

T. S. ELIOT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

Number 60

Fall 2006

Published by the T. S. Eliot Society (incorporated in the State of Missouri as a literary non-profit organization);
5007 Waterman Boulevard; St. Louis, Missouri 63108

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY OF A CLASSIC

[At its meeting on September 22, 2006, the Society's Board of Directors unanimously approved the following:]

On the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*, the T. S. Eliot Society celebrates the monumental contribution to Eliot studies made by its author, Grover Smith. Generations of Eliot readers are indebted to his pioneering scholarship and interpretation. A half-century later, it remains a starting point and inspiration for any who would undertake serious work on Eliot.

We also take this occasion to express our appreciation for the many contributions Grover has made to the Eliot Society: as a member and officer of the Board of Directors, as a Memorial Lecturer and frequent presenter, and, not least, as a generous critic and jovial interlocutor with all who seek his enthusiastic advice. To our good friends Grover and Barbara Smith we extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes. "Fare forward, voyagers."

Changes in Board of Directors

During the September meeting, the Board of Directors elected David Chinitz as Vice-President and Frances Dickey as Historian. They will take office January 1, 2007, when Benjamin Lockerd will become Supervisor of Elections and William Harmon President. Cyrena Pondrom and John Karel will remain as Secretary and Treasurer.

Call for Papers

The Society will sponsor two ninety-minute sessions at the 18th Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, May 24-27, 2007, at the Westin Copley Place in Boston, MA. If interest warrants, one session may be devoted to Eliot and Auden, since 2007 is the latter's centennial.

Information on the association and the 2007 meeting is at www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/ala2/. January 15, 2007, is the deadline for proposals to wharmon03@mindspring.com.

“If You Came This Way . . .”

Members of the Society will be pleased to learn that Ferrar House, adjacent to the original site where Nicholas Ferrar and household came in 1625 and next to Little Gidding church, now offers bed and breakfast accommodations. Little Gidding, Cambridgeshire, is about eighty miles north of London.

Famous for Eliot's visit in 1936, which furnished material for the last poem in *Four Quartets*, Little Gidding has also been associated with King Charles I and George Herbert.

Ferrar House offers: reasonably priced bed and breakfast, self-catering facilities, morning coffee and afternoon tea, a small conference center, quiet retreats, and a peaceful countryside location. More information can be found at www.ferrarhouse.co.uk.

LIKE ELIOT by Ted Richer

Eliot had the feeling:

. . . life is a cheat and a disappointment . . .

Eliot had the thought:

. . . life is a cheat and a disappointment . . .

Yet.

Eliot had the writing:

. . . *life is a cheat and a disappointment* . . .

To express:

The feeling and the thought.

Yet.

You, too, had the feeling:

. . . life is a cheat and a disappointment . . .

You, too, had the thought:

. . . life is a cheat and a disappointment . . .

Yet.

Eliot had the writing:

. . . *life is a cheat and a disappointment* . . .

To express:

The feeling and the thought.

Not you.

Yet.

I, too, have the feeling:

“ . . . life is a cheat and a disappointment . . . ”

I too, have the thought:

“ . . . life is a cheat and a disappointment . . . ”

Yet.

I, too, have the writing:

“ . . . *life is a cheat and a disappointment* . . . ”

To express:

The feeling and the thought.

Ted Richer, a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, currently teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. In 2003 his book *The Writer in the Story and Other Figurations* (introduction by Christopher Ricks) was published in England by Apocalypse Press.

Book Reviews

A *Waste Land* Encyclopedia in Spanish

Viorica Patea, ed., and José Luis Palomares, trans., *La tierra baldía* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005); pp. 328, €11 (\$14.02, £7.42).

Viorica Patea's *La tierra baldía* is the latest and arguably the most ambitious edition of *The Waste Land* published in Spain. The editor ends her thorough introduction with an interesting note (180-81) on the various translations of Eliot's poem undertaken in Latin-America and Spain—not only into Spanish, but also into the other official languages. *Tierra Baldía*, the first of these versions, appeared in 1930 in Barcelona, and, since then, as Patea's bibliography shows, the poem has never ceased to fascinate Hispanic critics and translators. Through the years, Eliot's mythical construct of images has been called "el yermo," "el páramo," and a number of adjectives have been attached to the words "tierra," "terra" or "lur": "baldía," "desechada," "eixorca," "eremua," "ermo," "estéril," "gastada," and so forth.

At several points in her analysis, Patea insists on how fragmentation in *The Waste Land* paradoxically contributes to a sense of unity (54) and suggests that the reader should take on an active role in the attempt to make sense of the puzzling "heap of broken images," to solve the enigmas that the text poses. She considers Eliot a forerunner of reception theories (45) and, accurately in my opinion, refers to the reader's participation in the reading process as "un acto de *jouissance* barthiano" (59). Her erudite introduction and footnotes, perhaps rather off-putting

for readers confronted by the poem for the first time, will be both helpful and stimulating to those who have some background knowledge.

Referring to a comprehensive bibliography on *The Waste Land*, ranging from works by critics contemporary with Eliot to criticism published in Spain as recently as 2004, Patea is successful in drawing attention to the beauty and complexity of the poem, as well as in surveying the vast criticism that has derived from it. There is no single detail that she fails to elucidate and only very occasionally indulges in the "wild goose chase" that Eliot lamented. For example, in a footnote on the Ionian splendour of Magnus Martyr (247n), we are told that columns in this architectural style were meant to reproduce the shape of the female body. The information may be of interest but becomes irrelevant and even misleading in the context of "The Fire Sermon."

The editor's introductory study smoothly and progressively leads the reader into the poem. Patea begins by providing relevant biographical information and, in evoking Eliot's childhood and youth in Missouri, suggests that Saint Louis might have been the initial inspiration for urban poems such as "Preludes" or "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (11). The assumption is questionable, since the settings in these poems come across as markedly European and the poems were written after Eliot's experience of living in Paris and London. From this biographical contextualization, I found the section on Eliot's university years the most illuminating: the editor traces the shaping of Eliot's thought and critical views admirably, clearly distinguishing what he took and what he rejected from the teachings of his Harvard professors:

Santayana and Babbitt (16-18), James and Royce (29-31).

Patea goes on to discuss Eliot's relationship with Pound, his contact with the new European artistic currents and the publication of his first books (35-40). One might object to her recurrent use of the adjective "experimentalista," too vague to refer to the author of *The Waste Land*, although Patea's intention, to some extent justified, is probably not to confuse a Spanish readership by calling Eliot "modernista" —Latin-American "modernismo" or Catalan "modernisme" are opposed to modernism, among other things, in their sublimation of modernity and progress.

This "Perfil de una biografía literaria" is, as I said, profusely and impeccably documented. That is why Patea's referring to *Ara Vos Prec* as a "críptico nombre" (38) is rather surprising. The title is taken from Canto XXVI of *Inferno*, in which Dante meets the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel. There is ample evidence that this canto had a great impact on Eliot: the line "*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*" in the closing section of *The Waste Land*, hinting at purgation and spiritual regeneration for those gone astray in a desolate world; the phrase "*Sovegna vos*" in part IV of *Ash Wednesday*, consistent with the imploring tone of the poem; and finally, Eliot's title *Ara Vos Prec* for one of his earliest poetry books and his reference to his mentor Ezra Pound as "*il miglior fabbro*" in the dedication of *The Waste Land*, echoing Dante's epithet for the Provençal poet.

It is suitable to present the biographical information in strict chronological order: it seems to result inevitably in the poem that is the main object of study. Further, the associations between Eliot's life and his poetry reinforce the paradox that the work of an

author who solidly defended impersonality in poetry reflects like a mirror his personal, spiritual evolution, from the *March Hare* poems to the last of the *Quartets*. In her thought-provoking conclusion to her biographical "Perfil," Patea stresses the validity, in the third millennium, of Eliot's concerns, as expressed in *The Waste Land* which, according to her, anticipated environmental problems and isolation in ever more individualistic societies (52).

In the second part of her study ("La estética de la tierra baldía"), Patea sets forth the different interpretation theories and traces the process of the poem's composition, as well as its reception through the decades. The sections on the development of the mythical method, on the work of Frazer and Weston, and on Jung's archetypes (74-88), approached comparatively, are excellent and insightful.

The introduction to *The Waste Land* is completed with a detailed analysis of each part of the poem, generally accurate and well-grounded, as the preceding sections, but unfortunately, more subjective and interpretive. For example, Patea refers to the lines in which characters recall the Starnbergersee, the colonnade and the Hofgarten as a "banal cosmopolitan conversation between modern tourists, who are the main characters in the poem" ("una banal conversación cosmopolita entre turistas modernos, que son los principales personajes del poema," 97) —such a statement is, to say the least, equivocal. At other points in the analysis, symbolic connections are established without being explained or justified: the river's tent in "The Fire Sermon" is said to be a metaphor of "virginity and the realization of love" ("metáfora de la virginidad y de la

realización del amor,” 129), which, so formulated, sounds like a contradiction in terms.

Patea’s analysis also argues that Eliot’s characters are redeemed by their assimilation into timeless archetypes: “The anonymous inhabitants of the Waste Land overcome their insignificant existence the moment they become aware of the hidden transcendent content of their psyche” (“Los anónimos habitantes de la tierra baldía superan su existencia insignificante en el momento en que toman conciencia de los contenidos soterrados y trascendentes de la psique,” 87). In a similar line of interpretation, she sees Phlebas’ death by water as a fulfilled regeneration rite through which the Phoenician sailor is born to a new life (148) and considers the Upanishad benediction at the end of *The Waste Land* a celebration of the soul’s peace in God (171). These interpretations should have been amplified to include the views of other interpreters who doubt that Waste Land characters actually “overcome their insignificant existence,” that Phlebas is resurrected from drowning and that “Shantih shantih shantih” is a sign of manifested peace, rather than a desperate cry to be blessed by it.

This new edition of Eliot’s poem is also a new translation by José Luis Palomares. Most translators would agree, I believe, that the proof of a good translation of *The Waste Land* lies largely in rendering “A Game of Chess” effectively. From the artificial description of the lady’s room, with its Shakespearean echoes, to the naturalistic pub chat, the varying register and rhythm challenge the translator. The translation by Palomares is adequate overall: it stands the test of being read aloud, appealing to the auditory imagination of a Spanish-speaking reader or listener. The best lines are

possibly those in “The Burial of the Dead” (“What are the roots that clutch . . .”), in which the solemn prophetic tone is wonderfully conveyed through the sounds of Spanish: “ven a la sombra de esta roca roja . . .” On the other hand, in the pub scene, the translator does not wholly succeed in his attempt to make Lil’s friend’s Spanish “demotic” and natural.

La tierra baldía is illustrated with a number of photographs of Eliot at different stages of his life, with photographs of one of the original *Waste Land* manuscripts and one of the typescripts with Pound’s and Vivien’s annotations, and with several reproductions of the tarot cards drawn by Patricia Coleman-Smith. It also includes an appendix of texts (299-325) quoted or alluded to by the author, from Geoffrey Chaucer’s “General Prologue” to Gerard de Nerval’s “El Desdichado.”

Despite the minor objections made above, Viorica Patea’s edition is praiseworthy in its comprehensive and scholarly approach. It could well be labelled “a *Waste Land* encyclopedia,” which, in Spanish and in such a rich presentation, we did not really have up to this point. *La tierra baldía* will deservedly become a reference work for Spanish-speaking teachers and students belonging to the field of English Studies.

Dídac Llorens-Cubedo
(Universitat Jaume I de
Castelló, Spain)

[The following review appeared in mangled form in an earlier *Newsletter*. Let us try again. –Ed.]

James E. Miller Jr., *T. S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922*, (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005); pp. xx + 468 p.; \$39.95.

James E. Miller Jr. calls his newest book—*T. S. Eliot: The Making of an American Poet, 1888-1922*—a biography. The dates in the chapter titles, though overlapping, promise a conventional organization, but Miller says his book isn't conventional and "might be called a biographical interpretation" [xviii]. The sentence ends there, leaving open the syntax and the question "interpretation of what?". It soon becomes apparent that Miller means that he will read Eliot's poems by the light of the life, and the life by the poems'. His large concern—the relation of life and poems—contains more particular ones, most abidingly Eliot as a reader, as a writer of personal poems, and as an American, and Eliot's psychological states, focusing on those do to with family and with sex. But the method Miller employs is too often that of conjecture. He seems to have forgotten that there is no reason for Eliot to have led a life that was designed to be convenient for biographers. Miller assigns psychological motives for Eliot's writing based on what Eliot read or might have read. Miller elaborates coincidence of place and time into what *must have been* or *must have been felt* by Eliot. Speculation so weakens Miller's claims and arguments (and even the trust a reader might have in his facts) that it becomes increasingly difficult not to wish this were a different sort of book altogether.

When writing in a conjectural vein,

the better part of prudence is to establish trust early on. It is no good Miller's writing on page 8 "And I have tried to refrain from leaping hastily to conclusions," if in what precedes this claim there are demonstrations that he lacks restraint in such leaping or that for him there is only the trying. Which is it in this case?

In his 1951 lecture, "Virgil and the Christian World," Eliot made perhaps his most intriguing statement about *The Waste Land* without naming the poem: "A poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience; his lines may be for him only a means of talking about himself without giving himself away; yet for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation." [xii]

Here, on the top fourth of the second page into the book, Miller invites you to leap quickly with him. Beware. Although he has already quoted both the famous *rhythmical grumbling* and Eliot's brushing away the claims that he wrote in *The Waste Land* about the "disillusion of a generation," Miller hasn't set out enough of the matter to support his bald statement that, in this *intriguing statement*, Eliot is discussing *The Waste Land*. Why hasn't he asked if it isn't possible that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or "Portrait of a Lady" or "Preludes" (to begin at the beginning), as well as *The Waste Land*, were based on "only his private experience"—though any of them might become for readers "the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation"?

Why hasn't he challenged Eliot on *only* or as to what constitutes private experience? Had Miller shown how he came to understand what Eliot wrote and how he came to conclude that *The Waste Land* is likely to have been what Eliot was referring to, early trust would have not been harmed as it now is.

Still in the prefatory matter ("A Note on Sources"), Miller writes that the 1988 *Letters* is incomplete (he actually says "the letters ... are incomplete," but we know what he means), "because, as the editor of his letters writes," Eliot burned much of the correspondence with his mother and brother after their deaths [xvii]. I wondered about that *because*; was it Miller's or Mrs. Eliot's? One needn't know anything about Eliot or scholarly methods to want to put the *because* aside, for a moment, and ask if Eliot, like other people, didn't lose letters or throw them away thoughtlessly, or if his correspondents hadn't similarly been less than dutiful archivists, or if the impossibility of knowing the existence of letters one knows nothing about might lead an editor to acknowledge the incomplete state of the volume or to rejection of some of the letters as outside the scope of the volume. Checking the *Letters*, I find that Miller, not Mrs. Eliot, commits the too simple, and to no purpose, *because*.

I know, I know. I'm being pedantic. But, how can I trust what I can't research when I can't trust what I can. Miller is an habitual user of those small coercive words and phrases that are cognate with his assumption that Eliot meant *The Waste Land* when he might not have. This time a strong-arm phrase is paired with an assumption. Writing about Charlotte Eliot's book on her father-in-law, the poet's grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, Miller says:

Eliot's introduction, through his mother's book, to the complexities of the "social evil" at such a young age most likely intensified his adolescent urge to write the humorous and sexually explicit poems, which he began at an early age and continued throughout his life in the epic King Bolo verses. [13]

Epic? Well, *most likely* is characteristic of the arguments Miller makes. No consideration of the millions of other dirty-poem-writing young people who did not, do not, and will not have a Puritanish Unitarian *paterfamilias* who was dedicated to the sexual lives of others (as WGE is painted). No consideration of the complexity of responses young Tom might have had to reading about his grandfather. What is the basis for this suggestion by Miller? And what's the point? Miller, in his excitement to say that Eliot's poems are "personal poems, written out of and about his personal experiences—physical, mental, and emotional" [2], forgets that Eliot is not alone in being a person (an animal, even) who is affected by his own life and his own truths, which, as I understand Eliot to say in "The Function of a Literary Review," include his literary life.

Coupled with his delight in finding what he sees as correspondences between the life and the work is Miller's decision that Eliot's "basic approach to poetic composition" is to have a "murky or hidden presence" in the poems [6]. And because Miller is both a fantasist and a literalist of the imagination, he thinks he knows some of what Eliot wants to hide. Ezra Pound's now-central-to-Eliot-studies throwaway poem, "Sage Homme," introduces *Uranian Muse* into the conversation; the

adjective is a late 19th-century term for *homosexual*. Miller makes much of the poem and, oddly—though he says that Pound has turned his *labeling* of Eliot into a joke—he doesn't figure out that Pound's not publishing it might have something to do with the poem's having been written as part of a letter and so not being either a public one or one of sufficient quality for Pound to make it so [2 and 388-93]. It misses the mark to deny a poet the mask of art if he wants to assume it; no poet is obliged to reveal himself or to be concerned with the sort of speculations others make about him. Being a great poet, Eliot imagined into his poems the truths that he knew, in the ways he thought best.

I know some of you have a genuine interest in Eliot's genuine life—not in one presented in terms of *probably, without doubt, must have*. So you'll be interested that Miller says that for two years there were weekly visits to the dentist's, where the boy discovered and read Poe's writing. I'll bet you, like me, wonder what went on during those hundred dental appointments, and I'd like to tell you, but I can't, because Miller doesn't say. But he does speak authoritatively about Eliot and his awakenings to love. He first repeats Eliot's phrase from *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* about Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubáiyát:

“Youthful experiences of love”?

If there were such experiences in Eliot's youth, the curtain had been closed on them by the destruction of all of Eliot's early correspondence. Given the surveillance of his parents, and the nature of the all-male preparatory schools he attended, there seems little likelihood that he experienced such boy-girl

love firsthand. Moreover, at Harvard, in all of the surviving accounts of friends and acquaintances (some as we shall see discussing his strong friendships), there is no mention whatever of dating or girl-chasing—or even a yearning for girls. [34]

What is special the nature of these particular all-male prep schools, compared to other such, that makes it likely that the boys who went to them didn't know love firsthand or holding hands? If the destroyed letters existed, would the surviving accounts then be of account? Who talks about a college friend's yearnings? Doesn't it bother you that guess is turned to fact, or that, here where Eliot uses a phrase within an essay, and uses it as if he knows what he means, Miller thinks he doesn't have any personal experience to back up the use?

It is tedious to read this book. But what about *this* book: *Harvard Episodes*, written by Macomb Flandrau, and published in 1897—by Oscar Wilde's publisher, the tar brush announces.

It was a very popular book whose appearance coincided with the arrival at Harvard in 1898 of T. S. Eliot's older brother, Henry. It is hard to believe that he, with his genius in capturing the personalities of Harvard's professors in a few telling lines of verse, would not have taken delight in it and recommended it later to his younger brother. [59]

This, and a similar sentence two pages later about Flandrau's other book, *The Diary of a Freshman* (1901)—“it is entirely likely that Henry mentioned the book to his younger brother when he was preparing for Harvard”—help comprise

the hit and run suspicions that Eliot was, or lived among, homosexuals. Dickey Dawson's mother says, after all, about Dickey's friends in *Harvard Episodes*, "They're queer young men... ." If Miller knows that the OED's first recorded instance of *queer* as homosexual is in 1922 and still wants to ask if this was coded language in 1898, why not tell us? He does cite George Chauncey's 1994 *Gay New York* for its "account of the various terms used for 'homosexual'" [105], but he doesn't let us in on the accounts of those terms he suspects of being used as code. And what if Eliot read these books, what then? What if he had been a homosexual? Because this is not, as Miller rightly says, a conventional biography (in which the sexual self would be placed within a full life), this supposition looms so large that it threatens to become more important than the poems and other writings, which are the very incitements to wanting to know more about Eliot.

Miller's methods do not serve his ideas. Though the chapter titles include dates, Miller follows a chronology only in part—each chapter covers a broad time period, both before and after the years set, and the dates of the chapters overlap. In combination with the lack of biographical tissue (which Miller may have been wise not to include if he hadn't much to add to the recent biographies which he credits), the instability of chronology suggests Miller might have done himself and his readers a favor had he found a structural principle that was more integral to his ideas.

Even the index is a poor servant. Vivien Eliot has more indexing space than does Eliot; so does Ezra Pound. Conrad Aiken, Richard Aldington, and "Homosexuality" each have at least half the space Eliot does. Given the title of

the book and the blurb—"...showing that the emotional springs of his poetry did indeed come from America"—what about this entry under *Eliot*:

American "roots" of, 2-3, 419-25;

[Period.]

In what is becoming less unfamiliar as more authors (or is it the presses?) do it, cited works are given acronyms that often require a key to decipher. These have not yet been standardized. Miller uses *OPP* to refer *On Poetry and Poets*, while the complementary *POO* is *Prufrock and Other Observations*. I'll leave you the pleasure of recognizing *CPP* and *TPP* for yourself. *UPUC* is *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. All straightforward. But *WLF*? (Hint: *TWL:Fac.*) Of our society, Ron Bush has written *TSESCS* and others; Lyndall Gordon has (in order) *EEY*, *ENL*, and *EIL*; and Grover Smith has both *PP* and (that most Eliotic of abbrevs) *TWL*. Alas, some of you are just referred to by last name—Hargrove, Loucks, Oser, Ricks, and Schuchard—but it is lovely to see so many members acknowledged by that name. If you grow weary in your reading—and if you aren't happy that, having finally become inured to Lawrence Rainey's *LOTSE* (Jim McCue makes note of its strangeness in his January 2006 *Essays in Criticism* review), Miller, subtly optimistic, uses *LTSE1*—just say *Shantih*, or *IOMH* (*Inventions of the March Hare*) or more simply, *UOM* ("Ulysses, Order and Myth"), or, most aptly (Miller in 1998 on Eliot's 'Uranian Muse'), *UM*.

—Marcia Karp

Massachusetts College of Art

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October 2006

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The Society would like to establish a listserv for quicker email communication of news and announcements. Members are requested to email their names (in preferred form) and email addresses to djcorlew@email.unc.edu.

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T. S. Eliot Society Newsletter is edited and published, in behalf of the Society, by William Harmon, UNC CH, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Printing and mailing generously subsidized by the UNC CH Department of English and Comparative Literature, James Thompson, Chair.
Administrative management by Anita Braxton.

Printed in the USA