

T S ELIOT SOCIETY

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Exchanges...

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Page 2

Editorial

Page 3

Returning to Little Gidding

Page 4

Dipping into the T.S. Eliot Summer School

Page 7

Review: The Collected Prose of T.S. Eliot

Page 9

Envoi



*T.S. Eliot measures out coffee as
a Starbucks barista in the latest AI creation...*

Editorial

How important are writers to one another? The question is prompted by a photo-portrait of the Irish novelist Edna O'Brien which accompanies the announcement of her death in 'The Guardian' of July 29th. Pictured in 2019, O'Brien sits in front of bookshelves, on which some few books are standing with their front covers to the fore. 'The Poems of T S Eliot' (the edition annotated by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue) is one; another is Robert Crawford's 2015 biography 'Young Eliot'. Were the books just there by chance before the picture was taken? Or did O'Brien arrange them specially to indicate Eliot's particular significance for her?

There is, of course, no way of knowing. But it wouldn't be surprising to any Eliot enthusiast that later writers might in some way want to express their homage; and that this could have been O'Brien's intention seems a distinct possibility. For such has been the extent and depth of Eliot's impact that all later writers are in some sense indebted to him, as his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' suggested was the way in literature. A hundred and more years on, Eliot still exercises his distinctive influence on those who write today.

But what was 'distinctive' about his poetry? Challenged by one of the speakers at last year's T S Eliot festival to explain what Eliot 'meant by' the term 'the unimaginable / Zero Summer', I confess I felt that this was somehow the wrong question. I was reminded of Eliot's response when asked what he 'meant by' the line, 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree', which was – according to the received narrative – simply to repeat the line. The line was what he 'meant'.

And that reminded me of my first encounter with 'Prufrock', which I read as a sixteen-year-old, having picked up a copy of the Selected Poems at a stall on the Charing Cross Road. The opening lines struck me at once as both bizarre and 'unpoetic', yet also powerful. The etherised patient and the evening sky were hard to visualise together, and I puzzled to work out quite what was 'meant by' the evening being 'spread out against the sky'. But the fact that I couldn't fully grasp Eliot in the way I could, say, A level set texts by Wordsworth or Byron, made him fascinating.

Am I further forward in my understanding of Eliot today? Well, yes and no. We now have a splendid range of biographical studies at our disposal, and we know far more about his life. We also have access to the full range of his writings, both the Letters and the Complete Prose, not to mention the new Collected Prose, about to be published, and reviewed below. But there remains something elusive about the poems themselves. Even the remarkable annotated edition, magnificently comprehensive though it is, can't 'explain' what Eliot 'meant by' particular lines or phrases: it simply provides a multi-layered, informative context within which to consider them. The reader still has to do the work. This is perhaps what constitutes Eliot's distinctiveness. He's not an easy poet to grasp, to say one 'understands'. He remains elusive; and that may be his fascination.

The annual T S Eliot Festival at Little Gidding, held this year on Sunday 7th July, and jointly organised as usual by the Friends of Little Gidding and the Society, provides, as might be expected, some of the material for this edition of 'Exchanges'. Festival-goer David Strong offers a review of the day, also attended by members of The T S Eliot Summer School. The Summer School experience is also the subject of an appreciative piece by Dan Dearlove.

This year's Festival, though, was notable by the sad absence of Pauline Davison, who for many years had been part of the Festival Committee and a key member of the Society's Committee. Pauline's death in early June was followed by a fitting and beautiful funeral service at Great St Mary's, Cambridge, and her obituary may be found at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/12/pauline-davison-obituary> .

Paul Keers contributes to this edition what we believe is the first published review of Faber's long-promised *Collected Prose of T S Eliot*; surely there can't now be any more unpublished Eliot out there? His review questions issues of inclusion and exclusion, and he clearly has reservations about some aspects of the project.

On a lighter note, Simon Kershaw of the Friends of Little Gidding (and much else!) provides a picture of the 'literary walk' in Huntingdon, which demonstrates that Eliot is not just to be found on the bookshelves of renowned novelists. As ever, I am grateful for all contributions, and end with an invitation to all readers to consider making their own; why not respond to something in this edition?

John Caperon
Editor

Exchanges is the quarterly members' 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 Exchanges@tseliotssociety.uk

On Returning to Little Gidding

This year marked my second time attending the T S Eliot Festival and visiting Little Gidding. As last year, I came as part of the T S Eliot International Summer School, taking place for the first time this year at Merton College, Oxford; and I was struck again by the ability of Eliot's work to draw together a diverse range of enthusiasts for generative discussion on a variety of topics. I would like to pick out a few threads from the various lectures of the day that I think capture the range of what we can talk about when we talk about Eliot.

In the first lecture of the day, A N Wilson spoke on Eliot and Dante, offering several challenges to the assembled audience. I found his discussion of Eliot in relation to devotional poetry to be particularly rich. Here, Eliot's persistent doubting is interpreted by



A.N Wilson at Little Gidding

Wilson as a wavering before the desire to write devotional poetry in 'Four Quartets'. Wilson then compared this to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and the question of open, frank intensity as Wilson candidly admitted that he desired Eliot to make a leap in 'Little Gidding' that never occurs. Wilson ended by stating that the task of a Christian tradition is to be intelligible and truthful, a thought that has stayed with me in the weeks since the Festival as I revisited Eliot's work, particularly his writing on the social function of the poet, and drama as a public mode of poetry.



Festivalgoers at Little Gidding

After lunch, Charles Wilde spoke on Eliot and George Herbert, and **3**

continued developing the thread of Eliot's social criticism. Saying that neither Herbert nor Eliot 'withdrew from the world,' Wilde pointed to Eliot's social criticism as a neglected area of inquiry. The tension between Eliot's often definitive prose writing compared with the doubting and searching tone of his poetry is something that I feel increasingly drawn to in my own research.

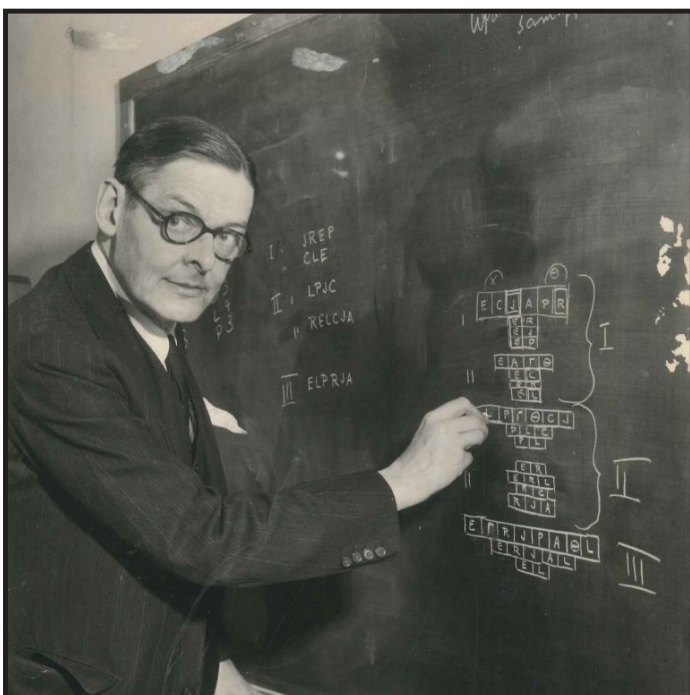
In the final lecture of the day, Maud Ellman, returning to some of A N Wilson's thoughts earlier in the day, noted that the 'hypnotic rhythms' of 'Little Gidding' smooth out the jagged and fragmentary use of quotation in 'The Waste Land'. The possibility of the persistence of that same fragmentary jaggedness, of a tension being held at bay rather than overcome, complemented ideas of doubt, wavering, and persistence established by Wilson and Wilde.

In all three lectures, perspectives on the poetic, personal, and political were interwoven; the Eliot we each want met the Eliot we all have, and that contact produced overlapping and generative lines of inquiry. Over the course of the day, a community formed as we were brought into contact with new people and new ideas. It is fitting that the day ended with everyone gathering in front of the church to listen to Katherine Waterson read 'Little Gidding', returning to the movement and rhythm of the poetry in a moment of shared contemplation. I left grateful to the Friends of Little Gidding and the T S Eliot Society (UK) for organising the Festival and providing a venue for enriching and wide-ranging conversation on Eliot.

David Strong

David is a postgraduate student in English Literature at the University of Glasgow. His current research looks at W. H. Auden's relationship to the development of theopoetics through the Society for the Arts, Religion, and Contemporary Culture.

Dipping into the TS Eliot Summer School, July 2024



At this year's T S Eliot Festival at Little Gidding, Anthony Cuda, associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Director of the annual T S Eliot Summer School, took to the stage and said that any member of the T S Eliot Society would be welcome to join the Summer School in Oxford for a day or two. My ears pricked up at this invitation; and the following Thursday, I was on the train from Paddington to Oxford.

This was the first year the Summer School had been held at Merton – Eliot's own college. It involved a week of lectures and seminars, dinner in the hall at Merton on the Friday, and a trip to Burnt Norton on

the Saturday. Lectures began at 9am, so I arrived *in medias res* – both in the middle of the week and after the beginning of the day.

I wanted to get my bearings and so wandered through the college. It seemed strangely familiar – then I realised that I recognised the grounds from an interview (to be found on YouTube) with J R R Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*. This was Tolkien's college as a professor; and also the home of F H Bradley, the British Idealist philosopher – Eliot's philosophical hero, who had drawn him to Merton - and someone I work on for my own PhD in Philosophy.

After lunch, we heard a lecture by John Haffenden, Editor of the *Eliot Letters*. This is a lifetime project, for Eliot was a prolific correspondent! There was so much to be gleaned from the talk: about the art of letter writing, the way in which correspondents influence or mirror one another,

and about Eliot as a person – both the good and the bad. Haffenden insisted that in the letters, Eliot, on the whole, comes across as a thoroughly decent and generous man, especially to up-and-coming writers while he was at Faber and Faber.

Yet, there are controversial aspects: moments of antisemitism in his letters, the Emily Hale correspondence, friendships with extreme, right-wing-leaning intellectuals of his day. After the lecture, discussion developed about Eliot's Christian vision of society – and his warnings about leaving that vision behind. This was evidently a divisive topic: people like Eliot for many different reasons.

One contributor noted that at her first Eliot conference, during dinner, she had found herself seated between two Eliot enthusiasts – a priest of the Church of England on her right, and an anarchist post-modernist on her left! Was Eliot right about the need for a Christian backdrop to society? What will happen if we leave this behind? And how did that vision of society square with the right-wing forces at large in Europe at that moment?

Mulling this over, I was lucky to next find myself in Anthony Cuda's seminar on 'The Waste Land'. During the week the group had reached the shortest section, 'Death by Water'. We discussed these ten lines for over an hour – and could have gone on much longer. The more one attends to the seemingly simple passage, the stranger the imagery becomes. Phlebas, the drowned Phoenician sailor, seems to undergo a backwards transformation after death – a kind of rebirth. 'He passed the stages of his age and youth, entering the whirlpool'.

Was there a danger of anachronistically reading Eliot's later work and thought back into his earlier poems? Can traces of his Christian turn be found even here? Is this a baptism?

During the 'free' evening, we reconvened at the Lamb and Flag pub on St Giles' for drinks and dinner. We would have preferred the Eagle and Child (the usual meeting point of the Inklings) but it has been closed since Covid, and awaits its rebirth. But I was happy to find out that Tolkien, Lewis and co, also drank and read to each other in the Lamb and Flag too. It was a privilege to be joined there by John



Professor Anthony Cuda, Director of the TS Eliot Summer School



Haffenden, and we peppered him with questions about Eliot

The next morning, back on the station platform, I spotted the leading historian Tom Holland, and briefly said hello. Holland is the author of the hugely influential *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, which traces the long shaping of the Western world by Christianity. Holland's central claim is that our modern world – whilst seeming to many freed from its Christian origins – is so steeped in Christian values that we fail to see its deeply-imparted influence in our most basic assumptions: it is like not seeing the glasses at the end of your nose.

As Holland puts it in an interview, we are goldfish, and Christianity is the water we swim in. Holland poses a daunting question:

'If secular humanism derives not from reason or from science, but from the distinctive course of Christianity's evolution—a course that, in the opinion of growing numbers in Europe and America, has left God dead—then how are its values anything more than the shadow of a corpse? What are the foundations of its morality, if not a myth?' (Dominion, 2019, p. 524)

Holland doesn't offer an answer solution to his question, and it struck me that Holland, Eliot, Tolkien and Lewis would have much to say to one another, especially about the place of Christianity today. I was reminded of this quotation from Eliot:

'The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.' (T S Eliot, 'Thoughts after Lambeth' (1931))

Musing on this imaginary dialogue (perhaps held at an imaginary Eagle and Child?), I boarded the train. I hope to have offered a brief glimpse of the Summer School – thanks to Anthony Cuda and attendees' generosity. And I hope to return as a fully signed up student next year.

Dan Dearlove

Dan Dearlove is a PhD student in Philosophy at King's College, London.



Review: The Collected Prose of T.S. Eliot

When Valerie Eliot died in 2012, ‘The Guardian’ reported on the projects which she had inaugurated. ‘*The Collected Prose*,’ they wrote, ‘edited by Archie Burnett (but without annotations), is to be published in six print volumes, in 2014.’ It has finally appeared; a handsomely produced ‘clean-text’ (ie without notes) work in four volumes, presenting in chronological order all of Eliot’s prose writings which he saw published during his lifetime.

But in the intervening twelve years, we have seen the production of the monumental *Complete Prose*. Its eight-volume, print edition published only in the US, the *Complete Prose* is predominantly an online resource, offering rich scholarly annotation, a powerful search facility, and an incomparable wealth of content, both published and, significantly, unpublished.

In 1938, Eliot wrote to John Hayward, ‘I have had to write at one time or another a lot of junk in periodicals the greater portion of which ought never to be reprinted ... you could take it in general that what I have not published in books by the time of my death I don’t consider worth publishing.’

Professor Burnett’s introduction establishes his own similar criteria for inclusion in the *Collected Prose*. ‘Eliot was acutely aware of what he wished to see published (or not published),’ he writes. ‘The present edition collects in book form the prose that T.S. Eliot allowed to reach print, or that circumstances indicate he would have allowed to reach print.’

So as early as page 8, his *Collected Prose* differs from the *Complete Prose*. The *Complete* offers ‘The Defects of Kipling’, an essay handwritten by Eliot in 1909 during his Harvard studies. It is particularly interesting not only because it is about Kipling, an author Eliot was to publish and write about later in his career, but also because it raises for the first time the issue of ‘immaturity’, a criticism Eliot later applied to many writers. However, as an essay Eliot chose never to publish, it is absent from the *Collected Prose*.

Inevitably, inclusion and exclusion, along with definitions of ‘print’ and ‘prose’, will therefore spark debate. We get the great critical essays, material from the ‘Criterion’, and the many prefaces and introductions Eliot wrote for other authors’ books. We get the suppressed content of *After Strange Gods*. We also get Eliot’s paragraph entries in *Who’s Who in America* – is that even ‘prose’? We get a ‘Tribute to George Svensson’, a paragraph once ‘printed’ in holograph facsimile to mark a Swedish publisher’s sixtieth birthday – but not the ‘unprinted’ ‘Tribute to John F Kennedy’, sent in a telegram.




We do, however, get some of the significant interviews which Eliot gave over his lifetime. These are reproduced, Burnett explains, ‘where there is circumstantial evidence that a substantial and faithful record of the interview was preserved.’ We may again debate whether these qualify as ‘prose’, but it is marvellous to read the previously hard to access 1949 interview Eliot gave to ‘John O’London’s Weekly’ over four cups of tea.

But if you want to read the celebrated 1959 ‘Paris Review’ interview, conducted by Donald Hall, and best known as part of their ‘Writers at Work’ series, you won’t find it under any of those three references. You will need to know that its published title was ‘The Art of Poetry I’, which looks more like an essay than an interview. Unfortunately, there is no categorising of the index into - for example - essays, lectures and 7

interviews. In fact, the indexing of this enormous work is far from adequate.

All that the *Collected Prose* provides is an ‘Index of Article Titles’. As a consequence, there are 18 index entries for the title ‘Introduction’, 5 for ‘Foreword’ and 16 entries for ‘Preface’, distinguished only by their dates. How is one to know that, for example, ‘Preface (1929)’ is Eliot’s hugely significant opening to his book on Dante? Or that if you want to read Eliot’s revealing ‘Introduction to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn’, you will find it indexed merely as ‘Introduction (1950)’?

There is no means of tracing the presence of those authors or books most important to an understanding of Eliot; Dante, for example, gains just three entries, where his name appears in the actual title of a work, while Eliot’s many other references to Dante over the years go unindexed. Look up the three entries for ‘Dryden’ by all means – but you’ll need to know that ‘The Age of Dryden’ is not indexed there, but under ‘Age’.

T.S. Eliot’s Prose in Print		
Selected Essays	Collected Prose	Complete Prose
		
1 volume 544 pages	4 volumes 3458 pages	8 volumes 6541 pages
Content: “A kind of historical record of my interests and opinions.”	Content: “The prose that T.S. Eliot allowed to reach print, or that circumstances indicate he would have allowed to reach print.”	Content: “Comprehensive in its inclusion of published and unpublished works”
Format: “clean text”	Format: “clean text”	Format: “Textually edited, annotated, and cross-referenced”
Edited by: T.S. Eliot	Edited by: Archie Burnett	Edited by: Ron Schuchard + nine other Eliot academics
Price: £20 (Faber rrp) £14.98 (Amazon.co.uk)	Price: £50 each volume (Faber rrp) £137.50 pre-ordered set of 4 (Amazon.co.uk)	Price: US\$700 (Hopkins Press rrp) £560.18 (Amazon.co.uk)

Eliot compiled his own *Selected Essays* in 1951, and its 38 major essays will be sufficient to satisfy many enthusiasts, and perhaps reflect his view of his own prose legacy. (Frank Kermode also edited a 320pp *Selected Prose* in 1975.) At the other end of the scale, the colossal *Complete Prose*, with its unpublished material, its wealth of notes and references and its online search facility, has established itself as the *de facto* scholarly reference work. *The Collected Prose* now sits between the two. If you know what you are looking for, it provides a polished, clean-text reading experience for both major and less familiar published prose – and some enjoyable evenings under lamplight, for those of us who would choose a book over a screen.

Paul Keers

The Collected Prose of T.S. Eliot is published by Faber & Faber in four volumes on August 15th.

Envoi



About ten miles from Little Gidding is the town of Huntingdon, formerly the county town of Huntingdonshire, a small county sadly consigned to history by the local government re-organisation of 1974. At the end of Huntingdon's high street is an alleyway called Literary Walk, which has recently been painted with six murals of literary figures who have some connection with Huntingdon and Huntingdonshire. The six include T S Eliot, whose connection is of course with Little Gidding, though he only visited the hamlet once, in 1936....

Grateful thanks to Simon Kershaw for the picture above; and an article describing the full extent of the 'Literary Walk' can be found at: <https://littlegidding.org.uk/literary-walk-huntingdon/>