

T S ELIOT SOCIETY

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Exchanges...

Summer 2018

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Percy Wyndham Lewis with his portrait of Eliot
rejected by the Royal Academy, April 1938

EDITORIAL

“Summer surprised us”, wrote Eliot in *The Waste Land* and this year it certainly has done, with seemingly endless stretches of sunshine and heat. As I write this in August – the month which does double duty as both itself and as entire ‘summer’ (as in ‘Have a good summer’, when people sign off at the end of term) – it has, though, turned cooler again; and heat having ravaged the hanging baskets and the flowerbeds, there is even a visible touch of Autumn. Not long then, perhaps, until the time for ‘The evening with the photograph album’....

But while the later remains of summer still endure, here is the seasonal *Exchanges*. In this edition we look back to the Little Gidding T. S. Eliot Festival of July, and also to the Royal Academy of Arts’ 250th Summer Exhibition with its rehabilitation of the Wyndham Lewis portrait of Eliot. There are some further thoughts on Eliot and Intertextuality, with Ford Madox Ford in the frame. We publish Committee Member Dr Chris Joyce’s review of a recent book on Eliot by our 2016 T. S. Eliot Society lecturer, Sarah Kennedy; and in addition, we provide more evidence of the ongoing influence of Eliot on our language patterns and ways of thinking. We reflect further on the significance of Eliot’s American roots; and we reproduce an account by the then Secretary of the Rowntree Memorial Trust, Eric Cleaver, of his attendance at the Eliot memorial service at Westminster Abbey in 1965, which brings this issue to an apt conclusion.

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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Little Gidding Festival 2018

This was one of those sunny and near-cloudless days of the long, hot summer: not ideal weather, perhaps, for listening to talks in a marquee in deepest Huntingdonshire! But the Festival committee had put together an excellent range of speakers for the day and the heat didn’t faze either audience or lecturers; and the plentiful supply of fine food and drink (and lots of cool water) added to a feeling of indulgence, both intellectual and physical. It was a summer’s day to remember. (Recordings of the talks are available on the website.)

Introducing the day, Simon Kershaw referenced Eliot’s own visit in 1936 and the 17th century legacy of Nicholas Ferrar and his family: Little Gidding is hallowed by both. The poet George Szirtes, first up, gave a closely personal record of his encounter with Eliot. “Not a scholar of any description”, as he modestly described himself, Szirtes – a refugee from 1956 Budapest – found a further refuge in poetry while a schoolboy. Introduced to Eliot’s work he recognised himself in the Jewish characters of the earlier poems, and the low and high comedy of the Sweeney poems attracted him. From these he graduated to *The Waste Land*: a poem arising out of “a chaotic collection of flotsam and jetsam”, but with a unifying - possibly sexual – theme, and with a sense of “taking place in a constant present.”

From this personal encounter, it was a stretch to the scholarly, objective - and absorbing - talk by Seamus Perry, Professor of English Literature at Oxford and Fellow of Balliol. Again referencing Eliot's visit to Little Gidding, originally undertaken out of antiquarian rather than spiritual interest, he suggested, Perry delved into the Ferrar connection and explored the *Four Quartets*, notably 'Little Gidding,' in some detail, highlighting the "Eliotic conditionality" which permeates the poem. The spiritual life, argued Perry, was for Eliot "always a matter of hesitancy"; it is something one may intend but cannot plan. The elusive nature of Eliot's spiritual experience echoed in 'Little Gidding' (and contrasted with the "direct" nature of Auden's mystical experience) reflected both the key significance for Eliot and for Pascal - an illuminating comparison - of dependence on divine grace, suggested Perry. Characterising Eliot as a theological Jansenist, Perry emphasised the continuing, post-conversion "darkness" of Eliot's vision: God was for him "always present but also absent."



Society Chairman, Paul Keers, introducing Professor Seamus Perry

One feature of the Festival since its inception in 2006 has been a 'My favourite Eliot' spot: a chancy thing, but this year irradiated by a dazzling reading of Eliot's early French language poem 'Melange Adultère de Tout' by a French native speaker. For those of us who'd not heard Eliot in French, this was an absolute revelation: the sound-play, energy and sheer bravura made clear that Eliot's career as a poet could well have been in either language.

The Anglican priest and radio presenter Richard Coles was interviewed by Adam Begley, like Eliot a transatlantic import. Begley's style left one wondering at times; but Coles - perhaps sensing this - took over the interview and ran it himself, talking illuminatingly about his own late-emerging spiritual sense and Eliot's influence in its development. Is it possible, wondered Coles, to experience 'Little Gidding' as a secular poem? Or is the religious and spiritual impact inescapable? It was illuminating to hear Coles dilate on the significance of the Anglo-Catholicism of the 1920s and 1930s as the shaping context for Eliot's Anglican faith.

Reading 'Little Gidding' at the close of the day (another regular Festival feature) was the actor George Blagden, familiar to viewers of BBC 2's 'Versailles' as King Louis XIV. It was a clear and professional reading from the porch of Ferrar's restored church, overlooking his tomb. This was a reading which might even have been described as 'secular': a tentative, even ambivalent ending to a day which had been strong in its religious focus.

John Caperon



George Blagden reading 'Little Gidding' and the Reverend Richard Coles in interview

Acceptance, rejection, readmission: T. S. Eliot portrait forms part of a special exhibition at the Royal Academy

In what many admirers might consider an instance of 'poetic justice', Wyndham Lewis's (in)famous portrait of T. S. Eliot was included in a special exhibition coinciding with the 250th Summer Exhibition of the revamped Royal Academy of Arts in London. The portrait's appearance in *The Great Spectacle: 250 Years of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition* came eight decades after its rejection by the Selection Committee (for the 1938 Summer Exhibition) which sparked Augustus John's resignation from the Academy in protest and a media frenzy fed by pronouncements from the self-styled rebel Lewis himself.

The absorbing T. S. Eliot portrait, set in a broad, gold frame, easily lived up to the 'great spectacle' billing, both in the context of the wider exhibition and, in so far as it was possible to view it in isolation, as a singular masterpiece. The portrait's side panel served to place the rejection controversy in a far larger numbers context, and this was complemented by the portrait clearly being one important work among many important works on display. Created when Eliot "was running the publishing company Faber & Faber", the portrait "was one of the 11,221 works sent in that year to the Summer Exhibition and one of the 9,955 works to be rejected. A media storm ensued with the debates surrounding the Academy's relationship with modern art becoming the central issue, rather than the merits of the painting itself." A display case near the portrait contained Augustus John's handwritten letter to Academy president, William Llewellyn, dated April 23, 1938, tendering his resignation with "many personal regrets" following "the crowning ineptitude of the rejection of Wyndham Lewis' picture."

Eliot expressed his approval of the portrait, and its possible role in shaping his legacy, in a letter to Lewis dated April 21, 1938: "I learn from the Telegraph that your portrait of me has been rejected by the Academy... But so far as the sitter is able to judge, it seems to me a very good portrait, and one by which I am quite willing that posterity should know me, if it takes any interest in me at all." He also made clear his "feeling of relief" at the rejection, and affirmed his position in solidarity with Lewis: "Had the portrait been accepted, I should have been pleased – that a portrait by you should have been accepted by the Academy would have been a good augury... But I am glad to think that a portrait of myself should *not* appear in the exhibition of the Royal Academy, and I certainly have no desire, now, that my portrait should be painted by any painter whose portrait of me would be accepted by the Royal Academy."

Visitors to the *Great Spectacle*, which ran concurrently with the 250th Summer Exhibition until 19 August, found the portrait strategically positioned alongside John Singer Sargent's of Eliot's literary antecedent and fellow transplanted American, Henry James. The latter portrait was slashed by suffragette Mary Wood in 1914 – an incident which, as the side panel stated, "caused a ruckus and was widely reported in the press." The juxtaposition certainly encouraged, then, a drawing of parallels; and visitors found more to ponder in relation to Eliot elsewhere, such as R. B. Kitaj's "The Killer-Critic Assassinated by His Widower, Even" in which Eliot's dictum of an "escape from personality", famously expressed in his critical essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), is inverted and appropriated.

The exhibition was aided by a companion book which expands on the rejection "sensation", on pages 123 to 125, under the heading "ACCEPTANCE, REJECTION, READMISSION". It sets up a dichotomy between Lewis (backed by Augustus John) and Winston Churchill, with the portrait reproduced on p. 124 directly opposite Churchill's "Winter Sunshine, Chartwell" on p. 125, which also formed part of the exhibition. The Eliot portrait was on loan from the Durban Art Gallery, South Africa. Director, Dr Mduduzi Xakaza, said it was "heartening to know that it has now regained its significance not only in its country of origin but perhaps at a global level." He added: "The Durban Art Gallery is absolutely honoured to have been given this opportunity of having its important heritage asset showcased among pieces by great masters of the world. We also feel honoured to share the piece with the citizens of the UK, where the work was masterfully produced."

Dr Sarah Victoria Turner, one of the co-curators, said: "As an art historian of British modernism, I was keen to tell the story of the Summer Exhibition's sometimes difficult relationship with modern art and the fallout that could occur when an artwork was rejected from the Summer Exhibition. We are very grateful to the Durban Art Gallery that they have loaned this important work in their collection to us."

Dr Jaron Murphy, Southampton Solent University

(The 2018 edition of *The Journal of the T. S. Eliot Society* features Dr Murphy's essay on the portrait in relation to Eliot's legacy: <http://s699163057.websitehome.co.uk/the-journal-of-the-ts-eliot-society-uk>)

1. W. K. Rose (ed.), *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Methuen, 1963), 251
2. T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 33
3. Mark Hallett and Sarah Victoria Turner (with Jessica Feather), *The Great Spectacle: 250 Years of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2018), 123

**Review of *T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination*
by Sarah Kennedy – Cambridge University Press 2018**

As with Yeats and Joyce, Eliot has become the subject of much scholarly industry in the last twenty years or so - some of it useful (even distinguished) some of it less so. Is this book, then, just another addition to the ever expanding list of 'secondary sources'? No. It's remarkable for its depth of knowledge of Eliot's work, in prose and in poetry (a pre-condition for such a book one might suppose but often less evident than in this case) as well as of her other sources. Sarah Kennedy draws selectively but astonishingly widely on her predecessors (paying due tribute) but her book stands out also for its penetration into the imaginative workings of Eliot the creative artist.

Kennedy shows that the fragmentary processes associated with *The Waste Land*, culminating in those "fragments I have shored against my ruins", can be found throughout Eliot's poetic oeuvre: "The poems of *Four Quartets* are themselves something of an assemblage of fragments." They "reach back to the locations and sensations of childhood imagination" and "play on the reader's recollection of earlier poems while consciously re-examining the processes of their own composition." These are perhaps not entirely new observations, but Kennedy puts new life into them and in doing so vivifies Eliot's own originality. The image of childhood recurs in many different forms in Eliot's poetry, one of a cluster of ideas which unify it. It is much more than a matter of Eliot, with the passing of the years, seeking to reverse the severance he had effected with his American past, or an indulgence in nostalgia. His memories of the coasts of Maine and Massachusetts, the fir trees, the fogs and the lighthouses, the flora and fauna of New England, "the woodthrush calling through the fog", the "granite islands towards my timbers", "the white sails seaward flying" ("unbroken wings"), "the lost lilac and the lost sea voices" - the imagery is transfigured through Eliot's "dynamic imagination"; Kennedy speaks of his "alchemy." One cannot separate out the nautical images from their corresponding Shakespearean resonances which (as Eliot said of the noise of the typewriter and the smell of the cooking) are always forming new wholes in the poet's mind. To such an extent is this so that intertextuality in Eliot's work begins to take on the nature of a complex extended metaphor. Eliot hears in the sea its "protean voices."



Casco Bay, Maine

"What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers
And woodthrush calling through the fog
My daughter."

Kennedy deals with Eliot and Shakespeare – and Eliot on Shakespeare - extremely well. She somewhat modifies a view of my own that Eliot lacks a fully sympathetic response to Shakespeare in favour of his preoccupation with Dante. The first section of her book is headed ‘Sea Voices: Eliot’s *Tempest*’. Its epigraph from *Richard III*, “O, then began the tempest to my soul”, almost makes one feel one can read Shakespeare through Eliot! But it is to Eliot’s response to the plays that Kennedy directs us. Of *The Tempest* she writes that it “inhabits Eliot’s imagination as a metaphor.” Likewise, one feels, the effect of *Pericles* upon him, giving birth to one of his most deeply poignant poems, ‘Marina’.

Kennedy quotes from Eliot’s 1929 essay on Dante: “ ‘ Shakespeare understands a greater extent and variety of human life than Dante; ... Dante understands deeper degrees of degradation and higher degrees of exaltation ...’ .” As with other statements in Eliot’s essay, the present reviewer finds this not wholly convincing – possibly the result of a disturbance in his troubled soul. Kennedy balances it with this: “Corcoran [Neil Corcoran, *Shakespeare and the Modern Poet*] argues persuasively that early in his career Eliot found in Shakespeare the foreclosure of opportunity, and that in avoiding prolonged critical treatment of Shakespeare he was ‘protecting himself as a poet.’” Eliot had written that ‘Dante can do less *harm* to anyone trying to write verse, than can Shakespeare’. Yet, as Kennedy illustrates in her chapter ‘*This isle is full of noises ...*’, Eliot drew upon the immense resources of the English language, which Shakespeare pre-eminently made alive for him.

Dante of course reappears, and exceptionally interestingly, in the chapter headed ‘Dark Doubles’ (which at first glance, by an odd psychological quirk, I read as ‘dark troubles’). Here she refers to the various identifications that have been offered for the ‘familiar compound ghost’ but points out – I have not seen it put in this way before – that “the most immediate identification is that of the poet’s mirrored self” and a “recognition of the inherent instability of the self.” Kennedy doesn’t take up the question of personal instability in this last of the Quartets where, following the magnificent Dantesque passage in which Eliot transmutes Dante’s *terza rima* into blank verse tercets, those things “ill done and done to others’ harm” become expiated by allusion to the refining fire, and “all shall be well.”

But the author has done so much in this book and done it so well that one can hardly ask for more. It is already so intensive and concentrated that the reviewer (this one at least) is helpless to do real justice to it. For all the complexity of the subject matter, the writing is lucid throughout: luminous, one might say, as the author does of Eliot’s poetry. Which is perhaps a way of saying that the best thing to do – to adapt Pound’s famous words - is to read her.

Chris Joyce



Eliot, aged 9, with his cousins, Eleanor and Barbara Hinkley
Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1897

Eliot and Intertextuality: another instance

When some years ago Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* was televised by the BBC, it prompted many of us to buy the book. My copy lay dormant on the shelf until this summer, when it was a delight to discover the huge intelligence and complexity of Ford's writing. In what is a pretty baggy four-part novel sequence, Ford's central characters are Christopher Tietjens and Valentine Wannop, the latter of whom is reflecting on Armistice Day 1918 on her possible future in the following paragraph:

She began for a moment seriously to take stock of her position – of her whole position in life. It had certainly been hitherto rather nunlike. She was twenty-threeish, rising twenty-four. As fit as a fiddle, as clean as a whistle. Five foot in her gym shoes. And no one had ever wanted to marry her. No doubt that was because she was so clean and fit. No one had ever tried to seduce her. That was *certainly* because she was so clean-run. She didn't obviously offer – what was it the fellow had called it? - promise of pneumatic bliss to the gentlemen with sergeant-majors' horse-shoe moustaches and gurglish voices! She never would. Then perhaps she would never marry. And never be seduced!

Published in 1926, the third of the novels in the sequence, *A Man Could Stand Up* could not have been written quite as it is had not Eliot's *Poems 1920* included 'Whispers of Immortality', where the pneumatic Grishkin makes her brief appearance. More significantly, though, than this instance of Ford picking up and exploiting an Eliot reference, is the whole Modernist style of Ford's writing: "as modern and as modern and as modernist as they come", according to Julian Barnes. Arguably, the whole tenor of Ford's work owes a debt to Eliot.

Jay Philips

Eliot lines in common use

It might be thought a poet's legacy consisted in the impact he or she makes on other poets, or writers more generally. Or we might turn to the vernacular tongue, and see whether poetry (too often thought of an 'elite' art form) has impacted there. In Eliot's case, there is some evidence that lines and fragments of his verse occur at least in the written, everyday tongue. To take one instance: in June the columnist Nick Cohen, in a rather bitter political piece in *The Observer*, wrote: 'This is the way the world ends, not with a whimper but a giggle.'

This adaptation of Eliot's lines in *The Hollow Men* relies on reader recognition, of course; and my guess is that "not with a bang but a whimper" is one of the most widely current of Eliot phrases. Or is this making a big (and unjustifiable) cultural assumption? Is familiarity with Eliot something I perhaps share with the elite group who write our more up-market newspapers? The very next day, the *Guardian's* quick crossword contained a clue which read 'Four Quartets poet': so readers are expected to know, clearly.

It would be interesting to find a way to gauge properly what lasting impact Eliot's (not extensive) poetic oeuvre has had and still has on common usage.... Ideas?

John Caperon

“Home is where one starts from “

“... the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight”

During the 1950s Eliot made a number of visits to his native land. The photograph below shows him back in St Louis, Missouri, in June 1953, after giving a lecture at Washington University there (founded by his grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot) on ‘American Literature and American Language’. In prefacing the lecture he reminisced nostalgically about his early years:

The Church meant for us the Unitarian Church of the Messiah, then situated in Locust Street, a few blocks west of my father’s house and my grandmother’s house; the city was St. Louis—the utmost outskirts of which touched on Forest Park, terminus of the Olive Street streetcars, and to me, as a child, the beginning of the Wild West; the University was Washington University, then housed in a modest building in Lower Washington Avenue. These were the symbols of Religion, the Community and Education: and I think it is a very good beginning for any child, to be brought up to reverence such institutions, and to be taught that personal and selfish aims should be subordinated to the general good which they represent.



An English friend, Hope Mirrlees, had once said to him,

“There is this indestructible American strain in you.”
“Oh yes, there is”, he replied; “I’m glad you realised it.”

In an interview in 1959 for the *Paris Review* Eliot said of his poetry that “in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America”; and at about this time he deleted from the script of his last play, *The Elder Statesman*, these lines about exchanging

“The loneliness of home among foreign strange people
For the loneliness of home which is only memories.”

The Presence of the Eternal

The sacred and the secular in T. S. Eliot

There has been more than one reflection in these pages as to whether Eliot is best considered under the aspect of his religious convictions (from whatever point on the Christian or other spectrum the reader comes) or whether his poetry should be considered as equally capable of being responded to by those who approach him with no such convictions, as secular readers—or whether the line dividing these aspects of Eliot is sometimes so thin as to make them virtually inseparable. All readers will surely find moving the following tribute to Eliot from the archives of the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust by Eric Cleaver, the then Secretary to the Trust.

On a day last February when the thin sunlight did little to blunt a serrated edge to the wind, I slipped out of a meeting of Council early and un-noticed and made my way down to Westminster, to the Abbey. I was a little late. Most of the usual notables had arrived and the unusual ones too, - Ezra Pound, John Wren Lewis, Alec Guinness, - writers, actors, poets, playwrights. Among the ordinary were to be noticed a bunch of schoolgirls who had been given leave, duffle-coated students, City gents who had taken time off without asking, some scooter-drivers with jerkins and dangling crash helmets up from the Western approaches, retired clergy, evident academics, young wives and old husbands. The occasion was the Memorial Service to T.S. Eliot, the man who perhaps beyond others in our day had caught hold of time, - time past, present and even future and with muscular insight had bent it into a continuum through which eternity might be glimpsed.

The Cathedral Chapter, under the influence no doubt of the new men such as Max Warren, had imaginatively dispensed with an address. Instead they invited Alec Guinness to read from Eliot's own writings, - notably the Four Quartets. So did 'King Hearts and Coronets', 'The Lavender Hill Mob', 'Lawrence of Arabia' and 'The Bridge over the River Kwai' become for us unaccustomedly mixed up with The Cocktail Party, Murder in the Cathedral, The Dry Salvages and Little Gidding.

p.t.o...

I do not know whether the blurring and blunting of the edges which separate the sacred from the secular are quite as clearly seen in the experiences of T.S. Eliot as in that, for example, of Harry Williams, Werner Pelz or van Buren. But his witness to the continuing presence of the Eternal is his everlasting memorial.

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning..."

ERIC D. CLEAVER
November 1965.