

# Time Present

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## Book Reviews

**Craig Raine. *T. S. Eliot*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.**

Reviewed by Jayme Stayer  
Universidad Centroamericana

Like many a desperate teacher, I have hurled at my undergraduates any number of arguments—some of them contradictory—for why the citation of sources and the situation of one's position are such essential skills. But until I read Craig Raine's *T. S. Eliot*, I never realized how my habits of wide reading and meticulous footnoting were products of my own anxiety: the neurotic fear that I'm going to say something howlingly stupid.

Raine seems to suffer from no such crippling distress, nor, fortunately, does he say anything howlingly stupid. In fact, his newest book is full of interesting insights, though few of them are connected to the critical dialogue that surrounds Eliot's work. You will enjoy this book if you keep three things in mind: that Raine has a lively, suggestive intelligence, rather than a head for lengthy, intricate argument; that the book is addressed to a general audience rather than to Eliot specialists; and that Raine is a poet-essayist, rather than a critic, historian, or scholar.

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## Ferrari Window Rededication

David Huysman  
On behalf of the T. S. Eliot Society

Little Gidding, 20 May 2007

It is a distinct honor and pleasure to share in this rededication ceremony and to bring greetings from the American T. S. Eliot Society, founded twenty-eight years ago in Eliot's hometown of St. Louis. When the Society visited here in 2004, Canon Bill Girard suggested that we might wish to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Eliot's visit in 1936, perhaps by placing a sundial in the precincts of the church. As Secretary of the Society's Board of Directors, I was charged with exploring the feasibility of such a memorial. It soon became clear that a project of this complexity, conducted at a great distance, presented formidable difficulties; whereupon I inquired of the Friends of Little Gidding whether a contribution to the restoration of the church fabric might be appropriate. Such an alternative would not only solve the logistical problem, but directly involve the Society in preserving a place of religious, historical, and literary

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## Eliot at the ALA: Call for Papers

The T. S. Eliot Society will sponsor two ninety-minute sessions at the 2008 Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, May 22–25, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Francisco. Please send proposals or abstracts (up to 250 words), along with a curriculum vitae, electronically to professor William Harmon (wharmon03@mindspring.com). Submissions must be received no later than January 15, 2008. Information on the association and the 2008 meeting is available at [www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/ala2](http://www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/ala2).

## Eliot at the MLA

Ed Madden of the University of South Carolina has organized a session at the upcoming convention of the Modern Language Association called “Tiresian Poetics: Modernism, Sex Change, and Mythographies of Power and Pleasure.” Professor Madden explains that while “the papers focus on Joyce, Woolf, and H.D., Eliot is inevitably part of the context of the thinking of this session.” The session is to be held on Friday, Dec. 28, 8:30–9:45 AM, in the Burnham room at the Hyatt Regency Chicago.

## Public Sightings

“April is the Coolest Month.” (*Columbia University Alumni E-Newsletter*, April 2007.) This caption headed a list of campus events.

“April is the (something) Month.” (Patrick T. Reardon, in the *Chicago Tribune*, 2 April 2007.) This short article continues: “T. S. Eliot famously called April the cruelest month, but that hasn’t stopped advocates for a wide array of causes, hobbies, foods, products and activities to [sic] claim it for their own.” A lengthy list follows, including, for example, National Autism Awareness Month, National Humor Month, National Poetry Month, National Welding Month, and Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

“The poet T. S. Eliot famously called April the cruelest month. What an idiot.” (Stephen Hunter, in the *Washington Post*, 10 Oct. 2007.) “No, by far October is the cruelest month,” continues this essay, titled “A Farewell to Arms (...and Legs and Ankles and Toes and Shoulders and Necks and...)” October, according to the writer, is cruel because it is “the month the flesh goes away.” It is in October, in other words, that women begin to dress for the cold. Celebrating the sensuous elegance of exposed flesh, the essay concludes by looking forward to the day “when April, the kindest month, finally arrives.”

## Society Notes

Nicholas Birns’s *Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900*, co-edited with Rebecca McNeer, has just appeared from Camden House. He recently taught a series of seminars on the Gospel of Luke at Grace Church in New York.

Will Gray has begun work toward the PhD in English at the University of St. Andrews. He will be studying with Robert Crawford—the Society’s 2005 Memorial Lecturer—and writing on Eliot’s evolving relationship with the metaphysical poets. His wife, Alison, who attended our London meeting with him in 2004, will be taking the MLitt in Creative Writing.

Nancy Hargrove’s article “T. S. Eliot’s Year Abroad, 1910–1911: The Visual Arts” has been awarded the 2007 *South Atlantic Review* Essay Prize for the best essay published in the journal last year. Nancy was presented with the award (along with a plaque and a check) at the annual conference of the South Atlantic MLA in November. The essay comes from her nearly completed book on TSE and Paris. She expresses her thanks to the members of the Eliot Society for their “great suggestions” over the years, and especially to Marianne Thormählen and Cyrena Pondrom for their generous readings of an early draft of the essay.

Lee Oser has been on a publishing tear, with three books and a poem appearing in 2007 alone. The poem, “Dates,” appeared in the *National Review* on January 29. The books include *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, and Beckett* (Cambridge UP); *The Return of Christian Humanism: Chesterton, Eliot, Tolkien and the Romance of History* (U of Missouri P); and *Out of What Chaos: A Novel* (Scarith)—described by one reviewer as “a loving and yet appalled description of the underground music scene in the Pacific Northwest.”

Leon Surette’s new book, *The Dilemma of the Modern: Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot and Humanism*, is forthcoming from McGill-Queens in 2008.

James Matthew Wilson has moved to East Carolina University as an assistant professor. His daughter, Livia Grace, was born last September.

*Please send your own news and “public sightings” to David Chinitz (dchinit@luc.edu) for a future issue of Time Present.*

## Ferrar Window Rededication

(continued from p. 1)

significance, a place where, in Eliot's words, "prayer has been valid."

The response was an invitation to underwrite the restoration of the Ferrar Window. On behalf of the Eliot Society, which contributed from its funds, and the individual members who contributed half of the £1,000, I express our gratitude for the opportunity to join you in the work of William Hopkinson, whom Helen Gardner nominated "the first Friend of Little Gidding" (59), and, indeed, of Eliot himself, a Patron of the Friends.

... There is an additional source of delight which I cannot refrain from mentioning, namely a connection between Little Gidding and my hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan, where, by happy coincidence, I have resided for almost forty years on Giddings Avenue. I refer to the fact that in 1980, the Eerdmans Publishing Company of Grand Rapids brought out a paperback edition of A. L. Maycock's *Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding*. A few weeks ago, I visited Eerdmans' bookstore in quest of a copy, ... and I now hold before you the very last copy in stock, rescued from an attic storeroom. From mid-America back to its source, I present to the Friends of Little Gidding this final copy of a book which undoubtedly contributed to the composition of the poem upon which Eliot rested his reputation as a poet.

Perhaps it was Maycock's book that reminded Eliot that the stained glass of the church was a nineteenth-century modification, and this may have led him to omit from the poem any reference to the windows as anachronistic. Similar considerations may have caused him to stop short of identifying the "three virtues" window at St. Michael's church, East Coker, as the inspiration of his lines on Hope, Love, and Faith in "East Coker" III. Today, his ashes lie only a few feet from that window, which had been placed there by another American descendent of Andrew Eliot only a short time before the poet visited what was to become his end as well as his beginning.

For Eliot's explicit views on church windows, then, we must turn to *The Rock*, a pageant play written on behalf of the Forty-Five Churches Fund of the Diocese of London. Eliot makes the case for stained glass ironically, by giving voice to the forces ancient and modern arrayed against it, including the Puritan Preacher who thunders against the worship of images, the "baits of the Devil," urging his flock to "destroy them utterly, whether they be graven, or molten..., whether of gold or silver or brass or stone or canvas or glass" (72); and, with equal zeal, the communist Agitator, who, for all his adherence to the party line regarding religion, does not scruple at taking a page from the Preacher's sermon in his campaign of "exposin' all the dope o' Christianity an' turnin' it to ridicule.... [E]very time as you can see

your way to 'eavin' a brick through one o' their stained glass windows what is pure idolatry an' worshippin' o' graven images, you'll be doin' a service to 'umanity" (40).

The sole voice raised in defense of church windows is that of the nostalgic and somewhat dotty Mrs. Poultridge, who champions "our dear old simple late Gothic churches." "What's a church without stained glass?" she asks. "It isn't hardly a church at all until you get stained glass." Eliot slips in a private joke at her expense when she betrays an uncertain grasp of English poetry: "What is that lovely line of Keats, *dim religious light*? Or is it George Herbert?" (69-70). The "lovely line" is, of course, from neither Keats nor Herbert, but from *Il Penseroso* by John Milton, on whom Eliot would shortly publish a notoriously depreciative essay!

Yet Eliot is not averse to painting with a "dim religious light" of his own in the concluding chorus of *The Rock*, in which stained glass plays its part:

*We thank Thee for the lights that we have kindled,  
The light of altar and of sanctuary;  
Small lights of those who meditate at midnight  
And lights directed through the coloured panes of  
windows  
And light reflected from the polished stone,  
The gilded carven wood, the coloured fresco.  
Our gaze is submarine, our eyes look upward  
And see the light that fractures through unquiet  
water.  
We see the light but see not whence it comes.*



St. John's Church, Little Gidding

Photo: David Chinitz

## Book Reviews

(continued from p. 1)

What do we expect of poet-essayists? We expect their interpretations to be not definitive, but illuminating. We expect them to have a general, rather than a thorough grasp of the history and criticism, and we expect them to have some idiosyncratic entryway into the work through which we can follow them.

To my mind, Raine's greatest strength as a poet-essayist lies in his subtle, attuned ear. One of many fine examples in the book is his compelling explanation of the tonal and rhythmic comedy of "The *Boston Evening Transcript*." The poem, Raine argues, "turns very simply and brilliantly on the gross hybridity of the verse—the awkward conflation of the poetic and the irredeemably, thumpingly prosaic. It is tonally axiomatic that the three words '*Boston Evening Transcript*' are clunky. Here they function like a leg iron on a gnat. No sooner is the poem airborne than it is grounded" (53). By carefully attending to the metric regularities and irregularities of the poem, Raine offers a rich, even definitive reading.

The chapter on classicist emotion begins unpromisingly with a generic overview of Eliot's anti-Romanticism, rather than a careful analysis. But the discussion picks up steam, turning into a spirited romp through Eliot's early poems, showing how they explore the non-obvious emotions seldom found in poetry: embarrassment, malice, envy, glee.

Another strength of Raine's book is his teacherly penchant for encapsulation. When introducing Eliot to students, I always struggle with the right amount of information to give. A danger of overpreparing students is that they are led to too many conclusions before grappling with the poems. But Raine offers a way out of such difficulties by the way he can pin down, in a terse phrase, what Eliot's poems are up to: *Ash-Wednesday* is not a poem about belief, but "a poem about the visceral nature of belief, the difficulty of true belief" (30). "Gerontion" is a poem "spoken by a voluptuary of inaction with an extensive collection of alibis" (6). "Hysteria" and "Dans Le Restaurant" are tellingly described as "restaurant poems both, [in which] the private (what we really feel) obtrudes into the public sphere" (61). Sending undergraduates off to do battle with Eliot's poems armed with nothing but a dictionary and some of the better Rainian quips would be about all they would need to come back to class bloody, victorious, and ready for discussion.

But such a talent for sound bites works against Raine when he approaches the more complex poems or

when he tries to expound an argument based on such a quip. One of his more puzzling arguments is that the Lady of *Ash-Wednesday* is a nun. It is not a ridiculous suggestion, but neither is it convincing. Spending some time with the reams of criticism written on the poem might have cleared away some difficulties and given Raine more substance into which to weave his often canny insights. (Raine is good, as he often is, on the intended and unintended tonal failures of *Ash-Wednesday*.)

Longer arguments, such as his chapters on *The Waste Land*, and *Four Quartets*, are sustained in a desultory manner. His discussion of *The Waste Land* includes a lengthy account of the depression of the 1930s, farming problems, and railroad policy—a digression only tenuously linked to the poem. But as with listening to an erudite professor ramble off-topic, we don't merely forgive such quirkiness of a poet-essayist, we expect it.

Like some other poets who write about poetry, Raine holds the fundamentalist belief that one need merely approach the poems "directly" to understand them well. Hear ye this: "*The Hollow Men*, approached directly, is a simple poem" (15). And this: "Though this central thrust of Eliot's argument [in *Ash-Wednesday*] is easy to follow, there are local difficulties" (24). And this: "despite the evident weirdness [of the ghost episode in "Little Gidding"], Eliot's tone couldn't be clearer or more straightforward" (107). And—my favorite—Raine's diktat regarding the objective correlative: "the idea is obvious" (133). Wherever such of-courses and couldn't-be-clearers appear, they manage to sound both imperious and defensive, and they are usually attached to an idiosyncratic reading that is far from obvious or clear.

Of a piece with Raine's fundamentalism is his contempt for criticism and scholarship. Be warned: "*The Hollow Men* is a poem almost buried alive under the weight of commentary" (14). And: "Critics have puzzled over what Eliot meant by [*The Waste Land*'s reference to Stetson]. The apostrophe isn't a puzzle at all" (77). I would like to put the best possible interpretation on such posturing, and here is my attempt to do so. Because Raine loves Eliot's work so much, he wants average readers (his intended audience) to enter into the poetry and criticism without feeling they need a Master's degree in literature. It is as an encouraging teacher to uncertain students that Raine speaks in this hectoring tone: in this reading, his impolitic judgments are not

Raine holds the fundamentalist belief that one need merely approach the poems "directly" to understand them well.

aimed at enemy critics, but at fellow non-specialists being encouraged to make their own confident parries and thrusts.

But such a benign interpretation begins to break apart when we sense how Raine's disdain for "critics" is not merely rhetorical but genuine. Here is one such *anathema sit*: "the allusion to 'Cavalcanti' [in *Ash-Wednesday*] represents a recurrent mistake in readings of Eliot's poetry—the idea, dear to the academic mind, that recondite knowledge, the identification of a source, will unlock the meaning of a poem" (23). And this below-the-belt punch: Eliot "had written off, in a wry, humorous paragraph, the life's work of Grover Smith, a leading Eliot scholar" (193). That Raine slyly neglects to footnote the source where Eliot supposedly dispatches Smith's work is an indication of a peevish, dissembling spirit. As Raine himself, occupying a precariously high moral ground, says of another writer whom he despises: "These are the flimsy insinuations of the unscrupulous and unscholarly biographer" (xv). Raine's last twist of the knife is a flimsy insinuation that Smith's life's work resides primarily in discussion of the Grail and Tarot, and that his oeuvre is merely one book that has been expanded and repackaged. This is likewise scurrilous and so... so *unnecessary*. Can't we all just get along?

As Raine points out, Eliot was sometimes frustrated by the emphasis on sources. But Raine does not bother to tell the other side of the story: Eliot's recognition that the identification of sources can be more important than any of the interpretive work that Raine and most of the rest of us have done. Raine cites Eliot's "The Frontiers of Criticism" as evidence of the poet's exasperated rebellion against scholarship. He does not, however, mention "The Function of Criticism," where Eliot writes: "[I]t is fairly certain that 'interpretation'... is only legitimate when it is not interpretation at all, but merely putting the reader in possession of facts which he would otherwise have missed" (SE 20). In so far as Raine is an interpreter and his opponents are presenters of facts, Eliot would seem to be on *their* side.

Raine's appendix, an extended slam on Anthony Julius, adds nothing new or interesting to the discussion of anti-Semitism in Eliot's work. Having apparently read none of the scholarship since Julius's book came out, Raine replays a decade-old argument. And his interpretations of the evidence are merely rehashings of what others have already said. Concluding his argument about "Burbank with a Baedeker," he says that it is "not an anti-Semitic poem, but a poem about anti-Semitism." He follows up the analysis with this whopping impertinence: "This new interpretation will seem implausible for a time, in the way that radical re-readings do before they become accepted" (170). Raine's interpretation of "Burbank" and the gesture which seeks to deflect criticism both reveal in miniature his two most vexing flaws: his unwillingness to do his homework and his princely arrogance about his ultimate rightness. That "Burbank" is about anti-Semitism rather than an anti-Semitic poem is in no way a new interpretation. A half an hour's search on my part dis-

covered at least three critics who have explicitly made this argument.\* And none of these critics boasts that he has said something new.

The project of criticism and scholarship is a slow-motion dialogue in which we rely on, augment, correct, and qualify the ideas of others toward the end of better understanding. It is not an alpha-male pissing contest. In spite of his strenuous efforts to position himself as infallible, Raine is wrong on any number of counts, but he's also delightfully right just as often. Perhaps more importantly, he is interesting and provocative when there's no clear way of judging. As I have intimated, Raine's more eccentric pronouncements would not offend so much if he spoke as a poet-essayist rather than as an oracle of truth. His audience—those students waiting to join the dialogue about what Eliot's work means—might have learned even more from a teacher willing to admit his debts to others and to acknowledge his uncertainty.

\* David M. Thompson, "Eliot, Anti-Semitism and the Weight of Apologia," *T. S. Eliot and Our Turning World*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (New York: St. Martin's, 2001) 165–76; Ronald Schuchard, "Burbank with a Baedeker, Eliot with a Cigar: American Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and the Idea of Culture," *Modernism/Modernity* 10 (2003): 1–26; John T. Mayer, *T. S. Eliot's Silent Voices* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989).



**Harold Kaplan. *Poetry, Politics and Culture: Argument in the Work of Eliot, Pound, Stevens and Williams*. New Brunswick (USA): Transaction, 2006.**

Reviewed by Leon Surette  
University of Western Ontario

This is Harold Kaplan's third book. This reviewer has not read his two previous books, *Democratic Humanism and American Literature* (1972) and *Power and Order: Henry Adams and the Naturalist Tradition in American Fiction* (1981). Their titles suggest, however, that there is a continuum between those books and *Poetry, Politics & Culture*, whose main purpose is to articulate the "humanist poetics" Kaplan finds in the poetry of Stevens and Williams, and which he characterizes as "deeply in harmony with liberal and democratic humanism." Part of his project is to contrast the non- or anti-humanist poetics of Eliot and Pound to the humanism of Stevens and Williams.

I cannot restrain myself from making a personal aside before describing Kaplan's argument. Like him, I am emeritus—that is, old—but I am heartened to discover that Professor Kaplan is much older than I, having been born in 1916, making him ninety years old when *Poetry, Politics and Culture* was published. Another personal note is that I have a book in press which also focuses on the topic of humanism—though dealing only with Eliot and Stevens. I have

published extensively on Pound—with particular attention to his cultural, economic and political views in *Pound in Purgatory* (1999). Williams, however, has so far escaped my pen.

It is no small feat to orchestrate a discussion of four major poets around a central theme—especially one as fraught as politics and culture. Unsurprisingly, Professor Kaplan writes from a perspective that is now rather out of fashion in an age when neo-Marxist, post-Saussurean and post-Heideggerian socio-cultural commentary has displaced the highly personal communing with literary texts that characterized the period of New Criticism. (He admits to a strong affinity for the views of Kenneth Burke.) Fundamentally this is a work of cultural history on the now-discarded presumption that individual artists have views, and reach conclusions, as autonomous intellects embedded in an ambient socio-cultural context. Kaplan explicitly challenges the contrary post-modern presumption that individual artists are automata, blindly reflecting and expressing the false consciousness of their time, nation, class and gender.

In the brief preface Kaplan explains that his “theme in this book” is that the “pressure of (modern) reality”—amending Stevens—“forced efforts to retrieve or redeem the poet’s vocation, the poet being now understood, explicitly or implicitly in the minds of at least three of the poets I have in view, to be the representative of a clerisy bound to create and defend a culture of values” (ix). The exception, of course, is Williams. They all, Kaplan believes, shared with him “the belief that the imagination created value and that what happened in poetry could be the vitalizing source for ethics, politics, and culture” (x). No one, I think, could disagree with the second clause, but I would question the first. Only Stevens and Williams put any emphasis on the role of the imagination, and even they were anxious to avoid the charge of Romanticism that such an emphasis inevitably prompts.

Kaplan’s task, then, is to demonstrate that Stevens and Williams took the better path—that is, humanism—in their effort to “redeem the poet’s vocation,” and that Eliot and Pound took the worse paths—that is, religion (Anglicanism) and ideology (Fascism), respectively. Once again it would be difficult to find scholars to disagree with these broad identifications, though, as Kaplan acknowledges (189), Stevens denied that his position was compatible with humanism. And, of course, Postmodernists, neo-Marxists, and Deconstructors would not find humanism any more acceptable than Anglicanism. Williams, apparently, was silent on the issue of labelling, but humanism seems a plausible enough label for the position he adopts in *Paterson*—a work Kaplan strangely neglects.

Kaplan makes no effort to disguise his liberal posture, declaring early in the book:

At the center of the dramatic contrasts one finds between these two pairs of American poets, major in all respects, is the debate within the democratic culture over the role of authority, the conflicting

ideals of order, freedom, and equality, the sanctities and immunities protecting the lives of individuals, and the centrality of individuals in the democratic ethos. (9)

Kaplan sees that debate as taking place in the context of what he calls “the world apocalypse that has haunted modern thinking on all levels” (38). By “world apocalypse” he means the two world wars and the Bolshevik revolution, events that irretrievably altered the world order ante, dominated by the little countries of Western Europe—Britain, France, Germany, and Austria. Somewhat surprisingly, Kaplan makes no reference to the New World Order, post 1945: the hostile duopoly of the USA and the Soviet Union, allegedly representing distinct and opposed ideologies. Instead his focus is on the “the stresses of epistemic scepticism and alienated consciousness,” that he claims are characteristic of the entire twentieth century, including the Cold War and the Postmodern periods. (I am unclear on just where—or rather, when—we are in 2007. No doubt “Postmodern” is past its best-before date.)

There is a strain of nativism in Kaplan’s argument that will not appeal to non-Americans like myself. He comes very close to arguing that the errors into which Pound and Eliot fall are a consequence of their having lived most of their lives abroad: “The American poets who refused exile in Europe, Stevens, Frost, and Williams, possessed the instinct to refuse aristocratic ironies or a standpoint of spiritual detachment.” Remaining in the good old USA was motivated, he believes, by “an intrinsic allegiance to democracy” (110).

It must be admitted that neither Eliot nor Pound had a strong allegiance to popular democracy as practiced in the USA. At the same time, their critique of American democracy as in truth an oligarchy was not without merit. Moreover, Kaplan’s own reading of Stevens’s poetry does not reveal him as uncritical of the egalitarianism that Kaplan seems to identify with democracy. Williams’s neglected *Paterson* can certainly be read as elitist, and hence anti-democratic on Kaplan’s criteria. For he believes that there “is a tradition in American writing... which consults the democracy of nature and life, a metaphysical democracy enforced by the absence of fixed hierarchies” (122).

Although *Poetry, Politics and Culture* is intended as a challenge to contemporary literary critical predispositions, it does not reflect a good acquaintance with contemporary criticism—not even of the recent scholarship on his four authors of a literary-historical character that should have informed his assessment of those authors. His foray into a polemic against the neo-Marxist and anti-humanist tendencies of the contemporary scene is courageous, but not particularly persuasive. I share his antipathy for those tendencies, but his grasp of the issues is somewhat uncertain. For example, he invokes Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” in support of Williams’s alleged humanist views and as a refutation of the tendency to abstraction and generalization in Eliot and Pound (174–75). But Heidegger is resolutely hostile to humanism, and, as a member of the Nazi party, was

much further to the right than either Eliot or Pound. No doubt, Kaplan invokes Heidegger, a darling of the Postmodern, in hopes of persuading some younger critics to accept his point of view.

I have no quarrel with Kaplan's project "to restore both persons and the real world... to their traditional place at the center of literary discourse and invention" (218). But it is rather a quixotic task, and one not to be successfully carried out with theoretical tools not much better than Quixote's old nag, Rocinante, and tin pot for helmet. All of his commentaries are designed to further his general thesis, and are accordingly rather selective. That said, *Poetry, Politics and Culture* is full of sensitive and challenging readings of poems by Stevens and Williams. His readings of Eliot and Pound are less persuasive—and, indeed, less present in the text.

The book concludes with three unnecessary appendices: on Levinas, on Bakhtin, and on a commentary on both by Michael Eskin. There is no bibliography, but there are endnotes for each chapter identifying works cited.



**Marina MacKay. *Modernism and World War II*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.**

Reviewed by Patrick Query  
United States Military Academy

Marina MacKay takes as her subject "the end of modernism," where *end*, she explains, carries the double sense it does in "Little Gidding": "Either you had no purpose / Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured / And is altered in fulfillment." Thus the end of modernism for MacKay means both "its realisation and its dissolution" (1), its vindication and its termination. The passages in the Introduction in which MacKay elucidates this formula are among the most compelling in the book. The logic by which the rest of it hangs together, though, becomes more tenuous with each subsequent chapter.

One of the first things one notices upon opening *Modernism and World War II* is the unexpected cast of characters that the author assembles in the table of contents. Far from a roll-call of the usual modernist suspects, there are chapters on Rebecca West, Henry Green, and Evelyn Waugh, as well as Eliot and Virginia Woolf. MacKay is to be commended for assembling such an interesting group of subjects rather than simply trotting out the high modernist stalwarts. One particular advantage of her choice is that it enables her to avoid the unhelpful political polarities that almost always inform discussions of late modernism, "to avoid," she writes, "the short cuts offered by the individual case—say, by Ezra Pound's fascism on one side and Hugh MacDiarmid's communism on the other" (4). In their diversity and complexity, as well as in the sincerity of their "stocktaking" during the Second World War, her writers

"compel a more measured and historically responsible approach to the persistent critical debate surrounding the politics of modernism."

This freshness of approach, however, leads to some important problems. The most consistently vexing is that MacKay nowhere offers a clear working definition of *modernism*. It seems very late in the game to be taking the term for granted, and the understanding of modernism that drives her choice of authors is sufficiently unorthodox for the principle of selection to be made explicit. Even if the chapters were devoted to Woolf, Eliot, Pound, and Wyndham Lewis, much more would need to be said on modernism. Either that, or much less, since the book reads more like a survey of World-War-II writers than like a critical examination of modernism as a field of meaning in its own right. In his recent *Oxford English Literary History, Vol. 10: 1910–1940*, Chris Baldick lambastes the fashionable critical move wherein *modernism* is used as a Trojan horse with which to get any author of interest past the gatekeepers of twentieth-century literary study. Increasingly, it seems, almost anything will fit in the modernist basket, an excellent way to get neglected authors into the critical spotlight, but an equally effective way to dilute the meaning of the term. A more suitable term than *modernism*, given the book's mixed lineup—not to mention its lack of any systematic discussion of modernism itself—might be the more flexible and inclusive "modern movement" Baldick uses as the subtitle and theme of his book. Woolf and Waugh are simply bedfellows too strange not to warrant some convincing rationale for lumping them together.

As individual units, almost all of the chapters are engaging, often insightful, meditations on a given author. In her chapter on Eliot, "The Situational Politics of *Four Quartets*," MacKay follows Michael Levenson's lead and asks, "does *Four Quartets* have a politics?" (73). The question is largely rhetorical, but answering it leads MacKay to her most useful contributions to Eliot studies. Among the political themes the poems explore, MacKay emphasizes the dignity of passive resistance, the mistrust of "old men," the end of empire, England's vexed relation to Europe, domestic class shifts, and English patriotism. The chapter makes original and interesting use of three of the "Occasional Verses": "Defense of the Islands" (1941), "A Note on War Poetry" (1942), and "To the Indians Who Died in Africa" (1943). Through analysis of these propaganda pieces, MacKay gains a foothold from which to resituate *Four Quartets* in a wartime context of political engagement, to restore their proper historical specificity and to right what she sees as the improper balance between topicality and "an ideal of timeless durability" that has characterized critical readings of *Four Quartets*. "[I]f the cultural and political work *Four Quartets* performed in their own time has been systematically bypassed," she writes, "it is not because their author was interested in concealing it" (72). Her focus on the political, though, does not blind her to other possibilities. In one place MacKay enlists Lyndall Gordon's biography to sanc-

tion a biographical—and personal—reading of a passage in “Little Gidding” (“And last, the rending pain of re-enactment...”), then argues convincingly for the passage’s public resonance in light of the way it echoes the appeasement-era rhetorical style of Neville Chamberlain.

In the book’s best chapter, on Woolf, MacKay identifies a growing national feeling, verging on patriotism, in *Between the Acts*. The chapter on West, while intriguing, proceeds from rather too narrow a starting place: MacKay sees in West’s use of the Serb “black lamb” and “grey falcon” myths the grounds for reading the travelogue of that title as a work in the mythical mode, à la Eliot and Joyce, which seems a stretch. The Henry Green chapter does an admirable job of finding the meaning behind Green’s “slippery war-

time comments” (117) and the “evasive neutrality” to which his writing aspired. The chapter on Waugh takes some rather too-easy roads and adds very little to recent discussions of *Brideshead Revisited*. MacKay’s evidence for labeling Waugh a modernist—an essay on Cubism he wrote at the age of 14—is dubious.

*Modernism and World War II* does considerable good work with each of its five authors and with refreshing the reader’s sense of WWII as a unique literary context. It will be of immediate interest to students of twentieth-century literature. The utility of the book for the modernist studies cohort, though, will largely depend on whether they share MacKay’s expansive view, in which almost anyone who wrote in the 1920s, 30s, or 40s can be called a modernist.

**Louisville Conference  
February 21–23, 2008**

The Society is sponsoring two sessions at the  
Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900

**Panel I**

Chair: Benjamin G. Lockerd, Grand Valley State University

1. “Eliot and Pound vis à vis the Most Modern Generation.” William Harmon, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
2. “T. S. Eliot, Henri Alain-Fournier, and Jean Verdenal.” Nancy Hargrove, Mississippi State University.

**Panel II**

Chair: William Harmon, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

1. “T. S. Eliot, J. W. N. Sullivan, and Beethoven: Pointing Beyond Poetry in Eliot’s Unpublished New Haven Lecture.” Christopher McVey, University of Virginia.
2. “‘A Catholic Cast of Mind, a Calvinistic Heritage, and a Puritan Temperament’: T. S. Eliot’s Puritan Hermeneutics.” Michael J. Ristich, Wayne State University.
3. “Images of Mechanistic Darwinism in Eliot’s Poetry.” Benjamin G. Lockerd, Grand Valley State University.

For further information, please see the conference web site:  
<http://modernlanguages.louisville.edu/conference>.

**FROM THE AMERICAN LITERATURE  
ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE  
Boston, MA, May 24–27, 2007**

“Poet and Critic: T. S. Eliot on Herbert Howarth’s  
*Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot*”

In 1961 Herbert Howarth suggested to his editor at Houghton Mifflin that his manuscript of *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* be shown to T. S. Eliot. The work is now considered a classic of Eliot scholarship; but when Eliot was persuaded to look at a typescript, his criticisms devastated Howarth’s plan to publish the book. Howarth had to spend two years not merely in a revision but in the “reconstruction” of the book that Eliot required. The poet who seemed a cultural hero to the critic now seemed in Howarth’s eyes to have a “small and ignoble nature” (Howarth to his editor, Jan. 28, 1962). A portion of the 1961 manuscript with Eliot’s notations now resides, together with several letters by Howarth and Eliot concerning the matter, in the archives of Washington University Library in St. Louis.

The conflict that developed between poet and critic concerned the thesis that, in Eliot’s words, “my poetry can be accounted for largely in terms of my devotion to, and of my reaction against, my own family” (Eliot to Howarth, Dec. 26, 1961). Eliot argues that this thesis leads to many errors of fact, instancing Howarth’s suggestion that *Murder in the Cathedral* was inspired by Charlotte Eliot’s dramatic poem *Savonarola* and “Song for Simeon” by the character of Eliot’s grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot. On the manuscript pages that Eliot read quickly in December 1961 at a Cambridge, Massachusetts hotel, Eliot writes comments such as “This is just silly,” “Absurd,” and “This is utter nonsense.”

When Howarth told Eliot that he would try to respond to the marginal criticisms made on the manuscript, Eliot’s objections hardened in a reply of January 8, 1962. He first observed that his marginal comments were merely illustrations of some errors and that there were many others “equally absurd.” He told Howarth that “you should face the fact that piece-meal repair is not enough” and that what was needed was “the abandonment of an untenable thesis.” Eliot concluded: “Your book would have to be thoroughly reconstructed to be a serious work of literary scholarship.”

Howarth had no choice but to “reconstruct” the book and bury the family thesis because it would have been disastrous to have Eliot publicly reject the book. Howarth removed the biographical speculation and turned his work into a relatively objective compendium of background information about Eliot’s family, Harvard professors, and artists who influ-

enced the poet. Reviewers praised the book when it was published in 1964 for the intellectual and cultural context it gave to Eliot’s career, but one reviewer perceptively noted that T. S. Eliot himself was “curiously absent” from the book.

Howarth’s thesis about the influence of the Eliot family would of course be widely accepted today. Nevertheless, Howarth’s expression of the thesis seems naive by today’s standards. Eliot is correct that Howarth’s 1961 version of the thesis is too speculative. Yet it is of great interest as an early and insightful exploration of a biographical interpretation of Eliot’s poetry.

After presenting the above information about Eliot’s critique of the 1961 manuscript, I will indicate the interpretations of various poems that drew Eliot’s harsh comments and speculate on the degree to which Howarth’s interpretations seem valid or even original today. I look forward to telling this story because Howarth, who was my colleague at the University of Pennsylvania, gave these papers to Washington University so that the record would one day be known. In a note on a letter to his editor—“for the future”—he wrote that “The very ferocity of Eliot’s reaction seems to tell me that I am, if not accurately on the mark, very near to it. He is afraid that people will see him as he has been, and that my interpretation will either discover this or sufficiently prompt other writers that they disclose it.”

Timothy Materer  
University of Missouri, Columbia



“Do(ing) Trauma in *The Waste Land*”

Part of a larger project that reads Eliot’s oeuvre as a traumatic narrative, this paper explores the implications of understanding the controlling voice(s) of Eliot’s long poem as occupying a traumatic position. Particularly in terms of their relationship to history and memory, these voices struggle to work through the burdens of extreme experience. The problematic figure of Tiresias, who supposedly unifies these voices, may actually make more sense when reading his presence through trauma theory, since that context can help explain the causes of such fractured, contingent, and detached witnessing.

Tiresias has a special status as the poem’s most troubled living victim, a trauma sufferer whose precarious position informs all aspects of the poem, including its narrative structure, its range of allusion and relationship to history, its subject matter, and its struggles ultimately to reconcile many of the competing interests and energies running through its lines.

My talk raises some questions about Tiresias' status as a trauma victim and speculates about how the vocabulary of trauma might help unlock some potentially rich readings of *The Waste Land*.

Along the way the paper examines a variety of issues typically associated with trauma, including Tiresias's status as a doubled figure, "throbbing between two lives"; his apparent loss of affect, which impairs so many victims and makes their reintegration into the "normal" world so difficult; the challenge of unifying fractured memories and integrating them into a personal history that makes sense; the treacherous position of witnesses, especially those who have viewed extreme experiences like transgressive acts of sexual violence; the related difficulty of giving voice to that experience; and the central question of whether Tiresias is "performing" or "representing" trauma, the opposing positions adopted by two of today's central trauma theorists, Cathy Caruth and Ruth Leys.

Richard Badenhausen  
Westminster College (UT)



"Circles in 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales'"

Although "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" consists of ten quatrains, its images form a series of circles around the poem's center, lines 19–20. The poem alludes to this structural circularity with the words "circles," "circumscribe," "overturns," and "concentrates" (an etymological cousin of "concentric"). Some of the poem's circles are readily visible, such as the one containing both the silent man in mocha brown and the silent vertebrate in brown, but many are more difficult to see, such as the circle containing both "gate" (line 8) and "door" (34). For the poem's circles to emerge into view, one must assume potential significance for each word and press each cryptic image until it makes sense within the context of the poem as a whole. For example, why in line 36 is the convent called "Sacred Heart" instead of something else, such as "Lady of Grace," and what has this convent to do with Agamemnon's death in the next stanza? According to both Aeschylus and Ovid, the path to Agamemnon's death begins when Artemis, the goddess of the moon, sends a storm that blocks the Greeks from sailing to Troy (hence, the "stormy moon" of line 5). To appease the goddess, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, but at the last moment, under the cover of fog, Artemis secretly whisks Iphigenia off the altar to safety, substituting a hind or hart as the sacrifice—hence Eliot's pun on "Sacred Heart" in line 36. In rotating from the first

half to the second half of the poem, many of the circles "overturn" the images they connect. For example, the outermost circle suggests a similarity between Sweeney and Agamemnon because it contains both "maculate" (4) and "stain" (40), but the same circle has Sweeney laughing and Agamemnon crying, which suggests a contrast. My discussion of the structural circles in the poem will consider how such similarities and contrasts contribute to the poem's overall narrative line, and how each circled image, whether mythological, Jewish, or Christian, contributes to the poem's thematic concerns with sacrifice and metamorphosis.

Debra San  
Massachusetts College of Art



**FROM THE 28<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY  
St. Louis, MO, Sep. 28–30, 2007**

"Maurras vs. Dawson: The Prime Influence on  
Eliot's Cultural Thought"

"Eliot's reputation as a critic of society has been worse than his record"—so wrote Roger Kojecký at the beginning of his 1971 book, *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. Thirty-five years later, the situation has not changed, for Eliot's cultural criticism continues to be more maligned than studied. A speaker at a recent conference, for instance, accused Eliot, without evidence, of having "flirted with fascism" and of having proposed the establishment of a theocratic state. When the subject is discussed in a somewhat more serious way (which is rare), Eliot's views are inevitably identified with those of the anti-Semitic French reactionary Charles Maurras. In a well-informed essay, Kenneth Asher calls Maurras, without qualification, "the source" of Eliot's political ideas, asserting that "From beginning to end, Eliot's work, including both the poetry and the prose, reveals itself to have been shaped by Maurras's advocacy of an endangered Latin tradition and all that it entailed." There was no doubt that Maurras was a major influence on Eliot at an early period, but over time (beginning in the early 1930s) the prime influence on his cultural thought came from a wiser source, the British Catholic historian Christopher Dawson.

Maurras raised the banner, as Asher says, of the Latin tradition, but he ultimately rejected the religious core of that tradition. He valued the hierarchical structure and traditional authority of the Catholic

Church but was himself a non-believer whose motto was “politique d’abord,” politics before all else. In 1926, Pope Pius XI placed several of his works on the Index and condemned the *Action Française* movement. Though Eliot at that time wrote an essay in *The Criterion* in support of Maurras, the latter’s influence over Eliot faded. At about the same time, Eliot came to know the work of Dawson, who increasingly became his primary mentor on cultural issues. Dawson, in stark contrast to Maurras, argued that religion is integral to culture. Following Dawson, Eliot maintained that religious consciousness should ideally permeate all the elements of cultural life. However, again following Dawson, he makes it clear that his ideal state would not be a theocracy but would involve a creative tension between church and state. Under Dawson’s influence—or perhaps we could say in collaboration with Dawson—Eliot developed a balanced, coherent, and remarkably flexible cultural theory that consistently put forward their contention concerning the necessary integration (but not identification) of civil and spiritual authorities.

The charge of Fascism sometimes leveled at Eliot has been maintained largely by exaggerating the influence of Charles Maurras on his political views. Maurras was indeed important to Eliot in his early years. Eliot was introduced while at Harvard to Maurras’s anti-Romantic, anti-Revolutionary views by Irving Babbitt, who shared those views. Eliot derived his declaration of royalism, classicism, and Catholicism from Maurras—but also, as Ronald Schuchard shows in *Eliot’s Dark Angel*, from T. E. Hulme. This does not mean, however, that Eliot followed Maurras into the latter’s increasingly ugly program of virulent anti-Semitism and incitement of street violence. Asher’s insistence that Eliot never distanced himself from Maurras is surely wrong. As early as 1927, shortly after adopting Maurras’s triple declaration, Eliot strongly qualified his admiration. In “The Humanism of Irving Babbitt” (an essay Asher does not cite), Eliot wishes Babbitt could bring himself to ground his humanism in religious belief: “His influence might thus join that of another philosopher—Charles Maurras—and might, indeed, correct some of the extravagances of that writer.” Kojecký quotes an unpublished 1930 letter to the editor of the *Bookman* in which Eliot declared that “there are far grosser positive errors and far greater dangers in the doctrine of Maurras than in that of Babbitt.”

Asher quotes as evidence of persistent adherence to the Maurrasian program Eliot’s 1948 statement calling Maurras “a sort of Virgil who led us to the gates of the temple,” failing to put this into the inevitable Dantean context (27). Just as the pagan poet Virgil could lead Dante only to the gates of the tem-

ple but no further (after which he was compelled to return to his place in Limbo), Maurras had brought Eliot to the temple but had remained behind when Eliot entered. Asher’s attempt to make Maurras “the source” of Eliot’s political thought requires him to misread this statement and to ignore others. In fact there were many sources—S. T. Coleridge, Charles Maurras, Irving Babbitt, T. E. Hulme, Paul Elmer More, V. A. Demant, Karl Mannheim, Jacques Maritain, and others—but chief among them in Eliot’s mature thought was Christopher Dawson.

Ben Lockerd  
Grand Valley State University



#### “Eliot’s Best-Kept Secrets”

Though it does not promise any shocking insights into his personal life, this paper will examine the many speakers in Eliot’s early poetry who dread the accidental disclosure of a shameful, horrid secret—often hidden even from themselves. I will discuss the uncanny connection between these early dramatizations of secretive anxiety and Eliot’s late, seemingly uncharacteristic theory of poetic composition, which provides for an identical (though hopefully not so shameful) unconscious disclosure. Drawing from four of Eliot’s rarely discussed late interviews and from a range of unpublished letters, I will conclude by demonstrating the emotional continuity of this trope—which he calls “the secret which I cannot find” (*IMH* 80)—from his earliest to his latest work.

Anthony Cuda  
University of North Carolina, Greensboro



#### “Between Prayer and Poetry: Eliot and Lancelot Andrewes”

In a 1930 letter, Eliot spoke of “a very important field still unexplored by modern poets—the experience of a man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in terms of the divine goal.” Interestingly, Eliot locates this field “*between* [my emphasis] the usual subjects of poetry and ‘devotional’ verse.” We know that “betweenness” was a major impetus behind some of his most powerful imagery (“between the violet and the violet” of “Ash Wednesday”; “between unbeing and being” in “Burnt Norton”; “between midnight and

dawn” in “The Dry Salvages,” to name just a few examples). Here, it reflects the poet’s search for a poetic strategy, a way to navigate the textual space, as it were, between “devotional verse” and the lyric.

Eliot’s interest in the Christian mystical tradition (Dame Julian of Norwich, St. John of the Cross), and in “the Anglican devotional spirit” has been well documented. In the writings of George Herbert, Nicholas Ferrar, and others, Eliot found “continued religious meditation[s] with an intellectual framework” (“What Is Minor Poetry?”) that would help him traverse the distance between the “usual subjects” of poetry and devotional verse. In this paper, I suggest that one way in which to read much of Eliot’s post-conversion poetry is to see it as a performative act that navigates the space between poetry and devotional verse.

Recent performance theorists have defined performance as “surrogation,” a replacement or replaying of previous performances within new and current contexts. Surrogation is both an act of memory and an act of creation; it re-enacts the past through present structures. Like all acts of citation or reiteration, Eliot’s religious poetry performs previous texts. In addition to the poet’s engagement with Herbert or Ferrar, Eliot’s performative reading of Lancelot Andrewes in the post-conversion poetry, I argue, is what allowed him to explore the difficult relationship between interior, spontaneous worship and the formal demands of poetry. Examples will be drawn from “Ash Wednesday” and *Four Quartets*.

Kinereth Meyer  
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