

T S ELIOT SOCIETY

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Exchanges...

Winter 2017-18
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Jeremy Irons reading *Four Quartets*
in the doorway of St John's Church, Little Gidding, during
the annual Eliot Festival; Paul Keers, Society Chair, to his right

EDITORIAL

Exchanges Winter 2017-18

Welcome to this new format edition of *Exchanges*

You know it's winter when the sun doesn't shine. *The Guardian* reports this January that North-West Europe is suffering one of its darkest winters since records began. Brussels apparently had only ten and a half hours of sun in December; while in Lille, a mere 2.7 hours of sun were recorded in the first fortnight of January 2018. Low spirits are not surprising in such conditions.

So it is something of a relief to turn to Eliot and his evocation of 'midwinter spring'. Society members will know well the opening of 'Little Gidding', in which Eliot describes 'the brief sun' which 'flames the ice, on pond and ditches,/ In windless cold that is the heart's heat....' His notion of the 'dumb spirit' being stirred by a 'glow more intense than blaze of branch or brazier' hints at the possibility of spiritual energy, 'pentecostal fire', even in 'the dark time of the year.'

I hope this edition of *Exchanges* ... will offer something to encourage readers in this sun-deprived season. You will find an article by committee member Pauline Davison on 'Reading Poetry Aloud', which reflects on her reading to a public audience with a group of friends. We report on a recent visit to the T. S. Eliot collections at Eliot College at the University of Kent; and there's a review (of a review) of a new book on the Modernist movement and its *annus mirabilis*, 1922, by member Jay Phillips; and an article by member David Geall on 'Enigmatic Signifiers of Spring in Eliot' – full of seasonal hope! Finally, we publish a stringent review by Society Chair, Paul Keers, of the *Waste Land*-related exhibition at the Turner Contemporary at Margate. For reasons of space, the article on Eliot and Anglo-Catholicism is held over until the next edition; but to whet your taste buds, this edition closes with a short piece from Paul on Eliot and cheese!

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: Exchanges@tseliotociety.uk

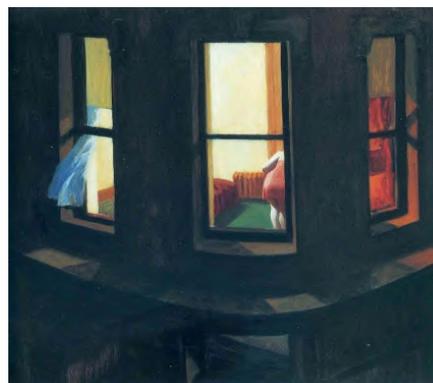
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Next edition

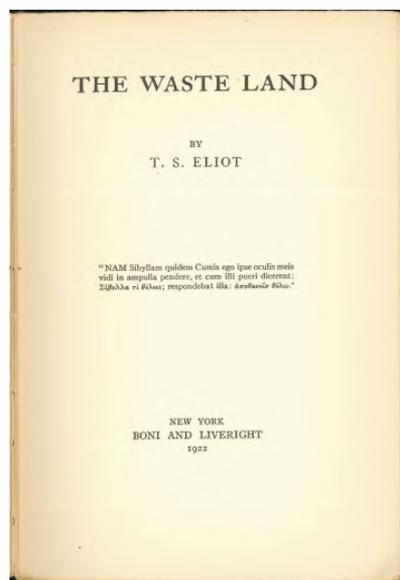
We carry a reflection on reading (or is it 'performing'?) Eliot's poetry in public, and an article on T. S. Eliot and Anglo-Catholicism, a reflection on the personal in T. S. Eliot, prompted by last Autumn's T. S. Eliot Society lecture (available for members to listen to on the members' section of the website); and a number of other articles.

We invite contributions from members: a couple of hundred words on your favourite line or lines, anyone?

John Caperon
Editor



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), 'Night Windows' (1928)
See the review of 'Journeys with *The Waste Land*', at the Turner Contemporary, Margate, on page 7



First edition of Eliot's groundbreaking poem, first published in book form in New York in December 1922. It had appeared two months earlier in the UK in Eliot's journal *The Criterion*.

See the article, 'Annus Mirabilis 1922', by Jay Phillips, pages 4-5.

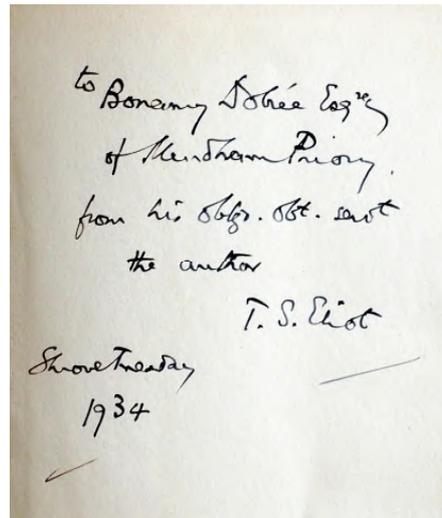
A Visit to Eliot College at the University of Kent and its Eliot Collections

January 4th 1965 saw both the death of T. S. Eliot and the granting of its Royal Charter to the new University of Kent at Canterbury. There was a proper recognition of this synchronicity in the naming of the first college of the university for the poet; and Eliot College continues to honour the life and memory of T. S. Eliot under the leadership of its current Master, Stephen Burke. Stephen generously invited two of the Society's committee members to view the college and its Eliot memorabilia, and Dr Chris Joyce and I were warmly entertained there in mid-November.

The university campus is located high above the city of Canterbury, and Eliot College has fine views over the city and cathedral. Entering the Master's office, one was struck immediately by the Epstein bust of the poet – a fine, craggy rendering; and the adjacent SCR has a unique collection of original Eliot portraits – including those by Patrick Heron and Edgar Holloway, and a brilliant Eliot caricature by Gerald Scarfe; it's really a treasure-trove, a well-hidden cache of superb Eliot material.



The Epstein bust of TSE at Eliot College



Bonamy Dobrée's signed copy of Eliot's
After Strange Gods

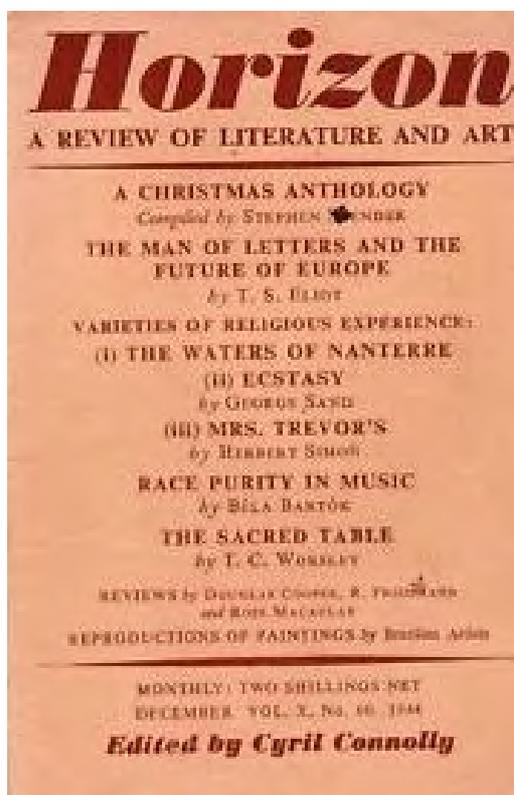
The Master's bookcases also contain a number of Eliot works inscribed by the poet for his friend Bonamy Dobrée, Professor of English Literature at the University of Leeds from 1936 to 1955. These evoke a warm and longstanding relationship between the two men, and there is a sense of somehow being very close to the poet as one looks at these autograph examples: it is almost as if one has wandered back into the 1930s and 40s and eavesdropped on personal conversation.

It's not Eliot College alone which houses important T. S. Eliot sources. The university's spacious, recently extended Templeman library, just a couple of minutes' walk from the college, has a valuable Eliot special collection in its controlled-environment stacks, which Stephen Burke arranged for us to visit. I was particularly fascinated to see a fine first edition of *For Lancelot Andrewes*; and also a copy of Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* magazine for December 1944, to which Eliot contributed a piece on 'The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe': a reminder that for Eliot, the social function of literature was a vital issue as he looked beyond the war to the new Europe to be created from the battle-scarred ruins of the old.

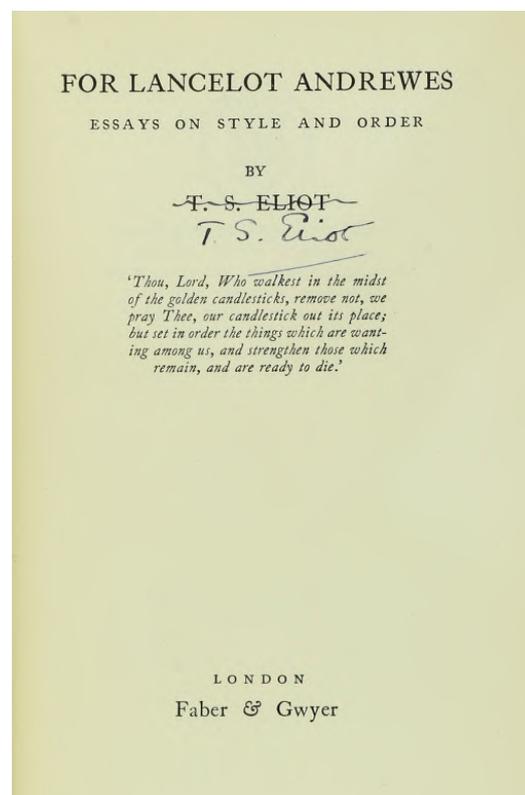
It's also a reminder that there remain very significant numbers of Eliot's essays and other prose works which as yet remain uncollected: a challenge which the complete prose works project masterminded by Professor Ronald Schuchard* is grappling with.

* [Ronald Schuchard, who gave the Annual Lecture for the Society in November last, at Newnham College, Cambridge, is Professor Emeritus of English at Emory University in the United States and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of English Studies at the University of London. He is the General Editor of the multi-volume edition of *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot*.]

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The front cover of *Horizon* for December 1944 containing Eliot's 'The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe'



The title page of a rare first edition of *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928) [This one in private ownership]

The close, even intimate relation between Eliot College and the poet which our visit brought out is further demonstrated by the annual T. S. Eliot Memorial Lecture sponsored by the college in collaboration with the university's School of English. Recent lecturers have been given a pretty free brief, and the relevance of the lectures to Eliot studies has been uncertain; but the lecture series itself honours the poet and his memory, as does the college – with its rich cornucopia of Eliot material – that bears his name. The Society hopes to keep in close touch with the college and to collaborate with them whenever opportunity arises.

John Caperon

Annus Mirabilis 1922

A new book by Bill Goldstein, *The World Broke in Two*, sets out to “tell the story of 1922”, the year which saw the publication not only of *The Waste Land* but also of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and was also the year in which Virginia Woolf completed *Jacob's Room* and began in earnest on *Mrs Dalloway*. Goldstein concentrates, though, on four writers, Eliot, Woolf, Forster and Lawrence, some of whom are not especially associated with the year; and in his review published in *The Guardian* (23/12/2017), John Mullen, who holds the Lord Northcliffe Chair of Modern English Literature at University College London, notes that this choice of authors “unsettles our notion of a unified movement that we now call ‘modernism’.”

Mullen argues, rightly I think, that however closely linked Forster may have been with the “modish Bloomsbury group”, in 1922 “his fiction seemed locked in a bygone Edwardian age”; and Lawrence, whilst radical in his subject-matter, “declined to be part of any movement”. So how correct are we in identifying a ‘Modernist Movement’ at all, I wonder? Might it be better simply to see the various experimental developments in perception, subject and style of the period following the First World War as simply features of a post-apocalyptic era in writing?

For this Eliot enthusiast, Mullen takes rather too much pleasure in swiping at the great man. “Being ill-looking is evidently Eliot's thing”, he suggests: hardly fair, perhaps, to someone in Eliot's state of marital desperation and nervous exhaustion at the time. This state might well explain what Mullen – again too

flippantly - calls Eliot's "ever ready to succumb to any kind of medical quackery"; how remarkably easy it is for a later and more enlightened age to look down on the crude thinking of the past.

But going back to the greatest works of the year – *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land* – one is struck by the newness of the writing. However medically uninformed the writers may have been – and both experienced what we would now have to call serious mental health issues – their capacity to perceive and to write with startling originality is surely not in doubt.

Jay Phillips

Eliot's Enigmatic Signifiers of Spring: From Lilacs to Ailanthus

*April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land ...*

How odd, one always thinks, but that's Eliot for you: in *Murder in the Cathedral* it's a bitter spring and a sour spring, while cruel April is followed by depraved May in *Gerontion*, with dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas, the last being *Cercis siliquastrum*, the Judas Tree, with prolific pink flowers in spring. In *Portrait of a Lady*, (just as in *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, neurotically *Her hand twists a paper rose*):

*Now that lilacs are in bloom
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
And twists one in her fingers ...
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks) ...
'Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall
My buried life, and Paris in the Spring ...'*



On the other hand, reading *The Dry Salvages* one realises how American it is, and not just because of the location. The rhythm of the *strong brown god* is present in the *rank ailanthus of the April dooryard*, which no doubt deliberately recalls the title and first line of Whitman's elegy on Lincoln, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. Whitman describes the lilac in the third section:

*In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love ...*

Contrasted with this is the ailanthus or 'tree of heaven' (aka 'tree of hell'), a foul-smelling, invasive species in the USA, also known as stinking sumach or stinktree (*Ailanthus altissima*), hence *the rank ailanthus*. It is *rank* in another sense too: it is the eponymous tree of Betty Smith's 1943 novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*: "Some people call it the Tree of Heaven ... It grows out of cellar gratings. It is the only tree that grows out of cement. It grows lushly ... survives without sun, water, and seemingly without earth. It would be considered beautiful except that there are too many of it."

*You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'
Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet ...*

I have always found these lines rather puzzling too. Hyacinths: those waxy, odorous blooms sprouting from big bulbs are often forced to flower in order to be given as gifts. Putting them in the garden doesn't seem to work well, though: better to keep them dry and dark before growing them in a pot or bowl. In *A Song for Simeon* Eliot wrote that *the Roman hyacinths are blooming in bowls*: these are a smaller, often white-flowered variety of the same species, *Hyacinthus orientalis*. So what is a hyacinth garden? *Hyacinthus orientalis* is also known as the Dutch, common or garden hyacinth, so can be grown outside: *With the smell of hyacinths across the garden*, in *Portrait of a Lady*. But would your arms be full of hyacinths, as the lines above seem to suggest? In *La Figlia Che Piange* she has *her arms full of flowers*: *Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise – Fling them to the ground and turn ...*

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Reading Poetry Aloud

Ever since **The Eliot Festival began** in 2006 one of the highlights has been the reading, by a more or less distinguished person, of *Little Gidding*. At my first Festival in 2009, I was delighted to hear it read by the poet Seamus Heaney and the biographer Robert Crawford, a pleasure enhanced for me by their intelligent understanding and their Irish and Scottish accents. Last year we were delighted when the actor Jeremy Irons sat outside the 'dull facade' to read and talk about the poem. In the years between there have been a variety of voices, some more convincing or appealing than others, but always interesting in that each reader has shone a different light on the poem, and somehow its truth and beauty have still come through.

With the memory of Heaney and Crawford in mind I had been reluctant when a friend suggested a public reading of *Four Quartets*. It seemed somewhat presumptuous. Who would want to hear four not-at-all famous and rather old people read Eliot? How embarrassing if no-one came. Peter, whose idea it was, used to work for the British Council where he learned to encourage and cajole. He was confident we would get an audience and that anyway we could enjoy reading, even if no-one came. And he was right. We did enjoy the hours spent in preparation and the satisfaction of getting to know the poems really well.

We were fortunate to have access to a free venue in the centre of Cambridge. Michaelhouse, once a medieval college chapel, is still a consecrated church. I persuaded the Vicar that reading Eliot, a Christian poet, could be considered part of its mission. We chose Tuesday lunch-hours and were pleased and rather surprised that we attracted a regular audience of between 35 and 50. Some saw the posters in the café and were curious, some were lovers of poetry in general, and some were dedicated disciples of Eliot and especially *Four Quartets*.



Our preferred weather for the Annual Eliot Festival at Little Gidding



Michaelhouse, Trinity Street, Cambridge
"I persuaded the Vicar that reading Eliot, a Christian poet, could be considered part of its mission"

For Lent 2015 we devised a programme of 20th century religious poetry from a wide range of writers, grouped under themes – *Creation, The Journey, Sacred Spaces* and *Encounters with God*. This required a different but rewarding kind of preparation, remembering well-loved poems, discovering new ones, arguing for their place in the scheme and putting them together like a collage. We read *Four Quartets* again in February last year to an appreciative audience, including a young Chinese woman, Ping-Ping, a passionate admirer of Eliot, who went on to attend the Festival in July and get to Burnt Norton with the Summer School before returning to China. We have just finished reading a series of 17th century poems, starting with Donne and Herbert, followed by Jonson and Herrick, then Milton and Marvell and finally Vaughan and Traherne. We found it quite challenging to bring some of these to life, and were pleased that our audience enjoyed the unfamiliar as well as the famous.

Why do we choose to read poetry aloud to an audience? First, because we love it and practising helps us to increase our understanding and appreciation, particularly of less accessible texts. It reveals the structure, pace and tone that reading on the page can miss. I say understand, but that comes with a caveat. Some poetry, Eliot's for example, is so complex and many-layered that it can't be understood completely, but we can strive to grasp the meaning – or enough of it - to convey it to the audience. Secondly, we read aloud because it is a two-way pleasure. The reader is challenged to communicate with the listener, and to engage the audience, whether by refreshing them with a new reading of something familiar or introducing them to something new. After our recent reading of Vaughan and Traherne, Peter remarked that we had read much better than we had at our rehearsal, and I think he was right. The attention and interest of the audience had enhanced our performance and made it a joint venture.

Pauline Davison

Would one really want to rip off armfuls of waxy blooms to put in a vase? It's possible, but what is the connection between giving hyacinths and having a hyacinth garden, unless it was a gift of a whole host of hyacinths? The name 'hyacinth' has also been applied to bluebells, *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus* or *hispanica*, and North American species including *brodiaea*, *camassia* and squill, among others – so it is just possible that Eliot had one of these in mind, subconsciously or as a distant memory, perhaps.

In *Ash-Wednesday* we are given a glimpse of a springtime scene – not on that day but two or three months later, when the hawthorn blooms, traditionally in May, and *the garden god, Whose flute is breathless*, is perhaps *The force that through the green fuse drives the flower*, to quote another poet. As Eliot commented elsewhere, in that unhelpful note to *The Waste Land*, "Anyone ... will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies."

*And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair ...*

David Geall



**Journeys with *The Waste Land*,
Turner Contemporary, Margate
3rd February – 7th May**

On Margate Sands, the Turner Contemporary does connect something with something – *The Waste Land* with modern art. The question is whether the connections it makes illuminate or enhance the poem itself. For this is not an exhibition *about The Waste Land* – it is an exhibition about responses *to* the poem. In "a pioneering approach to curating", the content has been assembled by a Research Group of local residents. It is their responses and reflections which drive the exhibition. And of course, the breadth of imagery and reference within the poem permits a corresponding breadth of potential – and subjective – responses and associations.

In an early section, there are some items directly related to Eliot, and to his writing of *The Waste Land*. It's a pleasure to see the original Patrick Heron portrait and the Jacob Epstein bust; but the manuscript pages are facsimiles, and the period photographs reveal little about Eliot's time in Margate. The exhibition then becomes like an episode of that TV quiz show, *Only Connect*. What, you find yourself asking, is the connection between this particular work and *The Waste Land*? OK, so that's a chess set... that's a bird, yes, there are birds in the poem... oh, there's a pleasant Walter Sickert, *Off To The Pub* (1912); I suppose that resonates with the pub scene? (Although presumably it would not have been there had it been titled *Off To The Races*...).

The stand-out work is Edward Hopper's magnificent *Night Windows* (1928). It reflects both the situation and the mood of the typist episode, with Hopper's masterly evocation of urban isolation. But what about a Berenice Abbot photo of a woman working on a 1940s computer? "We're connected, but disconnected," says a contributing member of the Group. "I think Eliot was probing a not dissimilar conundrum in *The Waste Land*, just in a different era." Does this photograph then make us revisit the poem with fresh insight? Or *Abstract Design* by Wyndham Lewis. "It's a visual distortion of reality," says its contributor, "in the same way that *The Waste Land* is a literary distortion of reality." Really?

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Cy Twombly's *Quattro Stagioni* (1993-5) dominates one room. I listen to the Group on an ear-piece discussing how these paintings, like *The Waste Land*, deal with "seasons...", "the cycle of life...", "the roots of language". But do the paintings then illuminate *The Waste Land* in any way? Or does the poem illuminate the paintings? I find no merit in juxtaposing the two.

The exhibition includes an artist's video of a visit to a gents toilet over a reading of the poem. "The nymphs are departed," he blurrily recites, as the camera pans across the condom machine. And the justification summarises the Group's approach: "The fact that John Smith connects the poem to the interior of a pub toilet also reinforces that it's ok to connect the poem to anything. For me all interpretations are valid." You could, of course, claim that the exhibition itself is "a heap of broken images", and that its juxtaposition of styles and periods therefore reflects the poem itself. Alternatively, like the Arts Editor of *The Times*, you could describe it as "a hodgepodge".

If the exhibition encourages people to read the poem, all well and good. And it has clearly been an enriching experience for the participants. But there is little here to enhance the poem for those of us who are already immersed in it. Sitting in the Nayland Rock shelter, where Eliot sat, looking out over Margate Sands, gave me a much closer feeling of connection to the man and his poem.

Paul Keers

The cheese comes round again...

The perennial subject of Eliot and cheese, pursued at various times by both Chris Joyce and myself, has been raised yet again, this time by the poet and Anglican priest Malcolm Guite. "It's a pity," he writes in his *Church Times* column of 5th January (<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/5-january/comment/columnists/malcolm-guite-poet-s-corner>) "that Eliot's love of cheese didn't find expression in his poetry, though perhaps the phrase 'or even a very good dinner', from *The Dry Salvages*, implies, in Eliot's cryptic way, some excellent cheese." He then goes on, in a poem of his own, to compare various poets to various cheeses – but concludes:

*From creamy Keats with his "mossed cottage trees",
Tasting the words themselves like cottage cheese,
To Eliot, difficult, in cold collations,
Crumbling, and stuffed with other folk's quotations*

Is that really the kind of cheese with which we would associate Eliot? "Crumbling"? Not the resonance of a mature Cheddar? The complexity of a Stilton? Surely members will have better suggestions...

Paul Keers

And *finally*, one of our members' favourite Eliot quotations!

