

# Time Present

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## “Prufrock” and the Ether Dome

Sarah Stanbury  
College of the Holy Cross

One of the most famous objects in twentieth-century poetry is a table supporting an etherized patient: “Let us go then, you and I / When the evening is spread out against the sky/ Like a patient etherized upon a table.” Eliot’s table is apposite for the sky, the backdrop or support for a sunset: This simile comprises arguably one of the most egregious pairings in American literature. Categories cross as the immaterial evening and sky are forced into a relationship with the material body and table; the scene floats in space, yet in floating it comes to rest on the table that ends the sentence. The table is both essential and inert—a support, in fact, for the structure of the metaphor in its entirety: everything comes to rest on it.

“Prufrock’s” table also places the poem geographically and makes regional claims. Eliot’s wanderings around Boston inspired many of his early poems, “Prufrock” among them, and those urban walks may well have brought him past the Massachusetts General Hospital’s famous Ether Dome, site of the first demonstration of ether in 1846 (Fig. 1). This event, a foundational moment in the development of modern medicine, was widely commemorated in paintings and photographs showing an etherized patient lying on a table, surrounded by doctors (Fig. 2). It was also documented in 1868 through the Ether Monument, which still stands in Boston Garden near the Arlington St. entrance. In 1910 the domed auditorium of the Bulfinch building, designed as a surgical amphitheater and dubbed the “Ether Dome” shortly after 1846, was used for lectures rather than surgery; but its associations with the discovery of anesthesia had endured. Its annual Ether Day Address brought in prominent speakers, among them, in 1909—one year before Eliot began work on “Prufrock”—Charles William Eliot, Harvard president and distant cousin of the poet. “Prufrock’s” opening image imaginatively occurs in a place that is tied, in unsettling ways, to a substance that takes action on the body or even takes it over—and to a substance that was etched onto Boston’s cityscape through, architecture, images, and public monuments.



Above: Print, based a painting by Arthur Ignacius Keller of the 1846 ether demonstration. *Semi-Centennial of Anaesthesia* (Boston: Massachusetts General Hospital, 1897), after p. 15.

Photos courtesy of Sarah Stanbury. Article: Sarah Stanbury, ‘The Man of Law’s Tale and Rome’, *Exemplaria*, 22.2 (2010), pp. 119-137.

### Eliot Society Granted Tax-Exempt Status

We are pleased to announce that on May 28, the Internal Revenue Service approved the T. S. Eliot Society's application for tax-exempt status under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The Society is now classified as a public charity, and contributions (gifts, bequests, etc.) are now officially tax deductible.

From its beginning, the Eliot Society has been incorporated as a non-profit organization in the State of Missouri. However, this is the first time we have gained the imprimatur of the Federal Government.



### Eliot Society Election

Four seats on the Eliot Society's Board of Directors are up for election this year. All members in good standing—i.e., those whose dues are current, as well as honorary members—are eligible to vote. Ballots must be submitted by August 27 at the latest.

This year's election will be conducted using an online ballot rather than paper ballots. To vote, please follow these instructions:

1. Click the "Eliot Society Election" link on our website ([www.luc.edu/eliot](http://www.luc.edu/eliot)).
2. In the login box that pops up, enter the user name **eliot** and the password **TSE1888**.
3. On the ballot screen, enter your first and last names and your email address. Then click on the boxes next to the names of up to four candidates. Clicking once will put a check in the box; clicking again on the same box will remove the check.
4. When you are ready, click the "Submit Your Vote" button.

Please note that the identifying information (name and email address) is required only for purposes of validation or in case of a problem with your ballot. Votes will be seen only by the Supervisor of Elections and the President, and, as with our quondam paper ballots, they will be held in strict confidence.

If you lack internet access or are otherwise unable to use the online ballot, please contact either the Supervisor of Elections or the President, who will be happy to enter your vote manually.

Four persons have been nominated: Chris Buttram, Tony Cuda, Melanie Fathman, and Nancy Gish. Terms for the elected candidates will be four years for the highest ranked (in terms of votes received in the election), three years for the second and third highest, and two for the fourth highest. As explained in *Time Present* 70 (Spring 2010), in order to reestablish "staggered"

terms, the Board recently amended the Society's by-laws to vary the terms of the elected Board Members for this election only. The by-laws are available on the Society's website (see <http://www.luc.edu/eliot/who.htm>).



### Public Sightings

Compiled by David Chinitz

**Cruel months.** Googling "X is the cruellest [or cruelest] month," for any month X, results in hundreds or even thousands of Eliot-inspired hits. By doing this for each of the twelve months, *Time Present* brings you herein a plebiscite on mensural cruelty.

Readers of *Time Present* will be delighted to learn that Eliot's perception of April's cruelty is widely approved, with 567,000 hits, over 50 times as many as for the next-most-cited month. Even with the words "waste" and "Eliot" excluded from the search (plus the common misspellings "Elliot" and "Elliott") in order to eliminate direct references to the poet and his poem, April gets an impressive 329,000 hits. There seems to be no dispute, then, as to which month is cruelest, although April's malice is often ascribed either to the U.S. income tax filing deadline or to early baseball results, neither of which is quite what Eliot had in mind. [All data as of April 28, 2010.]

More unexpected, perhaps, is the consensus that August is the second-cruellest month, with 10,880 hits. *Slate* magazine describes August as "the dark space on the calendar when wars start, when sports disappear, when the summer heat chokes, when Elvis died." David Plotz has argued that August should be abolished because "nothing good ever happens in it."

September rates third-cruellest, with 7,380 hits, followed distantly by March (2,569), January (2,440), and February (2,303). The cruelty of these winter months will probably surprise no one. January, for instance, has, according to various websites, the most couple breakups and the worst movie releases of the year.

And the *least* cruel month? Definitely, that would be July, with a mere 261 hits. June is the next kindest month (810), followed by May (928). October approaches the winter months, but November and December are quite mediocre in their cruelty.

Now we know.

Name of the Sept. 24, 2009 program on the French Symbolists at the Art Institute of Chicago: "**Disturb the Universe:** In Search of the Modern." The program,

*Continued on p. 7*

**T. S. Eliot Society**  
**31st Annual Meeting, 24–26 September 2010**

**Friday, Sept. 24**

**Washington University**  
**(Room locations on campus TBA)**

**Board Meeting** 9:00–12:00

**Peer Seminar** 10:00–12:00  
 “Eliot Among the Moderns”  
 Chair: Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Pomona C  
*No auditors, please*

**Scholars Seminar** 10:00–12:00  
 Chair: Benjamin Lockerd, Grand Valley State U  
*No auditors, please*

*Lunch ad lib.*

**Session I** 2:00–3:30  
 Chair: Anita Patterson, Boston U  
 James Stephen Murphy, Harvard U  
 TS vs. FS.: Eliot, Flint, and Magazine Modernism  
 Matthew R. Vaughn, U of Tulsa  
 “You Cannot Value Him Alone”:  
*The Waste Land* in its Magazine Context

Beci Dobbin, Trinity C, Cambridge  
 Eliot’s Almost Modern Typist

**Memorial Lecture** 4:00–5:00  
 Michael Levenson, U of Virginia  
 “and what if she should die some afternoon”: Eliot’s Stage of Violence

**Reception** 5:00–6:00

*Dinner ad lib.*

**Saturday, Sept. 25**

**St. Louis Woman’s Club**  
**4600 Lindell Boulevard**

**Session II** 9:00–10:30  
 Chair: Cyrena Pondrom, U of Wisconsin, Madison

Elisabeth Däumer, Eastern Michigan U  
 The Problem of Empathy in Eliot’s Early Poetry

Christopher McVey, U of Wisconsin, Madison

Worlds of Speculation: T. S. Eliot, F. H. Bradley, and *Four Quartets*  
 Megan Quigley, Villanova U  
 Eliot, Bertrand Russell and the Vague

**Session III** 10:45–12:15  
 Chair: Michael Coyle, Colgate U

Srila Nayak, U of North Carolina, Charlotte  
 T. S. Eliot and Derek Walcott: Death by Water and Other Transnational Echoes

Thomas Brennan, St. Joseph’s U  
 Everyday Prophecy: “Choruses from *The Rock*” and *The Changing Light at Sandover*

Emily Hall, U of North Carolina, Greensboro  
 Jeanette Winterson’s Object of Affection

**Society Lunch** 12:30

**Special Presentation** 1:30–2:15  
 Nancy D. Hargrove and Guy Hargrove  
 Eliot and Popular Music: Music Hall Songs, Bawdy Ballads, Ragtime, and All that Jazz

**Bus Tour: Eliot’s St. Louis** 2:30–5:00  
 Melanie Fathman

**Home of Tony & Melanie Fathman**  
**4967 Pershing Place**

**Society Dinner** 7:00

**Roundtable** 8:00–8:30  
 Update on the New Editions of Eliot’s Works  
 Ronald Schuchard, Emory U  
 Tony Cuda, U of North Carolina, Greensboro  
 David Chinitz, Loyola U Chicago

**Sunday, Sept. 26**

**First Unitarian Church**  
**5007 Waterman Boulevard**

**Session IV** 11:00–12:00  
 Chair: Benjamin Lockerd, Grand Valley State U  
 Anne Stillman, Clare C, Cambridge  
 T. S. Eliot’s Shakespeare  
 James Matthew Wilson, Villanova U  
 The Rock against Shakespeare

**Eliot Aloud** 12:15–12:45  
 Chair: Chris Buttram, Winona State U

**Announcement of Awards**

A reduced rate of \$124 per night is being offered by:

Parkway Hotel  
 4550 Forest Park Avenue  
 St. Louis, MO 63108 USA  
 (314) 256-7777

Please ask for the “T. S. Eliot Group Block” when you make your reservation.

**Deadline for reservations: August 23**

For fast and economical transportation to the hotel, take the Metrolink train from Lambert Airport to the Central West End station at 410 S. Euclid Ave. The hotel is just <sup>2</sup>/<sub>10</sub> mi. from the station.

***A Companion to T. S. Eliot.* Ed. by David E. Chinitz. Malden, MA, and Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.**

Reviewed by Suzanne W. Churchill  
Davidson College

T. S. Eliot was an inveterate recycler, composing poems out of bits culled from everything from Dante to Tin Pan Alley; reusing in later works scraps cut from his own poems and plays; and “constantly” republishing his essays (69, 217, 246, 276). As an editor, he turned *The Criterion* into a veritable recycling station, a “public forum in which he could experiment with the structural organization of his poems, assembling wholes from fragments that had previously been published separately” (288). Yet all these “decisions and revisions” result in an idiom that is distinctively Eliot’s own. Indeed, the tension between recycling and originality animates his entire career: it is, as Sanford Schwartz observes, the opposition between “tradition” and “the individual talent,” between Classicism and innovation, and between the inheritance of the past and the demands of the present (19-21). This tension also invigorates *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, recently published by Blackwell and expertly edited by David E. Chinitz.

What makes *A Companion* so distinctive, compelling, and instructive is not so much its originality, but its ability to contextualize, distill, and synthesize Eliot in his time and in the century of criticism that followed in his wake. *A Companion* is a magnum opus of scholarly recycling.

By “recycling,” I do not mean rehashing old arguments, nor am I referring to the familiar position of “scholars who... recycle conference papers with a bit of self-reproach—and the protection of a new title” (Ingram 116). Rather, by “recycling,” I mean a scholarly activity akin to Eliot’s own creative practice: the gathering, reclaiming, and recombining of ideas, contexts, and interpretations in order to create a new composite. Literary scholarship today tends to valorize the individual talent who overturns traditional paradigms. In *A Companion*, however, the emphasis is on tradition—not only Eliot’s place in it and definition of it, but also “tradition” in the sense of a shared body of literature and a community of interested readers. Instead of asserting startlingly original claims in highfalutin professional jargon, scholars here deliver sound arguments in clear, accessible language. The chapters offer fresh perspectives on well-mapped fields, the best of them succeeding not only in surveying the territory, but also forging new paths. They teach us something new about Eliot without laying waste to what has come before.

The hefty *Companion* comprises thirty-seven chapters that span Eliot’s life, works, and critical legacy. It is divided

into three parts. “Part I: Influences” offers chapters on personal, literary, religious, intellectual, cultural, and political forces that shaped his life and thought. “Part II: Works” offers guided tours through his poems, plays, and prose. “Part III: Contexts” examines his work in light of current debates about race, gender, politics, and religion, as well as his role as a publisher and editor in relation to his enduring cultural authority and vacillating reputation. The pithy, readable chapters average 10-12 pages, and each includes a helpful bibliography of “References and Further Reading.” Together, they provide a solid foundation in Eliot studies for advanced undergraduates, graduate students, teachers, and scholars. After reading the volume, I felt like I’d completed a comprehensive course on T. S. Eliot team-taught by the best professors in North America and the U. K.

The volume begins with a strong start. Anthony Cuda offers a biographical overview of the poet’s life, linking Eliot’s personal experiences, intellectual growth, and poetic development without reductive confluences between art and life. Barry Faulk puts a new spin on the French Symbolists by linking them to the rise of the urban metropolis. Jewel Spears Brooker’s comprehensive overview of Western philosophy is framed by two exemplary chapters on less studied

but no less formative influences on Eliot: Buddhism and popular culture. These chapters, by Christina Hauck and Chinitz respectively, are model essays for students and scholars alike: written in a clear, supple prose, they present compelling arguments, integrate rich primary and secondary source material, and open

the door to further discussion. Marc Manganaro traces the influence of the emerging field of comparative evolutionary anthropology on Eliot’s own evolving theories about myth and culture, and Vincent Sherry links Eliot’s poetics of Decadence to the historical context of imperial decline. In addition to offering “a primer in the poetic of Decadence” and a European history lesson, Sherry delivers actual literary criticism, distinguishing between the strained “pratfall triple-syllable rhyme of ‘strangled you’ and ‘mangled you’,” and the more successful “sardonic comedy in the rhyming of ‘crumpets’ and ‘trumpets’” (94, 98).

The chapters in Part II survey Eliot’s works in chronological order. Jayme Stayer launches the section with a discussion of Eliot’s juvenilia, which he organizes around three ontological problems that preoccupy the young poet. Like Sherry, Stayer does not shy away from identifying weaknesses in Eliot’s early verse and he likewise exhibits his own delight in language, as when he sums up Eliot’s accomplishments in a masterful list: “the telling allusions, hallucinatory squalor, transcendent intimations, muted suffering, electric fear, and bilious ennui all of its spoken, sung, or growled in virtuosic registers of irony, obliquity, deadpan,

“What makes *A Companion* so distinctive, compelling, and instructive is not so much its originality, but its ability to contextualize, distill, and synthesize...”

and directness” (118). As in Part I, the best of the chapters in this section cover familiar territory but introduce a fresh perspective, as when Jeffrey Perl uses Eliot’s pervasive ambivalence to complicate the traditional division of his career into two phases; when Sarah Bay-Cheng introduces games and play to a discussion of the *Cats* poems; and when Leonard Diepeveen wittily deflects attention from Eliot’s canonical early essays to his eclectic range of journalism, counting “as least 24 essays which turn to [the topic of how to write criticism properly], or 23 more essays than use the term ‘objective correlative’” (266). Yet though Diepeveen widens the playing field, he manages to reach all the bases: not only the objective correlative, but also difficulty, tradition, and impersonality. Section II provides instructive typologies and glosses to help readers organize and make sense of Eliot’s diverse writings: Francis Dickey groups the poems in *Prufrock and Other Observations* around particular signatures and motifs, Randy Malamud identifies common features of the 1930s plays along with succinct summaries of each, and John Xiros Cooper defines key but often misunderstood terms such as “culture” and “society” (287). Because these chapters provide objective overviews of Eliot’s writings, a few seem a bit bland or diffuse, but undergraduates who struggle to comprehend Eliot may appreciate them most. My students certainly did, though they also wished for discussions of topics such as “irony” and “rhyme,” which, though touched on, don’t merit a chapter of their own or even entries in the index. (Despite these omissions, the index is actually very thorough and user-friendly.)

For this reason, I found “Part III: Contexts” to offer more dynamic readings and persuasive analyses. Cyrena Pondrom, Bryan Cheyette, and Patrick Query confront the controversies of gender, race, and sexuality head on, identifying various factions and presenting taxonomies of Eliot’s women, racial types, and sexual orientations. Cheyette does an especially fine job guiding readers through Eliot’s life and poems before introducing the critical arguments, thereby training readers to participate as informed players in the unfolding debate. Kevin Dettmar takes on the even more sensitive and taboo topic of Eliot’s religious faith, providing a serious secular appreciation of what he calls “some of the most significant religious poetry in English of the era” (374). Ann Ardis draws attention to the historical and material contexts of modernism in its various incarnations; weaving together an astonishing array of critical voices, her essay represents the spirited colloquy of the “New Modernisms” today. Part III also presents fine scholarship on Eliot’s editing, publishing, and New Critical legacy, with excellent chapters by Jason Harding, John Timberman Newcomb, and Gail McDonald that make potentially dry topics accessible and interesting. They provide clear narratives of complex territory, but also lead to some surprising wrinkles and contradictions, as when Harding argues that “by the late 1920s, ... the *Criterion* was undoubtedly in retreat from experimental modernism” (297), while, in the next chapter, Newcomb asserts that Eliot’s position at Faber & Faber, which he assumed in 1925, “allowed him to shape the formation of in-

ternational high modernism over the next four decades” (409). This discrepancy regarding Eliot’s relation to high modernism is not a weakness in *A Companion*, but a sign that its typologies, genealogies, and glosses do not box Eliot in, but provide stepping-stones for continued research.

*A Companion to T. S. Eliot* is a necessity for any college or university library and a worthwhile investment for your personal library. You will use it and reuse it, and you’ll encourage your students to do the same. If Eliot’s criticism influenced so much of what came after him, let’s hope this volume influences literary scholarship as it’s practiced today, inspiring us to teach instead of dazzle, to value quality over quantity, and to “reduce, reuse, and recycle” in order to produce a more sustaining and sustainable body of criticism.

#### Works Cited

Ingram, Randall. “Historical Alternatives to Our Environmental Crisis: Recycling and Robert Herrick’s *Hesperides*.” *ISLE* 14:2 (Summer 2007). 107-20.



*Origins of Literary Modernism 1870-1914*. Ed. Gregory F. Tague. Palo Alto, CA: Academia Press, 2009.

Reviewed by Kinereth Meyer  
Bar-Ilan University

As I never tire of telling my students, no one woke up one morning and announced the beginning of Romanticism, or the Victorian age, or modernism. At best, literary periodization is a useful tool for readers, critics, and historians; it functions as “a rough way of locating our attention,” in Michael Levenson’s words. At worst, it may lead to artificial categories that freeze and essentialize what are highly individual responses to historical, cultural, and literary change. Literary modernism is particularly problematic in this context, not only because it wrote “Make It New” on its standard, but because its dynamic re-evaluation of philosophical issues, such as the relationship between subject and object, or between conception and experience, generated a parallel reformulation of aesthetic concepts—image, symbol, convention, structure. The vocabulary through which we examine literary modernism demands a flexibility that can accommodate the fluidity of these reformulations, one that refuses categorizations that will effectively stultify what was a volatile and dynamic literary movement.

Gregory Tague, editor of *Origins of Literary Modernism, 1870-1914*, thus makes the wise decision to define the field in general terms as “the creative nexus of London from the end of the nineteenth cent. to the beginning of the twentieth century (up to around 1914)” (ix). He provides a wide context in which to consider writers ranging from Thomas Hardy to Derek Wolcott and subjects that range from literature to architecture to postcolonialism. Tague describes this collection of twenty-one essays on early modernism as “edgeless clusters of essays” (ix); the primary component

linking them to each other is their combined interest in locating those cultural, literary, and philosophical transformations that feed into the movement we call literary modernism. High modernism, particularly as represented by Pound and Eliot, is conspicuously (and, in my opinion, unfortunately) absent from this collection, and instead the focus is on Hardy, Woolf, Forster, Conrad, Lawrence, Ford Madox Ford, Katherine Mansfield, T.E. Hulme, and Wyndham Lewis. Later writers, such as Wole Soyinka and Derek Wolcott, both born after 1930, are considered through their connections to modernism.

The opening essay, Tyrus Miller's "Wrong from the Start," poses the question that defines the enterprise of the entire collection: how does one write about modernism? Miller's analysis of the historiography of modernism is both a critique and a corrective. While most accounts of modernism posit a clear connection between artistic innovation and "a fundamental shift in experience," such views may be only "apparently historical." Miller is concerned that such "large scale historicity" may obscure less obvious, more "micrological" (4) forces that shape and transform cultural artifacts. In taking into account both economic change and mass culture, Miller provides a challenging re-evaluation of the historiography of early modernism.

Most of the other essays in the volume have a more specific focus. Some, like Elizabeth Foley O'Connor's "'A Splendid Forlorn Hope': *Fin-de-Siècle* Little Magazines, Modernism and the Public Sphere," attempt to expand the borders of where we locate "modernism" by reading early cultural artifacts as models for later, more well-known examples. O'Connor argues that relatively unknown little magazines, often denigrated as decadent, symbolist, or Edwardian, provided models for later, more successful magazines, such as *The Little Review*, *Blast*, and *The Egoist*. Similarly, Jason B. Jones's essay on Arnold Bennett's early criticism claims that the work of more "canonical" modernists, such as Pound, Woolf, and Eliot, was in fact anticipated by Bennett's advocacy of cultural change. Jones takes a new look at the old opposition between Woolf, who considered Bennett a representative of narrow Edwardian conventions, and Bennett, and concludes, not entirely convincingly, that Bennett's essays actually "helped set the stage for Woolf's later innovations" (52).

Lori M. Campbell's essay on Hardy confronts the difficult question of where to locate Hardy's modernism. Campbell discusses male-female power struggles in Hardy within a context defined by the conflict between the ideals of folk belief and industrial capitalism, concluding that Hardy's women escape actualization by the male characters, and even by Hardy himself. Although her argument is not fully realized, Campbell raises some interesting conjectures, and opens the door to a re-examination of some long-held perceptions of Hardy's work.

Virginia Woolf is the focus of several essays in this volume (by Elizabeth Primamore, Wayne Stables, and Timothy Vincent). Stables, for example, reads Woolf's early fiction by first discussing the history of the symbol and then show-

ing how the history of the trope can be a useful tool for navigating the relationship between Romanticism and modernism. Instead of first reading Woolf's fiction and then drawing conclusions about literary structures, Stables chooses the more provocative path of first discussing the etiology of "symbol" itself and then suggesting how this can illuminate ambiguities in *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*. If Stables uses the history of a well-known literary structure in order to read modernist texts, Tom Henthorne discovers sources of a contemporary critical concept—postcolonialism—in modernism. Although his use of recent critical parlance may be a bit forced, Henthorne reminds us of the "sense of liminality [of] colonial subjects" experienced by writers such as Conrad and Joyce. Somewhat less convincingly, Henthorne argues that this sense of liminality was "appropriated by later modernists to address other forms of alienation, including those based on gender, social and economic class, sexual preference and race" (395).

More specifically historicist arguments are presented in Robert McParland's interesting discussion of the collaboration between Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, in Daniel Moore's examination of the connection between material history and modernist attitudes toward history, and in Allan Johnson's commentary on E.M. Forster and architectural space. Moore's sophisticated reflection on the archeological histories of Italy in general and Rome in particular offers a way of re-examining modernism through aesthetic history. Moore rightly argues that modernist aesthetic criticism is "a genre ripe for significant historiographical re-evaluation" (311). Looking back to Walter Benjamin, Moore claims that an examination of art objects and architecture can provide a provocative way of examining the epistemology of studying the past.

Several of the essays in *Origins of Literary Modernism* do manage to question and challenge standard views of modernism, one of Tague's stated goals. However, overall, this is an uneven collection. Together with essays that succeed in incisively exploring the history and transformations of early modernism, we find essays that are vague and inconclusive, filled with non-sequiturs and imprecise language. Provocative ideas are often overwhelmed by redundancy or imprecision or are inundated by excessive quotation. More rigorous editing would have given shape and form to this "edgeless cluster" of essays.



**T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*  
Dir. Scott Alan Evans**

Patrick Query  
U.S. Military Academy, West Point

During the March 7–April 10 run of *The Cocktail Party* at the Beckett Theatre in Manhattan, The Actors Company Theatre (TACT) organized three post-show "talkbacks":

opportunities for interested audience members to engage in new ways with the play, with Eliot, and with the company.

I participated in the second of these, entitled “The T.S. Eliot Poetry Jam,” on March 19<sup>th</sup> as the respondent for a question-and-answer session following a reading by TACT players of some selections from Eliot’s poetry. Prior to the performance, Assistant Director Andrew Block and I had collaborated to arrange a series of excerpts that might echo and enhance some of the language and ideas in the play: memory and desire, the circularity of time, elusive identity. Our selection resulted in a sequence in which snippets from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* framed and interweaved between longish passages from *Burnt Norton I*, *East Coker V*, and *Dry Salvages III and V*. Excerpts from “A Game of Chess” which resonated with certain exchanges between Edward and Lavinia did not make the final cut. The sections from *Four Quartets* provided the audience with the best re-statement and extension of the play’s abiding concerns, while the *Prufrock* lines reminded the audience of the Eliot sound they may have first loved and perhaps suggested some continuity between those moving early notes and the mature orchestration of Eliot’s later work. The combined effect of the two threads was, it seems to me, positive, and many in the audience seemed taken with what they heard.

The readers, for their part, were all excellent. Simon Jones, Nora Chester, Delphi Harrington, Greg Salata, Todd Gearhart, Richard Ferrone, and James Prendergast delivered their parts with great care and purpose. (The Assistant Director had even consulted me beforehand to ensure the correct pronunciation of a couple of words: I do hope I got *Ar-juna* right). The readers remained on the stage with me during my own remarks and provided a wonderfully supportive and inquisitive extension of the main audience, perhaps half of which had remained for the talkback. The questions posed ranged from Eliot’s process of revision to his dramatic versification to the influence of Buddhism on his later writing. I did my best to answer well but also happily deferred to the cast in matters of character and acting craft.

The Director, Scott Alan Evans, was thoroughly gracious and welcoming, as was everyone else with whom I interacted. In the Spring issue of *Time Present* Marianne Huntington offered a review of the full production, but I will say that it seemed to me as good a performance of this play as could be wished. I was particularly struck by the intelligence of the lighting and set design. (One complaint, minor but grating, is that one of my favorite terms in Act I, “harmless,” somehow became “hopeless.”) It was a thrill to sit amongst—indeed, on—the furniture used in the play and shoulder-to-shoulder with Simon Jones (The Unidentified Guest) and other company members: the kind of experience, I reflected both before and after, that one feels truly lucky to

have as a student of literature, outside of the classroom and the conference panel, in the world where poetry, as Eliot would have it, becomes a part of everyday life. I am most grateful that I was tapped for the assignment.

## Public Sightings

(Continued from p. 2)

sponsored by the Poetry Foundation and the Art Institute, featured Goodman Theatre actors reading passages “while dancers from Hubbard Street Dance Chicago improvise in response.”

“Best Books, chosen by Ian Rankin” (*The Week* 20 Nov. 2009) lists, alongside five novels, **Four Quartets by T. S. Eliot** (Harvest, \$9). “I studied these poems in high school and come back to them every decade or so. As I grow older, they become ever more meaningful as a meditation on the passing of time and the span of human life. They are opaque, humane, moving, and I look forward to reading them again ... in time.”

**A Hollow Man.** “You came here to be a martyr and to die in a big bang of glory. But to paraphrase the poet T. S. Eliot, you will die with a whimper.” (Federal Judge Leonie Brinkema, sentencing Zacarias Moussaoui to life in prison, 4 May 2006.)

## Call for Papers

The Eliot Society will again offer two 90-minute sessions at the annual Louisville Conference on Literature & Culture since 1900, to be held at the University of Louisville, February 24-26, 2011. Those interested should send a 300-word abstract to William Harmon ([wharmon03@mindspring.com](mailto:wharmon03@mindspring.com)) by September 1, 2010. Please include the following information:

Name  
Home Address  
E-mail address  
Telephone number  
Academic affiliation (if applicable)  
Title of paper/work  
Personal biographical note (100-150 words)

For further information, please visit the conference website: <http://www.thelouisvilleconference.com>

**American Literature Association  
San Francisco, May 27–30, 2010**

The Poetics of Political Failure: T. S. Eliot's Rejection of American Liberalism

While Eliot's engagement with poetic traditions outside of the United States often drive discussions of his work, I argue that the American poetic tradition is that which fundamentally structures it, and which, through the mechanisms of rejection and revision, leads to its pronounced anti-liberalism. I assert that we must view Eliot, if we are truly to understand the ideological content of his work, as developing out of a particular American poetic tradition, specifically one that replayed and reinforced important tenets of American liberalism and nationalism. If we do so, we find that Eliot's most characteristic poetic landscape (the urban cityscape) develops within a tradition dominated by Whitman, the most significant American urban poet prior to Eliot. The post-Whitmanian, American streets are the terrain on which the early Eliot's modernism plays out, and which serve as the catalyst for his anti-liberalism.

Rejecting the notion that Eliot was a disconnected and detached cultural observer so immersed in elite European intellectual traditions that he was blind to the realities of American culture, I argue that Eliot was drawn to his anti-liberal position because of very concrete and practical concerns about poetic craft. Quite simply, the city that Eliot wanted to write about, the American city in which his poetic imagination wandered and developed, was the city Whitman had bequeathed to him; and as Eliot would demonstrate, that city was based on impossibilities. By closely reading "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and comparing it to "Song of Myself," I will demonstrate how Eliot presents a dystopian inversion of Whitman's ideal public and urban city.

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Traumatic Loss and Absence in *The Waste Land*

This essay explores the way in which *The Waste Land* is preoccupied with the some of the problems inherent in confusing loss and absence, in the manner discussed by trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra. In LaCapra's work, because loss involves specific historical events, such events can be narrated and eventually overcome; absence, on the other hand, is transhistorical and non-specific. Because it is not an event and therefore has no standing in relation to the past, present, or future, absence cannot be situated in any kind of recovery

narrative. When absence and loss are conflated," according to LaCapra, "melancholic paralysis or manic agitation may set in, and the significance or force of particular historical losses (for example, those of apartheid or the Shoah) may be obfuscated or rashly generalized."

I use this model to demonstrate how *The Waste Land* conflates loss and absence, and I tie the melancholic paralysis that seems such a dominant feature of the poem's speaking voices to this conflation. In key moments, the poem specifies a particular loss (the death of an actual character, for example) and then converts that loss into absence by generalizing the historical circumstances; this conversion is also complicated by the manner in which the poem implicates the reader in this project. My discussion concludes by tying this melancholic paralysis to the poem's preoccupation with elegy. Less a covert elegy (Jahan Ramazani's argument), the poem is, in my view, more directly and intentionally concerned with disrupted mourning and its expression.

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"Backward half-looks": The Role of Memory in *Four Quartets*

The paper is a close reading of Eliot's *Four Quartets* as a meta-poem in which a poet's own life, his poetics and the literary theories that preceded him come together to create the exact existence he desires: timelessness within linear time. Being his most famous late work, *Four Quartets* provides a unique opportunity for the scholar to study Eliot's poetry through three different lenses of memory: theoretical, poetic, and personal. In its most overarching lens, the theoretical, the paper analyzes the vestiges of Romanticism evident in Eliot's poem, specifically its resonance with Emerson's *Nature*. The poem is a Romantic journey for Eliot, one in which he considers forms of spirituality and religion as they function as humanity's route to eternity.

The second type of memory is the echo of Eliot's modernist poetics in *Four Quartets*. This critical memory of poems like *The Wasteland* is worth studying as it appears in *Four Quartets* in order to identify Eliot's simultaneous growth from and return to those poetics. ("In my beginning is my end.") Indeed, the poetic goal of the work is an inherent paradox reminiscent of Eliot's modernism: it is the task of discovering the threshold where timelessness intersects with time and discerning how humanity can access this portal to escape from horizontal, linear time to the vertical, mystical eternal.



Finally, there is Eliot's personal memory, the specific details of his own life. By including many autobiographical references in *Four Quartets*, Eliot shares his own most meaningful experiences. *Four Quartets* artfully melds these three versions of memory: theoretical, critical and personal, and the paper evaluates Eliot's attempt to find man's place within the dichotomy of time and timelessness, which is where memory itself exists.

Kate S. Flynn



Eliot and Badiou: Sacrifice and Belief in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

As the legitimacy of post-modern critique wanes it is instructive to return to the example of Eliot, whose critical work provides a strong model for overcoming the questions of modernity we still face. I read Eliot's landmark essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" through the critical lens of Alain Badiou in an effort to demonstrate a successful engagement with the twin horns of a modern critical dilemma characterized by the authoritarian urge of the high modernist and the entropic relativity of the post-modernist.

In this essay Eliot executes a successful enquiry into the principles of critical response by risking the parameters of

the essay itself, yet remaining steadfast in his belief in the value of his goal and the efficacy of his process. I disagree that the essay is ironic in tone or Romantic in basis; I read it instead as a desperate search for clarity that will align Eliot's belief in artistic surrender with the rigorous demands of a literary critique. The success of the essay lies, however, in Eliot's ability to locate in Keats's nightingale the germ of his notion of the objective correlative, a materially useful term for literary criticism.

Badiou describes just such a procedure of testing a situation from its interiority based on a belief founded external to the situation. Such a procedure as performed by Eliot suggests we may be able to anchor future critique in an ethical aesthetic separate from the whims of current fashion or the appeal to Romantic genius.

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**Note from Julia Daniel:**

In the previous issue of *Time Present*, book reviewer Sarah Kennedy was incorrectly associated with Oxford University; she is actually at Cambridge.



The Bulfinch Building, with dome over the amphitheater, before 1845

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*If you are aware of any 2009 citations that do not appear here, please contact Jayme Stayer at jayme.stayer@gmail.com. Omissions will be rectified in the 2010 listing.*

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