

organizes literary outings to places associated with Eliot or other literary figures.

When Eliot died in 1880, officials of Westminster Abbey had refused to accept her remains for a literary shrine there in Poets' Corner because of her long liaison with George Henry Lewes. But in 1975 the fellowship issued a worldwide appeal for funds to place a memorial stone to Eliot there to mark the centenary of her death. Officials of Westminster Abbey no longer opposed the establishment of such a memorial, and in June 1980 it was unveiled by Haight. Every year since then the fellowship has held a service at the stone and laid a wreath there.

Following another worldwide appeal that the fellowship made for funds, in 1986 a statue of a seated George Eliot by Warwickshire sculptor John Letts was placed in the center of Nuneaton; since then, a copy of this statue was placed on the lawn near the entrance of the George Eliot Hospital. The fellowship has placed plaques in two churches with which George Eliot is associated, and, as its Millennium Projects, the fellowship plans to create a garden around the hospital statue and to refurbish the area around the memorial in the George Eliot Memorial Garden.

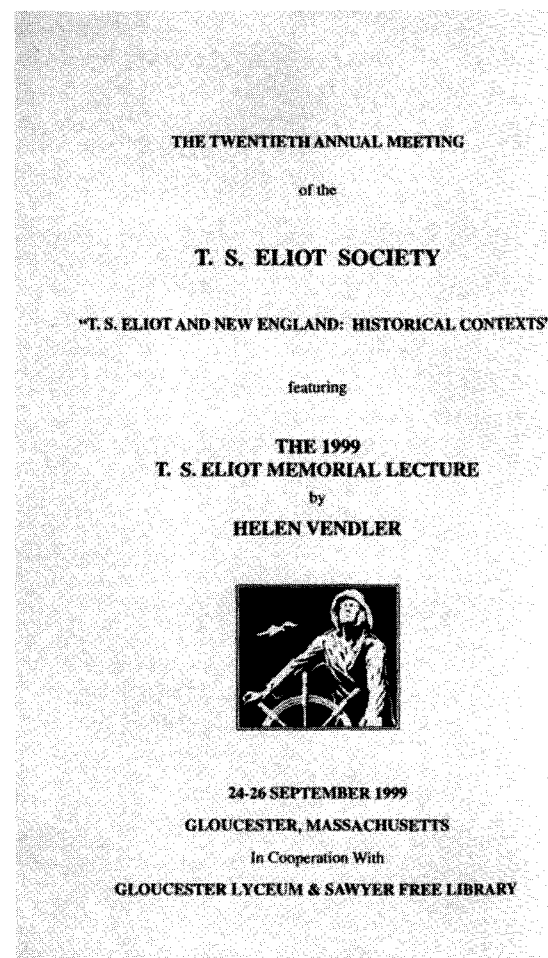
The fellowship has published a journal—*The George Eliot Review*, which includes a mix of academic articles, book reviews, and essays of local interest—every year since 1970. The secretary also publishes a quarterly newsletter to promote interest in and to pay tribute to Eliot. The projects of the fellowship also include watching for any items that may be added to the fine George Eliot collection in the Nuneaton museum and library, publishing books about Eliot and her country, and producing cassettes of Gabriel Woolf's readings from her novels. In association with the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, each summer the fellowship organizes and guides four immensely popular tours of George Eliot country. Several members of the fellowship speak to other organizations about the author's life, and the fellowship responds to many inquiries from students, teachers, and schoolchildren every year.

In seventy years the George Eliot Fellowship has grown from a tiny local society to one which has six hundred members in twenty countries. Many of these members are in the United States and Japan, where Eliot's work is much admired. Those seeking additional information or interested in joining the fellowship should write to Mrs. Kathleen Adams, Secretary, The George Eliot Fellowship, 71 Stepping Stones Road, Coventry CV5 8JT, United Kingdom, or telephone 011-44-24-7659-2231.

## The T. S. Eliot Society: Celebration and Scholarship, 1980–1999

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In September 1999 the annual meeting of the T. S. Eliot Society was conducted not, as always in the past, at its home base of St. Louis, Missouri, but at the "Eliot-family second home" of Eliot's youth, the Cape Ann seaport of Gloucester, Massachusetts. With participation by the Gloucester Lyceum & Sawyer Free Library and the Cape Ann Historical Museum, members forgathered for a three-day commemorative event. They came from eight foreign countries and various parts of the United States. This twentieth celebration, for all the novelty of its setting and arrangements, resembled its predecessors expressly in featuring the invitational Memorial Lecture that has come to predominate the annual meet-



*Program cover for the annual meeting of the society, the first to be held where the young Eliot and his family usually spent their summer holidays*

ings, as stipulated by society bylaws. In pursuing the aim of encouraging fellowship among Eliot's readers, the Memorial Lecture is always open to the public, unlike the "members-only" sessions for the reading of scholarly papers. The Memorial Lectures have afforded viable perspectives on Eliot's poetry and verse-drama as well as on the critical strategies and philosophical components of his prose writings. The biographical approach gradually made possible since Eliot's death in 1965 has contributed significantly to such explorations, but each Memorial Lecturer has proceeded in his or her own way.

The first Memorial Lecture was offered in 1980 before a small group assembled to found the society. Since then, with the enlargement of membership these lectures have attracted audiences interested not only in the subject matter but also in the opportunity to meet widely published commentators on modern literature. The lecture for 1999, "Historical Contexts: Available Discourses," was delivered by Helen Vendler, the A. Kingsley Porter University Professor of English at Harvard University. Vendler, whose scholarly work includes several centuries of literature from George Herbert to William Butler Yeats, focused on how the young Eliot's "first imaginative priority . . . was to find discourses—extended systems of language—to project the qualities warring within him" that led to his "first canonical poem," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

In two sessions members of the society addressed, or strategically skirted, the general theme of the 1999 meeting—historical New England as a context for Eliot's work. The audience, with many Gloucester residents on hand, shared glimpses of Eliot contemplating the bird species of Cape Ann, Eliot replicating material from New England authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Eliot creating poetry. Board member David Huisman, the primary organizer of the weekend, followed up these sessions with a slide presentation featuring the landscapes of *Four Quartets* including Gloucester scenes that Eliot drew from memory in "The Dry Salvages," the third quartet.

Among the extraordinary amenities of the meeting was a nautical excursion, by whale-watch boat, to view the Dry Salvages, which Eliot identified in a headnote to his poem as being "a small group of rocks, with a beacon, off the N. E. coast of Cape Ann." It is a desolate place even "on a halcyon day," a setting of "menace and caress of wave that breaks on water," in Eliot's phrases, and of many a shipwreck "in the sombre season / Or the sudden fury." It is also, as knowledgeable members recalled, a place with symbolic connotations—its name supposedly meaning "three savages," and its granite formation, for the devout Eliot of the *Quartets*, a triune emblem of the Christian rock of salvation.

Gloucester and its neighbors have features not to be missed, such as the Portuguese church of Our Lady of Good Voyage. Some society members traveled to Salem—where witches had been hanged, Hawthorne had occupied the Customs, and the House of the Seven Gables still stands. The Gloucester Lyceum & Sawyer Free Library lavished an abundance of instruction and entertainment on those attending the meeting. A special Eliot exhibit at the library, "T. S. Eliot's Gloucester" (a panel presentation), and "A Tribute to Eliot," an elaborate evening performance by dancers, musicians, and poetry readers, were attention-riveting events. The Historical Association displayed its remarkable Fitz Hugh Lane, Maritime, and Fisheries Galleries, and Vendler's Memorial Lecture took place in the museum auditorium.

Why had the society chosen to meet in Gloucester? Eliot's associations with Gloucester were fundamental and prolonged, involving both his life and his poetic development. His parents, Henry Ware and Charlotte Champe Eliot (or Charlotte by herself, when her husband was detained by business), were accustomed in the early 1890s to put behind them, every summer, the damp heat of St. Louis and to take their younger children on a five-month vacation to the Massachusetts shore. In 1896, when T. S. Eliot was in his eighth year, his father, an affluent brick-manufacturer, built a large summer cottage, The Downs, at Eastern Point on Cape Ann. There, while Eliot was a Harvard student, he passed his summer holidays—every year except in 1911, when he was in Europe until September.

Confronting the majesty of the sea, Eliot made himself, over the years, "expert with sail and oar," in his words from *The Waste Land* (1922). Impressions from his experiences as an amateur sailor, including time on his beloved catboat, the *Elsa*, lingered in his creative work. In verses written in 1910, part 4 of "Goldfish" (which he thought so little of that he partly canceled the lines with a scribble), he uses his boat in a mystique of spiritual serenity, when it is steered by a female hand, and certain assurances are conveyed by sibylline eyes on the watch. The wind and waves of the sea portend a different, ominous fate, and the poem resolves nothing. Twenty years later in *Marina* Eliot returned in imagination to the little craft, now beached and unseaworthy, for another vision of renewal and fulfillment. The imagery of the sea and shore of Cape Ann and northward along the coast also crystallizes such conflicting energies of affirmation and loss in *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) and "The Dry Salvages."

At its beginning in 1980, eligibility for membership in "The T. S. Eliot Society of St. Louis" was confined to a circle formed by its founder, Leslie Konnyu, who with the advice of a few friends undertook to fill a want in the cultural life of St. Louis. Konnyu, a cartographer, historian, translator, biographer, and poet, had

come to the United States as an émigré in 1949; a Hungarian Catholic by birth, he was repelled by the prospect of a Sovietized central Europe. He is regarded as the most distinguished Hungarian-American man of letters, producing some fifty books in four languages until his death in 1992. He founded the *American Hungarian Review* and wrote the standard work *A History of American Hungarian Literature* (1962). During his residence in St. Louis he deplored the absence of a memorial to Eliot and of significant public interest in the poet and was supported by several St. Louis intellectuals, notably the poet Charles Guenther. Encouragement came also from Earl K. Holt III, minister of the Unitarian church that was led in the nineteenth century by Eliot's grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot. Holt participates in society governance and conducts, along with fellow Unitarians, an annual Eliot commemoration service and lecture-forum in tandem with society meetings in St. Louis.

In 1984 Jewel Spears Brooker of Eckerd College was admitted into Konnyu's group, and two years later Konnyu, Holt, and Brooker incorporated the present T. S. Eliot Society (dropping "of St. Louis"), executed new bylaws, and opened membership to the dues-paying public. Konnyu's objective of setting up a public monument to Eliot in St. Louis was attained in 1988, when a large bronze portrait-plaque commissioned at Konnyu's expense and sculpted by Andrew Osze was ceremonially dedicated in the St. Louis Public Library. Konnyu's other principal goal, to spread knowledge of Eliot's achievement, became a major concern of the newly constituted society, which has become more and more an academic organization, though membership remains open to all Eliot admirers.

For 1988 the reconstituted T. S. Eliot Society prepared to celebrate the centenary of Eliot's birth on 26 September 1888. Brooker, then society president, set to work with great energy to plan an appropriate program. On the weekend preceding that anniversary, a grand four-day celebration took place in St. Louis. The Memorial Lecturer was A. D. Moody of the University of York, England. There were discussion panels, analytical papers, vocal and instrumental music, poetry readings, and productions of two plays—Eliot's *The Elder Statesman* (1958) and *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), the latter staged by Washington University. Addresses were given by some of the best-known contemporary Eliot scholars, including Armin Paul Frank, Russell Kirk, Cleanth Brooks, Carol H. Smith, Nancy Hargrove, and George T. Wright. Senator Michael Butler Yeats spoke on his father's connection with Eliot and other modern writers. On completing her presidency, Brooker contracted with the University of Missouri Press to publish a collection of papers that she had chosen and edited. This volume,

comprising six Eliot Memorial Lectures and eight Centenary Celebration papers, is *The Placing of T. S. Eliot* (1991).

After 1990, when the society joined the newly formed American Literature Association (ALA), pressures to offer papers at the annual meeting of the society increased. In recent years society programs in St. Louis have been broadened appreciably, as a result of generous funding by members Anthony and Melanie Fathman, to facilitate participation by selected graduate students intending to specialize in Eliot and his work. Anyone interested in receiving further information about the society may contact Linda Wyman, President, T. S. Eliot Society, 621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City MO 65101.

### The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society

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Founded on 29 December 1989 at a meeting in Washington, D.C., The Ralph Waldo Emerson Society is dedicated to fostering scholarship about and appreciation of the life and writings of a great American author. With about two hundred members in eleven countries, it is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Though his critical reputation has risen and fallen—especially in academia—through the years since his death in 1882, Emerson continues to be a national icon as a representative American voice. Called the Sage of Concord and the "wisest American" by admirers, he inspired Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, Walt Whitman, and many later writers with his challenge to be self-reliant and with his innovative literary style, and readers have turned to Emerson's writing for consolation, reassurance, and uplift. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, however, disputed Emerson's vision in their fiction, and many critics have reviled what they consider to be his easy optimism and blindness to social and cosmic evil. Yet, to this day readers are drawn to Emerson—whether to find inspiration or to quarrel—as a benchmark of personal and national character, and his reputation has never been higher.

Primarily an educational and literary organization, the Emerson Society is formally organized with a constitution and bylaws. Its officers include a president, president-elect, secretary, and treasurer. An advisory board (which serves also as an editorial board) consists of the newsletter editor, the past president, six elected members, and an ex officio member named by and representing the Ralph Waldo Emerson Memorial Association. A program chairperson, named by the advisory board,