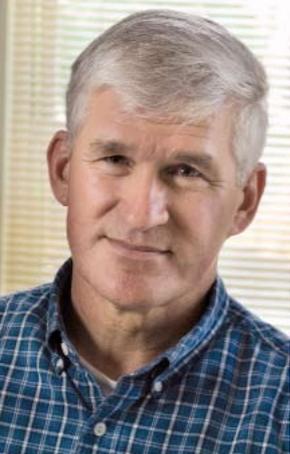


to sustain our penchant for consumption. As households, we need to begin saving again. Those are the sorts of things that I think are required. And to the extent that freedom is more or less synonymous with a compulsion to consume, to the extent that we continue to think that's really what we value in American life, then it seems almost impossible to learn to live within our means.

To the extent that people would be willing to embrace a different understanding of freedom — not one in which we would all move into the desert and live like hermits, but a definition in which consumption is no longer the central value — then it might become possible to generate political support for sacrifice. But even as I say that, it's obvious that some kind of wholesale reconsideration of our culture would be required first, and I can't say that that seems to me to be in the cards anytime soon.

Andrew Bacevich



President-elect Barack Obama has promised a culture change in Washington. But you think it's unlikely that new leadership will be able to put America back on track?

President Obama will face enormous constraints. The federal deficit for the current fiscal year is expected to be upwards of a trillion dollars. That alone, it seems to me, is going to impose real limits

on his ability to make good on his promise to change the way Washington works.

Furthermore, an important legacy of the Bush administration has been to demonstrate how much more limited American power is than we imagined in the heady aftermath of the Cold War, while also damaging America's standing and reputation in the world. And in that regard, it seems to me that rather than embarking upon any great decisive foreign policy initiatives, President Obama is going to have to attend primarily to repairing the wreckage left by his predecessor.

Editing Eliot ///

Christopher Ricks relishes the sound of the words as much as their meaning

BY NATALIE JACOBSON MCCrackEN

It takes erudition to understand T. S. Eliot's poems, but, says literary critic and Eliot expert Christopher Ricks, it is also important to stop sometimes and hear the music.

Ricks, BU's William M. and Sara B. Warren Professor of the Humanities and codirector of the Editorial Institute at Boston University, is editing, with Jim McCue, the first complete critical edition of Eliot's poems, to be published by Johns Hopkins University Press in America and Faber & Faber in Britain.

Ricks is author of *T. S. Eliot and Anti-Semitism* and editor of *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, a volume of previously unpublished Eliot poems, among many books.

He spoke with *Bostonia* about editing Eliot.

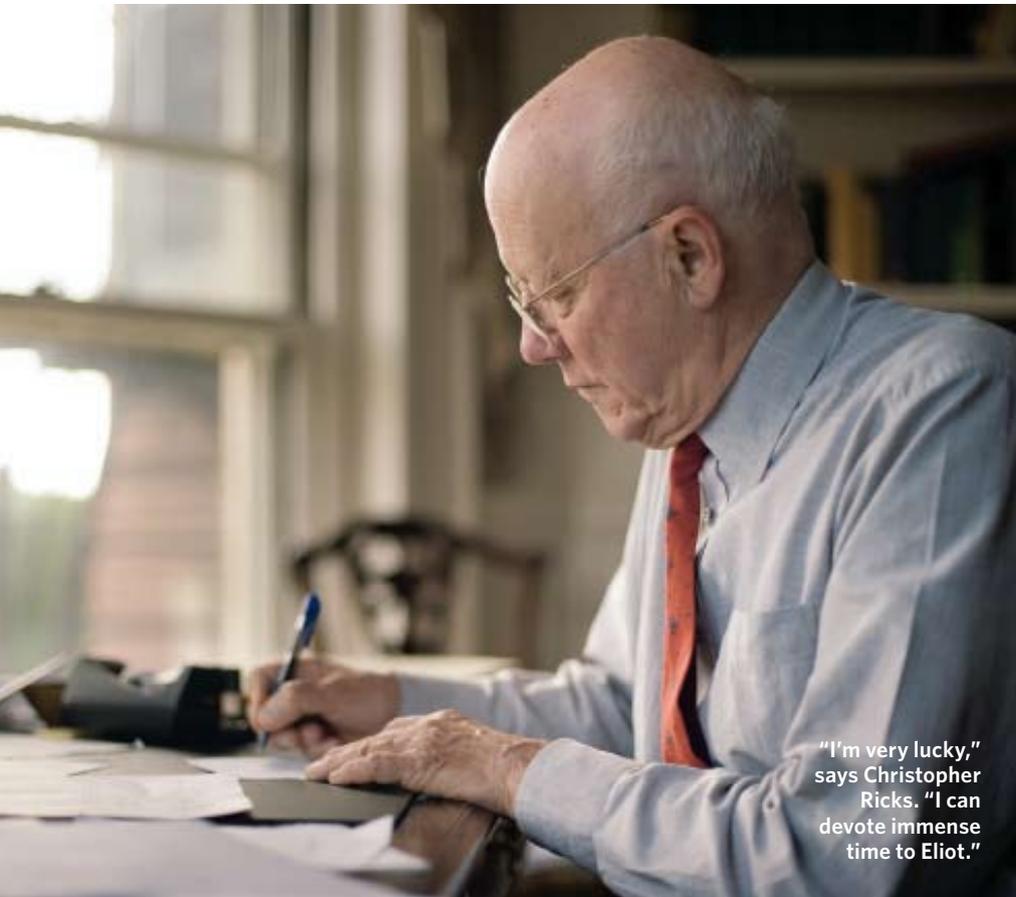
We all know what editing fiction and nonfiction means. What does it mean to edit poems?

It depends how fully you do the editing. When I was editing Eliot's early, unpublished poems, a friend who's a literary agent assumed that all I had to do was copy them out, photocopy them, and send that to the publisher.

First, there's much textual work that needs to be done to establish a truly correct text of the poems themselves, to trace all the prepublication materials — jottings, manuscripts, possible illustrations, things of that kind.

And there's an even larger body of contextual material that a reader in the twenty-first century needs — annotation, in terms of classical and other kinds of literary allusion and of the social world. I found myself annotating the phrase "department store," not because nobody would know what it means, but because they ought to know that at the time Eliot wrote these poems people put it in quotation marks. It's a strange term. Does a department store sell departments in the way a hardware store sells hardware?

So there are all the contextual worlds. And there's the world of Eliot's theological and religious understanding, the world of his political convictions, and the world of other poems with which his poems would often be in some sort of conversation, which he loved doing — for instance at the start of "The Wasteland," saying, "April is the cruelest month."



"I'm very lucky," says Christopher Ricks. "I can devote immense time to Eliot."

announcing that it has a different standing from what's around it. I prefer leaving out the apostrophe.

Shakespeare aside, I think Eliot is the poet people most often quote — "Let us go then, you and I," "This is the way the world ends" — without remembering the precise context. But critics (present company aside) show almost no interest in the sound. Is it impossible to enjoy both difficult meaning and the music?

I think it's perfectly possible. I think we lack a language for describing sound very well. You know these descriptions of what Caruso sounded like? Vocalization is exceptionally difficult to describe. I believe in analysis, but I think you've then got to go back, to synthesize the poem by reading it.

Isn't the pleasure of reading poetry aloud now much neglected? I think that children should memorize and recite Tennyson and

Contrary to how Browning started a poem — "Oh, to be in England now that April's there."

Exactly.

Will all that annotation dominate the poetry?

Our edition will be two volumes, with the poems essentially all in volume one. Jim and I are both very against using textual and editorial apparatus to tell people how to read poems. I'm not against essays that suggest how to read poems, but the editor should give you the material separately rather than suggest an interpretation in the poem.

The poems will be exactly as Eliot wished, though improving the text because there were some very bad printing errors. Very extraordinary, given that he was the publisher, as it were. Eliot was not a good proofreader of his own work. There are repeated mistakes that are a consequence of, for instance, a break between one bit of the poem and the next having been lost because it fell at the foot of a page. The error would be clear for a poem composed in quatrains, for instance, but not in units like those in "Ash Wednesday." Jim McCue is very persuasive that a line of "Hollow Men" has been missing since it got into a volume.

One major textual question is whether there will be an apostrophe in "Hurry up please its time." Of course there should be an apostrophe to be grammatically correct, but Eliot prints it without. It is in fact better without an apostrophe because that's more illiterate, less literate. "Hurry up please its time." [Ricks adopts the accent of a working-class Londoner.] It's all in capital letters, so it's

Kipling, for instance, before they're old enough to be cynical about them.

Eliot loved Tennyson. He mocked Tennyson; he said Tennyson had a large, dull brain like a farmhouse clock. Farmhouse clocks are wonderful: they're sort of beautiful and they're so sensible and the opposite of digital trickery and so on. He loved Tennyson, and he never forgot how much. There is such charm in mere words, cunning locutions, and the voice ringing. Once a year in the College of Arts & Sciences Core Curriculum, we have a very good evening with people simply choosing a poem or two that they like and reading it aloud. You let the poem speak for itself, or rather, you let your speaking of the poem speak for itself. I vary it a bit, but if I take "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," there's no doubt that everybody is thrilled, as I am myself, by the haunting cadences, these unignorable insinuations through the sound.

There's a beautiful remark of Eliot's that genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood. It's also true that nobody could hold in his or her head and heart all the suggestions and all the kinds of amazing information that's in a great poem. I'm very lucky. I can devote immense time to Eliot. But my brother loved poems, and since he never had the duty to say anything about any of them, he was able to love them with a kind of freedom and purity that those of us who teach poems and write about them haven't actually got. We've got something else instead. It's a little like the fruits of autumn as against the blossoms of spring. You can't live in two seasons. ■