

T. S. Eliot's Eternal Relationship with France

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要 旨

ヨーロッパ文化という視座からのエリオット研究は過去数十年に渡りほとんどなされてこなかったと言える。最近出版された研究書で入手できるのは、ジェイミー・ステイヤー編著の『エリオット、フランス、そしてヨーロッパの精神』（2015年）であり、この研究書では英国詩人としてのエリオットがフランス文化にどれだけ影響を受けていたかを様々な視点から考察している。

エリオットのフランス文学やフランス文化一般という分野への傾倒という点に関してはナンシー・ハーグローブ教授の *Eliot's Parisian Year*（エリオットのパリ留学時代、2009年）が古典的な研究書となっている。この名著を読むとエリオットだけでなく多くの若い作家達が芸術の都であるパリに惹きつけられていた事がよく分かる。しかし「エリオットとフランス」といった見地から研究する学者は日本では言うに及ばず西欧でも決して多くはない。

事実日本の研究者や大学院生の多くはエリオットは英国詩人であるため、エリオットをフランス文化に関連付けて考察することを奇異に感じるのかもしれない。しかしエリオットが当時アンリ・ベルクソン、アラン＝フルニエ、そしてシャルル・モーラスといったフランスの知識人の影響を多く受けていたという点は等閑視できない。換言するなら、フランス文化からの影響という点を見捨ててエリオットの人物像や彼の詩作品を論ずることは片務的な研究になってしまうであろう。なぜならエリオットはパリでの有意義な留学を通して所謂ヨーロッパ詩人となっていたからである。

ステイヤーもエリオットにフランス文化の影響を認めることの重要性を説いている。当にエリオットは詩人たちが自分の感受性に多大な影響を与えた国、フランスに向けて旅立って行ったのである。ステイヤーによれば、20世紀の初頭における芸術的、哲学的、政治的潮流の真っ直中に身を投じていたため、短期間にせよフランス留学はエリオットに多大な影響を及ぼしたとされる。

この論文ではエリオットの詩作品を通してフランス文化の大きな影響について考察を試みた。

Eliot studies from the viewpoint of European culture at large have rarely been conducted in the past decades. However, if we want to know something about Eliot in a European context, we have at hand *T.S. Eliot, France, and the Mind of Europe*,¹ which discusses how much Eliot as an English poet was affected by French culture. Some scholars and students might say that “Eliot and France” does not sound appropriate when considering Eliot's

poetic belief and thought; however, Eliot's affection for French literature and culture is apparent, thanks to Nancy Hargrove's *T.S. Eliot's Parisian Year*.² She details the cultural epoch the young poet found himself in when he was an exchange student at the Sorbonne from 1910 to 1911. One might say that Eliot was able to come to Paris at the right time since Paris was called the capital of art. It can be said that the image of magnificence of Paris attracted many young artists and men of letters to the center of the city. Eliot was part of this young generation.

However, why are there not many scholars who discuss the theme of "Eliot and France" head-on in Japan much less in western countries? Some Japanese scholars argue that relating T.S. Eliot to French culture sounds bizarre because Eliot was a British poet, albeit born and raised in Saint Louis. Japanese scholars and students tend to deal with Eliot's poems as British literature. They generally disregard the fact that young Eliot went to Paris to be affected by prestigious figures such as Henri Bergson, Alain Fournier and Charles Maurras, from whom Eliot was later estranged.

It might be said that discussing Eliot and his poems without considering the influence of French culture on his work offers only partial insights, because Eliot should be called a European poet. One might say that French culture had a great deal of influence on his spiritual growth as a poet.

Jayne Stayer stresses the importance of acknowledging a deeper affection for French culture in "Eliot and France, Eliot and Europe."

. . . he was headed to a country whose poets had already deeply affected his sensibility. His short year in the country would change him even more decisively, as he swam in the artistic, philosophical, psychological and political currents of early century Paris.³

Stayer also points out scholars' general indifference to such a subject as Eliot's French connection. He discusses that point as follows:

For scholars who have tracked influences on the poet, T.S. Eliot's indebtedness to France has never been in dispute. But because Eliot's year in Paris was so decisive for his development, mapping the contours of that influence has never been a simple matter.⁴

Stayer points out that some French influence such as the French Symbolists can be observed in Eliot's maiden work, *Prufrock and Other Observations*,⁵ which came to the public in 1917,

¹ Jayme Stayer, ed. *T.S. Eliot, France and the Mind of Europe* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015) p. xv.

² Nancy Duvall Hargrove, *T.S. Eliot's Parisian Year* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) pp. 6-9.

³ Stayer, *Ibid.*, p. xv.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

five years after the young poet returned to America. One may well imagine that Eliot tried to put his feeling and thought into the *Prufrock* poems recalling his Parisian experiences from 1910 to 1911.

As Nancy Hargrove details in her *T.S. Eliot's Parisian Year*, Eliot was lodging at the Pension Casaubon in the heart of the Latin Quarter ⁶ where people were coming and going to dine out on the streets. He would have caught glimpses of the daily lives of Parisians. The deliberate reader can find a poem wherein the young poet might have depicted daily life on the streets, seen from his attic lodging. The following poem is from *The little Passion from "An Agony in the Garret"*:

Upon those stifling August nights
I know he used to walk the streets
Now following the lines of lights
Or driving into darkness retreats
Or following the lines of the lights
And knowing well to what they lead:
To one inevitable cross
Whereon our souls are pinned, and bleed. ⁷

If we pay attention to the direction in which the poet is looking, we might say that the poet takes a bird's-eye view of the busy streets. ⁸ In other words, he depicts the street-scene below his eyes. Such a passage as "Whereon our souls are pinned, and bleed" sounds like the passage, "Like a patient etherized upon a table. . ." in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. ⁹ Additionally, the word "retreats" in the former poem recalls "The muttering retreats" in *The Love Song*. ¹⁰

Some readers may wonder why Eliot in his thirties could write such a pessimistic poem. As Peter Ackroyd explains, the young poet encountered the poems of Jules Laforgue through Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. ¹¹ Eliot was much affected by Laforgue's free verse style that allows poets to express what they want to say without any strict rules of verse. ¹² He also learned from Laforgue's poems how to compose a satiric poem in which he satirizes the upper ranges of society because of their snobbery. ¹³

The following two free verses indicate a similar technique in depicting daily life in Paris.

⁶ Hargrove, *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁷ T.S. Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare-Poems 1909-1917*, edited by Christopher Ricks (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998) p.57.

⁸ Junichi Saito, *T.S. Eliot Review* No.28. (Kyoto: Japan T.S. Eliot Society, 2017) p.29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Peter Ackroyd, *T.S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984) p.34.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

Every street lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.¹⁴
underline mine

Les yeux sont noyés de l'opium
De l'indulgence universelle,
La bouche clownesque ensorçèle
Comme un singulier géranium.¹⁵

. . . Symbolism began with the first words uttered by the first man, as he named very living thing; or before them, in heaven, when God named the world into being. And we see, in these beginnings, precisely what Symbolism in literature really is the form of expression, at the best but approximate, essentially but arbitrary, until it has obtained the force of a convention, for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness.¹⁹

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poems since he read about the French Symbolists in Symons's book.²⁰ Eliot admits later that he would not have read Laforgue's poems if he had not read Symons's book.²¹

. . . I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt: but for having read his book, I should not, in the year of 1908, have heard of Laforgue or Rimbaud; I should probably not have begun to read Verlaine; and but for reading Verlaine, I should not have heard of Corbière. So the Symons book is one of those which have affected the course of my life.²²

The careful reader might wonder what really attracted Eliot to France at that time. Eliot expresses his thinking in 1934 in relation to his thinking in France in *The Criterion* :

Younger generations can hardly realize the intellectual desert of England and America during the first decade and more of this century. In the England desert, to be sure, flourished a few tall and handsome cactuses, as well as James and Conrad . . . in America the desert extended, *a perte de vue*, without the least prospect of even desert vegetables. The predominance of Paris was incontestable. Poetry, it is true, was somewhat in eclipse; but there was a most exciting variety of ideas.²³

Cyrena N. Pondrom states in *The Road from Paris* that the opinion of Eliot's mentor, Ezra Pound is much more shocking to students of English literature.²⁴ Pondrom quotes from Pound's contributed article:

'For the best part of a thousand years English poets have gone to school to the French, or one might as well say that there never were any English poets until they began to study the French . . . The history of English poetic glory is a history of successful steals from the French . . . The great periods when the English showed the greatest powers of assimilation.'²⁵

It might be said that the sterile atmosphere of the literary society of London was an accepted view at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁶ Pondrom also states that "French influence was ubiquitous in the innovative movements of poetry in London between 1908 and 1920 . . ." ²⁷ Hargrove discusses the importance of the young poet's experience in Paris. She says :

²⁰ Junichi, *Ibid.*, p.31.

²¹ Junichi Saito, "T.S. Eliot and Paris" in *Management Journal* (Kanagawa: Kanagawa University, 2015) p.103.

²² *The Criterion* (London: January 1930) p.357.

²³ 'A Commentary', *Criterion*, XIII,52 (London: April 1934)

²⁴ Junichi, *Ibid.*, p.99.

²⁵ Cyrena N. Pondrom, *The Road from Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) p.1.

²⁶ Junichi, *Ibid.*

²⁷ Pondrom, *Ibid.*, p.2.

His year in Paris provided him with a gold mine of cultural, intellectual, and personal experiences that extended his horizons in many directions and influenced him and his works in significant ways. He always looked back on it with nostalgia and acknowledged its impact upon him, describing the Paris of that time perhaps most memorably as “un present parfait” . . .²⁸

The readers can find Eliot’s four French poems in *Poems, 1920*. They are “Le Directeur,” “Mélange Adultère de Tout,” “Lune de Miel,” and “Dans le Restaurant,” all of which were composed around 1916, but were not satisfactory ones. This might have been because of the limits of Eliot’s French abilities. Eliot’s French poems are not bad, but they might illustrate that mother tongue plays a crucial role in the production of a fine work of art. The readers may feel strange reading such a French poem. It reads:

En Amérique, professeur;
En Angleterre, journaliste;
C’est à grands pas et en sueur

One might wonder if this poem was really composed by the same poet. The careful reader might understand that Eliot expresses his unstable feeling as an expatriate.

“Lune de Miel” is a poem in which Eliot deals with the theme of a contrast between the secular and the sacred on a scenic tourist route. It reads:

Ils sont vu les Pay-Bas, ils rentrent à Terre Haute;
Mais une nuit d’été, les voici à Ravenne,
A l’aise entre deux draps, chez deux centaines de punaises;
La sueur aestivale, et une forte odeur de chienne.

Eliot depicts a couple’s trip to Europe in the poem; a couple lie down on the bedsheets at a hotel. They don’t pay any attention to historical architecture and relics near the hotel. Perhaps this couple represents a kind of callous secularism. This might reflect Eliot’s awakening to the invisible holiness and eternal values which he focused on afterwards. It is quite unlike Eliot to compose such French poems because of his limited vocabulary in French.

The fact remains that Eliot gives much credit for France in “What France Means to You,” because the country inspired him to find his own poetic voice. Eliot talks ardently about his memorable days in France:

. . . it was no accident that had taken me there. For several years before I went there, what France had meant to me was, above all things, Poetry. The discovery of Baudelaire,

²⁸ Hargrove, *Ibid.*, p.3.

and all of the poetry which derives from Baudelaire . . . was an event (or a series of events) without which I hardly think that I should have found it possible to write at all. For it assured me of that of which no English poetry of the same period had given me any evidence . . . that there were still unexplored possibilities for English verse²⁹

As for the reason why young Eliot sought a career in France, William Marx explains as follows:

. . . Far-fetched as this scheme might now appear, it would have seemed less so at the time when American expatriate writers such as Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein resided in France. While Wharton and Stein wrote in English, other writers had attempted a complete linguistic switch Eliot therefore had living examples of successful literary emigration before him.³⁰

Marx points out that what Eliot decided to do was a radical challenge at the time when many American writers had moved to Chicago or New York.³¹

It is very surprising for students and scholars of English that Eliot once thought of giving up English to begin a literary career in Paris. He pours out his heart to an interviewer in *Writers at Work* :

. . . I had at that time the idea of giving up English and trying to settle down and scrape along in Paris and gradually write French. But it would have been a foolish idea even if I'd been much more bilingual than I ever was, because, for one thing, I don't think that one can be a bilingual poet. I don't know of any case in which a man wrote great or even fine poems equally well in two languages. I think one language must be the one you express yourself in in poetry, and you've got to give up the other for that purpose. And I think that the English language really has more resources in some respects than the French.³²

One might say that Eliot seems to express his mind in a suppressed way while appreciating memorable moments in Paris. His story at the interview might have eased the readers' mind, because Eliot happily regained his true identity as an English poet after a memorable experience in Paris. However, the reader should not underestimate the French influence on Eliot's literary career throughout his life, though Lyndall Gordon maintains that Eliot's sojourn in Paris was just a small experience in his life.³³

²⁹ "What France Means to You" (London: La France Libre, June 1944)

³⁰ Jason Harding, ed. *T.S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.26

³¹ Ibid.

³² George Plimpton, ed. *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*, 2nd series (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p.110.

It may be much more interesting to consider that Eliot's indebtedness to French culture continued throughout his whole career. His brief account in "What France Means to You" proves this. Eliot states ardently:

. . . my brief account . . . of what France has meant to me in the past, should indicate what it means to me for the future; and it is because I care about the future of England, that I must care also for the future of France ; and it is because I must believe in the future of England, that I must look with confidence to the future of France.³⁴

As a matter of fact, Eliot stresses in another paragraph of the account that Paris was both the entire past and the whole future : time past and time future brought him the perfect present.³⁵ It may not be too much to say that Eliot and France are united by some profound bond, because he returned again and again to France and continued to be influenced by French culture throughout his life.

(This paper is based on my presentation in the 44th Annual Meeting of the International T.S. Eliot Society held in Boston in 2023.)

³³ Lyndall Gordon, *T.S. Eliot: an Imperfect life* (London: Vintage, 1998) pp.54-55.

³⁴ "What France Means to You", Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.