

# Time Present

The Newsletter of the International T. S. Eliot Society

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## The Eliot - Hale Archive: First Readings

*This issue of Time Present devotes a considerable amount of space to Emily Hale and to T. S. Eliot's letters to her. You'll find here the initial responses of six readers fortunate enough to have spent time with the archive before it was temporarily closed, along with so much else, due to the coronavirus. (Virus-related closures are also responsible for making this our first electronic-only edition of Time Present.) You'll also find in this issue an interview with Sally Foss, the daughter of Mary Walker Foss, a lifelong friend of Emily Hale. Mary and Emily were so close, Ms. Foss tells us, that they were more like sisters. Ms. Foss provides us with a vivid memory of a day spent with Hale and Eliot as well as an account of Hale that helps to give us a richer, less Eliot-centered sense of this woman who compelled so much of Eliot's imagination for so many years and who continues to compel our own.*

### I. "After such knowledge..."

John Whittier-Ferguson  
University of Michigan

The unsealing of the letters from T. S. Eliot to Emily Hale is the most significant event to take place in modernism's archives since well before I started working in this field and exploring special collections. And it takes no time at all to recognize the collection's importance, as Frances Dickey reported to us in the third entry of her [invaluable blog](#), posted on the evening of the day Hale's boxes were unsealed, the 2nd of January. The first letter from Eliot to Hale (3 October 1930) so quickly unspools its declarations of regret and love, so nakedly discloses its revelations connecting the man who suffers, the mind which creates, and the supplicant who confesses in the Anglo-Catholic church that, mid-letter, stunned, I stopped reading, stopped transcribing: oh, it was going to be like this, my mere week with these boxes? And there are some 1100 of these letters? Ron Schuchard and, most extensively, Lyndall Gordon had told us how central Hale was to Eliot's life and writing; few critics who attend to biographical matters are privileged to have their prescience so publicly, explicitly rewarded. But here was Eliot himself, thrust from the wings to the proscenium by Hale's bequest of these letters to Princeton, come back to tell Hale again—here, now, always—in these saved pages (and now to tell us, too) all.

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## A Conversation with Sally Foss about Emily Hale

By Susan Stewart and Joshua Kotin  
Princeton University

*The release of T. S. Eliot's letters to Emily Hale by Princeton University's Firestone Library in January 2020 was greeted with great interest from both Eliot scholars and the international press. Faculty in the English Department at Princeton were barraged by queries. One query was from David and Susan Julien Foss, the nephew and niece of Sally Foss, a ninety-six-year-old resident of Vermont. The Fosses explained that their aunt had vivid memories of Eliot and Hale together and asked if we would like to talk to her. On January 15, we interviewed Ms. Foss by telephone from a Princeton sound studio. Ms. Foss, so far as we know the only living witness to Eliot's visits with Hale, had many memories of Eliot and Hale and a rich, first-hand knowledge of Hale as a person. The interview was transcribed by Andrew Ferris and has been edited for clarity and brevity. The full audio recording of the interview is available from Special Collections, Firestone Library at Princeton University.*

**Sally Foss:** I knew Emily very well. She was a very, very, very close—probably the closest—friend of my mother. They went to school together as teenagers at Miss Porter's School, referred to as MPS, in Farmington, Connecticut. They both were in the drama group, and they did a lot of things together. They kept up over the years, and that's how I got to know her.

I grew up in Concord, Mass. And that's where Emily came to visit with us, off and on. She just appeared, and she'd stay for a week or a month, or, you know, off-and-on. And she was like a sister, you might say, for my mother. Eventually, she came to stay at the Concord Colonial Inn, where she died, and I went to see her very often, because it was right in the middle of town. And she showed me all the books that she had of T. S. Eliot's and we talked about the poems, not her part of writing back and forth to him and him to her. There were about three or four poems that I particularly liked that we had read together and we just talked about them. Not to criticize them exactly, but just to understand them and how they got written.

She hardly ever talked about Eliot specifically, personally. I just knew that she knew him way back

when she was young, living in Cambridge. Her father was a minister there, in Cambridge. I never met him; I know little about him. I know her mother was sick for a long time and not discussed in any detail except that she was not well and in some kind of a sanatorium.

I also met Emily at a number of different times—probably four or five different times—in England. I can't think of the name of the town she used to live in—Chipping Campden. I never met him there.

**Interviewers:** You once spent the day with Hale and Eliot?

**Foss:** Emily was in a play in Dorset, Vermont in 1946, in July. She was with a New York theater company—don't know the name of it—but they had an annual presentation in Dorset Playhouse. She was in *Blithe Spirit*. Emily called my mother and asked her if she would like to come up and see the play with her in it. And also bring Thomas Eliot with us—"us" meaning my mother and me and Mrs. Williams, a very close friend of my mother's, who knew Emily. None of us had ever really met him. And so, that's what happened. I can fill you in with a very interesting kind of fun conversation that I had with Tom on the phone, because Emily said, "well, I've asked him to come and I'm going to call you and ask if you would drive up and pick him up, in Cambridge, and then drive up and so forth." I had said, "well that sounds interesting. But I'm a little anxious about driving around Cambridge. I happen to know it a little bit—not well. It's an old town and lots of curvy roads and one-way streets you can't go left because it's one way or the other way." That kind of thing. So, Emily said to me, "would you be good enough to call him?" I said sure, and so I did. We chatted a little bit, I explained who I was—a friend of Emily's—and about my mother. He knew about my mother, but I don't think they'd ever met. So I said would he be good enough to get the train to Concord and I'd pick him up at the railroad station. That would be a lot easier for me because Saturday morning is kind of a rough time for me to get things done. That's what happened. I said, "Well, it's a picnic; do you have any special choices of food? Do you like sandwiches or salads or soup or what?" He said: "Oh well, peanut butter and jelly would be just fine." And I said, "Do you like bananas, apples, or something else? Chocolate? What else would you like? Ice cream? I can't carry that very well, because I don't have a refrigerator thing." He

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## ANNUAL MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

### International T. S. Eliot Society 41st Annual Meeting

Cambridge and Gloucester, Massachusetts  
October 1-3, 2020

#### *Conference Venue and Back-Up Plans*

*We are aware of the precarious nature of all such plans, given the cancellations forced upon us by the coronavirus. We will continue to plan hopefully for the future and also to reevaluate those plans as we move closer toward the fall. Expect updates and more current information about our Annual Meeting in the summer issue of Time Present and on the Society's website. We are also beginning to plan for mounting our annual conference in a virtual (online) form, should that become necessary.*

#### Call for Papers

The Society invites proposals for papers to be presented at our annual meeting, this year held at Harvard University, Cambridge, and Gloucester, Massachusetts, Oct. 1-3, 2020 (Thursday to Saturday). Clearly organized proposals of about 300 words, submitted as Word or PDF documents, on any topic reasonably related to Eliot, along with brief biographical sketches, should be emailed by June 1, 2020, to [teliotsociety@gmail.com](mailto:teliotsociety@gmail.com), with the subject heading "Conference Proposal."

Each year the Society presents the Fathman Young Scholar Award to the best paper given by a new Eliot scholar. Graduate students and recent PhDs are eligible (degree received in 2016 or later for those not yet employed in a tenure-track position; 2018 or later for those holding a tenure-track position). If you are eligible for the award, please mention this fact in your submission. The award, which includes a monetary prize, will be announced at the final session of the meeting.

#### Memorial Lecturer:

#### Robert von Hallberg

We are pleased to present as our memorial lecturer Robert von Hallberg, whose lecture "Intellectual Eloquence: *Four Quartets*" will address the ways in which Eliot's late masterpiece resists the doctrines of Anglo-American modernism and exploits the stylistic resources of intellectual prose. Von Hallberg will explore why Eliot might have cultivated these changes for the last phase of his poetic career, and whether modernist techniques had been exhausted or the public sphere had demonstrated unforeseen needs.

Von Hallberg's first book was *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art* (Harvard, 1978), in which he made the case that, from about 1945 to 1960, Olson was drawn to a variety of intellectual, even didactic poetry. Von Hallberg then published *American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980* (Harvard, 1985) arguing that poets as different from one another as Robert Lowell and Ed Dorn felt the allure of mainstream U.S. culture. His next volume was less thesis-driven: a survey of U.S. poetry for volume 8 of the *Cambridge History of American Literature*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch (1996). He then wrote a book about poetry in general, *Lyric Powers* (Chicago, 2008). His most recent book is on film noir: *From The Maltese Falcon to Body of Lies: Spies, Noirs, and Trust* (New Mexico, 2015). He has recently completed a study of love poetry and popular song. He has also edited several volumes, beginning with *Canons* (Chicago, 1984), and he and Robert Faggen have collected two volumes of new critical essays, *Evaluations: U.S. Poetry since 1950*, that are forthcoming from New Mexico in 2021. With Lawrence Rainey, von Hallberg founded and co-edited the journal *Modernism/modernity*.

#### Peer Seminars

The peer seminar format offers the opportunity to share your work in a more in-depth way with a group of participants who share your interests. Participants will pre-circulate short position papers (5 pages) by September 1; peer seminars will meet to discuss the pre-circulated papers for two hours on the first day of the 2020 Society

## ANNUAL MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

conference, Thursday, October 1. Membership in each peer seminar is limited to twelve on a first-come, first-served basis. Please enroll by July 15, by sending an email with the subject line “peer seminar” to [tseliotsociety@gmail.com](mailto:tseliotsociety@gmail.com) with your contact information.

The Society will award a prize, sponsored by *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, to the best seminar paper presented by an early-career scholar. Graduate students and recent PhDs who attend a seminar are eligible (degree received in 2016 or later for those not yet employed in a tenure-track position; 2018 or later for those holding a tenure-track position). For consideration, papers must be submitted as Word or PDF documents attachments to [tseliotsociety@gmail.com](mailto:tseliotsociety@gmail.com) by September 1 with the subject line “Seminar Prize Submission.” The winning paper will present original research and a persuasive argument in clear and fluent prose; it will also respect the length requirements of a typical position paper (5 pages double-spaced). The winner will receive a monetary prize and a copy of the following year’s *Annual*.

### Peer Seminar 1: Eliot and Racial Others

Led by Anita Patterson, Boston University

This seminar will consider representations of race and prejudices in Eliot’s poetry, as well as revisionary engagements with his work in postcolonial and African diasporic literatures. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. refers to Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” in order to explain Ralph Ellison’s conception of a literary “ancestor” as a writer who provides model texts for revision. Gates here calls attention to how Black writers seek to place their works in a larger tradition. Does our awareness of *The Waste Land* as a model text for revision in works by poets such as Robert Hayden, Rita Dove, and Derek Walcott change the way we read Eliot, and if so, how? Other possible topics might include, for example, Harlem Renaissance appropriations of Eliot; Eliot, jazz, and vaudeville theatre; sources of resistance to Eliot’s influence; Eliot and anti-Semitism; Eliot and 19th-century ethnographic constructions of race; and fresh takes on Eliot and race inspired by the new critical editions of his work.

Anita Patterson is Professor of English and American Studies at Boston University. She is the author of *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms* and *From Emerson to King: Democracy, Race, and the Politics of Protest*, and has published on modernism and American studies, transnationalism, and cross-racial dialogue in journals such as *American Literary History*, *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual*, *Modern Language Quarterly*, *African American Review*, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Nanzan Review of American Studies*, *Review of International American Studies*, *Rivista di Studi Americani*, and *Souffle de Perse*.

### Peer Seminar 2: Eliot and the Avant-Garde

Led by Vincent Sherry, Washington University in St. Louis

This seminar will consider Eliot’s relationship to the avant-garde. Some major touchstones for framing Eliot’s place in the movement would include Marjorie Perloff’s construction of early Eliot as avant-garde poet in her recent *21st Century Modernism*, and Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Do those constructions warrant revisiting in light of 21st-century poetry and poetics or later 20th-century elaborations? This seminar welcomes historically informed understandings of early 20th-century avant-garde poetry and poetics, especially the ways in which Eliot’s poetry responds to those available models. Other possible topics might include, for example: Eliot’s appearance in *BLAST*; consideration of the longevity of the avant-garde impulse—at whatever strength it first registers; consideration of what happens to the avant-garde in the Great War, and what accordingly happens to Eliot’s avant-garde impulse; assessments of how Eliot’s poetry informs or adjusts our own historical understanding of the avant-garde; and points of contact between Eliot and other avant-garde writers and artists.

Vincent Sherry is the Howard Nemerov Professor in the Humanities and Professor and Chair in the Department of English at Washington University in St. Louis, where he teaches and writes about modernist literature. His books include *The Uncommon Tongue: The Poetry and Criticism of Geoffrey Hill* (1987); *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Radical Modernism* (1993); *Joyce’s Ulysses* (1995); *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003); and *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2015). He is the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War* (2005) and the *Cambridge History of Modernism* (2017). He is currently writing *A Literary History of The European War of 1914-1918*.

## I. “After such knowledge...”

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Or not quite all, not quite everything, and for that we should be grateful. The manifold revelations of this archive force us to consider how we are to return to Eliot’s poetry and plays after reading this correspondence. How, after this novel supervention, are we to approach the existing order of Eliot’s writing, not only because of the detailed, direct, autobiographical notes he provides for Hale about particular poems, but also because of the disturbing trajectory of the relationship from its beginning to its end: the letters tell a story that, at least as I read them, does not finally reflect well on Eliot.

In this gathering of first-responses from some of the earliest readers in the archive, you will find records of astonishment at the intimacies created by and described in these letters; celebrations of Eliot’s lyricism; sympathy for these lovers’ solitudes; disappointment at Eliot’s equivocations and evasions; anger at those moments between 1930 and 1947 when Hale compels the poet’s imagination for poetry and drama and is left bruised after the alchemy of creation has been accomplished; musings on the unfolding nature of this intense, doomed relationship (spending days with the letters feels like being caught up in a one-sided epistolary novel). Our essayists also offer powerful new readings of the Eliot we thought we knew and understood, showing, with license from Eliot himself, the personal roots that bind his private life to his published works and teaching us new ways of thinking about *The Waste Land*, *Ash-Wednesday*, *The Family Reunion*, the *Quartets*.

And yet as I read Eliot’s explanations to Hale of who the real Marie was, or where Mr. Silvero sprang from, or precisely what feeling the poet was trying to convey in that impossibly tangled cluster of images that opens *Burnt Norton II*, or what line in *Burnt Norton* he singles out as one of his favorites (“The crying shadow in the funeral dance”), I recalled a caution from one of the pioneering students of modernist archives. In *The Art of James Joyce* (Oxford, 1961), Walt Litz showed us how an author’s famous obscurities can be illuminated by recourse to notes and drafts and unpublished writings, but he also cautioned, in the “Preface” to that study: “But somehow the controlling design

that I sought eluded me, and I have long since relinquished the comforting belief that access to an author’s workshop provides insights of greater authority than those produced by other kinds of criticism.” (We readers of the Eliot-Hale archive should include letters, especially those letters that address Eliot’s writings, in that workshop.)

When we’re looking over Hale’s shoulder, we come regularly across the kinds of keys from an author that scholars of unpublished material dream of discovering, and yet we should not forget that these are love letters and that their recipient is a woman with whom Eliot has a dizzyingly complicated relationship, a partner whose love sustains him emotionally and enables him to write poetry after a long dry spell. Theirs is a bond strained but also sustained by prolonged absences, compounded, from Eliot’s record, of utterly earnest attachment, waxing and waning love, the novelties of reciprocated eros, but also marred by guilt, by evasions, by theological rigidities, moral compromises, disingenuousness, protestations that don’t ring true even as they also demand that we at least try to read charitably, remembering that were we to record and to review three decades of our most intimate attachments in similar detail, we might not be pleased with everything we found.

Eliot’s gift to Hale of private access in the form of glosses to his poetry is, among other things, a lover’s prerogative. Telling Hale that she is *Ash-Wednesday*’s first audience and only perfect reader (3 October 1930); that for “we” she alone should read “I” in the first response to *The Waste Land*’s thunder (“what have [I] given? / My friend, blood shaking my heart”) (3 November 1930); that these letters are his most important writing (12 January 1931); that he writes first and always for her (3 November 1930); that I. A. Richards knows less about Eliot than she does (14 April 1931); that *Burnt Norton* is not his poem but “our poem” or, rather, “our first poem” (14 January 1936)—there is much beyond the purely personal that we can and should make of these comments. The letters contain a stunning set of revelations about the poet’s work, but they remain not quite the last word on each poem. It’s important to keep in mind the audience for Eliot’s keys; they remain also a lover’s whispered secrets, a private garland of insider’s knowledge.

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## The Storied Past of *Time Present*

By Martin Lockerd  
Shreiner University

I feel a special connection with *Time Present*—not because of my occasional contributions to the newsletter, nor because my father, Benjamin Lockerd, served as editor for three years, but because it and I entered the world simultaneously, in the spring of 1987. We two children of the Reagan administration have come far in thirty-three years. If writing a retrospective about me, I assume that *Time Present* would immediately focus on what has changed over the years: acquisition of speech, the footlong mohawk phase, procreation. Looking into the archives of my Rushdian twin, I find myself initially struck by how much has remained the same. Let us consider those juvenile issues alongside more mature numbers to see what they share.

One, *Time Present* has, since its earliest days, maintained an *idée fixe*: the number 100. The newsletter never ceases providing helpful reminders of another centenary. In its very first number, *Time*

*Present* treated such commemorative observances with something verging on millenarian fervor: “The sheer imminence of Eliot’s birth Centenary, 1988, would daunt us no doubt if we had not strenuously expected the Celebration” (1:1987). Having survived this initial event undaunted, *Time Present* went on to celebrate various other centenaries. In 2016, the centenary addiction entered a new phase, and the “Centennial Focus” section was born. Since then, each issue has documented some important, hundred-year-old happening in Tom’s life. It’s fascinating reading, but we can only wonder how *Time Present* will satisfy its century complex after 2065. NB: It is not lost on me that my serial twin is now realizing its fixation through me by having me mark its 100th number with a retrospective.

Two, *Time Present* consistently reports on the doings of the annual meeting of the T. S. Eliot Society, though here we find a hint of difference and evolution over the years. Notably, the titles of papers have become, in many cases, both more complex and less immediately understandable. Compare the concise and transparent “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” (2:1987) or “Love and Death in *The Waste Land*” (8:1989) to the lengthy and somewhat inscrutable “Hyacinth Girls and Uncanny

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## *Cats*, directed by Tom Hooper, screenplay by Tom Hooper and Lee Hall

Reviewed by Steven Cullinane  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Those who’ve read Eliot’s recently unsealed statement about the Emily Hale letters will know how acutely he anticipated a high-profile posthumous embarrassment to come about around the end of the 2010s. He must have hoped for some smokescreen to distract the public from any potentially mortifying revelations about his love life. It seems that wish was granted, in a grimly ironic way: the film version of *Cats* was released just two weeks prior to the Hale letters, and somewhere in the world a finger finally curled shut on a cursed monkey’s paw.

What sort of on-screen afterlife can an American modernist poet expect? Perhaps the best case scenario is something like Jim Jarmusch’s *Paterson*, a low-key dramedy that’s only loosely based on William Carlos Williams’ North Jersey epic. The worst case scenario is

being Ezra Pound and having your own poetry readings become the soundtrack to one of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s harrowing anti-fascist allegories. *Cats*, it’s safe to say, is the second worst—determine for yourself by how wide or narrow a margin. And if this is similarly an instance of adaptation-as-retribution, we can only imagine what grievance Tom Hooper had against Eliot.

Is there anyone who ought to direct a T. S. Eliot musical? The late Ken Russell, who adapted both *The Who’s Tommy* and D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, is perhaps the only filmmaker at the center of this hyper-specific Venn Diagram. Frankly, it’s difficult to imagine the ideal viewer for such a film. I imagine that even for many *Time Present* readers *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* is simply what you land on when meaning to flip to *Murder in the Cathedral* in the old collected works. None of us asked for this, and yet we’re all somehow implicated in it. Academic colleagues will offer little sympathy: one fellow graduate student even believes I was lying when I told him that T. S. Eliot was responsible for the existence of the Rum-Tum-Tigger. Try for yourself. Explain in depth, and find that every subsequent detail that you thought would corroborate the story only renders it more absurd: “No, really,

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## Compiled by David Chinitz

**Destiny.** In a recent interview, Ed Asner explained that Eliot was responsible for his acting career. As a University of Chicago freshman, he played Thomas Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*. “From that night on,” said Asner, “I knew I was destined to be an actor.” He then recited Becket’s famous speech (“Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain,” etc.), telling the interviewer, “It’s the only soliloquy I still retain. The verse is gorgeous. Some of the most beautiful lines ever written.” (Monica Kass Rogers, “Sunday Breakfast: Ed Asner,” *iwcdaily.com*, 29 Aug. 2019)

**Scuttling.** After showing a clip of President Trump speaking about the Mexican border wall, Stephen Colbert commented on *The Late Show*: “My mouth is dry, and my heart is just racing in a panic trying to follow that sentence. At this point I think he’s just reciting avant-garde poetry.” And then, mimicking Trump: “A wall is going up, it is new, old is down, and now a new wall in every place, and less and less, you know. I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the walls of silent wall.” Eliot was not mentioned by name, and *Newsweek* misidentified the excerpt as an example of “beat poetry.” (Brendan Cole, *newsweek.com*, 10 Apr. 2019)

**We grope together.** For *Death’s Dream Kingdom*, a new album from the record company Houndstooth, 26 electronic musicians were asked to create tracks inspired by Eliot’s phrase “In death’s dream kingdom” or, if they preferred, by the whole of *The Hollow Men*. Limited to 500 quadruple vinyl copies, the album includes “hand-drawn” “apocalyptic artwork” by the Rotterdam-based artist Jazz Szu-Ying Chen. An early review describes the album as “A work of pure desolation, an echo from a point of no return.” (*store.houndstoothlabel.com*, 1 Dec. 2018)

**Pretty lame.** In Season 5, Episode 1 of the Australian comedy *RAKE*, a character remarks, “This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a phone call.”

**Flickering.** Media reviewer Charlene Weisler compares traditional or “linear” TV to J. Alfred Prufrock: “I have seen Linear TV’s moment of greatness flicker.” After analyzing the causes of its decline, she concludes that the lesson to be learned is that executives must “think

and act long term, even if you’re not around to see [the results].” She then quotes the final lines of “Prufrock”—about lingering till we drown—as a warning. (“Linear TV’s Moment of Greatness Flickers,” *tvrev.com*, 10 Aug. 2019)

**Maculate conceptions.** The *Evening Standard* reports that Eliot’s birthday, September 26, is actually the most common birthday in the UK, with 2,000 babies born that day, 11% more than average. Why so? “The spike in births shows more babies are conceived in the days around Christmas than any other time of the year.” Apparently the trends are similar in the US and New Zealand. As examples of Sept. 26 birthdays, the article cites, in order, Serena Williams, T. S. Eliot, and actress Linda Hamilton from the *Terminator* series. George Gershwin, Winnie Mandela, Andrea Dworkin, Olivia Newton-John, Johnny Appleseed, Ivan Pavlov, Martin Heidegger, and Pope Paul VI, who all share the same birthday, were apparently seen as less worthy of mention. (“September 26 is Most Popular Birthday—with Serena Williams Among Those Born on That Day,” *www.standard.co.uk*, 23 Sep. 2019)

**Deliciously stinky.** Guess who took 1st place at the American Cheese Society 2016 awards! No one-hit wonder, Prufrock Cheese subsequently won the silver medal at the 2019 World Cheese Awards in Bergamo, Italy, and a Good Foods Award in San Francisco, California (2020). The product really is named for the Eliot character, who would doubtless be mortified. For Prufrock’s creator, on the other hand—a notorious cheese-lover—these posthumous victories might even be said to rival his Tony Award for *Cats*.



## I. “After such knowledge...”

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It’s the outside knowledge that we all carry with us into our reading of these letters, however, that makes them finally almost unbearable to read and threatens to scatter that garland of glosses to the wind. I thought often, as I was swept up in the lyric intimacies of the early 1930s, of Michael André Bernstein’s *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (California, 1994), a book that urges us to examine the past with as much speculative humility as we can muster, as though we did not know how things turned out, as though we didn’t know all the promises and protestations that were to remain unfulfilled after Vivienne’s death in 1947, or the shock of Eliot’s wholly unexpected alternative life that was to commence a decade after that, in 1957. But no matter how successful we are at following Bernstein’s advice, all possibilities come to an end with unforgettable force and simplicity in a pronoun: it comes as we’re reaching the last items in the collection, on 10 February 1957, a month after Tom’s quiet wedding ceremony with Valerie on the 10th of January. Eliot writes Hale a second letter (there is no record of the first, other than Eliot’s reference to this letter of the 10th as his “second” after his wedding) and, after the salutation to “My dear Emily,” the letter’s first word is the pronoun “Our”: “What might have been and what has been / Point to one end.” The gifts reserved for readers of this collection are precisely as challenging to confront as Eliot’s compound ghost warned us any review of a lifetime would be.

But for me, at least, there was another, equally and differently astounding moment in this archive—a more hopeful one that has remained with me as I turn again to Eliot’s poetry—to be found in the letter from 5 December 1935. I read the letter in the middle of my week in the library, at the very end of the day, seated next to Frances and Lyndall. The letter itself comes from the heart of a period of emotionally saturated and explicit correspondence. And yet by this point I confess that I had grown somewhat accustomed to endearments and nicknames and assurances of intimacies (all lovers’ letters ring with a little less resonance, when read by anyone other than the beloved). Enclosed with Eliot’s post, on a separate sheet of paper, however, was the opening of

*Burnt Norton*—virtually identical to the published text—from “Time present and time past” down to “I do not know.” The poetry stood apart from the thousands of pages around it—mysterious, differently expressive, gorgeously removed from the rhetorical lines criss-crossing this mountain of letters. The poem was immediately distinguishable from the particular intimacies that, more clearly than ever before, we now know lie just beyond each published page. Even the direct address in that penultimate sentence (“My words echo / Thus, in your mind”) was impossible for me to read as though it were a sentence excerpted from one of the letters (though this could easily have been something “Your Tom” would write to “Dear Emily”). In this enclosure for Hale, the pronouns “my” and “your” attach themselves naturally to the letter’s sender and its recipient. But in *Burnt Norton* the references’ attachments grow more expansive; they include all Eliot’s readers who now and in the time to come will call these words to mind. The echoes continue to reverberate, far beyond their author’s earliest articulation and the first person to hear them. The kind of thinking being done in these opening lines, too, and the way that thought unfolds on the poem’s page—the syntactic turns, the puzzling over temporality—this is thinking of a different order from that which we have been newly allowed to overhear in Eliot’s letters to Hale, where he ponders his choices, considers what his life, their lives, might have been, recalls their miraculous, private time together in the rose garden. Unlike Eliot’s letters from the summer and fall of 1935, *Burnt Norton* leads us into an imaginary garden. This does not mean, as Marianne Moore reminds us in “Poetry,” that the garden is not connected to reality; but we must “inspect” (Moore’s rigorous, scrupulously unromantic verb) it differently, as poetry rather than simply as the description of a place visited by Eliot and Hale. “I do not know,” the poet admits at the end of this opening, as he allows that he has made something that will continue to reshape itself long after he is gone, and I have been holding on to that assertion of not-knowing—the opposite of an insider’s key turned over to one reader and one reader only—since returning home from Princeton. The poetry of the *Quartets*, as I come back to it, continues to move far beyond the circuit of its origins—the life, the lives out of which it came.

## The Eliot-Hale Archive:

### II. Letters to an Eliot Fan

Lyndall Gordon  
St Hilda's College, Oxford

*These are excerpts from letters written to a correspondent in England, a keen reader of Eliot, who asked about Eliot's newly released letters to Emily Hale. These are early impressions, subject to change.*

9 January 2020

I'm writing from the reading room in the Princeton archives where there are six or so readers. It's quiet here and the hours fly by as they do when we are utterly absorbed. Starting with the first letter in October 1930, I am still in 1931. No, I am NOT making fast progress. The letters are so deep, complex and heartfelt that one has to read slowly, attentively, and not rush to conclusions. The word "impossible" is often in my mind: the impossibility of categorical opinions.

I feel also at times – as with other writers – the shame of reading private correspondence, especially with Eliot, who did not want this to happen when he wrote to Emily Hale that the letters were for her eyes alone. At the same time, of course, it's extraordinary to take in the seriousness of his attachment and also how divided he was. He wonders if he and Hale were to meet, will she recognise the writer of the letters, presumably because his contained public appearance belies his private expressiveness.

My responses alternate between exhilaration and regret that comes in part from knowing the outcome. Am fascinated by the conflict between his ardour and his commitment to the solitary path of spiritual trial.

As to Vivienne Eliot, I am keeping an open mind about his characterisation of her as a child, which has some truth to it but cannot suffice.

You ask about the experience of being in the archives. Every morning, from 8:30, readers are let into an anteroom where we get numbers in order of arrival, which allow us to choose to read the actual letters or digitally. I've chosen a digital copy because it allows for seeing the whole collection. For half an hour we sit around a table: some have their laptops

open; others share findings; and then we wash our hands and, at 9, enter the reading room. We are all now owing to exhaustion at 4:45 pm when the archives close.

Saturday, 11 January 2020 (at 4 or 5 am)

Waking early (failing so far to adapt to the time change) to a fresh challenge: the visit of documentary makers, Rosie Allison and Susanna White, tomorrow and Monday. With this in view, I jumped ahead yesterday to read a run of letters in December 1935. Early in January 1936 Eliot says these have been the real love-letters, and oh, they are wonderfully sensitive, intimate, filled with a grace of language. John Haffenden has said that the reader himself falls in love, and so it is. It's like reading a novel, like a reviewer of *Jane Eyre*, who said that he read it through the night and married Mr Rochester at four in the morning.

26 January 2020

You ask about a routine. The daily immersion is such, that when a librarian wished me a good weekend, as they closed this last Friday, it was like coming to the surface, a bit dazed. I didn't know what day of the week it was....

Rosie and Susanna came to Princeton on Sunday, January 12th and we talked for hours over lunch the day before filming. In order to be a fraction more informed, I had dipped into letters of 1934, surprised to find the issue of divorce hotting up sooner than anticipated. Hale is repeatedly asking to know her position in relation to the future, with Eliot standing firm: what future did she expect? But then, in the last weeks of 1935, the unexpected happens: a physical quickening.

I dipped also into letters following Vivienne's sudden death in 1947, and see that Eliot is at once making it clear to Hale he is not in a fit state to marry. He's explicit about not wanting sex. Of course it's awkward after all he had said about wanting to marry her if he were free, but the shock of the death, he says, has changed him permanently. It seems impossible not to question his sense of entitlement to downgrade their tie after declaring its rarity for sixteen years. He had reassured her that her happiness mattered more than his own.

In the middle of the night I lie awake, thinking of the tragedy of this unfulfilled relationship. Each

## II. Letters to an Eliot Fan

*continued*

day I read the letters until the archives close. One leaves emotionally drained and troubled by the differences that follow the ardent first letters. I can't but feel saddened by a situation that stands in the way of happiness and leads Eliot to distance himself from a woman whom he drew into his life.

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## The Eliot - Hale Archive: III. Eliot's Personal Theory of Poetry

Frances Dickey  
University of Missouri

I spent the month of January on the lowest level of Princeton's Firestone Library, reading Eliot's letters to Emily Hale during the day and working on an annotated bibliography of Eliot scholarship in the evenings and weekends. The coincidence of these tasks became a surreal confluence of past and present, or rather, of two different and not easily reconciled pasts. As my days in the archive revealed further surprises about Eliot's life and work, the question of what to do with a century's worth of Eliot criticism became increasingly urgent.

Readers of *Time Present* are doubtless familiar with the PS 3509. L43 section of the library, which at Firestone is located conveniently just a few feet away from Special Collections. This section, probably the largest of any twentieth-century writer, has a gravity field of its own, as well as a vast web-like structure branching out from Eliot's writing into many adjacent fields and connected with itself through paths of influence, rivalry, and citation. Although Eliot scholarship includes every conceivable method of literary criticism, most of his critics have agreed, at least in principle, that his poems admit of no simple explanation. Additionally, with a few important exceptions, such as Lyndall Gordon, who all this time was sitting nearby in Special Collections, most of the critics included in our bibliography have claimed that Eliot's poetry and plays can best be understood by reference to something other than his immediate

personal life: to literature, philosophy, politics, history, religion, art, Bloomsbury, the *Criterion*, and so on. Though the "death of the author" has come and gone, our desire to keep Eliot relevant has sustained the satisfying process of grounding his poetry in our world and interests. These basic assumptions of Eliot scholarship seemed unproblematic enough before January 2, but in the thirteen sealed boxes containing his single-spaced, typed letters, Eliot's own story was waiting to tell itself.

As Eliot begins writing to Hale, he is eager to reveal exactly how she figures in his poems. In his first, remarkable letter, he confesses his love for her, explaining that despite the ruin he feels he has made of his life, the thought of her led him to the Church, "for whatever is born of God overcomes the world" (Eliot quotes from 1 John 5:4). Now, he tells her triumphantly, she can understand his poem *Ash-Wednesday*, and nobody else ever will (3 October 1930). His second letter points to the "Hyacinth girl" scene and the "Datta" passage in "What the Thunder Said" as evidence of the fineness of his love for her, explaining that by "we," of course, he means "I" (3 November 1930). While many readers have speculated on autobiographical elements of *The Waste Land*, few, I think, expected him to openly acknowledge a one-to-one correlation between individual passages and episodes in his relationship with Hale. The letters contain other autobiographical revelations as well: Marie von Moritz, a woman who lived in his pension in Munich, said the words attributed to "Marie" in *The Waste Land* (2 March 1931). In "Gerontion," "Mr. Silvero" is Matt Prichard, "who walked all night in the next room" during their trip to Limoges at Christmas 1911 (24 March 1931), and "Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians," is Okakura Kakuzo, Japanese scholar and Curator of Asian Art at the MFA in Boston (29 December 1931).

These biographical identifications do not exhaust the meaning of Eliot's dramatis personae, but they do tell us something important about his own compositional process and how he regarded his poems. On 19 February 1932, Eliot remarks plaintively that as he watches people drawing the wrong conclusions about his poetry, he wishes that he could set them straight. The truth is far simpler than they believe; he would like to say something along the lines of "That is not what I meant at all/ That is not it, at all." On 15 March, he explains that he wants to save her letters not out of desire for fame, but for posthumous understanding. He believes that

### III. Eliot's Personal Theory of Poetry *continued*

her letters will unlock the meaning of his poems for future readers. He hopes she will save his letters, too, as evidence of the most important matter of his life (6 July). As soon as he began writing to Hale, or perhaps before, Eliot planned to store their letters together at the Bodleian or another library for sixty years in order to reveal the meaning of his poems after their deaths. This dramatic gesture bespeaks Eliot's theory—not Impersonal, but Personal—of his own poetry: that a simple autobiographical key can unlock its secrets.

In one 1933 letter, Eliot suggests in an offhand manner that the poet's heart lies in plain sight, but so well camouflaged as poetry that nobody can find it. You can hear him laughing at us from beyond the grave, foreseeing the critics who accepted his smokescreen of impersonality as dogma and dismissed biographical readings as heresy. His letters give support to those students (we've all had them) who wondered whether he is throwing up obstacles to conceal his true meaning, and indeed he says as much to Hale in January 1936 when he sends her the typescript of his newly composed poem *Burnt Norton*. It is a love poem written for her, he writes, but so obscure that she can truthfully and conveniently deny any understanding of it. He says that he considered using these lines from Shelley as an epigraph—

My song, I fear that thou wilt find but few  
Who fitly shall conceive thy reasoning,  
Of such hard matter dost thou entertain

—but, instead, to make his poem even more difficult, he has added lines from Herakleitos in Greek.

Such moments stun a diligent reader of Eliot's poetry who has combed the annotations and source studies to learn where his ideas and words came from. Textual antecedents still matter, but seem less central, displaced by his own complex and turbulent emotions and his consciousness of how, in his poems, he has represented people and events from his life. And the picture of Eliot's emotional and personal life conveyed in thousands of single-spaced typed pages is not serene. Passion, longing, self-abasement, irritation with family and friends, harsh rejections of Hale on flimsy grounds, and fits of depression intersperse Eliot's detailed, diary-like account of his days and weeks. Running through it all is a massive yet fragile ego, quivering with sensitivity, ambition, the desire for Hale's approval, and a terror of normal intimacy.

He is, as he says about himself, not an intellectual: he is "an emotional." There is more than enough private life here for hundreds of interpretations without reference to any larger world.

The opening of his letters to Hale does not bring Eliot scholarship to an end, despite his assertion that he can clear up the meaning of his poems with a few autobiographical explanations. Far from it: the letters will inaugurate a new and fevered era of source-hunting and explanation (witness this cluster in *Time Present*) and a reevaluation of the relationship between art and life, especially when the art feeds off another person's life. Eliot's letters to Hale do claim precedence over and will in some cases invalidate the criticism written in ignorance of them. But they do not make our previously gained understanding of his methods obsolete. His letters are no more straightforward than his other texts and, in many cases, only add to the mystery. For example, he tells Hale that the lines from Shelley quoted above—which he considered using as his epigraph to *Burnt Norton*—are from "Epipsychidion," a love poem to a woman named Emily. That's all he tells Hale, but the reality is more complicated, and the shimmering cascade of references, if we follow it, takes us to a not-unfamiliar territory of texts embedded within each other and inside life itself.

In Shelley's "Epipsychidion," the poet invites Emily to sail with him to "an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth and Sea" (does this give Eliot the idea for four poems based on the elements?). Furthermore, the lines that Eliot sent to Hale are not drawn from "Epipsychidion" itself, but from Shelley's translation of Dante's canzone, *Voi, che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete*, that Shelley used as the epigraph to his poem to Emily. Dante's canzone appeared first in his unfinished *Il Convivio*, a work of prose and verse intended to follow the *Vita Nuova*, and then by self-citation in *Paradiso* 8, the heaven of Venus. We thus come full circle back to Eliot's Dantean obsession by way of Shelley (did reading "Epipsychidion" as a teenager give Eliot the idea to fall in love with a woman named Emily so that he could write his own *Vita Nuova* for her?). In Dante's canzone, moreover, the poet turns away from Beatrice to another love, Lady Philosophy. (After the writing of *Burnt Norton*, Eliot's passion for Emily faded. Is he signaling his own turn when he quotes *Voi, che 'ntendendo* to her?) Finally, Shelley takes a calculatedly Olympian attitude towards the reception of his own poetry that readers of Eliot will find familiar. In his preface to "Epipsychidion," Shelley remarks that like

### III. Eliot's Personal Theory of Poetry *continued*

the *Vita Nuova*, his poem “is sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of readers without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates; and to a certain other class it must ever remain incomprehensible” (similarly, Eliot writes to Hale she may tell other people that she understands *Burnt Norton* or she does not, as is convenient for her). In a published letter, excerpted in the notes originally printed with his poem in 1821, Shelley further commented that “The Epipsychidion is a mystery; as to real flesh and blood, you know I do not deal in

those articles; you might as well go to a gin shop for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me.” Given the history of Eliot’s stonewalling and concealment of the autobiographical basis of his poetry, which he revealed with full consciousness in his letters to Hale, one can certainly picture him chuckling in agreement with Shelley. Does Eliot’s letter clarify the autobiographical meaning of his poem, or reveal the poetic basis of his life? Perhaps even stranger than learning that much of Eliot’s poetry may be read as a roman à clef about himself, we may discover—as Gordon and Schuchard already hypothesized before the opening of the letters—that he lived his private life according to a plan laid down for him by Dante.

### The Eliot-Hale Archive: IV. Searching for Emily Hale

Sara Fitzgerald

I arrived at Firestone Library on January 2 from a world different from some of my fellow “pilgrims.” I was a retired journalist, with an academic background in women’s history rather than English literature. Having spent five years researching the life of Emily Hale for a just-published novel, *The Poet’s Girl: A Novel of Emily Hale and T. S. Eliot*, I now wanted to test whether my theories—and the facts as I had understood them—were correct.

Even before we arrived to pore over T. S. Eliot’s 1,131 letters, we had learned some exciting news. Hale had been encouraged by her Princeton friends, Willard and Margaret Thorp, to write a memoir about her time with Eliot to provide more context to his letters. She had changed her mind about her first attempt and retrieved it from the Thorps. But the Library’s Finding Aid revealed that later versions had been preserved. Because Eliot arranged for Hale’s letters to be destroyed, this folder promised to provide a window, albeit small, into Hale’s side of the story, and that’s where many of us began our reading after we checked in.

It was the source of my first discovery: Eliot, Hale acknowledged, was drawn to her before she was to him. But she went on to say that Eliot’s marriage to Vivienne Haigh-Wood “was a complete surprise to his

family and friends and for me particularly, as he had corresponded quite regularly with me, sent flowers for special occasions, etc., I, meanwhile trying to decide whether I could learn to care for him had he returned to the ‘States.’”

Hale’s remembrances became more important that first morning when Harvard’s Houghton Library surprised the literary world by releasing the letter Eliot had prepared in 1960, in anticipation of the day Hale’s collection was unsealed. By the time most of us read Eliot’s letter online, we had reviewed enough of the Princeton letters to know that no matter what Eliot wrote after his second marriage, there was a time in his life when he had, in fact, told Hale that he was deeply in love with her. Frances Dickey urged Princeton to make Hale’s version public, since it was not covered by the same restrictions as the Eliot letters, and within a matter of weeks, Princeton followed through and [posted it online](#).

The very first Eliot letter, postmarked 3 October 1930, provided the next surprise. We knew, from a letter of 14 October 1930 that Eliot wrote his cousin Eleanor Hinkley, that he had seen Hale once that summer. The new letters revealed that he had actually invited her and her aunt and uncle to tea with Vivienne. Eliot told Hale that Vivienne had liked her to the point of “infatuation,” and that he had been so nervous that he almost dropped the teapot. What is not immediately clear is exactly how the two of them became reconnected during the 1920s and what prompted the beginning of Eliot’s ardent, frequent correspondence. Further, what was Eliot’s goal in hosting such a gathering? It was a time when other visitors were talking about Vivienne’s

## IV. Searching for Emily Hale

*continued*

difficult behavior. Did Eliot decide he needed to give Hale a taste of his marriage so she would understand the world he was trying to escape?

Before long, I realized that it would take more than the twelve days I planned to stay in Princeton to read all the letters and transcribe those portions that were of interest. Consequently, I decided to focus my time on letters written around the time of key dates in the Eliot-Hale relationship. Here are some of my initial insights:

By paraphrasing her husband's 1960 letter in her introduction to the first volume of Eliot's letters, Valerie Eliot perpetuated the story that Hale had rejected a proposal from Eliot when he left for England in 1914. However, in at least two letters in the Princeton collection—one dated 21 July 1931, and another dated 30 November 1947—Eliot said he never mustered the courage to tell Hale he loved her because, in addition to feeling shy and awkward, he believed his financial prospects were too bleak. Hale also said he never proposed before he left Boston.

The two of them were skillful at hiding their relationship from all but a tight circle of friends, a circle that, in fact, may have been tighter than previously thought. Hale was, of course, a talented actress and thus capable of pretending to be nothing more than a friend of Eliot's in front of different audiences of their friends and family members. Eliot makes few references to Hale in letters to others, helping to preserve their very private world.

The letters go through different emotional phases, which one would expect for a relationship that lasted more than 40 years. The earliest letters appear to be the most emotionally intense, as Eliot shares his deepest feelings and explains his recent poems. As they move through the 1930s, and visits on either side of the Atlantic, both share more details of their lives, the way spouses might over dinner. Eliot is obsessive about tracking where Hale will be on a particular date and how to get a letter to her as fast as he can, even to the point of studying the relative speeds of transatlantic ships. Finding the time and energy to write a long, meaningful letter to Hale is also a repeated source of frustration. By the end of their correspondence in 1956, they are sharing stories of doctors' appointments and physical ailments, as many contemporary seniors would. Still, even these

letters are heartbreaking to read, when one knows how the story will end.

In late 1935, as Hale was about to return to England after a long stay in England, Eliot's December 11-12 letters recall a very sensual, romantic night they shared before Hale's departure. Eliot's description of a change that had occurred in the previous three weeks led me to ask what might have happened in mid-November 1935 to spark such a change? One answer was that Vivienne suddenly reappeared in his life, shocking Eliot by showing up with their dog at a London book event. Did this drive Eliot into Hale's arms, or did Hale decide that this episode would make Eliot more emotionally vulnerable and give her an opening to try and change his mind about seeking a divorce? Eliot's memories of their time together continue into the letters of early 1936.

The letters provide further support for Lyndall Gordon's research on Hale's contributions to Eliot's career as a playwright, particularly to the development of *The Family Reunion*.

Again, at the critical point when Hale was returning to the States in December 1935, Eliot wrote Hale that his growing urge to write plays was driven by a desire to win her applause.

After my reading period, I returned home, feeling exhilarated but also exhausted by the long, intense days. I also felt sad—and, yes, angry—over the story that unfolded in the letters. A love affair, disrupted by bad choices, two world wars, asynchronous miscommunications—and, to a certain extent, bad timing and fate. The story of a woman who was a reluctant lover, but who then chose to accept “conditions as they were offered under the unnatural code which surrounded us.” A woman whose years of devotion were betrayed late in her life and belittled anew today. A woman whose own words were destroyed by a man for whom words were everything.

The lines from *Burnt Norton* returned to me:

Ridiculous the waste sad time  
Stretching before and after.

*Archive responses continued on page 15*

## Calls for Papers

### Midwest MLA

The International T. S. Eliot Society is accepting proposals for a panel at the 2020 Midwest MLA conference in Milwaukee, to be held November 5-8, 2020. Any proposal on a subject reasonably related to Eliot studies will be considered. Papers drawing from relatively recently released materials from the *Complete Prose* or *Letters* would be especially welcome.

If you are interested in participating, please send proposals (up to 250 words) to Professor Edward Upton ([edward.upton@valpo.edu](mailto:edward.upton@valpo.edu)). Please also forward a CV and brief biographical statement. Submissions must be received no later than May 15, 2020. For more information on MMLA 2020, please visit the conference website: [luc.edu/mmla](http://luc.edu/mmla)

### South Atlantic MLA

The International T. S. Eliot Society is also accepting proposals for a panel at the 2020 South Atlantic

MLA conference to be held in Jacksonville, Florida, November 13-15th, 2020. The Society invites papers on any topic relating Eliot's life and work, especially relating to the theme: T. S. Eliot: Provocation, Creation, and ...Scandal!

The SAMLA 92 theme—Scandal: Literature and Provocation—Breaking Rules, Making Texts—invites us to examine in particular Eliot's work in the context of the relationship between rule-breaking and text-making, as well as (personal or professional) scandal.

The recent watershed of previously unpublished material from Eliot—most notably the *Complete Prose* and the availability of the Emily Hale Letters—offers rich ground for exploring these issues. Though, again, we will consider papers on any topic.

By June 15th, 2020, please submit a 300-word abstract, brief bio, and A/V requirements to Craig Woelfel, at Flagler College ([cwoelfel@flagler.edu](mailto:cwoelfel@flagler.edu)). This year's SAMLA Conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront from November 13-15. More on the conference and its organizing theme can be found here: <https://samla.memberclicks.net/>

## SOCIETY NOTES

We offer exuberant congratulations to **Julia Daniel** on her tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor of Modern American Poetry at Baylor University.

More awards for Eliot's editors: Volumes 5 and 6 of *The Complete Prose* were co-winners of the 2019 MLA Prize for a Scholarly Bibliography. **Jayme Stayer** and **David E. Chinitz** attended the awards ceremony in January to receive the prize, while their co-editors **Iman Javadi** and **Ronald Schuchard** were recognized in absentia. The selection committee described the volumes as follows: "Part of a long-running, multivolume, digital collaborative edition, volumes 5 and 6 of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition* display uniform editorial excellence. Their thorough contextual introductions, sophisticated annotations merging intelligent commentary with brevity and completeness, and superb indexes make the volumes a pleasure to read and to use. Together they present new materials, open doors to further discovery, and enlarge our understanding of Eliot as the public intellectual at work." The volumes shared the prize with Marianne Moore's *New Collected Poems*, edited by Heather Cass White.

Congratulations to **William Marx** on his publication of Eliot's French notes on Henri Bergson's lectures at the Collège de France (1910-1911): T. S. Eliot, "Notes sur le cours de Bergson au Collège de France (1910-1911)" in the series *Annales bergsoniennes*, vol. IX ("Bergson et les écrivains") (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2020).

We hail the publication of a new volume by **Massimo Bacigalupo**, *Ezra Pound, Italy and The Cantos*, a book that is, of course, rich in references to T. S. Eliot. It is published in the new book series on Ezra Pound initiated and managed by **John Gery** and **John Morgenstern**.

We note the passing of one of the active early members of the T. S. Eliot Society, **Mildred Meyer Boaz**, who died in August 2019. She was a professor in the English Department at Millikin University in Illinois, where she also served as Department Chair. She also was an accomplished cellist. She had a special interest in Eliot and music, and has an essay collected in the MLA volume *Approaches to Teaching Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, edited by **Jewel Spears Brooker**.

## The Eliot - Hale Archive: V. “For Whom the Bell Tolls”: Reading the *Quartets* after the Letters to Emily Hale

Katerina Stergiopoulou  
Princeton University

On 17 December 1940, Eliot criticizes his brother Henry for having tried to identify the autobiographical elements in *The Family Reunion* upon seeing it performed in Boston. In contrast, Emily Hale’s account of the play, he tells her, was more astute, since it focused on the dramatic production itself (Eliot consistently praises Hale’s dramatic criticism). He then offers what we have always thought of as the Eliot line: what’s valuable in poetry isn’t the meager personal experience that may have gone into it but its transmutation. Here, however, it comes with a caveat: unlike any of his readers, Hale herself is permitted—indeed, subtly encouraged—to probe into the experiences that lie behind Eliot’s poems.

This does not come as a surprise to anyone who has read the hundreds of letters to Hale preceding this one, as I did this past January. But given that they will become available for public perusal within the next few years—and with Eliot’s permission (as recorded throughout the correspondence, including in the penultimate letter to Hale on 29 December 1956)—where does this leave us as readers both of the letters and of his poetry? A century after the publication of “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” the unsealing of the Hale letters draws out the tension at the heart of that essay more forcefully than we could have imagined. “Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry”; “It is not in his personal emotions . . . that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting”; poetry “is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality”—so Eliot would have us believe (*Prose* 2.108, 111). But can we now honestly say that knowing the empirical reasons for the proximity of Tristan and Isolde to the hyacinth girl sequence in *The Waste Land* (both reflecting experiences with Hale in 1913-14), or for the rewriting of that scene’s “heart of light” at the end of *Burnt Norton* I as a moment of partial fulfillment (shortly after their visit there in late summer 1935, Hale seems to have finally expressed her feelings towards him), does not affect our understanding of what the

poems mean? Of course once these moments make it into the poems, they create their own constellations, beyond Eliot’s own reasons for having put them there. But it does matter, I think, that he had very clearly articulated reasons for putting them there.

*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, based on lectures delivered before and after Eliot’s visit to Scripps College (1932-33) to see Hale for the first time after his epistolary declaration of love in October 1930, offers a different perspective on the relationship between poetry and the life of the poet: “certain images” that “recur, charged with emotion” for any of us “may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer” (*Prose* 3.688). If you are a poet—say, Shakespeare—“the right imagery saturated while it lay in the depths of . . . memory, will rise like Anadyomene from the sea” (*Prose* 3.687). This may not be an accidentally chosen simile. For the images, indeed ideas, that come to dominate Eliot’s *Four Quartets* are specifically not of unknown value to him, though they may be to his readers (until now). It is, if not Emily Hale herself, at least Eliot’s own writing to Emily Hale that rises like Venus, goddess of Love, into the sea of the *Quartets*, and to a degree unperceived until now, into that of the *Dry Salvages* specifically.

All of the *Quartets* are marked by Eliot’s relationship with Hale. We suspected as much about *Burnt Norton*—and Hale herself recalls in her now published account of their relationship that Eliot insisted it was a “love poem” for her, an assertion definitively supported by the letters, one of which suggests that the poem’s meditation on time is secondary to its being about Hale (11 May 1936). We may come to believe that the two are in fact one and the same: that Eliot’s experience with Hale allows him a particular understanding / experience of time that then becomes the material for the poems. (And if we’re cynical, we might say that once the experience has been expressed, Hale has outworn her use.) Hale seems quite cognizant of her role: in the single letter (26 April 1945) by her preserved in the archive—a copy she made of one of the many such frustrated letters she must have written (to judge from Eliot’s responses)—she speaks of the “very complimentary, rather grave responsibility you have placed upon me—and which I have always consented to accept—since 1934.”

Only a year into their correspondence, Eliot meditates on pattern, on time past and time future, and on their meeting in what *The Dry Salvages* calls a present “unattended / Moment” of illumination (31

## V. “For Whom the Bell Tolls”: Reading the *Quartets* after the Letters to Emily Hale *continued*

December 1931). It seems to me that he becomes increasingly invested in the temporal strangeness of their relationship: a present predicated on being the future unfolding of the past, but without it itself having any future (because Vivienne is still alive until 1947, because Vivienne’s death underlines his own advanced age afterwards). Eliot obsessively records their special “timeless” moments when they occur and repeatedly afterwards: “the moment in the rose-garden, / The moment in the arbour where the rain beat, / The moment in the draughty church at smokefall,” the “Fingers of yew . . . curled / Down on us.” All of these and more are recalled separately and together in at least five letters from fall 1935 (some written while Hale was still in the UK), and periodically after that (e.g., 11 January 1937, 4 September 1939). He stores these experiences in verbal form in the letters he sends, and they “echo / Thus” in his own mind when writing the *Quartets*. (Eliot did not keep copies of the letters.) Yet the letters also seem to use memory, as *Little Gidding* III will put it, for “liberation / From the future as well as the past.” As early as 21 February 1936, after a series of passionate, sensual love letters, Eliot forecloses a future with Hale in favor of an intense epistolary present. A year later (11 January 1937), he identifies his memories of their time together as complete, eternal, and untouched by the future, which, by implication, should not be contemplated (even as other such isolated future moments can be imagined).

The December 1940 letter I opened with comes right in the middle of Eliot’s composition of *The Dry Salvages*; he reports working on the poem earlier in the month (10 December), titles it in this letter, completes it on 5 January 1941. And the third *Quartet* turns out to have a more complex relationship to Eliot’s life than had previously been assumed. Lyndall Gordon presciently noted the significance of Eliot’s visit to New England in August-September 1936 (during which we knew he saw Hale), in relation to his visit to *East Coker* and *Little Gidding* earlier that summer. There are few letters between Eliot and Hale while he is in the U.S., but upon his return to London, on 17 October, he reminisces about their time together. They spent a week at the house of one of Hale’s friends in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, and it is on the beach there, and not further north in the area of the Dry

*Salvages*, where Eliot hears “The tolling bell” in Hale’s company (the identification is confirmed after the poem’s completion in the letter of 6 September 1941). Returning to his London rooms feels like returning to St. Louis after a childhood summer spent on the Massachusetts shore, he tells Hale; he can almost “smell [the] grapes on the autumn table.” Gordon has connected this line from *The Dry Salvages* I to a known 1917 letter to his mother; the difference now is that in the letter to Hale he isn’t recalling a memory but re-experiencing it through a double dislocation (St. Louis is now London, Gloucester with family is now Woods Hole with Hale). The moment on the beach and the sound of the bell are recalled again on 4 April 1940, as Eliot looks ahead to the first summer in years that he won’t be spending with Hale. Hale herself, however, does return to Woods Hole that July, and Eliot revisits the bell and keeps imagining her by the sea (26 July, 4 and 13 August 1940). He refers to the potential writing of a new poem on October 8, and *The Dry Salvages* is completed within a few months.

Why does this matter? Not only because it reveals that *The Dry Salvages* is tied to Eliot’s time with Hale as much as *Burnt Norton* is and that there is a real-world reason for the shift of the *Quartets* to America, but also because the poem now can be read not as the retrieval and reconfiguration of a childhood memory through poetry, but as recording the experience of the lived recurrence and reframing of that memory. (The recursive, indeed repetitive, nature of the whole poem—especially seen in the Provençal-type lyric in the second section—reflects this theme on a formal level.) Much as “annunciation” may become “Annunciation,” the Gloucester of childhood is displaced and refracted in 1936 through a newly heard bell and through the presence of the “Lady” (*Dry Salvages* IV), who is not the dedicatee of a Gloucester church (as Charles Olson tried to suggest; see *Poems* 1.981-2) but the epistolary persona of Emily Hale, almost always addressed with that honorific.

We can detect Eliot’s consciousness of the intense and known symbolic resonance of these images in his attempt late in life to reorient them away from Hale and towards Valerie Eliot. Most brazenly, “A Dedication to my Wife” refers to “The roses in the rose-garden which is ours and ours only” (*Poems* 1.219). Eliot also identifies the “significant soil” in *The Dry Salvages* V with *East Coker* “where I and my wife expect to end” (quoted in *Poems* 1.988); yet the mention of the “yew-tree” in the preceding line—so central an image in his letters to Hale and, of course, in *Burnt Norton*—rings a different bell.

## The Eliot - Hale Archive: VI. The Love of a Good Woman

Karen Christensen  
Berkshire Publishing

I read T. S. Eliot's first love letter to Emily Hale side by side with Daniel Bates, a Brooklyn-based stringer for the *Daily Mail*. After a few paragraphs we looked at each other, speechless.

We had been surprised but not speechless when we read Emily Hale's brief statement, her account of the relationship. It had been Hale's words that everyone had wanted to read before anything else on that first day, 2 January 2020, at Princeton's Firestone Library.

I don't know why we were so entirely on the same page about this, except that it was the only overview or introduction we would have, and as good scholars we wanted to read a summary before digging deep. But I had another reason: I simply wanted to be sure that the document existed, that Hale had not destroyed it and left Eliot's side of the correspondence as the only record.

I had been terrified about this for weeks, during the period the Firestone Library staff was cataloging the letters. When the reference to it came up in the online Reading Guide sometime in December, I was deeply relieved—not only because we would have a chance to hear Hale's voice, her side of the story, but because she hadn't capitulated to whatever internal or external pressure there had been to let herself be seen only as reflected in Eliot's words.

When I got to the library at 8:15, thinking I was very early, the lights were on in the two-story entrance hall, the doors were open, and there was a group of six or seven cautiously introducing themselves. I spotted Lyndall Gordon, whom I'd heard speak about Eliot's women at the Eliot Summer School in 2018. We'd had coffee in Hampstead once, after my article about Valerie Eliot was published in the *Guardian* in 2005, and I had been rereading everything she had written about Emily Hale.

"Karen," said another woman, "I'm Sara." This was Sara Fitzgerald, whose novel about T. S. Eliot and Emily Hale had just been published; we'd corresponded a little the week before, and I was glad to see a friendly face, another writer who was not an academic.

When I checked in, I was handed a square of paper

with the number 6. That is, I was the sixth reader. This would not be a problem later, as the library had made a full set of copies of all the boxes and had 3 laptops loaded with the entire collection. This meant there were five complete sets available at all times. But we all wanted to read Emily Hale's account, and there were only five copies.

The man in front of me, number 5, a tall Englishman in dark trousers and wool jumper, turned and said, "We could share."

This sympathetic gesture changed my experience entirely. I got to see Bates's reactions, and we pointed out revealing details as we saw them. This was true as we read Emily Hale's statement, but even more helpful when we turned to the first folder of love letters. We were both wide-eyed at how passionate Eliot was. I had read many of Eliot's letters and handled hundreds of them when I worked for Valerie Eliot, but I had never gasped over them before.

I found out that Bates was not a graduate student but a journalist. When he began typing up his story (which, incidentally, was heavily rewritten and published under another byline), I turned to the letters of 1947, the year Vivienne Eliot died. I had seen an edit in the folder with Hale's statement, in several drafts, clarifying her memory of exactly what he had said when he refused to marry her: "The second change should read 'against marrying again'—not 'marrying me.'" That is, she wanted it to be clear that he had presented the decision as one about marriage, not about her.

I read the 1947 letters expecting to be angry with Eliot for leading Hale on and then not fulfilling his pledge. To my surprise, I felt a surge of sympathy for him. He sounded so tired and so sad. His explanation of how he felt unable to undertake a new start seemed credible, and I could understand that, for Eliot, marriage to Hale would require too much change and be too risky. Hale and Eliot weren't ancient, but they were not young, and they had lives on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

This was a period I heard about from Valerie Eliot, when I worked as her editorial assistant in the Eliot flat in Kensington. We were compiling and editing the letters that went into the centenary Volume 1 of 1988. Valerie often came into the study where I worked and sat for a while recounting stories or musing over a particular letter. One day she told me a story she had heard, I think, from Eliot's sister-in-law, Theresa Eliot, about the visit Eliot made to Massachusetts later in 1947. "Tom said to me over breakfast, 'If Emily refuses

## VI. The Love of a Good Woman

*continued*

to release me, I shall kill myself rather than marry her.” The story made Hale seem presumptuous and demanding, a woman who had pursued a great man and was now trying to hold him against his will.

I do not agree with those who say Eliot was furious about her giving his letters to Princeton. I read the letters of 1956 carefully, in part because I was looking for references to Valerie Fletcher and Mary Trevelyan. What I saw was his worry about anyone reading the letters then, rather than long years later, because he knew that he had made remarks that might hurt or offend. And rightly so. I thought of my friend Linda Melton Benson, Eliot’s secretary during the 1940s. Linda was a lifelong admirer of Eliot and felt that they had had a special connection after going through the War together. She treasured the few letters and mementos she had from him, including a photo of his trip to Sweden during the War. She would have been

crushed by remarks he made about her in letters to Mary Trevelyan that are at the Houghton Library.

Eliot knew that he had made many remarks to Hale, his confidante, that needed to be kept under wraps. He might also have been thinking of Valerie, given that they were courting during 1956 when Hale and Eliot were discussing the Princeton bequest. He had a tendency to downplay his connections with other women, and it’s eye-opening to think that a man of 68 who had been hospitalized the year before because of constipation and complained of athlete’s foot and an abscess on his hip, was keeping three women (Emily Hale, Mary Trevelyan, Valerie Eliot) on a string.

This solitary and seemingly self-sufficient man needed the love of a good woman—the love of several good women, in fact. I have always felt for Hale and Trevelyan, but I came away from that first day at Princeton with a sense that Valerie Eliot had also lived in their shadow, in spite of the fact that, at 68, Tom had been so energized by her love that they were able to start a new life together.

## INTERVIEW

### A Conversation with Sally Foss about Emily Hale *continued from page 2*

said, “Well, no that’s not required.” And I said, “Tea, I suppose?” “Yes.” Anyway, it was all very fun, just to begin with. So, he said, “yes, I’ll take the train that gets in at whatever-time.” And I said, “I’ll be right there and I’ll be wearing a red jacket, so you’ll know I’m probably the only one in town in the summer wearing a jacket.” He said fine, so that worked out perfectly.

I drove and he sat in the front with me and then my mother and her friend, Mrs. Williams—I’ve forgotten her first name—sat in the back. We had a very nice, leisurely drive up—very chatty the whole way. He and I got talking about animals. He said, “Do you have any pets?” And I said, “Yes, dogs. We only have one at a time, but we’ve had a number of them.” And I said, “Do you like dogs?” And he said, “Well, you know, I like cats.” And I said, “Yes, that’s right, I know you’ve written about them.” So, he started reciting them—parts of it—and I recognized it but I certainly couldn’t

have quoted it, because I hadn’t practiced. But anyway, it was very relaxed and very fun. It was just perfect. I could tell it was just what he wanted.

The fact that he was going to see Emily was wonderful, too, and so on. And so we stopped on the way, because my mother loved to have picnics by any back road or twisty road in the country that might be near a little brook. We always liked to have little picnics by brooks. And also, Tom reported—I had heard it once by Emily—saying that he loved to stop in brooks and to wade in the water. I asked him that—I forgot to tell you—about talking on the phone to T. S. Eliot, about wading in a brook. That’s really unreal. But it was true. So I said, “Okay, I know where there’s a little brook, are you ready?” And he said, “Yes, I’m ready. I’m hoping. Make sure that it happens.” So we pulled over and we had plenty of time. He said, “I can’t wait to get my feet in—not a roaring river, rushing river or anything—just like a big puddle.” So he rolled up his pants up to his knees and then he said, “Oh, this is perfect.”

**Interviewers:** It was Eliot’s idea to go wading?

## A Conversation with Sally Foss about Emily Hale *continued*

**Foss:** Oh yeah, that's what he said he wanted to do. I said, "Well, we'll find a picnic place," and he said, "Well, I hope there's wading there." Because we talked about that, and that's something he really wanted to do. That's about all. He didn't explain it any more than that, except to say that's something you don't get to do very often, certainly not in Cambridge.

**Interviewers:** What happened when you arrived in Dorset?

**Foss:** We went in the back lawn of the Dorset Inn. It's a summer place in July and there were lots of kids. I forgot the number exactly—I'd say about ten. Pretty close to ten, little kids, maybe first grade or second grade or something, but not teenagers. And they were playing "Red Light." Well, they asked him if he would be the leader and he asked me, "What's 'Red Light' mean?" I said, "Well, it means a lot of things, I suppose. But the game is like this: they'll stand along a line, further away from you if you're the leader, and you stand over there. And then you turn your back to them and out loud, so they can hear you, you count to ten slowly. And then you turn around and say 'red light.' While you're counting, they will try to move as far as they can towards you and get to you before you finish counting number ten and saying 'stop.' And if you don't stop—keep your balance, you can't keep moving—if you keep moving after I turn around and say 'red light' and I can see you, then you have to go back to the beginning and start all over again." And he said, "Oh, that sounds like fun." We played for about half an hour. He just loved it. He didn't want to stop. He said, "I don't know your names, but I can give you names of cats. Would you want a cat name?" I mean that's how much fun it was. Right off the bat.

**Interviewers:** Did he give them cat names?

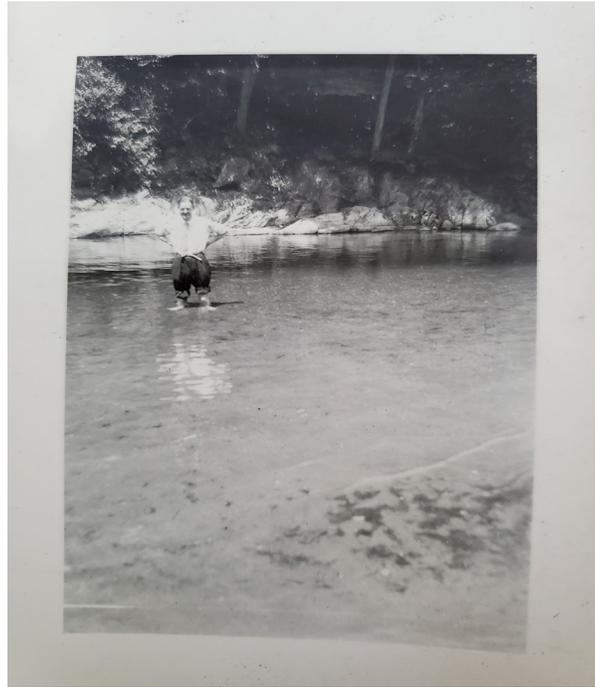
**Foss:** Yes. I can't remember what they were, but I know that happened—didn't surprise me, in a way. He fell right into it, exactly. Just like something he probably always wanted to do. I don't know—I never discussed it with him, but that's what happened. Then we went in and made connection with Emily, to let her know that we had arrived, and signed into the hotel, which is still there. Very nice. I think the Dorset Players are still active.

That was a memorable day. We got Emily over and then went for a walk and chat and whatever. We had dinner together and then the play. And then my mother and Mrs. Williams and I left the following day. He stayed. I don't know how long; I think he was

there two or three or four days. I don't know. It was none of my business. So that's my connection with the whole thing.

**Interviewers:** What did you talk about at the dinner?

**Foss:** About the play and about how Emily got into it. Did she like doing the play? Is she going to do more? It was all with her, I'd say. And, also what a treat it was for him to have a private ride to Vermont. Because he liked getting out into the country. It wasn't anything in depth. And it was not any discussion of his poetry or his plans to do this or that. I know they got talking about Chipping Campden in England. Emily just liked to say it, "Chipping Campden." "Oh, you mean Chipping Campden. Chipping Campden." I said, "It's the emphasis that matters," and she said, "No, it's the whole word!" It was fun. We were laughing the whole time. It was just sort of chatty. It wasn't anything professional about acting or about playwriting or poetry writing. Maybe some conversations about when they last were in Cambridge, because Emily stayed in Cambridge a lot, because her mother was there. Not in Cambridge—the next town, Malden—that's where her mother was. Not well for ages. That's all I can remember of that.



## INTERVIEW

**Interviewers:** And how was Eliot with Emily? Were they affectionate?

**Foss:** They were obviously very, very close friends. I wouldn't have said they were lovers, because they weren't holding each other in much of any obvious way. They were obviously very comfortable with each other and having a good time. It was like seeing your old best friend that you haven't seen for a while. Just say, "Well, you'll see me tonight. I'm going to be a little bit different because I'm going to be in a costume."

**Interviewers:** Emily taught at the Concord Academy for a while, didn't she?

**Foss:** Yes, that's true.

**Interviewers:** And were you her student?

**Foss:** Yes, I was her student at the time. And she stayed with my mother often. She'd just appear. She was like a distant cousin. She just came and wouldn't necessarily call in advance. She'd just knock on the door and say "Here I am. I haven't seen you for a while." She'd stay and we were very chatty. We saw a lot of her. Then she came to the school because she was going around to different schools. I don't know that list at all. I know it was sizeable. I would say three or four other schools, but I really don't know the details of that. But she came to Concord and I don't remember which play we did, but she did that. She liked directing. And then she also taught—I'm not sure whether she taught at Concord Academy but some other schools—I've just lost the word. What is it? Elo—and this is the way she'd pronounce it: She'd say, "Oh, I miss having . . ."—she always spoke very clearly like that—"I'm very happy to still be teaching classes on elocution." Just like that. She was fun, lots of fun to be with.

Emily was just different enough, but fascinating and relaxed. Very relaxed. We'd get talking about poetry and I'd say, "I don't know anything about writing it or getting an idea across." And she'd say, "Well, it's not easy because oftentimes it's very emotional, you want to get the feeling of what it's like to be sad or happy or dreamy or, you know, whatever—that you just had a good day." Or something like that. She's chatty! And then she'd say, all right, and I would say something like, "Well, give me an example of what you might do if . . ." And she'd say, "Let's open a poetry book and just see."

She described what she used to do with Tom: "he would write me of what he'd written and then ask if

I had any thoughts about it, what were my thoughts and so forth." "You don't have to tell me because that's private between you two," I'd say. "He would send me something and I would notice maybe one or two words and I'd suggested a change"—I'm sorry I can't give you an example for any proof of something. I remember listening with very, very attentive hearing. Sorry I can't give you an example. I'll have to look it up, because I wrote it in my book. She was very much in touch with the rhythm of the pattern of the line, along with the line above it or the line beyond it and so forth. In her letters—she didn't show me the letters, but she would say—"well, that's what I do, because I hear it differently" or "I hear, maybe that would sound better, or would underline the force of something, or the sentimentality of something. That it made me think of a dream that I had with something related to the subject." And that's about all I can report on that. She was wonderful to be with. Very relaxed and very attentive to what you're thinking as much as what you're saying. So, that's my connection with Emily.

**Interviewers:** You mentioned going over to Emily's house and reading Eliot's poems together. What did she appreciate in Eliot's poetry? How did she talk about it?

**Foss:** She'd just open the book and just say, "Well, let's look at this." We'd talk about it a little bit. Not in great depth, because I was not a student of poetry. I mean I had no objection to it; I loved hearing about it. I loved the way she talked about it: "What would you say? Because I'm thinking of"—she'd give me the example—"the whole accent of this part of the poem is anxiety, so I need another word that underlines that word and that meaning, because it's tough and it's cloudy and it's misty and it's uneven and it's scary"—that kind of thing. So we'd try to find a word that would fit that wasn't in there already.

**Interviewers:** You were looking at printed books, then, not at poems he'd sent her in manuscript?

**Foss:** That's right. Correct.

**Interviewers:** And that was during the post-war period?

**Foss:** Yeah. I never saw Eliot other than that picnic. I talked to him on the phone a few times when Emily asked me to, which wasn't very often. I think maybe two or three phone calls. But the main part of any conversation with him was that picnic.

## INTERVIEW

**Interviewers:** Because her letters were destroyed, people are very curious to know more about her. Were you also in her classroom?

**Foss:** Oh, no. She was just doing plays and we'd have practice of different scenes and so forth. She would also come in at a break, you know lunch time, and say "if anyone wants to talk about speech or travel or poetry or anything like that, I'd love to fill you in with this." And then she'd talk about whatever she was filling it in with. She was very easy to be with. She wasn't stressful. It was teaching, but it was also listening, you know? We would try to—in fact we wrote—oh yeah, I'd forgotten that—we wrote a little poem and a little play, a sort of dialogue. She said, "Okay, if you were a writer and you wanted to express great pain—the loss of your father or your mother or your boyfriend, your husband, your children, whatever—you know a shocking change, something you weren't prepared for." She taught us how to get into a specific emotional place and then write about it, which I hadn't done before. She was very inviting. She was a wonderful teacher. And directing plays was fun. It was great.

**Interviewers:** What were the plays that she was most passionate about? What art did she talk most about?

**Foss:** Good question. Let's see. You're asking the wrong person because my memory way back there is—I guess you probably don't know how old I am.

**Interviewers:** We do, and your memory is great, by the way.

**Foss:** I could make it up, but that wouldn't be nice. I remember before she died she showed me the books—as I think I said earlier—which I could take. And she said, "Well, I'll keep them now, but when I'm gone, they're yours." And I never got them because I didn't know the lawyers involved. In fact, I wrote them and never got an answer. Maybe at the last minute, she said, "Well, my plan is to leave my letters to Princeton and I don't want them opened—the letters or any correspondence with him." And I said, "Well, that makes sense." She said, "I'm going ask them not to open anything until about 2020," because, she said, "I don't want anybody like you, who knew me, to be alive." Well, lucky me, I'm alive!

**Interviewers:** Lucky us.

**Foss:** I remember that as if she said it yesterday. And I said, "Well, all right, they're your papers and your things. I've never seen them. I will be very interested

in seeing them." I knew Chipping Campden. I'd been there two or three or four times with her, not him, but I knew he had a place nearby, I think. I'm not sure how that all worked out. That's where they met a lot, in England.

**Interviewers:** What was that visit like when you went there to see her? She was with the Perkinses, her aunt and uncle?

**Foss:** That's right. I don't recall them. I remember the name—that's right, Perkins. I remember trying to get there because I was on a bicycle trip—I was going from here to there to the next place, visiting with other people. She said, "Oh, well you've got to come see me." So I said, "sure." It was a very short visit, but I wanted to see the place that she'd been talking about. Not in great detail, but I just knew that's where he was, too. And you can imagine—and I can't really describe it because we didn't really discuss it very much except to say—that she was very, very upset, understandably, when he married the second time and it wasn't with her.

**Interviewers:** So that was in 1957? What year was that that you were at Chipping Campden then? Do you remember?

**Foss:** I'm sorry, I'm not good with dates. It was before that—way before that.

**Interviewers:** Do you remember how old you were?

**Foss:** I was probably in my 20s. I was still in college. No, not in college. Right after the war. I graduated in '45.

**Interviewers:** So that was around the time that Vivienne, his wife had died, in 1947.

**Foss:** Well, that helps me. That rings a bell. I couldn't have said it exactly. I'm not good at remembering exact dates.

**Interviewers:** You remember Emily being upset?

**Foss:** Oh, very. Well, yeah.

**Interviewers:** And she talked to you about it?

**Foss:** She never told me what she put in her letters. She said they were just correspondents about critiquing. The main purpose was to critique each other's thinking about poems. And then obviously any other conversations they wanted to have with each other.

## INTERVIEW

She never showed them to me and I didn't ask. But she said, "you won't be around to read them." I said, "I don't know. You never know what's ahead of you."

**Interviewers:** And you can read them now. The archive is open, and our understanding is that they will be published next year. But we are sorry that we don't have her side of the correspondence. Do you know if she ever kept copies, carbon copies of her letters?

**Foss:** No, I don't. I had no discussion about that with her, except maybe she was thinking of his letters by saying don't open them up until 2020 or something. That was not a long discussion, because I didn't expect to live until 2020. I knew there were constant letters. She said, "Oh, we've been in touch ever since way back, way back when he was in college at Harvard." Somebody told me that he didn't want any of his letters publicized?

**Interviewers:** Yes. Harvard released a statement by him about that. It's quite mean. We were surprised by it. But I don't think it in any way detracts from her conscientious keeping of his letters and her making sure that scholars had them. One thing that surprised us was that inside his letters to her he included letters from other people. I know that Emily Hale visited his offices at Faber. Do you think that he introduced her to the literary circles that he knew?

**Foss:** It wouldn't surprise me, but I don't know it for a fact. I can't quote that I heard it. And she didn't talk about that much. She just talked about writing poetry. Writing and why this way and not that way. Or, what you're trying to get across. "Is that the way you feel? Do you understand it that way? Now if I change this word or that word or the pattern of it. It's the same thing with a play. You're telling a story, but you're also talking about feeling, you're talking about experiences that are new. You've never had them before so you're either frightened or you're scared or you're joyful, because it makes you feel good. Whatever." That's the kind of conversation we had with her. She was very relaxed. I remember feeling very grateful to talk with an older person so easily. I'd ask a lot of questions. And I'd say, "Oh, I hadn't thought of that." Or, "that's a different word. Why did you pick that versus something else?" We had a discussion about it. And then we'd play games. We'd make up words, or new words. So each week—well, whenever she was with us, two or three or four days or five days or a week or something—I'd look for a word that I hadn't ever used before that I'd read or something. It was fun.

**Interviewers:** And were you mostly together with her one-on-one or was your mother there?

**Foss:** Yes, she was there a lot. The two of them would giggle over what they used to do. She was writing when she was in school, too.

**Interviewers:** Did she share any of her poems with you or your mother?

**Foss:** No, not that I know of. They didn't talk about it and so I don't know. I doubt it, because I'm sure my mother would have said, "Do you want to hear about what we used to write when we were teenagers?" And I'd say, "Well, sure." What she did instead was to come and visit my mother, instead of just phoning her or writing a letter. They got along just beautifully, and she knew my mother very, very well. They acted together at Miss Porter's School, and that's how they got to know each other pretty well.

**Interviewers:** It sounds like she thought about poetry in connection with drama, as a kind of oral performance.

**Foss:** Yes. Well it had to do with elocution, of course. And the way she used to say el-oh-cution. Everything had a sort of rhythm to it, a pattern to it.

**Interviewers:** She must have been very beautifully spoken.

**Foss:** Yes, yes. It was, kind of—I remember thinking of it as childhood drama, just being with her. I didn't feel like I was on the stage or anything, cause there wasn't anybody, audience or anything. Just listening to her think aloud, it was fun.

**Interviewers:** And did she have any siblings? You mentioned her mother was ill.

**Foss:** I don't know. I never asked her and I never heard about them.

**Interviewers:** She sounds like a rather lonely soul.

**Foss:** Yes. She was busy teaching and being involved with students and other teachers, of course. With my mother, she was a member of a Shakespeare club, and they would read plays but not put them on the stage, just read them out loud to each other and with each other. Nobody else in my mother's friendship—my mother had lots of friends and she was a very busy lady with this, that, and the other thing—but Emily was her closest friend for a long, long time, really.

## INTERVIEW

**Interviewers:** What was your mother's first name?

**Foss:** My mother? Her maiden name was Mary Walker Parker. And then she married my father, Mr. Foss. So, she became Mrs. Leon Foss. That's my father.

**Interviewers:** When Eliot broke off the relationship, do you have a sense what hopes Emily had for her life after that? What she planned to do?

**Foss:** I knew what had happened. I knew he was married—I heard mother talking with Emily about it. I knew it had happened. Mother said don't bring it up. And I said, okay. My mother and I had kind of a signal that means not now, later maybe, if at all. So I wasn't in on any conversation about it. I knew she was upset. My mother explained it to me after she left the room or the next morning or something—that he had remarried and that her connection with him of working, back and forth, sending suggestions for poems and ideas and whatever else they had to say to each other—that had to stop. So, she didn't talk to me about it, because I didn't want her to, because it was none of my business really. I mean, I could see she was hugely upset, and I knew why. And I wasn't old enough to discuss it in any way. I mean, I couldn't say I know what you're going through, anything like that.

**Interviewers:** Do you know what her old age was like?

**Foss:** She was dying. She was sick. I mean, she didn't go to the hospital because she didn't want to. And I said, "you're staying at the Inn, would you like some help? My mother could find somebody to come and be with you if you need help." We were just around the corner, almost—not quite literally, but maybe a ten-minute walk from our house to the Colonial Inn in Concord. I really don't know how long she was there. I would say probably pretty close to two years.

**Interviewers:** So she spent the end of her life at the Colonial Inn in Concord?

**Foss:** That's right. That's where she died.

**Interviewers:** Did students visit her? A community of people?

**Foss:** To some extent. I don't know of anybody in particular. She did go to the Unitarian Church and maybe—I mean services—but maybe she was on a committee meeting. I don't know that she was. But I know she was active with them until she was sick. She was bedridden for quite a while there. She could get

up and maybe go to the table and eat or something like that. But she certainly didn't do any traveling. She would come over to the house and have tea in the afternoon with my mother. But she was not up and running at all. I think she was just plain discouraged about Tom. There was no more writing, no more talking with him, or being in touch with him. And then to be dropped off the end of the ladder, really, is awful.

**Interviewers:** Is there a memory you have of her that you would want people to know, because we have this opportunity to talk with you? We know it's very precious.

**Foss:** Well, she was a born teacher. I'd say that. She liked learning. She liked sharing. She liked interpreting what you said or what you meant or how else to say it or how else to do it. She could have been a psychologist actually, I think. She was very relaxed, very open, very honest, very genuine. And funny. We laughed a lot.

**Interviewers:** Eliot was lucky to have known her.

**Foss:** A very dear lady. Yes. And a very, very inspiring kind of friend. My mother went through a lot when her mother—my mother's mother, my grandmother—died, because she was living with us. And Emily, she just, she was on stage in a way, but genuine. I mean it was Emily talking. She could get you to laugh or she could get you to understand something that was really questionable, like why do you do that or why did you say that. You know, if you're uneasy or you're going through some kind of a mess—somebody called you and said, "I don't want to see you anymore"—and you think, what's that all about? Why would somebody do that? She would just let you talk and then, not that it happened to me that much, but she was interested in what I was doing—not that I was doing much of anything, really. I mean I was going to school. And I loved acting and so my brother, my twin brother, and I wrote little plays. And she said, "Well, they're not little plays. They're dialogues." And I said, "Well, okay; it's dialogue."

**Interviewers:** We feel so fortunate to be able to talk with you about her.

**Foss:** Well, I'm glad to be able to fill it in as best I can with you.

## The Storied Past of *Time Present*

*continued from page 6*

Cyborgs: *The Waste Land*, *Metropolis*, and *Star Trek: First Contact* (32:1997; author, M. Lockerd). One can imagine the lay Eliot enthusiast taking some interest in the earlier titles; the latter are, if more provocative to the experienced critic, perhaps an indication that *Time Present* is reporting on more rarefied proceedings. Regardless, the fact that the annual meeting continues not simply to exist, but to thrive, is a testament to the Society's excellent stewardship over the years.

Three, an important new essay collection is always forthcoming; permissions from the Eliot estate are always . . . less so: "For over two years Eliot specialists have been expecting the first volume of the *T. S. Eliot Annual*, edited by Shyamal Bagchee of the University of Alberta . . . The *Annual*, to be published by Macmillan in London, has at length received from Eliot's copyright holders, after a fifteen-month study of the typescript, the necessary permission for critical quotations, and is now definitely nearing production" (1:1987). It could almost have been written yesterday.

For all that has remained the same, *Time Present* has grown up, changed, and reflected the changing world around it. In reporting on the proceedings of the annual meeting and new developments in Eliot studies, the newsletter gradually evinced its own growing vocabulary. Words unheard in *Time Present*'s formative years became commonplace: "politics," "gender," "paradigm," "sexuality," "imperialism," "affect," and "ecology." Armed with its steadily expanding vocabulary, the newsletter took on new challenges over the years. Most notably, it expanded its interest in the important work of reviewing new books about Eliot. A compilation of the many excellent reviews produced over the years could serve as essential reading for an aspiring Eliot critic; it could save many from reinventing particular wheels.

Other things have changed. In 2007, in keeping with its growing sense of self and identity, *Time Present* shook off its old names—*News and Notes*, *Newsletter*—and opted for the more mature and appropriately allusive moniker it bears today. In addition to reporting Society news, reviewing books and performance, and publishing the odd poem or reminiscence, the rebranded *Time Present* began producing more original content that seems to reflect the mature publication's desire to affirm the cultural relevance of its subject. The "Public Sightings" section emerged as a means of recording Eliot's continued influence on the world

around us, from the profound, "New Artwork based on 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'" (72:2010), to the punny, "Prufrock'n'Roll" (93:2017). Also, headlines such as "Explicator and Chief" (77:2012) about President Obama's astute college musings on *The Waste Land*, and "Reading *The Waste Land* with the #MeToo Generation" (97:2019) began to appear. Eliot, *Time Present* continually argues, is for our time too.

For all that it has gained over the years, *Time Present* is losing something. Once, it could call on scholars like Christopher Durer ("T. S. Eliot's 'What Dante Means to Me' and a Four-Piece Suit: A Reminiscence and Some Thoughts" 43:2001) to share reminiscences of Eliot himself. The wonderful interview with Sally Foss in this issue may be the last of its kind. At least we can say with certainty that the historical gap between *Time Present* and the man who inspired its creation continues to widen. As we charge ahead into the new 'twenties, (yes, there will be many *Waste Land* centenaries to track in 1922) we are beginning to lose contact with those people who knew Eliot, or met him at a party, or bumped into him unexpectedly in the London Underground. As our temporal distance from Eliot grows, we might look back to *Time Present* for a sense of what he has meant to a generation of dedicated and inspired scholars. There, we can find insight, humor, and sense of who we are as a Society.

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## *Cats*, reviewed by Steven Cullinane

*continued from page 6*

Eliot's publishers would have gone bankrupt without the royalties from the original musical. Look it up, it's in Toby Faber's new book, *I swear . . .*." Cassandra's curse!

There aren't many allusions to Eliot's other works, but the ones that do exist serve to underscore the film's general creepiness. *The Dry Salvages* contains a haunting meditation on how it feels to confront "hints of earlier and other creation": its movie equivalent evokes uncanniness by other means, showing us Judi Dench swallowed up in digital cat hair and talk-singing lines about how "past experience revived in the meaning is not the experience of one life only but of many generations . . ." Grizabella, quondam "glamour cat," is said to live in *The Waste Land*. It's distressing to think that Lil's husband might be coming back from the

## REVIEWS

trenches to a city overrun by these creatures; however, this does offer the most plausible explanation to date for all of Madame Sosostri's sneezing.

Taylor Swift co-wrote a song exclusively for the film version; in a filmed interview, she says "If you can't get T. S. Eliot, get T. S.," and claims to have studied the "specific language and imagery" of her predecessor and apparent namesake. "Beautiful Ghosts" mimics the longing of Prufrock, but it's not quite the same. This cat daydreams of "dazzling rooms I'll never get let into"; J. Alfred's been to all those rooms, and would rather be on the ocean floor. I think we get a grim intimation of Prufrock's fate when Bustopher Jones eats a lobster out of a trash can.

A rare positive review came from the *Church Times*, an Anglican periodical which called attention to the "theological subtext." It exists, but it's not coming from Eliot: the play's original director Trevor Nunn is responsible for most of the *Cats* mythology. In his defense, he did take cues from poems that T. S. Eliot himself found too depressing for *Old Possum's Book*; however, many liberties were taken. Whereas the original book has no underlying narrative, *Cats* focuses on the Jellicle Ball, which culminates in a competition at which the cats all sing self-aggrandizing or self-pitying songs about themselves. The winner is released from this life and born into another—raptured up to the Heavise Layer in a hot air balloon. I had not gathered

from my reading of the original book that the Jellicle Cats were a death-cult led by Old Deuteronomy. Old Deuteronomy was male in the original, but Judi Dench plays the role in this film, likely because a female would draw fewer comparisons to Jim Jones and David Koresh. (His ninety-nine dead wives are also omitted.) It's not Eliot's theology: Grizabella's maudlin plea for reincarnation is worlds apart from Celia Copplestone's self-sacrifice, or Thomas of Beckett's refusal to seek egoistic gratification in his martyrdom. It's the "apothanein thelo" of the Cumaean Sibyl, the death-drive in its crudest expression. Petronius tells us that the Sibyl shriveled in her unending old age until she'd shrunk into the form of a grasshopper. If so, she'd be at home among the stomach-churning anthropomorphic cockroaches that get eaten alive on-screen in this film.

The worst part of *Cats*'s failure is its implications for the broader Eliot Cinematic Universe. Statistically, one of the myriad new streaming services was bound to produce a Sweeney miniseries. Nowadays anything can be turned into exclusive paywalled content, and what's \$15 more a month to see those hams shift in 4K? But now the commercial viability of the franchise is uncertain. We'll never know if Pipit would be cast as a young girl or an old woman, or if *Irishmanesque* CGI would be used to split the difference between the two.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### *T. S. Eliot Studies Annual* Volume 3

Clemson University Press is pleased to announce the contents of the forthcoming volume of the T. S. Eliot Studies Annual:

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- "Wind, Rock, Flower, Glass: *The Family Reunion* as Ecodrama," by Julia E. Daniel
- "'The Life of the Soil': T. S. Eliot and Organicism," by Jeremy Diaper
- "Eliot and Skin," by Kevin Rulo

"[Re]Cycled Fragments: the End of *Sweeney Agonistes*," by Sørina Higgins

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"The Myths of Emily Hale," by Sara Fitzgerald

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- “‘For Whom the Bell Tolls’: Reading the *Quartets* after the Letters to Emily Hale,” by Katerina Stergiopoulou

“Democracy, Punishment, Banality: Anti-Fascism 1940–2020,” by Patrick R. Query

“T. S. Eliot, Fraud,” by Leonard Diepeveen

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