

# T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

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### Call for Papers ALA 2001: Boston, MA

The annual conference of the American Literature Association will be held from May 24 to 27, 2001. The T. S. Eliot Society will sponsor one or two sessions. Papers must not be longer than 20 minutes. No person may present more than one paper at the conference, and chairs may not present a paper on panels they are moderating.

Members of the Society who have suggestions for organizing a topical session are urged to contact Shyamal Bagchee immediately. He may be reached at Department of English, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, CANADA T6G 2E5; ph. (780) 492-3258, fax: (780) 492-8142, email: shyamal.bagchee@ualberta.ca.. Members who wish to submit one-page proposals for individual papers are invited to do so by January 20, 2001.

**Nominations for Board Positions:** Four positions on the T. S. Eliot Society Board of Directors have become vacant, including one because of the election of Benjamin Lockerd as Vice-President. Members of the Society are invited to make nominations to the Board. Members may make multiple nominations; a person must be nominated by at least five members of the Society for her or his name to appear on the ballot. Members of the Board are eligible to succeed themselves.

Nominations may be sent by February 15, 2001 to the Supervisor of Elections, Linda Wyman, 621 - 6 Woodlander, Jefferson City, MO 65101; fax (573) 681-5040; email: <wyman@lincolnu.edu>

### A few words from the President

How the words of T. S. Eliot do inform one's consciousness! It is not at all that one looks to him for a quotation to dress up one's thinking, but rather that his words are often what one, otherwise *lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes*, thinks *with*. As I look back over a three-year term as President of the Society, I am glad of so many things:

\*the way that Society meetings, and Society programs, reflect *the easy commerce of the old and the new*. In the past three

years, at least 15 out of 26 papers delivered at our annual meetings have been given by persons speaking before the Society for the first time, and eight more persons have made their Society debuts at our ALA sessions. Those figures say something to me about the vigor of Eliot studies. Along with these new voices, we have had papers from familiar Eliot critics, continuing to challenge and enlighten long after their eminence has been established.

- the continuing contributions of international members of the Society, who now come from 14 countries. Persons from eight countries have attended annual meetings in the past three years.
- the joy of hearing Eliot read aloud in the opening session of Society meetings.
- the acknowledgment by program participants that a critic must have a very highly developed sense of fact and that "interpretation" . . . is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all. But . . . putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed.
- the insistence, in recently delivered papers, on clear language—*the common word exact without vulgarity, / The formal word precise but not pedantic*.
- the exciting and luminous Memorial Lectures of two self-proclaimed "non-Eliotists," Helen Vendler and Carl Phillips.
- the unifying transcendence of "Eliot Sundays" at First Unitarian church, St. Louis, and particularly of this most recent one.
- the seriousness, dedication, good humor, patience, and kindness of members of the Society, and especially of members of the Board.

*What might have been and what has been /  
Point to one end, which is always present.*

Linda Wyman

### Honorary Membership Conferred on Grover Smith

At its September 2000 meeting, the Society's Board of Directors voted to make Dr. Grover Smith an Honorary Member, in recognition of his contributions to Eliot scholarship and his service to the Eliot Society. Who knows not Grover Smith? His 1956 book *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and*

*Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* immediately became an essential reference for all Eliot scholars, and it remains essential today, nearly half a century later. It is a work of deep and wide learning, profound in its insights and encyclopedic in its range. Nearly everyone who has written on Eliot knows the experience of discovering something new and exciting, only to find upon checking this book that Smith had already made the discovery decades earlier. Since then, Smith has published many articles and reviews, as well as a book on *The Waste Land* and a collection of recent articles entitled *T. S. Eliot and the Use of Memory*. His most recent published essay, "T. S. Eliot and the Fragmented Selves: From 'Suppressed Complex' to *Sweeney Agonistes*" (*PQ* 77: 417-37), is a typically erudite and fascinating piece exploring the way Eliot uses in his poetry the psychological phenomenon of dissociated personalities.

Dr. Smith has been a leading light of The T.S. Eliot Society. He served on its Board of Directors for many years and held at one time or another nearly every office in the Society. His responses to ideas of other scholars presented at the annual meeting—always serious and critical but genial as well—have helped shape many works in progress. He may justly be called the dean of Eliot critics, and now that he no longer holds any office, it is fitting that the Society should mark his efforts and influence by appointing him an Honorary Member. [BL]

### Highlights of the Meeting of the Board, September 22, 2000

Present for the annual meeting of the Board were officers Linda Wyman, Shyamal Bagchee, William Charron, and David Huisman, and members Michael Coyle, Melanie Fathman, William Harmon, Earl Holt, Benjamin Lockerd, and Jayme Stayer.

- **Jayne Stayer** (*Texas A&M University-Commerce*) was congratulated upon his election to the Board.
- **Benjamin G. Lockerd, Jr.** (*Grand Valley State University*) was elected vice-president. His term will begin on January 1, 2001.
- **William C. Charron** (*St. Louis University*) was re-elected treasurer.
- **Grover Smith** (*Duke University*, emeritus), was elected an honorary member of the Society.

Three amendments to the by-laws were approved:

**Amendment XI** (Clarifying Article II, Section 3):

**HONORARY:** HONORARY (non-dues-paying, lifetime) membership may be conferred on friends and students of T. S. Eliot, distinguished for service in perpetuating the memory of the poet and knowledge of his work.

**Amendment XII** (Expanding Article IV, Section 3):

The Board of Directors may, from time to time, elect individuals to honorary membership, the total not to exceed ten. Society members may nominate individuals for honorary memberships by submitting their names to the President of the

Society at least two months before the Annual Meeting. Board Members may not be nominated during their terms of office. The President shall notify honorees of their election, and, upon their acceptance, publish the list of honorees annually in the Newsletter.

**Amendment XIII:**

The Board of Directors may, from time to time, confer Distinguished Service Awards on members who have rendered the Society notable service of long duration or distinction. Society members may nominate recipients by submitting their names to the President of the Society at least two months before the Annual Meeting. In the year following establishment of this award, multiple awards may be conferred, subsequently, up to two awards may be conferred annually. The President shall announce awards at the Annual Meeting and publish the names of current recipients in the Newsletter. Recipients will be presented appropriate diplomas of the Distinguished Service Award.

- *A Website* for the Society will be established soon.
- *The 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society will be held September 28-30, 2001, in St Louis.*

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### ABSTRACTS: Annual Meeting 2000

#### Aesthetic Unity and Religious Failure in *The Waste Land*

Katey Kuhns Castellano  
Bucknell University

The *Waste Land's* well-known scenes of attempted transcendence testify to a failure which, I want to suggest, will amount to a form of paradoxical spiritual insight. The collage of voices in the frequent allusions to disparate religious traditions harmonizes into a consistent and identifiable theme of religions' inefficacy in leading to transcendence. Forming an aesthetic unity based on this archetypal dilemma, this poem illustrates the paradox that perhaps the only shared human condition is our separateness and dissatisfaction, especially in regard to the search for an elusive God(s). While other critics have claimed that *The Waste Land* ends in spiritual transcendence of desire through asceticism, I would like to suggest that the poem's quest ends with no other transcendence than the unified aesthetic representation of an all-encompassing failure and confusion. This ending seems not only consistent with the theme of unrealized spiritual fulfillment woven through the poem, but it also may represent a nascent postmodern theology that posits God as unknowable and indeterminable. In a 1916 review of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Eliot wrote, "By uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object individuals become and feel

themselves to be in unison." Eliot may have had a similar notion in mind when he wrote *The Waste Land*; its disparate religious allusions all point to similar failure, yet their similarity in disparity—their shared cry—effects aesthetic unity. This interpretation may not seem appropriate when reading Eliot's notes on the last line, in which he claims the "Shantih" is similar in meaning to Phillipians 4:7, which reads, "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds." However, this hopeful note is not reinforced anywhere in Part V and definitely not in the last stanza. So what does Eliot mean by this note? Perhaps it is another dose of ironic humor, comparable to the "drip drop" repetition about water that cannot be found, or the rattling bones that failed to be revived as promised. In spite of the disappointment and hopeless incoherence that may follow such an amassed failure of so many different religious traditions, there remains a unity—a shared cry—in the theme of a quest for spiritual transcendence that will remain elusive. Thus, this final line can be interpreted to mean that the "peace that passes understanding" is found in accepting, as a universal condition, the failure of religious transcendence, and that failure, as it is aesthetically dignified in the poem, may well be at least a temporary refuge from despair.

#### Eliot and Goethe\*

R. Fleissner  
Central State University

Eliot felt he could recognize objectively Goethe's "wisdom while lingering strongly with some of his beliefs" (Noonan).\*\* He did try to revise his views on the German savant fully in his "Goethe as the Sage" address (originally presented at Hamburg Univ., then included in his collection *On Poetry and Poets*). To what extent did he relate Goethe to the Romantic movement, for the German genius is normally not considered a part of it? (We are reminded of his well-known comment that "Romanticism is sick, Classicism healthy.") Eliot did connect Goethe to some extent with Wordsworth, though, in terms of their both seeing God in Nature. Cf. Goethe's saying "Gefühl ist alles." In any event, too often Eliot's comments on Goethe are relegated simply to the remarks in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems," in which he referred to "minds" that "often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization." He then gave examples, the first being "Such a mind had Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther"; he then compared the Romantic poet Coleridge; he added that "neither of these men in writing about Hamlet remembered that his first business was to study a work of art." In other words, he found their views too subjective. But this fundamentally related to Eliot's being himself "Catholic" in religion and "Puritan" in his mode of living, as he put it. He originally did not allow for enough interplay.

My main focus has been on the *Hamlet-Faust* correlation

as brought out in my book *The Prince and the Professor* (Heidelberg UP, 1982) and thus related to Eliot's view of *Hamlet*, a play to which Goethe was somewhat indebted, as is well recognized. Insofar as *Faust* ends on a cheerful, life-sustaining note, and *Hamlet* ends somewhat unhappily, they are still markedly different. But because Eliot down-sized *Hamlet* in his famous essay on the subject, it is thus encouraging that he saw redeemable features in Goethe's play. He cited the two dramas in conjunction with each other ("What can be more English than *Hamlet* or more German than *Faust*?"). In his essay "Religion and Literature," he simply preferred *Faust*, that is when we are critically "applying ourselves to Shakespeare . . . and Goethe." He likewise referred to Goethe's play along with *Hamlet* in his essay "The Possibility of a Poetic Drama," preferring Goethe's work to Shakespeare's. This acknowledgment came late in life. Eliot's essay "Goethe as the Sage" also came late but was sincere (though some skeptics have found it a bit "staged"). What is more, he continually kept a picture of the Weimar genius hung up in his London office.

\* In Memory of Allen Koppenhaver, Historian, T. S. Eliot Society

\*\* James Noonan, "Poetry and Belief in the Criticism of T. S. Eliot" (1972) as cited in Robert Canary, *T. S. Eliot: The Poet and His Critics* (Chicago: American Lib. Assn., 1982) 71.

#### CAUGHT IN THE CIRCLE: THE PARADOX OF EVOLUTION AND PERSONAL PROGRESS IN *ASH-WEDNESDAY*

Lois A. Cuddy  
University of Rhode Island

"I went in search of myself" (Heraclitus)

I launched with zest into the exploration of my own mind, curious to discover what I might find there."  
(T. S. Eliot)

This is a brief outline of the narrative process operating in *Ash-Wednesday*:

*Parts I and VI* define the poet's conclusions about his character, his life, and his state of mind in 1930.

*Part II* recounts the struggles and defeats associated with the early *Inferno* period of his life from "Prufrock" through most of *The Waste Land*.

*Part III* tells the poet's attempts to mount the purgatorial stairs where he remains immobile on the third stair representing Dante's "satisfaction by works" (*Purg.*, IX).

*Parts IV and V* examine the reasons he is unable to gain "satisfaction" through his "works":

*Part IV* deals with the capacities and limitations of the "pure poetic imagination";

*Part V* questions the poet's verbal achievements and the inade-

quacy of words in the expression of reality, dreams, and the spirit.

*Parts VI and I* admit the nature of the personal weaknesses that persist to keep him on the third stair and thus deny him the "satisfaction" he should enjoy to proceed in his ascent and to be worthy of God.

*Part VI* shows him temporarily immobilized;

*Part I* is both an introduction and summary by giving the reasons for his immobility and creating the circle that is the philosophical design of his poetic quest to return "home" with new understanding.

*Ash-Wednesday*, then, recapitulates the steps and circular structure of Eliot's psychological and spiritual journey from his origins to the present in 1930.

### 'That Uncorruptible Sincerity of Word': Eliot's Dryden and the Absence of Hopkins

Christopher Wilkins  
Boston University

In analyzing what he called 'critical times', T.S. Eliot often found true what Yeats once wrote about who it is that is 'filled with passionate intensity. No judgment did he make of intensity itself, but what the intensity was for, where passion led, and whether either strengthened one's understanding. This led him to revive terms like orthodoxy, tradition, blasphemy, and heresy, which before him lay in long, dogmatic slumbers, and cast with them a prism's light on religious and cultural analyses through literature. This is a vital area of research which scholars of T.S. Eliot should not ignore.

Eliot named, and enabled others to name, as heresies intractable errors in poetic form, in the imagination, and of the nature of things as they are and as they seem. He did so particularly by means of *After Strange Gods: a Primer of Modern Heresy*, his most neglected and misunderstood work of literary and social criticism. Such errors took an acute perception or profound insight beyond their proper sphere, and thereby fueled means of thought and expression which became impure, and unable to address the concerns of their time.

Both John Dryden and Gerard Hopkins faced, as Roman Catholics, the question of how to integrate the truth as they knew it in their religion, with their cultural heritage as presented through English language and literature. For Eliot, Hopkins faced poorly a challenge which Dryden met well, because of his (Dryden's) ability to articulate how the creative and constructive imagination could make wholly new things appear also as things found again, or things recalled, in their being made new. Faulting such of Hopkins' works as were available to him as offering perception after perception without analysis or development, Eliot spoke of him little. Dryden, in restoring English poetry to the condition of speech which retaining the fine psychological and spiritual distinctions available in early modern English theology, taught Eliot how an integrated

orthodoxy within a living tradition was possible for users of words. Dryden's 'uncorruptible sincerity' defeated heresy as Eliot understood it, and was all the more strengthened for this defeat.

With it, Dryden offered Eliot something Hopkins could not: a catholic, orthodox, and traditional foundation for controlling and making intentional one's use of words. Such a foundation realizes that words purify only when they have a basis outside of themselves - in the speech which receives them and in the imagination which creates them - a basis which one does not have unless one has made it wholly one's own. This, basis enables what Eliot called 'a living and central tradition' to flourish in a virtuous circle by which novel insights meld with received wisdom in an ever-purifying language which in turn enables acute perception, profound insight, and attention to all that humans have realized and preserved in their cultures.

### "What Tiresias Sees":

#### *The Waste Land's Revision of Mythic Paradigms*

Venus S. Freeman  
Thontosassa, Fl.

For many critics, T. S. Eliot's "mythic method," mythic allusions, myth in some form, are central to understanding *The Waste Land*. Even the criticisms of Eliot's work as irretrievably elitist depend on the highly allusive nature of his *magnum opus*.

While I will not dispute the importance of allusion to Eliot's work, I will argue that a reconsideration of the function of myth is in order precisely because it has been so central to our understanding of the poem. My paper will focus on "The Fire Sermon." Though many critics have been driven to distraction by Eliot's infamous note to line 218, concerning "what Tiresias sees," few have actually given *what Tiresias sees* any close attention. Moreover, we have failed to take into account the significant revisions of classical myth established in this scene, revisions embodied in the figure of Tiresias himself. These revisions, in turn, carry far-reaching implications for *The Waste Land* as a whole and its depiction of women.

### The Upset of Time in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and in "Edwin Morris"

Marcia Kay  
Boston University

While the first lines to Tennyson's "Godiva" are a "Once upon a time ..." and "The Epic," the frame to his "Morte d'Arthur," is a "Once upon our time the opening to "Edwin Morris" is a "Once upon my time ..." And then there is "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in which indeed there is a time, a special time that is as much place as time: *where* and *how* Prufrock is, and only coincidentally *when*. He promises to be a man of action—

Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'

Let us go and make our visit.

But his visit is wholly verbal. He tells us what is or always is, or always has been. The time to act is future time: *And indeed there will be time*. He can't make a beginning, even a presumption, a hint, of a beginning to action. Nothing changes in his world. *For I have known them all already, known them all—; I have gone at dusk through narrow streets*. The present perfect is an omnipresent in which things that happen, or might, are always happening, or have happened and are finished, yielding dubious result, if yielding anything. Action is paralyzed not only by indecisions and revisions, but as well by grammar.

*And* is the great narrative device in the poem. There are ten *And*s in "Prufrock" that substitute for the passage of time or for causal relations; Prufrock rarely tips his hand with more explicit conjunctions. Prufrock Central Time is a hypothetical, perpetual time. Of course the attendant lord can't force the moment to its crisis. He would have then to acknowledge that there are moments.

The unnamed speaker in Tennyson's "Edwin Morris" is, however, a man who exists in time. Yet, he too is a self-proclaimed fool:

Though if, in dancing after Letty Hill,  
I do not hear the bells upon my cap,  
I scarce have other music:

He, too, moves through a fog—though his is the friendly mist of morn. And though aunts and pugs and uncles, trustees and poodles and cousins—voices animal and human—wake him, he does not drown. His self-prediction, *Time will set me right*, saves him. As if the poem is its own lake of pleasant rambles and the embrace with Letty Hill a stone dropped into it, the opening and closing, situated in the present, form a surrounding ring of ripples from where this man of solid stuff can dip into the past, where he dares to love and to act on his love.

And always there is Prufrock, who sets about to set time, not trusting either to himself or to time. Moving (or not moving) through Prufrock Central, where the present has always been and the future has already become past, he dares not suffer time's tolls or needs to, as long as sleeping fogs are let lie.

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### Donald Gallup, 1913-2000

We regret to inform members that Donald Gallup, bibliographer *extra ordinaire* and an Honorary Member of the Society, passed away this fall at the age of 87. There can hardly be a student of modern literature who has not been indebted to Gallup's masterly bibliographical work on Eliot, Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Eugene O'Neill, to name only a few major figures of the American literary landscape. Numerous scholars have experienced the warmth of his helpful personality, and his enthusiasm for the indispensable collections of manuscripts, periodicals and documents he built up at Yale. Most importantly, however, all students of Eliot of my generation recall vividly Gallup's 1968 article in *The Times Literary Supplement* describing meticulously the very recently

discovered manuscripts of *The Waste Land*--and adding an entirely new dimension to the study of Eliot's life and works. In Gallup's death the Society has lost an invaluable friend and supporter. [SB]

This is the last issue of the *Newsletter* to be published from Edmonton. It now moves into the able hands of the Vice-President, Benjamin Lockerd. Over the last three years my work on it has been made possible by the guidance and help of several individuals. In particular, I wish to express my thanks to William Charron, Nancy Goldfarb, William Harmon, Grover Smith and Linda Wyman of the Society; I am indebted to Ms. Theresa Daniels and Ms. Marina Menzes of the UofA English Department Office for their unfailing patience and dedicated assistance; finally, I have been kept going in more ways than I can enumerate by my family: Sumana, Shohini, and Shreyo. Thanks to all, and best wishes Ben. [SB]

### 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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To pay dues, inquire about membership, report a change of address, or report failure to receive the *Newsletter*, please contact the Treasurer:

William Charron  
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(616) 452-0478

\* Shyamal Bagchee becomes the Society's president on January 1, 2001; on that day Benjamin J. Lockerd Jr. assumes the position of vice-president, and can be reached at English Department, Grand Valley State University, Lake Huron Hall, Allendale, MI 49401, USA; email: lockerd@gvsu.edu. Linda Wyman will be our new Supervisor of Elections.



**SOCIETY WEBSITE**

**The site is currently under active preparation. Members who have images suitable for use on the site are requested to contact Shyamal Bagchee, early and preferably by email.**

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