

OVER THE TRANSOM

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When Swinburne died in April 1909, W.B. Yeats recognized his own position of ascendancy, proclaiming himself now as the new “king of the cats.” Thirty years later when Yeats died, T.S. Eliot shared a similar recognition, explaining in the first annual Yeats lecture that “the generations of poetry in our age” last about twenty years “before a new school or style of poetry appears.” Eliot identified the early Yeats of the Victorian era as “a younger member” of the Pre-Raphaelites, and empathized that “the weight of the pre-Raphaelite prestige must have been tremendous.” Hence he well understood the sense of relief Yeats had expressed in 1909. Eliot clarified his principle of the twenty-year generational cycle by identifying his own position among the cats: “By the time a man is fifty, he has behind him a kind of poetry written by men of seventy, and before him another kind of poetry written by men of thirty. This is my own position at present.” More than fifty years later the poet Les Murray, with a sigh of resignation, told me that if we are lucky we can stay in fashion for a decade before we slide into obsolescence.

Thirty, twenty, ten: through its communal nature, a journal can escape this fate. Most journals are like *The Germ*, *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, *The Yellow Book*, and *The Savoy*: they last less than a year or so. But the successful journal becomes institutional in a Ruskinian sense of the word: like a Gothic cathedral, a journal is dependent upon the communal effort of successive generations. My Yeats and Eliot quotations above are cited from an article by Joanne Seltzer – “The King of the Cats: Yeats and Eliot” – published thirty years ago in the first issue of our journal. When Francis Golffing founded the journal in 1977, which he called *The Pre-Raphaelite Review* until 1980, its printing technology was based on a pica typewriter and the critical pedagogy was old historicist and pre-poststructuralist. Golffing introduced the new interdisciplinary journal with a brief “Editorial Statement” identifying a utopian

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