

THE LETTERS OF T. S. ELIOT
VOLUME 5

By T. S. Eliot

THE COMPLETE POEMS AND PLAYS

verse

COLLECTED POEMS 1909–1962

FOUR QUARTETS°

THE WASTE LAND AND OTHER POEMS

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A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts

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POEMS 1909–1917

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letters

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THE LETTERS OF

T. S. Eliot

EDITED BY

VALERIE ELIOT

AND

JOHN HAFFENDEN

VOLUME 5

1930–1931

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PREFACE

Volume 5 of the *Letters of T. S. Eliot* documents a period of two years in which the poet, critic and editor endeavours, between the ages of forty-two and forty-four, to place his newly avowed faith in Christianity – ‘the Catholic Church in England’, as he knowingly styles it – at the centre of his life. He tries too to express in his poetry some of the deepest and harshest implications of his faith, including struggle with renunciation and a reaching for transcendence.

It is a tough time for Eliot, morally and socially. Several of his friends and associates, including Virginia Woolf, Herbert Read and A. L. Rowse, are at odds with his religious commitment; some are even antagonistic or patronising. ‘Anyone who has been moving among intellectual circles and come to the Church, may experience an odd and rather exhilarating feeling of isolation,’ he remarks, though the sense of alienation is probably more upsetting than he would admit. The strain is both social and personal. He finds in his religion not devotional delight and balm, but a locus of moral and spiritual struggle very like that of the ‘dark night of the soul’ of the Spanish mystic St John of the Cross. ‘To me,’ Eliot writes, ‘religion has brought . . . not happiness, but the sense of something above happiness and therefore more terrifying than ordinary pain and misery: the very dark night and the desert.’ And he tells his friend John Hayward: ‘I know just enough . . . of “the peace of God” to know that it is an extraordinarily painful blessing.’ Becoming a Christian means embracing a rigorous ascetic vocation ‘Thought, study, mortification, sacrifice.’ The Church is for him fundamentally an institution of order and authority, with ‘fixity of dogma’. To William Force Stead he writes: ‘The man who disbelieves in any future life whatever is also a believer in Hell . . . People go to Hell, I take it, because they choose to; they cannot get out because they cannot change themselves.’ Thus his demanding faith gives ultimate meaning and purpose to his life: now and again in his earlier years, he discloses at this time, he had felt ‘on the verge of insanity or imbecility . . . If I had died even five years ago [that is to say, before he became a Christian in 1927], everything that I had suffered up to then would, so far as I can see, have been waste and muddle.’

Eliot becomes an active participant in Church counsels; joins the Literature Committee of the English Church Union, and undertakes to be a ‘Departmental Editor’ on a projected *Encyclopaedia of the Christian Religion*. In January 1931 he makes his first retreat at the Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham in Nottinghamshire. He becomes acquainted with the journalist and writer on mysticism Evelyn Underhill, and entertains at home in London the American journalist and like-minded philosopher Paul Elmer More, whom he considers ‘extremely kind . . . loveable’. More momentarily he gains authority as a critical apologist for Church doctrine and deliberations, when he publishes in March 1931 an outspoken pamphlet in the ‘Criterion Miscellany’ series entitled, with deceptive mildness, *Thoughts After Lambeth*. This brief, sharp essay on the arguments and resolutions of the 30 bishops assembled at the Lambeth Palace Conference of 1930 is written with advice from senior clergy including William Temple, Archbishop of York (and future Archbishop of Canterbury), who approve the value of Eliot’s strictures on Christian doctrine. ‘The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilised but non-Christian mentality,’ writes Eliot at the outset of the 1930s:

The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from Suicide.

He composes during this period two of his most tantalising and admired poems. The first is the multilayered, hallucinatory, talismanic, prayerful and penitential set of six lyrics entitled *Ash-*

Redeem

The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.
[. . .]
Redeem the time, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken

Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew

And after this our exile

While denying that this sequence is ‘devotional’, he humbly declares that ‘it attempts to state a particular phase of the progress of one person’ – that is to say, ‘an intermediate phase’ of his own spiritual development. It is about ‘the experience of man in search of God, and trying to explain to himself his intenser human feelings in terms of the divine goal’. If it is obscure, he says, he hopes that it expresses a ‘good’ kind of obscurity – ‘the obscurity of any flower: something simple and to be simply enjoyed, but merely incomprehensible as anything living is incomprehensible’.

The other great lyric of this period is the beautifully tactful, wondrous *Marina* (1930). ‘The theme is paternity,’ he explains: the poem functions as ‘a comment on the Recognition Motive in Shakespeare’s later plays’. In addition, the first part of the satirical–political and personal nightmare of *Coriolan*, entitled ‘Triumphal March’, is published in October 1931, with illustrations by the fine artist and designer E. McKnight Kauffer. ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ (the second part of *Coriolan*) appears in the French periodical *Commerce*. Eliot publishes too his translation of *Anabase*, by St-John Perse (*nom de plume* of the French diplomat Alexis St Léger Léger).

Eliot’s output as critic and lecturer remains as high as ever, despite – and perhaps because of – a home life that is perennially edgy and distressing. He writes an Introduction to Christopher Isherwood’s ‘bad’ translation of Baudelaire’s *Journaux Intimes*. He delivers a series of six radio talks on seventeenth-century poetry, covering aspects of the work of Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan, Traherne, Marvell, Milton, Cowley and Dryden. He writes an introduction to G. Wilson Knight’s study of Shakespeare, *The Wheel of Fire*; an introduction to Johnson’s *London: A Poem* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*; and an introduction to Pascal’s *Pensées*, for the Everyman Library. He admires what he terms Pascal’s ‘unique combination and balance of qualities’. He also contributes three BBC talks to mark the tercentenary of the birth of John Dryden. And he publishes in an American anthology the influential essay ‘Donne in Our Time’. Eliot pronounces there: ‘Donne was, I insist, no sceptic.’

In his professional career, as a director of Faber & Faber and editor of the small-circulation but influential periodical *The Criterion*, he remarks, with ironic asperity: ‘I am not really interested in contemporary literature to begin with, and it frequently happens that what I do like is, by a natural coincidence, published by my own firm.’ Despite affecting occasional jadedness – ‘Qua publisher I always take a depressed attitude about verse’ – he continues to prove himself one of the greatest talent-spotters of the century. In the period covered by this volume of letters, he promptly recognises the talents of the new generation of poets headed by W. H. Auden (‘I have been struck from the beginning, not only by his remarkable literary abilities, but by his general activity and curiosity of

mind and variety of intellectual interests'), Stephen Spender ('I have hopes, but he is a mere nurseling'), and Louis MacNeice (whose poetry he finds 'very interesting', although he will wait until 1935 to publish MacNeice's collection *Poems*). He prints Auden's *Paid on Both Sides* in the *Criterion* and brings out Auden's first collection *Poems* from Faber & Faber later the same year. 'Publishing is more venturesome than banking,' he tells an old colleague at Lloyds; and as if to prove the point, he encourages his fellow directors at Faber & Faber to put out James Joyce's *Haveth Childers Everywhere* (the complete work, *Finnegans Wake*, lies some years in the future). But perhaps the one slip of the period occurs when Eliot and his fellow directors turn down a proposal by Eric Blair (George Orwell) to translate from the French a Zolaesque fiction about a Parisian prostitute by Jacques Roberti entitled *À la Belle de Nuit*. (Blair says he is quite familiar with the milieu and the slang made use of in the novel, but that does not avail him.)

In his capacity as mentor and fosterer of upcoming writers, Eliot meets and likes Hugh MacDiarmid (pseudonym of C. M. Grieve). He invites Marianne Moore to contribute to the *Criterion*. He delights in making friends with the curious, charismatic poet Ralph Hodgson. He writes introductions for Seán Ó'Faoláin (among others), with a view to securing for him a foothold in literary journalism and publishing. In addition, he inaugurates regular meetings of the 'Criterion Club' – some of them held at Harold Monro's famous 'Poetry Bookshop' opposite the British Museum – for getting together with regular contributors to the *Criterion* including Bonamy Dobrée and Herbert Read, and with the guests whom they wish to cultivate (they include William Empson).

The domestic background to all this successful professional enterprise remains disrupted and distressing. Virginia Woolf, one of the witnesses to the continuing torment of the Eliots' marriage, relates in her diary that 'Poor Tom is all suspicion, hesitation and reserve . . . There is a leaden sinister look about him. But oh – Vivienne! Was there ever such a torture since life began! . . . This bag of ferrets is what Tom wears round his neck.' According to another friend, Vivien is 'positively hostile' to Eliot's involvement in religious affairs, deriding them as 'monastic'. It is perhaps symptomatic of the mutual discontent of Eliot and his wife that they cannot settle on a place to live in peace: they move house every few months, from 177 Clarence Gate Gardens (near Regent's Park) to 43 Chester Terrace (close to Eaton Square), and then back to 68 Clarence Gate Gardens. After dining with the couple, Eliot's old friend Conrad Aiken gossips that he found Vivien 'shivering, shuddering, a scarecrow of a woman' who 'directed at T[om] a cold stream of hatred'. Vivien reports feeling a 'fearful shock' when her brother Maurice suddenly marries, without notice, a young American named Ahmé Hoagland. Eliot confirms that this event has 'desolated' her. (Perhaps her brother's rush to marry a young American revives in her sorry feelings about her own rushed and secretive marriage to Eliot in 1915.) Eliot seeks to encourage her to develop independence and her own circle of acquaintance, and strives to ensure that friends including Ottoline Morrell, Mary Hutchinson and Alida Monro see as much as possible of Vivien by herself: 'the more people she can see without me the more people I might be able to see without her!' Having said so much, he promptly rephrases the observation more positively: 'If she can be persuaded to believe that people she likes want to see her the more self-confidence and independence she might acquire.' The American academic Willard Thorp, who visits the Eliots at home in London at this time, notes that Eliot is obliged to deal with Vivien 'like a patient father with a fractious child'.

A respite from the developing moral void of his home life is held out by an irresistible offer from Harvard University that he become Charles Eliot Norton Lecturer for the academic year 1932–3. Eliot promptly resolves to go there alone. Whether or not he sees this development as a chance to leave Vivien for good cannot be known at this stage. For the time being, as another friend, Robert Sencourt remarks, Eliot strives diligently to 'establish serenity between them'.

VALERIE ELIOT EDITING THE LETTERS

The Letters of T. S. Eliot owes everything to Valerie Eliot (1926–2012). She had been Eliot's greatest fan ever since, aged fourteen, she listened to a recording of 'Journey of the Magi' played to the class by her English teacher at St Anne's School, Reading. From that moment Valerie Fletcher (as she then was) felt a spiritual connection. 'I was overwhelmed by it,' she wrote. 'I remember intense excitement, as though a bomb had exploded under me. I knew something had happened, I knew this was different.' One of the first things she read by Eliot was his self-revealing introduction to the *Collected Poems of Harold Monro* (1933): 'There is no way out. There never is. The compensations for being a poet are grossly exaggerated; and they dwindle as one becomes older, and the shadows lengthen and the solitude becomes harder to endure.' It moved her profoundly. 'It was extraordinary that I felt I just *had* to get to Tom, to work with him. That introduction to Monro's poems haunted me.' Later, she sought out ways of working for him, and she hoped to become his secretary. For a year after leaving school, 1945–6, she worked in the Rare Manuscript Library of the Brotherton Library at Leeds University; and in 1948–9 she was secretary to the author Charles Morgan. However, her passion for all things Eliotic persisted, and became something of a family joke; and even Dylan Thomas – for whom she did occasional secretarial work in the late 1940s – knew her open secret. He was going to see Eliot at his office, Thomas told Valerie one day. 'What is it worth to you if I push my secretary down the stairs?' In time, astonishingly, a tip-off from a family friend meant that she did secure the position as Eliot's secretary, in 1949, and she acquitted herself admirably in the job. She revered the man and his work, and she came to love him – though she did not tell her love. Eliot considered her the best secretary he had ever had, and favoured her so far as to give her an introduction to Max Beerbohm one summer when she was holidaying in Rapallo. However, after seven years of working with Valerie, his admiration grew into deep love, and the 68-year-old Eliot found the courage to propose to her by letter – 'Dear Miss Fletcher' – in November 1956. They were married at St Barnabas Church, Addison Road, London, on 10 January 1957 (when Valerie was just thirty). The marriage lasted for eight years – 'minus four days', as Valerie would poignantly say – and it brought them both the most intense happiness.

T. S. Eliot enjoyed reading the letters of many writers from Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Baron von Hügel to James Joyce, and he shared his enjoyment with Valerie: they would often read aloud to one another. She it was who kept on pleasantly pestering him about his own letters, and her enthusiasm for having them published at some point. Taking the hint, the uxorious Eliot came to agree that she might in due time make a selection – posthumously. In a memo to his executors, signed in December 1960 – indeed, it was set down earlier than one might imagine – he stipulated: 'I do not wish my Executors to facilitate or countenance the writing of any biography of me.' However, he went directly on to authorise an edition of his selected letters – 'if the selection is made by my wife'. (In June 1970 Valerie would tell T. S. Matthews: 'It was with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded him not to ban the publication of his letters.') In the same memo, Eliot expressed his loving faith in his wife, though not without mentioning the hope, or the heavy hint, that she would safeguard his interests exactly as he saw them. 'I wish my wife Esmé Valerie Eliot to have sole control over my correspondence, to preserve or destroy letters written to me, and copies of letters written by me, at her discretion.'

Widowed at thirty-eight, Valerie dedicated the best part of the remainder of her life – nigh on fifty years – to recovering as many of her husband's letters as possible. 'I suppose it's an emotional outlet if I'm honest,' she once said. 'I've put everything into it.'

Originally, long before he met Valerie, the very thought that anyone might publish his letters went wholly against the poet's wishes. He dreaded in particular the likelihood that the story of his unremittingly unhappy private life with Vivien Haigh-Wood Eliot (1888–1947) – from whom he formally separated in 1933, but from whom he was not to be divorced – might one day be played out for a curious public.

So too, when he learned, late in life, that his intimate friend Emily Hale had placed all of the letters he had written to her – more than a thousand, covering thirty years of their relationship – in the Firestone Library of Princeton University, so ensuring that they would be preserved for the interest and instruction of posterity, he reproached her with some vehemence:

I have the greatest dislike to revealing my private affairs to the public now or at any time merely because of my importance in the world of letters whatever that may be. I have indeed no desire to give information about my private life to the scholars and biographers who have nothing better to do than pry into the biographies of men of letters, and I am afraid that in the same spirit I have destroyed your letters to myself. The thought that posterity may be interested in my work naturally gives me some pleasure but not the thought of posterity being interested in my private life.

It did not seem to occur to Eliot that what he thought a selfish and tasteless decision on her part might well have been meant as a generous tribute to him. It was an unusually ill-tempered letter, begotten by shock. Those letters were to be embargoed until fifty years after Emily's death; but Eliot could scarcely countenance even the idea that an archivist, in a professional capacity, might read his private letters and keep the confidence.

To Ann Bowden, at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Eliot wrote in August 1961 in more measured vein on a related subject: 'As for the Aldington correspondence, I appreciate your interest in these letters but I cannot at present adjust my mind to the publication of any volume of my correspondence during my lifetime. It seems to me that this is a matter better left to my executors, and perhaps even better to a remote posterity, if that remote posterity is still interested in my correspondence . . .' With the writer Richard Aldington he had enjoyed a close but at times warily ambivalent relationship through the 1920s, only for the friendship to be betrayed by the publication of Aldington's spiteful lampoon *Stepping Heavenward* (the present volume details that particular falling-out, and the enmity that ensued). At least in his dealings with third parties, therefore, Eliot was realistic enough to appreciate that a selection of his letters was bound to be published at some time.

We know that Eliot himself destroyed some batches of letters written by himself, and indeed some written to him (including perhaps most of Emily Hale's: a few have survived); and we must suppose he destroyed, or arranged to destroy, others. It seems possible, for example, that a box of papers faithfully burned by his editorial colleague Peter du Sautoy at Eliot's direction included some letters from Eliot's first wife Vivien. In addition, Eliot's bibliographer Donald Gallup informed Valerie on 1 November 1987, 'I remember Theresa telling me that she and Tom burned most of Tom's letters to Henry.' (Theresa Eliot was T. S. Eliot's sister-in-law: the wife of his older brother Henry.) Similarly, following the death of Eliot's mother Charlotte in 1929, Henry returned to his brother a number of the letters he had written to her; and Eliot told Henry on 25 May 1930: 'I am glad to have the letters to make ashes of. I should never have wanted to read them again, with all the folly and selfishness; and don't want anyone else ever to read them and possibly print them; and if I could destroy every letter I have ever written in my life I would do so before I die. I should like to leave as little biography as possible.'

However, since Eliot made his firm decision to allow his wife to edit the letters as early as 1960, it seems likely that he grew much warmer towards the project during his declining years as he came to appreciate Valerie's passion for it. Her joy was his greatest gratification. The journalist Michael

Davie, in a profile of Valerie Eliot published in the *Observer* on 15 May 1983, reported: ‘Mrs Eliot told me a moving thing. “Tom did destroy a lot of letters. He told me, ‘If I had known I was going to marry you, I wouldn’t have done it.’”’

Notwithstanding Eliot’s gentle promptings in the memo to his executors quoted above, I have come across no evidence to suggest that Valerie destroyed any letter written by Eliot. Everything in her temperament and conduct points to her wish to conserve everything written by her late husband. Morally, she was incapable of junking any piece of paper on which he had written anything. My conviction in this regard is supported by Karen Christensen, who worked as Mrs Eliot’s assistant in the 1980s – and who is in certain respects critical of her ways and means – in an article entitled ‘Dear Mrs Eliot . . .’ (*The Guardian*, 29 Jan. 2005): ‘it would have been impossible for her to destroy anything of Eliot’s’. And Valerie offered her own testimony, which I believe to be reliable, in March 1969: ‘I was . . . to destroy papers at my discretion, but this I have not done.’

Innumerable carbon copies of the letters Eliot posted from Faber & Faber, following his appointment as director in 1925, are kept in the Faber Archive. The archive, then, was Valerie’s first recourse – and at Faber’s, in the days before the firm took on a full-time archivist, the tactful editor John Bodley would be tasked to help her hunt down obscure items in neglected corners. But Valerie quickly realised that the carbons did not always tell the full story, since Eliot often ‘had the blithe habit’ (as she put it to Frederick Tomlin in 1977) of making holograph additions and emendations to the top copies which were not routinely recorded on the carbon copies. Thus her necessary objective was to track down the signed originals wherever possible.

Further problems came to daunt her: ‘up to 1925, when my husband went to Faber’s,’ she wrote in a letter, ‘he was casual about keeping copies of letters and many of them were written by hand, too. So a good deal of time has to be spent in seeking the whereabouts of the early ones. Many of the correspondents, too, are now dead, and they were not necessarily writers of importance whose papers have been preserved, or are easily available.’ She was referring in particular to the early years when Eliot edited the *Criterion* – before the periodical was adopted by Messrs Faber & Gwyer Ltd – and when he wrote many letters by hand. (He had a very legible hand, but in later years he would always prefer to write a letter on the typewriter, blaming writer’s cramp.) Consequently, before the age of the computer and the internet, Valerie had to write hundreds of blind letters of enquiry to widows, children or associates, and even to remote possible connections, and to hunt down wills at Somerset House. In the beginning she had little idea as to which libraries in the UK and elsewhere held major and minor collections; she knew of the foremost Eliot holdings at King’s College, Cambridge, and at Harvard and Texas (which she had visited with her husband), but not much else. Richard Ellmann (who had once hoped to be able to write a biography of Eliot’s early life, up to the period of *The Waste Land*) obliged her by typing out a comprehensive but not exhaustive list of US research libraries. Thus the track of her work for years to come was immediately laid down; as she told an American friend in May 1966:

I am kept busy answering a large correspondence about Tom and his work and I foresee that I shall be trampled under foot and vituperation (when permission is withheld!) by the increasing number of would-be PhDs who want access to Tom’s unpublished papers. And I chase round the world (metaphorically speaking) after his letters. Some were sold in a New York saleroom recently and have gone to earth in the University of Texas who have kindly supplied me with copies. There is a fair amount of detective work involved as I look up wills in order to trace the estate of deceased friends and writers to whom Tom wrote. I find it satisfying and moving to see the picture of him that emerges in his own words over the years but one cries too over his anguish at certain periods.

As that last phrase indicates, the pursuit of the letters was by no means a disinterested academic exercise. It was emotionally taxing, often exhausting, as she lived with him, in all the troubles and

triumphs of his earlier life, through all the months of her grieving widowhood. Her work on the letters she told another correspondent, was ‘occasionally rather desolating, when Tom is describing his current troubles’. Yet she never failed to find her vocation invaluable and fulfilling. ‘It’s fun,’ she would say. ‘It’s very exciting to recover him in this way.’ She became addicted to the research; it was all-consuming, and she relished in particular that ‘detective element’. As Michael Davie reported in 1983, ‘Mrs Eliot is not being dilatory. She works seven days a week, absorbed by the chase.’

The editing and annotating were demanding work, too: she told her intimate friend Mary Lascelles on one occasion: ‘It is a Ulalume sort of day, wet too, and . . . this morning was spent grappling with an article on “A Method of Rearranging the Positive Integers in a Series of Ordinal Numbers Greater than That of Any Given Fundamental Sequence of Ω ”, in order to annotate a letter from Tom to Norbert Wiener, the “father” of cybernetics. This editorial work is an excellent discipline but how my imagination longs to have its way!’ However, at other times – since she had a great sense of humour, and a love of gossip and anecdote – she thoroughly enjoyed the chase after teasing references that might never be solved. For example, she told her friend Carol Rothkopf in 1975: ‘I am thinking of offering a prize for the solution of the following: the carbon of a letter to a Dr Moore: “I return herewith with my humblest apologies something which I discovered on my coat collar some time after I left you.”’ (Her co-editor would still like to receive answers to that one, though a prize is not guaranteed.)

The very largest part of her time was to be spent on her top priority, garnering the primary materials: the letters. ‘Apart from my editing work,’ she told another correspondent, William D. Quillian, on 8 March 1977, ‘collecting, sorting and checking absorb my time.’ The scale of the work was huge: it was like assembling a gigantic jigsaw puzzle of hundreds of thousands of pieces, with no template to start out from – a fair number of letters (several to Ezra Pound, for instance) are undated and there were in the case of many of the principal correspondents, including Pound, literally hundreds of letters to track down and put in order, with outgoing and incoming letters in correct sequence.

At every turn there were setbacks to be negotiated, obstacles to be overcome, puzzles to be revolved and solved, as well as some surprises and unexpected bonuses. Indeed, there can be no doubt that she became an astute researcher and editor. In 1972, for example, she told Lascelles: ‘In a note to *The Waste Land* Tom gave a passage from *Blick ins Chaos* by the German novelist and Nobel Prize winner, Hermann Hesse, whom he had visited in Switzerland in 1922 as a result of his admiration for his critical work. There was no correspondence in the files but I had a hunch that Tom had written a “fan” letter and I finally traced a son living in Frankfurt who has not only produced it – written in French – but also two others in German and one in English for good measure. A success of this kind makes up for many disappointments.’ But she was disappointed to have to tell T. S. Eliot’s American publisher Robert Giroux on 19 July 1968, apropos Michael Holroyd’s biography of Lytton Strachey: ‘In it he quotes, with my permission, part of an important letter from Tom dated 1st June, 1919. Tom kept none of his correspondence with Lytton (whom he disliked) so I asked for a photostat of this particular letter and was told by Holroyd . . . that it had disappeared. So down I went to Marlow where the Strachey papers are kept and spent hours searching through them in case this item had been misfiled, but I eventually returned home cross-eyed and disappointed.’

She benefited from a wealth of willing co-operation; and on 7 October 1966 she was happy to tell Rupert Hart-Davis that she had received only one refusal so far:

That was from Mrs Vinogradoff [Julian Morrell] who said she might want to sell the letters and would get more for them if they were unpublished. Fortunately Tom did not write anything of importance to her mother [Lady Ottoline Morrell]. Bertrand Russell has promised to force a trunk to which he has lost the key and I only hope he does not get distracted by

his present well-publicised activities . . .

And she went on, in the same letter:

As usual the Pounds are causing a headache! Mary [de Rachewilz, Pound's daughter] sent all Ezra's private papers to Yale recently without consulting Dorothy [Pound] who has control in her role of legal guardian. Dorothy turned up here in a fury and said she would not allow the crates to be unsealed for many years after Ezra's death. I hope that when she has calmed down a little she will change her mind. She is perfectly willing in principle that I should have access . . .

Such ups and downs were almost a daily occurrence. With respect to the first item – Eliot's letters to Ottoline Morrell – it was fortunate that Valerie was mentally prepared for the long haul, as she was able to report to Lascelles only nine years later: 'After months of enquiry throughout America I have at last traced 111 letters from Tom to Ottoline Morrell of which I had copies of only 26. Mrs Vinogradoff sold them some years ago without learning their destination.' There were in fact 126 letters to Morrell housed at Texas University, and some were of importance. (Valerie's remark that 'Tom did not write anything of importance' to Morrell was of course written in a miffy moment – it perfectly natural to sniff at what one can't have.) The problem of the Pound papers too was solved only after a lapse of seven years, as Valerie wrote to T. S. Eliot's beloved cousin Eleanor Hinkley: 'Yale have bought the Pound crates for \$292,000 and Ezra's daughter, Mary, is being appointed Curator of the collection. I am hoping to have access to Tom's letters to his friend, because much of their correspondence (written in the style of Uncle Remus) is undated, and I understand that Ezra often kept envelopes.'

However, as with all research, it was the outstanding 10 per cent of the ached-for and angled-for materials that proved the most exhaustingly elusive – and all the more desirable for being elusive. In the summer of 1975 she suffered from a prolonged illness, requiring hospitalisation; and she told Gallup on 14 October that year about some of the missing links, including the French connection – specifically, Eliot's early dealings with certain prominent writers associated with the periodical *Nouvelle Revue Française*:

Through my illness, I have lost three months' work on Tom's letters, and I doubt if I shall be able to deliver the manuscript by the end of December. Some time ago I was in touch with Jacques Rivière's son in the hope that he might have some of Tom's letters to his father, of which I have a number of carbons. He replied that he had none, but that he would go through the *NRF* material in Mme [Jacques] Paulhan's possession and write to me again. That was a year ago, and I have heard nothing, but recently I learnt that a French bookseller has been offering three of Tom's letters to Rivière, and I am trying to trace his name. Due to the kindness of an American university librarian, I was sent a note about a comprehensive collection being sold by International Bookfinders of Pacific Palisades, California. It mentioned that there were eighteen letters, of which ten were typed, written between 1922 and 1954, but gave no details of date or recipient. I have written to them, asking for information, but fear the collection may have been bought by someone who wishes to keep it private . . .

It was frustrating too when a few other parties did not respond as readily as Valerie would have wished. It was not that she expected others to jump at her command, although admittedly to some correspondents Valerie's approach felt like a royal command. Her ever-developing authority as a scholar brought her confidence and *savoir faire*, and her increasing wealth in later years brought her the patina of power; she was also a glamorous woman, and she had the glamour of being T. S. Eliot's widow. But she found it difficult to comprehend how others seemed on occasion reluctant to return her offer of quid pro quo. She was always willing to reciprocate, despatching letters to other literary estates in return for copies of their original Eliot letters, and supplying letters to scholars authorised by other estates to edit their letters. On 6 March 1973, for example, she advised John Kelly, editor of the letters of W. B. Yeats: 'I have already extracted a number of letters from Yeats to TSE, and when I am sure that I have found them all, I will send you photostats.'

Similarly, she wrote on 14 October 1977 to Michael and Edna Longley:

As I am preparing my husband's correspondence for publication, I wrote to Mrs MacNeice earlier this year to enquire whether any of his letters to her husband had been preserved, but received no reply. I understand from Professor [E. R.] Dodds that she was abroad at the time, and he thinks that you may have taken copies of the letters in the course of your work.

If, being on the spot, you could obtain Mrs MacNeice's approval, I should be grateful if you would kindly let me have photostats at my expense of any TSE letters, or, if they are lent to me, I will have them copied and returned by registered post on the same day. I have carbon copies of 116 letters, but would of course prefer to have sight of the originals in case of holograph additions. It would seem from my files that the two men did not correspond in 1955 or from 1959 to 1962, which is odd, especially as Louis came to one of TSE's birthday parties in the later period.

The Longleys correctly responded that they had not yet reviewed the MacNeice letters; and of course they were not authorised to transmit to another scholar letters which were owned by Mrs MacNeice. Four months later, on 1 March 1978, Valerie consulted Charles Monteith (then Chairman of Faber & Faber) apropos the problem, as she saw it, of Mrs MacNeice:

I approached her in February last year about Tom's letters, but received no reply. I then wrote to Dodds, who sent me copies of four letters and said he would send her a reminder. Still no reply. I have also been in touch with the Longleys who are preparing a biography of Louis, but 'have not yet gone through the vast bulk of correspondence which Hedli possesses'. I have carbon copies of 116 TSE letters and feel sure more than four originals must have been preserved. The Longleys are planning to examine Louis' letters to Tom which I have extracted from the files and put into a folder, and I wonder whether I might bargain a little? In other words say that Mrs MacNeice must play her part by producing Tom's side of the correspondence at the same time. Please allow some blackmail!

In time, of course, the problem was civilly resolved, without recourse to 'blackmail' or any other form of bargaining.

In such ways she made herself into an expert, assiduous and determined (not to say hard-nosed) scholar – the scholar-editors she aspired to emulate, she once remarked, were Gordon Haight, Gordon Ray, 'the Dickens trio', and Richard Ellmann – and she was not prepared to let go of any of her literary quarries once she had got it by the tail. Just how exact, and exacting, she was in her record-keeping can be gathered from a letter to Clive Driver at the Rosenbach Foundation, dated 13 January 1976:

At present I am working to 1930, so I cannot say how many of [TSE's] letters to Marianne [Moore] I shall be using. I enclose a list of my carbons and photostats, which total 75 letters, 2 postcards, and one cable. On a letter from Marianne dated 30th March 1954 TSE had written 'answered 10. 4. 54'; so I should appreciate a copy of his reply at your convenience. Would you like me to check your list of Marianne's letters to TSE when it is ready?

At the end of those first ten years, when she was pressed by Faber & Faber to notify them when they might expect to receive the first part of what was initially projected to be a three-volume set of letters, she proclaimed with justifiable pride in her achievement, in a letter of 5 February 1977 to Peter du Sautoy (Monteith's predecessor as Chairman):

I have assembled from several countries Tom's correspondence relating to the first four years of the [*Criterion's*] existence, the period before he joined the firm, and I am enriching our holding of the later years by tracing letters which Tom either wrote by hand or typed himself without retaining a copy – and as you know a number of carbons lack the bottom lines. Furthermore, many of the contributors were or became personal friends as well as Faber authors – Ezra [Pound], [Herbert] Read, [Bonamy] Dobrée, [Wyndham] Lewis, Aldington, Joyce, to name a few – and I have prepared complete collections of each which means that they no longer have a separate existence in the *Criterion* boxes. When I have completed my task I must re-plan the storing of Tom's correspondence because there is over-lapping and muddle at Harlow [where the Faber & Faber archive was then housed] and I have accumulated at least twice as much fresh material.

Our three volumes will reflect Tom's work as editor, though it is in his role as publisher that he advises authors in a similar way to the help he received from Ezra.

In a speech given at the Faber & Faber offices in Queen Square in February 1987, she stressed likewise: ‘Publishing suited TSE’s temperament and I think it is true to say that some of his finest criticism will be found in his letters to correspondents known and unknown and in marginal comments on returned texts.’ The grand topic of TSE’s marginal notes on returned texts still awaits the right Ph.D. candidate.

It was a magnificent feat of research and retrieval on her part, the bringing back together of probably the overwhelming majority of the letters of the lifetime of the foremost man of letters of the twentieth century. ‘Searching for early material is the hardest but rewarding task,’ she wrote on 1 June 1977 to Ellen Dunlap at Texas, ‘and I could write a book about it.’

She had determined too, she said in letters to other enquirers, that the first of the three volumes would comprise 750 letters by Eliot and about forty by other people. And she made known in a letter of 8 March 1977 to William D. Quillian this additional pertinent information: ‘After I have completed my selection, the entire correspondence will have to be reorganised to include later garnerings (which have doubled the size since 1965) before it can be made available to scholars.’

There was one outstanding problem which Valerie never quite got to grips with in the earliest years of her research. So intent was she on amassing the letters that – for understandable reasons – she did not fully face the necessity to figure out just how many of the letters might fit into the three-volume selection that she envisaged. On 20 April 1967 she told Mary M. Hirth, of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Texas: ‘I dare not begin to make a selection just yet.’ Five years later, she told Robert Giroux, on 21 June 1972: ‘I hope a natural break will occur in 1932, but again this will be influenced by the amount of correspondence that ought to be included.’ It was natural for her to apprehend a break in the narrative in 1932, for that was the year when a major break had actually occurred: Eliot had broken away from his first wife in order to spend a year at Harvard, and he was to seek a legal separation on his return home in 1933. The couple would never again live together, and Eliot would see Vivien on only a couple of occasions thereafter. (One might speculate also that Valerie would therefore have hoped for a second break at about the end of the Second World War; and the third and final volume would carry the story through to T. S. Eliot’s death in January 1965.) However, just a year later, in July 1973, she advised Hinkley, ‘The first volume of Tom’s correspondence will probably go up to 1935.’ But then, on 11 November 1975, in a letter to Mario Praz, she reported: ‘The (generously) selected correspondence will appear in three volumes, the initial one ending about 1927.’

The reason for bringing the date forward is not far to seek: additional caches of letters were still coming to light, notably including letters to Ezra Pound. ‘I doubt if the first volume of the correspondence will appear until the spring of 1977,’ she advised her friend Professor L. C. Knights, ‘as the Pound situation I mentioned is unlikely to be settled by September when I should have to go to press . . . It is galling, but I must include all Tom’s epistles to Ezra.’ (Valerie recognised that Pound had been the prime figure in Eliot’s career, so she wanted to print every one of Eliot’s letters to him.) She wrote too, in the same month (May 1975), to Carol Rothkopf: ‘I am determined to wait until I have access to [James] Laughlin’s Pound letters.’ After just another year, she explained to Giroux in New York on 1 June 1976:

Another Pound setback. Some more letters from Tom have turned up in the possession of the heir of William Bird . . . with whom Ezra left papers on his departure from Paris in 1924. The executors now claim them as their property, to be sold to the Lilly Library, but the Pound estate disputes this and a court case may follow. Whatever the outcome it is obvious that this cache will not be available for my first volume goes to 1926 – and should be ready for you and Peter [du Sautoy] next month. I suppose this material will have to be an appendix to volume two. O dear.’

In truth, she could not bear the idea of having to introduce an appendix of earlier letters into a late

volume: after toiling for so many years at her appointed task, she anticipated volumes of formal perfection, with every letter in its proper place. This latest 'Pound setback', as she called it, was to be overcome over a year later, as she told Giroux on 27 October 1977: 'William Cagle of the Lilly Library says that the dispute with Yale over the Bird papers has been settled and Indiana University is to get Tom's twenty letters and one postcard written to Ezra before 1924, and will be sending me photostats. I am delighted that we shall be able to include them in their proper place in volume one instead of as an appendix to a later volume.'

But no sooner was that obstacle overcome than another precious bunch of letters came to light, as Valerie told Lascelles on 27 July 1977:

Owing to a recent death 207 TSE letters, 25 postcards and 4 telegrams are to be made available to me by the University of Texas. There was a further twenty years' ban on their release before I told a piteous story to the recipient's Q.C. son [Jeremy Hutchinson, son of Mary Hutchinson]. Until the photostats arrive I do not know what number fall within the compass of the first volume or how many I shall want to use, but I expect footnotes will have to be adjusted at a time when I am suffering from footnote-it-is – that is a compulsion to annotate everything I read, a condition exacerbated by the recollection of Johnson's remark about it being impossible for an expositor . . .

She received copies of those long-embargoed letters to Mary Hutchinson by the turn of the year, and she informed Edward Mendelson (W. H. Auden's literary executor and sympathetic fellow editor) on 14 February 1978: 'I have been busy adjusting footnotes in the first volume as I have had to include a further twenty letters from Ezra which have now become available after the legal argument between Yale and Indiana; and 207 letters from another recipient who died recently.'

This was to become a frustrating and in fact self-hampering problem. Since Valerie was aiming to shape each volume in terms of a single continuous run of footnotes, any infiltration of additional letters meant that all the succeeding notes would be dislocated, requiring retyping (this was still some time before the advent of the computer in the 1980s). Yet the bulk of her text was expanding exponentially with almost every day's delivery of mail; and there were few rare book and manuscript dealers or specialist librarians throughout the world who were unaware of her interest in buying, or begging to borrow, every new find. At times she would feel almost harassed by news of new letters, for all the practical difficulties they raised, while unequivocally welcoming them in her heart. But how to squeeze the whole into a manageable volume, without leaving out countless plums: that was the problem.

'You may recall', wrote William R. Cagle, Lilly Librarian, on 9 December 1981, 'that a few years ago we acquired a small number of Mr Eliot's letters to Ezra Pound in the papers of William Bird. Now, by good fortune, we have added some 12,000 letters written to Ezra and Dorothy Pound from the estate of Mrs Pound and among them are approximately another hundred letters from Mr Eliot.' The level of anxiety Valerie felt at that moment is apparent in her response of 22 December to Cagle's courteous notice: 'I feel stunned at the thought of another 100 letters from TSE to Ezra Pound, but assume that the majority of them were typed and that I have the carbon copies. I have in fact prepared a number of letters in this way, not knowing whether the originals existed or not. My four volumes are laid out and the first must go to the printer soon.'

The number of volumes had been revised upward to four by 1980. By 1983 Michael Davie reported 'There will be four volumes, possibly five.' Karen Christensen has likewise testified that by the mid-1980s, 'There had been plans to publish five volumes.' And in a letter to Valerie in February 1991 John Bodley referred to 'II, III, IV, V and so on'.

In the event, Volume I of the Letters appeared in 1988; it covered the period ending in 1922 with the publication of *The Waste Land* and the founding of *The Criterion*. (The volume sold 10,187 copies in its first year.) Interestingly, Volume II – spanning 1923–7 – was advertised in the Spring and

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