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ENLT 520.01: American Literature Seminar - Henry James & T. S. Eliot

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Fall 2001

**English 520: American Literature Seminar:
Henry James & T. S. Eliot**

Texts:

- James, Henry. *Tales of Henry James*. (Norton)
———. *The Portrait of a Lady*. (Penguin)
———. *What Maisie Knew*. (Penguin)
———. *The Ambassadors*. (Penguin)
———. *The Golden Bowl*. (if time permits) (Penguin)
Eliot, T. S. *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. Ed. Frank Kermode. (Penguin)
———. *Four Quartets*. (Harcourt Brace)
———. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. (Harcourt Brace)
———. *Murder in the Cathedral*. (Harcourt Brace)

Plan:

Recalling one of T. S. Eliot's visits with Virginia and Leonard Woolf, the latter wrote of the poet confessing that "he had a kind of personal upheaval after 'Prufrock' and this altered his inclination, which had been to develop in the manner of Henry James." It is true, of course, that however Jamesian a poem such as "Prufrock" might be (one thinks especially of the affinity between Prufrock and John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle"), Eliot certainly carved out his own space; and it might be possible (albeit not easy) to talk about the poetry without making a single reference to the novelist. But the connection is there; and Eliot was being sincere when he spoke of James as "the most intelligent man of his generation," an intelligence that, as Eliot understood it, made itself most convincing manifest by its refusal to reduce sensation to the level of ideas, or as Eliot famously wrote of James: "James's critical genius comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas: a mastery and an escape which are perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence. He had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it." This sense of the novelist became, in turn, a guiding inspiration for the poet, especially as he sought to make his work expressive of what he spoke of as an "objective correlative," wherein the latter is understood as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." It was, said, Eliot, "[t]he only way of expressing emotion in the form of art."

Method, temperament, exile—these are categories, among others, by which fruitful comparison might be made between James and Eliot. But the richness of such comparisons will be most strongly experienced in the course of the readings; and it is the purpose of this seminar to place in juxtaposition both a novelist and a poet whom a majority of thoughtful readers consider as among our finest.

The first eight weeks will be devoted to James, the last six weeks to Eliot.

First Assignments:

Thursday, Sept. 6th: *Daisy Miller*

Tuesday, Sept. 11th: “The Art of Fiction”

Thursday, Sept. 13th: *The Portrait of a Lady* (Book I)

Requirements:

As this is a seminar, the expectation is that you will assume a fair amount of responsibility with regard to our classroom discussions. This responsibility includes a consistent record of attendance and a thoughtful familiarity with the text(s) to be discussed. There will be times when I will arrange for you (either singularly or in a group) to lead the discussion; but mostly our sessions will be more plenary in nature. A noticeable part of your final grade (1/5) will be based on your classroom work. Another part of your grade (1/5) will be based on your mid-term exam, focused upon James, and final exam (1/5), focused upon Eliot. The largest part of your grade (2/5) will be based on your term paper, a twenty page essay dealing with both James and Eliot.