

## **The Archivist** by Martha Cooley

1. Matt seems to have found the perfect profession for himself -- an introvert with an incredible respect for books and literature should, of course, be an archivist. It was quite shocking, then, that he would betray his passion by burning the Hale letters. How does he let us know that this betrayal is what needs to be done?
2. What, exactly, do you think is at the core of Judith's paranoia? She didn't know the reality of her parents' demise until just before she took her life, but it is as if she had an inkling all along. Was it this sense that made her different from other Americans hearing of war-torn Europe? Was it perhaps this unknown connection that forced her to take it all so personally? Can we account for Judith's obsession?
3. T. S. Eliot's contradictions are cited more than once in the book ("Teach us to care and not to care"; "Time the destroyer is time the preserver") and are one of the reasons Judith and Matt admire him. How does this relate to this work as a whole? Think specifically about betrayal versus trust.
4. One vital message addresses the importance of our religious roots. Judith and Roberta both suffered as a result of religious lies. It was perhaps the most important factor in Judith's undoing, and the driving force for most of Roberta's actions. Do you think it's realistic that religion plays such a large role in the lives of the characters? What role does religion play in your own life?
5. We are all products of our experience. When Matt and Roberta speculate about T. S. Eliot's reasons for institutionalizing his wife and converting to the Anglican Church (p. 38), how do their experiences influence their speculations?
6. The character development of Lottie and Sam so late in the book is fascinating, as we already know so many of the players. With whom do your sympathies lie, Lottie and Sam, or Carol and Len?
7. Although Matt suffers from a guilty conscience, he acknowledges that even in hindsight he wouldn't have done things differently for Judith. How much do you think Matt's attraction to solitude plays a role in his actions?
8. Matt's disdain for his mother's brand of Christianity leads to what he calls his own deity -- a combination of both parents' beliefs. How does his God serve him?
9. What are the extent of Matt's feelings for Roberta? Is he in love with her?
10. The ultimate contradiction in life, betrayal versus trust, is the underlying theme of this book. We see betrayal take many forms: religion, relationships, profession, self. What we are left with at the end of the book, however, is a sense of well-being. How does the author make this happen?

**Source:**

<http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/archivist.asp>