Letters from T.S. Eliot to Emily Hale

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Miss Emily Hale.
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24 RUSSELL SQUARE
LONDON, W.C.1

4 September 1931.

Dear Dove,

Time only for a short line to-day: and I am wondering whether by Monday I should not be writing to Brimmer Street instead. I had been hoping that you would have a few weeks at West Rindge on your return; because, however salubrious Seattle may be, and even with mountaineering and other excursions, it is not quite the same as being in the country, is it?

I am cursing myself for having promised to write anote of introduction for a volume of a yyoung poet who killed himself a year or so ago, named Harry Crosby. Ezra Pound has done a note for one volume and D.H.Lawrence did for another; and his widow (Caresse Crosby her name is) begged me so hard to write one for the third that I weakly agreed, the man being dead. And I know very little about him, except that he was a nephew of Pierpont Morgan and had much more money than was good for him.

Wednesday I made my quarterly confession; and although I always wish beforehand that I was going to the dentist instead, this time I found it much easier, and was able to be much more calm and detached about myself, and felt more fully relieved afterwards than for a long time; and Father Underhill was very encouraging; and so for the last 48 hours I have enjoyed a kind of serenity which comes from time to time; and which I hope you have more often than I, inasmuch as you deserve it more fully than I. No letter from you to-day; but no American mail anyway; so I look forward to Monday. You made me very happy, a couple of letters ago, by saying that you felt closer to me even since the spring. For I like to think that our lives grow more and more together, even against such odds of space and absence.

Tom.

"Instant comprehension" implies that the artist had actually witnessed such a scene; perhaps this is what you mean. But I don't see how you can be sure from an etching, which is a slow kind of work, whether the author's comprehension was instantaneous.

An Etching.

Drawn with a skilful hand, inspired with the mind and eye
understanding?
Of instant comprehension, a picture stabs my memory

Comprehension means taking in several things at once.

I am not happy about the change of rhythm in these 2 lines.

weak
And leaves it spent for pity.
Two figures face me from the wall~~s~~,
A man and woman - humble children of an ancient eastern race.
He sits, grey bearded, powerfully limbed and tall,
Mute and motionless, beside ~~a~~ a form ~~whose~~ of which the face
Is covered, lest yellow scavengers along the street
Should sniff and paw this strange thing at their feet,
Which once outran the swiftest in a laughing village race.
The hands that gently placed the pall, are caught
In a steel-like grip of self control. The head is bent
As if in prayer. "Allah is good, Allah is - " over and over he
~~sought~~ tried
To say. Against the full companionable years they went
Together - he sets tomorrow's empty earth, and firmament.

?

in spite of the rhyme.

But surely he was praying.

Why against?

Who? if the old man and woman, then is it they had gone or they were still to go? But they are not going in the picture.

Does this mean loss of faith in Allah?

LONDON W.C.
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Seattle Wash

Miss Emily Hale,

41. ~~Brimmer Street,~~

~~Boston~~ Mass.

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24 RUSSELL SQUARE
LONDON,W.C.1

Dear Lady bird,

Monday 7 September 1931.

I am beginning my letter this afternoon, having a quarter of an hour after a short committee; but I do hope that I may have a letter from you tomorrow, to say exactly when you are returning from Seattle to Boston. I guess, that if I send this to Seattle it will only be delayed a few days; but I should like to have a letter waiting for you on your arrival. And I am waiting to hear whether you will be in Boston straight on from the middle of the month, or go to West Rindge, or visit, and exactly how you will be placed.

This morning a very cheerful letter from Penelope, from Cotuit (here I was interrupted by our Scotch sales-manager who has just been bitten by an Alsatian Dog in Cheltenham but wanted to consult me about the French Book of the Month Club) describing a typical New England summer. Apparently she has been sailing and bathing, and her father is very well etc. How difficult it is to adjust the past to the present, and other people's present to one's own! I mean that it comes as a

TUESDAY 8 Sept.: What was I saying? Oh yes,...as a surprise to me always and a kind of shock when I realise for a moment the *continuity* of most people's lives. Eleanor, and Penelope, and Harold Peters and Leon Little, are all older, of course; but they have grown and flourished in the same soil, surrounded always by the same other trees. The same is true, of course, of most of my English friends; they have grown up and gone on continuously in the same environment, in continuous contact with the same friends and with their relatives; whereas for me, and I think to a large extent for you, life has been *discontinuous*. The only people I know who quite understand this difference are a few Colonials: those who have been to an English university and practically never returned - for the Australian or New Zealander as a rule is more completely cut off from his native land than the ordinary American resident of Europe. But it is hard to put oneself in the place of those people, the majority, who have never had to stand quite alone; who have always had that support of relatives and old friends with similar early memories, about them. Isn't it?

Now your dear letter of the 29th has arrived and made me very happy; so long it is, and shows you so much in command of yourself. I am glad to have my mind settled about where to write - this goes to

Brimmer Street, where in all probability it will await you on the hall table for several days - so now I can throw away my blue air slips. There is much to say. I do understand the difficulties of an only child; I had rather analogous handicaps myself. My eldest sister, Ada, is nearly twenty years older than I; the nearest to me, Henry, is eight years older; so that I was somewhat like an only child in a large household. In a way I was spoilt; in a bustling houseful of sisters just coming out or going out and having much society, I was allowed to indulge my tastes for solitary dreaming and reading all sorts of odd books in a library corner, unnoticed. I never talked, for who~~m~~ was there to talk to? And I had no playmates. We continued to live in a old quarter of the town, which had originally belonged to my grandfather; for the reason that my father took particular responsibility for his mother; her house was close by, and she did not want to move away from the scene of so many associations, and father did not want to be far ffrom her - she depended upon him far more than upon any of her other children. So that we lived practically in a slum: it harmed me only in starting me with a rather drab image of the world, and in isolating me from other children of my own class. I never met little girls at all, except at the dancing classes, of which I was terrified; and I very much envied the other little boys who apparently played more or less with the same girls - or at least saw them frequently on other occasions than dancing classes - and who to my perpetual amazement seemed as much at ease with the girls as with each other. I became both conceited and timid; independent and helpless... But how I run on about my childhood, quite too garrulous. I tried to put some of this into a little poem called "Animula".

I don't want to think of you as perfect, for what companionship could I have with a person <u>too</u> superior to myself; it means much more to me that you too should have had to struggle against difficulties and defects of temperament; and because of that struggle you will go much further than most people, my dear. You see, I do know and recognise in you exceptional spiritual capacities; the greater the capacities the longer and harder the road, and perhaps the more lonely. And it is a long long time before one has conquered any one fault so completely as never to be in danger of being surprised by it unprepared - thatis my own experience. But what an assurance of life it is to me, to find all these potentialities in one ~~other~~ person, just when I needed it most!

I hope that by now you will have got over fussing about whether you are "prying" into my life or asking painful questions. You can indeed help me by asking; for I do want fervently to reveal myself wholly to you; and you are doing me a great great service by allowing me to. I wish to have no reserves whatever; only you must help a very reticent person to abandon all reticence.

Tom

I should like to see you in the rôle of Beatrice! It is odd that you should have mentioned Ellen Terry, for I have been designing to send you the Shaw-Terry correspondence as soon as the ordinary edition appears - but not very quickly - not much before your birthday - as I want to look at it myself so as to be able to comment on it and appreciate your comments. I believe a considerable part consists of Shaw's advice about her various parts.

Thank you again for a very satisfying letter which has made me happy. Now to lunch with Mr.A.J.Penty the economist. I am very much worried about the present state of Britain and not much reassured by the provisional government - but this letter is too long already to start on politics now; and I do not want to distract my own mind from what you have said to me.

Your

Tom.

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24 RUSSELL SQUARE
LONDON, W.C.1

11 September 1931.

My dear Dove,

Although it it is pleasant to be writing again to a place so comparatively near as Boston, I imagine that you may now be several weeks without hearing from me - which certainly is a deprivation to me if not to you! - as I suppose that you will tarry on the way back, very likely, on little visits in the middle West? However, I like to think that there will be a little pile of letters from London waiting for you, even though some of them, like this, are brief - but I shall really write a long letter on Monday and Tuesday. I was up rather late last night - did not start to bed till 11:45 which is very late for us; and consequently was a sluggard this morning; so that with the usual odds and ends of work I have left myself only five or ten minutes for writing to you. Meanwhile I have been able to reread your letter of the 29th again and again, always with more appreciation and a feeling of being always nearer to you. You are right, I think, in relating faults to virtues - I mean, I am sure that progress is not a simple matter of weeding out faults - the roots of the faults are entangled with the roots of the virtues - that is not a very good metaphor; it is a question of gradual improvement of the whole being, so that the faults fade away rather than are violently torn out; to improve one's good qualities and organise them is more important; and it is the desire for good, rather than the abhorrence of ill, which is really creative...But I have no time to expand this at present, however clumsily it be expressed. And next week I want to chat more, too, just about events and thoughts of the moment; and my Emily, we want and ought to want all the joy that is possible.

Tom

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24 RUSSELL SQUARE
LONDON, W.C.1

Dearest Lady.

16 September 1931.

Although, of course, rather miserable at having no letter from you yesterday or to-day, I had prepared myself for the vacancy, as I expected that you would be in transit, either direct or by stages, between Seattle and Boston. I had become reconciled to Seattle, with the aid of the Air, though I prefer Boston; but I cannot help being a little uncomfortable while you are travelling about and quite inaccessible. It will be therefore a relief to learn that you have arrived at Brimmer Street, but I shall want a great deal of information from you about yourself as soon as you arrive, as you know.

This has been a confused and busy ten days. I have read: a Life of Mohammed (in German); a Life of Calvin (in French); a Life of Marcion the Heretic (in Scotch, or at Least by the Minister of Ecclefechan); a Life of Aimée Semple Macpherson (in American); an Autobiography of Judas Iscariot (in German); the Autobiography of Emma Goldman (in her own Yiddish-American); five French detective stories; and four other French novels. This is of course, work for Faber & Faber. Most of them I rejected at once; and thank heaven none of this reading remains in my memory. Then Harold Peters has been in London again, having completed both the Ocean Race and the Fastnet Race, in the "Highland Light"; spent the weekend with us, and has just left for Southampton to return to Boston. He is a particularly lovable fellow; but as his chief interests are yachting and nautical adventure of any kind, and getting himself tattooed (by the Tattooist to the Royal Family - some of the decorations on his torso are certainly very remarkable) it is is not always easy for me to provide him with sufficient congenial society in London. So it was a little tiring, though I am very glad he came. Tonight I believe the Joyces are coming to dinner, as they are returning to Paris in a few days; and Montgomery Belgion and Herbert Read tomorrow.

Miscellaneous correspondence: e.g. from Mr Siepmann of the B.B.C. asking if I had any objection to the Ceylon Station re-broadcasting my next talks in March. Of course I haven't, if they want to; but I feel more and more that this educational broadcasting is bunkum. It is all very odd: you invent and perfect with immense toil and ingenuity and expense, some mechanical device like radio, you build up an immense organisation with all sorts of "vested interests"; and then a number of people are put to work to try to find some justification for the horrible machine, and Education is the word: Adult Education, and what is even worse, education of children; and I suppose television (a barbarous word that) will be brought in-to the schoolroom, and the infants will be kept in close touch with everything that is going on in the world, and their minds will be more confused and untrained than ever. I don't think my talks on poetry, Dryden etcetera, do much harm, because I am sure only people who are already interested in the subjects listen; but when it comes to "broad discussions of modern problems", The Modern Dilemma and so on, I fear that it is merely filling up empty minds just as the news bulletins and the "light classical music" fill them up; and I feel that the £50 I shall earn will be tainted money unless I am pretty careful what I say. I must try very hard to think of enough that is firm, salutary and unwelcome. Thinking, after all, is an occupation to which most people should give themselves only in moderation, particularly thinking (or talking and listening) about "world problems"...

I loved your last letter. I am wondering what you will think of of my answer to your enquiries about which you were so unnecessarily afraid of being "inquisitive". I like you to be inquisitive. And you must remember that no doubt much that may puzzle another person may seem self evident to myself; and that I cannot know how much you ~~xxx~~ understand or not, already, except by your going on asking questions: there are probably quite somple facts or considerations which merely have never occurred to my mind to put. And if I can make my mind clear to you I can probably make it clearer to myself. You understand me, I think, more or less intuitively; at any rate, essentially better than anyone else does; and I hope and believe that I understand you in the same way - and perhaps equally more than anyone understands you? But to understand a person is not necessarily to understand all the circumstances of their life; and these we need constantly to explain to each other.

Your Tom

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24 RUSSELL SQUARE
LONDON, W.C.1

18 September 1931.

Emily dear,

I was surprised and happy to have a letter yesterday - that of the 7th - as I was not expecting one till the end of next week perhaps. Your questions did not seem to me either stupod or insistently repetitive, as you should know by now. There are still, no doubt, many gaps, which when filled in, will add to understanding; it is simply impossible to explain a lifetime at once, but gradually I hope, with the aid of questions from you, that it may become clear. So do not,please, undertake never to take the initiative again. For instance, you are still a bit confused on one point. You say you suppose that "the night at Eccleston Square was too confusing, too painful, to make reasonable action possible". Of course I had not thought out beforehand how I should answer a question which was unexpected; but my refusal was more to do with you than with anyone else. To have answered your question would have meant explaining the whole history; and to do that I should either have had to pretend that I no longer cared for you - which falsehood would have been beyond my powers of chivalry to commit~~t~~ - or else to admit that I still cared; and I felt that it would be wrong to let you know the truth when I was hopelessly separated from you - I knew so little about your life in the meantime, and would it hsve been fair to you to let you know what might have directed your thoughts more towards me? It is necessary to speak without fear of vanity, in such a matter; even the remotest chance was to be avoided. But then why, you will think, did I change my behaviour and abandon my scruples and write to you as I did a year ago? Well, perhaps even that is indefensible, and indeed I have worried a great deal aboutit- though if I regretted it I should be superhuman - but we were both older and I think both very much more mature than six years before; and last summer the suppression became unendurable. Even so, I attribute my letter entirely to our meeting: I felt, from the moment that you came into the room, that there was something very strong and deep between us about which I could not be deceived, and which made everyone else seem quite unreal to me. And now there's another matter explained, I hope.

The rest of your letter I must answer next Monday. Like all your letters, it gives me a happiness of which I know I am unworthy.

Your Tom

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24 RUSSELL SQUARE
LONDON, W.C.1

22 September 1931.

My Dove.

I am hoping for a letter towards the end of this week: but I shall have no right to complain if none comes, because my Tuesday morning has unexpectedly been cut very short, and I find myself with only a moment to write - a change of servants required my presence at home most of the morning: it is annoying, because I could just have made time to start a letter yesterday morning; so next week I shall not rely on my Tuesday but will write part of a letter on Monday. I have to lunch with Darsie Gillie, the Berlin correspondent of the Morning Post, and have possibly to go out to tea. I have just heard from Willard Thorp, they are temporarily domiciled near here, and have asked him to lunch with me on Friday, pending our asking them both to tea. The political situation here, though by no means unexpected, gives reason for much anxiety; and I shall not be surprised to see it become much worse. At the best I expect that everything is going to cost more; fortunately for myself I have a small income from America, so that as the pound goes down that part of my income will increase; but that will not compensate me. However, one can endure a great deal with equanimity when there is absolutely nothing to be done about it.

I have much still to answer in your letter of September 7th, and another letter shall follow this very unsatisfactory note in two days. Your letter was very lovely. As for inadequacy - you must know how that thought has stung me, about myself - how stupidly unappreciative I was of the best when I saw it - but I have to believe that the worst failures can always be turned to good. If either of us had been a little more mature than we were... but perhaps we are making our lives something finer still. One cannot feel this way always, and one cannot think of these things too long at a time.

Your Tom

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24 RUSSELL SQUARE
LONDON,W.C.1

24 September 1931.

My dear Lady.

I have twenty minutes this afternoon which I did not expect to have - I lunched with Middleton Murry, early, as he had to catch a train at 2:30 from Liverpool Street to Norfolk where he lives now; and my usual Thursday committee is not till 3 o'clock. I hope you may observe, my dear, though you will not have observed so clearly as I have - that I am no longer so fretful when I do not hear from you exactly on the day on which I might expect to hear from you - I feel now that we are always near together even when communication lapses - which is very glorious for me: still, I do feel a normal worry when I am not sure when you are - merely because you may miss your train ormay be in a railway accident or subject to any of the vicissitudes ~~of anything~~ that may happen to a precious article in transit - so I shall emit a sigh of relief when I get a letter from you from Boston. - And now I must go to my committee - because my 15 minutes have been interrupted twice - and if I have time I shall write a little more after the committee, and finish the letter tomorrow morning.

I have five minutes more this afternoon! and hope to have time to finish this tomorrow morning - when I have no engagements except that I have asked Prof. George Williamson of the University of Washington and also Willard Thorp to lunch with me. This morning I interviewed Mr.César Saerchlinger of the Columbia Broadcasting Inc. and after some haggling over the price - I think he got the best of it - finally agrred tentatively to broadcast for American stations on Dec.6th at 5:30, that is 12:30 Sunday morning New York time, fifteen minutes on John Dryden at a guinea a minute - I believe that I agreed largely because it amused me to think that any of my friends in America who have radio sets will be able to hear me if they want to. Do you know anyone who has a wireless?

I only see Murry about once a year. We have a peculiar intimate relationship which is not exactly friendship in the ordinary sense; more a consciousness, on both our parts, that the patterns of our lives are in some inscrutable way interwoven.

FRIDAY Sept. 25.: He is a strange mixture of sincerity and insincerity, of consciousness and unconsciousness, of humility and inferiority, of envy and hero-worship. I met him first in 1918-19, when I was still in Lloyds Bank; he wrote and asked me to be his assistant editor on "The Athenaeum" which was just being revived. I almost accepted; on the whole, I am not sorry that I did not. Anyway, the Athenaeum xxx lived only a few years; but for the most of that time I wrote regularly for it, three weeks out of every four, and saw a good deal of Murry. Katherine Mansfield was very little in London; usually abroad or at sanatoriums, I think. I never saw much of her, and I do not think I liked her very much. Later, after he had founded "The Adelphi" and I had got involved in "Thw Criterion", our ideas began to diverge more and more. After Katherine's death he went to live in the country, and has never lived in London since, and I only see him two or three times a year. He is now again a widower, with two small children by his second wife, whom I never met. I do not think he has quite a firstrate mind; I have never felt quite sure that his loyalty would be always unquestionable. But his insight, at times, is great; and, as Maritain once said to me when speaking of Cocteau, "if he is not sincere, he has a sincere desire to be sincere"; and he is one of the very few people - how few they are! - who are seriously concerned about the most serious things. I sympathise very much with his preference for remote and isolated country life - he tells me that he may often see no one for a week or more at a time, to talk to, except the local vicar - though that too, like living in town, has its intellectual dangers.; but in the present state of the world there can be few lives preferable, for the person who feels, than living in an old country district and seeing childdren, animals, trees and vegetables grow. To be uprooted, to have no very strong ties in a place, to have only what one has managed to erect by one's own individual skill or intellectual superiority of some kind - as one gets older this kind of life is very very tiring, exhausting. There are times when New England, or my memories of it, seem more real than old England; and when I feel that if I were suddenly translated elsewhere, the whole of my life in England would become a dream: for nothing is quite real when one never quite relaxes. And the craving for one's own flesh and blood, and a world in which one's own people have lived, which they have helped to form, a countryside or shore steeped in ancestral lives: all this asserts itself. But I am only a case of one type; and the whole modern world, more or less, seems to suffer from displacement, restlessness. And now I must go and behave as a correct clubman.

I shall write again on Monday. God bless you. my love. Where are you, now, I wonder?

Tom.