'Tovey, if I may quote him just once again, says that the ending [of the Adagio of Brahms' 2nd Sextet] reminds him of “a sky in which all clouds are resting on the horizon and dazzlingly white”; I can only say that, for me, that image doesn’t quite do justice to the patch of colour in the very last bars when a D natural on the first viola is twice contradicted by a D sharp on the second. Incidentally, the second cello, who has if it must be admitted a dullish time during much of the sextet, fully makes up for it in this adagio.’

Unfair perhaps to write out now what has been crossed out in the manuscript, but irresistible to me as a snapshot revealing the characteristics of the man! First we have a reference to authority, to Donald Francis Tovey, Reid Professor at the University of Edinburgh, who more than anyone else set the tone and preoccupations of enlightened musical thinking, both of professionals and amateurs in his own times. ‘Just once again’, says Edward, but only to revise what is after all no more than a metaphor, to get it quite right, to justify the subjective and evocative image with a specific and concrete observation of detail. And then, heralded by the ubiquitous, ‘incidentally’, he joins on an acute observation of his own.

I dwell lovingly, if a bit pedantically, on such trivial details because Edward Boyle had the speechmaker’s gift of writing very much as he spoke, and speaking straightforwardly as he thought and was. There is a striking similarity between his language and utterance and his mind. As he was a reticent, even shy, man, and as it would be an impertinence for me to claim an intimate understanding of how he was on the basis of the regrettably too few years that I knew him, and above all because he himself, if he would at all have wished anyone to write about him, would have been the first to observe any false tone, it seems appropriate to try to portray him through the things that concerned him and, as far as possible, according to the values he held dear to himself.
There were always those, in the University and in Leeds, who sought to know Edward Boyle in a more intimate and revealing way than may have been possible. Such people, though well aware of his personal warmth and consideration in his dealings with those around him, may nevertheless have felt a certain impersonality in such dealings. Although a man equipped with a phenomenal memory will hardly have been able to avoid a measure of personal reminiscence (‘1936 – a remarkably hot summer: on August —, at Lords, Ranji scored a magnificent innings of —’), he seemed primarily to have been concerned with a world of objects outside himself. They were part of a perpetual present, to be appreciated, understood, defined and finally remembered. Houses, gardens, food and wine, fine art, music and literature, to say nothing of the statements of politicians and thinkers, all were arranged in that remarkable storehouse of his memory, ready to be brought out and re-examined at any moment. He certainly seemed less concerned with abstract ideas or theory, certainly as far as music was concerned. A foray on my part into the higher abstractions would, as often as not, be received in silence, or at best, with a corroborating or by implication critical but always concrete example. The impression of impersonality may be given, when taste and knowledge result from a mulling over of accumulated and carefully observed detail. He did not work by hunch, intuition or the association of disconnected observations bridged by personal feeling. He made no jumps or generalisations. Doing quite the opposite myself (as will be obvious from what I write about him), these characteristics of his often caused me a certain uneasiness in our conversations. On the one hand, without a detailed memory for musical themes, chords and procedures at my disposal, I found myself in a perpetual condition of mendacity, saying that I remembered things that I didn’t, because had I said that I did not know that moment in the piece he was referring to, he would probably have regarded it as an unfairness on his part to display superior knowledge. But then again, I had to take care to avoid abstract rodomontade and try to say things in a more concrete and justified manner to retain his interest. When he had nothing to say, he said nothing and the conversation had to start anew. But in this way, he taught me a great deal.

Mention of impersonality and of a concern with detail might suggest little more than a kind of connoisseurship, a polite way of describing the mentality of a stamp-collector. But this would be quite short of the mark. Eliot uses the notion of impersonality in