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Review. Jewel Spears Brooker, “Dialectical Imagination”

Jewel Spears Brooker, Professor Emerita of Literature at Eckerd College (Florida), is an eminent scholar, particularly renowned for her work on T. S. Eliot. Her entire career has been dedicated to literary modernism and to the interpretation of Eliot’s work. Brooker’s latest monograph, *T. S. Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination* (2018), is a hallmark of scholarly brilliance and literary taste. She discusses the visions behind Eliot’s ever-evolving creative process, starting from the tongues of flame in the epigraph to “Prufrock” to the symbol of the flaming rose at the end of *Little Gidding*.

In *Eliot’s Dialectical Imagination*, Brooker explores the process by which the poet’s imagination constantly reinvented itself as he moved from poem to poem. His two guiding principles – dialectics and relativism – originated in his philosophical work. By “dialectics,” Brooker means the process by which opposites are perceived and transcended. By “relativism,” she means the conviction that all truths exist in relation to other truths. Both principles are integral to comprehending the sense of disjunction one meets in the paralyzed characters of his early poems. Each of eleven chapters identifies key moments where dialectics and relativism influenced the poet’s intellectual and artistic pursuits.

W. H. Auden once quipped that “T. S. Eliot is not a single figure, but a household.” Brooker, similarly, notes that there are several specters of Eliot known to the reader – a poet, a critic, and a philosopher. In her first chapter, based on her analysis of his dualism, Brooker introduces him as the ‘conflicted idealist’. His resonance with symbolist movement is shown from the scope of its connection to the clash between idealism and materialism.

As a general principle, Eliot noted that artists cannot be judged in isolation: “You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.” In her third and fourth chapters, Brooker associates Eliot’s dialectical and relativist outlooks with F. H. Bradley and J. G. Frazer – the former being an example of the dialectical imagination and the latter of relativism. Bradley’s influence is analyzed through Eliot’s weekly papers on epistemology for his Oxford tutor, his PhD dissertation, and the poetry he wrote while studying philosophy at Harvard and Oxford. After extensive discussion of “O little voices”, Brooker interestingly points out that Eliot doesn’t merely employ Bradley’s *Appearance and Reality* as a reference – instead, he engages in a debate with him on dualistic theories. Through commentaries on his dissertation, it is made even clearer that *Appearance and Reality* left a significant mark on Eliot’s imagination.

In the fourth chapter, Brooker closely explores “The Interpretation of Primitive Ritual” as a paradigm for the structure of *The Waste Land*. She points out concepts of

'internal' and 'external' interpretations, defined as interpretations by voices inside the poem and those made by the reader. Brooker also underscores the importance of E. B. Tylor's term 'survival,' defined as fragments which survive into a later period, for the poet's perception of facts. Frazer's influence is also analyzed, especially his principle of "description without explanation"(65). These fragments are usefully classified as 1) allusions, 2) translations, and 3) 'survivals'. Brooker analyzes them by providing remarkable, lucid examples from his poetry and concludes that Eliot often incorporated both survivals and allusions in his poetic frame "as a way of establishing a dialectical relationship between the past and present" (67).

In chapter five, Brooker offers a remarkably insightful account of idealism's durable and central nature in Eliot's work. She traces the poet's famous notion of impersonality back to his idealistic perspectives while closely analyzing this concept from his criticism of Pound, Joyce, Conrad, and Yeats. Brooker uses four principles to elucidate the poet's early criticism: The first principle, finding likeness in non-identical objects, is connected to idealism. She notes that "realists focus on difference, on analysis; idealists on likeness, on synthesis"(76). The second principle is that all fragmentation leads to one 'whole' and the 'whole' is always ideal. The third principle is that everything is interconnected in the 'whole'. The concluding, fourth, principle is depersonalization, which Brooker considers as an integral source for understanding Eliot's early criticism and his notion of tradition. The spatiotemporal construct creates a dialectic process. If continuous dialectical movement can include and also transcend opposites, 'Self-annihilation' is a part of that movement, yet Brooker notes that it must not be understood as a termination in itself, but as a way for fully realizing the self in writing.

Chapter six is dedicated to an exploration of the composition of "The Hollow Men", especially its various epigraphs and late additions which, as Brooker explains, are associated with the poet's deepening realization of the inadequacy of his philosophical solutions. Eliot's disillusionment is better understood when we take into account his comments on the juxtaposition of Dante's and Dostoevsky's dualities. In the discussion of the epigraph from *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad suggests the inherent duality of civilization. According to Brooker, the famous line "exterminate the brutes" is identified with Kurtz's idealism. In her discussion of *Julius Caesar*, Brooker continues her analysis of the idealist perspective by exploring the character of Brutus. In the following two chapters, Brooker associates the despair evident in *The Hollow Men* with Cartesian dualism, Dante, Lancelot Andrewes, and Pascal – all emphasizing Eliot's progress, both ideologically and artistically.

Chapter ten has a fascinating frame, a symbolic juxtaposition created by the thrush ("singing through the fog" and "calling through the fog") that intensifies both the theme of exile and duality of worlds. The poet first feels exiled from America and then, in the climactic ending of Little Gidding, from Eden. Brooker connects the symbolism of the bird not only to *Marina*, but also to *Ash Wednesday* where it is associated with the idealization of Emily Hale and desire of youth. The chapter continues by recounting Eliot's return to the U.S. and his reunion with Hale. The resurfacing of his inability to choose between

dualities is especially interesting - exemplified by analysis of his early poetry, his King's College speech ("Two Masters"), his fascination with *Inferno III*, and his 1930 essay on Baudelaire. Following this discussion of "choosing between two masters", Brooker identifies possibility of his reluctance to never marrying Hale. Her insightful analyses of the thrush symbol culminates in the discussion of garden scene of *Burnt Norton* - "shall we follow the deception of the thrush?" - a passage in which the stress exemplifies a deceptive world created by memory and desire. Eliot's attempt to "redeem the time" is reimagined in spiritual context: if there is a memory in time of a moment outside of time, then there is also a possibility to redeem it.

The analysis of Eliot's dialectical imagination culminates in the last two chapters. Brooker scrutinizes the dialectical structure of *Little Gidding* where it is evident that Eliot came to perceive disjunction between history and faith as an aspect of art, admitting the inadequacy of philosophical theodicy and accepting the transcendence from the language. The *Little Gidding* rose with petals of flame is analyzed as the dialectical image that ends the loop that started from 1914 philosophical papers. The symbol of rose of flames serves as a culmination of Brooker's argument. Considering the three stages of Eliot's artistic life - disjunction, ambivalence, and transcendence, one can see that the dialectical principle is best illustrated at the third where through unification of flesh and spirit in the Incarnation. The first (personal) and second (impersonal) phases overlap, all of them including and at the same time transcending previous ones. Brooker shows that significant events and influences in the poet's personal life, including his graduate work at Harvard, chaotic period of war and marriage, and conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, are interventions which reveal how the two guiding principles of dialectics and relativism form an ever-evolving instrument for his poetic fabric.

Starting with *Prufrock and Other Observations* and ending with *Four Quartets*, this book is many things, but undoubtedly it is a true feast of reading for any Eliot scholar. By demonstrating how the poet's diverse influences and readings fed into the development of his poetry, Brooker offers a meticulous study which is not only a lucid guide to Eliot's intellectual biography, but also a superb example of vibrant critical prose, which, despite having multidimensional scope, is consistent in both clarity and depth of literary exploration.

In the very first chapter of the book, Brooker emphasizes Gauguin and particularly his *Le Christ jaune (The Yellow Christ)* as an important part of Eliot's artistic development. His fascination with the painting is explained in terms of the decontextualized, dialectical nature of the image "that conveys the reality of two worlds, one that is here and now and another that is timeless" (18). We also read that after returning to the States from Paris in 1911, the poet brought along only one "souvenir": this iconic Gauguin print and for years he faced it over his morning coffee. Based on this repeated exposure to the print, Brooker maintains that it contributed to his developing aesthetic. Similarly, the same image, which is the frontispiece of Brooker's book, crowned by her illuminating study, will serve the

very function for Eliot scholars; the difference is that we will marvel at it on our bookshelves and not in his room on Ash Street.

In the wake of more archival material becoming available for scholars, Brooker correctly points out that "we are in the dawn of a renaissance in Eliot studies" (3). Indeed, this book breaks new ground and will serve as an illuminator of Eliot's dualism in the realms of ideas for any reader who desires to revisit the most crucial poet of the twentieth century.

ლიზა ძაგნიძე
(საქართველო)

რეცენზია. ჯუელ სპეარს ბრუკერი,
„ტ.ს. ელიოტის დიალექტიკური წარმოსახვა“

რეზიუმე

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ჯუელ სპეარს ბრუკერი, ტომას ელიოტი, მონოგრაფია.

პროფესორ ჯუელ სპეარს ბრუკერს თავისი კარიერის განმავლობაში არა ერთი შესანიშნავი მონოგრაფია მიუძღვნია ლიტერატურული მოდერნიზმისა და კერძოდ, ცნობილი პოეტისა და კრიტიკოსის ტომას ელიოტის შემოქმედებისათვის. ბრუკერის ბოლო მონოგრაფია „ტ.ს. ელიოტის დიალექტიკური წარმოსახვა“ მრავალი წლის კვლევითი გამოცდილების შედეგია, რომლის მნიშვნელობის გადაჭარბებული შეფასება შეუძლებელია. წიგნი წარმოადგენს ერთგვარ შეჯამებას ყველა იმ მნიშვნელოვანი თვალსაზრისისა, რომელიც წარმოდგენილია თანამედროვე ელიოტისტიკაში.

ბრუკერი ქრონოლოგიურად აანალიზებს ელიოტის წარმოსახვის ფორმირების პროცესს და მას უპირისპირებს ორ განმსაზღვრელ პრინციპს, დიალექტიკასა და რელატივიზმს. წიგნის თერთმეტი თავიდან თითოეულში თანმიმდევრულად არის განხილული ის ძირითადი მომენტები, რომლებშიც ჩანს დიალექტიკისა და რელატივიზმის გავლენა ელიოტის ინტელექტუალურ და მხატვრულ მისწრაფებებზე.

წიგნში საგანგებოდ არის ხაზგასმული ახალი საარქივო მასალების ხელმისაწვდომობა. ბრუკერი მართებულად აღნიშნავს, რომ „დღეს ჩვენ ელიოტის კვლევის აღორძინების ხანაში ვიმყოფებით“. მართლაც, მისი მონოგრაფია ახალ ნიადაგს ქმნის მომავალი კვლევისთვის და ნათელს ფენს ელიოტის მსოფლმხედველობას ნებისმიერი მკითხველისთვის, რომელიც მე-20 საუკუნის ამ უმნიშვნელოვანესი პოეტის სიღრმისეულ შესწავლას ან თუნდაც სახელდახელო გაცნობას მოისურვებს.