T. S. Eliot Letters to Emily Hale, 1930-1956: Finding Aid

Summary Information

Call number: C0686
Repository: Princeton University. Library. Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections
Manuscripts Division
One Washington Road Princeton, New Jersey 08544 USA
Size: 5.50 cubic feet
12 boxes
Language(s) of Material: English
Abstract: Consists of approximately 1,131 letters and related enclosures by British poet and Nobel Prize winner T. S. Eliot to Emily Hale (1891-1969), a teacher, actress, and secret muse to Eliot.
Location: This collection is stored in special vault facilities at Firestone Library.
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T. S. Eliot, the noted modern poet, dramatist, and literary critic, was born in St. Louis, Missouri. After earning a master's degree from Harvard University and beginning his Ph. D. studies, Eliot moved to the United Kingdom in 1914, eventually becoming a British subject in 1927. In addition to his writing, Eliot worked as a schoolteacher and a bank accounts manager before joining the publishing firm of Faber and Gwyer (later Faber and Faber) in 1925, where he worked for the remainder of his career. Best known for such poems as The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, and Four Quartets, Eliot was the recipient of the 1948 Nobel Prize in Literature.

The collection consists of approximately 1,131 letters and related enclosures by Eliot to Emily Hale (1891-1969), a teacher, actress, and secret muse to Eliot. The letters span the years from 1930 to 1956: 1930 (7 letters), 1931 (92), 1932 (100), 1933 (64), 1934 (64), 1935 (91), 1936 (76), 1937 (63), 1938 (59), 1939 (78), 1940 (53), 1941 (35), 1942 (35), 1943 (37), 1944 (40), 1945 (30), 1946 (27), 1947 (34), 1948 (25), 1949 (15), 1950 (17), 1951 (20), 1952 (15), 1953 (12), 1954 (14), 1955 (14), 1956 (14).

Access

The collection is sealed until January 1, 2020, by agreement with the donor, Emily Hale. In 1956, Emily Hale donated T. S. Eliot's 1,131 letters to Princeton, along with related printed items and enclosures. Her interest in the Princeton University Library grew out of conversations with her friends Professor Willard Thorp and his wife Margaret Thorp. On 7 July 1942, Library Director Julian P. Boyd wrote to Hale, "I understand that you wish to protect the Eliot letters by placing them in a safe repository until they can be safely transmitted to their permanent home, which I assume is to be the Bodleian Library." By the time Hale was ready to send the letters to Princeton, she changed her mind about the permanent home for the letters. On 24 July 1956, Hale wrote to Thorp and promised to send the letters to Princeton "with the knowledge of T.S.E." and because of "my years of friendship with you." In a separate note, Hale specified that the letters were to be "under auspices of Professor Willard Thorp, as executor of my wishes in regard to them--not be looked through or published 25 years after my death." Thorp discussed the gift with William S. Dix, the new University Librarian; and Alexander P. Clark, Curator of Manuscripts. By 17 November 1956, however, Hale had reconsidered the length of restriction, probably based on Eliot's wishes, and she signed a deed of gift, stipulating that the letters be kept "completely closed to all readers until the lapse of fifty years after the death
of Mr. Eliot or myself, whichever shall occur later. At that time the files may be made available for
study by properly qualified scholars in accordance with the regulations of the Library for the use
of manuscript materials. To carry out this intention the Library is to keep the collection in sealed
containers in its manuscript vaults."

Once received in November 1956, Alexander P. Clark organized them chronologically in a dozen
document boxes. Their physical organization was to facilitate appraisal of the letters for tax purposes,
thus allowing Hale to donate them in installments. Steel security bands were put over the boxes at
a later date. The gift was formally accessioned on 12 December 1956. Additional gifts from Hale in
the next dozen years, including two typed Eliot letters of 1930, donated in 1967, which are now in
the Emily Hale Collection (C1294). They are entirely literary in content and thus were not considered
personal enough to warrant being sealed with the bulk of the letters received in 1956. T. S. Eliot died
on 4 January 1965 and Emily Hale on 12 October 1969. While the 50-year restriction period should
end on 12 October 2019, William S. Dix stated in 1971 that the Eliot letters be sealed until about 1
January 2020. This has been the official posted opening date since then. It provides sufficient time for
proper arrangement and description of the letters, possible conservation treatment, and other things
that must be done before the official opening on 2 January 2020.

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition

Gift of Emily Hale in 1956.

Processing and Other Information

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); T. S. Eliot Letters to Emily Hale, Box and Folder
Number; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Encoding

Machine-readable finding aid encoded in EAD 2002 created from MARC record via MarcEdit and XSL
stylesheets in 2008.

Descriptive Rules Used

Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

Subject Headings

- Hale, Emily, 1891-1969 -- Correspondence.
- Actresses -- United States -- 20th century -- Correspondence.
- Poets, English -- 20th century -- Correspondence.
· Love letters.
· British literature