

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Number 28

Spring 1996

Published by the T. S. Eliot Society (incorporated in the State of Missouri as a literary non-profit organization), 5007 Waterman Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri 63108

Eliot-Pound Society Formed in China

Professor Lu Wen bin reports the establishment of the T. S. Eliot-Pound Society in Dalian, China, in October 1995. Professor Lu Wen bin was elected president.

Forty-four scholars from all parts of China attended the meeting. A total of 14 presentations dealt with Eliot's poems, plays, and criticism.

Members of the newly formed society have decided to "put both T. S. Eliot's and Pound's works into Chinese and to write a series of books to introduce their works and literary theory to . . . Chinese readers."

President Lu Wen bin has expressed his society's need for "the help and support" of the T. S. Eliot Society. Readers of *T. S. Eliot Society Newsletter* who would like to express their interest in, and support of, the Chinese society--and perhaps even to send books--may wish to make note of the following address:

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Eliot Society Sponsors ALA Session

The T. S. Eliot Society sponsored a session at the American Literature Association meeting held in San Diego on May 30 through June 2. The session was organized and chaired by Sanford Schwartz, president of the Society.

Papers were given by Benjamin Lockerd (Grand Valley State University), "Eliot's Aristotle: 'In my telos is my beginning'"; Patricia Sloan (City University of New York), "Pun and Games: A New Approach to Five Early Poems by T. S. Eliot"; and Ethan Lewis (University of Illinois at Springfield), "Prelude and Meditation: How We Read *Four Quartets*."

An entry for the T. S. Eliot Society will appear in the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, the standard reference guide to associations, societies, and other nonprofit organizations.

Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the T. S. Eliot Society
St. Louis, September 27-29, 1996
Memorial Lecturer: Marianne Thormählen,
University of Lund (Sweden)

Charlotte Eliot and *Ash-Wednesday's*
Lady of Silences

Abstract of a paper presented at the
1995 annual meeting of the Society

Biographers of T. S. Eliot have tended to portray Charlotte Eliot as a frustrated artist who redirected her thwarted literary ambitions into stifling concern for her youngest and gifted son. Even when well-intentioned, such portrayals have worked to obscure this mother's actual accomplishments, both as a religious poet and as a social reformer, while casting a predominantly negative light on her unceasing involvement in her son's poetic and personal life. I challenge this biographical view by suggesting that Charlotte Eliot's literary and social ambitions (which found support in specifically Victorian notions of maternal authority) nurtured in her son the conviction that women held an authoritative and influential position with regard to language and culture.

In addition, I explore how this conviction may have energized Eliot's effort in *Ash-Wednesday* to symbolize the mother as the "author" of the speaker's transformation and resurrection into a new self. The poem achieves this symbolization by combining, in the figure of the Lady of Silences, allusions to both the Blessed Virgin and such pagan fertility goddesses as Isis, who mournfully sacrifices and then ecstatically reassembles and resurrects her spouse (who is, as well, her son and brother). In her dual aspect of Mary and Isis, Eliot's Lady of Silences recuperates for Mary her ancient power as both destroyer and bestower of life. For even as the three white leopards, ambiguously associated with the Lady, represent the forces of dissolution and regression, the very death effected by them of the speaker as a unified, cognizant self makes possible his resurrection into a new self and thus his spiritual and artistic growth.

Bringing to bear recent psychoanalytic efforts to rearticulate the role of maternal subjectivity in compelling the infant's individuation, I argue that the symbolization in *Ash-Wednesday* of the mother as author points to the poem's muted dramatization of a mother-centered narrative of conversion, which, from a psychoanalytic point of view, is also a narrative of coming into language and identity. This mother-centered narrative originates in the inaugural poem of *Ash-Wednesday*, "Salutation"--which recaptures the speaker's shattering encounter with maternal autonomy or difference--and culminates in section VI with the speaker's prayer to the matriarchal trinity of "Blessed sister, holy Mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the sea," which concludes in the speaker's plea: "Suffer me not to be separated / And let my cry come unto Thee." Echoing the infant's spontaneous cry in the adult's plea for reconnection and communion with the mother, this concluding prayer contradicts the poem's dominant narrative of conversion, invoked in allusions to St. John's negative mysticism, and counterpoints it with an alternative narrative, in which the mother herself, endowed with divine authority, guides the speaker's individuation and conversion.

Elisabeth Däumer
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David Partenheimer
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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:

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Eliot Society Members to Figure Prominently in London Conference

Jewel Spears Brooker, past president of the T. S. Eliot Society, has organized and will direct an Eliot conference in London on July 25-28. The title of the conference is "Time Past and Time Future: An International Symposium on T. S. Eliot and Our Turning World."

Although the conference is unrelated to the T. S. Eliot Society, ten of the 15 papers to be presented at the conference will be given by Society members, all by invitation. Among those participating are Richard Badenhansen, Brooker, William Charron, Lee Oser, Christopher Ricks, and Ronald Schuchard, all from the United States, and William F. Blissett (Canada), Maria Teresa Gilbert-Maceda (Spain), Tatsuo Murata (Japan), and Marianne Thormählen (Sweden).

Information on registration and housing is available from Anna Brooke by FAX at 011-44-171-580-7352.



Watch Summer Issue for Details of Annual Meeting

Program details for the seventeenth annual meeting, to be held in St. Louis on September 27-29, will be revealed by President Sanford Schwartz in the summer issue of the *Newsletter*, which members may expect to receive in August.

Full registration information will also be provided by Treasurer William Charron in the summer issue.



Books Sought for TSE "Reading Wall"

Eliot Society member Donna Charron reports that the Midtown Arts Center is establishing a T. S. Eliot reading wall in its St. Louis Authors' Library at 3207 Washington Avenue, just blocks from Eliot's boyhood home.

Persons who have extra copies of critical studies on Eliot or of major Eliot sources are asked to consider donating them to the Midtown Arts Center, which is able to supply a tax credit for donations.