

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

NEWS & NOTES

Number 9

Fall 1989

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1989 SEPTEMBER MEETING IN ST. LOUIS MEMORIAL LECTURE HIGHLIGHT OF PROGRAM

The tenth annual meeting of the T. S. Eliot Society took place in spectacularly bright, cool fall weather, probably due to the aftermath of hurricane Hugo, which unfortunately delayed the arrival of our President, Dr. Grover Smith, until the nth hour. The program was a carefully balanced mixture of music, lectures and social events. The highlight of the occasion was Dr. Leonard Unger's Memorial Lecture, "Actual Times and Actual Places in Eliot's Poetry," held on Saturday morning, September 23. Dr. Unger presented a careful reading of a number of Eliot poems, including a recitation and critical appreciation of several of the minor early lyrics. These came newly alive through his understanding of their tone and range of reference.

The Society Members Panel on Saturday afternoon included Drs. Ron Schuchard, Stanley Sultan and Lois Cuddy, all of whom gave eloquent and interesting presentations. Ron Schuchard brought us up to date on his important work on the editing of The Clark Lectures, which will be a major contribution to Eliot studies. Stanley Sultan's talk, "Love and Death in *The Waste Land*," returned us to the thematic problems of that enigmatic poem, and Lois Cuddy cast new light on Eliot's views of the history of religion, a challenging and little explored aspect of Eliot's work that has important implications for some controversial issues.

Afternoon and evening included a stroll through Tower Grove Park, followed by supper at the Director's Residence as guests of its learned and charming director, Mr. John Karel. The park is a visual and historical record of the civic life of St. Louis, its frontier origins, its nineteenth century aspirations toward culture and the development of amenities in the public sphere, its rich diversity of ethnic communities, and the new interest in its heritage today. The event, a pleasure in itself, gave a sense of the values that informed Eliot's sensibility long after he had left St. Louis itself behind. After supper, we adjourned to an excellent performance of *The Family Reunion* (reviewed elsewhere in these pages) followed by a pleasant reception arranged by Ms. Marilyn Holt.

On Sunday morning, we continued in the tradition of the Society by meeting at the First Unitarian Church, a congregation founded, of course, by Eliot's grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, and now under the leadership of the Reverend Earl K. Holt III, a long time member of the T. S. Eliot Society and soon to become its official historian. The church provided a warm milieu for a forum on *The Family Reunion* led by Dr. Linda Wyman and Fr. James Torrens. Each of them gave a lucid and discerning presentation on the play, and a lively discussion followed, which included both visiting scholars and members of the public. Later in the morning, Earl Holt delivered a sermon/presentation, "Ghosts: Who You Gonna Call?" which again brought Eliot alive in the context of a vital tradition of ethical, social and religious concerns.

This year's meeting was once again remarkable for the quality of its musical interludes. Under the direction of Ms. Laurie Ryan, Director of Music at the First Unitarian Church, who herself played the piano and directed a small choir, we heard works ranging from the classical through the modern and contemporary, often based upon

poetic texts and with lyrics and musical settings both witty and moving. We remember particularly Laurie Ryan's elegant and warm Debussy and Persichetti, the choir's rendition of Lovelace's beautiful setting of Blake's "Mercy, Pity, Peach and Love," the very post-modern geographical fugue of Toch, and the "Modern Music" of William Billings—a crowd-pleaser if there ever was one! Soloist Jeff Schmidt interpreted 'Memory' with particular eloquence. We also note with pleasure the informal dinner music presented by Tony Fathman.

NEW SOCIETY HISTORIAN ELECTED Reverend Earl K. Holt to Serve

The Reverend Earl K. Holt III was elected to the office of Historian by the T. S. Eliot Society Board of Directors at their September 24 meeting. He will serve for the term 1990-93; we extend to him our congratulations and thanks for his willingness to serve. He replaces Dr. Allen Koppenhaver, who received a vote of thanks from the Board for his excellent service to the Society in its early years, and whom the president wishes also to thank personally. The archives of the Society will now be transferred to the First Unitarian Church, which has offered to look after them for us.

Dr. Koppenhaver has suggested that anyone with photographs of the Sunday afternoon events of the 1988 Centennial Conference forward them to Earl Holt at the First Unitarian Church, 5007 Waterman Boulevard. They would be a welcome addition to our records of that occasion.

Board Election Candidates

We have two candidates for the seat on the Society's board of Directors left vacant by Earl Holt's acceptance of the position of Historian (Mr. Holt has permanent tenure on the board, so Dr. Koppenhaver's seat must be filled by election.) They are:

Lawrence C. Melton, Instructor of History, East Central College, Union, Missouri. Larry Melton is a community college American history teacher. He avidly researches St. Louis history with an emphasis on Scott Joplin and the "Ragtime Era," and has an avocational interest in T. S. Eliot.

W. Ronald Schuchard, Associate Professor of English, Emory University. Ron Schuchard is the author of a number of articles on Eliot and other modernists in the *PMLA*, *Review of English Studies*, *ELH*, *Southern Review*, and other journals. He is co-editor of *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, vols. 3 and 4, and editor of the T. S. Eliot's Clark Lectures. He served as 1985 Eliot Memorial Lecturer for the T. S. Eliot Society.

Ballots (included in this issue) should be mailed to Dr. Vinnie-Marie D'Ambrosio at 405 Parkside Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, 11226, by January 1, 1990. The results of the election will be announced in the spring issue of the NEWS & NOTES. The successful candidate will serve from January 1, 1990 through December 31, 1992.

Review of *The Family Reunion*

James Torrens, S.J.

The dramas of T. S. Eliot, I am convinced, play better than they read. Decent staging can make some heavy-looking lines come alive off the page. This was confirmed for me in what is probably the most difficult case, that of *The Family Reunion*, creditably performed on September 23 by the West End Players Guild in the little theater of the Union Avenue Christian Church.

The company has minimal technical resources, which hampered their presentation of the Eumenides. When Harry screamed "Look there" at their first appearance, the audience did not get very much to see--no looming countenance nor unkempt and clawed figure, only the principal actors with their back to us doubling the Furies in gray robes and hoods. But the acting was generally good--Gerald blustery and Charles jolly and Violet jaunty, if puzzled, and Ivy timorous but thoughtful. They pulled together intelligibly, although a bit stiffly, for the choruses.

A high point in the performance was the dialogue between Harry and his younger cousin Mary, in Part I, Scene 2. Mary responded well to the sudden twists and turns of the interchange--from reminiscence about their confederacy as children, to a clash of perspectives (world weariness vs. sheltered good sense), to the closing of the doors on romance. In Part II, by contrast, the lines seemed somewhat beyond her. The audience got a knowing and rather severe Aunt Agatha, aloof from her brothers and sisters. In the scene (II, 3) where Amy accuses her of having alienated the affections of both her husband and son, and Agatha tries to set Amy straight, it is Amy who wins our sympathies. And indeed Amy, the property manager and family arranger, the manipulator, ends the play as a touching and honest figure.

Audience members from the T. S. Eliot Society afterwards debated what is the true cast and temper of Eliot's protagonist, Harry Lord Monchensey. Is he a hand-wringer, morbidly self-absorbed, or a genuine pilgrim? In his withering comments upon his relatives and upon people in general, does he take an insufferably high-minded and judgmental stance, or is he simply being true to his painful gift of a wider, more divine, perspective? No clear verdict was rendered, but all agreed as to the clarity and sensitivity of the interpretation by lead actor Alfred Erickson. He had to step through his part with script in hand, due to an illness that had curtailed his rehearsal energies. Yet this somehow enhanced his rendition of the pensive anti-hero, harried by his demons, drawn towards glowering and whining but also genuinely troubled, up until the moment (II, 2) when his Aunt Agatha helps him turn guilt and fear into courage and insight.

A final note. The West End Players make it quite clear that this cerebral play, this Eliotic comment on original sin, revulsion between marriage partners, expiation and the spiritual quest, is, in about a dozen places, comic, genuinely funny. Laughter broke from the audience. So the Players may be excused if, in comedy-of-manners fashion, they poured themselves a drink at every pause in the action. And they must be applauded, first for undertaking *The Family Reunion*, and second, for carrying it off.

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DUES REMINDER

Your 1990 dues are due this fall. Help keep the Society solvent by responding promptly. Dues should be sent to Linda Wyman, Treasurer, T. S. Eliot Society, 1121 E. McCarty Street, Jefferson City, MO 65101.

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REFLECTIONS

By the President of the T. S. Eliot Society

On January 4, 1990, a quarter century will have passed since the death of T. S. Eliot. Let us, during the approaching anniversary year, apply ourselves to the clearer understanding and appreciation of Eliot's originality in point of view. Without this commitment we cannot expect to interpret his poetry afresh (as on every reading we do interpret it) without re-enacting in a new form the naive blunders of past readings.

The T. S. Eliot Society, having affiliated with the American Literature Association, will participate in the inaugural conference in San Diego, CA, May 31 - June 3, 1990. As authorized, I sent out a call for papers in October. If you didn't get the word, here it is again in condensed form:

ALA rules prohibit anyone from reading more than one paper, but members of the T. S. Eliot Society in good standing may send me 15 to 20 minute Eliot papers (not abstracts or topics merely) for consideration. The deadline is February 1, 1990; my address, P. O. Box 6043, Durham, NC 27708. Do not submit, as a whole or in part, anything published or publicly read prior to the conference. Decisions are final. The Society does not fund participants. Any member of the Society may attend, whether reading a paper or not. The registration fee will be \$25.00. The program will emphasize American literature, not theory.

The Stevens, Cummings, and Frost societies have got a head start and have set up panels which are described as "dazzling." Not to worry: if our experience of last June furnishes portents, we may out-dazzle these dazzlers.

Future conferences of ALA will often take place elsewhere than on the West Coast, plans being subject to review each year.

The 1989 meeting of the Society, featuring Leonard Unger's Eliot Memorial Lecture, went smoothly. I had to miss hearing Dr. Unger, owing to my late arrival in St. Louis after two flight cancellations in the aftermath of hurricane Hugo. I had read the lecture, and I well understand the pleasure its delivery brought. The other highlights of the meeting also deserved all the praise they drew. But the shortage of time for discussion of papers at the Saturday afternoon session proved most regrettable - the more because the same disappointment had marred one of the sessions in 1988. Frequently members of the Society have suggested ways of improving the annual meeting. The provision of adequate discussion time leads my list.

For 1990 a different format on Saturday afternoon and evening is being contemplated with rather more attention to social mixing even than hitherto - though how we could have been better regaled than by Ms. Fathman's groaning board at the Tower Park or Ms. Holt's after the production of *The Family Reunion*, I cannot imagine. Perhaps we shall spend more time out of doors if the weather allows, or under hatches, if it turns adverse.

The tenth year of the T. S. Eliot Society concludes with the number of members reassuringly high after the expected dip in enrollment after the Eliot Centenary excitement. It is more important to the Society that it should comprehend in its membership a good representation of (a) active Eliot scholars and (b) lovers of Eliot's poetry. These two categories cannot always coincide; it must not be taken for granted that those who love the poetry write articles and books about it - or conversely, indeed, that scholarship (even literary scholarship) fronts for love of poetry. There is never enough useful scholarship; but what has become of the ardor once described by the late Robert Penn Warren as firing up those college students who, in 1922-23, went chanting passages from *The Waste Land* on campus lawns? I hope that the T. S. Eliot Society will keep serving scholarship as it merits - the Society and the American Literature Association - but wouldn't some members like to have a fling at a chanting-
bee?

GROVER SMITH

SOCIETY PEOPLE

Society founder Dr. Leslie Konnyu, historian and geographer, has just published *Bettelheim, 1811-1870: Trailblazer of Western Civilization*. The Reverend Dr. Bernard J. Bettelheim was born in Hungary in 1811 and died in Brookfield, Missouri, in 1878 after a long and distinguished career in the Far East, in the course of which he made the first translation of the Anglican Bible into Ryuku-Japanese and Chinese languages. Dr. Konnyu's memorial tribute to Bettelheim is published trilingually in English, Hungarian and Japanese and has a cover by the artist Tibor Nagy. It is available from Dr. Konnyu, "American Hungarian Review," 5210 Kerth Road, St. Louis, Missouri, 63128 for \$10.00 in paperback or \$15.00 in hardcovers, plus \$1.34 for postage.

The First Unitarian Church of St. Louis celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of Reverend Earl Holt's ministry with a gala event on October 29, 1989. Mr. Holt was showered with greetings and congratulations from the many friends, colleagues, organizations, and institutions whose lives have been touched by his dedicated and energetic work in their city. The T. S. Eliot Society joined in the congratulations to Earl as well, and we are grateful ourselves to have been spared so much of his energy, wisdom and responsiveness to our needs and plans over the years.

Society member Robert F. Fleissner has recently published *A Rose by Another Name: A Survey of Literary Flora from Shakespeare to Eco* (Locust Hill Literary Studies No. 5). There are discussions of rose symbolism in Wilkie Collins, Conan Doyle and Umberto Eco as well as a chapter on T. S. Eliot's "multifoliate rose."

Father James Torrens writes dramatically from San Francisco that he was actually jotting down a few opening sentences for the review of *The Family Reunion* included in this issue when the quake hit. He found himself at the entrance of a shaking building on an unstable surface. Three hours later he was back at work on his review by candlelight! There were a few snags, later, in the printout process, due to loose connections, but all was well. Nothing made the events in San Francisco more immediate to us than Jim's note! Judging from the tone of the account, the earth may have been shaken, but he was not.

A CALL FOR PAPERS ON T. S. ELIOT TOPICS

To Our Members

The T. S. Eliot Society will participate in the first annual Conference sponsored by ALA (The American Literature Association) at the Bahia Resort Hotel, San Diego, California, on May 31 - June 3, 1990.

The ALA, a non-political alliance of literary societies with agenda concentrating on American writers and their works, will hold a large variety of sessions at each year's Conference. Under the terms of the Association, the T. S. Eliot Society determines the content of the Eliot portions of the program.

Neither ALA nor the T. S. Eliot Society assumes costs or liabilities in connections with the Conference. The arranged hotel rate is \$69 a night single, \$75 double. (The Grosvenor Inn, several miles distant, offers a rate of \$45 a night single or double.) There will be a Conference fee of \$25 (\$10 for retired persons and graduate students). ALA does not enroll memberships.

T. S. Eliot Society members should observe the following:

(1) Any Society member in good standing may submit Eliot papers for consideration. No one may read more than one paper during the Conference, e.g. for one or more author societies.

(2) Papers are limited to 15-20 minutes' reading time. Neither abstracts nor long papers will be considered. Papers must not have been published or publicly read prior to the Conference.

(3) Only a limited number of Eliot papers can be accepted. All decisions are final, and no correspondence about the selection process can be undertaken. Paper accompanied by return postage will be mailed back if not scheduled for reading.

(4) Persons not yet members of the T. S. Eliot Society must have joined for the calendar year 1990 prior to January 1 to have papers considered. (Dues/contribution \$15-up, to be sent to Linda Wyman, Treasurer, T. S. Eliot Society, 1121 E. McCarty Street, Jefferson City, MO 65101.)

(5) All Eliot papers must be received by February 1, 1990, and should be sent to the following address:

Grover Smith, President
T. S. Eliot Society
P. O. Box 6043
Durham, North Carolina 27708

BALLOT

Members of the T. S. Eliot Society

This list has been compiled as of November 13, 1989. The names of Contributing Members already in good standing for 1990 in addition to 1989 are indicated by an asterisk (*). All current members may vote in the announced Board election, and members for 1990 become entitled to submit papers to be considered for the ALA inaugural conference. Honorary Members, who have been elected by the Board, have full membership privileges and are exempt from the payment of dues.

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- *Jewel Spears Brooker, St. Petersburg, FL
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- *Rev. Earl K. Holt III, St. Louis, MO
- *Marilyn Holt, St. Louis, MO
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HONORARY MEMBERS

- Cleanth Brooks, New Haven, CT
- Valerie Eliot, London, England
- Donald Gallup, New Haven, CT
- Robert Giroux, New York, NY
- Andrew Osze, Vero Beach, FL

MEMBER'S BALLOT FOR ELECTION TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY (Term ending December 31, 1992)

You may vote for one:

Larry C. Melton
Ronald Schuchard

Signature _____ Dated _____ 1989

Mail by January 1, 1990 to: Dr. Vinnie-Marie D'Ambrosio, 405 Parkside Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, 11226