

Book Reviews

---

Elisabeth Däumer and Shyamal Bagchee, eds. *The International Reception of T.S. Eliot*. New York: Continuum, 2007. Pp. 320. \$150.00.

The title of this collection of essays, *The International Reception of T.S. Eliot*, may lead readers to expect comprehensive histories of Eliot's reception by writers and/or literary critics in various countries and cultures. The countries and cultures addressed are indeed various—Caribbean and Bengali cultures, France, Germany, Romania, Israel, Iceland, Italy, Spain, China, Japan, Canada, Argentina, Poland, Australia—but equally various are the genres of reception history offered. Not all countries and cultures could be represented in a single book, and so one might resist complaining about notable omissions were it not for the fact that Germany, Israel, and Bengali culture get two essays each while there is nothing on South Korea and its T.S. Eliot Society, as well as nothing on the place of Eliot in African postcolonial reaction against traditional English studies. Additionally, some essays offer no more history of Eliot's reception than can be found in the essay writer's autobiography.

Certain of the essays review the arc of Eliot's reception within a country or culture, first by indicating when he was initially noticed and by whom; what the reactions to him were by writers, literary critics, and translators, and how these reactions reflected and refracted issues of import in local and national literary domains; and then by following the subsequent developments in this reception all the way into the twenty-first century. Of this sort are Shunichi Takayanagi's "In the Juvescence of the Year' – T.S. Eliot's Impact and Reverberations in Japan 1930–2005," Lihui Liu's "China's Reception of T.S. Eliot," Astradur Eysteinnsson's and Eysteinn Thorvaldsson's "T.S. Eliot in Iceland: A Historical Portrait," Leonore Gerstein's "T.S. Eliot and Modernism in Mid-Twentieth-Century Israel," Santiago Rodriguez Guerrero-Strachan's "Multiple Voices, Single Identity: T.S. Eliot's Criticism and Spanish Poetry," Stefano Maria Casella's "By the Arena . . . Il Decaduto': Eliot &/in Italy," and also, although not quite as historically comprehensive as the other essays I have mentioned, Shirshendu Chakrabarti's "The Shadow of Eliot Across Bengali Poetry of the 1930s." These are the best of the book's reception histories. Eighteen essays like these seven would have made *The International Reception of T.S. Eliot* not only a book worthy of its title but also an enduring standard resource for Eliot scholars.

This is not to say that other essays are not valuable in their own right. Matthew Hart's study of the adversarial relationship between Eliot and Caribbean poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Brian Trahearne's study of Eliot's determining influence on Canadian poet A.J.M. Smith, Juan E. De Castro's study of the influence of Eliot's provoking Eurocentrism on Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, J.H. Copley's study of Eliot's conflicted friendship with German scholar E.R. Curtius, Magda Heydal's study of Eliot's modernizing influence on Polish writer Czesław Miłosz, and William Marx's study of the differences between Eliot and the editors of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* are all good accounts of the way particular people received Eliot's work in particularly Caribbean, Canadian, Argentinian, German, Polish, and French ways, respectively. Of course such relatively narrowly-focused influence studies are just baby steps towards a history of Eliot's reception in these countries and cultures.

Elisabeth Däumer's essay, "(Re)modernizing Eliot: Eva Hesse and *Das Wüste Land*," and Sean Cotter's essay, "Translated Eliot: Lucian Blaga's Strategy for Cultural Survival and the Soviet Colonization of Romania," suggest that there is a book to be written on Eliot's international reception by way of translation. Däumer's essay, mind you, analyzes differences between translations of *The Waste Land* by E.R. Curtius and Eva Hesse as part of the story of Eliot's changing reception in Germany over the course of the twentieth century, whereas Cotter's essay primarily examines the way Blaga developed the art of translation into a strategy for creatively asserting Romanian cultural difference within otherwise hegemonic Soviet political culture and merely observes of Eliot, rather incidentally, that one of the two short poems by him that Blaga translated can be used as an example of Blaga's typical translation methods.

Eliot seems similarly incidental to a number of other essays. Sean Pryor, in "Reported to Me from Sydney, Australia: Reading Eliot Down Under and in the Mother Country," and Srimati Mukherjee, in "T.S. Eliot: Poet of My Bengali Childhood," use their personal reactions to Eliot over the years as the occasion for vaguely postcolonial reflections on the experience of moving from Australia to England, in the one case, and from India to the United States, in the other. Their essays are appropriately preceded by Kinereth Meyer's "Why Eliot? Cross-Cultural Reading and Its (Dis)Contents," which happens to use Meyer's experiences when teaching Eliot in Israel as the occasion for reflections on the need to avoid teaching techniques that suppress a student's potentially adversarial response to a writer like Eliot. Shyamal Bagchee asks Meyer's question—"Why Eliot?"—of the very book he introduces, but he does not answer it. I would ask it of the last four essays I have

## Book Reviews

mentioned, for each could have used any number of Eurocentric authors other than Eliot as the basis for pretty much the same essay.

So *The International Reception of T.S. Eliot* is a rather mixed bag of essays. It seems to have been unfair happenstance that has made for the differential treatment of countries and cultures in this book, such that the reception of Eliot in one place is represented by a comprehensive historical survey, in another place by a study of his influence on just one writer, and in Australia by an expatriate's idiosyncratic appropriation of Eliot's poetry and prose as his personal Baedeker guide to his mother country's imperial culture.

Donald J. Childs