

Time Present

The Newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society

Number 65

Summer 2008

Contents

Historical Marker Unveiled in London, by John D. Morgenstern.....	1
News	2
Program: T. S. Eliot Society Annual Meeting	3
<i>The International Reception of T. S. Eliot</i> , ed. Elisabeth Däumer and Shyamal Bagchee—Reviewed by John D. Morgenstern.....	4
<i>T. S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition</i> , ed. Giovanni Cianci and Jason Harding—Reviewed by Hazel Atkins...	5
<i>The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf and Beckett</i> , by Lee Oser—Reviewed by Michael Cotsell.....	6
<i>Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900–1930</i> , by Rachel Potter—Reviewed by Elisabeth Däumer.....	8
Poem: “Eliot—To You,” by Ted Richer	9
2007 Eliot Bibliography, by Jayme Stayer and Andrew Powers.....	10

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Historical Marker Unveiled in London

John D. Morgenstern

In 1917, Vivien Eliot characterized living at Crawford Mansions as “being in a wilderness... no-one around us knows us, or sees us, or bothers to care how we live or what we do, or whether we live or not.”

While T. S. Eliot’s anonymity was short lived, until recently his Crawford Street residence remained obscurely tucked away in the Marylebone district in London. On 23 April 2008, this oversight was rectified when the City of Westminster marked the building with a green commemorative plaque subsidized by the Crawford Mansions Tenants and Residents Association and by members of the T. S. Eliot Society.

In an afternoon ceremony, the Lord Mayor of Westminster, Councilor Carolyn Keen, and Mrs. Valerie Eliot together unveiled the historical marker on 62–66 Crawford Street, where Eliot lived in flat 18 from March 1916 until November 1920.

On the steps of the building, across the street from the once noisy pub where Eliot heard barmen shout “HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME,” poet Craig Raine spoke about



Sean O’Brien, Craig Raine, Valerie Eliot, and the Lord Mayor

Photo: John Morgenstern

the years Eliot lived at Crawford Mansions. Raine evoked Eliot the school-teacher, lecturer in Yorkshire, and bank clerk, and reminded his audience how much the poet loved to dance. Poet Sean O’Brien, winner of the 2007 T. S. Eliot Prize, then read the London Bridge scene from *The Waste Land* and the final verse paragraph of “Little Gidding.” Following the ceremony, the current resident of flat 18, Ms. Beatrice Srivastava, and fellow residents at Crawford Mansions warmly received guests for refreshments.

For additional photos from the unveiling ceremony, see our website at www.luc.edu/eliot.

The T. S. Eliot Society thanks Beatrice Srivastava of Crawford Mansions for organizing the drive for the plaque; fellow resident Tina Jodla, who assisted her efforts; Gillian Dawson, Manager of the Green Plaques Scheme (Westminster City Council), for her indispensable help in bringing the enterprise to a successful conclusion; and the members of the Society for their generous support of this project to commemorate and honor Eliot.

Eliot Family Residence Goes on Sale

The Eliot family's home at 4446 Westminster Pl., St. Louis, is being offered for sale by its current owners. This "lovingly restored" 5,700-sq. ft. residence would make an ideal permanent home for the T. S. Eliot Society and an Eliot museum—if only we had the \$774,900 asking price, or anything close to it. (Any ideas?)

For further information, see the Society's website (<http://www.luc.edu/eliot>).



Call for Nominations

The Board of Directors will be electing a Secretary at its meeting in September, since the term of the present secretary, Cyrena Pondrom, will be ending December 31. The election will be for a three-year term beginning January 1, 2009. All members of the Society are welcome to make nominations for this position, and any member of the Society is eligible to be nominated. Members may also make nominations for honorary membership and for distinguished service awards.

Nominations must be received by August 15, 2008. Please send your nominations to both the supervisor of elections, Ben Lockerd, and the president, William Harmon. Their email addresses: lockerdb@gvsu.edu and wharmon03@mindspring.com.



Society People

On June 1, [William Harmon](#) added "Emeritus" to his job title, retiring after a total of forty-one years at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill.

[Jayme Stayer](#) has spent the past year living in El Salvador as part of his formation as a Jesuit. He taught ESL at the Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador, living with some of the survivors of 1989 offensive in which six Jesuits were murdered by the government. Jayme also spent a few months teaching up in the mountains, where, he says, "the people were wonderful and the conditions (ahem) were primitive. Not many working toilets." At September's conference, he will be glad to regale interested parties with such stories as his being attacked by a machete-wielding drunkard, on condition that nothing be reported to his family, who think he was in London on a fellowship. Jayme has just accepted a visiting professorship at John Carroll University in Cleveland, where the proportion of working toilets to angry machetes is reversed. Or so he has been promised.

Public Sightings

POEM; These Fragments I Have Shored. In this short article, David Lehman introduces the *cento* as "a collage-poem composed of lines lifted from other sources.... Ever since T. S. Eliot raided Elizabethan drama and 17th-century poetry for *The Waste Land*, the collage has held a strong attraction for modern poets." Lehman himself then culls a cento from *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, which he had recently edited. (*New York Times*, 2 Apr. 2006.)

"**These fragments I have shored against my ruins,**" T. S. Eliot wrote in *The Waste Land*, and Caouette does the same thing." Thus Roger Ebert describes *Tarnation*, a bio-documentary written and directed by Jonathan Caouette, which Ebert calls "a remarkable film, immediate, urgent, angry, poetic, and stubbornly hopeful. It has been constructed from the materials of a lifetime: old home movies, answering machine tapes, letters and telegrams, photographs, clippings, new video footage, recent interviews, and printed titles that summarize and explain Jonathan's life." The quotation from Eliot follows this summary. (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 15 Oct. 2004.)

"When I contemplate all my neurotic health practices, I realize that there is much for me in T. S. Eliot's words, **These fragments I have shored against my ruins.**" So states Bill Templeman in the Canadian magazine *Maclean's*, reporting his experience of becoming a father beyond age 50 ("I'm Dad, Not Granddad," 5 Apr. 2004). "In the end," the author continues, "my ruins will crumble. But can I hold off my own Waste Land long enough to get my kids launched safely into adult life?" Thus those "neurotic health practices," which include yoga, green tea, vitamins, and healthy foods.

Mopefest? "Back when I was young," Garrison Keillor claims, "most major American writers seemed to be alcoholic or suicidal or both, and we students absorbed the notion that the true sign of brilliance is to be seriously screwed up.... The prime minister of high culture was T. S. Eliot, who suffered from a lousy marriage and hated his job and so wrote 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' a small, dark mopefest of a poem in which old Pru worries about whether to eat a peach or roll up his trousers. This poem pretty much killed off the pleasure of poetry for millions of people who got dragged through it in high school. The first line of 'Prufrock,' as you may recall, was 'S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse'—he opened with six lines of a language 99 percent of his readers do not understand! How better to identify yourself as a serious poet than to be incomprehensible?" ("Choosing the Right Lunch Partners," 20 Feb. 2007, prairiehome.publicradio.org)

T. S. Eliot Society
29th Annual Meeting, 26–28 September 2008

Friday, Sept. 26

*Saint Louis Woman's Club,
4600 Lindell Blvd.*

Board of Directors Meeting 9:00–12:00

Peer Seminar 10:00–12:00
T. S. Eliot and Internationalism
Chairs: Michael Coyle, Colgate Univ.; and David Ayers, Univ. of Kent
 No auditors, please

Lunch ad lib.

Session I 1:30–3:00

Chair: Elisabeth Däumer, Eastern Michigan Univ.
 Michael Stevens, Cornerstone Univ.
 “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow”: Reconsidering Eliot and the Agrarian Movement
 Josh Mabie, Univ. of Minnesota
 Eliot's St. Louis
 Cyrena N. Pondrom, Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
 T. S. Eliot and Djuna Barnes: Shared Gender Views and a Surprising Friendship

Session II 3:15–4:45

Chair: Benjamin Lockerd, Jr., Grand Valley State Univ.
 Timothy Materer, Univ. of Missouri—Columbia
 The Gomez Effect: John Peter and Herbert Howarth on T. S. Eliot
 Julia Daniel, Loyola Univ. Chicago
 “Or it might be you”: Audiences in and of *Sweeney Agonistes*
 Carol Yang, National Chengchi Univ.
 “He Do the Police in Different Voices”: Becket Agonistes in *Murder in the Cathedral*

Home of Melanie and Anthony Fathman, 4967 Pershing Pl.

Roundtable 6:00–7:00

A Day-by-Day Chronology of Eliot's Life Online
 Michael Coyle, Colgate Univ.
 James Loucks, Ohio State Univ.—Newark
 David Radcliffe, Virginia Polytechnic Institute

Dinner 7:00

Saturday, Sept. 27

*Saint Louis Woman's Club,
4600 Lindell Blvd.*

Session III 9:15–10:45

Chair: David Chinitz, Loyola Univ. Chicago
 William Blissett, Univ. of Toronto
 Eliot and Marianne Moore: The Light Line
 Hazel Atkins, Univ. of Ottawa
 “Return to the sources”: Lethaby, the Anthropological School, and Eliot's Superlative Symbol
 Jayme Stayer, John Carroll Univ.
 Precedents of Pruffrock's Personal Pronouns: Eliot's First Rhetorical Problem

Memorial Lecture 11:00–12:00

Chair: William Harmon, Univ. of North Carolina—Chapel Hill
 Grace Schulman, Baruch College, CUNY
 The “Ariel” Poems: T. S. Eliot and E. McKnight Kauffer

Society Lunch 12:15–1:30

Session IV 1:45 – 2:45

Chair: Lee Oser, College of the Holy Cross
 Loren Higbee, Univ. of Notre Dame
 Burland and *The Waste Land*: Eliot in Orson Scott Card's *Hart's Hope*
 Frances Dickey, Univ. of Missouri—Columbia
 Eliot's “Moeurs Contemporaines”

Emerging Scholars Seminar 3:00–5:00

Chair: Shyamal Bagchee, Univ. of Alberta
 No auditors, please

Society Dinner 6:30

Sunday, Sept. 28

*First Unitarian Church,
5007 Waterman Blvd.*

Service 9:30

Session V 11:00–12:30

Chair: Chris Buttram, Winona State Univ.
 Jewel Spears Brooker, Eckerd College
 “Sin is behovely”: Theodicy in Julian and Eliot
 Shunichi Takayanagi, Sophia Univ.
 Santayana and Eliot's Clark Lectures: Philosophy of Art and the Literary Canon
 Anita Patterson, Boston Univ.
 Eliot, Hybridity, and the Emergence of New World Modernism

Eliot Aloud 12:30–1:00

Chair: Linda Wyman, Lincoln Univ.

Announcement of Awards

Elisabeth Däumer and Shyamal Bagchee, eds. *The International Reception of T. S. Eliot*. London: Continuum, 2007.

Reviewed by John D. Morgenstern
Oxford University

Addressing a Washington University audience in 1953, T. S. Eliot opined that for an author to have enduring significance abroad, foreign readers must identify with aspects of his or her work. “The foreigner,” Eliot observed, “may at first be attracted by the differences.... But a vogue due to novel differences will soon fade out; it will not survive unless the foreign reader recognizes, perhaps unconsciously, identity as well as difference.” Elisabeth Däumer and Shyamal Bagchee’s study of Eliot’s international reception traces the ways in which writers have identified with Eliot’s experimental poetry and criticism across continents and hemispheres. The book’s nineteen chapters, each written by a distinguished international contributor, also illustrate how Eliot’s work has been transmuted once integrated into local literary traditions.

In the book’s introduction, Bagchee cautions that in order to acquaint oneself with the numerous international representations of our celebrated poet, it is “necessary... for Eliot’s primary Anglo-American readers to surrender or disown temporarily these familiar works and their typical perception of them to new narratives of unfamiliar formulations and unusual emphases” (1). Indeed, many chapters of this book introduce the seasoned reader of Eliot’s work to hitherto unknown Eliots: the poet as he was received and subsequently reconceived internationally. In one fine instance, Juan E. De Castro demonstrates how Borges re-wrote Eliot—most notably through alterations in his translations—in order to solidify his own impress on literary criticism. In another case, Däumer shows how Eva Hesse’s translation of *The Waste Land* substantively altered the poem to reflect more recent critical attitudes and tendencies, including psychoanalysis and explicit elements of Eliot’s biography. Eliot specialists must check their scholarly preconceptions at the door. In exchange, this book introduces even the most omnivorous reader to the works of many poets and critics by and large unknown in England and America whose work has rarely, if ever, entered into modernist scholarship in English.

Bagchee’s introduction also makes clear that he and Däumer consider this volume “only a first step in revealing the rich trajectories of Eliot’s reception around the globe” (4). Naturally, then, this exploratory study into relatively uncharted territory has its limitations. For instance, some geographic areas are omitted while more than one chapter is devoted to others. Eliot’s reception in Germany is the subject of two fascinating essays: Däumer’s and another by J. H. Copley, who draws on unpublished correspondence to shed light on Eliot’s increasingly tenuous rapport with the German scholar E. R. Curtius. Däumer’s chapter is the only one to introduce concerns of gender, while Copley’s is

stimulating not only for its insight into Eliot’s communication with Curtius and his vexed reception within the German Academy, but also for what it reinforces about Eliot’s character: that he was able to separate intellectual differences from personal friendships. Likewise, two essays engage with the issue of Eliot’s reception in Israel. In the first, Leonore Gerstein suggests that “those in Israel who cared about the poet and literary critic [in the 1930s] ignored the social thinker, and those who fretted over the social thinker discounted the importance of the poet” (69). Gerstein explores, almost exclusively and with historic distance, aesthetic responses to Eliot’s art. Kinereth Meyer, by contrast, confronts the pedagogical difficulty of teaching Eliot to Israeli students today and introduces her students’ objections to Eliot’s cultural polemics and anti-Semitism into the fray. Meyer’s meditations on the discontents of cross-cultural readings of the poet add fresh perspective to the debate over modernist anti-Semitism. Again, Shirshendu Chakrabarti’s scholarly account of Eliot’s influence on Bengali poetry in the 1930s finds its complement in Srimati Mukherjee’s more intimate reminiscence of Eliot’s role in shaping the creative and critical mind of her late father, the renowned novelist and journalist Sudhiranjan Mukherjee. While each of these essays on Eliot’s reception in Germany, Israel, and Bengal contribute significantly to the volume’s interest and lend to it a richer diversity, the inclusion of more than one essay dealing with Eliot’s reception in any single nation does come at a cost. Other countries where Eliot has been received with acclaim and where interest in Eliot continues to amplify the poet’s international reputation go without mention, including Korea, to name but one example. Similarly, it is curious that Eliot’s reception in Canada and Australia are represented while his reception in the rest of the English-speaking world is neglected. In spite of these limitations, the book covers respectable ground in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, Australia, North America, and the Caribbean.

As individual essays, many of the chapters are engaging, and a few present research that will be invaluable to future reception studies. In addition to the aforementioned chapters, other essays of particular interest include Matthew Hart’s for its postcolonial considerations and Stefano Maria Casella’s (on Italy) for its discussion of translation as the creation of something new. There are also a number of fascinating case studies relating Eliot to individual foreign literary figures and institutions. Among these chapters, the one of greatest interest for this reviewer is William Marx’s essay chronicling Eliot’s role as English correspondent to the French periodical *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. Marx’s consideration of the subtle cultural differences in England and in France *vis à vis* conceptions of modernism and classicism are in some ways definitive; though his position on Eliot’s relationship with French literary and political cultures (which were often interrelated) is more tenuous. Marx argues that the scarcity of Eliot’s “Lettres d’Angleterre” during his six-year tenure as English correspondent for the review is a paradigm for the greater cultural opposition be-

tween English and French modernisms. However, Eliot also failed to produce "London Letters" that met his exacting standards for the *Dial*, and, within months of assuming his role with the *NRF* in 1921, he resigned as the London correspondent for the American review. In the case of the *Dial*, Eliot's sparse and belated contributions have been attributed to ill health or to the pressures of preparing the maiden issue of the *Criterion* (Marx allows that this may have had bearing on Eliot's productivity in 1922). It is also likely that in Eliot's estimation too few literary events in London were worth reporting. But whereas Eliot's relationship with the *NRF*, for Marx, is exemplary of a more general cultural antagonism, the poet's resignation from the *Dial* hardly indicates competing modernisms in England and America.

Also debatable is Marx's assertion that the *NRF* ignored Eliot's poetry because it failed to conform to the review's aesthetic program: "Such a significant omission can only be attributed to the innovative nature of Eliot's poetry, which did not, on aesthetic grounds, have any right to the pages of the *NRF*" (30). It was also on aesthetic grounds, as Marx would have it, that the *NRF* did not publish any part of Joyce's *Ulysses*. As far as I know, Eliot was first mentioned in the *NRF* (along with Aldington, Flint, Lowell, Pound, and Hueffer among others) in Valery Larbaud's December 1919 note "Lettres Anglaises" as one of the "jeunes poètes" appearing in the little reviews in England: that is, the *NRF* recognized Eliot first as a poet. Larbaud also published an extensive appraisal of Joyce's oeuvre from *Chamber Music* to *Ulysses* in the April 1922 issue of the *NRF* that compared the Irishman's reception in literary spheres to Einstein and Freud in the sciences; Eliot translated a section of this for the *Criterion*'s inaugural issue. Additionally, it would have been Eliot's responsibility, as English correspondent in 1922, to comment on the publication of his own poem, which appeared in his own literary review. (He did write about Joyce in his "Lettre" of May 1922.) Perhaps Eliot's discretion was a matter of modesty? Certainly, though, there is unambiguous truth in Marx's persuasive argument: the *NRF*'s lack of commentary on Eliot's monumental poem is a noteworthy slight. My primary objection, then, is not with the thrust of Marx's argument, but rather with its place within the volume under review. Marx's positing of oppositional French and English modernisms effaces or at least sidelines the fruitful interchange that took place between these two cultures in the modern era. While this essay is valuable as a piece of literary scholarship, it obscures the narrative of Eliot's French reception as much as it elucidates.

Däumer and Bagchee's collection, while necessarily limited as a pioneering effort to recognize Eliot's worldwide reception, is commendable in its attempt to negotiate the complex issues that arise at junctures of cultural interface. As this book demonstrates, the Eliot that has emerged on the other side of these borders has often differed from the poet-critic Anglo-American readers know. More compellingly, and to the great credit of this volume, readers will undoubtedly recognize "identity as well as difference."

Giovanni Cianci and Jason Harding, eds. *T. S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

Reviewed by Hazel Atkins
University of Ottawa

T. S. Eliot's 1919 essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," was published in September and December installments of the small magazine *The Egoist*. Since then, it has been one of the most widely quoted, studied, taught, and debated essays of the twentieth century. In this collection of essays, the editors attempt to assemble a body of scholarship that looks at this essay, and its reception, with an aim of critical reassessment. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" has suffered from several attacks which equate it too closely with Eliot's later conservative Christian criticism. Feminist and postmodern scholars, particularly, have found Eliot's "orthodoxy" a deterrent to his ideas in this essay, and it has been understood as elitist, smug, patriarchal, and complacent. This collection, while reevaluating the essay itself, also responds to some of this scholarship, attempting to place the 1919 essay back into its postwar context when Eliot was not overtly religious, was profoundly interested in the culture of the avant-garde, and was firmly convinced of the need for modern culture to reconstruct itself creatively. This book offers a new perspective on Eliot's tradition and reassesses it in light of contemporary scholastic concerns. In so doing, of course, it consciously reinforces Eliot's idea that the past must constantly be liberated by reinterpretations of the present.

Held together by its focus on Eliot's seminal essay, this collection manages to pull together a surprising variety of critical responses, approaches, and topics. It is well organized into four sections that make coherent the diversity of ideas. The first section, titled "Tradition and Impersonality," includes contributions from Aleida Assmann, Stan Smith, Jewel Spears Brooker, and Clive Wilmer. Assmann considers Eliot's essay in terms of his dismissal of nineteenth-century historical or chronological thinking in favor of what she calls "systemic" thinking. The "demon of chronology" emphasizes the changes wrought by time on cultural values. Eliot worries about "cultural forgetfulness," and in his "re-invention of tradition" he is able to discard historical thinking without losing a sense of process. In his essay, Smith uses ideas of poststructuralist instability to discuss Eliot's tantalizing idea that it is the poet's role to transgress boundaries and frontiers; in other words, to move unhindered between two worlds, the past and the present. He suggests that at the heart of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" there is a revolutionary "transmutation" of boundaries in which the "frontier of consciousness" is violated and forced into motion. With characteristic elegance, Brooker moves the focus away from tradition to impersonality, arguing that Eliot's comments on impersonality are coherent despite many inherent difficulties. Eliot's metaphors of "impersonality," she

claims, are part of a process wherein the poet surrenders his autonomous self as a means to realize the creative or artistic self. Paradoxically, this allows for the expression of personal emotion in art. Following very neatly from Brooker's essay is Clive Wilmer's examination of a number of post-Second World War reactions to Eliot's poetry and tradition. Using examples from the poetry of Larkin, Gunn, and Lowell, he argues that these artists were more heavily influenced by Eliot than they perhaps knew or were willing to admit. He concludes that while the impersonal method may be difficult to understand and deficient in some aspects, it nevertheless forces a kind of "honesty" that is absent from poetry which does not employ it. Wilmer's essay is a gem—readable, even humorous at times—and while not uncritical of Eliot, it places some of the best-loved poetry of The Movement in its unavoidable context.

The second section includes an examination by Bernard Brugière of several ideas associated with tradition in light of some of the French writers whose work Eliot was reading before, or shortly after, his 1919 essay was written. In a delightful, though short essay, Jason Harding then places Eliot's formulation of tradition within the context of his work for *The Egoist* in 1917–19, arguing that it developed as a response both to the Georgian poets and to the nihilist egotism of experimental modernist art. In the next and last essay of this "Contexts—Literary" section, Massimo Bacigalupo then reassesses the Post-Romantic influences of Ezra Pound on Eliot's work and thought, arguing that Pound's critical engagement with Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* offers a connection between Wordsworth and Eliot and potentially provides Pound with a reason for saying, as did Coleridge of the "Preface," that Eliot's articulation of tradition is "half a child of my own brain."

The next section continues the contextualization of Eliot's tradition, this time in Art and Anthropology, and includes essays by Giovanni Cianci, Michael Hollington, Claudia Corti and Caroline Patey. Of particular note in this section is Cianci's contribution, which discusses Eliot's tradition in the context of the excitement around avant-garde art movements in London. He stresses the neglected fact that Eliot was steeped in European avant-garde art, and argues that "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is influenced by the innovative pre-war phase of visual art as well as the postwar *rappel à l'ordre*. Eliot's essay manages to combine, in its notion of "simultaneity," the timelessness of Byzantine art and the temporality of the modern avant-garde in a "powerful campaign for the recognition of the new" (127). Also valuable in this section is Patey's exploration of the "Magdalenian draughtsman" who makes his way unexpectedly into Eliot's formulation of tradition. Patey convincingly shows that the work of the anthropological school hovered over Eliot's thoughts as he wrote his essay, and continues to hover over us as we read and try to understand and evaluate the "group consciousness" and "collective representation" envisaged in the essay's theory of impersonality. She ends on an intriguing note, suggesting that the anthropological

subtext is so much a part of Eliot's essay that Eliot may be suggesting a new, almost ritualistic way of interacting with art—one in which reading becomes a communal activity.

The final section of this collection brings together several "Case Studies," including an essay by Marjorie Perloff that queries the apparent antagonism between Eliot and Duchamp; a contribution from Max Saunders, who recontextualizes Eliot's and Ford Madox Ford's respective traditions in light of each other; and finally a thoughtful response by Brett Neilson to the affinities between Eliot and Benjamin. While this is in some ways the most provocative section of the collection, it leaves one reader at least wondering why these case studies in particular are understood as especially illuminating to a study of Eliot's theory of tradition and impersonality. The collection ends with a select bibliography carefully arranged to parallel the four-section structure of the book. This is thoughtfully done on the part of the editors, for it means that a student interested in a particular topic can easily locate pertinent sources.

Altogether, *T. S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition* is an excellent addition to the library of a student or scholar interested in the continuing influence and legacy of Eliot's most famous essay. It is a diverse, provocative, thoughtful, and well-organized collection, not rehashing old debates or stirring the coals of burnt-out ideas, but reevaluating the role of tradition in contemporary scholarship, contextualizing and challenging accepted formulations, and determining and re-determining what should be held or discarded from our critical inheritance. Not least, this book confirms a suspicion that "tradition" is as important, troubling, rousing, and challenging for us now as it was for Eliot in 1919.



Lee Oser. *The Ethics of Modernism: Moral Ideas in Yeats, Eliot, Joyce, Woolf and Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

Reviewed by Michael Cotsell
University of Delaware

Lee Oser is known to this readership as the author of *T. S. Eliot and American Poetry* (1998), an exciting and original study of Eliot's poetry in the American tradition of Emerson and Whitman. The present study adopts a very different approach. *The Ethics of Modernism* is divided into chapters on the five modernists listed in its subtitle. Oser's heuristic device is well tuned and productive: take the clarity and rigor of Aristotelian ethics to the obscurities of Modernism. Each author is addressed in turn through the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Oser employs Eliot to sum up Aristotle—"Soul is to body as cutting is to the axe: realizing itself in its actions, and not completely real when abstracted from what it does"—although he later argues that elsewhere Eliot by sleight of hand turns Aristotle into a modernist. Joyce is even worse, for he "dismisses the *Nicomachean Ethics* as

‘the weak part of the peripatetic philosophy’ and readily dispatches the *Politics*.... Joyce prized Aristotle for his metaphysics and aesthetics.”

The main merit of this approach is that it raises a fundamental question about difficult and significant literature. Oser’s brilliant, stylish argument combines philosophical and literary languages in a manner entirely readable. He is an exciting and challenging writer, quick on his feet, surprising, witty, terse, imaginative, concentrated, and supple. A critical book like this is a pleasure to read and a stimulus to its reader, who derives from its clarity the pleasant feeling that he is more clever and better informed than he had previously noticed. This reader quickly found himself scribbling in margins and sitting up late in bed to read another chapter. Even very good works of criticism and scholarship are rarely this stimulating. This is a work, then, from which readers of modernism who are not dedicated to an *idée fixe* will take great pleasure. I would especially recommend it for the bright undergraduate or graduate student looking for an engaging, informed and challenging overview of major English-language Modernists.

Having said this, it was somewhat disappointing to realize that the elements of Oser’s argument and organization are strongly reminiscent of the moral criticism of F. R. Leavis (who is not mentioned in his text) in the mid-twentieth century. For Leavis, Lawrence—along with his own prejudices—provided the moral touchstone that in Oser’s work is represented by Aristotle: a welcome switch from Romanticism to Classicism, and from assertion to nicely conducted argument. Leavis, it will be recalled, was no great fan of the modernists. Yeats did well, but Joyce and Woolf were summarily rejected (Bloomsbury was a very negative term for Leavis and his *Scrutiny* colleagues). I don’t recall that Leavis ever paid attention to Beckett. With Eliot, Leavis and *Scrutiny* conducted a long argument, in which Eliot’s impersonal poet and religious cultural conservatism were generally characterized as coming together as a snobbery that was detached from life only for the wrong reasons. Nevertheless, Leavis admired Eliot’s poetry, and his *New Bearings in English Poetry* is largely dedicated to separating out what seemed vital in Eliot’s poetry from what seemed posture. Leavis thought *The Waste Land* was the beginning of modern English Poetry, and I recall people in the seventies being surprised to learn that it was not. As well, Oser begins his study by opposing his ethical humanism to a recent British cultural phenomenon, neo-Darwinism, an updated version of Leavis’s deploring the “scientism” of C. P. Snow. It would have been interesting if Oser had brought Leavis into a discussion that he influences. Oser’s omission of Lawrence is similarly regrettable, because one imagines he would have important things to say about the novelist. The reader is left asking what the rationale is for this particular selection of one American, one English, and three Irish writers, unless it

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is a repeat of Leavis’s questionable notion of what was “English.” But this is not the case: Oser knows an Irish writer when he sees one, even if he chooses to examine Eliot without reference to either American thought and poetry—perhaps because he had done this before—or French.

Leavis and Oser also have in common a great deal of respect for the Arnold of *Culture and Anarchy* and even *Literature and Dogma*, preferring him to Pater and aestheticism. It appears that, whatever its source, the approach to modernism from ethical criteria seems to arrive at a rejection of modernist formalism or aestheticism—at the argument that with modernism the elaboration of art overwhelms or obscures or operates at the expense of “life.” This comes perilously close to a rejection of literary modernism *per se*, as if everything that Eliot and others derived from interior monologue, stream of consciousness, irony, ambivalence, the mask, *dedoublement*, etc., counts in the end as a displacement, a diversion from ethics to emotional epistemology as a loss of engagement with the world. The energy of modernism, its by-no-means-entirely successful project of an enlargement that did not succumb to the dangers of action that were evident everywhere, and its exploration of the difficulty of establishing the habitually well-organized person Aristotle assumes as his auditor, go undervalued. The question might be put this way: is stream

of consciousness, along with the other ways of representing subjectivity in modernism (all that Eliot celebrated in his essay on Joyce and the mythical method), alienation?—the expression ultimately

of a fatal fatigue or hostility? It is interesting to observe that Oser’s citations of Aristotle’s emphasis closely resemble Janet’s psychology of action. Yet it has been argued that Janet is ultimately a behaviorist.

In respect of Eliot, however, it has been my impression from other discussions that Eliot emerged from his study of philosophy with an Aristotelian perspective that, concurrent with the influence of dynamic psychiatry, enabled him, with varying success, to embark on a long examination and evaluation of the romantic, aesthetic, and even theological construction of his troubled subjectivity. Aristotle, and Bradley’s Aristotle, provided him with the means to winnow his modernist Idealism and even Bradley’s Hegelianism. Both elements were necessary. Is there a lack of action in Eliot that is not bemoaned?

Nevertheless, Oser pursues his lines of argument so well that something is always being said or observed that is interesting. Every reader of *The Ethics of Modernism* will have his or her favorite chapter: mine was the chapter on Beckett, whose compassion and moral responsibility are impossible to miss. But Oser is always the skeptic. His chapter on Eliot, for instance, concludes with a discussion of Reilly’s speech to Celia in *The Cocktail Party*. One might argue that Eliot’s poetics are always close to revealing the abyss beneath human habit, always, as it were, rendering Aristotle’s audience

uneasy, as in this description of respectable, loveless, morally-numbered marriage. This may be one of the reasons why we may feel he ultimately has more to say to us than some of his Victorian predecessors. Or we might conclude with Oser that the passage is evidence of Eliot's equally habitual, somewhat Gothic, distaste for the quotidian life. Or we might point to *The Four Quartets* for evidence in Eliot's late work of the unity of spontaneity and spirituality in action in terms unavailable to Aristotle. Certainly, Oser reminds us of the necessity of an active virtue: discrimination. The reader is more than grateful for a book that raises questions of such significance and gives so much delight in so doing.



Rachel Potter. *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900–1930*. Oxford UP, 2006.

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This interesting but uneven study raises a number of productive questions about modernist culture, gender, and politics that complicate what we think we know about modernism's alliance with authoritarian politics; the ideological and political differences (not to mention aesthetic ones) between male and female modernists; and the meaning of such fundamental terms as *democracy*, *liberalism*, and *authority*—terms that, as Potter shows, have been far from stable, meaning one thing in 1914 and something different in the 1930s, when Eliot launched his notorious attack on a “worm-eaten liberalism.”

Deftly summarizing the new understanding of gender and modernism that arose in the wake of feminist and post-structuralist interventions in modernist historiography, Potter questions its rather too tidy depiction of a central opposition between an elite male modernism, authoritarian and misogynist, and the forces of democratization, aligned in such pioneering studies as Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide* with both feminism and postmodernist aesthetics. Potter complicates this picture by tracing the various ways in which male and female writers shared a profound skepticism about “the new political mechanism of democracy.” “At the heart of many modernist texts,” she maintains, “is the idea that modern democracies become formally inclusive at the historical moment when the state extends its power over the individual citizen. The change from restricted to mass democracy in the period alters the meaning of key political and aesthetic categories. At the moment that the state becomes inclusive, then, the terms of this inclusion become opaque.” Thus Mina Loy wondered in 1921: “What happens to our belief in equality when the masses are ‘hypnotized’ by the power of a mass media controlled by warmongering capitalists?”

The introductory chapters of Potter's book outlining these larger social changes in relation to reigning political

debates and shifting modernist aesthetics are by far the best part of the book. In chapters one and two Potter discusses the English reception of the radically individualist “egoist” ideas of Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche in the *New Age* and the *Freewoman* (which changed its name to the *New Freewoman* and then to the *Egoist*), and the range of modernist responses to the “intense interrogation of the meaning of democracy and liberalism” that marked the political context of the 1910s and 20s. The subsequent three chapters are studies of individual poets—H.D., T. S. Eliot, and Mina Loy—in which Potter aims to tease out the strange collisions and alliances among modernism(s), democracy, and sexual difference.

Potter's study testifies to the advantage of doing detailed research in journals of the time and thereby resituating modernist writers within the immediate context of then-raging political debates on such issues as democracy and women's rights. Those who assumed, as I did, that the *New Freewoman* became the *Egoist* under the influence of Pound and his decidedly male-inflected modernity will find themselves corrected by Potter's account, directing us to “egoist feminists” like Dora Marsden, the previous editor of the journal, who adopted Stirner's and Nietzsche's radical will-based individualism to argue against the suffragist struggle to secure women's legal equality (which would, according to Marsden and other “egoist feminists,” keep them bonded to an illusory sense of freedom secured by reliance on the state), in favor of an internal freedom, issuing in a more radical liberation of women from, ultimately, the very category of woman itself. Potter's observations on the strange meeting places between sexually opposed camps creates a rich and nuanced portrait of the range of ideological and artistic positions among modernist writers and political activists, united by concern about the impact of social democratization on the pursuit of artistic excellence and individual expression. Thus Potter shows, in her book's early chapters, how Italian futurists and egoist feminists connected over both a shared disdain for the suffragist faith in legal reform and an animosity to ideals of modern democracy that do not break with traditional (i.e., static) notions of respectability, rationality, and empathy.

The three chapters focusing on H.D., Eliot, and Loy, although still of interest, are not nearly as strong. Potter seems more confident when discussing the political and aesthetic ideals of these three poets, especially when she gleans them from the poets' prose writings. By contrast, her analyses of actual poems in relation to their authors' attitude toward democracy, authority, and sexual difference appear frequently awkward and uncertain. Potter is markedly more comfortable approaching poetry as a discourse about political and ethical implications. This difficulty suggests perhaps a more fundamental problem of culturally framed literary analyses: how to discuss an author's political ideas in relation to his or her poetry, without reducing poetry to merely a reflection of such political ideas—without, in other words, privileging politics over aesthetics.

Notwithstanding her opening assertion that “the subject of this book is modernist poetry, rather than prose,” Potter’s uneven and sketchy treatment of poetry detracts from the persuasiveness of her chapter on Eliot, in which she aims to show that “his representations of women, so central to many of his early poems, are informed by his political understanding.” To her credit, Potter’s argument is complex and nuanced, seeking to integrate observations on larger historical changes with an analysis of Eliot’s intellectual and aesthetic attitude toward democracy, and doing so without oversimplifying the different ways in which Eliot deploys the feminine as signifier of “verbalism” (“indefinite language, in which words have become severed from their objects”), cultural decline, and mass democracy. In the period from 1909 to 1916, when public debate over democracy focused on the distinction between romanticism and classicism, individual liberty versus external authority, Eliot connected women “with a romantic introspection in which the individual is privileged over cultural and political authority”; after WWI,

and most decisively in 1928, when the suffrage was further extended to women 21 years of age, he considered women’s “participation in political affairs as a ‘dilution’ of democracy.”

Even after multiple readings of this chapter I still found it difficult to grasp the details of Potter’s actual—rather than her announced—argument. Simply put, she is good at telling us what she is going to argue and at effectively summarizing what she has argued, but the actual development of her argument about modernism, democracy, and sexual difference limps behind, especially in terms of her ability to “show” how poetry itself (and not only writings about poetry) became a central site for the articulation of modernist writers’ complex attitudes toward democracy and sexual difference. Despite this weakness, Potter’s study makes for compelling reading. The questions it raises are important and productive ones, and I expect that other scholars of modernity, as well as Potter herself, will pursue these questions in subsequent, more detailed analyses of individual poets and their works.

Eliot—To You*

Ted Richer

do you

how “to reject a bad poem”

know

do you

how “to select a good poem”

know

...

how “to select a good *new* poem”

if you

...

know

if you

how “to select a good poem”

know

do you

how “to select a good *new* poem”

know

do you

how “to reject a bad poem”

know

...

how to select or reject this *new* poem

if you

know

* on “the rudiment of criticism”

by Jayme Stayer
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If you are aware of any 2007 citations that do not appear here, please contact Jayme at jayme.stayer@gmail.com. Omissions will be rectified in the 2008 listing.

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Time Present is edited and published on behalf of the Society by David Chinitz, Loyola University Chicago.

Printing and mailing subsidized by the Loyola Department of English and College of Arts & Sciences.

Design and editorial assistance by Julia Daniel.

Printed in the USA.