

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

NEWS & NOTES

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President's Message

One of the T. S. Eliot Society's principal ties to the literary profession is its affiliation with the American Literature Association. Since its inception six years ago, the ALA has grown from approximately thirty to nearly seventy constituent organizations, most of which are individual author societies. Its annual spring conference, which is held in San Diego and Baltimore in alternate years, has also been growing in size and scope. Much of its success is due to the energetic work of the executive director, Alfred Bendixen, who has a knack for finding attractive waterfront accommodations at ordinary convention rates.

The most recent ALA convention, which took place at the end of May in Baltimore, was the largest and most successful in the brief history of the association. The Eliot Society sponsored two sessions, the maximum for any one organization. The first session, devoted to Eliot's philosophical studies and their relationship to his poetry, was chaired by William Charron and featured presentations by Benjamin Lockerd, Jr., ("Pre-Heraclitus") and Ethan Lewis ("Eliot as 'Imagist': A Philosophical Perspective"). The other session, chaired by myself, included papers by Robert Abboud ("America Erect: Eliot and Emerson"), Lee Oser ("Poe, Eliot, and the Unreal City"), and Virginia Phelan ("Play it Again, Tom: Comic Re-Vision in *The Confidential Clerk*"). The attendance at each session ranged from twenty to twenty-five persons, not as many as we would have liked, but about as many as we could expect at a conference that runs six to seven sessions concurrently in a location offering a substantial number of enticing diversions.

Next year the ALA convention returns once again to the Bahia Hotel in San Diego. Due to the geographical distribution of its membership, the Eliot Society usually attracts fewer participants to the West Coast than to the East Coast meetings of the ALA. My hope is that we can put together at least one full session for May 1996. Anyone who is interested in proposing a session topic or in assembling a session should feel free to contact me at 465 Park Lane, State College, PA 16803 (814-867-3031; FAX 814-863-7285). Calls for individual papers will appear in the Fall *News & Notes*. Having attended the San Diego conference several years ago, I can say with some confidence that next year's ALA should prove to be as stimulating and collegial as this year's assembly in Baltimore.

Sanford Schwartz

Make Your Reservations at the Inn at the Park

The Inn at the Park, a Best Western facility, has been chosen as the headquarters motel for the annual meeting of the Society on September 22-24. Located at 4630 Lindell Boulevard, the Inn at the Park is in the same block as the Woman's Club, where most sessions of the annual meeting will take place. The Inn is near the entrance to Forest Park and within walking distance of many places of interest in the Central West End.

The room rate for either one or two persons is \$60 per night. The toll-free number to call is 800-373-7501; the FAX number is 314-367-9015. **September 8 is the cut-off date for reservations.**

Louis Menand to Give Memorial Lecture

President Sanford Schwartz has announced that Louis Menand, professor of English at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, will give the sixteenth annual Memorial Lecture at the annual meeting of the Society on September 23.

In the view of Samuel Hynes, Menand's *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context* (1987) is "a shrewd, witty, skeptical, altogether elegant essay."

Menand is also the author of other essays on Eliot, and he is co-editor with Leslie Berlowitz and Denis Donoghue of *America in Theory* (1988). He is a frequent contributor to *The New Republic* and *The New York Review of Books*.

Poetic Injustice

[Ed. note: The following article originally appeared in *National Review* for May 29, 1995. Its author, a member of the Society, is executive director of the T. S. Eliot Memorial Development Committee.]

St. Louis is a wonderfully self-conscious city and not a little celebratory about its unique history and geography at the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. As I discovered on a recent weekend visit, it is difficult to drive more than a few miles without seeing some reminder of St. Louis's or Missouri's great and diverse history. Statues of eminent citizens are found in the city's beautiful parks, in its tree-lined antique neighborhoods, and in the downtown areas near the Old Courthouse. The most notable architectural structure in St. Louis is the 630-foot stainless steel Gateway Arch, designed by Eero Saarinen to commemorate the city's historic role as "Gateway to the West."

But the shininess of the Arch is not typical of St. Louis's public style. The city thinks of itself, rather, as the epitome of an older, better idea of Midwestern urbanity, more oak paneling than stainless steel.

The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1880, is the second oldest in the United States. St. Louis is the home of five universities and numerous colleges, among them one of the best liberal arts schools in America, Washington University.

But then there is the matter of T. S. Eliot. In this city of cultural monuments there is no memorial, no garden, no library, no museum, no bronze bust, no marker, nothing that would tell the world it was the birthplace and childhood home of the greatest poet and literary critic of the modern era. At a time when Eliot's reputation is in the ascendancy, when he and his first wife are the subject of a popular (if unflattering) feature film, when his least important poems have been transformed into one of the most popular musicals in history, when academics are increasingly embracing the poet they were viciously attacking only twenty years ago, it is, from the perspective of St. Louis, as if he had never lived there.

Eliot was born at home on September 26, 1888, in a house that stood at 2635 Locust Street, near downtown. The house is long gone. That spot is now a paved parking lot, owned by Southwestern Bell.

When I inquired of the Southwestern Bell Foundation, headquartered in Texas, whether they would be willing to erect a memorial, or a small marker, or anything at all noting that it was Eliot's birthplace, I was told by the Foundation's president that "there isn't much interest in poets." I then approached the local district manager of Bell. I wrote him letters, exchanged telephone calls, and shared some ideas with him. He said he would consider them and get back to me.

I never heard from him again. Instead, I was put in touch with a community relations fellow who told me that Southwestern Bell "may have other plans" for the property.

So I tried the next best thing: the Danforth Foundation. The Danforth name is most famously associated with the Ralston Purina Company and Eveready Batteries and has its home office in St. Louis. William Danforth just retired as the chancellor of Washington University. I thought that if ever there were a project the Danforth Foundation might want to assist, it would be a memorial to T. S. Eliot. Alas, the director wrote me saying that the memorial fell outside the Foundation's funding priorities.

None of this should come as a surprise. In 1980, a Washington University spokesman said of Eliot, "We still consider him one of our favorite sons . . . but most of his generation is dead." While a great city, St. Louis is sometimes a distinctly parochial one.

The last push for an Eliot memorial was a study in provincialism. A prominent Hungarian-American, Dr. Leslie Konnyu, spent a great deal of time in the early 1970s working to establish a fitting tribute, only to have his efforts rejected, mostly out of indifference on the part of the city's leading residents.

But Konnyu would not be defeated. Out of a powerful artistic commitment, he privately commissioned sculptor Andrew Osze to create a small bronze plaque honoring Eliot, which Konnyu then tried to give to St. Louis.

"The enthusiasm from the community was sorely lacking" Konnyu was quoted as saying at the time. "There was even outright opposition. Some write him off because he was an expatriate . . . Others don't like the idea of his [early] negative poetry." In 1980, with a memorial in hand but no place to display it, Konnyu humbly affixed the 17-by-29-inch bronze plaque to his suburban ranch home in St. Louis's South County.

Eventually, Konnyu donated the plaque to the St. Louis Public Library, where it was re-dedicated in 1988 as a part of the T. S. Eliot Society's celebration of the centenary of Eliot's birth. Today the plaque is exhibited in a small locked room. To get in to see it, one must be assisted by a staff member.

It is an irony that St. Louis had a direct impact on much of Eliot's best poetry. Eliot said the title of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" came from a sign he had seen once in St. Louis—for the William Prufrock Furniture Company. The "yellow fog that rubs its back upon the windowpanes" was a St. Louis fog, he later said. And "the strong brown god" in "Four Quartets" clearly refers to the Mississippi. Eliot even made two famous return trips to Missouri, in 1953 and 1959. On these occasions, he spoke warmly about growing up in St. Louis.

Eliot never lost his love for the region, admitting that "Missouri and the Mississippi have made a deeper impression on me than has any other part of the world." His Irish nursemaid took him as a child to see bison in Forest Park (now an exclusive, leafy part of town), and he loved to hear the steamboat whistles from the river. He always remembered St. Louis, though it doesn't seem to remember him.

St. Louis at its best is too dynamic a city, too sensitive to poetry and the arts, to forget one of its greatest sons.

Eliot is an essential part not only of St. Louis's literary history but also of the Midwest's contribution to American and Western literature. It is, in the words Eliot used in "Ash Wednesday," appropriate that we now "redeem the time."

Timothy Goeglein

Editor Seeks Addresses of TSE Societies Abroad

Some members of the Society who do not live in the United States are members of Eliot societies in their own countries. The editor would like to establish a directory of T. S. Eliot societies throughout the world and invites readers having pertinent information to send it to Linda Wyman, 621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO, 65101, USA. If possible, please include the name of a contact person, a mailing address, and an e-mail address and/or FAX number.

A Second Call for Notes on Teaching Eliot

Recognizing that the future of Eliot studies and the future of the Society depend on students' learning to read Eliot, the editor intends to publish a series of notes on successful teaching practices for Eliot's poetry and plays. The first such note, by Professor Elisabeth Däumer of Eastern Michigan University, appeared in the Spring 1995 issue.

The editor invites submissions of about 500 words. Please indicate for whom the course is intended (e.g., general students, undergraduate English majors, graduate students), and please give a telephone number where you may be reached.

The T. S. Eliot Society

congratulates

Joan Fillmore Hooker and John A. Karel

on their election to the Board of Directors

and thanks them

for their willingness to serve.

For Help with Society Matters . . .

● To submit papers for any reading session sponsored by the Society or to make suggestions or inquiries regarding the annual meeting or other Society activities, please contact the president:

Sanford Schwartz, Department of English
22 Burrowes Building, University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-3069; FAX: (814) 863-7285

● For all matters regarding the content of *News & Notes*, please contact the vice-president, who edits *News & Notes*:

Linda Wyman
621-6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO 65101
(314) 681-5195 (office), (314) 634-5431 (home)
FAX: (314) 681-5566

● To pay dues, inquire about membership, report a change of address, or report failure to receive *News & Notes*, please contact the treasurer:

William Charron
709 S. Skinker, #401, St. Louis, MO 63105
(314) 863-6550

● Persons having business with the secretary are advised to contact her directly:

Mildred M. Boaz
603 Radliff Rd., Bloomington, IL 61701
(212) 424-6256; FAX: (217) 424-3993

Dues

Members who have not yet paid their 1995 dues are reminded to send them to the treasurer:

William Charron
709 S. Skinker, #401
St. Louis, MO 63105

Of Dates and Infamy

The editor deeply regrets her grievous error in reporting the dates of the 1995 annual meeting. The correct dates are September 22-24.

Annual Meeting -- September 22-24, 1995

Program of Events

Friday, September 22 *The Inn at the Park*

4:00 p.m. **Board of Directors Meeting**

6:30 p.m. **Registration**

7:00 p.m. **Welcome**

Sanford Schwartz, President

Presentations:

Nancy Hargrove
"Eliot and the Dance"

Peter Puchek
"History as Pagan Whirlwind:
The Tenuous Christianity of
Eliot's 'Gerontion'"

Jewel Brooker
"Crack-up: Eliot, Descartes, and
the Mind of Europe"

8:30 p.m. **Open Forum of Society Members**

Saturday, September 23 *The Woman's Club*

9:30 a.m. **Greetings**

Sanford Schwartz

Presentations:

Linda Wyman, Chair

David Thompson
"Casting Lots: Eliot's 'Burbank'
and the Possibility of Identity"

Elizabeth Däumer
"Charlotte Eliot and *Ash
Wednesday's* Lady of Silences"

10:30 a.m. **Interlude**

11:15 a.m. **Sixteenth Annual T. S. Eliot Memorial
Lecture**

Louis Menand
"T. S. Eliot and Modernity"

12:30 p.m. **Lunch**
Reservation and payment required in
advance of the annual meeting (see
registration form).

Various afternoon activities, including readings of
Eliot's work.

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6:30 p.m. **Dinner** *4967 Pershing Place,
the home of Anthony
and Melanie Fathman*

Reservation and payment required in
advance of the annual meeting (see
registration form).

Sunday, September 24 *First Unitarian Church 5007 Waterman Boulevard*

9:30 a.m. **Sermon**

Rev. Earl K. Holt III

11:00 a.m. **Forum**

Mildred M. Boaz, Chair

David Partenheimer
"*The Waste Land* and 'Desolation
Row': The Apocalyptic Archetype"

David Huisman
"Neither Bang nor Whimper: Notes
towards the Detonation of Closure"