

The International T.S. Eliot Summer School

July Was Not the Cruellest Month

BY JULIA DANIEL

THIS YEAR, FROM July 10–17, the International T.S. Eliot Summer School had a hard act to follow: its own. In July of 2009, the Eliot Summer School, hosted by the Institute of English Studies at the University of London, inaugurated its first week of classes with presentations by a variety of superlative lecturers, poets, and performers, such as Seamus Heaney and Jeremy Irons. The School brought together a diverse body of those interested in the life and works of T.S. Eliot, providing them large lecture and intimate seminar environments to explore Eliot's poetry, drama, and critical prose. The promise of this new venture translated into a rich experience for that first class. They promptly spread word of the Summer School, speaking of both the academic rigor and warm collegiality that marked their time together in London.

This past July, the School managed to surpass its own budding reputation. Sir Tom Stoppard opened the week with thoughts on Eliot as a developing dramatist while reflecting on Eliot's influence in his own work. He concluded with a bit of Eliot-inspired doggerel discovered inside a used book, infusing the evening's academic and artistic tone with a touch of playfulness. As the week progressed, students were treated to two daily morning lectures, where topics ranged from moral integrity in *Murder in the Cathedral*, to textual variants in the *Collected Poems*, to the impact of popular music on Eliot's *oeuvre* (complete with live vocal performances). In

the afternoon, students engaged in seminar sessions with leading Eliot scholars, variously studying Eliot's early or late poetry, drama, prosody, or the influence of figures like Shakespeare, Dante, Laforgue, and Pound on Eliot's work. Conversation was enriched by the participants' broad variety of backgrounds. On any given day, one might see a professor of physical chemistry and Eliot enthusiast talking with a graduate student focusing on ecocriticism, while at the same table practicing poets and students of Pater or Woolf or Dante traded thoughts with established Eliot scholars and editors. These discussions often spilled out of university halls into the restaurants and pubs of surrounding Bloomsbury.

As School director Ron Schuhard aptly noted, these discussions mark the beginning of a new era in Eliot studies. The Eliot Estate has launched an ambitious and much anticipated editorial project that will result in new editions of Eliot's poetry, prose, drama, and letters. Present at the School were several members of the editorial community currently working on these materials, much of which has never been published before. Students enjoyed the rare opportunity to contribute to discussions about this massive scholarly undertaking with the very people preparing these texts for a new generation of learners and teachers.

The School also provided students ample opportunity to extend their inquiries outside of the classroom. The Josephine Hart Poetry Hour brought Dame

Eileen Atkins, Ian McDiarmid, and Mark Strong to perform readings of *The Waste Land* and other poems, bringing to life Prufrock, Sweeney, and Madam Sosostriis for a house of intrigued auditors. Later in the week, poet Robin Robertson enchanted his audience with readings of his metamorphic, at times flirtatious, but always haunting verse. Students also enjoyed walking tours of literary Bloomsbury and three excursions to sites from *Four Quartets*. At Burnt Norton, students and professors picnicked on the edge of Eliot's dry pool and wandered through the yews and roses of the estate before engaging in a discussion of *Burnt Norton* on the grounds. At Little Gidding, the School joined the Friends of Little Gidding and the English T.S. Eliot Society at the T.S. Eliot Festival for an afternoon marked by intellectual generosity and gracious hospitality. Some students also opted for a Sunday excursion to East Coker, where Gail McDonald brought our week to a close with timely and thoughtful words on Eliot's vision of intellectual humility.

Generosity was indeed the defining characteristic of the week: generosity of thought, talent, and enthusiasm, along with the generosity of Mrs. Valerie Eliot, the Eliot Estate, and countless other donors who made the week possible and provided bursaries for several students. The School is sure to become an institution constantly outstripping its own glowing reputation in years to come. ■

—Loyola University of Chicago

ANOTHER FINE (BUT EXPENSIVE) CRITICAL VOLUME

S. E. GONTARSKI, EDITOR.

A Companion to Samuel Beckett.
Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

able to afford to purchase the book, and, for this reason, the companion is likely to come to the attention of students and scholars

here: Ackerley, Brater, Bryden, Knowlson, Perloff, Pilling, Porter Abbott, Rabaté, and Rosset are all here, as well as Herren,

Ireland in Beckett's work, describing it as "obsessional" in the sense that it "cannot be finally possessed" (184), which neatly