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Eliot Society Abstract

“You Cannot Value Him Alone”: *The Waste Land* in its Magazine Context

A review in the *Times Literary Supplement* published shortly after the appearance of the first number of the *Criterion* concludes by asking, “What literary school, then, does this new quarterly represent?” Having highlighted the diverse contributions of T. S. Eliot, May Sinclair, Thomas Sturge Moore, and George Saintsbury, the reviewer reflects that, obviously, no such literary school exists: “It becomes apparent that the only school represented is the school of those who are genuinely interested in good literature.” Jason Harding’s recent work on the *Criterion* echoes this sense of heterogeneity, characterizing the first issue as an “eclectic mixture of modernist provocation and polite reassurance.” It is difficult to see past the eclecticism of an issue pairing May Sinclair’s conventional ghost story “The Victim” with *The Waste Land*, but by emphasizing the *Criterion*’s heterogeneity we risk overlooking ways in which it teaches us how to read Eliot’s poem. More than an eclectic collection representing the school of good literature, the first number serves as a platform for *The Waste Land* in which each contribution not only enhances the poem’s cultural prestige, but also illuminates aspects of its design. Although the appearance of *The Waste Land* in the *Criterion* is not prefaced by a manifesto that could explicate the philosophy behind its construction, Eliot made certain that the articles accompanying his poem in publication supported a modernist aesthetic valuing tradition, difficulty, and fragmentation. While these qualities do not necessarily represent essential aspects of Eliot’s work, they do represent the manner in which he wished to be perceived at this crucial point in his career.