
H-France Review Vol. 11 (June 2011), No. 140

Nancy Duvall Hargrove. *T.S. Eliot's Parisian Year*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. xvi + 324 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 (pb). ISBN 10:0813035538.

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"If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast." Ernest Hemingway

It would be difficult to deny that the dynamics of the city of Paris in the years directly preceding World War I represent one of the most culturally exhilarating milieus of the history of Western aesthetics. We know that Paris embodied an optimal hub for the coming together of a myriad of representatives from these aesthetic spheres, as it came to be known as a truly remarkable cultural site for international and interdisciplinary exploration. Experimentation, innovation, scandal, and adventure embodied fundamental motifs in a broad variety of aesthetic circles, as provocatively inventive work was carried out by creative geniuses in literature, visual arts, music, theatre, dance, and beyond. From Guillaume Apollinaire to Pablo Picasso, from Igor Stravinsky to Isadora Duncan, some of the most daring imaginations of aesthetic history converged in Paris during these vibrant years.

In her new study, Nancy Duvall Hargrove focuses on the year of 1910-1911 which she describes as an *annus mirabilis* for the young T. S. Eliot, who, having graduated from Harvard, wished to experience first-hand the world of French aesthetics that had so influenced his own burgeoning sense of literary art. Quoting Eliot in French, Hargrove describes this year as a *présent parfait*, a truly extraordinary mix of past and present, of history and future possibility. Within this framework, Hargrove reminds us of the substantial impact on Eliot's sensibility of the work of a number of nineteenth-century French Symbolist poets, such as Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Jules Laforgue, Arthur Rimbaud, and Tristan Corbière, and she notes that it was during this seminal year that Eliot penned his celebrated poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." She suggests indeed that the creation of Eliot's Prufrock is based in large part on an original blending of two characteristically French cultural figures from the second half of the nineteenth century, Baudelaire's dandy and Laforgue's *flâneur*. Though Eliot's fluency in French was weak when he arrived in France in October 1910, he worked hard to improve his linguistic skills, and was eventually able to communicate well and to write in grammatically and syntactically solid French. Hargrove also remarks that it is during this time that there is a marked influence of Henri Bergson on the young writer, as Eliot attended at least some of the lectures given by the celebrated philosopher at the Collège de France. During this time, too, Eliot established important contacts with a number of young Frenchmen whose friendships he deeply cherished, such as Alain-Fournier, Jean Verdenal, and Jacques Rivière. Certainly, given the existence of numerous memoirs detailing the often wild and always formative experience of early twentieth-century Paris later published by so many young artists who found themselves in the City of Light during this remarkable period, it seems likely indeed that Eliot would never have forgotten this "moveable feast."

Hargrove decides to structure her study around different art forms popular in 1910 and 1911. Thus, chapters on "The Theatre," "The Visual Arts," "The Dance," "The Opera," "Music of the Concert Hall," and "Popular Entertainment" (melodramas, cabarets, *cafés-concerts*, music halls, circuses, fairs and exhibitions, dance halls, and cinema) provide a meticulously-researched and minutely-detailed overview

of the strikingly high number of cultural events that took place in Paris during the time period in question. From this perspective, especially with regard to the specifics surrounding the contemporary production, presentation, and reception of plays, ballets, concerts, novels, and art exhibits, Hargrove's study offers much pertinent factual data and engaging background information centering on some of the most influential cultural movements of the early 1900s. She bases much of her presentation of these details on documentation dating from the period in question, from newspapers, reviews, journals, and travel guides to the city, particularly Karl Baedeker's 1907 *Paris et ses environs*, a guidebook owned by Eliot himself.

However, despite the substantial amount of cultural information provided in Hargrove's book, in this reviewer's opinion, one serious shortcoming of the study at hand needs to be pointed out. While the author clearly states that she aims to analyze the impact of the year Eliot spent in Paris on his work, unfortunately, the figure of Eliot himself remains ultimately peripheral to much of the discussion. We are provided with an intricate overview of the aesthetic activities available to any culturally curious individual of the time, but we get very little information regarding those activities Eliot himself may have experienced and how these activities may have directly or indirectly influenced his art—apart from a short subsection entitled “The Influence of Parisian Avant-Garde Art on *The Waste Land*” in the chapter on the visual arts (pp. 136-140). In fact, it appears that only three letters of his from this time period are still extant, and these letters seem to provide very little detail as to what he saw, where he went, and what may have most impressed him during his Parisian sojourn. No other information from Eliot himself, or from his colleagues, appears to be available to help support claims focusing on the influence of the aesthetic or social factors of Parisian life during this time. Necessarily, then, the analysis of this general cultural impact can only remain largely hypothetical, and there are apparently few other resources—letters or journal entries from contemporaries, for example—that might provide more concrete information in this important regard.

This lack of information is underscored by a very frequent use of words such as “perhaps,” “apparently,” and “possibly,” as well as expressions such as “It is entirely plausible that...,” “It is not far-fetched to imagine that...,” “We may speculate with some assurance that...,” and “We can only wonder if...” This style of uncertain authorial discourse begs the question of what the true aim of the book might actually be. If, on the one hand, we as readers hope to discover how Parisian literary art, visual culture, or musical styles are to be traced through the later work of T. S. Eliot, I fear that while the current study might well provide some possible starting points for future research and exploration, in the end, we are left with many possibilities but few solid bases on which to ground strong critical arguments. If, however, we are curious about what went on in the artistic spheres of Paris in 1910-1911—information provided by Hargrove often in a day-by-day format—then indeed, the study proves to be a very useful resource, as a carefully-constructed cultural history.

Further, I am compelled to underscore another substantial concern, difficult to overlook in the study in question, which emerges in an ethical realm. The author writes at some length of the admiration Eliot expressed for a controversial French cultural figure, Charles Maurras, who headed up the *Action française*, which the author describes as “a political organization which promoted nationalism, monarchy, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Army, as well an intolerance of the four ‘enemies’ of his vision of France: Protestants, Jews, Freemasons, and foreigners, the latter designated by the derogatory term *métèques*” (p. 44). By all accounts, Maurras was a dangerously persuasive writer and speaker, and he was unfortunately quite popular among a certain crowd of young Frenchmen who were drawn to his ultra-nationalistic message. He was even accompanied in the streets by a group of these individuals, who called themselves the *Camelots du Roi* and who served as his bodyguards. Armed with lead-filled canes, they instigated riots among the populace when they felt their leader's honor was besmirched. The author points out that in 1910, a “special forces unit” of the Camelots was formed, called the *Commissaires de L'Action française*, which was, quite frankly, a kind of early, local terrorist group who trained on a small island in the Seine, land bought by the association for this specific purpose.

Clearly, this was a group whose message had deeply troubling resonance in French society and many writers, artists, politicians, and others spoke out strongly against its damaging effects, both at the time of its activity and ever since. While later in her study Hargrove does write of the atmosphere in the early 1900s in France: "Anti-Semitism was still quite virulent, its flames fanned by newspaper articles like those of Maurras" (p. 62), at no point does she address the disturbing aspects of the fact that Eliot himself was a strong supporter of Maurras. He is simply listed, along with Bergson and Irving Babbitt (Professor of French literature at Harvard), as among the most formative influences for the American writer. We do know that Maurras presided over a meeting of the *Action française* at which many impressionable students were in attendance, poised in rapt attention to the words of this powerful man, and, as the author writes, "Eliot may have been one of those students..." (p. 110). It may well be that Maurras' belief in "tradition, order, hierarchy, authority, and clarity" (p. 43), impressed the young Eliot, and while it does not seem yet possible to confirm if he attended any of the fiery meetings presided over by Maurras, what the author describes as his "conversion" (p. 45) to Maurras' ideas certainly merits closer review, particularly since Eliot seems to have been under his influence for some years, dedicating as he did his long and substantial 1929 essay on Dante to the dubious French figure. Even as late as 1948, Eliot published a text of homage to Maurras, *Aspects de la France et du Monde*. Hargrove suggests that by the mid-twentieth century, Eliot had finally come to question some of Maurras' beliefs, yet the reader is left without significant exploration of this really quite disquieting element in the convictions of the writer at hand.

Finally, there are certain concerns regarding the general standards of critical cultural and academic studies. First, a great deal of the material in Hargrove's book has been published elsewhere previously. The acknowledgments mention no fewer than twelve articles or book chapters from which portions of this book were taken. Moreover, there is a heavy reliance on the work of other critics who have examined the dynamics of European art forms in Eliot's work, often dating from quite some time ago, such as Herbert Howarth's *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* and Grover Smith's *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning*.^[1] In the end, given the promising nature of the few pages that Hargrove provides on the relationship of the visual arts to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, readers may wish that the author had endeavored to analyze in more detail the potential impact of the decisive year of 1910-1911 in the actual texts composed by Eliot after this epiphanic period.

NOTES

[1] Herbert Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964) and Grover Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

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ISSN 1553-9172