation arose before discussing how T. S. Eliot defines his condition of music by borrowing from Pater’s terminology and, more broadly, from the terminology of absolute music. I argue that Eliot’s construction and ultimate rejection of Pater nevertheless indicates that he creates his own method of harnessing the non-referentiality of music in literature through the combination of structure and effect. Focusing on Eliot’s essays and lectures—particularly “Poetry and Drama,” his “Introduction to Valéry’s Art of Poetry,” an earlier draft of this introduction, and “The Music of Poetry”—I problematize Eliot’s articulation of the marriage of sound and sense, the indissolubility of the pattern from the sound, as borrowings from the language usually associated with absolute mu-

sic, eventually giving rise to his choice of the quartet, a form of absolute music, for his *Four Quartets*.

Michelle Witen  
Oxford U



## A Modern Lilith: D. G. Rossetti and T. S. Eliot

Two of Eliot’s earliest works are picture sonnets in the style of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “Circe’s Palace” and “On a Portrait.” From these poems as well as Eliot’s reference to his youthful “rapture” with “The Blessed Damozel” emerges a story of Rossetti’s formative influence on the young poet. In particular it was the Damozel’s dark double, Lady Lilith, who became an icon of Aestheticism, was reinscribed by Pater in his description of La Gioconda, and made the most lasting impact on Eliot’s poetry as a figure of both self-absorption and of a feminine erotic power associated with visual images. “Circe’s Palace,” modeled on Rossetti’s “For The Wine of Circe by Edward Burne-Jones,” begins Eliot’s poetic career by trying to extricate the poet from Rossetti’s “inner standing point” of sympathetic identification, a process of repeated leave-taking and temperature-lowering that continues in “On a Portrait,” “La Figlia Che Piange,” and other poems that invoke the flowing hair and mysterious beauty of the Rossettian femme fatale only to turn away from them. Yet Eliot returns to the scene of Lilith’s dressing-room and her strangulation of the “youth” with her golden hair in the “Game of Chess” section of *The Waste Land*, where now the poet inhabits and cannot depart from the inner standing point. In this paper, I examine some of the evidence for Eliot’s absorption and transmutation of the Aesthetic image-text.

Frances Dickey  
U of Missouri



## “My opinions on art... have modified radically”: T. S. Eliot and Henri Matisse

While studying in Paris, Eliot arranged for the bookseller Alphonse-Picard to send a copy of the Trocadero’s latest catalog to his former tutor Edward Forbes, then director of Harvard’s Fogg Museum. Writing to Forbes in

## LOUISVILLE ABSTRACTS

May 1911 to confirm this arrangement, Eliot revealed that his year in Paris had significantly transformed his views on art in particular. "I have enjoyed my winter very keenly," he told Forbes, "and have gained, I think, a great deal. My opinions on art, as well as other subjects, have modified radically."

Despite having told Robert McAlmon that he had known no one in the art world during his student year in Paris, Eliot kept the company of at least one man who was in touch with its center: Matthew Stewart Prichard. Together with the avant-garde painter Henri Matisse, Prichard was then in

the process of developing a religiously inflected aesthetic theory based on his study of Bergson's metaphysics, for which Byzantine art was the model paradigm. Drawing extensively on Prichard's unpublished papers, this essay reconstructs the circumstances surrounding Eliot's visit to Matisse's Issy studio in March 1911 under the auspices of Prichard. Furthermore, it argues that Prichard's Byzantium figures behind Eliot's 1917 French poem "Lune de Miel."

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## New Waste Land Website

Adam Hammond, University of Toronto

I recently launched He Do the Police in Different Voices (<http://hedothepolice.org>), a website for exploring voices in *The Waste Land*. The site has a simple goal: to make Eliot's poem more accessible by encouraging readers to approach it as a tangle of voices.

The site consists of three main sections. The first allows readers to transform *The Waste Land* from a poem to a play: by "activating" a series of voices listed in a window on the left of the screen, lines of verse by different voices separate themselves from one another and distinguish themselves typographically. This part of the site is called "What the Class Said," so named because the specific vocal divisions were decided upon collaboratively by the students of the "The Digital Text," the course I teach at the University of Toronto. (The class also produced the electronic file upon which our edition of the poem is based.) The particular division of voices represented in "What the Class Said" are not intended as definitive, but rather as the starting point for a conversation.

The other principal sections of the site engage this conversation in different ways. "What the Computer Said" details the efforts of Julian Brooke—a researcher in Computational Linguistics—to develop an algorithm for automatically detecting vocal switches in *The Waste Land*, and presents a version of the poem representing his markedly different findings. The third section, "Have Your Own Say," allows readers interactively to divide the poem according to their own sense of vocal divisions, and then to view a rendering of the poem based on these choices. The site also includes a number of essays that place questions of voice in the context of Eliot's engagement with genre, that explain in detail the methodology and goals of the project, and that detail future plans for the site.

This site emerged from a classroom and has, I believe, many possible applications in the classroom. Teachers looking to give their students a "way in" to *The Waste Land* could, for example, have them browse the site, complete the "Have Your Own Say" section, and then submit the result of their efforts. Any feedback on this or other aspects of the site would be greatly appreciated ([adam.hammond@utoronto.ca](mailto:adam.hammond@utoronto.ca)).

## PUBLIC SIGHTINGS

Compiled by David Chinitz

**TSE in the TLS.** From recent *Times Literary Supplement* crossword puzzles:

**#899** (21 Oct. 2011) Clue: "Ventures broadcast re T. S. Eliot" (9 letters).

**#914** (17 Feb. 2012) Clue: "A friend of Tom Brown, and one of Gulley Jimson, seen in Eliot's west country village" (9 letters).

**#917** (9 Mar. 2012) Clue: "A party-goer of Eliot's? Or a character from Scenes from Clerical Life?" (5 letters).

**#924** (27 Apr. 2012) Clue: "He took a composed view of Eliot's cats" (10 letters).

Stumped? Here are the answers, explained by former Eliot Society president and champion *TLS* crossword solver William Harmon:

**#899:** "Broadcast" means thrown around—it's a term from sowing seeds—and therefore what's being sought here is an anagram of "re T. S. Eliot" that means "ventures" (i.e., "chances taken"). The answer, therefore, is "lotteries."

**#914:** Tom Brown (in Tom Brown's School Days) has a friend named Harry "Scud" East. Gulley Jimson (in

The Horse's Mouth) has a friend named D. B. Coker. Do the math....

**#917:** The answer is "Gibbs"—i.e., Alexander MacColgie Gibbs, from The Cocktail Party.

**#924:** "Practical Cats: An Entertainment for Speaker and Orchestra. Verses from Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats, by T. S. Eliot. Music by Alan Rawsthorne." There's your answer.

**The T. S. Eliot Appreciation Society.** Dutch singer/songwriter Tom Gerritsen performs as a one-man band named "The T. S. Eliot Appreciation Society." Incubate.com describes Gerritsen as "a new rising star from Utrecht who plays breathtaking acoustic folk/alt-country songs." His six-track digital album, released in February 2012 and available for download at whatever price the buyer considers it to be worth, includes songs named "Jesus," "The Dreadnought Hoax," and "The Ship of Fools." While not obvious to this listener, the music's connection with Eliot is probably explained in the 18-minute interview Gerritsen gave the Netherlands' KX Radio—in Dutch, naturally.

## Urban Expansion Threatens East Coker

The Eliot Society has received an update from Joe Coles, Chairman of the East Coker Preservation Trust. Mr. Coles writes:

The local Council have now approved a plan to build a small town (of 2,500+ houses) joining East Coker to Yeovil. The plan not only would destroy Eliot's sunken lanes but would destroy the village of East Coker: the village is scheduled to become a suburb of the sprawling town of Yeovil. The motivation of the council for the development (they have admitted this) is to obtain £150m in central government grants. The community has been fighting the plans but the council have voted (down party lines) to approve the development, and they will be making a submission to the national Planning Inspector in October 2012.

The East Coker Preservation Trust will be making representation to the Planning Inspector in October, and if we fail to get the plan thrown out then will make a submission for a judicial review. The East Coker Preservation Trust has been set up by the village to organise and fund the representation to the Planning Inspector, which is likely to cost £10,000, and the judicial review, which is likely to cost £100,000. The trust is non-profit making and the members of the trust are all unpaid.

The Trust would welcome any financial contributions from Eliot Society members. Please send a check, made payable to East Coker Preservation Trust, to the Treasurer, Richard Vanderpump, at Homefield Brye / Moor Lane / East Coker / Somerset BA22 9JR.

For further information about the battle to preserve East Coker, or about how to contribute to the cause by direct deposit—or if you are able to contribute in some way other than financially—please email Mr. Coles ([joe.coles@coles.zeal.co.uk](mailto:joe.coles@coles.zeal.co.uk)) or write to him at East Coker Preservation Trust / Coker Court / East Coker / Somerset BA22 9JW.



## CFP: Louisville Conference, Feb. 2013

The T. S. Eliot Society will again offer two ninety-minute sessions at the annual Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, to be held at the

University of Louisville, Feb. 21–23, 2013. The first of these will be an open session that invites abstracts on any subject reasonably related to Eliot. The second will specifically consider Eliot's use of, or response to, aspects of nineteenth-century culture, including but not limited to literature (Romantic, Victorian, or Symbolist poetry in particular), literary criticism, journalism, philosophy, other art forms, or science.

Those interested should send a 300-word abstract to John Morgenstern ([j.morgenstern@chch.oxon.org](mailto:j.morgenstern@chch.oxon.org)) no later than Sept. 1, 2012. Please include the following information with your abstract: name; home address; email address; telephone number; academic affiliation (if applicable); paper title; and brief personal biographical note (approximately 150 words).

For further information, please visit the conference website: [www.thelouisvilleconference.com](http://www.thelouisvilleconference.com).



## Eliot Society Panel at SAMLA

The Society is sponsoring a panel at the convention of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association, Nov. 9–11, 2012, in Durham, NC. The session, organized and chaired by Tony Cuda (U of North Carolina, Greensboro), includes the following papers:

Patrick Query, U.S. Military Academy, West Point:  
T. S. Eliot's "Coriolan" and the Voices of Power

William Harmon, U of North Carolina, Chapel Hill:  
Eliot Visits Vanity Fair

Margaret Greaves, Emory U:  
Spanish Folksong in Eliot's Minor Poetry



## Election Outcome

As a result of this spring's election, Gabrielle McIntire will join the board of the Eliot Society through June 30, 2014. Welcome to the board, Gabrielle! Also, Nancy Gish was reelected to the board, and Cyrena Pondrom will rejoin as a board member after serving two terms as Secretary of the Society. Both Nancy's and Cyrena's terms run through June 30, 2015. The Society is grateful for their service.

### **Email Listserv**

Members are invited to subscribe to the Society's informational listserv, which is used for occasional official communications only—never for discussion.

To join, please contact the Secretary.

### **For Help With Society Matters**

To submit papers for any conference session sponsored by the Society, or to make suggestions or inquiries regarding the annual meeting or other Society activities, please contact the President.

For matters having to do with *Time Present: The Newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society*, please contact the Vice President.

To pay dues, inquire about membership, or report a change of address, please contact the Treasurer.

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

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