

Time Present

The Newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society

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**Mark your calendars
for the 35th Annual
Meeting of the T. S.
Eliot Society**

**St. Louis, September
19-21, 2014**

*Please note that the
date is set a week
earlier than usual to
accommodate Rosh
Hashanah.*

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Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, eds. *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 4: 1928– 29.* Faber and Faber, 2013.

Reviewed by Timothy Materer
University of Missouri

In September 1928 Eliot wrote to a friend that his fortieth birthday was a “peculiar solstitial point on my progress from birth to death” (261). In 1929 he told his brother Henry that his salary as a director at Faber and Faber was inadequate and that the firm’s success was uncertain; and he expressed his weariness at the need for continual reviewing and lecturing: “I begin, I confess, to feel a little tired at my age, of such irregular sources of income.” Describing his difficulty in establishing a career, he concluded: “I have begun life three times: at 22 [the year in Paris], at 28 [Lloyds Bank], and again at 40; I hope I shall not have to do so again, because I am growing tired” (652–53).

Volume 4 of the letters (1928–29) thoroughly documents the years of mid-life crisis. The editors declare that “all letters of any importance or significance whatsoever, professional or personal, are to be published” and that only “items of little moment or consequence” are left out (xxx). The effort to gather all known letters has been tireless. The editors have drawn upon nearly fifty archives and on information from countless sources, including the Faber records and the uniquely valuable memory of Valerie Eliot. Illustrations such as Eliot with “Charlie Chaplin moustache,” and the covers of key publications from 1928–29, enhance the text. A month-by-month biographical commentary and a biographical register of principal figures are included. Among the latter, the biography of Edouard Roditi gives valuable information about Eliot’s support of this young Jewish poet. Indexes of correspondents and recipients assist the reader, as well as a detailed general index with descriptive subheadings—for example, under “Eliot, Vivien,” “TSE and tea with Woolfs,” and “on ‘most terrible flat’” (805).

Although the volume’s comprehensiveness is welcome, it raises editorial difficulties. If letters “of little moment or consequence” are eliminated, why are so many letters about real estate and banking technicalities included? Even trivial letters receive intensive documentation. Attached to a one-sentence letter to James Burnham on setting a luncheon date is a note of some two hundred words on his political theories. Anything to do with the history of Faber and Faber is exhaustively detailed. To name one instance, the editors include a long letter from Geoffrey Faber to Frank Morley about reorganizing the firm that mentions Eliot only in passing (435–37). The firm’s history also inflates editorial commentary: a note to a short letter about reorganizing the firm occupies a full page in small type, owing to the extensive quotation of correspondence between Lady Gwyer and Faber (461–63).

The length of this volume, and of the previous three, might not be a distraction if the notes were more relevant. In Volume 3, to cite an egregious example, Eliot mentions in a letter to Ezra Pound that he has met Derek Patmore. Note 2 to the letter quotes Patmore’s unpublished memoir in which he expresses “a secret suspicion which I have always believed that T. S. Eliot had a hidden streak of homosexuality in his nature.” Anything more irrelevant

to the actual letter could hardly be imagined since Eliot merely wrote: “Have seen the boy and quite like him” (123). In Volume 4 there are many such irrelevant editorial opinions; for example, that John Crow Ransom was a “reputable poet in his early career” (104) and that G. B. Shaw was a “philanderer and pro-feminist” (709). The most tendentious of the notes takes Geoffrey Hill to task because in 2001 he “deplored” the epigram from Charles Maurras that Eliot used in his *Dante*, and then quotes Christopher Ricks’s refutation in 2003 of Hill’s opinion (582). Since Eliot’s letter to Maurras merely refers to the passage, nothing in the letter is illuminated by controverting Hill.

In some letters the lengthy footnotes apparently leave no room for more important annotations. For example, when Eliot discusses Granville Hicks’s *Time and Tide* article on literary obscenity, the editors’ half-page footnote quotes a passage from Hicks’s article; but they do not annotate Eliot’s references to Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* and Aldous Huxley’s *Antic Hay* in the same letter (321–22). Shorter footnotes elsewhere might have provided room for annotations to explain the significance of “the Lobster God” (30), “Sainte-Sulpicerie” (351), “red Ribbon” (499), “quarter day” (505, 506), and the allusion to Ezra Pound’s poem “Ancient Music” in Eliot’s dating of a December 1928 letter as “this last day of the Old Year Goddam” (370). A reference to the “question of Reservation” (30) is not annotated, even though the practice of “reserving” a consecrated host after a service for adoration in a church tabernacle was controversial. Eliot considered Reservation so essential to devotional practices that he claims he would be forced to leave the Established Church “if it came to an issue on the question” (30). The reference to “The Immaculate Conception,” which Eliot says he “cannot swallow” (351), should also have been annotated. (Later Eliot accepted the doctrine.)

Quotations from Eliot’s critics also swell Volume 4. For instance, two-page letters from the scholars J. M. Robertson and H. J. C. Grierson flank a two-paragraph letter from Eliot (344–49). A nearly two-page footnote (as lengthy as any letter in the volume) is devoted to Alan Clutton-Brock’s criticism of *Thoughts After Lambeth*. Despite the interest of such background materials, the issues that they raise would appear more appropriately in short notes. One might of course argue that these documents, to use the editors’ phrase from Volume 1 (2009), “flesh out the story of Eliot’s social life and literary career” (xxi). After an immersion in the quotidian details of Eliot’s life, we can marvel at the creation of poems such as the first part of “Ash Wednesday,” “A Song for Simeon,” and “Animula” as well as critical works such as *Dante* and *For Lancelot Andrewes*. But the reader might have been spared some of the tedium.

This latest volume reveals relatively little of Eliot’s intimate family life. Eliot and his family destroyed most of his correspondence with his mother, brother, and wife; and the letters written to Emily Hale are embargoed until

2020. Fortunately one letter to his brother Henry (quoted above) survives from these years. When Eliot’s mother died, Vivien wrote to a friend, “I fear for Tom, at this time” (615). Eliot’s only reaction to the death appears when he thanks his brother for an account of his mother’s final illness and reminds him that his mother promised to destroy all of his letters. He remembers his mother telling him that a poem that he had written when he was sixteen was better “than any she had written” and reflects that “even then I had some perception of what such a statement meant” (651). Approving of her burial in St. Louis, he writes: “I find myself turning more on St. Louis, and with more pleasure and less pain, than on Cambridge” (650). Eighteen letters by Vivien Eliot remind us of the prolonged crisis of the Eliot marriage. Eliot tells Lady Ottoline Morrell on February 20, 1928 that Vivien’s return from the French sanatorium “may be not a bad thing” (50). Vivien writes to Morrell on February 28: “I am very unhappy, & as you agreed with me—quite defenceless. So there it is. If you hear of me being murdered, don’t be surprised!” (73).

Controversial issues in these years include a defense of the Action Française against charges that it undermines belief in God, and attacks on Humanism for its parasitic dependence on the Christian religion for its principles. Censorship is also an important issue. Feeling the “rare pleasure” of agreeing with G. B. Shaw about Irish censorship (321), Eliot not only protests it but also commissions pamphlets on the issue for a Faber essay series. For all of his combativeness, he seems genuinely humble when his friend Conrad Aiken critiques *For Lancelot Andrewes* for a “thin and vinegarish hostility towards the modern world.” Eliot replies, “Thrice is he armed who knows what a humbug he is,” and states that he hopes to make progress “in purging myself of a large number of impure motives” (572). He replies to E. M. Forster that in his essay “T. S. Eliot and his Difficulties” he was right to detect “the element of bluff in much of the prose,” but he mildly defends the “‘impersonality doctrine’” as “of some value in its time” (573). Thanking Forster for his appreciation of *The Waste Land*, he adds:

I only think that you exaggerate the importance of the War in this context. The War crippled me as it did everyone else; but me chiefly because it was something I was neither honestly in nor honestly out of, but the *Waste Land* might have been just the same without the War (573).

Eliot is more sensitive to criticism of his commitment to Anglo-Catholicism. To Paul Elmer More, a convert to Catholicism who once taught Greek to Henry Eliot, he explains that it is “rather trying to be supposed to have settled oneself in an easy chair, when one has just begun a long journey afoot” (567). More seems to replace Middleton Murry as Eliot’s “mon semblable—mon frère.” Eliot tells him of “the void that I find in

Reviews continue on Page 5

The 2013 T. S. Eliot Society Annual Meeting in St. Louis

The Society celebrated the 125th anniversary of Eliot's birth by meeting in St. Louis to appreciate, discuss, and debate his work, renew old friendships, and commence new ones. We held our conversations in the ivied halls of Washington University, the rose-colored drawing room of the Woman's Club of St. Louis, the fellowship hall of the First Unitarian Church—beneath a stained glass window salvaged from the original church in downtown St. Louis founded by Eliot's grandfather—and at the gracious Central West End house and garden of our patrons, Melanie and Tony Fathman. Apart from panels and seminars, described elsewhere in this issue, some of the highlights of the weekend included Jahan Ramazani's keynote lecture on "Poetry and Prayer," an exhibit of Eliot books and archival materials, and updates on the Eliot editorial projects.

On Friday, conference participants gathered at Washington University's Olin Library for a display of Eliot material from the university archives and special collections. We got a firsthand sense of Eliot's sometimes frightening incisiveness as an editor in the letters he exchanged with Herbert Howarth, whose *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* was all that was left after Eliot eviscerated the original, more biographical manuscript. Modern Literature Curator Joel Minor also brought out several fine press editions, including a 1920 printing of *Ara Vos Prec* and several rare books containing holograph corrections in Eliot's hand. Archivist Sonya Rooney shared documents of Eliot's life in St. Louis extending from the program of the 1904-5 Smith Academy graduation exercises to photographs and news reports of his later visits as a literary celebrity.

Jahan Ramazani's Memorial Lecture, "T. S. Eliot, Poetry and Prayer," was the highlight of the weekend. Known both



Timothy Materer and Frances Dickey at Special Collections

for his groundbreaking work in postcolonial poetics and his brilliant analysis of elegy, Professor Ramazani of the University of Virginia has also been exploring the genre of prayer in relation to poetry as part of his new book, *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* (U of Chicago P). He began by analyzing some shared features of poetry and prayer: both make use of apostrophe that is directed simultaneously outward and inward, as an address to a person or deity and as a private address within oneself. In addition, both genres incorporate the rhetoric of persuasion—a poem to the addressee, and a prayer to God—and both have abstract truth-values, as neither a poem nor a prayer can be said to be "true" or "false." While these shared features draw the genres together, the degree of sociality, fictiveness, and self-consciousness vary between prayer and poetry. Compellingly, Ramazani pointed out that prayers tend to be communal acts, and that the freshness and originality valued in poetic language often rupture the genre of prayer by rendering it unfamiliar to its community. Eliot has an ambivalent attitude toward the intersection of



Memorial Lecturer Jahan Ramazani talks with Lauren Hawley, Ben Lockerd and others at the Fathmans

prayer and poetry, Ramazani argued, demonstrating his point with examples drawn from across Eliot's early and late work. As Society President Michael Coyle emphasized in his introduction to the lecture, Ramazani's scholarship combines the best of fresh theoretical perspectives and disciplined close reading. Examining the disquieting line breaks in the prayer to Mary in the fourth part of "The Dry Salvages," he showed that even Eliot's post-conversion poetry resists restoring poetry to the realm of genuine prayer. The question and answer session sparked excellent discussion, particularly when Tony Cuda prompted Ramazani to consider the function of prayer and ritual in Eliot's verse drama in addition to the poetry.

A reception hosted by the Washington University English Department followed Ramazani's talk, giving new and established Eliot scholars the opportunity to discuss the lecture. The reception was a prelude to the traditional garden

party at the Fathmans' home the following night, which featured a postprandial talk by Ronald Schuchard of Emory University. Professor Schuchard gave encouraging updates on the progress of the Eliot prose volumes, indicating that the first of these will be released online in February or March 2014. In a welcome surprise, there will also be a limited print edition of the online collected prose. The prose co-editors then gave updates on the progress of their individual volumes, paying homage to Schuchard's diligent archival work and legacy of generosity. Shawn Worthington, editorial



Matt Seybold, Michael Coyle and John Whittier-Ferguson

assistant to Christopher Ricks, followed with an update on the collected poems, which do not yet have a definite date of publication. The evening concluded with an impromptu piano recital by Abby Ang on the Fathmans' grand piano, playing Bach and Satie as the hour approached midnight.

On Sunday morning, an Eliot-centered sermon at the First Unitarian Church echoed with the Memorial Lecture's theme of the connections between prayer and poetry. After the traditional Eliot Aloud session, the conference concluded with the awarding of the Fathman Prize, given each year to a graduate student or recent Ph.D. for an outstanding paper. This year the Board divided the prize between two stellar candidates: Joshua Richards (Palm Beach Atlantic U) for "Some Influences of Evelyn Underhill on T. S. Eliot" and Matt Seybold (U of Alabama) for "Living a Fiction: Finance and Fraud in *The Confidential Clerk*."



Joshua Richards

Margaret Greaves
Emory University

Peer Seminar: Eliot and Asia

T. S. Eliot's use of Eastern traditions has remained a matter of debate at least since 1935, when F. O. Matthiessen praised "What the Thunder Said" for Eliot's discovery of an "excellent 'objective correlative'" in the *Upanishads*—which Matthiessen, nonetheless, had not yet read. The "Eliot and Asia" peer seminar at the 34th Annual T. S. Eliot Society Conference, led by Anita Patterson (Boston U) sought both to take stock of this debate, and to explore further how transpacific intercultural dialogue figures in Eliot's poetry and thought. Hoping to recalibrate a critical tradition that oversimplifies Eliot's interest in Eastern traditions, seminar participants agreed that scholarship on Eliot must move beyond both framing Eliot as an ignorant and provincial orientalist, or as someone who had a simple authoritative mastery over his Eastern sources. Joined by the conference's 2013 Memorial Lecturer, Jahan Ramazani (U of Virginia), participants agreed that situating Eliot in terms of global modernism thus requires approaching Eliot's collocations of Eastern and Western sources as acts of translation (and interpretation) that are both limited and continual.

Roderick Overaa (East Tennessee State U) began the discussion by suggesting that, rather than offer value judgments regarding Eliot's appropriation of his Eastern sources, it would be more useful to explore why so many modernist writers took such an avid interest in the philosophy of India and the Far East, and what this sustained interest has to teach us about Euro-American modernism. Overaa argued that scholarship must move beyond individual case studies of both particular texts and authors, since "to continue studying these individual engagements in isolation is to remain fixated on teapot eddies while the real tempest howls around us." Nancy Hargrove (Mississippi State U) offered one such expanded historical analysis by investigating a range of Eastern art on display at the Musée Guimet (now the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques—Guimet), as well as a range of other prominent museums in France during Eliot's year abroad in 1910-11, including the Musée d'Ethnographie and the Musée Cambodgien. As a consequence, Hargrove showed how Eliot's interest in the East must be placed in context with a broader cultural orientalism that nonetheless made possible a heightened global awareness and cross-fertilization among the arts. Aaron Graham (Emory U) called for nuancing our understanding of Eliot's interest in Indic philosophy, suggesting that Western attempts to translate or explain such sources within a Western "philosophic-linguistic system of understanding" flattened or ignored the complexities of that thought.

Christopher McVey (U of Wisconsin-Madison) likewise explored issues of translation by highlighting Eliot's decision to change the language of the final note in *The Waste Land* for the 1931 Harcourt Brace printing of *Collected Poems 1909-1925*, wherein "a peace which passeth understanding"

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becomes an “equivalent” rather than “feeble translation” of the shantih invocation. McVey suggested that Eliot’s ambivalence surrounding this note underscores the way in which *The Waste Land* is involved in “a continual process of translation between East and West,” pointing out that we might reconsider the poem as an act of limited or failed translation. Joon-Soo Bong (Seoul National U) also explored the complex and often contradictory remarks Eliot made about the relationship between East and West, offering close readings of both Eliot’s prose and poetry to show how Eliot’s figuring of such borders evolved over his career. Patterson (Boston U) shared her current research in American Japonisme, showing the ways in which Eliot’s Boston functioned as an alternative

capital of modernism, where the influence of Japanese art and religion during Eliot’s years at Harvard shaped the guiding principles of his art. The range of biographical, historical, cultural, and textual analyses of the peer seminar show the continuing relevance of Eliot within newer critical frameworks of global modernism and transnationalism, and that Eliot’s interest in Asian art, culture, and religion remains a complex and relevant field of study for future scholarship.

Christopher McVey
U of Wisconsin-Madison



Anna Finn, Megan Harris, John Melillo, Abby Ang, Tony Fathman, and John Whittier-Ferguson making music



Jewel Spears Brooker with Peer Seminar leader Anita Patterson

REVIEWS

Review of *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 4*

Continued from Page 2

the middle of all human happiness. . . . I am one whom this sense of void tends to drive towards asceticism or sensuality, and only Christianity helps to reconcile me to life, which is otherwise disgusting” (432–33).

As the editors note, Eliot in these years “comes to write much more openly and expansively” to a wide range of friends and associates (xv). He laments to I. A. Richards that we might have “at present no ‘beliefs’ to correspond to some of our feelings” (304). To a French translator of “The Journey of the Magi” he explains that the narrator’s claim that he would be glad of “another death” means “that in his state of indecision he would be glad if his own death came to settle it” (85). He sends his mother a vivid description of the burial of Field Marshall Haig, with “that horrible Scotch dirge grinding away on the bagpipes,” and tells her of the decision to bury Thomas Hardy’s body in Westminster

Abbey and his heart in Dorchester: “Curio hunting I call it. Why not divide him joint by joint, and spot him about the country?” (38). He warns a young man considering a career in publishing that it might “kill any zest one had in reading” (640) and explains to one of the many young poets whom he encourages that he revises poems “by reciting them aloud to myself with the accompaniment of a small drum” (171). Even the repetitious, kindly letters of rejection for *The Criterion* are amusing to read in small doses. As the number of volumes increases, however, one hopes that the definition of what is a letter “of little consequence” will be adjusted and that such letters, as promised in the preface to Volume 3, appear instead on the Faber and Faber website.

The Elder Statesman, The Undercroft Theatre, Washington, D.C.

Reviewed by Jayme Stayer
John Carroll University

The first thing that you should know about this performance, one of a nearly month-long run of *The Elder Statesman* at The Undercroft Theatre this past spring, is the predisposition of its reviewer to find Eliot's plays tiresome. Rather than have them performed, most of the plays are best read silently—and as seldom as possible. The second thing you should know about this performance is that the metro area of Washington, D.C. apparently shares my feelings. At the performance in question, there were forty-two people in the audience. If you subtract the stage personnel and friends of the actors, that leaves perhaps two dozen disinterested persons in the audience. The theater, though intimate, felt cavernously empty.

The director was Bill Largess, who has either acted in or directed five Eliot plays that the Washington Stage Guild has produced in the past seventeen years: *The Cocktail Party*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Confidential Clerk*, *The Family Reunion*, and now, *The Elder Statesman*. Eliot's *The Rock* was also presented in a reading by the Guild this spring, and since they claim to have produced all seven, *Sweeney Agonistes* must have gotten squeezed in somewhere. Given the paucity of productions of Eliot's plays—and their implicit unpopularity—such risks are to be commended. Largess's program notes were finely written, placing Eliot's dramas in the context of theater history and revealing a knowledge of Eliot's non-theatrical works. Largess, who also serves as the Guild's artistic director, has clearly been bitten by the Eliot bug. His enthusiasm has helped to shape the repertoire of this company, which proudly bills itself as a presenter of "eloquent plays of idea and argument, passion and wit."

At their best, Eliot's works for the theater are idea plays, with *Murder in the Cathedral* as the most successful and the most often performed. They provide illuminating windows into the poet's perennial themes: time, sin, guilt, redemption, masks, identity, and social trivialities. The plays can provide more direct access than the poetry, as the themes are worked out for general audiences. But for the weaker plays, such as *The Elder Statesman*, getting those ideas to come alive on the stage is a near-impossible business.

The play follows the story of Lord Claverton, a respected statesman on the verge of retirement, who is possessive of his daughter, Monica. Monica keeps her suitor, Charles, at arm's length while she lends support

to her father. Various revelations from Claverton's past unsettle his smooth reputation and inner harmony: Gomez, whom he had corrupted, and Mrs. Carghill, whom he had loved but allowed to be bought off. Claverton's trajectory in the play leads through redemption; his shame and guilt meet the love and acceptance of his daughter. But Claverton's son, Michael, mirrors his father's early ambitions and is seemingly set upon a path of destruction, assisted by the uncertain motives of Gomez.

Kelly Renee Armstrong gave her valiant best in the role of Monica, though her accent unfortunately ricocheted between watered-down BBC and middle-class American. It didn't help that the actor was saddled with the thankless role of *das Ewig-Weibliche*, for which she affected a simpering smile. She gave off the worrisome vibe of an actor trying to be radiant. Who can blame her? The part includes the lion's share of the play's most awkward lines. Interrupting a heated exchange between her brother and father, Michael and Lord Claverton, she has the following muddle to slog through:

Michael! How can you speak to Father like that?
Father! What has happened?
Why do you look so angry?
I know that Michael must be in great trouble,
So can't you help him?

Monica has just heard her father insulted by his own son, and she wonders why he looks irritated? She then neglects to wait for answers to her three questions, instead leapfrogging into a different issue. This moment and many others reveal the finger of a playwright nudging the plot along rather than allowing a human drama to unfold. A few seconds later Monica pirouettes into a description of family love:

Father! You know that I would give my life for you.
Oh, how silly that phrase sounds!
But there's no vocabulary
For love within a family, love that's lived in
But not looked at

Such stuff is undeliverable, so there is no point in being disappointed in the actor who is charged with uttering it.

Robert Leembruggen as Gomez was the best actor, with the most complex role. Asked for his address so that the Clavertons might keep in touch with him and Michael, Gomez, according to the script, is to present his business card. But Leembruggen ruffled through his pockets, unable to find his card; he ended by shrugging cynically. This evasion seemed to make Gomez even more sinister, and to suggest that Michael will be lost, both geographically and morally, in Gomez's clutches. Even though the script of the play is more ambiguous—it suggests that Michael's fate hangs in the balance—it was a dark touch that I rather liked.

The play is blessedly free of the tedious stage bits that were intended by Eliot in his earlier plays as farcical

comedy. Mrs. Piggott's officiousness (well acted by Lynn Steinmetz) and Mrs. Cargill's vanity (played by Jewell Robinson) provide enough tonal relief without stooping to the kind of broad comedy or buffoonery that was wholly alien to Eliot's refined wit. He loved music-hall comedy; that doesn't mean that he could write it himself. By the time he came to write *The Elder Statesman*, he had the good sense to leave well enough alone.

Other than entrances and exits, there is little stage direction for the actors in Eliot's script—a mark of an idea play. And so to make the play seem less cerebral, the director had the actors moving about, which sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. Monica's lines about family love were lost underfoot, the calm of that moment obscured by the whappady-thippity-thumping of high heels. Likewise, the intensity of some of Claverton's lines was obscured by John Dow's too-quick delivery and extraneous gesticulating. It is understandable that the actors would want to make their lines sound like real speech between humans rather than lyric poetry humming quietly on the page, which is what much of *The Elder Statesman* sounds like. For example, Claverton describes sins that are neither dark crimes nor legal misdemeanors in lines that are simply undeliverable as dramatic language:

There are many things not crimes, Monica,
Beyond anything of which the law takes cognizance:
Temporary failures, irreflective aberrations,
Reckless surrenders, unexplainable impulses,
Moments we regret in the very next moment,
Episodes we try to conceal from the world.

Such lines might work in *Four Quartets*, but they fall flat on the stage. In the mouth of a character, much of Claverton's dialogue sounds like a pedant giving a lecture rather than a man humbly discovering his sinfulness. Eliot more memorably evokes reckless surrenders and unexplainable impulses in *The Waste Land*, a poem which provides more drama than any of the plays. By writing verse drama, Eliot was not aiming at speech that sounded like gritty dialogue, nor was he aiming at realistic arguments. But the lines still need to be somehow convincing, if only within the world of the play.

The worst moment was the last. As there was no erotic spark between the actors who played Monica and Charles, the closing love scene was no transcendent union but a wince-making collision. And perhaps the other actors were tired as they neared the end of a four-week run; two of them struggled to remember lines, which made the play seem to creak and groan even more than it might have.

Overall, the performance I saw was unconvincing rather than inferior. And my detailing of its problems here for an audience of Eliot scholars is not meant to pillory the hard-working actors or the director, who should be praised for their dedication to Eliot's plays. The reason for going into

such detail is to put the blame where it should rest: squarely on Eliot's shoulders. Which is to say that neither the actors nor the director can be faulted with infusing so little life into these two-dimensional characters. From the opening scene to the last, I could not get beyond the sense that I was watching a sketch for how a play about sin and redemption might proceed, rather than witnessing the fierce struggle for reality that Eliot elsewhere conveys with such terrifying precision.



André Gushurst-Moore, *The Common Mind: Politics, Society and Christian Humanism from Thomas More to Russell Kirk*. Angelico Press, 2013.

Reviewed by Martin Lockerd
University of Texas–Austin

The Common Mind concerns itself less with a medieval *sensus communis*, shared “common sense,” than with reasserting a Thomistic sense of natural law—the notion “that human nature is perennial and has an objective reality” (8). This objective alone may discourage some readers from finishing the rest of this review, let alone the book in question. It is a testament to the author's good sense and sincere interest in engaging an audience outside of the usual consumers of conservative intellectual history that he includes the following invitation in his foreword: “My hope is that my readers also of differing political views will pursue this book with an open mind, willing to consider broadly what the principles of a Christian politics might be” (vii). Gushurst-Moore's brief appeal to a broader readership reflects well on his authorial ethos, but, ultimately, *The Common Mind* makes no meaningful overtures to non-Christian readers. It also makes no pretense about its nonacademic nature. The author openly avers that his book addresses itself to “common readers,” and this self-analysis holds true. Those looking for relief from the standard fare of academic writing, with its sometimes stultifying hyper-specialization, will find this work exemplary for its intellectual candor and engaging prose style. That said, those looking for original scholarship and patently new arguments for the importance of Christian Humanism in the modern world will find little of either. At its best, *The Common Mind* condenses and supplements past conservative intellectual histories, such as Russell

Kirk's *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*. At its worst, the study truncates and rehashes existing scholarship.

The chapter devoted to T. S. Eliot displays both tendencies. With the exception of an interesting opening discussion of the antipathetic relationship between Eliot and Chesterton, in which Gushurst-Moore insightfully argues, "Eliot, more than Chesterton, recognized aspects of the divided Western consciousness in himself" (186), the discussion does little more than rehearse the work of Russell Kirk and Benjamin Lockerd. And yet, as a primer to *Eliot and His Age* (1971) and *Aethereal Rumors* (1998), the chapter does its work admirably.

Eliot is only one of twelve intellectual luminaries discussed in this book. Though he and Chesterton dominate the introduction and conclusion and clearly hold a superior place in the author's consciousness, his sincere interest in More, Swift, Johnson, Burke, Coleridge, Newman, Brownson, Disraeli, Lewis, and Kirk becomes infectious. More stands out as a man devoted to speaking truth to power, and the reading of Utopia as a rebuke to Machiavellian politics, though not wholly original, distinguishes itself by merit of its lucidity and precision. Swift, like others, is forgiven for not being Roman Catholic, and the author produces

an astute reading of *Gulliver's Travels* that would greatly benefit any first-time reader of Swift's complex satire. Johnson emerges not as a bullish Tory, but as a man of common sense attempting to "integrate the intellect with the whole personality, and in doing so oppose intellectualism" (62). This common sense, Gushurst-Moore contends, led Johnson to condemn Descartes's separation of the mind from the body, the materialists' soulless determinism, and the American revolutionaries' practice of slavery. The remaining champions of common sense reveal a similar pattern. They bear witness to and combat the "heresies" of their time. All of these portraits insist upon the essential relationship between common sense and a Christian worldview.

When the author attempts to make men of the past speak to today, however, he often lets the assumed sympathy of his audience stand in for thorough, thought-provoking argument. This is a very typical problem for conservative defenders of Eliot and Chesterton. It is a problem that helps us appreciate, for instance, the thoroughness and intellectual challenge of Lee Oser's work, or even that of Eric Voegelin. For example, Gushurst-Moore equates Johnson's common sense rejection of slavery with contemporary conservative opposition to abortion: "Thus, the 'rights' of slave owners are as meaningless as is the 'right' to abortion for many of us nowadays" (78). This provocative conclusion suggests a connection between the work of past thinkers and

contemporary social controversies, but it receives no further justification or examination and seems to depend for its legitimacy on the automatic agreement of "many of us." The author might have served his readers better by developing his survey of past luminaries of Christian thought into a more direct indictment of the obvious ideological counterpoint to *sensus communis*, namely, modern secular society.

His conclusion attempts such an indictment. It provides some general but intriguing insights into the author's vision of the role of Christian common sense in the twenty-first century—a vision that builds primarily on Eliot's cultural criticism. Drawing inspiration from *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Gushurst-Moore rejects the sentimentality of backward-looking medievalism and treats the model of the Middle Ages, the historical bastion of *sensus communis*, as "not so much a template, but a source of inspiration, a pattern for the person and society, the soul and the commonwealth" (231–32). A Christian society today, argues the author, must avoid both the moral relativism of secular law and the theocratic absolutism of radical Muslim shari'a law. Gushurst-Moore contends, however, that the main cultural influence of Christianity, with its belief in

humanity as created by God and subject to certain natural laws, must come not from the political sphere but from the sphere of the arts, and his analyses of Chesterton, Tolkien, Eliot, Lewis, and others does much to demonstrate the validity of such an observation.

After attacking the 1960s Cultural Revolution, deconstruction, and postmodern authors as the enemies of society, Gushurst-Moore suggests, "the rebirth of the imagination, the return to nature, and the increasing suspicion of materialism may offer points of growth" (246). What such phrases as "the return to nature" actually signify remains a hint half guessed, and readers may not always find such generalities fulfilling. That said, *The Common Mind* has definite things to say about what makes life worth living. For the author, a good life demands recognition of religious truth as the foundation of a culture sustained by adherence to a Thomistic natural law, from which we derive common sense. Such a conclusion is unsurprising but, at least, consistent.

Eliot receives the final word, as Gushurst-Moore takes some comfort in the notion that "there is no such thing as a Lost Cause, because there is no such thing as a Gained Cause" (246). Though this book may represent a lost cause for many academics and non-Christians, sympathetic readers will certainly find a good deal of merit in *The Common Mind*.

"...he often lets the assumed sympathy of his audience stand in for thorough, thought-provoking argument."

Reports from the 2013 T. S. Eliot International Summer School, London

Overview

The T. S. Eliot International Summer School returned for a fifth year to the University of London's Institute of English Studies, drawing students, scholars, and poetry lovers from eighteen nations around the world. Professor Ronald Schuchard began the proceedings with a lecture that marked his departure as director of the summer school and provided food for thought and discussion throughout the week. The lecture, "Valerie Eliot and the State of Eliot Studies," respectfully noted the academic legacy of Valerie Eliot—ever modestly fearful she was a "being a good wife but a bad editor"—and discussed how the publication of hitherto restricted archive materials will change the field of Eliot scholarship.

Students attended seminars on an array of topics including "Poems and Letters" with Robert Crawford, "The Frontiers of Consciousness in Eliot's Poems and Plays" with Lyndall Gordon, "French Influences on Eliot's Poetry and Criticism" with William Marx, "Eliot Among the Novelists" with Megan Quigley, "The Early Poetry" with Jayme Stayer, "Affective Effects of Eliot's Allusions" with Marianne Thormählen, "The Making of *The Waste Land*" with Wim Van Mierlo and "Later Poetry and Criticism: 'Ash-Wednesday' to *Four Quartets*" with Schuchard. These weeklong seminars were complemented by daily lectures on themes such as "Eliot's Cultural Caritas," in which Schuchard spoke revealingly of the years 1930-50 and Eliot's little known talks for Church groups, schools and charitable organizations, Thormählen's talk on "Eliot, Emotion, and the Reader," Jayme Stayer's lecture on "Eliot as a Schoolboy," and other topics discussed at greater length by Sumita Chakraborty below. The week's lectures closed on a highlight: Sir Christopher Ricks spoke on "T. S. Eliot and 'cumulative plausibility,'" vividly exploring the possibility of an allusive "cumulative" cohesiveness through the microtexture of Eliot's poetry.

The location of the summer school provided many opportunities for exploring Eliot's poetic allusions to

London sights and sounds. With its place in *The Waste Land* and tradition of a "Fire Sermon" to commemorate the Great Fire of London in 1633, Christopher Wren's St. Magnus the Martyr was an ideal site for Hugh Haughton's lecture on "Acoustics and the City: Hearing *The Waste Land*." Hugh Haughton read Eliot's 1922 poem with a critical ear for what Eliot famously referred to in a 1921 "London Letter" as "the barbaric cries of modern life" that sound along Upper Thames Street, including "the scream of the motor horn, the rattle of machinery, the grind of wheels, the beating of iron and steel,

the roar of the underground railway." Following this lecture, Carey Adina Karmel and Mark Storey led an "Unreal City" walking tour, which illuminated the geography of *The Waste Land* and of Eliot's own years working in the City at Lloyds Bank. Other London highlights included Nuzhat Bukhari's tour of the Heron exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery to accompany her lecture on "Variants & Versions: Patrick Heron's Portraits of T. S. Eliot." Christopher Reid gave a poetry reading at Christie's, where students had the opportunity to view English art collected by Valerie Eliot, to be auctioned this fall. London also provided the backdrop for congenial social occasions, with discussions often continuing into the Summer School's appropriately literary haunt for the week: The Lamb pub on Conduit Street.

The generosity of spirit that marked the Summer School was reflected in the provision of bursaries for students that were, quite charmingly, named after Practical Cats. These were endowed by the late Mrs Valerie Eliot and the Estate of T. S. Eliot, Mark Storey, Durham University, Royal Holloway, University of London, Dr. Julius Cruse, Joan and Joe McBreen, Paul Muldoon, Professor Jahan Ramazani, Professor Ronald Schuchard and Roger Thompson. This generosity, combined with the academic rigour of the Summer School, ensures the continuation of the program and continues to attract excellent scholars and students from around the world.

Francesca Bratton
University of Durham

Excursions

In addition to the five-day program of lectures and seminars, the T. S. Eliot International Summer School



Hugh Haughton lectures at St. Magnus Martyr

included daytrips to the locations that inspired three of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. The first trip was to the village of Little Gidding in Cambridgeshire, organized to coincide with the second day of the annual T. S. Eliot Festival, which takes place on the grounds of the Church and is generously arranged by The Friends of Little Gidding. We arrived just in time for tea and cake before a joint reading of "Little Gidding" by poets Robert Crawford and Daljit Nagra. In the afternoon, Nancy Hargrove gave an illuminating lecture on Eliot and popular music, with songs performed by her husband, Guy Hargrove, including "That Shakespearean Rag" and "The Cubanola Glide," contemporary hits that appear in *The Waste Land*. After a lecture by distinguished Eliot scholar and biographer Lyndall Gordon, there was time to enjoy a final cup of tea and to attend choral evensong in Little Gidding Church.

The following Saturday, after the School's core academic program in London, we traveled to Burnt Norton, a manor house situated in the stunning Cotswolds countryside, whose grounds Eliot visited in 1934 and recalled in "Burnt Norton." Highlights include the empty concrete pools and the rose garden, which is eerily as one imagines it when reading the poem. After a picnic on the grounds, Crawford and Reid together read



Poets Robert Crawford and Christopher Reid at Burnt Norton

"Burnt Norton," and the mistress of the house, Caroline Sandon, spoke about its eventful history. After Nancy Hargrove's lecture on Eliot's connection to landscape, Guy performed a little-known but intriguing musical setting of "Burnt Norton" by British composer Sir John Tavener.

The final event of the Summer School was the daytrip to East Coker, a village in the county of Somerset. After a substantial barbecue in the garden of the fifteenth-century Heylar Arms Inn, we walked across to St Michael's Church, which is the final resting place of T. S. and Valerie Eliot. The couple's ashes are interred behind a memorial plaque bearing the inscription: "in my beginning is my end / in my end is my beginning." After a student reading of "East Coker" from the church lectern, Megan Quigley lectured on "Why 'East Coker' is still shocking," offering an exciting new perspective on the poem. The rich talks and readings set the landscape in context and provided plenty of food for thought.

Alexander Fyfe
University of Warwick

Cumulative Plausibility: A Closer Look at Some Lectures

On the first full day of the 2013 session of the T. S. Eliot International Summer School, students and faculty journeyed to Little Gidding. Among the other sensational events on the day's program was Lyndall Gordon's lecture, "What might have been and what has been": Eliot's Search for Perfection in *Four Quartets*." In a marquee adjacent to the "tombstone" and near the "pig-sty" familiar to readers of the poem, Gordon framed her talk with two opening questions: how did Eliot's search for perfection begin, and what approach to attaining a perfect life did Eliot settle upon? Gordon described Eliot as an imperfect person whose verse oscillates towards and away from dreams of an ephemeral, agonizing ideal of perfection. According to Gordon, Eliot ultimately felt that perfection entails redemption through pain: for the Eliot of the *Four Quartets*, as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the way up is the way down. The journey "from fire by fire" is the only way in which "[a]ll manner of thing shall be well." "Cumulative plausibility," to borrow a phrase from the title of Christopher Ricks's lecture a few days later in London, describes the way Gordon drew from a wide range of subjects to engage and enchant her audience.

Speaking more broadly, "cumulative plausibility" also describes the range of lectures given over the course of the nine-day School. Just to take a few examples, Gail McDonald explored Eliot's sustained interest in states of betweenness, such as the half-object in his dissertation, the in-between state in the *Upanishads*, and Tiresias in *The Waste Land*. She considered these texts alongside Eliot's many metaphors of reading as sensory invasion, including the reading scene in "Animula" and the recurring images of pregnancy. She argued that for Eliot, reading is a relational interchange between the poet and the reader rather than a one-sided, dogmatic transfer. To draw listeners through Eliot's London, Wim Van Mierlo incorporated the rhyme "London Bridge Is Falling Down" to picture an urban landscape in perpetual rebirth: the Bridge, he noted, does not only constantly fall down, but is also constantly rebuilt. Reflecting on the process of writing a new biography of Eliot, Robert Crawford frankly described this work as a balancing act between multiple contradictory impulses, exemplified by the tension between the title that he envisions for his first volume, *Young T. S. Eliot*, and the current first line of that same volume, "T. S. Eliot was never young." William Marx traced the history of Eliot's Nobel Prize, suggesting that Eliot received the prize in part because of the death of Paul Valéry, who longed for and would have received it had he lived. Marx claimed that in selecting Eliot—in a sense as a substitute for Valéry—the Nobel committee sought to rectify the neglect of Symbolist and high modernist work. However disparate their topics, the lectures shared the same mandate: "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."

Sumita Chakraborty
Emory University

PUBLIC SIGHTINGS

Compiled by David Chinitz

Battling Eliots. In its humorous weekly “One-Page Magazine,” the *New York Times Magazine* includes a regular feature by Eric Spitznagel called “Compare and Contrast.” The issue of 21 July 2013 pitted T. S. Eliot against Eliot Spitzer. In the category of Famous Affiliation, the poet was assigned the “The Modernist Movement,” and the former NY governor “The Emperor’s Club V.I.P.” Under Bitter Rival, TSE was given C. S. Lewis, Spitzer investment banker Kenneth Langone, whom he prosecuted in 2004. In both cases an Embarrassing Homage was noted: in the poet’s case, *Cats*, and in the pol’s case, the porn parody “Gov Lov.” As Alter Ego, Prufrock stood against “Client No. 9.” In the end, T. S. Eliot was declared the WINNER. But you already guessed that.

Weialala leia. In the same issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, the clue for 121 Across in the crossword puzzle was “River that ‘sweats oil and tar’ in T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land.’” Here again, you’ve already guessed the answer.

From the Vatican. Pope Francis’s first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, quotes Eliot’s Choruses from *The Rock*. “When faith is weakened,” writes the Pontiff, “the foundations of life also risk being weakened, as the poet T. S. Eliot warned: ‘Do you need to be told that

even those modest attainments / As you can boast in the way of polite society / Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their significance?’ If we remove faith in God from our cities, mutual trust would be weakened, we would remain united only by fear and our stability would be threatened” (sect. 55). A friendly theologian informs us that although the encyclical is attributed to Pope Francis, it was begun by his predecessor Benedict XVI. The Pope Emeritus, in fact, almost certainly wrote the passage quoting Eliot, which strongly resembles his other warnings about the removal of faith from the public sphere.

Round the Prickly Pear. Two columnists independently turned to “The Hollow Men” in describing the end of this fall’s US government shutdown. In the *New Republic*, Jonathan Cohn opined, “It looks like the Republican extortion campaign of 2013 is about to end, not with a bang but with a whimper” (“The Republicans May Lose, But So Will You,” 15 Oct.). Almost simultaneously, Ed Kilgore blogged for the *Washington Weekly*: “All in all, this unnecessary stroll through an early Halloween house of horrors looks as though it will end not with a bang but a whimper, with the loudest whimpering coming from him that loosely holds the House gavel” (“Not with a Bang but a Whimper,” 16 Oct.). Kilgore, who wins the Public Sightings Award for Accurate Quotation, later appended a note observing the duplication of the metaphor. Neither writer mentioned Eliot by name.

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Modern Language Association Convention

Chicago, January 9-12, 2014

Eliot and the Other Arts

- “Eliot, Dance, and Transatlantic Poetics,” Susan Jones, University of Oxford
- “Eliot, Stravinsky, and the *Rite*,” T. Austin Graham, Columbia University
- “Print and Performance in Eliot’s *Inventions*,” Frances Dickey, University of Missouri, Columbia

American Literature Association Conference

Washington, D.C., May 22–25, 2014

The T. S. Eliot Society will sponsor two sessions at the 2014 annual conference of the American Literature Association, May 22-25, at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

Please send proposals (up to 250 words), along with a brief biography or curriculum vitae, to Professor Nancy K. Gish (ngish@usm.maine.edu). Submissions must be received no later than January 15, 2014. For information on the ALA and its 2014 meeting, please see the ALA website at www.americanliterature.org.

Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900

University of Louisville, February 20-22, 2014

Eliot as Editor/Editing Eliot

Organized by John Morgenstern, Clemson University

- “Editorial Modernism: T. S. Eliot’s Periodical Compositions,” Nikolaus Wasmoen, University of Rochester
- “Eliot’s Typewriter,” Matthew Schilleman, Clemson University
- “‘Visions and Revisions’: From Facsimile to *Four Quartets*,” Jonathan Patterson, University of Kansas

Abstracts from the T. S. Eliot Society Annual Meeting St. Louis, September 27-29, 2013

Specimen Voices: T. S. Eliot and the Harvard Vocarium

In 1929, James Joyce undertook a phonograph recording of *Anna Livia Plurabelle* under the direction of the philosopher, linguist, and founder of the Basic English System, C. K. Ogden. When Faber agreed in 1929 to publish the written text, Eliot initiated negotiations with Ogden to insert an advertising slip into the eventual 1930 printing of *ALP* on the proviso that H.M.V. fund the enterprise: “the slip may help to sell the record but unless H.M.V. do some advertising on their own, *the record will not help to sell the pamphlet.*” This paper will address the degree to which Eliot understood how listeners, as consumers “who think they know how to read poetry already,” themselves gave primacy to the written text, approaching the phonograph record as an ancillary, or supra-textual, artifact. Such behaviour, I will suggest, compounded his unwillingness to “introduce poems to people who are unprepared for them” through an oral rendering of the text, and it was the both the social and physical *limitations* of the phonograph that made it an ideal pedagogical medium for the oral transmission of his poetry. Indeed, by drawing on the privately collected archive material of Frederick C. Packard, the founder of the Harvard Vocarium, this paper will argue that Eliot’s first 1933 laboratory recordings were not merely serendipitous: rather, an excavation of the origins of the Vocarium will reveal that Packard’s own Edisonian conviction that the phonograph could “serve mankind in a unique way” provided Eliot with access to a perfect mechanical conduit between his poetry and his social criticism from the period, whilst guaranteeing (in a way that the radio could not) access to an erudite audience.

Elizabeth Micaković
University of Exeter

T. S. Eliot, Sound Art and Sonic Philology

In this paper, I propose to investigate the ways in which various poetic, musical and performative experimental practices in sound inflect our understanding of the work of T. S. Eliot. I will not trace lines of Eliotic “influence” on sound art but rather argue that certain aesthetic experiments in sound allow us to listen to and reread Eliot’s poetry with new affinities and genealogies in mind. In a recent symposium on *The Waste Land*, the critic Marjorie Perloff

spoke about the ways in which we can read the “uncreative” aspects of that poem through the conceptual poetics of Kenneth Goldsmith, Vanessa Place and others. In my paper, I would like to take up this method but ground it within the materiality of sound. One way to define the field of sound art—which is still contested and transforming in contemporary artistic practice—is to emphasize the ways in which sounds create an ambiance, that is, a space or medium through which bodies, affects and concepts move. Ambiance also has history, however, and I will take up artists who uncover and reimagine the various sonic strata within a given physical, conceptual or affective environment. If the epic is “poetry containing history,” then I would like to use an epic sound art to reveal a new way of listening to Eliot’s listening to history, tradition, and his environment. I will read fragments of Eliot against the sound experiments of Susan Howe (in her “Articulation of Sound Forms in Time” and “Frolic Architecture”), Morton Feldman (in long durational pieces like “For Bunita Marcus”), Steve Roden (in his “Forms of Paper”), and “noise” bands like Einstürzende Neubauten, Sonic Youth, and Swans. By sketching a series of affinities, rhymes, continuities and breaks in the sonic practice of these artists and Eliot, I will be echoing a “sonic philology” already experimentally practiced in the work of all of these poets and musicians.

John Melillo
University of Arizona

Transmitting the Preludes: Frédéric Chopin’s Egregious Fate in T.S. Eliot’s “Portrait of a Lady”

By the time the lady in Eliot’s “Portrait of a Lady” (composed 1910-11) heard the latest Pole transmit the Preludes, Chopin, described by Edward Said as an “astonishing musical and cultural revolutionary”, had been rendered merely “effeminate and trivial” by admiring but less talented imitators. Chopin had resisted the sentimental titles English publishers tried to attach to his music, revitalized the prelude and nocturne away from their saccharine connotations, and drew inspiration from Bach rather than his fellow Romantics, but these aspects were lost as his music became popular in bourgeois drawing rooms.

Critics often suggest that Eliot’s poem represents Chopin as an example of the culturally trivial and the artistically degenerate. While attentive to Chopin as a failed musical

experience, these readings do not account for Chopin's transformation of meaning, acknowledge his similarities to Eliot's project, or differentiate the decadent and reductive from the realities of Romantic musical convention. "Portrait of a Lady" fiercely exposes formulated phrases, "false notes", and self-parody, but was Eliot targeting Chopin as a pretentious occasion of decadent high culture? Or was Eliot decrying the process through which great works are drained of power and significance? Proposing an alternative reading of the musical experiences in "Portrait of a Lady", this paper treats Chopin scholarship on performance practice, compositional aesthetics, and critical reception as a way to illuminate the complexity of Eliot's critique.

Abby Ang
Indiana University

Evenings at the Phoenix Society: Eliot and the Independent London Theatre

This essay relates the untold story of Eliot's involvement with the Phoenix Society, an independent London theatre group whose immensely popular productions of Elizabethan and Restoration plays were the topic of his sustained attention from its founding in 1919 until its demise in 1926. When Georgian literary celebrities like William Archer attacked the artifice and mannerisms of the Phoenix Society's first productions, Eliot sensed the beginning of a crucial debate about the value and nature of theater in the twentieth-century, and he soon publicly entered the fray. He joined the Society's Board of Directors, promoted its interests among his friends and family, and wrote frequently of its productions in his many non-fiction essays and reviews from the period. He attended performances alongside many of the literary luminaries of the day, including Virginia Woolf, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, the Sitwells and others. The upstart Phoenix Society—with its emphasis on gesture rather than expression, on the dramatic text rather than the actors, and on the continued use of conventions like the aside and the chorus—helped Eliot to hone his own ideas about verse drama and the contemporary stage. In fact, each of his major statements regarding dramatic verse during this period is informed by reflections on the performances of the Phoenix. And it was while he was renewing his debate over the Society with Archer in 1924 in "Four Elizabethan Dramatists" that Eliot was also beginning to compose his own experimental verse drama, *Sweeney Agonistes*. This essay argues that although its colorful and controversial history has all but vanished from histories of the early twentieth-century stage, the Phoenix Society exerted a deep and lasting influence on Eliot's dramatic theories and practice.

Anthony Cuda
University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Anthropology in *The Cocktail Party*

Eliot uses the term "maturity" throughout his career to describe his cultural and artistic alliances. He praises maturity as the defining characteristic of a classic work in "What is a Classic," dismisses Shelley's views as "puerile," and develops from a young age a poetic persona that conveys worldliness and adulthood. The approbation of maturity peppers Eliot's prose. David Rosen argues that Eliot adopts the pose of maturity as a component of a poetics grounded in historical consciousness, rather than in the Romantic imagination. But Eliot's conception of maturity also develops throughout his career. This paper demonstrates that there is a complex correspondence between the shifts in Eliot's conception of maturity and his changing picture of "primitive" cultures and religions. For the earlier Eliot, the mature poet's awareness of the past includes some experience of the vitality of a primitive culture. In Eliot's later work, by contrast, maturity becomes a virtue operating at both the individual and communal levels, and as such it is opposed not only to youthfulness, but also to the primitive. Primitive cultures, however, simultaneously retain many positive features for the later Eliot, who sees their "childhood" as relatively safe, compared to the more corrosive and dangerous puerility of his modern contemporaries. Focusing on Eliot's late prose essays and his verse drama *The Cocktail Party*, I chart the complexities of his later conception of maturity, which arise from his Christian belief in the radical fallenness of humanity and his need to evaluate a variety of cultural responses to that fallenness using a common standard.

Glenn Clifton
University of Toronto

Living A Fiction: Finance and Fraud in *The Confidential Clerk*

My paper uses the essay "American Literature and the American Language," delivered at Washington University in St. Louis in June of 1953, to provide insight into *The Confidential Clerk*, which premiered later that same summer. The title of the play is the first in a series of puns upon the word "confidence." Eliot is hardly the first philologist to marvel at the flexibility of this term, which has the potential to mean both secrecy and confession, uncertainty and assurance, faith and deception. Two crucial American tributaries to Eliot's literary torrent were Henry James and Walt Whitman, both of whom made a habit of pointing out that "to con" meant both "to read" and "to deceive." This may be why, in "American Literature and the American Language," Eliot refers to David Maurer's *The Big Con*, an exposé of grifter culture during the Depression, as foremost "a fascinating book about one specialized area of the American vocabulary." My paper focuses on how Eliot

uses the private life of the financier (the profession of the central character in *The Confidential Clerk*) to elucidate the artistry of the con. Each of the seven characters in the play are, to some degree or another, deceivers, both of each other and themselves. Eliot demonstrates both the variance in the structure and creative ambition of their deceptions, and the potential for each to deceive not only for the purpose of profit and self-interest, but also to protect peers and patrons, even to the detriment of themselves. Eliot very candidly asks whether confidently created fictions may in fact adhere to an ethic that is inherently superior to the chaos of fact.

Matt Seybold

University of Alabama

Co-winner of the Fathman Young Scholar Award for 2013

Eliot and Japonisme

“Japonisme” is a term art historians have primarily used to describe how the discovery of Japanese woodblock prints influenced French Impressionism, but research in American Studies has documented how a similar, pervasive trend also developed in the Boston area, shaping decorative arts and material and popular culture, as well as poetry, music, and the fine arts. This paper explores how T. S. Eliot’s interest in Japanese art and Japonisme forms part of his effort to come to terms with his New England heritage. Drawing on Eliot’s early poetry and prose, I argue that Eliot’s adaptation of the techniques of Japonisme indicates his awareness of his family’s roots in a region with longstanding ties to Japan, and helps us to understand how Eliot’s Harvard coursework and ambivalent literary encounter with Boston-area Orientalists such as Emerson and Thoreau laid a foundation for his modernism.

Anita Patterson

Boston University

“A Satirist of Vices and Follies”: Beardsley, Eliot, and Images of Decadent Catholicism

Thanks in large part to W. B. Yeats’s myth of the “tragic generation,” British decadence became synonymous with an aesthetic of failure, and his romantic version of literary history depicts decadent artists such as Aubrey Beardsley, Lionel Johnson, and Ernest Dowson as men fated for early deaths preceded by lives dominated by profound excess and a self-torturing, Catholic spirituality. Since then, critics such as R.K.R. Thornton have acknowledged the tension at the heart of decadent art between competing desires for hedonistic excess and the spiritual sanctuary offered by

Rome. While Eliot’s critics have yet to address adequately the role of this decadent Catholic aesthetic in his formation, the hitherto unacknowledged influence of the visual artist Aubrey Beardsley sheds light on Eliot’s debt to decadence. Beardsley’s illustrations, in the words of a contemporary reviewer, distill “the very essence of the decadent *fin de siècle*.”

Lionel Johnson, W. B. Yeats, Arthur Symonds, and John Lane all agreed that Beardsley was “a satirist of vices and follies and extravagancies, but not, so to say, a sentimental student of them for their curiosity and fascinations sake.” This line is taken from a letter of Lionel Johnson’s reflecting on Beardsley’s death and conversion to Roman Catholicism – a letter that Eliot personally acquired for publication in the *Criterion*. My essay is devoted to reading Eliot’s poetry in light of Beardsley’s decadent Catholic aesthetic. I begin by demonstrating parallels between Eliot’s early unpublished poems “Opera” and “The Love Song of Saint Sebastian” and Beardsley’s drawings “The Wagnerites” and “The Coiffeur.” I then produce a new reading of the allusion to the severed head of John the Baptist in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by suggesting that it alludes to one of Beardsley’s illustrations of Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*.

Martin Lockerd

University of Texas, Austin

T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and the Christian-Platonist Tradition

A pair of recent interpretive studies of T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* chiefly attend to it as a devotional or religious document that might aid the reader’s spiritual journey to God (Howard and Kramer). Given that modernist art criticism in general, and Eliot’s in particular, evidently strove to isolate the aesthetic object from extrinsic interests so that it might more fully and simply be its own site and source of meaning, one may initially be surprised to see the poem applied so unreservedly to extra-aesthetic ends. It may be no less surprising to consider the possibility that, apart from literary critics, who continue to submit Eliot’s work to dissection, a sizable part of its readership has been for some time just those Christians looking to find a redemptive artistic achievement in the literary waste land of modern and postmodern letters.

Eliot’s poem is especially suited for such a role, because the poem is a work of art concerned with *imitating* religious ideas and experiences, and *representing*, in particular, elements of what I shall call the Christian-Platonist contemplative tradition. But it is not only that. *Four Quartets* itself *enters into* that contemplative tradition and constitutes a new addition to it. I do not mean, as was frequently said in Eliot’s day, that it is a poetry that rises to prayer, though certain parts of it are indeed prayers. Rather, the *Quartets* are at once instruments of, and objects

ABSTRACTS

for, contemplation similar in kind, and continuous with, the major works of the western, or Christian-Platonist, spiritual tradition. My paper will set forth the stakes in, problems with, and consequences of reading Eliot's poem as part of a devotional and contemplative tradition, and then indicate those points in which the individual *Quartets* make substantive contributions to the Christian-Platonist tradition in particular, highlighting the ways in which Eliot builds upon and transcends his sources.

James Matthew Wilson
Villanova University

Eliot's Theological Poetics

Many of the most significant critics of Eliot's later, post-conversion poetry make the important interpretive mistakes of assuming that these poems' primary concerns are humanist (which focuses discussion around questions of "voice" and "identity"); that their primary interest for us in our day will be biographical or historical; that their form is modernist (or postmodernist); that their manner of proceeding is philosophical (and, to a slightly lesser extent, psychological); that their "doctrine" can be parenthetically referenced or considered as something separate from the poetry. The historical-cultural turns that characterize so much of the best work being done in literary studies over the past couple of decades can lead critics to proceed as though understanding Vivien Eliot and Emily Hale, or the Blitz and the Battle of the Atlantic, or English political and social policy could prepare us for *Ash-Wednesday*, the *Ariel Poems*, and the *Quartets*. I do not believe this to be the case. In this paper I focus on the first part of Eliot's great, understudied, insufficiently admired poem, *Ash-Wednesday*, taking up the question of how aesthetic aspects of Eliot's Christian poetry can be understood in theological terms — how, that is, the forms of Eliot's later poetry are underwritten by, and responses to, and in conversation with the theological tenets and practices of his church. This paper

is part of my forthcoming book, *Mortality and Form in Late Modernist Literature*, on the late poetry and prose of Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and Wyndham Lewis.

John Whittier-Ferguson
University of Michigan

Some Influences of Evelyn Underhill on T. S. Eliot

This paper examines the textual and personal relationship between T. S. Eliot and Evelyn Underhill to ascertain what influences, if any, the Anglican author and mystic had on his work. Eliot first encountered Underhill's seminal text *Mysticism* during his studies at Harvard, and his notes are recorded on cards in the Houghton archive. There is little evidence of her influence initially during the most secular phase of Eliot's life and work, but he prominently mentions Underhill in his 1919 review "Beyle and Balzac," an important source for many interpretations of *The Waste Land*. Eliot most likely reexamined her work during the preparation for his Clark Lectures, and alludes to her *Mysticism* in "Little Gidding," suggesting that the influence of this text on Eliot was lifelong.

In terms of a personal relationship, the matter is less clear. In Eliot's works and letters, there is only circumstantial evidence that they met. Eliot's choice of Father Underhill, her cousin, as a confessor is certainly tantalizing. An unpublished 1931 letter to Eleanor Hinkley implies that they were acquaintances on a first-name basis, and that Hinkley would know who she was. Eliot's obituary after Underhill's death is certainly warm and laudatory. While evidence on Eliot's end is scarce, this paper will, I believe, help delineate a complex network of textual and personal relations between two prominent Anglican intellectuals in the first half of the 20th century and explore how Underhill work influenced Eliot's poetry and theology.

Joshua Richards
Palm Beach Atlantic University
Co-winner of the Fathman Young Scholar Award for 2013

BOARD REPORT

Michael Coyle, Society President

The 2013 Board meeting offered society officers the opportunity to review a number of long-standing policies. Reviewing the structure of the annual meeting, we discussed whether the conference was yet "right-sized" and considered at what point additional presentations might interfere with that feeling of community so characteristic of the Eliot Society. The question of the annual meeting also took us to further discussion of our projected 2016 meeting in Rapallo, Italy. Chris Buttram and Tony Cuda will assist the President in working with our Italian host, Massimo Bacigalupo. Thereafter the Board renewed discussion about how to proceed with the Loucks database project, which when complete promises to document Eliot's activities on a virtually daily basis; we discussed how best to handle the rising costs of mailing *Time Present* to our membership; we learned that the Society is in good financial health; and we thanked Cyrena Pondrom for her willingness to continue running the Society listserv. All told, we look to fare well as we fare forward.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Call for Nominations

The Supervisor of Elections seeks nominations for the position of Board Member to fill the seat presently held by Gabrielle McIntire. The elected candidate will serve a three-year term from July 1, 2014, to June 30, 2017.

Board members are expected to attend the annual conference of the Society, at which the Board meeting is held, and to take on other tasks in service to the Society.

Nominations and self-nominations should be sent to the Supervisor of Elections, David Chinitz (dchinit@luc.edu) by January 31, 2014. Candidates with five or more nominations will appear on the ballot.

Email List Serve

Members are invited to subscribe to the Society's informational list serve, which is used for occasional official communications only—never for discussion. To join, please contact the Secretary.

For Help With Society Matters

To submit papers for any conference session sponsored by the Society, or to make suggestions or inquiries regarding the annual meeting or other Society activities, please contact the President.

For matters having to do with *Time Present: The Newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society*, to pay dues, inquire about membership, or report a change of address please contact the Vice President

The Society Historian is John Morgenstern (jdmorgens@gmail.com).

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