

T S ELIOT SOCIETY

OF THE UNITED KINGDOM



# Exchanges...

Winter 2018-19

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*Lancelot Andrewes, Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge,  
and Bishop of Chichester, Ely and Winchester in succession*

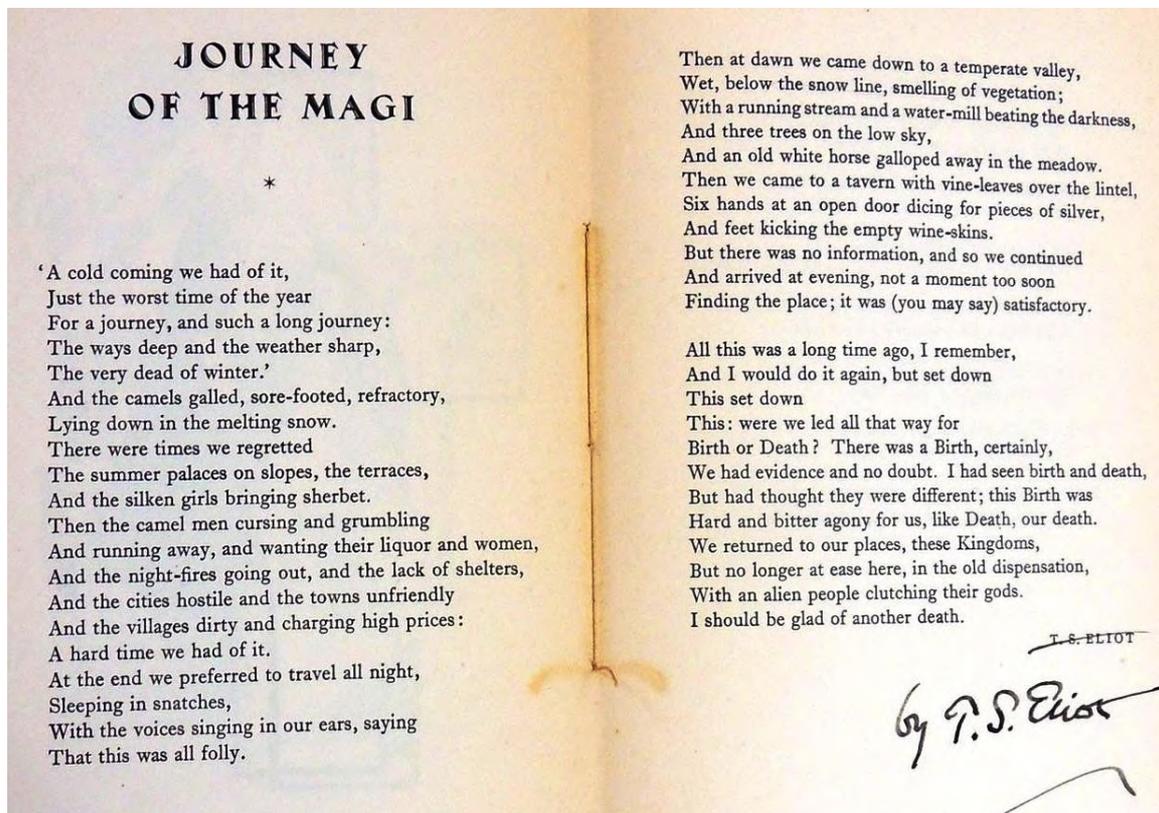
## Editorial

Winter this year, until very recently, has felt like winter. Beginning seriously in December, it was brightened on 3<sup>rd</sup> of that month by the annual Society Lecture, delivered on this occasion at Pembroke College, Cambridge, by Professor Sir Christopher Ricks, the doyen of Eliot critics, and probably of literary criticism itself. A full account appears later in this edition. But winter reasserted itself thereafter, and although Epiphany saw a minor outbreak of Eliot enthusiasm as vicars across the country read from or referenced 'Journey of the Magi', there was little comfort - no silken girls bringing sherbet - to be found in later January as the snow fell and we were gripped in our annual, icy, corporate shiver.

It's interesting how Eliot's earlier poems offer – from the perspective of the East Coast of the USA – a somewhat cosier version of winter than that of the journeying Wise Men. 'Portrait of a Lady' has the enclosing 'smoke and fog of a December afternoon', and within the social bubble of the arranged scene there is felt intimacy, conversation pivoting around friendships, without which life is simply a nightmarish 'cauchemar!' And in 'Preludes' we have, 'The winter evening settles down / With smells of steaks in passageways': an evocation of indoor warmth and sociality to set against the outdoor 'gusty shower' and the scene 'at the corner of the street', where 'A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps'. Winter can be cosy: last year's much-hyped *hygge* – the Danish-inspired notion of warmth and togetherness - seems nothing new when Eliot's early poems are considered. Winter has always been about survival, one way or another!

This edition brings you reviews of the annual Society Lecture; of Bill Goldstein's *The World Broke in Two*; and of Jewel Spears Brooker's *T. S. Eliot's Dialectical Imagination*. We have a further instance of Eliot shaping our thinking and writing a century and more after his early poems appeared; a note on the recent award of the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry to Hannah Sullivan; and some thoughts on the Lancelot Andrewes -T. S. Eliot legacy. It was of course from Bishop Andrewes that Eliot took his opening lines below.

John Caperon, Editor



*Exchanges* is the quarterly newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society (UK). If you would like to contribute or if you have queries or suggestions, please contact the Editor direct at: [Exchanges@tseliotssociety.uk](mailto:Exchanges@tseliotssociety.uk)

## The Society Lecture 2018

The setting for the Lecture, the Old Library of Pembroke College, Cambridge, seemed perfect. Society members and a wide range of Eliot enthusiasts from Cambridge and further afield gathered to form a capacity audience in these stately surroundings for this, the 10th annual lecture. We are grateful to committee member, Dr Chris Joyce, back in his old college for the occasion, for organising the event, and to Pembroke for pulling out all the stops to make the evening a splendid success. The College was an apt setting also as Lancelot Andrewes (see the article on him in this edition) had been Master there from 1589 to 1605.



Welcomed on behalf of the College by Dr Mark Wormald, Fellow in English at Pembroke and Director of Studies for Part II, and introduced by Paul Keers, Society Chair, Christopher Ricks presented a picture of astonishingly active senior intelligence, lecturing with the accomplishment of very many years' experience and with the capacity both to divert and focus his audience. It was a huge privilege to be in the presence of Sir Christopher's profound scholarship and sheer brilliance.



*Professor Sir Christopher Ricks with Paul Keers, Society Chair*

Focusing his lecture on Eliot's 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca' (and using the original text read before the Shakespeare Association on 18th March, 1927) Professor Ricks engaged with Othello's self-dramatization (what Eliot referred to as Othello "*cheering himself up*") in his valedictory speech 'I have done the state some service...'. Eliot's critical acumen notes a "universal human weakness", the "human will to see things as they are not", argued Ricks. It is as if Eliot is "really listening to Othello", and this is evidenced, he continued, in the "convergence, the plaiting of the words" of Othello and Eliot. We might take this observation as an acute description of Sir Christopher's own criticism: it is from the closest possible engagement with the text itself and reflection upon it that great critical writing emerges.

Just as, in Ricks' view, "the depth of Eliot's critical engagement is indicated by the echoing of words of the text criticised", so his lecture interacted with Eliot's essay and Shakespeare's play, dipping in and out of both and adding judicious, elucidatory comment. As Eliot's criticism illuminated Shakespeare, so Ricks' illuminated Eliot's: the lecture itself a paradigm of literary criticism at its very best.

Though Professor Ricks offered a deeply serious insight into both Eliot's critical acumen and Shakespeare's 'skill in human nature', what he also exemplified was a lightness of touch and a mischievous wit one wouldn't necessarily expect from so senior a critic. In, for instance, dismissing the overuse of terms such as 'the iambic pentameter' as simply the kind of stuff English departments now felt themselves obliged to teach so that tuition-fee-paying students felt they had learnt something they could tell their parents about, one sensed not only his preference for his own term – 'the English heroic line' – but a sharp awareness of the changed ethos of Higher Education, no longer an open, liberal enterprise but one entrapped by a notion of education as a consumer commodity. This was lecture as insight and entertainment, a bravura performance by a very great critical voice. Thank you, Sir Christopher!

John Caperon

### **Eliot and our way of thinking...**

*Exchanges* has previously noted the way in which odd phrases from Eliot's poems have taken a firm place in public and private discourse. Under the heading 'The Brexit mess', the political journalist Julia Langdon recently introduced an article in *The Tablet* like this:

*Something about the current state of British politics directed me this week to 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock' and T. S. Eliot's suggestion that he measured out his life with coffee spoons. It was, when I found them, the lines about there being 'time yet for a hundred indecisions / And for a hundred visions and revisions' that I was looking for (you can perhaps see why).*

Langdon's sense of the apparently endless, repetitive confusion of our current politics is appositely captured in her quotation. We can perhaps forgive her elision of Eliot himself and J Alfred Prufrock, the poem's speaker....

### **Annus Mirabilis 1922 - Bill Goldstein's *The World Broke in Two***

In last winter's edition of *Exchanges* your Sussex correspondent noted John Mullen's review of Bill Goldstein's book, subtitled 'Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster and the Year that Changed Literature'. Well, thanks to Bloomsbury Publishing's paperback edition of 2018 and its ready availability in the splendid and fairly recent branch of Waterstone's in Lewes, I can now return to write a review, not a second-hand 'review of a review'. First, this is an absorbing and engaging study – a really 'good read'. Clearly rooted in sound and thorough research, it isn't off-puttingly academic or abstruse, and will be interesting and informative for the amateur Eliot enthusiast. It provides a wider context for T. S. Eliot in the work of other writers of the period, notably of course those within the so-called

‘Bloomsbury Group’, in which the writers named in the title were involved.

Goldstein does tend to overwrite at times, and indeed his title is one instance: *the year that changed literature?* At least the epigraph for his book, adopted from Willa Cather, is more modest in its claim: “the world broke in two in 1922 or *thereabouts*.” It might well be argued that Goldstein indulges a bit in what Woody Allen, in his hugely entertaining film ‘Midnight in Paris’, calls “golden age thinking”: the assumption that this was a somehow completely unique creative era. Mind you, the film, showing its twenty-first century time-travelling (or wishfully-dreaming?) central character meeting up in 1920s Paris with Hemingway, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Picasso *and* T. S. Eliot is a hilarious reminder of what being in a cauldron of creativity might feel like....



*Midnight in Paris (Netflix.com)*

Interweaving the lives and writing of his chosen writers, Goldstein narrates a year in which they all move from or through ill-health and other personal difficulties to a point where by the year’s end ‘The Waste Land’ – the key Modernist poem - had been published; *Mrs Dalloway* begun; *A Passage to India* resumed; and *Kangaroo* completed. But what about Joyce, one might ask? Goldstein inevitably includes material on *Ulysses* – the key Modernist novel – but doesn’t explore writer or work in much depth. His perspective is evidently Bloomsbury-focused, and it is the London-Sussex nexus which preoccupies him.

In fact, despite his treatment of Lawrence’s and Frieda’s itinerant lives and struggles with censorship, and of Forster’s travels and doomed relationships at home and abroad, we learn most from Goldstein about the lives of Eliot and Virginia Woolf during the *annus mirabilis*. Both writers evoke sympathy, not least because of their persistent illnesses. Goldstein produces fascinating material on Eliot’s treatment in Lausanne by Roger Vittoz, an early pioneer of what we now know as cognitive behaviour therapy, and offers real insight into Woolf’s debilitating psychosomatic illnesses. How did they manage their creative output in these circumstances? Perhaps it was these very traumas that nurtured their creativity: we can’t imagine ‘The Waste Land’ coming out of anything but breakdown, both cultural and individual.



*Virginia Woolf's writing lodge in the garden at Monk's House (National Trust)*



*Virginia Woolf at Monk's House towards the end of her life*

There is a huge poignancy in all the personal lives of so many Bloomsbury people. Living at, or on, the edge may have released great creativity, but at great cost. Eliot's blighted personal life is well documented, not least through the 'Letters' project; and within twenty years of the miraculous 1922 Woolf had walked determinedly into the River Ouse near her Sussex home Monk's House in Rodmell, her pockets weighed down with stones. Visiting the Sussex Bloomsbury sites – Monk's House itself, Charleston Farmhouse, home of Virginia's sister Vanessa and her husband Clive Bell and their artistic ménage, and the nearby and lovingly hyper-decorated Berwick Church – one is filled with ambivalent feeling, as one is on coming from Goldstein's book. So much genius; so much creativity! But so much human misery!

*Jay Phillips*

### **Literary Legacy: Andrewes, Eliot and a contemporary Anglican poet**



*Southwark Cathedral with the Shard (A Church Near You)*

The Anglican priest and poet Malcolm Guite has a regular column in *The Church Times*' 'Poet's Corner'. In a recent column he writes about a visit to Southwark Cathedral to attend a consecration, and Southwark's significant literary resonances – it is the burial place both of Shakespeare's brother and of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes – clearly touched him:

“I glanced across the sanctuary at the one bishop who was up there with us, lying comfortably on his back, the fine lawn of his rochet gathered in at the wrist of a hand that was holding the Bible, in whose translation he played such a part. Even in effigy, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes was a central presence for me in that place. The man whose sermons had helped to convert T. S. Eliot, whose work on the *Authorised Version* had so renewed our language and our faith, would have been glad that the new bishop ... was also a poet, and a translator of ancient wisdom into new words.”



*Effigy of Bishop Andrewes (Southwark Cathedral)*

It was, of course, in his early essays *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (1928), that Eliot first announced that he was a ‘classicist in literature, royalist in politics and anglo-catholic in religion’; could it be that with the publication of the *Letters* and *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*, we shall begin to revere him more as a critic than a poet, one wonders?

### **The T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry**

“She has just arrived, and it is breathtaking”, reported the *Guardian* at the news that the T. S. Eliot Prize for poetry had been won by Hannah Sullivan. Sullivan, a Londoner who studied at Cambridge and Harvard, worked as an associate professor at Stanford University in the USA before becoming an associate professor at New College, Oxford. The winning *Three Poems* is her first collection, and a review will appear in the next edition of *Exchanges*.

### ***T. S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination* by Jewel Spears Brooker**

*Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018*

As epigraph to her book, Brooker has taken lines from Eliot’s doctoral dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. “The life of a soul does not consist in the contemplation of one consistent world,” wrote Eliot, “but in the painful task of unifying...jarring and incompatible ones, and passing, when possible, from two or more discordant viewpoints to a higher which shall somehow include and transmute them.” This dialectical approach, she argues, “permeates Eliot’s mind and art at every level”; it is revealed in a “palpable sense of disjunction and his recurring attempts to cope with his divided self.”

Her book follows a roughly chronological sequence through Eliot’s life and work, and her earlier chapters are concerned primarily with his philosophical studies. The work of Bergson and Bradley, Eliot’s own doctoral thesis, idealism, relativism and the thinking of Kant, Hegel, Joachim, Royce and others, are explored in some detail, and these chapters can be hard going for those without a grounding in philosophy. But if Eliot’s thesis is seen as “underpinning most of his subsequent poetry”, it is surprising that Brooker deals so little with the poems which most immediately followed those philosophical studies. Of the 24 poems published in Eliot’s first two collections, only ‘Rhapsody On A Windy Night’ receives significant close analysis in support of Brooker’s argument. One wonders whether much of that early poetry might not have been an escape for Eliot from his philosophical pursuits, into something less cerebral, more observational and personal – the poet himself ‘throbbing between two lives’.

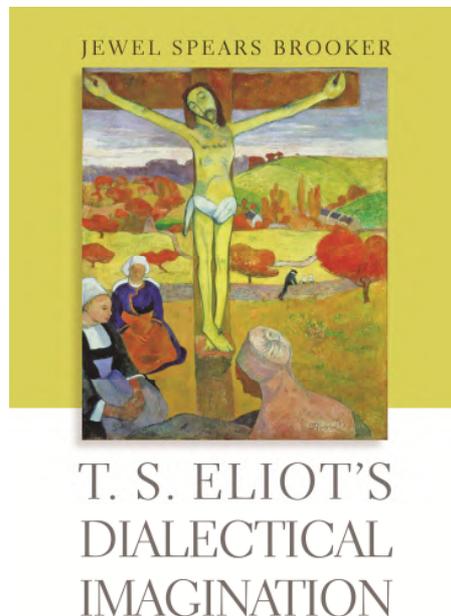
In his last year of philosophical study at Harvard, however, Eliot turned to the social sciences, and his paper on 'The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual', Brooker says, articulates principles that were to "provide a paradigm for the structure of 'The Waste Land'. She sees "The striking contrast between the psychological structure of 'Prufrock' and the paratactic structure of 'The Waste Land' " as due in part to Eliot's intervening immersion in the social sciences. Eliot's debt to Frazer is seen in the 1922 poem, not least in that Eliot's "hallmark principle of parataxis – the juxtaposition of decontextualized fragments without transitions – is a literary relative of Frazer's methodology of cataloging fragments."

Brooker goes on to analyse Eliot's "triadic thinking", and offers a revelatory study of Eliot's 'exilic trilogy' of 'The Waste Land', 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina', as exemplifying the "dialectic of exile, in which the last term involves a return to the first, which has been transformed by the intervening journey." The haunting beauty of 'Marina' is placed here in an illuminating sequential context. When related to Eliot's own life, she writes, "this sequence suggests ... an end to his long exile, and ... a journey through despair to hope."

Eliot's return visit to the United States in 1932 is linked to the writing of 'Burnt Norton', argues Brooker; and she traces a movement from the exilic to the Edenic in *Four Quartets*. She is particularly enlightening on the significance for Eliot of Julian of Norwich, and on the dialectic which Eliot explores between her theodicy and that of Augustine. It is in 'Little Gidding' itself, says Brooker, that "the conflict between reason and love (intellect and feeling)... is first pondered and then transcended in a move to poetry." And if the book's thesis is valid, one must surely consider whether this resolution, after a lifetime of dialectic, was the reason why he produced no later work of such significance.

*T. S. Eliot's Dialectical Imagination* becomes progressively of greater interest to the student of Eliot's verse as it mirrors Eliot's own arc from philosophical essays to poetry. It is challenging to establish any thesis which has equal validity across the whole range of Eliot's poetic oeuvre. Yet Brooker's work does so, offering a fascinating perspective on the man and his psyche, and significantly illuminating his poetry.

Paul Keers



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'Exchanges' invites and welcomes contributions from Society Members on any Eliot-related theme. Our aim is to be a place of genuine exchange between members about the poet and critic who links them together. If you would like to offer a contribution or have comments or queries, please contact the editor John Caperon at:

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