

Valerie Eliot felt that she was unable to waiver control over the copyrights. Therefore, Sencourt had not been permitted to quote freely from Eliot's published and unpublished materials.

Sencourt first met Eliot in 1927, at Divonne-les-Bains, a place reputed for dealing with nervous disorders. The Eliots were there recuperating from what appears to have been emotional exhaustion. Vivienne's insomnia attacks were increasing and Eliot was growing depressed over the state of his marriage. A decade before, Bertrand Russell had observed that Vivienne was "a person who lives on a knife-edge, and will end as a criminal or a saint." Eliot would struggle with his ill-fated marriage until 1933 when he would abruptly separate from her.

Sencourt argues that *The Waste Land* cannot be fully understood without knowing something of Eliot's first marriage. The point is temptingly believable. Eliot's mood in the poem does seem to suggest, in I.A. Richard's words, a "persistent concern with sex, the problem of our generation, as religion was the problem of the last." It would not be difficult to conclude (especially for the scholar who revels in this sort of pop Freudianism) that Eliot probably transferred some of his private agonies into his poem. Yet, even if we accept Sencourt's point here at face value, we are confronted with the obvious fact that it is on this very important point of information that Sencourt most notably fails to inform us. Sencourt adds little to what had already been previously known about Vivienne. Any reader even faintly acquainted with Eliot's life knows that Vivienne grew progressively unstable during their marriage and her deteriorating condition caused Eliot much pain. Sencourt has not divulged any new information, new insights or refreshing reasons behind Eliot's marriage to a woman whose personality was so obviously different from his.

To return to Divonne-les-Bains, Sencourt, who was suffering from nervous problems, was also a patient there. Eliot and Sencourt were introduced by a doctor who hoped that their common interests would serve the interests of mutual therapy. Both men shared a literary background, a devotion to Catholicism and its traditions in the Church of England, and both were well read in Indian philosophy.

Some of Sencourt's recollections of Eliot throughout their subsequent acquaintanceship will be unsettling to the many who have accepted the "grim" and "prim" image of the poet. Consider, if you will, Eliot as a practical joker. Eliot, it appears, was in the habit of placing "woopee" cushions on the seats of friends and cracking ribald jokes. Eliot's sense of humor, moreover, had a touch of the macabre as well. Often his joking, Sencourt observes, "would also exceed the permitted bounds. It reached its acme one morning when the Fabers found themselves presented with a pair of human ears." This story may lose something in the

retelling, but I failed completely to understand how Eliot could ever find such a ghastly presentation to be amusing. If the incident is true, then Eliot might well be among one of the most psychopathologically interesting people since van Gogh.

At times, Sencourt digresses from this anecdotal level to become a literary critic. He makes the rather *ex cathedra* statement that Ezra Pound committed a disservice when he blue-pencilled out about 500 lines from *The Waste Land*, "cutting out among other things a long passage in imitation of Pope." On this passage, Pound had advised Eliot that "Pope has done this so well that you cannot do it better: and if you mean this as a burlesque, you had better suppress it, for you cannot parody Pope unless you can write better verse than Pope — and you can't." Most critics would agree. Additionally, it seems curious that Sencourt would argue for the retention of such lines of astonishing mediocrity as:

*Full fathom five your Beliestein lies,
Under the flatfish and the squids
Graves Disease in a dead jew's eyes!
When the crabs have eat the lids...*

What possible pleasure could these lines have given that was missed by their absence? Had Sencourt's judgment on the quality of the deleted lines been based upon an inspection of the original *Waste Land* manuscript? It had not. According to Hugh Kenner, Sencourt was not privileged to read the poem before its publication. In my opinion, this section serves only to permit Sencourt to indulge his private fantasies as a literary critic capable

of passing judgment on T.S. Eliot's works.

Those diligent detectives who are forever looking for clues to the meaning of *The Waste Land* will find a few tasty morsels of information in this book. Lou, the woman in the "pub" talking boldly of abortion, was suggested to Eliot in 1914 by the rough, crude charwomen he met while living with Vivienne on Crawford Street. The line "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Latauen, echt deutsch," which has baffled many, was inspired by a Lithuanian girl who amused Eliot by declaring that in spite of her Russian nationality she was a real German.

Readers who had hoped that Sencourt's book would be a sort of Boswellian treatment of the Eliot personality are bound to be disappointed. Sencourt was just not writing that kind of book, nor does it appear that he was capable of doing so. From all appearances, Sencourt seems to have been an intellectual lightweight who could not have written a brilliant and perceptive exposition of Eliot's social and literary thought. Furthermore, the nature of their friendship would not have really permitted this. Sencourt was not in the position to copy down at length Eliot's raw and undistilled wisdoms on a medley of subjects. Their acquaintance lacked the intimacy and affection that characterized the Boswell-Johnson relationship. Hence, Sencourt's book suffers from a certain unevenness of structure and theme. Mixed with his anecdotes and gossip tidbits are some rather mediocre efforts at literary analysis.

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Moreover, we cannot escape the conclusion that Sencourt perhaps misleads the reader on the warmth and intimacy that Eliot supposedly felt for him. For a friendship that spanned some thirty-seven years, there is lacking the evidence that they maintained close regular contact during most of that time. Too much of Sencourt's information is not taken from Eliot, but rather is gathered through hearsay or his deductions from incidents he heard about. As Hugh Kenner, a critic who has written much of Eliot, flatly states, Sencourt "wasn't privy to as much of the story as he and his post-humous sponsors let on." In Eliot's later years, Kenner observes that Eliot had instructed his secretaries not to admit Sencourt. Why? Sencourt, continues Kenner, was a loquacious bore. If Kenner is correct in his estimate of Sencourt, then Sencourt might have been nothing more than an undesired hanger-on to Eliot. Would such a man make a reliable witness to a man's life?

Eliot's desire for privacy was legendary and his poetry for all his defense of the objective correlative, classicism and tradition was highly personal and was sometimes "very near the limits of coherency." Considering the awful difficulties that critics have encountered when they try to assess Eliot's achievement, Kenner observed in 1959 that "opinion concerning the most influential man of letters of the twentieth century has not freed itself from a cloud of unknowing. He is the Invisible Poet in an age of systematized literary scrutiny, much of it directed at him." However, so long as interest in Eliot endures, there will be many who feel that they must know more of Eliot, the man, in the belief that such knowledge provides a proper understanding of his poetry. Many critics, and wise ones I believe, have

warned against this kind of analysis. Kenner argues that such interpretations are based on the Genetic Fallacy that supposes the meaning of the poem is found in the poet's experiences, the books he reads, the women he frequents, and so forth. F.O. Matthiessen has written that to identify a poet's life with what he wrote is "misleading" and "disturbing."

In any case though, Sencourt will not be very helpful to those who engage in this sort of analysis. This book leaves too much of Eliot's life still shrouded in the mystery that originally brought many to it. The same questions seem to persist. Why did Eliot leave his native America to seldom return ever again? Why did his parents object to him spending a year at the Sorbonne? Why did he abruptly give up an academic career after eight years' preparation? And why did he choose to leave Vivienne, his new wife in England, while he visited his parents in America? Also, little is told to clarify the nature of his relationship with his parents. Were there personal reasons, related to his homelife, which compelled Eliot to leave the country? Satisfactory answers to such questions, perhaps, will never be forthcoming, having been interred seven years ago with the poet.

Although Sencourt has not written a scholar's paradise of information, he has managed to pen a pleasingly written account of Eliot's life. His style, throughout, is lucid and straightforward. The gossipy anecdotes, which please him so, will keep the reader who enjoys that sort of thing from becoming bored. But "The Invisible Poet" is still with us; Sencourt has not contributed to lifting that "cloud of unknowing" which has surrounded him. To me, that is what makes this book such a great disappointment.

struck back with an adornment for the thinking man's coffee table.

As a picture book *This Great Game* is a striking success. There are some marvelous old early parks, fans and heroes. Those who cherish memories of the Polo Grounds will especially be interested in the scenes beneath Coogan's Bluff half a century ago. The publishers commissioned Leroy Nie-man to do some original action portraits of eight superstars, and the paintings explode with color and energy.

The photographs — hundreds of them — capture the special action, violence, grace and danger of baseball. Together with the essays by eight sportswriters, two novelists, an umpire and a manager, they tell baseball's story, which is that baseball is uniquely pleasing to the eye and mind.

Football, unlike baseball, is a game which can hold the attention of persons who do not know much about it. Twenty-two beefy men mauling one another is as entertaining as a horse opera or a situation comedy. And the better maulings can be re-savored on instant replay if one is watching football on a television screen, for which its compact action is well-suited.

Football fans slouched in front of their television sets, watching flickering images of their well-padded heroes collide, like to say that baseball is not for he-men. But those who think there is no violence in baseball should try to make the double play pivot at second base with Boog Powell rolling in with disruptive malice aforethought.

Those who think baseball is a game without manly danger should stand at the plate while Juan Marichal puts a 110 m.p.h. velocity on a very solid baseball that crosses the plate on a trajectory that seems to begin at third base and passes four inches from one's ribs.

Batting? Nothing to it. You just make solid contact with a round bat (not to exceed 2.75 inches in diameter) on a round ball (2.868 inches in diameter) that is moving over 100 m.p.h. and is rising or dropping, or curving while rising or dropping. If you make solid contact, and the struck ball eludes nine agile men, you get to first base. If you fail to do this only seven out of ten times you are a star. If you fail only sixty per cent of the time, you are a superstar.

True, baseball is not a game of constant action. But if constant action were the standard of sports excellence, the roller derby would be the most excellent sport. And football, which consists of very short convulsions of action followed by much longer committee meetings, would rank somewhere below lawn bowling.

Consider the action in this familiar football sequence. Team A has the ball third-and-two on team B's twenty yard line. Huddle. Plunge off tackle, gaining not quite two yards. Elapsed time, five seconds. Out comes the chain crew for a measurement. No first down for team A, so out comes team A's field goal kicking team and team B's field goal blocking team. The kick is a

The Sporting Life

This Great Game

by Jacques Barzen

Prentice-Hall, \$14.95

IT IS FREQUENTLY said that football has become the "national pastime." This is very annoying to us baseball fans, who think baseball is esthetically superior and better for the soul.

Now we at least have a book that helps us explain our prejudices. *This Great Game* is pretty and informative. Its hundreds of splendid photographs are shown through a dozen lively essays. The pictures and essays will be useful in our crusade to keep football in perspective and in its place.

Jacques Barzen, who prefers baseball, describes football as "violence watched from a distance." That description helps explain why the 1960s, which were unkind to many institutions and people, were so kind to football.

In a decade dominated by various

forms of mayhem, including the "television war," football gained in popularity and pretensions to the point that its fans began to advertise it as the "real" national pastime, a "now" substitute for the distinctly non-now grace and stateliness of baseball.

The nation's publishers bought the subversive doctrine about football as "the new national pastime," and before long the fans were being supplied with pretty football picture books that weighed about as much as Bubba Smith, and caused coffee tables to groan like injured linemen.

In an unending stream they came, thick, colorful volumes on the quarterback, the running backs, this league and that league, the Super Bowl and the good old days. Now baseball has