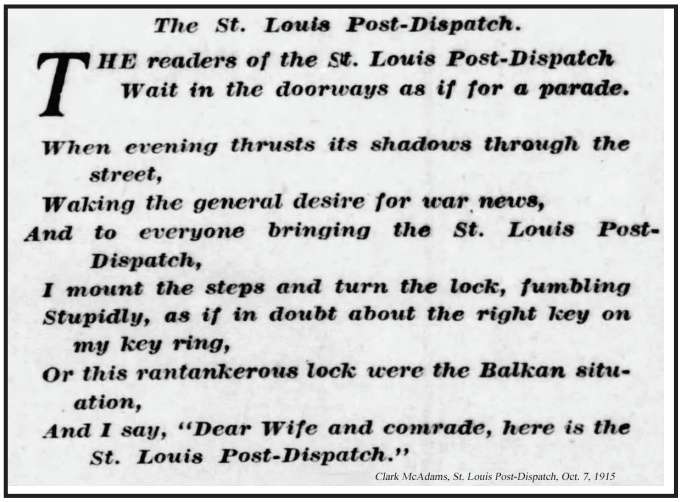
T S ELIOT SOCIETY

OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Exchanges...

Autumn 2022



The St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

THE readers of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch
Wait in the doorways as if for a parade.

When evening thrusts its shadows through the street,
Waking the general desire for war news,
And to everyone bringing the St. Louis Post-Dispatch,
I mount the steps and turn the lock, fumbling
Stupidly, as if in doubt about the right key on my key ring,
Or this rantankerous lock were the Balkan situation,
And I say, "Dear Wife and comrade, here is the St. Louis Post-Dispatch."

Clark McAdams, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Oct. 7, 1915

As if to remind us that not everyone takes Eliot as seriously as ourselves, this resurfaced – a 1915 pastiche of The 'Boston Evening Transcript' *– from the* St Louis Post-Dispatch.

Editorial

This Autumn edition of 'Exchanges' coincides with the centenary of the first publication of 'The Waste Land' in the UK in Eliot's 'Criterion' magazine of October 1922. Unsurprisingly, the centenary week itself was marked by a number of TV events. BBC4 repeated on the Sunday evening an earlier Eliot documentary fronted by A N Wilson, followed by a TV version of Ralph Fiennes' heroic stage performance of 'The Four Quartets': quite an event. Previously, on the Thursday evening, BBC2 broadcast a new documentary on the composition of 'The Waste Land', foregrounding the identification of Emily Hale as 'the hyacinth girl' and the central inspiration of the poem.

There were some illuminating moments in the hour-and-a-half programme. It was good to see comments from Lyndall Gordon, who appeared at this summer's T S Eliot festival, and Hannah Sullivan, a recent Society lecturer, exploring some of the textual complexities of the poem. But the problem with the documentary's approach was that its biographical focus almost entirely neglected the poem's wider cultural context, its significance as an analysis of Western civilisation on the brink of collapse and as a - possibly 'the' - key text of Modernism.

But perhaps that's just television for you? It has little time or space for extensive analysis such as we'd find in a critical, reflective text; and the visual must always take precedence over the analytical…. Society members will doubtless have their own views of this programme, but your Editor's is that there is perhaps no urgent need to rush to i-Player if you missed the broadcast in the crucial, 'Waste Land' centenary week!

The centenary of 'The Waste Land', though, together with the earlier opening of the cache of Eliot's letters in Emily Hale's possession, has clearly prompted a renewed interest in Eliot biography. July's T S Eliot Festival at Little Gidding, readers will recall, brought biographers Lyndall Gordon and Erica Wagner together to discuss, respectively, Eliot's relationships with Emily Hale and with Mary Trevelyan. Society Committee members Christina Percy and Pauline Davison offer insights into both Lyndall Gordon's and Erica Wagner's new books below.

Biography is certainly becoming more prominent in Eliot studies. Robert Crawford's *Eliot After The Waste Land* completes his biographical study of the poet, and for a detailed review (even possibly a substitute for reading all 600 pages!) I'm happy to refer you at the suggestion of *Exchanges* contributor Sandra Newton to the on-line 'Baffler': https://thebaffler.com/latest/portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-grown-man-domestico . A further, reader review of Crawford's second volume should appear in the next edition of 'Exchanges'.

Another 'biography' recently published is Matthew Hollis's unusually subtitled *The Waste Land: A Biography of a Poem*. Hollis – an informative contributor to The Waste Land' documentary noted above - explores the lives and situations of those who in his view contributed to the birth of the poem; and below we print a review by Society Chairman Paul Keers, who was clearly hoping for more than the book delivered.

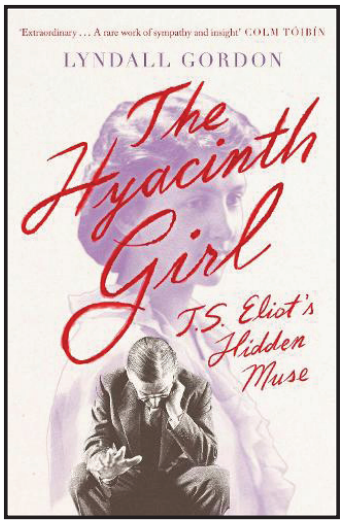
With all this current biographical flurry going on, it's perhaps easy to forget that Eliot biography goes right back almost fifty years to 1973. That year saw T S Matthews' *Great Tom: notes towards the definition of T S Eliot* published in the USA, its publication in this country being the following year, 1974. Your editor has only just acquired a copy, but has been quite taken by Matthews's style and verve. In her full-length article below Sara Fitzgerald, a previous *Exchanges* contributor from the United States, writes fascinatingly about the insights into Eliot offered by the T S Matthews papers in Princeton University Library. It's clear that Matthews shared rather more with the poet than just his initials!

But is the poetry itself – surely the focus of most lovers of Eliot? - getting lost amidst all this biographical enthusiasm? Let's hope not. We conclude with a response from a member who is also an Anglican priest to a poignant piece in Summer's *Exchanges*. There, Society member Bridie Macmahon wrote about *Little Gidding* as consolation in bereavement. Here, Fr Philip reflects from a priestly perspective on reading the poem with a dying parishioner.

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* Exchanges@tseliotsociety.uk

Women in Eliot's life 1: Lyndall Gordon on Emily Hale



Lyndall Gordon has waited forty-eight years to be able to write this very special biography, *The Hyacinth Girl*. Speaking to Cécile Varry for *The Modernist Review*, Gordon reveals that when she first learnt of the archive of 1,131 letters written to Emily Hale between 1930 and 1957, she: 'made a vow to myself, that I had to live to this day', the day of the opening of the archive. (This interview is fascinating, and I would thoroughly recommend reading it in full if you have not already done so: https://modernistreviewcouk.wordpress.com/2019/12/31/opening-the-archive-t-s-eliots-long-awaited-letters-to-emily-hale-an-interview-with-lyndall-gordon/ .

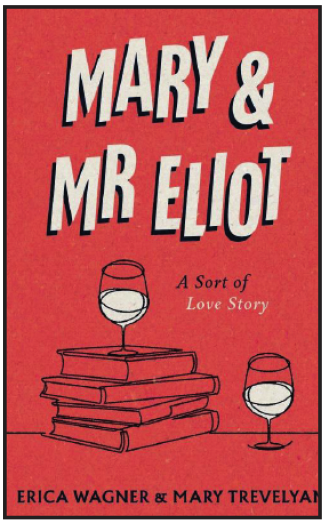
Gordon's excitement is infectious and I waited patiently for publication. The biography is a masterful culmination of her over fifty years of Eliot scholarship. Gordon guides the reader effortlessly through incredibly detailed biography, out to Eliot's work and back again. Eliot is presented in full: erudite, fallible, vulnerable, grotesque. Here the duality of Eliot's relationships is set out before the reader without fear or favour: thoughtful and intimate with his female acquaintances, vulgar and often playing for laughs with his male acquaintances. An early concern that biographical details were given more prominence than they should is completely unfounded. Reading through Gordon's account, one is gripped as a great love at first unfolds and is then consolidated as a profound, ultimately confounding love.

This is a fantastic read for those intimate with Eliot's earlier poems. And to those outraged male Princeton professors of earlier times – and let's be honest, those of not so earlier times – you are wrong! Read this and find out why.

Christina Percy

The Hyacinth Girl: T.S. Eliot's Hidden Muse by Lyndall Gordon, Virago, United Kingdom, 2022

Women in Eliot's life 2: Erica Wagner on Mary Trevelyan



For seventeen years, after his separation from his first wife, Vivienne, and before his marriage to his secretary, Valerie Fletcher, T S Eliot had a close friendship with Mary Trevelyan, a forceful and energetic woman who ran a Christian centre for foreign students. They shared their Anglo-Catholic faith and often worshipped together at St Stephen's, Gloucester Road, where Eliot was a Church Warden.

When their relationship ended abruptly after Eliot's marriage, Mary assembled an account of their friendship, 'The Pope of Russell Square', from their correspondence, pictures, and her diary. After Eliot's death she hoped it might be published, but his widow, who was preparing his letters for publication, prevented this. When Mary was in a nursing home her nephew found the manuscript and, realising its importance, gave it to the Bodleian Library. Erica Wagner has given Eliot lovers a gift by curating Mary's memoir and interspersing it with her own commentary, telling a fascinating and sad story of a friendship between two remarkable people.

They first met in 1938 at a Student Christian Movement Conference and kept in touch during the early years of the war. In 1941 Mary invited Eliot to a Nativity play put on by the students. He asked her to have lunch with him, at a restaurant of her choice, putting her in a quandary as she didn't know if he was well off or poor, but it was 'a long and fascinating lunch' and she was amused and flattered at having her hand held for an unusually long time on parting. Gradually their relationship deepened. They were drawn together by their Christian faith, but also by their love of music, of good food and drink. Eliot never learned to drive but he bought Mary a car and they would often drive round London on Sundays after church.

They went to the theatre and concerts together, dined out and cooked for each other at home. They had long telephone calls and talked at length about everything. They exchanged gifts at Christmas and on birthdays and prayed for each other. It was a cosy, domestic, sometimes flirtatious relationship and Mary thought that when Vivienne, his estranged wife, died Eliot might propose to her. But while Mary's life was an open book Eliot kept much of his hidden. Though she was introduced to his American relatives, Mary knew little of his connection to Emily Hale, his American muse and he kept his relationship with Valerie a secret.

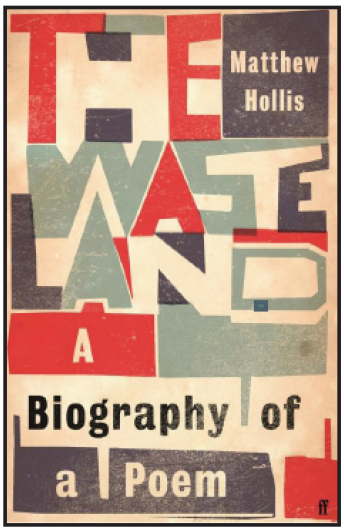
On January 2nd 1957 they met at the Russell Hotel and drank to each other's health for the New Year as they were both going away for a while. On her return a week later Mary found a letter telling her that he was marrying Valerie Fletcher. She was astonished and hurt, and though they exchanged letters they never met again. When Eliot died in 1965 Mary did not attend his funeral, so deep was the hurt still, though she did continue to pray for him.

Erica Wagner has brought Mary Trevelyan's unique document to light and set it in context, bringing to life a special relationship and adding to our knowledge and understanding of Eliot. It is also a very good read, informative, engrossing and moving.

Pauline Davison

Mary and Mr Eliot: A sort of Love Story by Mary Trevelyan & Erica Wagner (Faber & Faber, 2022)

Is a 'biography' of a poem really possible?



Perhaps it was inevitable that, in the centenary year of 'The Waste Land', someone would write a monumental (524pp) book which provides the general reader with the story behind the poem. A story much of which many Society members will already know, because we have probably read the biographies by Crawford and Gordon, and perhaps even those by Ackroyd and Pasternak Slater. Despite listing all these, Matthew Hollis surprisingly declares in his Notes on Sources that he has not drawn upon existing biographical studies in his research. So the question for us, therefore, is whether this large new volume offers Eliot enthusiasts much we have not already gleaned from those sources? The answer, sadly, is no.

Hollis has an unusual perspective on what, or who, is relevant to 'The Waste Land'. So there are more mentions of Wyndham Lewis than of Jean Verdenal and Emily Hale combined. Instead, there is considerable detail about literary magazine rivalries, and about people's flats; about Lytton Strachey and Middleton Murry, and even about James Joyce's shoes. And Pound, Pound, Pound: his dancing, his parents, his DIY coffee table, and his endless Cantos, 'each more incomprehensible than the one preceding it'.

Hollis has to give equal space and status to Pound, in order to maintain his thesis: that Pound is entitled to half of this 'biography of the poem'. Hollis's central conviction is that: 'The Waste Land' was 'neither 'Eliot's' composition nor 'Pound's' editorial, but a common project, equally imagined, inhabiting each man simultaneously and fully … in two halves of a combining mind'.

Hollis says that 'the thought is Helen Gardner's'. But in the essay from which he takes that 'thought', Dame Helen Gardner actually writes that Pound: 'was content with scoring through or boxing in, or querying words and phrases he thought struck a false note, without proposing improvements. He expressed disquiet, or disapproval, and left it to Eliot to solve his own problems … He was the midwife: the child that emerged into life was Eliot's.' Gardner's position surely undermines, rather than supports, the premise of this book.

It is surprising that Hollis chooses not to mention the publication of the facsimiles, or even the rediscovery of the manuscripts. Indeed, he appears uninterested in a century of further analysis, appraisal, interpretation and impact of the poem. For the book effectively ceases at the moment of the publication of 'The Waste Land': this 'biography' of a hundred-year-old poem concludes with the birth of its subject.

There is so much else here in Hollis's book that we either know, from those other biographical sources, or do not need to know, because we are not primarily interested in Pound. It is a big book for which to find the time, space and money, only to discover that the information it contains is already on our shelves. But for those who wish to explore Hollis's central contention, that the poem is as much Pound's as Eliot's, it will provide food for further thought.

Paul Keers

The Waste Land: A Biography of a Poem, by Matthew Hollis, Faber & Faber, 2022

Inside the Publication of 'Great Tom'

As scholars anticipate reading the 1,131 letters that T. S. Eliot wrote to his first love, Emily Hale, it turns out the Princeton University Library has been housing another, lesser-known collection of Eliot-related material. They are the papers of another socially prominent Ivy Leaguer, who edited Time magazine before moving to England and choosing to stay there for the rest of his life. In addition to sharing T. S. Eliot's initials, author T. S. Matthews had many things in common with the poet he admired. It was why his editor at Harper & Row begged him in 1970 to write the first biography of Eliot, five years after Eliot died.

Nearly forty years later, Matthews's son and literary executor donated his papers to Princeton, Matthews's alma mater. Two of the fifty-seven boxes of materials relate specifically to Matthews's work on *Great Tom: Notes Towards the Definition of T. S. Eliot*. The papers also include the author's correspondence with many of Eliot's contemporaries and others involved with his book, as well as interview notes, manuscript drafts, and a separate manuscript about his struggles to write the book. While the papers include little that was written by Eliot himself, they provide a fascinating snapshot of the battles that broke out over access to his papers in the first years after his death.

Matthews's book—and the approach he took to it—reflected the years he had spent as a writer, and later editor-in-chief, of Time magazine. He relied on the work of women researchers on both sides of the Atlantic, and sprinkled the book with anecdotes, without providing details on all of his sources. The footnotes that his publishers' legal adviser required him to compile generally pointed only to publications.

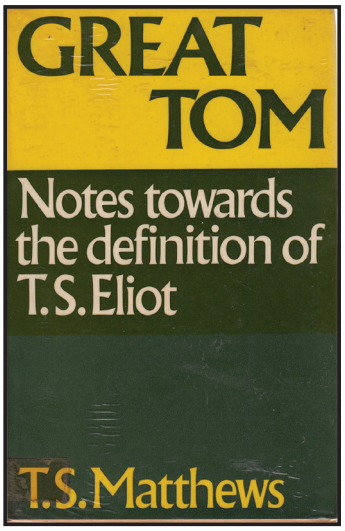
The idea for *Great Tom* came from Matthews's good friend and editor Frances Lindley, who urged him in January 1970 to write 'the biography of Tom Eliot which no one else is equipped to do. . . the non-graduate school, non-Marxist, non-Freudian book which only an American poet out of the American Middle West into the Eastern cultural cooker over to England, etc., etc. could do.' Lindley flattered her author by telling him that he was the only person who 'could write the book about Tom Eliot that I would be interested in reading ….'

Matthews signed a contract for the book, even though he was concerned that Valerie Eliot would not cooperate. Indeed, she quickly confirmed that, writing to a Harper & Row representative: 'I cannot give you the slightest encouragement or help with your proposed biography of my husband, because he forbad one in a memorandum with his Will. In time, of course, such a book must be written, but in accordance with my husband's wishes I cannot assist such a project.' Mrs. Eliot provided the same answer when Matthews tried a more personal approach five months later. She also declined to meet him, and advised that he would not be permitted to access the Eliot papers at Harvard, or the University of Texas, nor the papers of John Hayward.

In the Foreword to his book, Matthews thanked Mrs. Eliot for at least answering his letters when others did not. But his papers at Princeton reflect less charitable assessments. 'I found that not every man's hand was against me—or woman's either,' he wrote in a narrative, 'Description of the Making of Great Tom.' 'The list of those who were helpful to me took up several printed pages in my book,' he noted. 'But in general the Eliot family and close friends, and what I might call the Eliot Establishment, closed ranks and would have nothing to do with me.'

In the same document, which he wrote when he feared he never would be able to complete the biography,

Matthews said he had made 'two discoveries that I found very interesting: Vivienne Eliot's papers — and Emily Hale', who died just a few months before Matthews began his research. In reviewing Vivienne's will, Matthews learned that her papers had been passed on to the Bodleian Library. It took him two years of work to gain access to them.



In June 1972, a year before his contractual deadline, he reported to another archivist that Valerie Eliot 'remains adamant', but that he would be able to review Vivienne's papers. The Bodleian librarians, however, had told him the papers of Eliot's first wife were 'of no interest'. Matthews later observed that he believed the librarians had not given the papers 'the time nor the careful reading that I did', for he ultimately turned up something of interest: 'Vivienne's neurotic but moving description of her final meeting with TSE' and 'some tantalizing photographs ….'

As for Hale, Matthews seemed to ignore several early tips he received about the letters she had passed on to Princeton. Five months after Princeton Archivist William Dix advised him about the volume of embargoed letters Hale had donated, Matthews wrote back: 'Do you really mean 1,000—or was that a slip of the typewriter for 100?' The archivist assured him it was no typo. Matthews created two handwritten lists of 'awkward questions' about Eliot that his book would have to address, and the poet's relationship with Hale was added to one of them. After he published his biography, Matthews wrote that in Hale's case, 'I had to rely entirely on the evidence and hearsay of her friends, so the picture I gradually formed of her could not be very satisfactory — to me or to them either.' In fact, Matthews's papers indicate that by the time he was finally able to interview some of Hale's closest confidantes, it was too late to make major changes — or some factual corrections — in the chapter he devoted to her.

Matthews wrote that not long after Eliot died, Mrs. Eliot visited Hale, but he provided no further details to back up that story. As his book was being typeset, he interviewed Dorothy Elsmith, a close friend of Hale's; his notes from that interview read: 'E.H. is a very clever mimic — marvellous sense of humor (after meeting Valerie gave Mrs. Elsmith an uproarious imitation—which she won't describe).' It's possible that Hale did meet Mrs. Eliot, but also possible that she was simply venting to her close friend after hearing reports from other friends, such as Eliot's cousin Eleanor Hinkley, who had met Eliot's wife.

The papers track Matthews's interactions—both positive and negative—with, among others, Mary Trevelyan, Mary Hutchinson, Frank Morley, Peter du Sautoy, and Peter Ackroyd, author of the 1984 biography *T. S. Eliot: A Life*. (The editor in Matthews could not resist sending letters to Mrs. Eliot, du Sautoy and Ackroyd, pointing out typographical and other errors in the books they had written, edited or published.) But behind his polite letters, Matthews's narrative and his correspondence with his editor provide a franker view of the challenges he faced and his true feelings about those he was trying to interview.

Matthews wrote that he chose his title to acknowledge 'that this will not be the last word on the subject.' With the fourteen boxes of letters that Emily Hale donated to the Princeton Library, there are now still more boxes and folders there that are waiting to be fully explored.

Sara Fitzgerald

‘The fire and the rose are one’: reading with the dying

There’s a film cliché which has a priest bending towards the ear of a dying man to urge repentance before the final moment. That’s always seemed to me to be taking dreadful advantage of the vulnerability of the dying, the fact that they may not be in a position simply to say, ‘Oh do shut up and leave me in peace!’ But on several occasions in my priestly life I’ve found myself with dying people, and reading aloud – rather than urging repentance – has seemed just the right thing to do.

For some time I drew on Sister Wendy Beckett’s anthology of poems *Speaking to the Heart*, a title borrowed from St John Henry Newman’s *Cor ad cor loquitur*, ‘heart speaks to heart’. But it wasn’t long before I began to explore other sources. Poems of transcendent beauty seemed right: Keats’s *Autumn* and *Nightingale* odes; some Shakespeare sonnets, the Yeats of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, or of *The Wild Swans at Coole*.

But beauty didn’t always cut it. Sometimes poems of spiritual struggle seemed right, and in that category the Old Testament Psalms remain pre-eminent. Perhaps reading the Psalms sounds a more priestly thing to do at a deathbed? But spiritual struggle is there too in Herbert – Eliot’s ‘poet of the inner weather’ – and even more urgently in Donne, a poet whose recovery from obscurity in the early twentieth century was at least partly the result of Eliot’s ground-breaking ‘Metaphysicals’ essay.

From transcendent beauty and spiritual struggle it’s but a short journey to Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, and pre-eminently *Little Gidding*. To accompany a person towards their death is one of the greatest privileges of a priest. And Eliot’s poem is in some ways just perfect to read on that journey of accompaniment, a journey on which one senses also the presence of *The Waste Land*’s mystical Christ of the Emmaus Road. It’s a journey I recently made again.

So together we read through the poem, pausing for talk after each section. Conversation with people nearing death may naturally turn to what lies, or may lie, beyond our mortal lives. There’s a longing for beauty, for fulfilment, for peace. And there seems to me to be an absolute confidence in a future beyond death in the words of the final section of *Little Gidding*, however much Eliot himself might have questioned or doubted. For the poem always knows more than the poet!

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling

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….

And all shall be well
And all manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of flame are infolded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

Fr Philip