



T. S. Eliot
Pencil and Chalk Drawing
from life
by his sister-in-law
Theresa G. Eliot, 1955
(See page 83.)

*Affectionately,
T. S. Eliot*

The Story of a Friendship: 1947-1965

by
William Turner Levy
and
Victor Scherle



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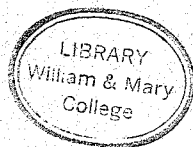
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To Fannie Hurst

With a deep sense of appreciation for her friendship



464674

it sounds very well!" I told him that I was pleased and flattered to do so. At the conclusion of our conversation, he said, "I am most anxious to have you meet my beautiful wife!"

We had arranged to see each other on Sunday, April 27, after his return from Texas.



Chapter Eleven



When I saw Tom he was wearing a ten-gallon hat and carrying an umbrella. We were going to church!

"This hat was given to me in Texas," Tom said proudly, as he, Valerie, my parents and I rode in the family car to All Angels' Church.

After the service, we all went to my home for Sunday dinner.

"Dear," Tom said to Valerie, "I should like to introduce Lord Peter Wimsey!" Wimsey was just as gracious in making the acquaintance of Mrs. Eliot as he had been in meeting her husband.

As we entered my study, Tom pointed out the view of the Hudson to his new wife.

"It's all exactly the way Tom described it to me," Valerie said with a charming smile. "I'm so pleased to be here."

After everyone had taken seats in my study, I brought in a

bottle of champagne and was surprised to hear Tom say, with a glint in his eye, "I'll have a very dry martini."

We all had martinis and I proposed a toast to the new bride. Later, with a second martini, Tom raised his glass and proposed my mother's health.

Valerie said that they had been grandly entertained at the University of Texas. "They were so pleased to welcome Tom. He opened an exhibition of his first editions and papers."

Tom told us of the elaborate precautions taken to preserve the University collections. "Not only air conditioning, but moisture control—everything!"

Valerie added, "Tom is now an honorary sheriff—remind me to show you his badge when we return to Margie's!"

I thanked Tom for sending me a presentation copy of his Minneapolis lecture, *The Frontiers of Criticism*, and reminded him that we hadn't spoken of the event, adding, "*Time* magazine said that it was the largest number of persons ever assembled to hear a lecture on literary criticism, and the photograph they printed showed an immense stadium that was packed to the very top with fifteen thousand people!"

Tom cleared his throat and replied, "I had no idea that the audience was to be of that size, and I'm glad I didn't know because I wouldn't have had any idea what to say. You know, William, I do not believe there are fifteen thousand people in the entire world who are interested in criticism!"

Tom raised his eyebrows and smiled broadly when my mother brought in a cobalt-blue dish which he had admired on his last visit—containing black olives! He wasted no time in selecting one of the largest. As he devoured it and reached for another, he smiled at my mother appreciatively—and winked!

Tom said to me, "I am glad that you reviewed the Kenner book in *The Christian Scholar* [Hugh Kenner, *T. S. Eliot: The Invisible Poet*]. I agree with you that his chapter on F. H. Bradley contains the most valuable new information for the reader. I especially like the title of Kenner's book. I like the image; it's very appropriate."

Kenner had been the first to read Tom's doctoral dissertation on F. H. Bradley, the philosopher, and see in it Bradley's influence on Tom's early thought. The influence extended even to Tom's choice of words and the shaping of his unique prose style.

Tom normally made it a point not to comment on books written about his work. When I had asked him, some years earlier, however, what book he thought was the best among those written about his work, he answered without hesitation, "Helen Gardner's book" [*The Art of T. S. Eliot*]. "She has done a fine job, in my opinion."

I took a small book, in French, out of a glass bookcase, and passed it to Tom without comment.

He was startled to recognize that it was the first volume of his French edition of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. "Did you get this from a bookseller?" he asked.

"Yes, I did," I replied, "with the intention of restoring it to you."

"Oh, no," he said, "this is yours now. I see it bears Gordon George's signature. How, I wonder, did it fall into his hands?" He looked at a few pages of the text and said, "The set has eleven or twelve volumes, and they are on my bookshelf at our apartment in Kensington Court Gardens."

Tom took out his fountain pen and inscribed the book to

me, below his own early signature and George's: "I don't know how this book came to have Gordon George's (i.e. 'Robert Sencourt') signature but it now belongs to my friend William Turner Levy. T. S. Eliot 27.iv.58."

I next showed Tom another new acquisition, two pages in Dylan Thomas's handwriting, from a notebook which he had used during his poetry readings. The pages contained the poem "Chard Witlow" by Henry Reed, a facetious take-off on Tom's "Burnt Norton." Tom gave it a close scrutiny, and remarked, "You know, I've been chairman of the British group that has been raising funds for Dylan Thomas's family. Caitlin, his wife, asked me to—a very sad business." Thomas's death in New York had left his family almost penniless.

Tom removed his fountain pen from his inside breast pocket and wrote on the bottom of the second of the two pages. When he finished, he handed it to my parents, who read it and passed it to Valerie. When it reached my hands, Tom said, "You know, William, this is the only piece of paper in existence that has both Dylan's writing on it and mine."

I read what he had written: "Not bad. But I think I could write a better parody myself! T. S. Eliot, 27.iv.58."

To be polite, I asked the Eliots if they would like another martini. I was thunderstruck when Tom immediately accepted the offer. We all had a third, ice-cold, bone-dry Beefeater martini.

Mother asked Tom, "Are you bothered a great deal by people who want to see you or question you about your work?"

Tom answered, "When I travel I am; for instance, once in Chicago, some time ago, a newspaper reporter bluntly asked

me at the railroad station, 'What *was* the love life of J. Alfred Prufrock?'"

"And what did you tell him?" I asked.

"I told him, as I hastened on, I am afraid that was precisely Prufrock's trouble—he hadn't any!" Tom threw back his head and laughed.

Valerie said, "Tom, do tell the lion-tamer story!"

"Oh, it is too long to go into, dear," he replied modestly.

"Do tell it, Tom!" I requested.

"You may be sorry!" he said jokingly. He took a sip from his martini, clutched the lapels of his jacket with both hands, cleared his throat, and said, "I remember so well an old American vaudeville act—two men, Moran and Mack, who put on blackface and called themselves 'Two Black Crows.' This was their lion-tamer routine."

Tom recited the following in a well-rehearsed and professional manner. He had obviously performed the routine many times; his timing was perfect and his intonations embellished the thin material:

I'd like to train lions.

You know, to be a lion trainer, you gotta be very quick.

Well, I *am* quick.

How quick?

Oh, I'm so quick, when I go to bed at night, I turn out the light twenty feet from the bed, and I'm in bed before the room is dark.

Boy, when are you goin' to stop lyin'?

No, that's a fact, and all you got to do to train lions, you just throw salt on his tail and then you got him, or else—

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