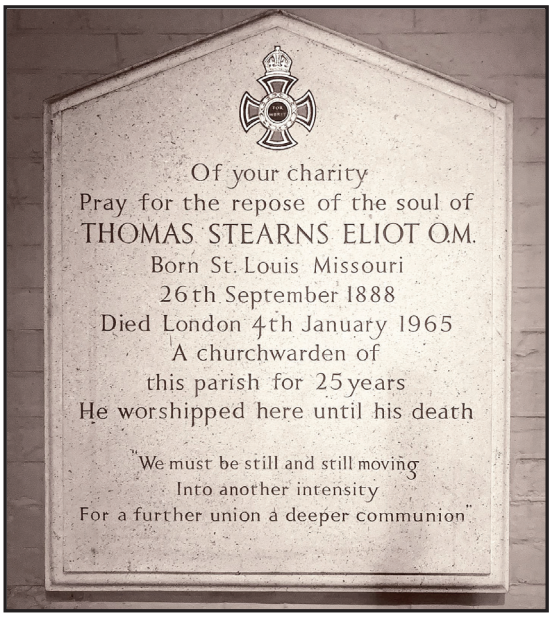
T S ELIOT SOCIETY

OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

Exchanges...

Winter 2023



The memorial stones at St Michael's, East Coker, and in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, are popular markers of Eliot's death in January – but this less well known memorial is at St Stephen's in Gloucester Road, London. The device at its head is based on Eliot's Order of Merit medal.

Editorial

Well, 2022 is over, and with it the year-long commemoration of T S Eliot's 'The Waste Land'; but not without demonstrating what seems now to be a consensus, that of the two great Modernist masterpieces of 1922, Eliot's poem and Joyce's novel 'Ulysses', Eliot's has the wider, more enduring cultural significance. If, that is, literary events and media coverage during the year are anything to go by.

And now, here we are in the Epiphany season of 2023. Eliot has also stamped his own mark on Epiphany, of course. 'Journey of the Magi', his 'first post-conversion poem', as Lyndall Gordon terms it, has now taken its place firmly as a feature of the season's church liturgies, and also of Christmas carol services. We might find it remarkable to recall that this decidedly chilly poem was written in August:

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey....'

Less remarkable, though, if we remember that Eliot was at the time immersed in the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, which – closely echoed in those opening lines – have their own distinctive, imaginative power. And there is something telling, too, about the unsettling quality of the poem's narrating voice: 'no longer at ease' could well describe Eliot's own struggles with his newly-found faith over the rest of his life. For quite how, and to what extent, faith shaped him remains something of a puzzle.

But 2022 has enabled lovers of Eliot's poetry to gain a clearer idea than ever before of the man behind the verse. Three new books, in particular, have enabled us to get closer to Eliot: though it has to be said that what they reveal may not endear us to him as a person. Mary Trevelyan's memoir of her relationship with Eliot (edited by Erica Wagner), and Lyndall Gordon's work on his relationship with Emily Hale, were both noticed in the Autumn edition of 'Exchanges'; this edition offers a review of the (hefty) second volume of Robert Crawford's biography, 'Eliot after "The Waste Land"', by recently appointed committee member Professor Christopher Southgate. The central question raised by the new biographical evidence is tightly expressed in Southgate's review: 'how such a profoundly flawed man came to write such extraordinary and unforgettable poetry.'

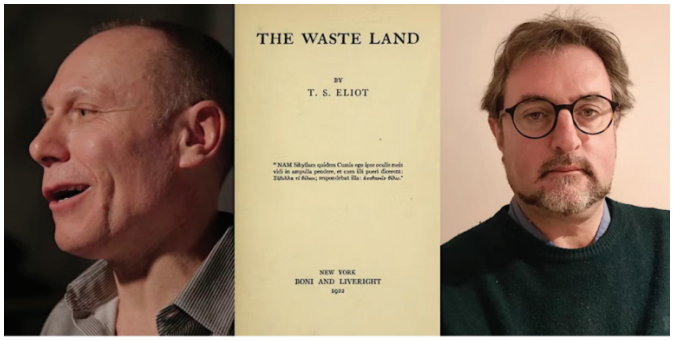
These twin questions, about Eliot's faith and his personal flaws, might take us back to the poems with a changed perspective. To 'the words on the page' are added our knowledge of the writer of those words; and if we keep both poems and poet in some kind of balance, we may get closer to a just evaluation of Eliot.

Meanwhile, below we take a look back at one of the last of 2022's Eliot events: committee member Mary Morgan gives an account of a discussion between professors Seamus Perry and Mark Ford at the London Review of Books. And Society Chair Paul Keers reviews something of an outlier, an international centenary edition of 'The Waste Land'. There's a brief note, too, on 'Dinner with Groucho', a play you may have missed, as your editor did, back in the centenary year. We couldn't keep up with quite all the year's events!

Debate about Eliot - his faith and his character, and their interaction with his life, his poetry, his drama and his criticism – looks set to run. It is as if the centenary of his Modernist masterpiece has sparked a renewed set of interests and concerns, rather than in any sense 'rounding him off.' Your Society aims to keep abreast of, and to contribute to, the ongoing and developing shape and emphasis of Eliot studies, and to continue to provide a forum for members' responses to him. Why not write your own piece for 'Exchanges'?

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



Mark Ford and Seamus Perry's 'Close Readings of 'The Waste Land'' was possibly the last significant UK event marking the centenary of the publication of the 20th Century's most famous poem. And what a sparkling way to end the year!

The format? A discussion between two of the foremost of today's English Literature scholars exploring the poetry of the work – and it did not disappoint.

Questions were posed by Seamus Perry, Professor of English Literature at Balliol College, Oxford, and Mark Ford, Professor of English at University College London, and a poet and critic. They ranged over the significance of the poem, regarded as the beginning of Modernism; Eliot's New England background; his easy acceptance into London life and English culture; the imagery in the poem and its wide-ranging literary allusions, often drawn from Eliot's broadly-based Harvard education as well as his exposure to European literature and art. Discussion also brought out his relationship with Jean Verdenal, to whom, of course, Eliot's first published volume 'Prufrock and other observations' is dedicated.

'The Waste Land' may be – probably is, we heard – the greatest poem ever set in London. Eliot had assimilated easily into London literary society. His association with Faber and Faber and his role as a critic came at a time when London was still regarded as the cultural capital of the world. Not for nothing was Eliot referred to as 'The Pope of Russell Square'; and the fact that there are current 'Waste Land' walking tours of the city and its churches reflect London's centrality in the poem.

A further element of the discussion focussed on gender, the role of women and the treatment of female experience in the poem: aspects particularly prominent in recent criticism. Eliot's first wife Vivienne, the professors agreed, contributed much to the poem: her gift of mimicry underpins the 'pub scene' (lines 139-173), and she was in a real sense his muse; whereas Emily Hale, Eliot later said, 'would have killed the poet in me'. Interestingly, the recent flurry of interest in Emily Hale and 'the letters' did not feature large in the discussion, despite Vivienne's contribution to the poem being acknowledged.

In many quarters 'The Waste Land' is seen as an intellectual, academic poem – the critic Frank Kermode is just one instance - but its perceived difficulty, agreed the professors, is something which attracts students and non-students of all ages, constantly generating new enthusiasts and new interpretations.

Against the background of the recent First World War, written at the time of Eliot's own nervous breakdown and treatment in Lausanne, and his attempted recuperative stay in Margate ('On Margate Sands. / I can connect /Nothing with nothing.'), the poem also reflects, it seems, Vivienne's illness. A 'waste land' indeed.

Two interesting facts I took away from the discussion were that Eliot never owned any property in London, and that the Oxford Professor of English Literature studied Physics, Chemistry and Biology for A level! It was a treat to be part of this well-attended event and, after a surfeit of recent publications of biographical detail about Eliot, to enjoy the poetry in a way that Eliot would have encouraged: an 'innocent audience' absorbing the poetry.

Mary Morgan

A video recording of this event is now available for viewing online at https://bit.ly/3QDUKB5

Eliot after 'The Waste Land'

This follows Robert Crawford's first volume, 'Young Eliot'. Up to now, biographers have suffered from a formidable set of obstacles, especially the refractory approach of the Eliot estate, and the embargo on the letters to Emily Hale. This book is the first full biographical study to include detail of the Hale letters, and even permission to quote from them. It also benefits from the publication of nine volumes of other letters, and new editions of both poems and prose.

But, of course, it still suffers from the intrinsic difficulty in writing about a deskbound businessman who came to wear what Virginia Woolf called 'the great yellow bronze mask'. Eliot was instinctively private, and became ever more so as his first marriage failed and he hid within Anglo-Catholic spirituality and an idealised love for Hale, conducted largely by letter.

What this reader most hankers for, then, is what Eliot himself would most have wanted to conceal, namely insight into how his agony with Vivienne fed his poetry, how he came to embrace what form of Christianity and how that in turn altered his writing, and how Emily Hale became both muse and victim of his inner life.

Crawford begins by throwing us a titbit, the disclosure Eliot made to Emily of an earlier brief adultery (presumably with Nancy Cunard). But then we settle into a dull chronicle of Eliot the banker turning publisher, often ill and with a chronically unwell wife. There is very little insight into his poetic process, or the poems themselves, until Crawford suddenly gives us two beautiful pages on 'Marina'. Later he is good on the genesis of 'Burnt Norton'. Here the literary scholar breaks through the detail, but all too soon we are resubmerged in that detail. It is as though the new abundance of sources has actually hampered true biography. (Interestingly I found the chronicling more compelling in the early wartime sections, when massive events were shaping intellectuals' lives, and Eliot was fashioning the last three Quartets in response.)

I learned lots of things from this study. The Hale letters do alter perspective. For instance, I had tended to think that it took Eliot five years of heart-searching from his baptism and confirmation to separating from Vivienne through his US lecture-tour of 1932-3. That separation looks very different in the light of his renewed and passionate friendship with Emily from 1930 onwards. Crawford also draws out the racist and scatological underside of Eliot in letters to male friends, puzzlingly coinciding with his intensified patterns of Anglo-Catholic observance. Even the poet's beautiful expressions of love for Emily betray a self-absorption that could have flashed danger signals had she not been so captivated.

So the enigma remains, as to how such a profoundly flawed man came to write such extraordinary and unforgettable poetry.

On a technical level there are significant irritations. Crawford makes hardly any reference to other studies of Eliot. He footnotes A.D. Moody's 'Tracing T.S. Eliot's Spirit', and includes him in the index. He footnotes Lyndall Gordon's 'Eliot's New Life' (only to tell us there is no evidence for one of her claims), but she is not in the index. And bizarrely there is no bibliography to enable the reader to know what Crawford did and did not consult. But critical interaction with, for example, Gordon on the growth of Eliot's

spirituality, or Anthony Julius on his antisemitism, would have paid rich dividends.

This is a painstakingly researched and thorough book Eliot specialists will have to use, alongside the excellent Ricks edition of the poems and the on-line collected prose. But the 486 pages of main text will be a daunting trudge for many readers.

Robert Crawford, Eliot after the Waste Land (London: Jonathan Cape, 2022), xi + 609pp, cloth, £25.

Christopher Southgate

'Dinner with Groucho'

One of the great joys of review pages is that they enable us to keep in touch with what's going on. By chance, I happened to notice in the Catholic weekly 'The Tablet' in early December a review of a play I'd like to have seen, had circumstances been otherwise: 'Dinner with Groucho', by Frank McGuinness. The reviewer was Radio 4 and 'Guardian' regular, Mark Lawson, who tells us that Groucho Marx and T S Eliot, 'comic and poet, after a mutually complimentary correspondence, did meet and eat together in London, in June 1964.' Well - who'd have thought it?

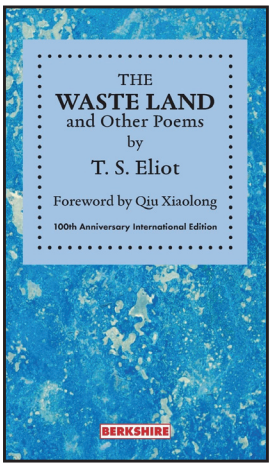
Attempting to recreate a dinner conversation on the stage doesn't sound straightforward, and Lawson indicates that McGuinness may not entirely have succeeded, describing the play as 'difficult and elusive'. But for the Eliot enthusiast in him, there was at least the pleasure of 'spotting the allusions and quotes subtly buried in the script'.

But the idea of such apparently different figures – the Nobel prize-winning poet and the comedy king – meeting and engaging with one another is surely worth toying with. For despite Eliot's public standing as an 'eminent man of letters', there was another side to him, as biographer Robert Crawford recalled in a 'Guardian article in 2015:

'His nephew Graham Bruce Fletcher remembers Uncle Tom taking him as a boy to a London joke shop in the 1960s. They bought stink bombs and let them off at the entrance of the Bedford Hotel, not far from Eliot's workplace in Bloomsbury's Russell Square. With a fit of giggles, Eliot put on a marked turn of speed as, Macavity-like, he and his nephew sped from the scene of the crime, Eliot twirling his walking stick "in the manner of Charlie Chaplin".'

Perhaps the play – for all the shortcomings Lawson (and indeed other reviewers) pointed out – did serve at least to remind us of a less-talked-about aspect of Eliot: his quirky (or should that be 'decidedly odd'?) sense of humour….

John Caperon



While we in the UK are familiar with the Faber editions of 'The Waste Land', there are dozens of other editions available on the international market; for while we still think of it as a modern work, it is old enough to have passed out of copyright in jurisdictions like the US.

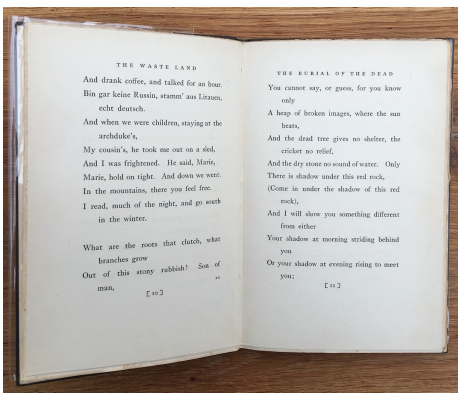
In simple terms, if a work was published in the US before 1978, then its US copyright lasted for a maximum of 95 years after publication. Hence 'The Waste Land', along with Eliot's earlier work, is now in the public domain in the US (whereas it remains within UK copyright until 70 years after its author's death). Inevitably therefore, over the last five years and particularly leading up to its centenary, small US publishers have brought out their own editions of the poem.

Against this background, Berkshire Publishing Group have produced 'The Waste Land and Other Poems – 100th Anniversary International Edition'. Behind its publication is Karen Christensen, known as an Editorial Assistant to Valerie Eliot. The edition carries a foreword by Qiu Xiaolong, a Chinese novelist, poet and translator, who explains how Eliot, read in secrecy, 'proved to be truly instrumental' to young poets under the Chinese regime; and Christensen hopes that this edition 'will provide readers with a sense of the concerns and experiences we have in common, across cultures, and from generation to generation.'

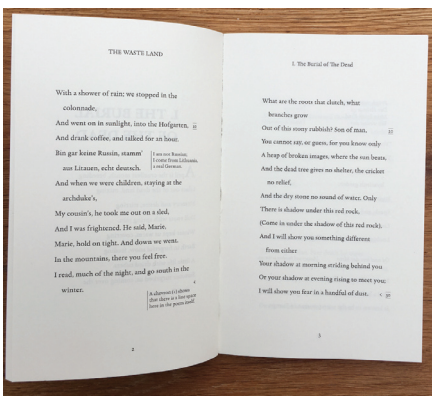
At the back of the book, its editorial principles are explained in a brief summary, 'About the 100th Anniversary Edition'. Unfortunately, it begins in error, stating that the poem 'was published first in a British journal in 1922, then in an American one, then as a British book, and finally, in 1923, as an American book.' The sequence was actually: in the British journal 'The Criterion' first in October 1922; in the American journal 'The Dial' almost simultaneously in the same month; but then as an American book first, by Boni & Liveright in December 1922; and finally almost a year later as a British book by the Hogarth Press in September 1923. 'For the design of the book,' they state, 'we drew inspiration from the Hogarth Press 1922 *(sic)* edition …. The page layout reflects that of the Boni & Liveright 1923 *(sic)* edition.'

This Anniversary reflection of the poem's First Edition is understandable, but also unfortunate. In order to fill the pages of that First Edition entirely with the single poem, the margins were set exceptionally wide. Many lines were broken not for poetic effect, but simply because of the narrowness of the printed column; whereas the layout in 'The Criterion', making use of the journal's greater page width, presented the poem in the manner with which we are more familiar. This Anniversary edition certainly reflects the First Edition – but does it reflect Eliot's poetic intentions?

The Criterion printing



Boni & Liveright First Edition



Berkshire Anniversary Edition

The comparison of these pages also illustrates one of the unique aspects of this edition; translations. 'To

our knowledge,' they say, 'this is the first edition of 'The Waste Land' to include translations on the page in line with the non-English text.' They believe that this 'will help readers move through the poem with greater understanding and confidence', while admitting that 'This addition may offend academic purists'.

What of the text itself? The excised line '(The ivory men make company between us)' is reinstated, but without its surrounding brackets. 'O City city' becomes 'O City City', losing the distinction between the city and City of London. Apostrophes are inserted into 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME'. And speech marks are not repeated at the beginning of subsequent lines of continued speech (eg before each of the eight lines addressed to Stetson).

Eliot's Notes to the poem – written of course specifically for that First Edition in order to bulk out the book – are omitted entirely, on the basis that 'they are easy to find online, along with many other notes and guides'. The latter, however, not written by Eliot himself.

There are many arguments about the control which copyright owners and literary estates exercise over literary works. However, the assiduous attention which has been paid in the UK to Eliot's texts is a tribute to Faber & Faber and the Eliot Estate. In this centenary year, we have become more aware than ever of the precision of Eliot's chosen words, punctuation and layout; we are fortunate that we have definitive texts to which we can turn.

Paul Keers