

Time Present

The Newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society

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“In a Bloomsbury Square”: T. S. Eliot the Publisher

An Exhibition at the British Library, London

Rachel Foss

“I once was a pirate what sailed the ’igh seas—
But now I’ve retired as a com-mission-aire:
And that’s how you find me a-takin’ my ease
And keepin’ the door in a Bloomsbury Square.

.....
“So if you ’ave business with Faber—or Faber—
I’ll give you this tip, and it’s worth a lot more:
You’ll save yourself time, and you’ll spare yourself labour
If jist you make friends with the Cat at the Door.”

(“Cat Morgan Introduces Himself,” from *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*)

To coincide with the 80th anniversary of Faber & Faber, the British Library’s current Folio Gallery exhibition, “*In a Bloomsbury Square*”: *T. S. Eliot the Publisher*, sheds new light on Eliot’s roles as publisher, editor and author. In the 1930s and beyond, Eliot used these roles to promote modern literature, successfully lending it authority and making it both respectable and accessible to a wider public. In his long career with Faber, Eliot exercised a profound and largely unparalleled influence on English literature. Bringing together for the first time material from the British Library’s collections with generous loans from the Faber Archive and the T. S. Eliot Estate, this exhibition uses original manuscripts, letters, artworks, and audio recordings to explore the ways in which Eliot nurtured and promoted some of the most significant writers of the last century.

The exhibition opens by exploring the beginnings of Faber & Faber. In the autumn of 1925, Eliot left Lloyds Bank to join the new publishing firm Faber & Gwyer, which had its roots in the Scientific Press and was known primarily for its medical and nursing textbooks. When Geoffrey Faber entered into partnership with Lady Gwyer, he expanded the firm into a general publishing house. In 1929, Faber & Gwyer became Faber & Faber—the name was thought to confer gravitas on the fledgling firm despite there being no second Faber—and launched its first catalogue with an illustrated edition of Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, the manuscript of which is among the items on display.

Eliot thrived upon the rhythms and routines of office life, and visitors to the exhibition can see the Faber Book Committee Register, open at pages documenting decisions by Eliot in 1944 to accept Auden’s *For the Time Being* and to reject Philip Larkin’s *Jill* and R. S. Thomas’s *Out of the Hills*. Despite affecting a certain detachment from proceedings—he frequently used to do *The Times* crossword during the meetings—Eliot was known for his shrewd business instincts and acute grasp of how literary reputations were made, as well as for his skill in writing blurbs (which he once termed “the most arduous form of literary composition”). A 1931 internal memorandum by Eliot on display here argues for a more innovative approach to advertising and criticizes what he views as the firm’s tendency to take on too many books. Among the objects on display are Eliot’s typewriter (the last of three that he owned) and David Jones’s design for a book-plate for Eliot and Valerie Fletcher after their marriage in 1957.

(continued on p. 5)

Eliot at the ALA: Call for Papers

The T. S. Eliot Society will sponsor two sessions at the 2010 Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, May 27–30, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in San Francisco. Please send proposals or abstracts (up to 250 words), along with a curriculum vitae, to Professor Lee Oser (leeoser@holycross.edu). Submissions must be received no later than January 15, 2010.

For information on the ALA and the 2010 meeting, see <http://www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/ala2>.



2011 Eliot Society Meeting à Paris

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of T. S. Eliot's "romantic year in Paris," the 2011 Eliot Society annual meeting will be held in that city in July. The board of the Society invites members' comments and suggestions; please write David Chinitz (dchinit@luc.edu).



Actions of the Board

At the annual meeting of the Eliot Society's Board, the directors voted to authorize planning of the 2011 meeting in Paris (see above). John Karel was reelected as treasurer and Frances Dickey as historian. Michael Coyle was elected vice president.

To synchronize registration for the annual meeting with payment of membership dues, the Board voted to define the membership year as beginning on July 1 and ending the following June 30.



Eliot Summer School

The second annual T. S. Eliot International Summer School will be held in Bloomsbury, July 10–17, 2010. Founded and directed by Ronald Schuchard, the Summer School is modeled on the highly successful Yeats Summer School in Sligo. The Eliot Summer School is hosted by the University of London's Institute of English Studies. This year's instructors include Jewel Spears Brooker, Ronald Bush, Marjorie Perloff, Gail McDonald, David Chinitz, Hermione Lee, Iman Javadi, Jim McCue, Massimo Bacigalupo, Stephen Romer, Wim Van-Mierlo, Ronald Schuchard, and others soon to be named.

Activities include a poetry reading by Simon Armitage, walking tours of Eliot's London, and trips to Burnt Norton, Little Gidding, and, optionally, East Coker.

For further information, see the School's website at <http://ies.sas.ac.uk/events/TSE>.



British Readers Name TSE Their "Favorite Poet"

In an online poll conducted by the BBC, T. S. Eliot recently edged out John Donne as "Britain's favorite poet." Results of the poll, part of this year's National Poetry Day activities, were widely reported in the press. Reuters noted that "Eliot was one of the 20th century's most important poets who captured the post-war sense of loss in *The Waste Land*, and on the eve of World War Two he produced *Old Possum's Book Of Practical Cats*, the inspiration for the musical *Cats*." The *Times* reported:

His poetry is difficult, his images obscure, and when he gave a reading of *The Waste Land* in front of the Royal Family the Queen Mother got the giggles at "this lugubrious man in a suit." Yesterday, however, more than 90 years after the publication of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," the suspicion with which the British public usually regard modern poetry was laid aside when T. S. Eliot was announced as the nation's favorite poet.

The *Guardian* pointed out other oddities of the poll results, including the fact that no women—"not even poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy or Sylvia Plath"—were among the top ten vote-getters, and that the third-place finisher (after Eliot and Donne) and the only living writer on the list was the Rastafarian "dub poet" Benjamin Zephaniah.

One might add that beyond Eliot, the poll's top ten poets were almost exclusively English, with only Yeats (#7) and Dylan Thomas (#10) complicating the national mix. And despite the *Times*' comment, the top ten were also heavily tilted toward the modern, with only Donne (#2), Blake (#6), and Keats (#9) representing earlier periods. The remaining poets, all 20th-century Englishmen, included Wilfred Owen (#4), Philip Larkin (#5), and John Betjeman (#8).



TSE and Emily Hale Novelized (Again)

Readers may recall the crucial role of Eliot's sequestered letters to Emily Hale in Martha Cooley's 1998 novel *The Archivist*. A new novel, *The Lost Life*, by the Australian writer Steven Carroll, recreates Eliot and Hale themselves as characters. A young couple sneak into the rose garden at Burnt Norton one day in 1934 and accidentally witness a "private ceremony" between Eliot and Hale. The ensuing interactions among these four characters form the center of the book's plot.

On Margate Sands

As his readers know, Eliot spent several weeks recuperating from his 1921 breakdown at the Albemarle Hotel in Margate. On Nov. 4, he wrote to Sidney Schiff about his progress on *The Waste Land* and explained that he had drafted about fifty lines of “The Fire Sermon” “while sitting in a shelter on the [water]front.... I sketch the people, after a fashion” (*Letters* 484–85).

As James Campbell noted last March, “An attempt made a few years ago by Margate Civic Society to have the Albemarle Hotel listed was unsuccessful ... and it was duly demolished. But the Nayland Rock Shelter ... still stands, and the energies of conservationists are now focused on preserving Modernism’s most important seaside shelter, by having it included on the Statutory List of Buildings of Architectural or Historical Interest” (“N.B.: Beside the Seaside,” *TLS* 13 Mar. 2009: 36).

Time Present is pleased to report that the Nayland Rock Shelter was declared a “Grade II” landmark on Oct. 15, 2009. BBC News quotes Peter Beacham of English Heritage: “I am delighted the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has taken our advice to list ... the Nayland Rock shelter which looks out over the sands of Margate, a special seaside town. It is a handsome late Victorian-Edwardian seaside shelter and has a very important historical association with T. S. Eliot.” Councillor John Kirby, Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services and Ramsgate Marina, added: “The fact that the shelter has been listed is excellent news and showcases Margate’s rich cultural heritage. The Nayland Rock Shelter is known far and wide for its associations with T. S. Eliot and has been reported on many occasions both nationally and internationally. It is only right that steps are taken to ensure that this unique shelter is preserved for generations to come.”

A Few Words on the Eliot Society’s Annual Meeting

David Chinitz

In 2003, when I joined the Board of Directors, the diminution of the Society was a matter of serious concern. The cadre of veteran members who had long sustained the Society was slowly dwindling. Meanwhile, due to Eliot’s critical fortunes—misfortunes, really—our annual meetings were not attracting many younger scholars.

Times have changed, and, like Eliot’s own reputation, the Eliot Society has clearly turned a corner. Young scholars are again a welcome presence, and many who attend now seem to be returning eagerly to subsequent meetings. Meanwhile, innovative events like the Peer Seminar are bringing in scholars who might not otherwise have thought to attend a meeting of the Eliot Society, and the Scholars Seminar is opening the door to additional graduate students doing work on T. S. Eliot.

Interest in our annual program has grown, and we now receive far more proposals in response to our annual call for papers than can fit into our program. If, as Ron Schuchard has predicted, the availability of new primary materials, and of Eliot’s *Complete Prose* and *Letters* in particular, sparks a resurgence of scholarly interest, we can expect that trend to continue.

In 2003, as at every prior Eliot Society meeting, our program included just three panels—one on each day of the conference—plus the annual Memorial Lecture and, sometimes, a special event, such as a musical or dramatic performance. Our program has expanded since then, partly in response to rising demand, and we continue to seek the right balance between scheduled programming and opportunities for members to relax and socialize.

This year we experimented by holding two panels simultaneously. Although Eliot Society members have always enjoyed being able to attend every panel, the surging interest in our annual meeting requires some flexibility in this area. Thanks to the concurrent session, we were neither forced to reject more proposals—thus turning away an even larger number of eager participants—nor to overload the schedule with additional 75-minute panel sessions, making the meeting as a whole less agreeable.

We are, one might say, seeking ways to deal with the Society’s growing success while preserving the things that members most enjoy about the annual meetings. Though we are trying to forge mutually beneficial ties with the fine English Department at Washington University—the institution founded in 1853 by Eliot’s grandfather—we retain our independence absolutely, and the Central West End neighborhood will continue to be our home in St. Louis. We will visit with the Fathmans for as long as Tony and Melanie will share their wonderful hospitality with us. We will continue to feature scholars and poets of stature as our annual Memorial Lecturers. The annual meeting will remain the welcoming and stimulating gathering it has always been.

Your observations and suggestions are welcome. Write me at dchinit@luc.edu.

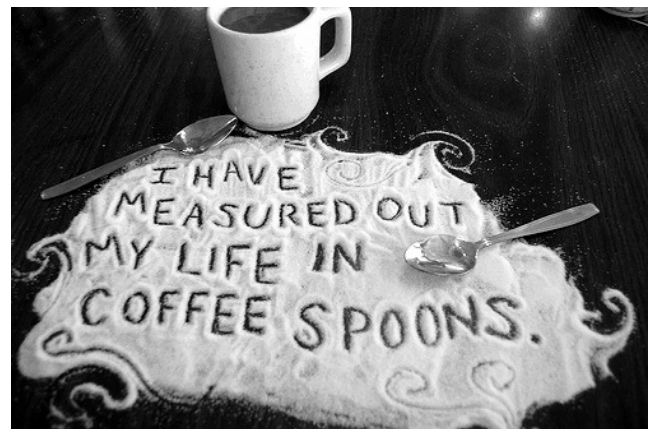


Photo: Amy Thrash

(from www.poets.org, the website of the Academy of American Poets)

Conference Programs

Sessions sponsored by the T. S. Eliot Society

Modern Language Association

December 27–30, 2009

T. S. Eliot and Transnationalism

Sunday, December 27, 8:45–10:00 PM

Chair: Kinereth Meyer, Bar-Ilan University

1. “T. S. Eliot, St.-John Perse, and New World Modernism.” Anita Patterson, Boston University
2. “T. S. Eliot’s Romanian Afterlife: Translation under Communism.” Sean J. Cotter, University of Texas, Dallas
3. “The Grim Salmon: T. S. Eliot and Transnational Vernacularism.” Matthew Hart, Columbia University



Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900

February 18–20, 2010

Myth and Metaphysics

Chair: Carol L. Yang, National Chengchi University

1. “Modernly Metaphysical: Understanding Eliot’s Sensibility.” Martin Lockerd, Saint Louis University
2. “Reader Collaboration and the Mythical Method in *The Waste Land*.” Cassandra Montag, Creighton University
3. “Eliot: Lists, Tallies, Catalogues, Inventories, Paradigmata.” William Harmon, University of NC, Chapel Hill

Metaphor and Metamorphosis

Chair: Martin Lockerd, Saint Louis University

1. “*The Waste Land* and the Virtual City.” Carol L. Yang, National Chengchi University
2. “‘Inside a ring of lights’: Eliot’s ‘Suite Clownesque.’” Stefanie Wortman, University of Missouri
3. “‘The Look of Flowers that Are Looked At’: Auratic Distance and Eliot’s Eyebeam.” Stephen Koelz, Providence College

Public Sightings

“April might be the cruelest month, but August is the dumbest—at least if you have the misfortune to be watching TV.” (Opening line of “Hot Time of Year for Bizarre Mutterings,” an op-ed piece by Meghan Daum. *Chicago Tribune* 10 Aug. 2009, sect. 1, p. 15.)

John Updike’s sonnet “Needle Biopsy 12/22/08,” from the sequence *Endpoint*, written a few weeks before his death, describes his anesthetized sensations while undergoing an adrenal biopsy. The poem begins archly, “All praise be Valium in Jesus’ name.” Its sestet starts by adapting a familiar phrase: “**All would be well, I felt, all manner of thing.**” Not so, however, in the end: “Days later, the results came casually through: / the gland, biopsied, showed metastasis.” (*Endpoint and Other Poems*, 2009.)

The Sept. 2009 issue of *Poetry* includes “**Four Quartets’ Revisited,**” by Belle Randall, which asks: “On opening a long unopened book, / what odor rises from the parting pages, / what genie is released, what dark spell broken . . . ?” (411). The speaker discovers an “apt” phrase she herself had unaccountably written in the margins of the book as a child: “On opening a long unopened book.” The poem thus closes with its own words renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

In a Turner Classic Movies featurette on *Apocalypse Now*, Dennis Hopper, who portrays the spaced-out, camera-draped journalist, recalls Marlon Brando’s reading of “**The Hollow Men,**” by **D. H. Lawrence.**” (Ahem.)

Helen Vendler, our 1999 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecturer, opines: “**Far more than Eliot or Pound,** [Wallace] Stevens wished passionately to be above all a poet of 20th-century America and its American English; and he had the luck, as they did not, to write with increasing genius to the end of his life.” (“The Plain Sense of Things.” Rev. of *Selected Poems by Wallace Stevens*. Ed. John N. Serio. *New York Times Book Review* 23 Aug. 2009: 13.)

“With apologies to T. S. Eliot, **in this room the women come and go** / Talking of . . . Picasso.” (“Picasso in Little Rock: Pictures at an Exhibition.” Paul Greenberg, in *Jewish World Review* 23 June 2006.)

“**I will show you fear in a handful of dust,**” wrote T. S. Eliot, a boast that will seem unduly modest once you have seen *Dust*, Hartmut Bitomsky’s eccentric and profoundly informative documentary.” (A. O. Scott, “Dust: Awe, Revulsion, and Affection for Those Particles Unto Which Thou Shalt Return.” *New York Times* 3 Dec. 2008.)

The Italian “progressive thrash metal” band **An Handful of Dust** has recorded its first demo CD, titled “I’ll Show You My Fear.” According to their website, www.anhandfulofdust.com, the CD was finally released “after a long time of bullshit.” Scholars are hereby urged not to confuse this group with “A Handful of Dust,” the “free noise” (avant-garde) band from New Zealand.

“In a Bloomsbury Square”: T. S. Eliot the Publisher

(continued from p. 1)

Under the heading “Commitment to Modernist Achievement,” the central section of the exhibition explores Eliot’s relationships with key writers of the 1930s, including W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, Marianne Moore, George Barker, Lawrence Durrell, and Djuna Barnes. These working partnerships, which frequently evolved into close personal friendships, were to continue until the 1960s. To pick just a couple of highlights here: a fascinating 1934 letter from Marianne Moore thanks Eliot for his introduction to her *Selected Poems*, which had just appeared. Despite its drawing on only two previously published volumes of Moore, Eliot called the volume “Selected” to create the impression that Moore was an established poet, knowing that this would impact favorably on her critical reception and her salability. Eliot also rearranged Moore’s poems radically out of chronological order, placing first her most recent work, whose recurrent concern is the mind’s ordering of reality. This had the effect of emphasizing her modernist credentials, a positioning underlined by Eliot’s discussion of her work in connection with the Imagist poets in his introduction. Moore’s letter demonstrates that she was deeply conscious of Eliot’s role in shaping her future reception, writing: “I

cannot speak fitly ... of the coolness with which you spike the guns of the critic before he attacks.” Elsewhere Eliot, who largely disliked the novel as a genre, advises the young Stephen Spender that he will soon have to choose between poetry and the novel, because, as he says in a letter of 1930: “I do not believe that any human organism can be stored with enough energy to cultivate two such different modes of speech.”

In spite of his tendency to dismiss the novel, Eliot was prepared to court controversy to defend Lawrence Durrell’s *The Black Book*, although England’s obscenity laws made it impossible to publish a work including such explicit sexual content. Eliot, who was later to describe *The Black Book* as “the first piece of work by a new English writer to give me any hope for the future of prose fiction,” writes in the 1943 letter to Durrell on display that Faber could not publish the book without radical expurgation (“a mutilation worse than not publishing at all”) and advises him to seek another publisher. However, Eliot successfully argued the case for Faber’s 1936 publication of Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, taking editorial steps to prevent its portrayal of a lesbian relationship falling foul of the censor. Unperturbed by either the

density of its style or the controversial subject matter, Eliot argued that the depiction of lesbianism was incidental to the novel, being simply a device through which Barnes approached what he termed “the universal malady of living.” Comparing *Nightwood*’s significance as a modernist text to Joyce’s *Ulysses* and his own poem *The Waste Land*, Eliot, in the 1936 letter to Geoffrey Faber on display here, urges him to back the novel’s publication, writing: “my feeling is that this book is very likely to be the last big thing to be done in our time.”

Eliot’s relationships with James Joyce and Ezra Pound, both of whom he met and supported before he joined Faber, are also considered in this section. Among the highlights

here are Eliot’s book reports on Pound’s *Guide to Kulchur* (“We asked for this and we have got it. It is only a damned kulchered person who will be able to find his way about in this book”) and the first volume of Joyce’s *Letters* (which appeared in 1957), in which he discusses the practicalities of undertaking the project.

Although the focus of the exhibition is primarily on Eliot the publisher, one section treats Eliot’s own writing. Among several items relating to *Old Possum’s Book of Practical*

Cats are Eliot’s preliminary sketches of “The Man in White Spats” and a 1931 letter to his godson which includes the poem “Invitation to All Pollicle Dogs and Jellicle Cats to come to the Birthday of Thomas Faber.” *Old Possum’s Book* appeared in 1939, and another section of the exhibition explores the impact of the Second World War on book publishing. At Faber, Eliot played his part in the communal response and dutifully took his turn on the fire-watching rota which obliged him to spend nights on the roof of the Faber offices at 24 Russell Square. Other items on display include Eliot’s annotated drafts of the poet Keith Douglas (who was killed during the D-Day assault) and a letter from Auden to Eliot in late 1940, relating rumors “that you are an air-warden, that you have invented your own fire-extinguisher which you keep up your trouser-leg.”

The exhibition closes with a section on Ted Hughes—Eliot’s last major discovery as a publisher—whose *Hawk in the Rain* was published by Faber in 1957. Items here include two journal entries by Hughes, part of the Hughes archive acquired by the British Library last year. In the first entry, Hughes recounts attending a cocktail party given by his publisher in June 1960 and describes his impressions of fellow Faber poets Auden, MacNeice and Spender. The news of



MacNeice, Hughes, TSE, Auden, Spender
Photo: Mark Gerson, Faber Archive

Eliot's death on 5 January 1965 was devastating for Hughes, as another journal entry, written just two days later, reveals. Hughes describes Eliot as a father-figure and writes: "I've so tangled him into my thoughts, as the Guru-in-chief, and dreamed of him so clearly and unambiguously that this will have consequences for me."

An extensive selection of audio recordings complements the physical display. Visitors can listen to the various Faber authors, including Eliot himself, reading excerpts from their work. There are also recordings of interviews with Lawrence Durrell and with Ezra Pound, who, at the age of 74, reflects upon life in London and Paris during the 1920s and, in typically belligerent fashion, outlines his views on such thorny matters as socialism and free speech. Visitors can also hear

an extract from an oral history interview by Anne Walmsley, a secretary at Faber during the 1950s, in which she elaborates her sense of Faber as a family firm.

Celebrating T. S. Eliot's position at the centre of English literary and cultural life, this exhibition is, we hope, a fitting testament to the enduring legacy of this most remarkable man.

"In a Bloomsbury Square": T. S. Eliot the Publisher runs at the British Library until 6th December 2009.

Rachel Foss is Curator of Modern Literary Manuscripts at the British Library

Book Reviews

Leon Surette. *The Modern Dilemma: Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot and Humanism*. McGill-Queens UP, 2008.

In undertaking this study, Leon Surette has set himself the challenge of climbing a daunting rock face. He addresses himself to the work of two major poets about whom mountains of pages have been written and who themselves wrote prose about their poetry, which, in the case of Stevens, is often opaque and sometimes illogical and, in the case of Eliot, is often evasive and sometimes inconsistent. Nor does the poets' relationship to each other offer any toehold since it was, for all practical purposes, non-existent. As Surette himself explains, "This study is motivated by the puzzle of their mutual neglect" (ix). Furthermore, both poets have accrued considerable symbolic heft in the course of half a century's scholarship (Eliot as classicist, Stevens as romantic; Eliot as ascetic, Stevens as hedonist; and so on). Thus a critic who writes about either figure must expend considerable effort chipping away at the icons earlier critics have constructed.

But Surette's aim is more ambitious still: he seeks to read exemplary moments and texts of the two poets' careers as indices of their engagement with "the modern dilemma." Eliot used the phrase in 1932 to refer to the choice between Christianity and Communism. Surette has adapted it to refer to the choice between Christianity (or some other form of faith) and Humanism—more generally, to what has come to be known as "the problem of belief." Surette is admirably careful to situate historically his use of the term "Humanism," making distinctions among early modern Christian Humanists (such as Erasmus and More), 19th-century Biblical scholarship, and the Arnoldian proposition that "literature could replace religion as a moral guide" (46). This last idea, a staple of late 19th- and early 20th-century debate, most troubles Eliot's and Stevens's thinking. As Surette expresses the problem in its barest form: the poets faced "the dilemma of how to deal with a world in which the old certainties have

vanished" (186). To write seriously about this dilemma, Surette recognizes, is to "chart the strong intellectual winds and tectonic shifts in the political and ideological geography of the West" in the years around and between two world wars (18). I can think of no topic more fundamental to the study of modernism and none more resistant to a conclusive statement, since both horns of the dilemma are slippery and neither "side" has won a lasting victory.

One way Surette has faced down these difficulties is by close study of well-defined topics within the much larger subject. Surette's preface and introduction to his monograph are models of clarity in this regard, both as to the overall argument of his work and as to the particularities of each chapter. Chapter 1 investigates the poets' commentaries on the work of Marianne Moore, showing the ways in which they reveal their own aesthetic principles by what they choose to praise in Moore's poetry. Chapter 2, "Eliot's Humanism," makes a case that Eliot took Humanism quite seriously for a time, under the influence of Bertrand Russell. (This chapter will be of most interest to readers of this newsletter, and I will return to it). Chapter 3 offers readings of *The Waste Land* and "Gerontion" and of Stevens's "Lettres d'un Soldat" and *The Comedian as the Letter C* as poetic responses to war. Chapter 4, "Rethinking Western Culture," considers Martin Heidegger alongside Eliot and Stevens, comparing his philosophical positions on the question of belief to theirs. The fifth chapter places the critic and political commentator Ramon Fernandez at the center of Stevens's "Idea of Order at Key West" and looks again at Eliot's prose commentary on Fernandez. Stevens's and Eliot's views of Paul Valéry's notion of "pure poetry" is the focus of chapter 6. Chapter 7 moves toward conclusions about the poets' "ultimate positions with respect to the modern dilemma"(xi), as Surette analyzes *Ash-Wednesday* and *The Man with the Blue Guitar*.

Surette stresses two aspects of his study that he believes are genuinely new: first, that no one to date has read "Idea of

Order at Key West” through the particular lens he trains on Fernandez, one that magnifies his role as Humanist; second, that Eliot turned first toward Humanism and then away from Humanism because of his involvement with Bertrand Russell. I will consider the second of these, an argument which occupies much of Chapter 2. Since Surette’s claim is unusual and quite forthright, I quote it: “Although Eliot told his Magdalene audience that Russell’s essay [“The Free Man’s Worship”] drove him *toward* Christianity, there are strong indications that, on the contrary, Eliot was drawn to Russell’s Humanism during the period of their intimacy while he was writing his dissertation on [F. H.]Bradley. I will further argue that Eliot turned away from Humanism toward Anglicanism not so much because of the essay as because of Russell’s misbehaviour [sic] with Vivien during their disastrous cohabitation with him as a newly married couple” (7).

Surette’s evidence for the first half of this claim (Eliot’s being drawn to Humanism) is based largely upon reviews Eliot wrote for the *International Journal of Ethics* between 1915 and 1918. Eliot got the opportunity to do these reviews through Russell, a fact that Surette mentions but does not emphasize. Having read the reviews and carefully considered the elements that Surette highlights, I am convinced that Eliot at this time was skeptical, a relativist, a “cracker of theories like small nuts,” as he described himself to Conrad Aiken. But to grant that Eliot took pleasure in his ability to pick things apart is not to say that he did not wish to put them back together again. Humanism and relativism are not synonymous. This is the same period, as Surette concedes, in which Eliot wrote the mystical poems central to Lyndall Gordon’s delineation of his early life. What is one to make of those poems? As to the second claim, Surette is not wrong to claim that Russell and Vivien Eliot betrayed Eliot in a most despicable way nor wrong to associate that betrayal with Eliot’s turn away from Russell and toward religious faith. Yet an overemphasis on this painful episode has the effect of undermining the serious and protracted struggle towards religious commitment—the reading, self-examination, discipline, and prayer—that Eliot records elsewhere.

Although I remain unconvinced by this part of Surette’s argument, I nevertheless admire this book for its learning, its scrupulous effort to check and weigh evidence, its lucid expression, and its firm stance that the commonplaces about the two poets are inadequate. Stevens particularly emerges from this study as a man who was dissatisfied with the consolations of Humanism, who despite his defense of the friendliness of empty skies, still yearned for something more awesome. Surette’s argument is a chiasmus: each poet had a more complicated relationship to the Humanist solution to modern unbelief than we have so far granted him, and in wholly different ways: Eliot perhaps less antipathetic, Stevens perhaps more so. That complexity has the ring of truth.

At several points in the book (20, 167, 195, 259, 319, 323), Surette makes disparaging remarks about postmodern criticism, suggesting that the enterprise as a whole has abandoned the effort to discover the truth; on the last page, for

example, he refers to “hermeneutic anarchism.” A final chapter pursuing this thesis would have been an interesting addition to the monograph: how might developments in postmodern literary criticism also be historically situated as responses to the modern dilemma?

Gail McDonald
University of Southampton



Edna Rosenthal. *Aristotle and Modernism: Aesthetic Affinities of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and Virginia Woolf*. Sussex Academic P. 2008.

In her latest work, *Aristotle and Modernism: Aesthetic Affinities of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and Virginia Woolf*, Edna Rosenthal sets herself an ambitious task. While few would bat an eye at an exploration of Eliot’s classicism, Woolf and Stevens may at first appear not to lend themselves readily to the same kind of analysis, and grouping the three might generate more discord than points of fruitful similarity. However, Rosenthal’s unique selection of authors is meant to undergird her thesis. If one can trace common Aristotelian principles through these three points, a sure line might be drawn through modernism itself, a line that could possibly cause us to replot modernism relative to far older and oft-neglected classical criticism, specifically Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In lucid and exacting prose, Rosenthal attempts to demonstrate a shared interest in “formal affectivism”—in which the form of an art object has as its end a particular emotional response—among these three writers as she simultaneously upholds the *Poetics* as a viable tool for the study of modern authors.

By and large, Rosenthal’s analysis succeeds in revealing previously unexplored Aristotelian connections and generates new readings as a result, particularly of Woolf’s treatment of character. The first chapter introduces both Aristotle’s dramatic theory and Eliot as champion of classicism revisited through the *Poetics*. Chapter two then connects Eliot’s and Stevens’s theories through shared Aristotelian concerns, such as “the impersonal ideal of poetry,” “the aesthetic aim of poetry,” “the Aristotelian notion of poet as maker,” and “the role of the ‘image’ in human cognition and aesthetic response” (10). The most intriguing material is found in the final two chapters on Woolf, in which Rosenthal investigates her “stealthy” classicism—a formal affectivism that substitutes ethos for mythos in the modern novel.

Unfortunately, the overall argument is diluted by the introduction of several intermediary Aristotelian theorists of wildly varying philosophies and temperaments, namely Lessing, Longinus, and Burke. These thinkers are paired with Eliot, Stevens, and Woolf respectively, not because the authors under consideration necessarily had direct contact with their matched Aristotelian’s theories, but because Rosenthal uses each theorist as a lens through which she

focuses on a particular aspect of the *Poetics* pertinent to the reading at hand. Rather than resulting in a clear light, however, the combination of these various lenses creates something of a blur. The lines of similarity between Eliot-through-Aristotle-through-Lessing and Stevens-through-Aristotle-through-Longinus and Woolf-through-Aristotle-through-Burke are not easy to find. Rosenthal possesses sure command of the *Poetics* and would perhaps have fared better by simply presenting her own reading and leaving the secondary theorists to supplement her argument and provide historical context. As it stands, *Aristotle and Modernism* presents strong and intriguing readings bundled by a thin thread, resulting in chapters that stand more as individual accomplishments than as parts of an organic whole.

Rosenthal begins her exploration with Eliot, posing a question in the title of her first chapter: “What’s New in Eliot’s Use of the *Poetics*?” While she admits at the start that Eliot’s deployment of the *Poetics* is “generally implicit” (16), Rosenthal nonetheless notes several junctions of critical overlap, specifically the emphasis on apprehending the formal unity of an art object, the affective end of the object’s structural elements, and its orientation in a generic and historical series. She presents Eliot’s view of tradition and the mind of Europe as a modern rendering of an essentially Aristotelian perspective. By inserting the eighteenth-century dramatist G.E. Lessing into the conversation, Rosenthal presents Aristotle as a descriptive analyst rather than a prescriptive lawgiver. Lessing chided neoclassical dramatists for negative mimesis—slavishly copying past masters—and championed positive mimesis in which the emotional telos of tragedy comes alive for a contemporary audience. Rosenthal likens this stance to Eliot’s view of tradition, which can mean alternately thoughtless imitation or originality arising from, standing against, and contributing to a prior diachronic series.

The most provocative section in the chapter on Eliot is “The ‘Essentials of Drama’ and the Western Canon.” Here, Rosenthal turns our attention towards Eliot’s experimentation with verse drama as the culmination of his marriage between the modern and the classical: “To bring about a modern classicism therefore necessitated a return to poetic drama as the expression of intense feeling and the fundamentals of human life” (29). This return, Rosenthal posits, is essentially Aristotelian in motivation. Specifically, she equates Aristotle’s focus on catharsis with Eliot’s interest in the affective potential of performance. One could hardly argue against the presence of strong Greek roots in Eliot’s drama, even in his earlier experimental work. However, Greek need not be exclusively Aristotelian. By limiting herself to explorations of Eliot’s dramatic theory and criticism and excluding analyses of his plays, Rosenthal emphasizes the importance of Aristotelian tragedy for a playwright who arguably never penned an Aristotelian tragedy. From the

outset, Eliot’s dramatic investigations were influenced by the research of F. M. Cornford, who argued that tragedy and comedy shared a lost ritual origin. By intertwining loss and death with revelation and rebirth, Eliot’s plays are, if anything, tragicomedy—a genre that would surely have boggled Aristotle and that problematizes catharsis. Furthermore, Rosenthal at times relies upon a soft definition of catharsis, “whereby the arousal of powerful emotions leads to their release” (39), that seems to describe any affective purgation, not strictly that of fear and pity as delineated by Aristotle. Turning to Eliot’s drama as the capstone of his practiced classicism is provocative and worthy of consideration, especially given the relative neglect from which Eliot’s dramatic career suffers. Yet it remains unclear why one must do so through Aristotle exclusively, let alone through Aristotle via Lessing.

One also wonders about the long-term viability of returning to the *Poetics* as a living critical paradigm for modern authors, not due to its age, but due to the genre-hopping that must occur when we apply a dramatic treatise to non-dramatic poetry or prose. Rosenthal would be the first to insist that the principle of formal affectivism demands attentiveness to the form of a work in order to understand how that structure achieves its end. She commits some violence against this principle by overlooking the wide formal divide between texts crafted for performance, let alone performances themselves as text, and those that are not. That having been said, this book is a worthy read. It challenges lingering divisions between classicist and anti-classicist modernisms and, in doing so, brings together diverse authors in original ways.

Julia Daniel
Loyola University Chicago



Rebecca Beasley. *Theorists of Modernist Poetry*. London: Routledge, 2007.

The aim of the growing *Critical Thinkers* series from Routledge is to offer clear, concise guides to familiarize readers with the key concepts of, and major lines of influence on, newly encountered thinkers. Rebecca Beasley’s terse and supple *Theorists of Modernist Poetry* achieves that, and does so with admirable briskness, bringing under the rubric of “critical thinkers” a formidable cadre of modernist poets—Eliot, Hulme, and Pound—who together, and in their often distinct ways, effectively revolutionized the practice of poetry and twentieth-century poetics. The guide is both practical in its layout, supplying timely definitions, and valuable as a compact resource guide for scholars and students alike. Beasley’s close readings are invariably astute and incisive,

and the volume as a whole does not shy away from relating its subjects' complicated legacies and politics to their poetic projects, concluding with a discussion of the contentious reactions all three continue to elicit, quite understandably, for their deeply entrenched reputation in the academic literary establishment.

For the beginner, this book may prove an indispensable introduction, offering an excellent "way in" to a group of writers often seen as daunting and difficult. Beasley offers accessible, topical sections that serve to frame engaged discussions of relevant historical and cultural contexts. There are six chapters in all, divided by topic, or "key ideas." From the dizzying post-idealist Bergsonian philosophical background, to the epoch-defining First World War, the book subtly surveys the contexts and crises that led to the modernists' revolutionary transformation of the poetic idiom. Neatly summed up, these three poet-critics "were pioneers in the use of free verse and in their expansion of the subject matter of poetry" (1). This book presents an important attempt to recapture the radical departure from traditional aesthetic expectations that was modernist poetics, even as its originary newness has somewhat dissipated in the banalizing process of institutional canonization and retelling. We have, after all, "inherited" this modernism, as Beasley rightly claims, living as its immediate historical successors.

Beasley navigates the Scylla of text and the Charybdis of context with seamless delicacy and tact, promising to keep historicists and practical readers equally satisfied with the breadth and range of her analysis. The beginning of her book sets up the topic nicely, though its binaries, which Beasley calls "the major issues we traditionally associate with modernism," may be stereotyped and old-fashioned with respect to our more developed understanding of the period (1). Disinterestedness *and* political engagement, tradition *and* novelty—these pairs are not most productively treated as antinomies, since the modernists, often notoriously self-contradictory, could simultaneously entertain both poles. The tradition and novelty pairing, admittedly, is one that Beasley does bring into sharp relief in chapter four, entitled "History and Tradition," where she writes, "One of the defining features of literary modernism is the tension it preserves between tradition and originality" (64). She logically parses Pound's famous dictum "make it new" to show that newness implies something old that precedes it. But the actual historical source for Pound's dictum illuminates no less effectively this still-puzzling insistence by a historically obsessed modernism on its own radical newness. Pound tellingly found the slogan as an inscription on an ancient Chinese emperor's bathtub. Beasley does nonetheless tease out this fundamental paradox through an analysis of what was a major and novel swerve in aesthetic objectives from the modernists' Romantic predecessors, in Eliot's complex synthesis of tradition and individuality, Pound's "method of luminous detail" and Hulme's emphasis on the stasis of the "image."

In this spirit of tracing the new to the old, Beasley's

chapter "Origins of Modernism" is arguably one of her best. The well-rehearsed modernist anecdote that Pound, upon his first encounter with Eliot, was impressed that the younger man had "modernized himself *on his own*" is rightly rectified. Eliot did not modernize himself on his own so much as he studied the French Symbolists on his own. Patricia Clements's *Baudelaire and The English Tradition* has already made this point forcefully. Placed in the first chapter, this section offers a defense for new students against an all-too-facile Anglo-British prioritization of modernism's complex, transnational genealogy.

The understanding of aestheticism, though generally accurate, is conventional here: "Aesthetes believed that art had no social responsibility, that it was an end in itself" (22). Aesthetes stated that principle more than they adhered to it. From Baudelaire up to Pater, aestheticism offered a powerful ethical critique of Victorian instrumental reason and faith in material progress. The poles of ethics and aesthetics are more intimate here than are often thought, and the deliberately provocative tenor of claims for *l'art pour l'art* should be pointed out. For Baudelaire, and even for Wilde, aestheticism was an attempt, in part, to shift the terms of public debate as a necessary defense mechanism against the real threat of censorship. Wilde is best understood as a sensitive *social* critic in a line that begins with Ruskin. It is difficult to see, then, how in one breath aestheticism can be called "a response to and rejection of nineteenth-century industrialism and its accompanying philosophy, utilitarianism," when in the next it is described as residing "outside all moral and even social considerations" (22).

In her chapter entitled "The First World War and the long poem," Beasley convincingly argues that the war effectively changed everything, politicizing and, I would add, sharply polarizing even the most hardened aesthetes. Speaking of *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land*, Beasley writes that "Both poems treat the First World War as a symptom of their main subject: the disintegration of civilization in the modern world" (80). Strengthened by important textual examples from both poems, this argument guards carefully against eliding the concrete historical context and against over-theorizing the disintegration of both poems as theoretical problems traceable merely to philosophical sources. The London of *The Waste Land* is the real, quotidian London of post-war desolation. The disintegration, of course, also has psychological valences, and Freud could bear at least a brief mention. Eliot, after all, suffered a truly life-defining nervous breakdown which, not accidentally, coincided with his period of convalescence *and* the composition of the final sections of *The Waste Land*, the fragments he famously shored against his personal ruin, from the spas of Switzerland.

Of the three poets, it is very likely Hulme will be the least familiar to students, and giving equal weight to him beside Eliot and Pound, those two modernist giants who often crowd him out, is a bold and justified move. Hulme's early essays provide the guiding principles of the early imag-

ist movement, and Pound's and Eliot's theories of poetics, as well as their cultural politics, were deeply indebted to his stirring writings. His works, however, have suffered from relative obscurity, and it was not until 1994, in an edition by Karen Csengeri, that his *Collected Works* were compiled in one modern volume. As Beasley remarks, Hulme was the earliest and most impassioned advocate of the style of poetics that came to be identified as imagist and, later, modernist. Hulme's important "cinder theory" is explicated with an exemplary close reading, and so is his scant but no less influential output of poems, such as "Autumn" and "Above

the Dock."

Theorists of Modernist Poetics demonstrates, by example, what it concludes by affirming: that Eliot, Hulme, and Pound helped institutionalize the practice of close reading. In the end, this slim but substantial volume adeptly balances close reading with contextualization, and it will do the valuable service of making the special subtleties of modernist poetry comprehensible to a non-specialized readership.

Ben Bakhtiarynia
Queen's University at Kingston

Abstracts

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Beyond "Was There a Scottish Literature?": T. S. Eliot in the National Library of Scotland

T. S. Eliot's 1919 review of G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* makes the sweeping claim that there was no continuous Scottish literature; he divides the literature in Scots into periods, only that through the fifteenth century being what he defines as "a literature." He asserts that to assume a literature is to assume an organic formation of history that is "a corpus of writings in one language," and that comprises "writings and writers between whom there is a tradition," writers related "so as to be in the light of eternity contemporaneous"; it is to assume "a part of History, which for us is the history of Europe." To deny this in Scotland is not only to elide writers from Fergusson and Ramsay, to Burns and Joanna Bailie and Lady Nairn, to Hogg and Scott; it is still to elicit anger in those who study Scottish literature, and the two-volume *Scottish Literature: an Anthology* (1996) seems a clear refutation. Nonetheless, the debate over the status of Scots as a language remained, even in Scotland, a key issue through much of the twentieth century. Eliot's 1919 claim, however, rests on confusion about what he defines as a "language." His resistance to Scots as a language, a resistance based partly in inaccurate linguistic history, colored not only that review but a history of his relations with Scottish writers.

His claim in that review is now well known, but Eliot's later influence on the development of Scottish literature is a more mixed and complicated topic. From the Faber publication of *Modern Scottish Poetry: an Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance*, to his long correspondences and friendships with at least three major Scottish authors—Maurice Lindsay, Edwin Muir, and Neil Gunn—Eliot provided a significant venue and invaluable contributions to much Scottish work. Moreover, he spent several vacations in the Highlands staying with the Gunns. In the early 1930s he wrote "Rannoch by Glencoe," and by 1935 he was a guest at the Gunns. One

of Neil Gunn's key books, *Highland River*, was suggested by Eliot, and he urged both Muir and Gunn to send work to Faber. Yet, other than in the anthology, he published only one article and two poems—written in English—by Hugh MacDiarmid, the most important poet of the century in Scotland and almost the sole creator of the Scottish Renaissance.

Eliot's later letters suggest both a changing perspective on Scottish literature (he called himself a supporter and sympathizer) and a sustained resistance to writing in Scots. In 1962 he praised Lindsay for saying he had given it up. And, though the 1946 book contained major poetry in Scots, Eliot said he felt poetry in that language should be published north of Hadrian's wall. Yet much poetry in Scotland today is written in the many dialects of Scots (not of English), and while the writers Eliot championed are anthologized and acknowledged, Lindsay changed his view again in the 1995 anthology he co-edited to represent a third position affirming the "Scots Polyphony." My thesis is that Eliot's changing and complex relation to Scottish writing represents both a questionable influence on who became known outside Scotland and a major support for key Scottish writers.

Nancy K. Gish
University of Southern Maine



Women and the Absolute in Eliot's Early Poetry

Lyndall Gordon argues in *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* that "Eliot was gradually formulating a choice all through his juvenilia: an Absolute or Pure Idea or Soul set against women, time, and society, who were the Absolute's enemies," a view of Eliot's early work shared by many critics (34). In my paper, I propose to challenge this depiction of women and the Absolute as polarities in Eliot by showing the thematic connections between them in his early poetry. Eliot's early speakers, in fact, tend to approach women and society with the same fear with which they respond to apprehensions of the Absolute, a fear that, rather than placing these themes in opposition, works to bring them together

through both isomorphic similarity and explicit comparison. Eliot's early poetry—particularly the unpublished poems of *Inventions of the March Hare*—consistently narrates paranoid terror at the possibility of the loss of control and individual identity in the face of both women and the Absolute.

I will then elaborate the relationship between the paranoia of Eliot's early speakers and their concerns over individual agency by way of Timothy Melley's concept of "agency panic," which he defines as an "intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self-control" (*Empire of Conspiracy* 12). Melley focuses on post-World War II narratives of paranoia, but his concept of agency panic is valuable well before the postmodern period, as I hope my examination of Eliot's early poetry will show. Furthermore, my reading will suggest, I believe, a perspective from which the relationships among women, the Absolute, and control can be reevaluated throughout Eliot's career.

Aaron Bibb
University of Wisconsin, Madison
Winner of the Fathman Young Scholar Award for 2009



A Surprising Legacy: Eliot in the Poetry of Richard Berengarten

There is a prolific poet living and working in England, acclaimed in Europe but little known in the United States, whose work presents one of the most relevant and unexpected contemporary responses to some of the challenges laid down by T. S. Eliot's poetry. Richard Berengarten's comparative obscurity is attributable at once to forces that Eliot was instrumental in creating and to forces against which Eliot actively militated. Berengarten, formerly Burns, frankly acknowledges both his debt to Eliot and his conscious opposition to certain of Eliot's principles—political, yes, but of even more interest poetic. A practical study of this relationship illuminates some of the most important ideas in contemporary Eliot studies that no amount of purely historical analysis can. Among these ideas, the ones that this essay will address are canonicity, the poet in history, and the status of the outsider—especially the Jew—in the British literary machine.

Berengarten's long poem *The Manager*, now republished along with the rest of his *Selected Writings* by Salt Publishing (Cambridge, UK), features several striking echoes, reworkings, and refutations of Eliot (*The Manager*'s original cover depicted a crowd of business people flowing over London Bridge) as well as of Ezra Pound. The poem follows the internal and external experiences of a London middle manager as he tries to situate himself amidst the fractious material—social, sexual, technological—of his daily life. Although there are both Prufrockian and Waste Landesque elements at work in the poem, the conclusion toward

which it drives, over the course of some 100 sections, is a deliberate reproach to what Berengarten sees as escapist tendencies in Eliot's poetic worldview.

Berengarten, a Jew born in London, used to describe himself as a European poet who happened to write in English. Now he prefers to eschew even the European designation in favor of what he calls a "universalist" position. Such self-designations are only one of the ways in which this provocative poet invites a discussion of what Eliot's legacy is actually doing in the poetic landscape Eliot helped—at times inadvertently—to create.

Patrick Query
United States Military Academy



"Who is the third who walks always beside you?": Complexities of Authorship in *The Waste Land*

Since the publication of the manuscript edition of *The Waste Land* in 1972, much work has been done to rethink the poem in light of Ezra Pound's contributions. Pound, however, was not T. S. Eliot's only collaborator: Vivien Eliot, the poet's first wife, made a number of suggestions to the "Game of Chess" section of the manuscript, most of which Eliot silently accepted and incorporated into the poem. But while critics have acknowledged the importance of the marriage and the strong influence Vivien Eliot had upon her husband's life, few have taken her seriously as his poetic collaborator.

Focusing on "A Game of Chess," my paper examines the problematic nature of heterosexual intimacy in the context of arguing for a new understanding of modernist multiple authorship. *The Waste Land* is a poem about the power of desire. Paradoxically, the anxiety of letting another person in, both physically and emotionally, is one of the central concerns of Eliot's work. This tension between the voluntary acceptance of another person—her words, her thoughts, and her body—and the paralyzing fear of invasion, infection, and loss of control was not only a constant issue for the Eliots in their marriage, but also one of the central issues of *The Waste Land*. Yet at the most basic level of textual production, the facsimile edition points to a successful marital collaboration.

My paper will explore this contradiction between substance and structure both in "A Game of Chess" and elsewhere in *The Waste Land* to argue that despite the difficulties and drama, the Eliots' marriage played an essential role in the composition of the poem. For too long, the Eliots' personal game of chess has taken precedence over and interfered with our understanding of the collaborative elements of their relationship.

Erin E. Templeton
Converse College

The Intolerable Wrestle: Plath's *Ariel* and Eliot's *Four Quartets*

During Sylvia Plath's sophomore year at Smith College, her then boyfriend Dick Norton bought her a copy of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* for her birthday. As a student of close reading, Plath annotated the copy furiously. The paper draws on primary research of these annotations to show a striking similarity between Eliot's *Quartets* and Plath's late poems in *Ariel* by analyzing the ways Plath's poetic voice and imagery were influenced by Eliot, whom she met in 1960.

In her copy of *Four Quartets*, Plath both placed a star

next to Eliot's "intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings" and underlined the lines. My paper argues, however, that it is not until the *Ariel* poems that Plath's speakers consistently, like Eliot, reflect on this wrestling over language. While Eliot is the poet of impersonality and Plath rebels as the poet of personality, the paper shows how both poets aim for a poetry that goes beyond poetry and reaches towards the Absolute in these late poems. Importantly, though, Eliot does this through metaphysics and Plath through myth.

Brigitte N. McCray
Louisiana State University

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William Harmon

Dept. of English and Program of Comp. Lit. / University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill / Chapel Hill, NC 27599
(919) 489-2766 / wharmon03@mindspring.com

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Department of English / Loyola University Chicago / 6525 N. Sheridan Rd. / Chicago, IL 60626
(773) 508-2789 / dchinit@luc.edu

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Department of English / University of Wisconsin / 7183 Helen C. White Hall / Madison, WI 53706
(608) 263-3717 / cpondrom@english.wisc.edu

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