

T S ELIOT SOCIETY

OF THE UNITED KINGDOM



Exchanges...

Spring 2018

In this issue:

Editorial

Page 2

'Four Quartets' performed

Page 3

Something missing: Journeys with 'The Waste Land' at the Turner Contemporary

Pages 4-5

T. S. Eliot and Anglo-Catholicism

Pages 5-6

Exploring Eliot's 'Four Quartets'

Pages 7-8



Eliot holidaying in the Bahamas, 1964

EDITORIAL

Exchanges Spring 2018

Timing a 'Spring' edition of anything is always hazardous, given the uncertain nature of the English weather. Spring might appear in March – 'when daffodils begin to peer', as Autolycus sings in *The Winter's Tale*; but it certainly didn't this year. An early Easter saw the country still in the throes of winter. But there was no doubt that the mid-April weekend heralded the new season; so the preparation of the Spring *Exchanges* began appropriately in Eliot's 'cruellest month'.

And now we are in May. At the recent Little Gidding pilgrimage, which begins at Leighton Bromswold in the church restored by George Herbert and which ends at Little Gidding church, pilgrims could not fail to notice what Eliot himself observed in the poem: 'If you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges /White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness.' White indeed they were, and almost impossibly burdened with blossom in what seems to be an exceptional year.

So: to the Spring edition. We look again at the Margate exhibition based on *The Waste Land* from the viewpoint of Sussex member Jay Phillips; there's a further reflection on reading Eliot aloud as performance, with Paul Keers, Society chairman, responding to Jeremy Irons' recent reading of *Four Quartets* at Southwark Cathedral; and at long last there is the promised look at Eliot's religious stance as an Anglo-Catholic. Plus, Scott Freer reports on a reflective *Four Quartets* event in Leicester, one of four arranged in the city to explore themes of time, place and spiritual journeying.

As always, I hope that the articles – reflective and intelligent, I trust, but decidedly not 'academic' - will prompt further thought in Society members. Even more, I hope that you may be prompted to offer an article of your own! Eliot wrote in 'The Function of Criticism' that 'The critic... should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks – tares to which we are all subject – and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgment.' That wonderful term 'the common pursuit' - later of course adopted

by F. R. Leavis – is a reminder that each new contribution has a place in helping us towards 'true judgement'.

Next edition

How risky it is to promise future items! An editor should surely know better... for alert readers will note that the present edition fails to carry the 'reflection on the personal in T. S. Eliot, prompted by last year's T. S. Eliot Society lecture' advertised in the last edition. Next time, perhaps But we can definitely offer in the Summer edition a review of Sarah Kennedy's new book on the poet and an announcement about a bursary for the 2018 Eliot Summer School, together with further items which we hope will be of interest. Might one of these be from a so-far-unpublished member of the Society?

John Caperon, Editor

Exchanges is the quarterly newsletter of the T. S. Eliot Society (UK). If you would like to contribute or if you have queries or suggestions, please contact the Editor direct at:

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For membership or more information about the Society, please go to: www.tseliotociety.uk



Bishop
Lancelot
Andrewes
(1555-1626)
Portrait in
Pembroke College
Cambridge

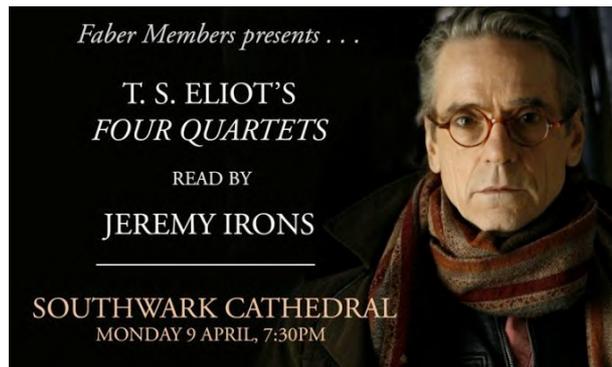


Window at St Andrew's Church, Bemerton (near Salisbury) - Herbert's parish— commemorating Herbert and his friend Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding. See the article on Eliot and Anglo-Catholicism on pages 5-6.

Four Quartets performed ...

More than 200 people filled the nave of Southwark Cathedral on 9th April for a live reading by Jeremy Irons of *Four Quartets*. The event was held to celebrate the release on CD of *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, the recordings by Irons which were broadcast across New Year's Day 2017 on BBC Radio 4. This was also effectively a book launch, with the powers from Faber and the Eliot Estate all in attendance.

Sub-Dean Michael Rawson first welcomed us, warned against photography or recording, and outlined Eliot's enthusiasm for the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, who is buried in the cathedral. Poet and Faber Poetry Editor Matthew Hollis then gave a brief introduction to the poems, before Jeremy Irons himself strode centre-stage. He was in character for his current role in *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, and his dark, three-piece suit, swept-back hair, thick moustache and glasses gave an unusually formal and period feel to his appearance.



Irons spoke first about the poems, reiterating comments he has made previously about allowing the words to “wash over” the listeners where they are too complex for immediate comprehension, and focused on their geographical inspirations – with the comment that he had been “privileged” to read ‘Little Gidding’ at Little Gidding (at last summer’s T. S. Eliot Festival). And then he took to the pulpit for his reading.

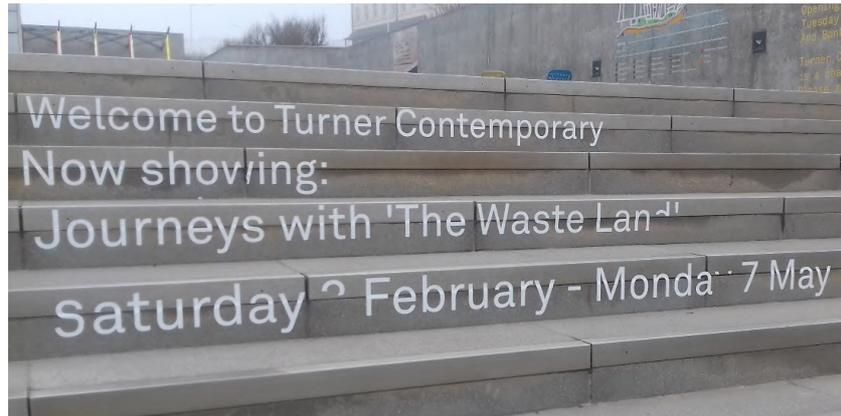
But this was very much a performance rather than a reading. The measured, intense reading of his recorded version was exchanged for a variety of tones and speed, at times vigorous (the war passages in particular), at others almost sing-song (‘Time and the bell have buried the day,/The black cloud carries the sun away.’) In the conversational passages he relaxed and almost talked through the lines, at one point putting his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets as if a common-room pontificator. Or, with his swept-back hair and spectacles, almost as if Eliot himself were in the pulpit.



This was a live performance, with that variety of voice compensating for an occasional lack of focus, and for a few inevitable stumbles, some corrected, others glossed over. It was as if his increasing familiarity with the text now permits him a greater freedom in his interpretation. And at the end of a reading which took nearly an hour, he descended to the chancel, blew kisses to the audience and to Andrewes’ tomb, turned to face the altar, and raised his fists like a prizefighter in his triumph.

Paul Keers

Something Missing ...



For a resident in rural Sussex, Margate is at the very end of the known world. First into Kent, then the long, dreary drive out to its farthest point east. The fact that our trip was dull and the morning grey and murky created a low mood which could possibly have affected our response to 'Journeys with *The Waste Land*' at the Turner Contemporary... and in our mind was the question raised by Paul Keers's review in *Exchanges*: how connected, in fact, was the exhibition?

We'd been prepared for our visit not only by Paul's astringent perspective but also by the views of two periodicals. *The Tablet's* review by Laura Gascoigne, headlined 'Rich pickings from *The Waste Land*' and illustrated by one exhibit, Paul Nash's bleak 'The Shore', identifies what for us also became the stand-out exhibit which made the whole show worthwhile, J. M. W. Turner's magnificent 'The Golden Bough' of 1834, with the Sybil of Cumae brandishing the bough which would admit Aeneas to the Underworld, stands as a kind of foundational art-work for Frazer's later study of myth and ritual, and also for Eliot's poem which depends so much upon it.

Nicholas Cranfield's review in the *Church Times*, headed 'Eliot and his angst beside the seaside' and illustrated by Edward Hopper's 'Night Windows' of 1928, perhaps the art work inevitably evoked by the typist of 'The Fire Sermon', is more ambivalent. He suggests that some exhibits 'take the poem itself apart'; and this seemed literally so in the case of John Newling's puzzling 'Eliot's Notebooks' (2017). This work is '433 cast paper pages from compost produced from 1000 shredded copies of T. S. Eliot's poem 'The Waste Land'', and the exhibition notes say: 'He's transformed the poem into something life-giving.' Well. It might have been more life-giving to have given 1000 copies of the poem to people to read, rather than shredding them, perhaps?



It was – frankly – disappointing to hear an indifferent reading of the pub conversation from ‘A Game of Chess’, and hard to grasp the rationale of some of the exhibits: why *these* masks from a production of ‘The Tempest’, exactly? And the videoed crowds flowing over London Bridge seemed to have far more life and energy than those imagined by Eliot, ‘undone’ as he describes them, by death. But the powerful ‘Abortion Sketches’ of Paula Rego (1998) brought a shocking and politicised view of Lil’s plight as a woman who took ‘them pills ... to bring it off’, but has ‘never been the same’ since: a truly chastening exhibit.

The description of the exhibition as curated by a group of twenty ‘members of the public’ makes one wonder, though. Is this just waving a flag for populism? A suggestion – in Michael Gove style - that the less we listen to ‘experts’ the better off we are? I wasn’t sure it all added up, really; it seemed somehow less than the sum of its parts. It lacked the internal coherence the poem possesses; it disappointed; it wasn’t connected. But it took us back to the poem, and a brisk walk along the dismal sea-front took us to Eliot’s vantage point over Margate Sands – the Newland Rock shelter. Now that was well worth a visit ...

Jay Phillips



‘On Margate Sands, /I can connect/ Nothing with nothing.’ (*The Waste Land* III; ‘The Fire Sermon’)

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many
(*The Waste Land* I; ‘The Burial of the Dead’)

63. Cf. *Inferno* III, 55-57: *si lunga tratta
di gente, ch’io non avrei creduto
che morte tante n’avesse disfatta*
(*Notes on the Waste Land*)

Another view of ‘The Waste Land’

In a well-worn anecdote, which has a mischievous sense of truth about it (writes Nicholas Cranfield in ‘The Church Times’) the late Queen-Empress recalled an evening at Windsor Castle, arranged by Osbert Sitwell as part of a series for the amusement of the royal family during the War: ‘We had this rather lugubrious man in a suit, and he read a poem – I think it was called The Desert – and first the girls got the giggles, and then I did and then even the King.’

T. S. Eliot and Anglo-Catholicism

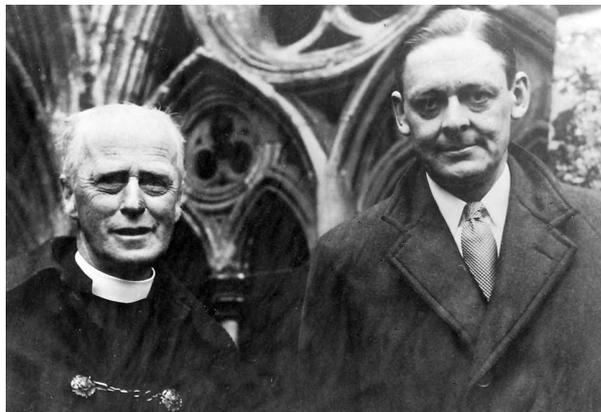
Eliot's decision to become a member of the Church of England in 1927 has sometimes been seen as a kind of betrayal, a sign that the poet had reneged on the core values of Modernism and of the intellectual classes generally. Alternatively, Eliot's conversion has been seen as a kind of home-coming, a move that enabled him to become in some sense fully 'English'. Whichever view we take, it's clear that Christian faith played a huge part in Eliot's life from 1927 onwards, and understanding his attachment to his particular version of Christianity – Anglo-Catholicism – may help the reader grasp the poetry more fully.

In his significant and insightful study, *Anglo-Catholic in Religion: T. S. Eliot and Christianity* (2010), Barry Spurr remarks on 'the complexity of Anglo-Catholic belief and the way in which committed Anglo-Catholics can differ from one another in articles of belief.' It's a reminder that Eliot's allegiance was in his lifetime to a wide stream or movement within the Church of England rather than to a narrowed-down version of Anglican faith.

Eliot wouldn't have tolerated the view that Anglo-Catholicism was inaugurated in the early nineteenth century with the Oxford Movement of the Tractarians. For him, what counted was the deep strand of catholic tradition and inheritance going back to the earliest days of the English Church. In this view, the English Reformation of the 16th century was something of a mistake; an unnecessary and regrettable separation of the English church both from the papacy and from the whole historical sweep of Western Catholic Christianity.

It's interesting to speculate what Eliot would have made of recent developments in the Church of England. Since his death evangelical styles of worship and belief have become more widespread, and there has been a shift in ecclesial power and gravity towards the low-church end of Anglicanism. The Anglo-Catholicism which – following its ascendancy in the 1920s – brought a catholic ethos to much of the mid-century Church of England now finds itself beleaguered, even marginalised. Women's ordination to the priesthood from 1993 onwards is not something one can imagine Eliot approving of, given its departure from accepted and from both Roman Catholic and Orthodox practice.

However, it seems (at least to the present writer) that it was the temper of Anglo-Catholicism rather than its precise doctrinal structures and shibboleths which Eliot found congenial. The sheer Englishness of the traditional parish church; the time-hallowed practices of worship and catholic belief stretching back to the origins of the faith; the unbroken stream of catholic practice within the church of England through and beyond the Reformation period; the witness to catholic truth of archetypal Anglican figures such as Lancelot Andrewes, Nicholas Ferrar and George Herbert: these were what made Anglo-Catholicism from 1927 onwards the natural spiritual home for Eliot.



Eliot with the Dean of Salisbury Cathedral, E. L. Henderson, in 1938, when he addressed the Friends of the Cathedral on George Herbert, describing him as 'the most intellectual of all our religious poets', one 'for whom sin was very real and the promises of death very terrible.'

That Anglo-Catholicism exists only in an attenuated, disempowered form in the 21st century, a hundred years on from its strongest and most influential phase, shouldn't concern the reader of Eliot's poetry. It is not as if an intimate, anthropological grasp of Anglo-Catholic ritual and belief is required to understand the poems today. What is needed, however, is the imaginative flexibility to enter a world where faith or its absence is decisive. 'A people without religion will in the end find that it has nothing to live for', wrote Eliot; and he clearly found in 1927 that this was true at an individual level too.

The modern reader needs to understand – to empathise with – that, and then to begin to see the meaning of the great Christian concepts which Eliot expresses or assumes: humankind's fallen, creaturely status; the reality of divine judgement; the eternal reach of divine grace; the validity of prayer and worship; the call to sanctity. These concepts have been rooted in the catholic church since the beginning, and Eliot, drawing on the profound tradition of English catholicism embodied in his time in Anglo-Catholicism, found that it was natural to describe himself as 'Anglo-Catholic in religion'. This was, it seems clear, just the right context for a poet and thinker seeking to be both fully English and fully Christian.

John Caperon

Exploring T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*

A workshop hosted by Mary Ann Lund & Scott Freer (University of Leicester)

One of the objectives of the T. S. Eliot Society is to encourage people to appreciate the poetry of T. S. Eliot. With this in mind, Mary Ann and Scott hosted four lunchtime workshops on *Four Quartets* in four Leicester venues of faith with the intention of exploring themes of time, place and spiritual journeying. The sub-heading of the event was: 'let's reclaim education from "Tumid apathy with no concentration" '.

What is presented here is an overview of the easeful debate that took place during the first workshop at the Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel (April 12th). Various people were present, academics from Leicester and UCL, students from Vaughan College (integral to the history of working-class education) and The Reverend Andrew Quigley from St. James the Greater.

Burnt Norton invites a biographical reading given that Emily Hale was present when T. S. Eliot visited the country manor in 1934. 'Time present' constitutes, for Eliot, a personal moment with Emily Hale at the site of an uninhabited house. Eliot often breaks the rules of poetry, no more so through playful pronouns. As in 'Prufrock', he invokes an unnamed woman, yet phrases of negation, e.g. "we did not take" and "we never opened", point to an autobiographical meditation on "what might have been" – a past romance that cannot be rekindled. The image of "a bowl of rose-leaves" implies aridity of romance.

Eliot then takes us into the 'rose-garden' and a shift from philosophical meditation to a mystical encounter occurs. It is not to be assumed that "our first world" intimates an Edenic world, for what is subsequently imagined is ambiguously haunting and deceptive. And why the thrush: a beckoning and knowing bird – a literary trope of the 'secret garden'? "Shall we follow?" implies hesitation.

As expected, Eliot cuts across the pastoral and the particular reverberates with signs of a fallen or tawdry modern landscape: "dry concrete, brown edged". Unlike Edward Thomas, poet of the particular, Eliot is abstract and distant from what is observed. The drained pool is both empty and full, depending on the impressionistic refraction of light. In other words, the revelation is deceptive.

Continues ...

The presence of children and the mysterious 'they' completes the sense of an uninhabited place: "Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children, / Hidden excitedly, containing laughter." Are the children sinister, for "containing" suggests so?

At this point, it is difficult to understand the purpose of movement 1 and what kind of spiritual staging is meant for the following movements. Burnt Norton is the site of a mystical encounter and Eliot can only offer glimpses and hints. Eliot is at odds with time present and at the same time reluctant to confront the remembrance or reality of time past.

Movement III: We reflected on whether the spiritual journeying of St. John of the Cross is relevant to Eliot's vision of descent and purgation. The two stanzas do not, though, express progression: the opening stanza is expressive of permanent stasis from which the spiritually dead cannot be reclaimed. Does this have something to do with Eliot's existentialist reworking of Augustinian theodicy?

But surely the 'here and now' was a vibrant London scene, and yet Eliot can only dehumanize the underground masses. Frank O' Hara would have embraced the charged now of the modern city. So is Eliot recycling a hackneyed image of lethargy, reiterating the condemnatory voice of *contemptus mundi* found in 'The Burial of the Dead'? But Eliot, we have been here before. Eliot's elitist theology would have chimed with the politics of the 1930s. Or is this more a reflection of Eliot's dejection and alienation during the 'low point' of his life (i.e. his legal separation from Vivienne)? *Burnt Norton* conveys the 'mental exhaustion' of T. S. Eliot in 'time present'.



Burnt Norton in Gloucestershire, which Eliot visited with Emily Hale in September 1934

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.

(*Burnt Norton* I)

I only looked through the little door
When the sun was shining on the rose-garden: ...
And then I was only my own feet walking
Away, down a concrete corridor ...

(Agatha in *The Family Reunion* Sc. II)