**Séminaire de la Société d’études modernistes**

**Vendredi 4 octobre de 17h à 19h**

**Ècole Normale Supérieure, 45 rue d’Ulm, salle Celan**

**Frances Dickey: “Prelude in St. Louis: T. S. Eliot’s First City”**

From his birth in 1888 to the age of seventeen, T. S. Eliot lived in Gilded Age St. Louis, which was then the fourth largest city of the United States. Later, he so completely remade himself as an Englishman that most readers still do not know his midwestern origins, yet he acknowledged, “My urban imagery was that of St. Louis, upon which that of Paris and London have been superimposed” (*Prose* 8:389). In the last decade, access to his prose and letters and a trove of digitized newspapers have revealed how Eliot’s childhood experiences in St. Louis, a segregated city, shaped his later poetry and drama—the “yellow smoke” and polluted rivers of his cityscapes, fleeting sounds of “music from a farther room,” his alienated flâneurs and shadowy female figures, his sense of sin and yearning for connection. The opening (in 2020) of over one thousand love letters from Eliot to an American woman, Emily Hale, has changed our understanding of how he “transmuted” life into art. This talk explores Eliot’s St. Louis background in connection with his poetry, including *Prufrock and Other Observations, The Waste Land*, *Sweeney Agonistes*, “Animula,” *Ash-Wednesday*, and *The Dry Salvages*.

**Frances Dickey** has written and edited Eliot scholarship for twenty years while teaching American and British literature at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Her books include *The Modern Portrait Poem from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Ezra Pound* (Virginia 2012) and the forthcoming *Prelude in St. Louis* (Johns Hopkins). She edited *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot, Vol. 3: Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929* (Johns Hopkins 2015), *The Edinburgh Companion to T. S. Eliot and the Arts* (Edinburgh 2016), and four volumes of *The T. S. Eliot Studies Annual* (2020-24). Her articles on Eliot and other modern poets have appeared in *Modernism/modernity*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, *Contemporary Literature*, and other journals and collections. She served a term as President of the International T. S. Eliot Society and frequent lectures at the T. S. Eliot International Summer School.