

Time Present

The Newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society

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On September 27th, 2013, the Eliot Society begins its 34th Annual Meeting and celebrates the 125th anniversary of Eliot's birth.

Please join us for this event. You can register on the Web at <http://www.luc.edu/eliot>

Murder in the Cathedral, San Diego Opera

Reviewed by Charlene Baldrige
Freelance theater and music critic

From March 30 through April 2, San Diego Opera presented the West Coast premiere of Ildebrando Pizzetti's 1953 opera, *Murder in the Cathedral* (*Assassinio nella Cattedrale*), based upon Alberto Castelli's Italian translation of T. S. Eliot's 1935 verse play of the same name. San Diego audiences heard *Murder in the Cathedral* in Italian with English supertitles—a roundabout way to receive Eliot's narrative about the assassination of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The San Diego Opera (SDO) production, staged by SDO general and artistic director Ian Campbell, designed by Ralph Funicello, and built in SDO's scene shop, was so eagerly anticipated that the national magazine *Opera News* printed an advance article in its March edition and also, on the day following the opening, posted an online review. The *Opera News* review and others, including that of *The Los Angeles Times*, were positive, and a spokesperson at San Diego Opera reports that at least two major opera companies are considering their own productions.

This is an amazing turn of events for an opera largely ignored for more than fifty years. The premiere of Pizzetti's *Murder in the Cathedral* took place in 1953 at Milan's La Scala with bass Nicola Rossi-Lemini as Becket and was followed by what *Opera News* calls a flurry of productions in Europe and North America, among which were a production in Montreal that fall, a concert version at Carnegie Hall, and a 1960 production at Vienna State Opera conducted by Herbert von Karajan. There ensued a forty-year caesura. In 2009, the opera returned to La Scala with the great Italian bass Ferruccio Furlanetto as the Archbishop, who reprised this role in San Diego.

"This work has fascinated me since the 1970s, when I obtained a pirated reel-to-reel tape of it," said Campbell. "I loved the music, and the character has always intrigued me. We were looking for a vehicle for Ferruccio, who loves the role."

The murder is that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, who was killed at the altar of Canterbury Cathedral in December 1170. The opera begins with two choruses of similarly dressed townswomen, one led by Helene Schneiderman and the other by Susan Neves. A herald (Allan Glassman) announces the Archbishop's imminent return to Canterbury after a seven-year exile. Acting as a Greek chorus, the townspeople explain the situation and voice the fear felt by Becket's devoted flock. They urge Becket to "leave gloomy Dover and set sail for France; to fill the white sail between the gray sky and bitter sea." Though he says he is grateful for their kind attention, he dismisses their anxieties as the "croaking of foolish women." Becket knows that the king's men, who are coming to assassinate him, will make a martyr of him.

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In both Eliot's play and Castelli's opera libretto, Becket has discourse with three priests (sung by Gregory Reinhart, Greg Fedderly, and Kristopher Irmiter), who understand Becket's actions; to wit, once he was ordained archbishop, Becket chose to devote himself and his decisions more to Rome than to England. He is accused by the crown of undermining royal authority, especially that of King Henry's son.

Becket is confronted by four tempters (played by Joel Sorensen, Malcolm Mackenzie, Ashraf Swailam, and Kevin Langan), the last of which urges him to enjoy martyrdom: "Think of the pilgrims, prostrate before the jeweled shrine."

Having been sent to assassinate Becket, the knights/assassins arrive at a tavern downstage, unpack, and proceed to get drunk in order to gather the courage to commit their not altogether relished task. Meanwhile, on the left side of the stage, in the cathedral, Becket is being vested for mass. It's a stunning scene, backed by designer Funicello's three stained-glass windows, seen through the cathedral arches. An immense crucifix occupied by the crucified Christ dominates the mise-en-scène.

When the assassins clamor outside the doors, Becket, urged by the priests and others to hide, orders that the doors be thrown open. "I surrender my life," he says, "for the law of God, far greater than the law of men." Becket is stabbed

first by one, and then brutally assaulted with staves by all four assassins. He lies in a pool of light as the faithful lament. In the final scene, Becket's body lies upon the altar as the chorus sings another of Pizzetti's magnificent chorales, glorious orchestrations played exceptionally well under the baton of Donato Renzetti.

As one would expect, this operatic version of Eliot's play, no matter how dramatic, poetic, touching, and tragic, does not lend itself to soaring arias or standard opera seria. Pizzetti's neglected work is really

a through-composed oratorio for bass with two choruses and soloists. The fact that the music is tonal is frequently cited as the possible cause of the opera's neglect, as tonal music was out of step in 1953. However, the real cause of the neglect may be its deviation from the operatic norm.

Furlanetto, this production's apparent *raison d'être*, possesses an incomparable, gloriously hued bass of great beauty and ease. His exceptional vocal health at age sixty-three allows him to sing Becket's sustained high Fs easily, and to manage crisp and meaningful narrative throughout the pageantry. Furlanetto is also a consummate, attractive actor, effective without undue histrionics. His resignation at the opera's end brought this viewer to tears. It was almost as if one had been to Canterbury instead of to the opera house.

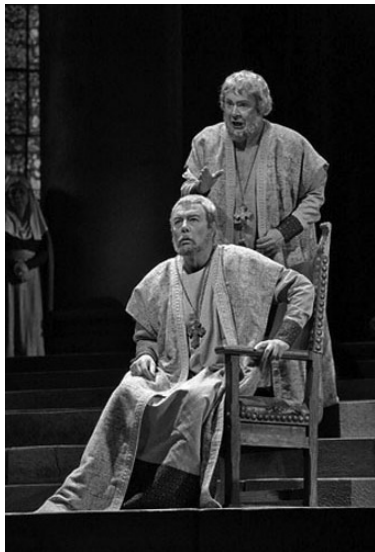


Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, eds.
The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 3: 1926–27.
Faber and Faber, 2012.

Reviewed by Timothy Materer
University of Missouri

Some three quarters of *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 3* concern Eliot's editing of the *Criterion* and publishing at Faber and Faber. But in its 954 pages Eliot often drops the pose of editor and businessman to reveal the man who wrote "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*. He expresses his emotional turmoil to friends such as Conrad Aiken, Middleton Murry, and Geoffrey Faber, and his deep family loyalties and religious convictions to his mother and to his brother, Henry. The anguished story of Eliot's marriage to Vivien continues to unfold. The volume's first letter is by Vivien to a Dr. Hubert Higgins (not identified), in which she pleads with him not to interfere with her marriage. The letter concludes: "Leave me alone, & you can get yr information through the nurse about me & as to whether I am persecuting my husband" (1). Although the volume includes twenty letters from Vivien, there are none after the crisis in the spring of 1926 when Vivien entered the Sanatorium de la Malmaison near Paris.

In this volume as in the previous two, Eliot pursues the theme of redemptive suffering. Complaining that he lacked inspiration, he wrote to his Harvard friend Conrad Aiken in



Bass Kevin Langan is the Fourth Tempter and bass Ferruccio Furlanetto is Thomas Becket in San Diego Opera's *Murder in the Cathedral*. March/April, 2013. Photo by Ken Howard.

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2013 CONFERENCE PROGRAM

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

Washington University in St. Louis

Board Meeting 9:00–12:00
Coffee Room, 2nd floor,
Duncker Hall

Peer Seminar 10:00–12:00
Eliot and Asia
Chair: Anita Patterson, Boston U
Room 217, Eads Hall
No auditors, please

Scholars Seminars 10:00–12:00
Chair: Jayme Stayer, John Carroll U
Room 205, South Brookings Hall
No auditors, please

Chair: John Whittier-Ferguson,
U of Michigan
Room 120, Duncker Hall
No auditors, please

Lunch ad lib.

Special Collections, Olin Library

Display of Eliot Materials 12:00–2:30

Presentation 12:15–12:45
Joel Minor, Modern Literature
Curator
Fame and Family: Eliot Materials in
the Washington U Libraries
Special Collections

Hurst Lounge, Duncker Hall

Session I 2:30–4:00
Chair: John Morgenstern, Clemson U
Elizabeth Micaković, U of Exeter
Specimen Voices: Eliot and the
Harvard Vocabulary
John Melillo, U of Arizona
Eliot, Sound Art and Sonic
Philology
Abby Ang, Indiana U
Chopin's Egregious Fate in
"Portrait of a Lady"

Memorial Lecture 4:15–5:15
Jahan Ramazani, U of Virginia
T. S. Eliot, Poetry and Prayer

Reception 5:15–6:15

Wildflower, 4590 Laclede Ave.

Dutch Treat Dinner 7:00

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

The St. Louis Woman's Club 4600 Lindell Boulevard

Session II 9:00–10:30
Chair: David Chinitz, Loyola U
Chicago

Anthony Cuda, U of North Carolina,
Greensboro
Evenings at the Phoenix Society:
Eliot and the Independent
London Theatre

Glenn Clifton, U of Toronto
Anthropology in *The Cocktail Party*
Matt Seybold, U of Alabama
Living a Fiction: Finance and
Fraud in *The Confidential Clerk*

Session III 10:45–12:15
Chair: Cyrena Pondrom, U of
Wisconsin, Madison

Vincent Sherry, Washington U
Drying Combinations: Decadence,
Modernism, and *The Waste Land*
Martin Lockerd, U of Texas, Austin
"A Satirist of Vices and Follies":
Beardsley, Eliot and Images of
Decadent Catholicism

Anita Patterson, Boston U
Eliot and Japonisme

Society Lunch 12:30–2:00

Session IV 2:00–3:30
Chair: Nancy Gish, U of Southern
Maine

Deborah Leiter Nyabuti, Southern
Illinois University, Carbondale
Eliot, Mysteries, and Para-
Authorial Roles

Margaret Greaves, Emory U
Classical and Medieval Theories
of Friendship in Eliot's Poetry
W. Shawn Worthington, Boston U
T. S. Eliot and Walt Whitman

Home of Tony & Melanie Fathman 4967 Pershing Place

Society Dinner 6:00

Postprandial Talk 7:15
Ronald Schuchard, Emory U
Update on the Editing of Eliot's
Works

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

First Unitarian Church 5007 Waterman Boulevard

Session V 10:00–11:30
Chair: Chris Buttram, Winona State U
John Whittier-Ferguson, U of
Michigan
Eliot's Theological Poetics
James Matthew Wilson, Villanova U
Four Quartets and the Christian
Platonist Tradition
Joshua Richards, Palm Beach Atlantic U
Some Influences of Evelyn
Underhill on T. S. Eliot

Eliot Aloud 11:45–12:15
Chair: Ben Lockerd, Grand Valley
State U

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>).

REVIEWS

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1914: “what is necessary is a *certain kind* (could one but catch it!) of *tranquility*, and *sometimes* pain does ~~but~~ bring it” (1, 47). In another letter to Aiken he wrote of “the great use of suffering, if it’s *tragic* suffering—it takes you away from yourself—and petty suffering does exactly the reverse, and kills your inspiration. I think now that all my good stuff was done before I had begun to worry—three years ago” (1, 63). In a 1925 letter to Middleton Murry, he dated his emotional wasteland from his marriage in 1915: “I have made myself into a *machine*. . . . I have deliberately killed my senses—I have deliberately died—in order to go on with the outward form of living—This I did in 1915” (2, 627).

The letters to Murry in Volume 3 extend this theme, showing that Eliot’s painful emotional life was linked to his disciplined intellectual life as an editor. He addresses Murry as “*mon semblable—mon frère*” (68), thinking perhaps of Murry’s emotional collapse after the death of his wife Katherine Mansfield as well as of Murry’s public discussion of his spiritual crisis in his journal, *The Adelphi*. To Murry, Eliot freely expresses his despair over his marriage: “You are in some sort of purgatory, I am perhaps thoroughly damned” (68). Although Vivien’s stay in a sanatorium gives Eliot more time for the *Criterion* and right-wing colleagues in Paris, his worries intensify because of Vivien’s suicidal tendencies. Eliot tells Murry, “I have not found religion of any use to her, either mine or anybody else’s. I am oppressed by a sense of doom, against which I struggle” (243).

Eliot’s classicism opposes Murry’s romantic humanism in long running controversies in the *Criterion* and *New Criterion*. Eliot launched the *New Criterion* in January 1926 with his essay, “The Idea of a Literary Review,” to which Murry replied with “The ‘Classical’ Revival” in the *Adelphi* (February and March 1926) and also in the *New Criterion* itself (“The Romantic Fallacy,” June 1926). The Eliot-Murry debates and similar controversies, as Eliot told Clive Bell, “rather bored” the journal’s patroness Lady Rothermere, who preferred “short & snappy Bits” (721). After she withdrew her support, the publication was suspended in December 1927 until new funding was found and publication resumed in January 1928. Eliot expresses his complex sense of editorial purpose and his intellectual rivalry with Murry in a letter to him that might be a draft for passages in *Four Quartets*:

In such a wilderness or desert, one can learn from others, one may even inadvertently do good (or harm) to others, but there can be no question of intellectual association or cooperation. What makes intellectual association possible is a practical end, an external action, something concrete where minds touch in action, a common aid of minds which have come, and so far as they have come, to a common conclusion however indefinable. But the purpose is

deformed and the aims are diffused and adulterated, in the process of execution, and the end like the beginning is solitude. And the difficulty in the end is to keep one’s solitude in humility and not in pride. (255)

This letter sets a limit to what Eliot thinks he can accomplish through intellectual debate. He turns down Richard Aldington’s essay on D. H. Lawrence because it does not agree with “the general position of the *Criterion*,” which he defines as a “consensus of opinion” among the journal’s major contributors (513). Eliot tells his brother Henry of his hopes of

forming a group of men which will hold together, and persist in the same direction, after I am gone. It is very indirect, and imperceptible action; but such a group of young men might have considerable influence on even the political future of England. There is a change, perceptible in a few, in the last five years. But one must not try to gain or keep “disciples”: that is a house of cards, and is only vanity and pride anyway. One must efface oneself as much as possible, to have any genuine influence. But as for “lasting sort of happiness” . . . I don’t know. One realises that one never arrives at anything, but must just go on fighting every day as long as the strength lasts. (229)

He explains to Henry that his strength is sorely tested because his family’s “Unitarianism is a bad preparation for brass tacks like birth, copulation, death, hell, heaven and insanity,” and adds that it seems “bizarre that a person of my antecedents should have had a life like a bad Russian novel” (228). His brother and his brother’s new wife, Theresa, see the Dostoevskian elements of Eliot’s marriage when Tom and Vivien join them for their honeymoon trip to Rome in April 1926. At this time, Vivien is beginning to suffer the breakdown that would lead to threats of suicide and treatment in a French sanatorium.

The editorial commentary on this major crisis regrettably obscures more than it elucidates. The first indication of this crisis appears in Vivien’s letter to Ottoline Morrell from London on April 16, 1926: “I am in great trouble, do not know what to do. In great fear” (145). The footnote to the letter merely states, “See TSE’s letter to Osbert Sitwell, 13 Oct. 1927.” Some six hundred pages later the reader finds a three-page footnote that tells virtually nothing about Vivien’s letter to Morrell. Eliot’s letter states that he was upset with Sitwell because Vivien had written to him “over a year ago from Rome, and . . . you did not reply” (749). In footnote three to Eliot’s letter, we learn from Sitwell’s unpublished memoir (1950) that Vivien’s letters to him and his sister Edith “declared that we should have inevitably heard of the scandal to which she was referring, and in which she was involved.

We should be aware, however, that if she returned to Tom, it would inevitably bring disgrace upon him. . . .” (749). The Sitwells had heard of no scandal. The footnotes do not explain from where or whom Vivien might return to Tom. The only context for this incident appears in the Biographical Commentary:

At some point during this period, Vivien writes to Osbert Sitwell, and separately to Edith Sitwell, saying that she has been involved in some sort of scandal and asking for their imperative help. The “scandal” presumably refers to her attempted suicide in Paris: there is no evidence that she became involved in any other form of scandal. (xvii)

If the scandal concerned this suicide attempt, why is Vivien writing to Sitwell from Rome rather than from Paris? The footnote to her April 16 missive connects the two letters to Morrell and Sitwell with the attempted suicide in Paris. However, the dates of the letters show that there is no connection. Footnote three quotes Sitwell’s reply to Eliot that he received Vivien’s letter on “the first day of the General Strike.” The note does not explain that England’s General Strike of 1926 began on May 3—more than two weeks after Vivien’s letter to Morrell. The commentary claims that Vivien wrote to Sitwell at “some point during this period,” which is the period in May just before Vivien entered the sanatorium; this is highly misleading because of the April date of the letter to Morrell.

The editors might have given supporting evidence that there was no other “form of scandal” in the spring of 1926. Their statement contradicts Carole Seymour-Jones’s claim in *Painted Shadow* (441–43) that Vivien was infatuated with another man and while in Rome was planning to leave her husband. Seymour-Jones’s information is suspect because she gives the name of the man (basing her identification on a secondhand reference to Morrell’s diary) incorrectly as Haden Guest rather than Stephen Haden-Guest, and she incorrectly claims that Vivien’s April 16 letter was sent from Rome. However, Vivien’s infatuation is also referred to in *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell* (ed. Nicholas Griffin). Russell wrote on March 20, 1926 that Eliot was “sending express letter about Guest’s sins.” The note to the letter reads, “Vivien Eliot had become infatuated either with Dr Leslie Haden-Guest . . . or with his son, Stephen” (Russell 1, 254). Writing to his brother from Rome at the time of this crisis (May 12, 1926), Eliot says that he is leaving for Germany (“*do not mention that we are going to Germany,*” 151); but the sketchy footnotes to the letter require the reader to depend upon the commentary to learn of the trip “from Rome

to Freiberg in Germany—to consult with Dr Karl Martin” (xvii). The footnotes, generally so comprehensive, might have clarified the “scandal” that occurred in Rome and apparently motivated the trip to Freiberg. Instead, the reader is sent into an editorial maze.

This crisis with Vivien and also her mental state might be better understood if (rather than so many business letters) some of her letters in 1927 were included. Eliot apparently destroyed his letters to her. However, the edition does include a heartfelt statement about the spiritual issues that arose from his failed marriage in reply to a long letter from Geoffrey Faber. Faber feels close enough to his friend to challenge what he takes to be Eliot’s disdain for the good things of life. Eliot replies that “the love of God takes the place of the cynicism which otherwise is inevitable to every rational person; for one’s relations to one’s friends and lovers, apart from the love of God, always, in my experience, turn out a delusion and cheat” (711). Faber plays the role of the man of the world and implies, in Eliot’s phrase, that he is a “Puritan ascetic.”

Eliot counters that he enjoys many things such as good dinners and music and “also minor pleasures of drunkenness and adultery” (712).

As close as he is to his brother and to Faber, Eliot’s deepest feelings are for his mother, and he expresses his religious convictions with her as with no one else. As she

becomes old and ill, her son assures her: “our future meetings, may not be in the least like anything that we can imagine; but that if it is different we shall then realise that it is right and shall not then wish it to be like what we can now imagine” (647). As the letter continues one sees how his absorption of writers such as F. H. Bradley and Pascal deepen his comforting sentiments:

That is what I always feel about the truths of religion; it is not a question of something absolutely true (or false) in so many words; but they are more nearly true than is the contradiction of them. I imagine that many people who think that they will meet “again” in a future life never meet at all; because I believe that these things will be regulated not by what we consciously think, but by our real affinities. Many people believe that they love each other, and understand each other, who are in reality utterly isolated from each other. But I believe that you and I understand each other and are like each perhaps more than we know, and that we shall surely meet. (648)

He concludes by telling her that, whatever is thought of him after his death, “I am merely a continuation of you and Father, and that I am merely doing your work for you” (648).

“The reader is sent into an editorial maze.”

The Preface to Vol. 3 states that “a number of minor letters” were left out of the text but will be “made available in due course on the Faber and Faber website” (xiv). They have not so far appeared, and no such statement about the website appears in Vol. 4. As the editions continue to be published (Vol. 4 will be reviewed in a subsequent issue of *Time Present*), the accumulation of letters to trusted and intimate friends such as Henry Eliot, Faber, Bonamy Dobrée, and John Hayward will eventually give Eliot’s readers a long-delayed fuller picture of the man and poet.



Frances Dickey, *The Modern Portrait Poem*. University of Virginia Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Nancy D. Hargrove
Mississippi State University

Frances Dickey’s *The Modern Portrait Poem: From Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ezra Pound* is a complex, interdisciplinary, multifaceted study that explores the influence of the art and poetry of the Rossetti circle in the 1860s on American Modernist poetry in the early twentieth century. Thus it challenges the widely-accepted view that Modernist works rejected the Aesthetic school and that there was a sharp break between them. Well-researched and full of details, it integrates insightful close readings with broad concepts such as gender and transnationalism. With the aid of ten reproductions of paintings, Dickey presents the interaction between the portrait poem and various arts, focusing on painting but also including other forms.

Dickey demonstrates convincingly the ways in which the visual arts influenced both the Aesthetic portrait poems and the Modernist portrait poems of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams as well as Edwin Arlington Robinson, H. D., Amy Lowell, Arthur Davison Ficke, Witter Bynner, Edgar Lee Masters, and E. E. Cummings, suggesting that the modern poets “were not doing anything radically new, but rather adjusting and rearranging the traits of the Aesthetic portrait poem to their own purposes” (11). She points out, however, that late nineteenth-century portrait poems were typically based on an actual portrait, while the early twentieth-century versions were typically without reference to a real or imagined particular work of art and explored possibilities about the self as well as the relationship of the different arts.

The first half of the book (Chapters 1–3) discusses the

characteristics of both the painted and poetic Aesthetic portrait and suggests the ways in which Pound and Eliot adapted them in their early poetry. The second half of the book (Chapters 4–6 plus the coda) “examines the modulation of the portrait poem by contraction, expansion, and adopting traits from other art forms and literary genres” (11), such as the novels of James, Flaubert, and Joyce, the sculpture of Gaudier-Brzeska, and performances of Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*. Dickey also widens the scope of her argument to include six poets in addition to Pound, Eliot, and Williams.

Her discussions of individual poems are complex and detailed, revealing a wealth of knowledge about both poetry and the visual arts. After setting forth the conventions of the Victorian portrait poem (touching on such figures as Cowper, Barton, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning) and explaining the ways in which Rossetti and Swinburne altered and experimented with the genre in Chapter 1, she moves to an analysis of Pound’s early portrait poems in Chapter 2. She compares and contrasts his unpublished manuscript “To La Mère Inconnue,” a poem which has not previously been discussed in Pound scholarship, and its revision, the obscure “Portrait: from ‘La Mère Inconnue.’” She argues convincingly that the differences in the two works reveal Pound’s struggle with himself about the role of the poet, coming to the conclusion in the revision, which she sees as a “complex dialogue with Rossetti, Yeats, and Swinburne,” that portraiture is “a process of inheriting the past, with the poet quite literally serving as a kind of clear space” (61). In “Portrait d’une femme,” in which Dickey finds “a more developed account of interspatial selfhood than in any of his previous poems,” and in “Patria Mia,” in which James and Whistler represent Americans successful in the arts, Pound uses the portrait poem to establish the value of American art and literature (69).

In Chapter 3, Dickey points out that of Eliot’s three portrait poems of 1910–1911 (“Mandarins,” “La Figlia che Piange,” and “Portrait of a Lady”), the last is the most experimental in its use of free verse, its combination of interior monologue and speech, and its departure from the idealized female subject in Victorian poetry, thus setting a high bar for both Pound and Williams. Dickey traces Eliot’s portrayal of both male and female to the daring “ambiguities of gender and sexuality” in *Aestheticism* (105). She further suggests that an updated portrait appears in the scene of the miserable couple in “A Game of Chess,” which draws on Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* and Henry James’s depictions of “lives stifled by unhappy marriage” (108), thus providing another layer of meaning to this famous scene: “In framing this picture of modern marriage, Eliot appropriately frames his pastiche of Rossetti, the Victorian poet of erotic love, under the sign of James, the novelist of disappointment” (106).

Dickey broadens her scope in Chapter 4, both by look-

ing at the Modernists' move to epigrams and epitaphs as a means of contracting the portrait poem in 1912–1913 and by considering as her examples the works of Robinson, H. D., Lowell, Pound, Eliot, Ficke, Bynner, and Masters. A particularly striking example is Bynner's series of portraits of poets, which raise and then dash expectations, as in the one on Eliot: "T. S. ELIOT/ the wedding cake/ of two tired cultures" (140). Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*, which Dickey sees as "the best example of short portraits gathered in a sequence," shows "the continuity between the Rossetian sonnet sequence and the modern epitaphic portrait" (141) in his depiction of human life as a relentless movement toward death.

Chapter 5 returns to Pound's portrait poems as they expand to portray multifigures, beginning in 1913 with "The Millwins" and moving to *Moeurs Contemporaines* of 1918 and finally to *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* of 1920. For me, this discussion was the most fascinating and complex part of the book. She begins by naming three strategies that Pound used to expand his portrait poems: "the concept of intersection in a 'futurist X,' the narrative of failed development adopted from the modern Bildungsroman, and the metaphor of the gallery or museum" (149), and she weaves in references to Pound's 1916 memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska, Futurism, and the Ballets Russes to explain how he arrived at this point in his development.

"Les Millwins" contrasts the response of shocked Edwardian ballet-goers with that of excited art students as they watch an avant-garde performance; Dickey's rich analysis considers such elements as the Futurist X, the angularity and primitivism of the dance, and the significance of the Royal Opera House as "the public space where these disparate figures come into contact with each other" (156). She sees *Moeurs Contemporaines* as Pound's poetic version of the Modernist novel of failure in a gallery of characters, terming it his "most avant-garde work of portraiture" (172), while *Mauberley* is a dazzling achievement, expanding the single-figure portrait to its greatest length while also functioning as a sequence of portraits of others. She argues that it is not a persona poem, as it has long been regarded, but various types of portraits described in the third person. Thus it is a high point in the genre, "both as an artistic achievement and as the moment at which the genre found its limit in scale" (182). Dickey's analysis is a tour de force and in my opinion the high point of her book.

However, there is more, as the sixth chapter delves into Williams's series of portrait poems written in the 1910s and early 1920s, beginning in the pastoral tradition and then turning to Nativism, influenced by his connections with this movement in the visual arts. She traces his 1914 "Pastorals and Self-Portraits" to the *Idyls* of Theocritus, while *Al Que*

Quiere! shows his embrace of Nativism, influenced by Marsden Hartley and Georgia O'Keeffe as well as by Walt Whitman, and his desire to promote American art and literature. In addition these poems also reflect Cubism, Futurism, and Vorticism. Finally, "Portrait of a Lady," in which Williams sets himself in competition with Eliot and Pound and considers how to be American in view of European traditions, reflects Charles Demuth's 1918 painting *A Prince of Court Painters*, of which she gives a very detailed analysis.

In the book's coda, Dickey briefly comments on Cummings's affinities with Rossetti, which have not previously received scholarly attention, in his use of the sonnet and the portrait. However, in fewer than five pages, she cannot build a compelling case, and I am puzzled as to why she does not devote a full chapter to this undertaking. Thus, the book seems to me, regrettably, to end on a weak note.

Despite my wish to hear more about Cummings, I found *The Modern Portrait Poem* to be a brilliant exploration of a fascinating subject, which challenges long-held assumptions about Modernist poetry, presents detailed analyses of numerous portrait poems and painted portraits, and at every turn gives the reader a wealth of information to ponder.



Kinereth Meyer and Rachel Salmon Dshen, *Reading the Underthought: Jewish Hermeneutics and the Christian Poetry of Hopkins and Eliot*.

The Catholic University of America Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Elisabeth Däumer
Eastern Michigan University

When I recommended this book to a friend and Eliot lover, she was skeptical. What can Jewish hermeneutics possibly contribute to our understanding of Eliot's Christian poetry? What more can it contribute than deconstructive or psychoanalytic interpretations—both in some ways offshoots of Jewish hermeneutics—or, for that matter, traditional Christological interpretations? The opening pages of Meyer and Dshen's book make immediately apparent that the authors are less concerned with offering new interpreta-

tions (although they do) than with modeling a cross-cultural approach to the Christian poetry of Hopkins and Eliot. Religious poetry, as they point out, referencing Eliot himself, appears to demand assent from the reader and tends to pose difficulties for those who do not share an author's avowed faith. A resisting reading might give such readers a foothold in the text and, in the manner of deconstruction, help them pit the multifarious underground life of poetic language against the poem's ideological or Christian content—in other words, embrace what Hopkins called the “underthought” of a poem against its “overthought.” Although they propose that Jewish hermeneutics is particularly well equipped to expose “a sharp divergence between [Hopkins's and Eliot's] poetics and the logocentric theological position they may be assumed to have held” (32) an actively resisting reading is not what Meyer and Deshen have in mind. They find themselves in the challenging position of devout Jewish readers—professors of English at Bar-Ilan University in Israel—deeply attracted to both Hopkins's and Eliot's Christian poetry despite reservations that they describe, politely, as “theological” and “sociological.” “What happens,” they ask, “when Jewish readers who respond positively to the powerful textures of Eliot's poetry encounter elements of difference that are theologically and sociologically objectionable?” (186).

Faithful to their stake in both Hopkins's and Eliot's poetry, Meyer and Deshen propose a cross-cultural hermeneutic practice committed to reciprocity between reader and alien text—or, as the case may be, alien reader and text. Taking their cue from Hans Georg Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics, Meyer and Deshen view the challenge of reading from “outside” as opening oneself, critically and emotionally, to the alterity of an “alien” text, without subsuming the otherness of either the text or of one's position as outside reader. In its commitment to “plurality and inexhaustibility” of interpretations, rabbinic hermeneutics functions as an essential cornerstone of this cross-cultural model of reading, allowing the authors to engage Eliot's religious verse *as* religious—yet from an alien perspective. Christian hermeneutics posits a central truth that must be believed before it can be discovered within a text; by contrast, rabbinic hermeneutics does not demand assent to the explicit or implicit content of the sacred text, inviting dialogue and interpretive give-and-take as a way of honoring divine truth. In the authors' apt summary of the difference: “Whereas Christian theology derives from an event that is prior to and a determinant of its hermeneutics, Jewish theology is implicit in the hermeneutics from which it must be derived” (57).

What this means in practice is richly developed in three chapters on Hopkins and another three on Eliot. The authors employ three rabbinic interpretive strategies, all of them de-

signed to involve readers in generating alternative, even opposed, readings of scripture: atomization, performativity, and intertextuality. From the perspective of Christian hermeneutics—a formative influence in traditional New Criticism—atomization is easily the most alien of exegetical practices. Proceeding, as David Stern explains, “from the assumption that every word and phrase in Scripture is as meaningful in itself as within its larger Scriptural context” (qtd. 20), atomization eschews unity of textual meaning in favor of ongoing dialogue. (Meyer and Deshen's analysis of Hopkins's “The Windhover: to Christ our Lord” proffers a perfect illustration of this interpretive strategy.) The emphasis on performance—i.e. on participation in exegetical dialogue—is a central feature of the interactive nature of rabbinic hermeneutics. The authors apply it productively in the chapter “*Ash-Wednesday* as Midrash,” where they trace the tension between Eliot's ambivalence toward language as daemonic or sinful and the whirling, perpetually back-folding movement of the poem, which reaffirms the undeniable pleasure of language, of words *as* words. The authors note the similarity between the “linguistic density” of Midrash and Eliot's work, whose “complex rhythm . . . is often at odds with the linear rhetorical thrust of the poem toward pure, unmediated presence” (222); and they invite us to read *Ash-Wednesday* “as an attempt by both poet and reader ‘to find their place’ *in establishing a state of sustained attention*” (226, their emphasis). “The goal of reading a religious text,” they conclude felicitously, “becomes attention rather than affirmation” (244).

I thought I knew what intertextuality, the third rabbinic hermeneutic strategy, meant until I read the book's final, crowning chapter on “*Four Quartets* and Wisdom Literature.” While I realize that to read intertextually means more than to “‘unearth’ acknowledged or unacknowledged intertexts,” I had not thought of it as placing “two texts in a dialogical relation in an effort ‘to release energy’” (248). The “energy” generated by the encounter of *Four Quartets* and Ecclesiastes, a prime example of “Wisdom Literature,” resides, not in the texts themselves, but in the activity of the reader who reads them with and against one another. The result, in this case, is an evocative discussion of the fluid, contingent nature of wisdom, and a kind of epistemological activism (my term), apparent in both Ecclesiastes and *Four Quartets*, which moves beyond “questions of what can be known to questions of what can be done” (260). As is the case with previous chapters on Hopkins and Eliot, this one is both philosophical and exegetical—so much so that some readers might want to accuse Meyer and Deshen of using Hopkins and Eliot as mere alibi for expounding on rabbinic hermeneutics. Yet to ask for a clean separation between interpretive theory and praxis would mean to miss their point

about the religious verse of two converts for whom questions of poetry, hermeneutics, and faith were inseparable. With regard to Eliot's most philosophical poem, Meyer and Deshen argue that its "conflicting registers" are not, as many critics believe, the "poetic representation of a divided consciousness" or instances of negative theology, but indications of "a mind contemplating the tentative and contingent nature of human thought" (261), in short: wisdom.

This is a rich and rewarding book. In modeling for us a cross-cultural approach to Eliot, Meyer and Deshen address hermeneutic and ethical issues as profoundly intertwined. Their book makes an argument for openness to the uncomfortable sort of alterity based in controversial ideological or religious convictions, one that can easily become the ground for rejecting authors or critical readings. The hermeneutic openness they advocate does not necessitate abandoning one's critical distance but a principled awareness of one's positionality and the beliefs, values, and experiences one brings to a text. Receptivity to the alien text, however, does imply a willingness to be affected by that text—a potentially scary proposition when it comes to works we disagree with ideologically. Any genuine dialogue, as Martin Buber proposed, demands openness to the other as "Thou"—and that precludes holding on, fixedly, to one's own position. Any genuinely interpretive act, then, does not simply reaffirm one's beliefs (or what Gadamer calls "foreknowledge") but, if ever so slightly, modifies them in the encounter with another text. Here, interestingly, it is Eliot himself who frequently points the way, as in his 1930 essay "Poetry and Propaganda," where he addresses our preference for poetry that "reinforces our own beliefs": "We are not really entitled to prize such poetry so highly . . . unless we also make the effort to enter those worlds of poetry in which we are alien."



Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Reviewed by Patrick Query
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One need not be moved by the author's observation that "violet" is almost the same as "violent" to come away

from Sarah Cole's excellent book *At the Violet Hour* convinced that *The Waste Land* is a pivotal document in modernism's complex engagement with violence. In fairness, there is much more to Cole's choice of the twice-repeated line from Eliot's poem as her title than what she refers to as the "metonymic affinity" (74) of these terms. The violets in *The Waste Land* serve Cole as one of many resonant images, scenes, and linguistic turns in the literature of modernism that highlight the aesthetic tension created by violence, with its nearly ungovernable tendency at once to engender and frustrate interpretation. Cole shows how Eliot, Conrad, Yeats, Woolf, and other writers struggled to get violence to signify rightly according to their own and their era's artistic, political, and social commitments—to signify a lot or a little, depending on the demands of the situation. The greatest difficulty, Cole's reader learns, is getting it to signify nothing. Violence in literature, she contends, confounds categories and seems always to say more than a writer or reader can confidently quantify. Whereas this kind of acknowledgment can in other contexts sound like a critical trick or evasion, in Cole's hands it is securely based on the evidence that "[v]iolence is, almost axiomatically, a site of excess" (12).

At the core of Cole's study is the play between what she calls enchanted violence ("magical," suggestive, and symbolic) and disenchanting violence (empty, diminishing, and brutal). The introductory chapter provides a wide-ranging overview of the terrain upon which modernism contended with violence, foremost war, but also technology, animals, land, politics, as well as both the mythic and the (inter)personal. It features incisive readings of the pandying scene in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, of Yeats's "Leda and the Swan," and of some passages from Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which lead ultimately to the suggestion that "violence in modernism is so deeply embedded as to function almost as the literary itself" (26). It is the kind of bold claim to which a reader can enjoy paging back occasionally to see it confirmed in light of the accumulating evidence Cole provides.

The chapter on *The Waste Land* begins with a long, but never tedious, survey of the ways in which violence, especially in war, was conceptualized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Frazer and Freud to Sassoon and Owen. Eager as one is to see what Cole will do with *The Waste Land*, it is a pleasure to follow along as the foundation is being assembled. With this groundwork in place, Cole's reading establishes the poem as the exemplar of the modernist tendency to mix, like lilacs and dead land, enchanted and disenchanting visions of violence: "[I]ts mixture and merger of the two modes demonstrates how subtly their aesthetic strategies can interpenetrate, even as they profess to stand, defiantly, as firm ideological antagonists" (40). Her approach includes some risk taking, as it should. In the end, the conclusions she offers about the poem are persuasive:

REVIEWS

“[T]he central idea” of *The Waste Land* “is to utilize imagery of change, rebirth, resurrection, and metamorphosis as part of a reflection on the troubling relationship between art, with its core commitment to beautiful forms, and the violence that has wrecked human life throughout history.” It offers “a poetic of enchantment that at the same time ruthlessly disenchant its own origins” (81). Whether Smyrna functions in the poem as “a location that dramatized the chaos and spiraling violence still being unleashed by the First World War” (70), whether the “stumps of time” truly “evoke amputated arms” characteristic of war injuries (79), or whether “the image of the swallow” ought to suggest “the idea of swallowing” (78) are open to discussion, but even when Cole swings wide, she always earns the reader’s attention through a sound structure of contextual and intertextual references. Cole’s treatment of drowning in the poem, to name one instance, partly in light of Owen’s “guttering, choking, drowning” soldier, is especially nuanced. One reads her analysis with a sense of the poem being stretched, but not beyond its limits.

Similarly, if there are times when the concept of violence becomes conveniently expansive—swallowing up, for instance, death and dying of all kinds within its scope—Cole almost always redeems such terminological liberties eventually. However, she is a bit less rigorous with the term *modernism*. In the depths of the chapter on the Easter Rising, for instance, there is precious little to connect writers and texts to anything recognizable as modernist beyond a shared span of years (Cole is most often content to refer to the “modernist period” or “era”). Perhaps their efforts to manage enchanting and/or disenchanting violence link Patrick Pearse, Joseph Mary Plunkett, and Thomas MacDonagh to Eliot, Yeats,

Conrad, and Woolf, but Cole’s own analysis suggests that the writers closest to the Rising drew on a heroic, chivalrous tradition that may have overlapped with modernism’s era but not much with its aesthetic. Cole’s reading of Yeats’s “Easter 1916,” however, prompts no such misgivings. (Nor, really, does thrice referring to “the most renowned figure in the nationalist movement before Parnell” (163) as Daniel *O’Connor* instead of *O’Connell*, an unfortunate but untypical mistake.) Her treatment of the poem sets it up along with *The Waste Land*, perhaps even more persuasively, as paradigmatic of poetic ambivalence about violence: “‘Easter 1916’ simultaneously enacts the ideal of generative violence—erasing the body and occluding the moment of violence, replacing these with a statement of lovely transformation—and sees that process as threatening to obliterate the kind of thought-inducing, propulsive language that Yeats always sought to create in his poetry” (150).

The scholarship behind this study is scrupulous and impressively up-to-date, but the book’s success, as I see it, owes most to page after page of careful and penetrating close readings. I won’t go into depth about the chapters on Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* or on virtually all of Woolf’s major works, other than to say that reading the former, with its discussion of “dynamite violence,” just after the Boston Marathon bombings, was a chilling experience, and that the latter, which must serve to bring the book’s discussion of violence all the way from the early 1920s to the brink of the Second World War, does so with impressive care and decision. Any one of *At the Violet Hour*’s main parts is worthy of a wide readership, and the book still manages to add up to more than their sum.

SOCIETY NOTES

David Chinitz’s new book, *Which Sin to Bear? Authenticity and Compromise in Langston Hughes*, just came out in February from Oxford University Press. Chinitz explores Hughes’s efforts to negotiate the problems of identity and ethics he faced as an African American professional writer and intellectual, tracing his early efforts to fashion himself as an “authentic” black poet of the Harlem Renaissance and his later imagining of a new and more inclusive understanding of authentic blackness.

Julia Daniel begins her new job this fall as Assistant Professor of Modern American Poetry at West Virginia University in Morgantown. Julia completed her dissertation, *City Limits: Modern Poetry and the Urban Transformation of American Wilderness*, under the direction of David Chinitz, and served as *Time Present* book reviewer for three years.

Jayme Stayer was ordained a priest in the Society of Jesus on Saturday, June 15 at Madonna della Strada Chapel at Loyola University of Chicago. In the fall he assumes a new position at John Carroll University as Assistant Professor of English.

Please send news (book releases, new jobs, prizes, etc.) for the “Society Notes” section to the editor at dickeyf@missouri.edu.

Election Outcome

As a result of this spring’s election, Julia Daniel will join the board of the Eliot Society. Welcome, Julia! Also, Chris Buttram was reelected to the board. Both Chris’s and Julia’s terms will run through June 30, 2016. The Society is grateful for their service.

PUBLIC SIGHTINGS

Compiled by David Chinitz

April in Korea. Sunghyun Kim of the T. S. Eliot Society of Korea informs us that public quotation of *The Waste Land* is a regular phenomenon in his country—one that repeats itself each April. This year, Yun Byung-se, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, opened his talks with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns by quoting “April is the cruellest month” in reference to the current geopolitical tensions on the Korean peninsula. Cho Young-gon, the new chief of Seoul Prosecutors, cited the first three lines of *The Waste Land* in his inaugural address, explaining that because April meant something special to him, vigorous investigations were imminent. And the poet Choi Young-mi published a column in the *Chosun Daily News* in which she used Eliot to express her own recollections of the hot and green atmosphere of April in the 1980s.

Our thanks to Sunghyun Kim for collecting these anecdotes.

Intriguing but wrong. “To the Editor: In his review of *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy From Slavery to Hip-Hop*, by Yuval Taylor and Jake Austen (Nov. 18), Kevin Young opens his interesting discussion of minstrelsy with the suggestion that T. S. Eliot’s original title for *The Waste Land*, ‘He Do the Police in Different Voices,’ refers to the minstrel tradition. The line is in fact a quotation from Charles Dickens’s novel *Our Mutual Friend*” (Aryeh Kosman, *New York Times Book Review* 2 Dec. 2012: 12).

Mere coincidence? “April really can be the cruellest month. The Boston bombings, the Deepwater oil spill (2010), the Virginia Tech shootings (2007), Columbine (1999), the Oklahoma City bombing (1995), and the Branch Davidian tragedy (1993) all occurred between April 15 and April 20” (Carla Capetillo, *newsmediatalk.com*, *Washington Post*, 5 Feb. 2013).

Sold! The BBC reported on June 25 that a copy of the 1923 Hogarth Press edition of *The Waste Land* was sold at auction for £4,500—about twice the expected sales price—to raise money for Oxfam. “The type in the donated book is thought to be hand-set by Virginia Woolf. It is part of an edition of about 460 copies. It was donated by Colin Cohen, who was given the book by a relative” (bbc.co.uk).

Eliot Society members who are disappointed at having missed this opportunity may take solace in the coming auction of Valerie Eliot’s art collection, scheduled for Nov. 20. “This great British collection is borne from one of the greatest love affairs in literary history; that of T. S. Eliot, who is among the most important figures in 20th-century literature, and his second wife, Valerie Eliot (1926–2012). Containing outstanding examples of Portrait Miniatures, Early British Drawings, Modern British Art, Victorian & British Impressionist Art, Modern Prints, Jewellery and English Furniture, the collection is testament to Mrs. Eliot’s connoisseurship” (www.christies.com).

ELIOT NEWS

Call for Papers

The T. S. Eliot Society will again sponsor a session at the annual Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, to be held at the University of Louisville, February 20–22, 2014. Abstracts on any subject reasonably related to Eliot are invited, but those concerned with Eliot as editor, editing Eliot, or any aspect of the compositional/editorial process are particularly welcome. For further information on the 2014 conference, please visit the website: www.thelouisvilleconference.com.

Those interested should send a 300-word abstract to John Morgenstern (jmorgen@clemsun.edu) no later than September 13, 2013. Please include your academic affiliation (if applicable), mailing address, and a brief biographical note with your abstract.

Eliot Society at SAMLA

The Eliot Society is sponsoring a panel at the South Atlantic MLA Conference in Atlanta, November 8-10, 2013. Organized by Anthony Cuda, the panel will include:

- “Eliot’s London Nights: Arthur Symons and *Inventions of the March Hare*,” by Frances Dickey, University of Missouri
- “Synchronizing the Arts: T. S. Eliot and Henri Matisse,” by John Morgenstern, Clemson University
- “The Phoenix Society Controversy: Eliot and the Independent London Theatre,” by Anthony Cuda, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Performance of *Four Quartets*

Actor and Eliot Society member Mike Rogalski will present a staged reading of *Four Quartets* in Chicago in a four-week run beginning in September. Rogalski performed the piece at the Society's annual meeting last year, where it was warmly

received. The performance was reviewed in the Winter 2013 issue of *Time Present*. Opening on September 26, the 125th anniversary of Eliot's birth, and produced by Mirovelle Partners LLC, the show will be mounted at Provision Theater Company. Additional information, including tickets, will be available through the production's website www.fourquartetsonstage.net

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Andrew Powers, Eastern Michigan University

Given the wide press coverage of Esme Valerie Eliot's death (Nov. 9, 2012), only the most substantial obituaries are listed here. If you are aware of any 2012 citations that do not appear here, please contact Jayme Stayer at jayme.stayer@gmail.com. Omissions will be rectified in the 2013 listing.

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T. S. Eliot Society Annual Meeting,
St. Louis, September 27–29, 2012

Marketing Eliot

T.S. Eliot worked at Lloyds Bank from March, 1917 until November, 1925, when he left to become a director at the publishing firm of Faber & Gwyer. Critics have generally considered Eliot's banking career a waste of time. Ezra Pound went so far as to call it a "crime against literature." In contrast to these views, his wife, Vivien, saw Eliot's time at the bank as a blessing, and considered his work in such a different field a means to ensure that his mind and brain would be "fresh enough to produce good literature." Both views are based on the premise that Eliot's job at Lloyds was separate or separable from his life as a poet.

My paper suggests that we re-examine the way we market Eliot. Perhaps major works such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *The Waste Land* were completed at this time *not* because working in such a different field left his mind and brain "fresh enough to produce good literature," but because his work in the bank contributed to their success. The connections between Eliot's work at Lloyds and *The Waste Land*, for example, were greater

than terms such as "C.i.f. London: documents at sight," that he may have picked up during his correspondence with foreign banks. What I wish to claim is that during his time at Lloyds, Eliot learned how to design an **economy**, a way of considering the production and allocation of words, from the point of view of both the poet and the reader.

In *The Waste Land*, for example, two economies resonate. The first is the economy "behind" the poem—the Grail legend, the source of all material and spiritual goods. The second is an economy of reading. Like a monetary economy, the economy of *The Waste Land* produces counters of value that are placed in circulation. Literature, history, myth, art, religion can all be appropriated and circulated. Image multiplies into image, text into text. In the kinetic tension between metaphor and metonymy in the poem, what appears to be a kind of hermetic or arcane economy—a "secret account whose dividends are accessible only to the initiate" (as someone once wrote about Pound's *Cantos*)—is in fact a participatory economy that depends on the *reader's* interpretive labor.

Kinereth Meyer
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American Literature Association Meeting,
Boston, May 23–26, 2013

'*La forme précise de Byzance*':
T. S. Eliot and the Prichard-Matisse
Theory of Aesthetics

In a letter to Herbert Read dated 9 April 1926, Eliot remarked that he was "in many ways deeply indebted" to the English art theorist Matthew Stewart Prichard, whose "sensibility to art," he added, was "greater than that of anyone [he had] ever met." Eliot was first acquainted with Prichard during his student year in France (1910–11) and, as a letter drawn from the Matisse archive in Paris confirms, it was under the auspices of Prichard that he and Jean Verdenal visited Matisse's art studio in March 1911. Throughout this period, and in collaboration with Matisse, Prichard formulated a theory of aesthetics based on Henri

Bergson's metaphysics, which privileged Eastern art over Western representation. Measured in three dimensions and ordered by proportional geometry, Western painting was considered by Prichard and Matisse to be static and frozen in time; Eastern decorative arts, by contrast, were seen to activate the intuitive faculties of the spectator to reveal the absolute. Drawing extensively on Prichard's unpublished papers, this essay begins by reconstructing his aesthetic theory, which Eliot praised in the aforementioned letter to Read as having "independent value." It then examines Eliot's earliest application of this theory in the notebook that he kept while touring through Italy in the summer of 1911 and the implications of this connection for his subsequent meditations on art.

John Morgenstern
Clemson University

“The Anatomy of Night” in Eliot’s
“Burnt Norton” and Djuna Barnes’s
Nightwood

This paper examines T. S. Eliot’s reception of Djuna Barnes’ novel *Nightwood* (Faber and Faber 1936) as both poet and editor. Critics have misrepresented Eliot’s role in publishing *Nightwood*. Monika Faltejskova claims that Eliot gave a “very lukewarm response to the novel,” and Andrew Field credits Edwin Muir for convincing Eliot to publish it. A better understanding of Eliot’s actual negotiations to publish the novel, which had been rejected by several American publishers, corrects these misrepresentations. It also shows that Eliot’s sympathy for the novel illuminates the themes and tone of Eliot’s poem “Burnt Norton,” which appeared in the same year as *Nightwood*.

The phrase “Anatomy of Night” is as relevant to “Burnt Norton” as it is to *Nightwood*. A major source of the image of darkness in “Burnt Norton” is St. John of the Cross’ *The Dark Night of the Soul* and in *Nightwood* Isaiah 21:11, “Watchman, what of the night?” Barnes’ character Robin Vote represents an “Eternal Light” that is as elusive to the main character Nora Flood as it is to Eliot’s speaker in “Burnt Norton”; and meditations on time are features of both works. According to the Tiresias figure in *Nightwood*, Doctor O’Connor, Robin’s fatal charm is that “the hide of time had been stripped from her,” and Nora replies that “Time isn’t long enough It isn’t long enough to live down her nights.” Time also prevents the speaker of “Burnt Norton” from finding the light that he seems to glimpse in the pool of Part I: “Time past and time future / Allow but a little consciousness.”

Defending the novel against Geoffrey Faber’s dislike of its frank sexuality, Eliot wrote that the novel makes no more of “erotic experience” than works such as *Madame Bovary* or *Jude the Obscure*. He compares Barnes’ conception of love to Platonic and Dantean conceptions and tells Faber: “I’ve tried to express something of my belief at the end of Burnt Norton. I mean that the ‘illusion’ of love is something to pass forward through . . .” (10 May 1936). The lines he refers to at the end of “Burnt Norton” express his conception of love only in admitting it is humanly unattainable: “Love is itself unmoving Except in the aspect of time/ Caught in the form of limitation / Between un-being and being.” The final words of Eliot’s poem express equally well the theme of *Nightwood*: “ridiculous the waste sad time / Stretching before and after.”

Timothy Materer
University of Missouri

T. S. Eliot, Performativity, and the
Concept of the Religious Life:
Rereading *Murder in the Cathedral*

In several papers about T. S. Eliot’s early work, I have argued that Eliot worked toward a concept of the performativity of gender, a perspective which can be found fully developed in *The Waste Land*. I now wish to argue that in *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot broadened the concept to include self identity in all its ramifications. Indeed, it is in this first completed play that we find an expression of the concept in all its subtlety, clearly distinguished from theatrical performance and profoundly elaborated from J. L. Austin’s landmark description of combinations of words in which “the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action (*How to Do Things with Words*, 6). But does Thomas’s dramatic order “Open the door. I command it. OPEN THE DOOR” make him a martyr and a saint? (CP 212). Not so fast. Two issues separate the subject, here Thomas, from automatic accession to sainthood—the issue of compulsion and the issue of intent, that is, of his state of mind.

The concept as Eliot presents it shares important characteristics with Judith Butler’s important dictum on gender performativity: that “the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself” (*Gender Trouble*, “Preface 1999,” xiv-xv). Both Butler and Eliot must seek to define the paradoxical relationship of free will and determination, and both explore how it is possible for subjects to form a state of mind independent of the interpretation of the meaning of their actions by others. For Butler, coercion takes the form of the tyrannical cultural institutions and practices experienced by Foucault’s interpolated citizen; for Eliot it is both that and the foreknowledge of all actions by God. How in the face of this does the subject form a choice which is his own? And how can we know what the meaning of the choice is? As the Chorus pleads, “O Thomas Archbishop, save us, save us, save yourself that we may be saved;/ Destroy yourself and we are destroyed”, Thomas finds, “Now my way is clear. . . . / The last temptation is the greatest treason: / To do the right deed for the wrong reason” (CP 196).

The paper explores the way the concept of performativity is essential to understanding this play and the identity of the subject in Eliot’s thought.

Cyrena Pondrom
University of Wisconsin

What was Eliot doing 100 years ago? The Society celebrated the 100th anniversary of Eliot's Parisian year by meeting in Paris in 2011, but there will be many smaller centennials to recognize along the way in the coming decades, as well as major milestones. *Time Present* seems like the appropriate venue for noting some of these.

In summer 1913, Eliot had just finished his second year of graduate work at Harvard, where as an Assistant he taught "freshmen what they didn't want to know and what I didn't know myself" (*Letters* 1: 70); he completed courses on Eastern religion, logic, psychology, metaphysics, and

the philosophy of Kant. In the spring he wrote two papers on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, one on the *Critique of Practical Reason* and a paper on "Degrees of Reality." In June he purchased his copy of F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* for some light summer reading.

Eliot had earned his vacation in Maine when he wrote to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley from Portland on 29 June: "This is sure one warm place. Am having photo snapped: if real good will send you one." He added, "PS Going to have fortune told. If real nice will let you in on it" (*Letters* 1: 39).

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