

XIV

AQ10

Modern Literature

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This chapter has eight sections 1. General. 2. Fiction Pre-1945; 3. Fiction Post-1945; 4. Drama Pre-1950; 5. Drama Post-1950; 6. British Poetry Pre-1950; 7. British Poetry Post-1950; 8. Modern Irish Poetry. Section 1 is by Jennifer Sorensen; section 2(a) is by Chris Mourant; section 2(b) will resume in 2023; section 2(c) is delayed by parental leave and will resume in 2023; section 2(d) is by Joshua Phillips; section 3(a) is by Katherine Parsons; section 3(b) is by Rebecca Roach, with thanks to Samuel Cooper, and covers work in 2020 and 2021; section 4(a) is by Sophie Stringfellow; section 4(b) is by Gustavo A. Rodríguez Martín; section 5 is by Catriona Fallow; section 6(a) will resume in 2023; section 6(b) is by Joshua Richards; section 7 is by Alex Niven and covers work in 2020 and 2021; section 8 is by David Wheatley.

1. General

Obsolescence was a major theme that emerged in scholarship of 2021—Philip Tsang and Joseph Elkanah Rosenberg analyse how modernist writers responded to feelings of obsolescence and other critics reflect on the threat of obsolescence that currently faces the field of modernist studies and the discipline of English more broadly. Douglas Mao concludes his introduction to *The New Modernist Studies* edited collection with a sobering account of the withering of institutional support for modernism in the form of faculty positions highlighting ‘the profoundly practical problem of how a field can survive absent people who can afford to devote to it the main part of their working time’ (p. 17). Yet even in the face of these fears of obsolescence, several critics point to modernism’s histories and aesthetics for a solution to our current crises. In their groundbreaking *The*

chapter 4 expands Venn's remit of text-based performance to include works by multi-disciplinary artist Bobby Baker's *How to Live* [2004], artist and activist James Leadbitter's (also known as the vacuum cleaner) *MENTAL* [2013], and Bryony Kimmings and Tim Grayburn's *Fake IT 'Til You Make It* [2015], to explore the nexus between ethics and autobiographical performance. This range of case studies and focal points makes for a carefully nuanced addition to scholarship on these performance examples, but also to work on affect, mental health, and the ethics of representation in contemporary performance.

Finally, Jacqueline Bolton's *The Theatre of Simon Stephens* offers the first monograph-length study of the work of one of the UK and Europe's leading contemporary playwrights. Engaging with every major stage work by Stephens to date, Bolton traverses the writer's oeuvre across four thematic chapters—‘Tension’, ‘Transgression’, ‘Juxtaposition’, and ‘Contradiction’, or what Bolton describes as ‘key dynamics in Stephens's dramaturgical development as a writer’ (p. 10)—while also making important reference to the key institutional, geographical, and political contexts that have shaped his career. Across these chapters, Bolton's analysis is enriched by reference to Stephens's unpublished personal archive and original interviews with directors and authors (including Stephens himself). A final chapter, ‘Critical Perspectives’, features contributions from other scholars: Caridad Svich's ‘Can't Help Falling in Love: Simon Stephens's “Late” Plays (2014–19)’; Mireia Aragay's ‘Pornography's European Directions: Germany and France’; James Hudson's ‘Percursive Texts in the Work of Simon Stephens: *Motortown*, *Birdland*, *Punk Rock*’; and a selection of short interviews, ‘The Directors’, undertaken by critic Andrew Haydon with major directors of Stephens's work including Marianne Elliot, Sarah Frankcom, Ramin Gray, Sean Holmes, Katie Mitchell, and Carrie Cracknell. Bolton generously—and rightly—frames this significant work as a useful starting point for ‘future scholarship on his as yet unwritten works’ (p. 11) and the significance and comprehensiveness of her own insights (and the insights of Svich, Aragay, Hudson, Haydon, and his interviewees) make this a landmark work in the ongoing literature on Stephens's praxis.

6. British Poetry Pre-1950

(a) General

This section will resume in 2023.

(b) T.S. Eliot

The discussion of criticism on T.S. Eliot must begin with an apology. Due to personal circumstances, I was not able to review every piece of criticism—hence the brevity of this piece. For the various sins of omission, I ask readers' forgiveness. Nonetheless, my editor has assured me that something is better than nothing. With *mea culpas* aside, this review is structured as follows. First, the two major book-length studies of Eliot are considered. Then, the entirety of the third volume of *The T.S. Eliot Annual* is reviewed, excluding the bibliographies.

Finally, there are the other major articles. It is in this last category where absences are most felt, and I have tried to review works where Eliot's own work is the focus, as opposed to being in a supporting role.

The major book published on Eliot in 2021—excluding the ninth volume of Eliot's letters which is beyond the scope of this study—is Jayme Stayer's *Inventing T.S. Eliot*. This substantial monograph is driven by an extremely detailed, primarily rhetorical analysis of Eliot's juvenilia volume *Inventions of the March Hare*. The work opens with its key research question: 'How does a young man who writes uninspired doggerel about wilting flowers transform himself—in twenty months without coaching or mentors—into the author of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"?' (p. 1). Stayer, then, chronologically explores the course of Eliot's development; his focus is almost exclusively rhetorical: 'Eliot's emerging sense of voice and audience' (p. 8).

The first half of the book concerns Eliot's work before his first truly successful poem. The first chapter of Stayer's work is devoted to Eliot's juvenilia before his 1910 purchase of the notebook that becomes *Inventions of the March Hare*. Stayer, although completing a work-by-work analysis of each of the thirteen extant poems written between 1899 and 1909, summarizes the rhetorical challenges that plague these poems: first, 'that he does not have much to say yet', that the 'voice of Eliot's juvenilia is the ventriloquized sound of serious literary authority', and a difficulty with 'the imagined construction of his audience' (pp. 15, 16). One of Stayer's most intriguing points regards the latter. He asserts that 'whenever "you" is invoked in the early poetry' as occurs frequently, it is actually because Eliot has '[lost] his sense of audience' (p. 16). The purpose of the second chapter is to complicate, rather than refute, the generally held narrative of Eliot's development: that the discovery of Jules LaForgue in 1909 led to the creation of Eliot's own distinctive poetic voice. Stayer attempts to complicate this in a few ways. The first is to 'restore Baudelaire's rightful if subsidiary place' in Eliot's development, and the second to indicate the audience and content issues caused by LaForgue's 'masks and irony' (pp. 50, 52). Stayer insists that the inability to unite the manner and worldviews of these two influences plagues the poems of November 1909. The third chapter explores the formal techniques as well as keener awareness of audience that marks the superior poems in the spring of 1910. These formal techniques include 'a combination of shortened lines, tight rhymes, and snappy rhythms' (p. 74). These formal innovations allow Eliot 'to address a chosen theme directly' as well as directing this 'to a specific audience' (p. 82). Stayer painstakingly modifies and expands his friend and colleague David Chinitz's readings in *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* to account for this change. The result of this includes Eliot's first real poetic success 'The Portrait of a Lady'.

In the work's second half, the fourth and fifth chapters hinge on Eliot's studying abroad and how that facilitated personal maturation. Those pieces written after his decision was made but before his departure show an interrogation of his upbringing, but, most importantly, the adoption of '[t]he sequence poem' which 'is the form of all Eliot's most significant mature work' (p. 111). Those written while in Paris meanwhile show the 'stark alienation' of his experience of being abroad (p. 148). There is much interesting biographical reading and subtle nuance in both of these chapters. The sixth chapter, utilizing the complete

collection of Eliot's bawdy verse, centres on a desire to frame these 'racist and misogynist' poems 'as [an] expression of youthful sexual frustration and facilitators of juvenile masculine bonding' (p. 181). In turn, Stayer takes up several common understandings of the Bolo poems. The first is that Eliot seriously attempted 'to publish his obscene verses in Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*' (p. 180). The second is the belief that the Eliot was still writing obscene, bigoted poems after his conversion to Christianity. Stayer's argument, against previous scholarship, is entirely convincing; he propounds that virtually all of this verse predates 1916, and none postdates his conversion to Christianity. Stayer's point about the bawdy poetry and its audience, while completely accurate, is less significant than this chronological reworking. The seventh and eighth chapters resolve Stayer's narrative arc by looking forward to Eliot's maturity. First is a reading of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in the context of both its compositional history and its place in the notebook 'to restore to the poem its sense of risk, and to its later readers a sense of what a bold and fragile experiment [it] must have been to its first audiences' (p. 237). The eighth chapter concerns the poems written after 'Prufrock', which Stayer characterizes as a period when Eliot was 'an artist very much at sea' (p. 240). It is a biographical and artistic examination 'as to why the quality and quantity of the notebook poetry fall off' (p. 241). Stayer's work, valuable for its intensive chronologies and close readings, beyond its overarching rhetorical argument, is a welcome addition to the study of Eliot's early oeuvre.

The other book-length work that treated Eliot's work substantially is Rick de Villiers's *Eliot and Beckett's Low Modernism*. This is, title notwithstanding, a book juxtaposing humility and humiliation in the two authors. There are two caveats to this. First, that my purview is to assess only the chapters on Eliot. The two authors are not interleaved, so this is an easy feat. Second, of the three chapters on Eliot, only one has never appeared before in print. The chapter on *Murder in the Cathedral* is presented from a *Literature and Theology* article I reviewed in last year's *YWES*, and the chapter on *East Coker* appeared in the *New Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*, covered by my predecessor. As such, the summary below is only for the new chapter on Eliot, which covers his only prose-fiction piece 'Eeldrop and Appleplex'. The author's stated goal is 'to extrapolate two types of humility [...] a religious humility which [...] entails the experience of a singularizing dread' and 'an aesthetic humility the recognizes the impossibility of adequately representing that dread' (p. 28). He explores this dichotomy through the depiction of 'morally compromising' relationships, 'ethical postures that negate humility, and literature's troubled accommodation of the unsayable' (p. 29). The analysis of these three conditions ranges consistently far beyond its initial setting of Eliot's short story.

There are a number of other scholarly items to consider, the most prominent of which is the third volume of *The T.S. Eliot Annual*, which, although it carries a 2020 date, was not actually released until 2021. Within this volume, there are the general articles as well as two special groupings, a three-essay selection on Eliot and the biological and a series of responses on the Hale archive. The latter are the peer-reviewed versions of postings that appeared throughout 2020 in *Time Present*, the newsletter for the International T.S. Eliot Society, and are significantly shorter than the average article. Their inclusion is part of preserving

the reception history of the Hale archive. These three groupings will be handled in order, although authors will be considered alphabetically within said groups.

The first work for consideration is Frances Dickey's relatively short but still important article “‘Hydraulic’: The Company and Its Archive” (*TSESA* 3[2020] 235–40). In it, she explains the history of the Hydraulic brick company of St Louis, which provided the livelihood of Eliot's parents and thus the background of his childhood. Dickey's excellent work with this archive has expressed itself in many scholarly works, and this article is a historical background to such. The next work is Leonard Diepeveen's salaciously titled ‘T.S. Eliot, Fraud’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 23–46), originally the keynote at the meeting of the International T.S. Eliot Society. Diepeveen examines the somewhat strange accusations of Eliot's early work being ‘some kind of intentional hoax’ through the early phase of his poetic career and the responses by Eliot's defenders (p. 27). This accusation of a lack of sincerity is used as a vehicle to explore the way that Eliot's early poems ‘really did muffle intent, particularly as it was understood at the time’ (p. 41). In ‘Emily Hale: The Beginning of All Our Exploring’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 161–70), Sarah Fitzgerald explores common knowledge about Hale that the letters showed to be false, including facts about her early years and her attitudes to poetry. As Fitzgerald sheepishly admits, many of these errors have the ageing Hale and her confidantes as their source. Sørina Higgins's work ‘[Re]cycled Fragments: The End of *Sweeney Agonistes*’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 181–214) provides an exceptionally detailed close reading of *Sweeney Agonistes*, specifically in light of several, unpublished, fragmentary endings. The way that Eliot's turn to faith and ‘The Journey of the Magi’ may have interacted with these fragments and revisions is explored, although it is necessarily speculative. Aleksandra Majak, in ‘Eliot's (Im)personality and Voices of Polish Modernism’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 215–34), unfolds a fascinating and detailed history of Polish modernism from its possibly apocryphal beginning of Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz rescuing a copy of Eliot's poems from a fire in 1943. The way that Eliot entered and influenced Polish literature throughout the middle of the twentieth century is woven throughout this account. As in any field, there are topical interests in Eliot, such as Patrick Querry's ‘Democracy, Punishment, Banality: Anti-Fascism 1940–2020’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 171–80), which documents the way Eliot, Rebecca West, and Hannah Arendt responded to fascism after the Second World War. Finally, there is Anita Patterson's “‘Projections in the Haiku Manner’: Richard Wright, T.S. Eliot, and Transpacific Modernism” (*TSESA* 3[2020] 11–22), an examination of how *The Waste Land* was a touch point for Richard Wright; specific allusions are a key focus including how Wright reappropriates and interweaves Eliot with Wright's own reading of Eliot's sources.

The next grouping in *The T.S. Eliot Annual* are the three essays on Eliot and the biological. The first is Jeremy Diaper's “‘Life of the Soil’: T.S. Eliot and Organicism” (*TSESA* 3[2020] 47–68). The stated intent of this article is to ‘provid[e] the first detailed account of the “biological” aspect of Eliot's engagement with agriculture’ (p. 48). In this it succeeds, charting Eliot's offhand comments and interests in farming throughout the 1930s to 1950s, although the relation of this to Diaper's monograph on this subject is, frankly, unclear. The second is section editor Julia Daniel's ‘Wind, Rock, Flower, Glass: *The Family Reunion* as Ecodrama’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 69–92). Drawing on the revelation from the Hale

archive that Eliot completed *The Family Reunion* during a visit to the Burnt Norton country estate, Daniel highlights the way that the play meets the criteria as ‘what critic Theresa May has called “an ecodrama”’ (p. 70). Her analysis ultimately shows that the claustrophobic interiority of the manor in the play, though, is the counterpoint to authentic, biological spaces. The third and final is Kevin Rulo’s ‘Eliot and Skin’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 93–116). While the title would seem all the summary required, Rulo’s essay explores this via economics as much as biology; especially in his early poetry, Eliot utilizes skin as a vehicle for moral and economic collocation in figures such as Sir Alfred Mond and the young man carbuncular.

The final grouping contains the responses to the Hale archive, prefaced by editors John Whittier-Ferguson and Frances Dickey. All of these are quite brief and will be covered likewise; as mentioned before, these are included as a documentation of the scholarly history and experience of the opening of the Hale archive. Again, the responses will be discussed in alphabetical order. The work begins with Hale’s own words, a publishing of her accompanying statement regarding the letters ‘In Her Own Words: Emily Hale’s Introduction to T.S. Eliot’s Letters’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 1–10) before a preface to the entire grouping by John Whittier-Ferguson, “‘After such knowledge...’: Readings in the Eliot-Hale Archive’, (*TSESA* 3[2020] 117–22) registering both the promise of the archive for scholars and the concomitant dangers. The next is Jewel Spears Brooker’s ‘Eliot’s Ghost Story: Reflections on His Letters to Emily Hale’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 147–50), a meditation on the recurring image of ghostliness—presence within absence—within Eliot’s letters to Hale. Karen Christensen worked with Valerie Eliot on the original volume of Eliot’s letters, and her response, ‘The Love of a Good Woman’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 143–7), sensitively traces the impact of the multiple women in his life on each other. Anthony Cuda contributes a charming compilation, as the title ‘Unbuttoned and Unimportant: Tidbits from the Archive’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 151–4) implies, of humanizing and entertaining items from the Hale letters. Frances Dickey offers one of the more scholarly selections in the group in her ‘Eliot’s Letters to Emily Hale and His Personal Theory of Poetry’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 123–9). She explores how Eliot’s private allusions to literature—often included with a disregard of Hale’s ability to comprehend—in their letters complicate straightforward biographical readings often suggested. Both of the next two selections are by two scholars who had researched the relationship between Eliot and Hale reflecting on the opening of the archive. The first is Sarah Fitzgerald’s ‘Searching for Emily Hale’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 133–40), which chronicles Fitzgerald’s surprises and discoveries upon reading the archive after years of writing a historical novel about the pair’s relationship. Similarly, Lyndall Gordon’s submission, ‘Letters to a T.S. Eliot Fan’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 129–32), contains brief excerpts from Gordon’s personal correspondence which provide a window onto the experience of being at the archive in the days immediately after its opening. Gabrielle McIntire’s ‘Love’s Errors and Effacements: T.S. Eliot and Emily Hale’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 155–60) analyses the way that Eliot’s letters to Hale perpetually undo and hedge not only in their statements but their very nature. Lastly, Katerina Stergiopoulou, in “‘For Whom the Bell Tolls’: Reading the *Quartets* after the Letters to Emily Hale’ (*TSESA* 3[2020] 137–42), offers a meditation on memory and revelations about the biographical nature of the

Quartets; it has its most interesting moment in its final few pages where she shows how Eliot's public comments on the *Quartets* reappropriate lines for Emily to Valerie Eliot.

While I have, as stated, restricted myself to works where Eliot is front and centre, I would be committing an injustice not to mention two articles that significantly involve Ezra Pound as they represent some of the finest scholarship that I read this year. The first, by Anderson Araujo, 'After Many Gods: T.S. Eliot and the Nagging Question of Ezra Pound's Beliefs' (*Renascence* 73:i[2021] 13–28), begins with an examination of Eliot's review of Pound's 1926 *Personae*; this becomes a vehicle to explore what Araujo terms 'the rich, if slippery, heterodoxy' of Pound's religious beliefs (p. 13). Araujo, in this subtly argued, nuanced piece, weaves between the fact that 'Pound shunned organized religion' (p. 18) and his fascination with the sacred embodied, for him, in Ovid and Confucius—as well as the entanglement of these ideas in the person of Mussolini. Eliot's repeated interrogations of Pound, quoted throughout, centre Araujo's enquiry. The second is David Hawkes's 'Modernism, Inflation and the Gold Standard in T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound' (*ModCult* 16:iii[2021] 316–39). Painfully timely, Hawkes begins by exploring the inflation crisis in the 1920s before a well-informed reading of Pound's understanding of the gold standard and its relation to symbolic value and usury contrasting with Eliot's own opinions about a necessary return to such. While dizzyingly technical, Hawkes's work is insightful.

The final portion of this review is dedicated to articles focusing on Eliot. As before, these will be handled alphabetically. The first essay is Elysia Balavage's 'Illumination, Transformation, and Nihilism: T.S. Eliot's Empty Spaces' (*JML* 44:iii[2021] 35–48). This work is an investigation around the question of nihilism in Eliot's philosophical engagement with Spinoza and Kant; then, it is applied to 'The Hollow Men' and *The Four Quartets*. The inclusion of Eliot's marginal annotations in his copy of Spinoza are of the foremost interest and note. Jewel Spears Brooker builds on her excellent work, reviewed in last year's *YWES*, on good and evil in Eliot and Hale's relationship with a new piece, 'T.S. Eliot in Ecstasy: Feeling, Reason, Mysticism' (*C&L* 70:i[2021] 22–7), which focuses on the concept of mystical ecstasy. This is demonstrated as a preoccupation in Eliot as well as undercutting the irreconcilable religious problems in his relationship with Hale. The next piece is a social-science study by Alistair Brown, 'The Accounting Meta-Metaphor of the Hollow Men by T.S. Eliot' (*Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, 18:i[2021] 26–52). In it, he explores the way that Eliot reflects accounting through the use of metaphor in 'The Hollow Men'. The most fascinating aspect of this article is the way that the chief accountant from *Heart of Darkness* is used as a figure of contrast. While producing two pieces this year, the most germane work, by Benjamin D. Crace, is 'An Incarnational Poetic at Play in T.S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*' (*SoAR* 86:i[2021] 18–38). Guided throughout by Jewel Spears Brooker's *T.S. Eliot's Dialectical Imagination*, this article is an ornate, complex work—citational issues and limited bibliography aside. He begins with an elaborate discussion of an 'Incarnational Poetic', defining it, in the words of medievalist Cristina Cervone, as a work whose 'thought and form coalesce' around 'the Incarnation' (Cervone qtd. p. 20). The Incarnation is, then, the meditative centre of the work. The reading of *The Cocktail Party* using this metric, while fascinating, is all too brief.

Next are two works at least in part by Frances Dickey. The first is her important article 'T.S. Eliot and the Color Line of St. Louis' (*Mo/Mo* 5:iv[2021]). In it, she traces from her archival research on St Louis and Eliot's family a convincing thread of Eliot's early experiences with intensely segregated St Louis. She argues for Eliot's mother having instilled a sense of the deep wrongness of segregation but also noted the hypocrisy and prejudice still present in his upbringing. Fascinatingly, she argues that Eliot may have fallen in love as a small boy with a black girl living nearby—while speculation, it is a compelling argument. The second, drawn from their work on the Hale archive, is co-authored with John Whittier-Ferguson. 'Joint Property, Divided Correspondents: The T.S. Eliot–Emily Hale Letters' (*Mo/Mo* 5:iv[2021]) concerns the copyright issues and legal wrangling over the physical copies of Eliot's letters to Emily Hale. It is a good deal more fascinating than the summary suggests. Patrick Eichholz, in 'Dadaism and Classicism in *The Waste Land*' (*TCL* 67:iii[2021] 269–92), offers some very interesting comments on Eliot's knowledge and opinions of the Dadaist movement, although much of the essay is spent rehearsing classicism in *The Waste Land*. In an article whose title is perfectly descriptive, Thomas Esposito's 'Echoes of Ecclesiastes in the Poetry and Plays of T.S. Eliot' (*Logos* 24:ii[2021] 98–123) is a dense and impressively learned discussion of Eliot's use of the biblical text; some knowledge of biblical studies and languages is a likely prerequisite for extracting all that Esposito's work has to offer Eliot scholars. By contrast, the next two articles are vade mecum to difficult areas in Eliot's life and work. The first, 'Lancelot Andrewes and T.S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi"' (*Quadrant* 65:xii[2021] 99–101), by Barry Gillard, is a detailed exposition of Eliot's understanding and relationship with Lancelot Andrewes. The second is Nancy Hargrove's charming review of Eliot's year in Oxford, 'T.S. Eliot at Merton College, the University of Oxford: 1914–1915' (*SoAR* 86:iii[2021] 110–20), which is poorly documented by the standards of his biography. Hargrove, in this exceptionally detailed and readable account, synthesizes numerous and up-to-date biographical sources into a cohesive explanation of a mysterious time in Eliot's life. Next is Patrick Turner's 'Building an Unreal City: Reading the Construction of St. Louis in Eliot's *The Waste Land*' (*JAmS* 55:iii[2021] 576–95). In this dense piece, Turner examines three events from the history of the construction of St Louis: 'the construction of the Eads bridge [...] the destruction of the Cahokia Mounds', and the 'Great Fire of 1849' (p. 591). This is a more New Historicist approach to Eliot and history than, for instance, the above work by Frances Dickey. Appropriately for Eliot, the last piece is an introduction; in this instance to the issue of *Renascence* that contained the aforementioned essay by Araujo, 'Introduction: Modernism and the Turn to Religion.' (*Renascence* 73:i[2021] 3–11). In it, editors Craig Woelfel and Jayme Stayer exposit and historicize the fraught relationship between religious belief and modernism. Despite its function as an introduction, it is a thought-provoking and well-researched item.

7. British Poetry Post-1950

Surely the biggest event in modern British poetry criticism in 2020–21 was the publication of *Nothing is Being Suppressed: British Poetry of the 1970s*, the