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*THE CRITICAL HERITAGE*

**T. S. ELIOT**

Edited by  
**MICHAEL GRANT**

**VOLUME 1**



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# T.S.ELIOT

VOLUME 1

## THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

Edited by

**MICHAEL GRANT**



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## General Editor's Preface

The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and nearcontemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer's historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* present a record of this early criticism. Clearly, for many of the highly productive and lengthily reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality— perhaps even registering incomprehension!

For earlier writers, notably pre-eighteenth century, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer's lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author's reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.

For Theresa

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# Abbreviations

- 'Bibliography' Donald Gallup, 'T.S.Eliot: A Bibliography' (London, 1969).  
Browne E.Martin Browne, 'The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays', second impression (Cambridge, 1970).  
CPP 'The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot' (London, 1969).  
Unger 'T.S.Eliot: A Selected Critique', edited with an introduction by Leonard Unger (New York, 1966).

# Introduction

Eliot's career was influential in many fields, poetry and drama, literary criticism, religious and social thought. However, his importance as a critic and as a religious and social thinker was and still is felt in so diffused and oblique a manner that it seemed fitting, from the point of view of this series, to confine the area of interest to the poetry and plays. This means that a wider selection of material can be given for each work than would have been the case had more of Eliot's output been covered. It seemed right, also, to concentrate on the immediate reviews, since there have been a large number of collections of essays, most of which are still in print, that consider at a more general level, and in a more extended way, Eliot's achievement. To offer to reprint this material seemed out of place and unnecessary. For this reason, and because of difficulties concerning availability, the material gathered here is of varied quality. Yet the very ephemerality and speed of response evident in some of the reviews justify reprinting them. Our own ideas as to what constitutes Eliot's lasting importance, or even of what kind his importance may be, are in continual change and almost two decades after his death there is no final judgment on his work. Many of Eliot's critics have recognised a profoundly unsettling and baffling quality about his writing, a quality also felt in the relation between the writing and the life. It may be that Eliot was in a special way the kind of writer whose work precludes any satisfactory classification, whose work undermines classification. However that may be, there is more than one type of immediacy, and the peculiar quicknesses of Eliot's poetry invoke that logic of the imagination which may be discerned as clearly in a review as in a full-length study.

## THE EARLY YEARS

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St Louis, Missouri, on 26 September 1888. He was the seventh and youngest child of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Chauncey Stearns. The Eliot family was of English origin, the American branch descending through Andrew Eliot, who came to Massachusetts from East Coker, Somerset, in the middle of the seventeenth century. Of the family influences upon him, Eliot's

mother would appear to have been the strongest. Not only was she a woman of compelling moral passion and eloquence, but the images and themes of her own poetry recur in the work of her son. Beatific light, fires of lust and purgation, the pilgrimage across the desert waste, all these were to provide focal points in Eliot's poetry, from the early days until 'Little Gidding'.

His childhood and adolescence were spent in St Louis, though in 1896 Eliot's father built a large house for the family at Eastern Point, overlooking Gloucester harbour, in Massachusetts. It was upon his memories of visits to this New England coast that Eliot was to draw for many of the images that pervade his work. In 1905, his earliest poetry and prose were published in the school magazine of Smith Academy, St Louis, and in 1906 he entered Harvard as a student of philosophy. He took courses with teachers such as George Santayana and Irving Babbitt. He was to remain at Harvard, with periodical visits abroad, as undergraduate, post-graduate and assistant, until 1914. During his undergraduate years, which lasted from 1906 until 1910, early poems appeared in the 'Harvard Advocate', a student literary journal of which he became editor. These poems were reprinted in 'Poems Written in Early Youth' (compiled by John Hayward and printed in 1950), and collected again at the end of 'The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S.Eliot' (1969).

It was during the writing of these poems that Eliot effected the transition from conventional, late romantic verse to something very different. The first five poems printed in the 'Harvard Advocate' between May 1907 and January 1909, the group comprising 'Song' ('When we came home across the sea'), 'Before Morning', 'Circe's Palace', 'Song' ('The moonflower opens to the mouth') and 'On a Portrait', exhibit those features of vagueness, flowing musicality and literariness that both Eliot and Pound were so strongly to attack a few years later. None the less, portents of the later work were already present. 'On a Portrait', for example (the portrait in question was Manet's 'La Femme au Perroquet', which hung in a friend's drawing-room), anticipates the mature poetry both in phrasing and in self-consciousness of perception.

During the December of 1908, Eliot first read Arthur Symons's 'The Symbolist Movement in Literature' (1899), a revised edition of which had appeared that year. Symons's discussion of the late nineteenth-century French poets drew Eliot's attention to the work of Laforgue, whose 'Oeuvres Complètes' he immediately ordered. Eliot read Laforgue over the summer of 1909, and the effect can be seen in the poems he wrote at this period. 'Nocturne', 'Humoresque', 'Spleen' and 'Conversation Galante' (the last poem was included in 'Prufrock and Other Observations') all date from this time. In the next year, 1910, the first two parts of 'Preludes' and 'Portrait of a Lady' were written; in 1911 Eliot composed 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock'.

In this new poetry, written under the influence of Laforgue, it is as though Eliot were examining his earlier procedures in a spirit of critical self-scrutiny, as though he could see that what formerly he had taken for an unquestioned and unquestionable meaning was without meaning, an illusion of meaning, a world whose meaning lay merely in the assertion that it has a meaning. If one compares



'The moonflower opens to the mouth' with 'Nocturne', the contrast and the connection are both apparent. Romeo's 'tune/Banal' might well be 'Whiter the Flowers, Love, you hold'. The poetic consciousness of 'Nocturne', as of other later poems, can participate in an experience that it is, simultaneously, alienated from. For Laforgue, this attitude was still essentially romantic. His personae, trapped within themselves and separated from truth and beauty, from the ideal, can do no more than mourn the fact in eloquent and ironic self-regard. Eliot, however, went beyond this by addressing himself to the question of the subject, the controlling 'I' of poetry, as a problem in its own right. Whereas Laforgue's ironic laments never undercut the identity and authority of the ego, of the imaginary, as the centre of the poem, it is precisely this that Eliot, with extraordinary genius, did effect. For Laforgue, the poem remains fixated upon the voice, upon the coherence of the lyric utterance, however debilitated and ironic this utterance may be. Eliot on the other hand, saw that the lyric subject of poetry was not constituted by some putative psychological and romantic condition, some presence, that pre-existed the poem. The subject, for Eliot, was constituted by writing, and specifically by a tradition of writing that reached back to the Renaissance and which had entered upon its death throes in the late nineteenth century. Peter Ackroyd has argued that it is the overt technical order of the poem and the literary tradition of which it is a part that locate the voice of the poem and at the same time displace it. (1) In *Prufrock*, Eliot was able to create a persona who exists both as formal device, as creation of the formal allusiveness and resonance of the poetic language, and as a zone of 'consciousness', a moral 'I' that takes form only through the substance of the poem's language. In the poem as a whole, this process recognises itself as such and thereby the 'character', *Prufrock*, retains upon experience (of a highly attenuated order) an ironic hold, a hold continuously in process of being displaced by language. Eliot's early work dwells in this uncertainty, and it is his ability to sustain this almost impossible dwelling between two worlds that constitutes his genius at this period.

From the autumn of 1910 to the summer of 1911, the year in which 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', the third part of 'Preludes' and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' were written, Eliot was in Paris, studying French literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne. Although this removal to Europe was against the wishes of his mother, Eliot had settled at a pension on the Left Bank in the autumn of 1910. In the early part of 1911, he attended lectures by Henri Bergson at the Collège de France. Though initially he was much taken with Bergson's ideas, he found that ultimately they would not suffice. Bergson's notion of the *durée réelle*, Eliot wrote in a philosophy essay of 1911, was 'simply not final'. Despite his attraction to France, and to French culture, an attraction that was to prove life-long, Eliot had decided by the summer of 1911 that he should continue his philosophy studies at Harvard, and, after a visit to Munich in the autumn, he enrolled as a post-graduate student at his old university. Upon his return to Harvard, he immediately took up the study of Eastern philosophy: Sanskrit under Charles Lanman and Patanjali's metaphysics under James Woods. In 1913, he

entered Josiah Royce's advanced seminar in Comparative Methodology. Royce was Harvard's leading idealist philosopher, and had just published 'The Problem of Christianity'. During this period, lasting from 1911 to 1914, the earliest of the material that was to form 'The Waste Land' was drafted.

In the summer of 1914, Eliot visited Paris and then went on to Marburg, where he had intended to participate in the university's summer programme for foreign students. The Harvard authorities regarded him as a future teacher in the philosophy department, and were encouraging him to complete his training in Europe, a training undertaken by many leading American teachers of philosophy before him. However, the outbreak of war in August brought him to Merton College, Oxford, where he was officially to spend the year on a Sheldon Travelling Fellowship, studying Aristotle under Harold Joachim, a disciple of F.H. Bradley's (Bradley himself had become virtually a recluse in his rooms overlooking Christ Church meadow). Eliot stayed in Oxford until his marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood on 26 June 1915.

It was during this period that the meeting between Eliot and Ezra Pound took place. Conrad Aiken, one of Eliot's Harvard friends and a fine poet in his own right, had been impressed by Eliot's early poems, and at a poetry gathering in London in 1912 had shown 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' to Harold Monroe, editor of 'Poetry and Drama', whose initial reaction was that the poem was 'absolutely insane'. Undeterred, Aiken wrote to Pound in the summer of 1913 to alert him to Eliot's work, 'a guy doing funny stuff at Harvard'. Eliot himself, when in England over a year later, called on Pound in September 1914, at Pound's flat in Holland Park Chambers, where they took tea. On 22 September Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe, editor of 'Poetry', of which Pound was foreign editor, to say that an American by the name of Eliot had called and appeared to have 'some sense'. He wrote to her again on 30 September: 'I was jolly well right about Eliot. He has sent in the best poem I have yet had or seen from an American. PRAY GOD IT BE NOT A SINGLE AND UNIQUE SUCCESS'. Eliot was getting the poem ready for the press and Pound would send it on to her in a few days. Pound was overcome by the fact that Eliot had 'actually trained himself *and* modernized himself *on his own*. The rest of the *promising young* have done one thing or the other but never both (most of the swine have done neither)'. Pound was pleased not to have to tell him to wash his face, wipe his feet, and remember the date (1914) on the calendar. On 3 October, Pound wrote to H.L. Mencken, one of the editors of 'Smart Set': 'I enclose a poem by the last intelligent man I've found....' Eliot's mind was 'not primitive', and the poem in question, 'Portrait of a Lady', was 'very nicely drawn'. However, the poem did not appear in Mencken's journal.

In October, Pound sent 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' to 'Poetry', with a covering letter stating that it was 'the most interesting contribution I've had from an American'. None the less, it took nine months for Pound to beat down Harriet Monroe's resistance to a poem of such strangeness. It did not finally appear in 'Poetry' until June 1915. Pound had been obliged to defend Eliot with vigour. The two letters of 9 November 1914, the letter of 31 January 1915 and that of 10 April

1915 ('*Do* get on with that Eliot') chart the course of a protracted struggle on Pound's part to convince Harriet Monroe of the poem's value. The letter of 31 January 1915 even gave her an explanation of what was happening in the poem:

'Mr Prufrock' does not 'go off at the end'. It is a portrait of failure, or of a character which fails, and it would be false art to make it end on a note of triumph. I dislike the paragraph about Hamlet, but it is an early and cherished bit and T.E. won't give it up, and as it is the only portion of the poem that most readers will like at first reading, I don't see that it will do much harm.

He went on to say that, since the poem was a satire on futility, it could not end by turning 'that quintessence of futility, Mr P, into a reformed character breathing out fire and ozone'. Pound's influence in securing the first publication of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' was decisive, and his efforts on Eliot's behalf continued. No sooner had 'Prufrock' appeared in 'Poetry' than Pound returned to the attack, pressing 'three gems of Eliot for September, and "Cousin Nancy"' on Harriet Monroe in a letter in August 1915. Three of the poems appeared in 'Poetry' for October 1915. The poems printed were 'The Boston Evening Transcript', 'Aunt Helen' and 'Cousin Nancy'; the fourth poem, 'The Death of St Narcissus', was set up in type, apparently for publication, but not printed.

Not only did Pound expend his powerful energies on getting Eliot's work published in those magazines over which he had some influence, but he also introduced him to the world of the avant-garde in London, peopled by figures such as Wyndham Lewis, Harriet Shaw Weaver, H.D. and Richard Aldington. From the middle of 1915 onwards, Eliot attended the Thursday night gatherings of the group in Soho and Regent restaurants, in the company of writers like Arthur Waley and Ford Madox Hueffer. Furthermore, Pound took it upon himself to look after the material details of Eliot's life. In Lyndall Gordon's words, 'it was as though Eliot was a precious plant to be watered and tended with care'. (2) Pound even went so far as to borrow money, without Eliot's knowledge, for the publication of 'Prufrock and Other Observations'. Pound's care and concern for Eliot's work was to show itself in very active and practical ways for a number of years to come.

Pound was influential in other ways as well. Eliot left Oxford in 1915 and in June married his first wife. After a visit home that summer, he took up school teaching, initially a High Wycombe Grammar School at £140 a year plus one meal a day, and later at Highgate Junior School where he received a stipend of £160 plus dinner and tea. Between 1916 and 1918 he delivered a series of extension lectures on English and French literature at Oxford and the University of London and evening lectures on Victorian literature at the County Secondary School, in Sydenham, South London, under the auspices of the London County Council. He also continued his philosophical studies, and in April 1916 completed his doctoral dissertation. 'Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley', which was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for doctoral candidates at Harvard. Two months after he had sent it to the Philosophy

Department he heard that the department had accepted it 'without the least hesitation', and that Josiah Royce considered it 'the work of an expert'. Despite all this, Eliot remained in London and gave himself over to poetry and literary criticism, abandoning the academic career for which he had been marked out. This decision was clearly influenced by Pound, whose encouragement and help with editors, and whose example of a man wholly dedicated to poetry, must have strengthened Eliot's determination to pursue a similar course.

In July 1915, the complete 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' appeared in 'Blast', edited by Wyndham Lewis, while 'Portrait of a Lady' appeared in 'Others', edited by Alfred Kreymborg, in September of the same year. 'Portrait of a Lady' appeared again in "'Others": An Anthology of the New Verse', edited by Kreymborg, and published in New York by Knopf on 25 March 1916. In a letter to Harriet Monroe of 25 September 1915, Pound regretted that 'Portrait of a Lady' had gone to 'Others', but, as he put it, 'I was in a hurry for it to come out before the "Anth." as you know'. By this he meant the 'Catholic Anthology', which he edited for Elkin Mathews and which was published in November 1915. It included 'Prufrock', 'Portrait of a Lady', 'The Boston Evening Transcript', 'Hysteria' and 'Aunt Helen' (under the title 'Miss Helen Slingsby'). This was the first appearance anywhere of Eliot's poetry in book-form. Harold Monro's opinions had undergone a change since his meeting in 1912 with Aiken. According to Pound, Monro had 'discovered "Prufrock" on his unaided own', and Pound, on 25 September, considered that 'Harold is dawning'. Monro was also glad to see that Eliot was in the forefront of the 'Catholic Anthology'. (Shortly after publication, Elkin Mathews received protests from Francis Meynell and other Roman Catholics concerning the anthology's title: however 'catholic' denoted its eclecticism, not its religious persuasion.)

The year 1915 saw the publication of most of Eliot's important poetry to date, while in September 1916 'Poetry' published 'Conversation Galante', 'La Figlia Che Piange', 'Mr. Apollinax' and 'Morning at the Window'. During 1916, Eliot's philosophical reviews started to appear in the 'International Journal of Ethics', while his literary reviews appeared in the 'New Statesman', the 'Manchester Guardian' and 'Poetry', a trend that continued as the volume of work he undertook increased, with reviews, in 1917, in the 'Egoist' (of which he was assistant editor from 1917 to 1919) and the 'Little Review', as well as in the journals already mentioned. Eliot's dialogue on poetry, Eeldrop and Applepex, a work of considerable importance for gauging his thought at this time, appeared in the May and September issues of 'Little Review' for 1917. By early 1917, when he entered the Colonial and Foreign Department of Lloyds Bank in the City of London, Eliot was in the process of gaining a considerable place for himself in the world of letters.

### ‘PRUFROCK AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS’

‘Prufrock and Other Observations’ was published in an edition of 500 copies by the Egoist Press in June 1917. The book comprised the poems by Eliot that had already appeared in ‘Poetry’, ‘Others’ and the ‘Catholic Anthology’.

The more traditional critics were dismayed and puzzled by Eliot’s work, foremost amongst these being Arthur Waugh, poetry critic of the ‘Quarterly Review’. In October 1916 Waugh had already opened the attack on both Pound and Eliot in a review of the ‘Catholic Anthology’, in which he asserted the connection between political disruption and what he called the ‘banalities of these literary “Cubists”’ (No. 1).

He went on to compare Pound and Eliot with the drunken slaves exhibited in the households of antiquity as a dreadful warning by example to the younger generation. It should be remembered, however, that Waugh was considering not only the ‘Catholic Anthology’ in this review, but two anthologies of Georgian poetry, of which also he disapproved. C.K. Stead has provided an admirable account of the critical presuppositions underlying this review in particular and the period generally in ‘The New Poetic’ (1964). Describing Waugh as belonging ‘to the school of critics who read poetry for the “ideas” it expressed’, Stead has shown that Waugh’s objections to the Georgians were based on his bewilderment at their refusal of generalization and large statement. (3) None the less, compared with this attitude towards the Georgians, disapproving though it may have been, Waugh’s dislike of Pound and Eliot was total.

Other reviewers sustained their attacks along the same lines. The anonymous critic of the ‘Literary World’, writing in July 1917 of the published volume, was disturbed, like Waugh, by the ‘revolutionary’ quality that seemed to lie behind Eliot’s work (No. 4). Resentment of Eliot’s intelligence was also a feature of this review, as it was of other adverse reviews, the ‘New Statesman’ critic, for example, remarking that Eliot’s poetry was ‘all decidedly amusing’, though much of it was ‘unrecognisable as poetry at present’ (No. 5). The ‘Times Literary Supplement’ reviewer wrote, with bland superiority, that ‘the fact that these things occurred to the mind of Mr. Eliot is surely of the very smallest importance to any one—even to himself’ (No. 3). The assumption behind this kind of response was that wit and poetry were antithetical categories.

In reaction to these attacks it was chiefly Eliot’s friends, Ezra Pound and Conrad Aiken, who defended his work in these first years. The violence of Waugh’s prejudice in favour of the native tradition began what has proved a continuing feature of the English reaction to modernism, and it was this that Pound turned against in his ‘Egoist’ article of June 1917 (No. 2). He pointed up Waugh’s ignorance of Laforgue, De Régnier and Corbière, showing how Eliot had drawn on French poetry and achieved a ‘comparable finesse’. The main drive of Pound’s review was to situate Eliot’s work in that tradition of Elizabethan English and modern French that much of the later criticism of Eliot has taken for granted. Pound also emphasised the uniqueness of Eliot, and spoke of his own joy in ‘the

freshness, the humanity, the deep quiet culture' of Eliot's work. It was a violent essay, with Pound's attention divided equally between Eliot's poetry and 'this stench of the printing press', the 'Quarterly Review'. One can see that for Pound the defence of the modern entailed a corresponding attack on the institutions, especially the literary institutions, of the day, an attack that lent credence to the political unease of the more traditional man of letters. Waugh's failure to respond to Eliot was, in Pound's eyes, a revelation of the rottenness of the civilisation of which Waugh could be seen as a symptom, a civilisation attacked so bitterly in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920). This connection between literary and social values was to have far-reaching consequences for Pound, as it was for Eliot, and it figured as a central theme in the essay.

Pound returned to Eliot's defence in 'Poetry', August 1917 (No. 6). This essay was a more considered version of his earlier 'Egoist' piece and restated his conviction of the necessity, or at least the advisability, of comparing English and American poetry with French work. He pointed to Eliot's 'two sorts of metaphor: his wholly unrealizable, always apt, half ironic suggestion, and his precise realizable picture'. He suggested also that Eliot's mingling of subtle observation with unexpected cliché was a further clue to the methods of the poetry. Pound was very careful to locate Eliot's superiority in his language and to assert what it was as an artist that made Eliot unique. This was in contrast to the dominant mode of critical reviewing at that time, which concerned itself instead with emotions and content. For this reason Pound's exposition led him into a lengthy consideration of versification and *vers libre*. Referring to a recent essay by Eliot in the 'New Statesman' (3 March 1917) on *vers libre*, he said that Eliot assumed in that essay that all metres were measured by accent. However, citing the famous remark, 'no *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job', Pound argued that what was important in poetry was a sense comparable to the musical recognition of what he called the 'shape' of the rhythm in a melody rather than the bar lines. It was the faculty of rhythmic invention that mattered in a poet, as in a musician. Pound would seem here to be running together both the reading and the writing of poetry into the one act of rhythmic recognition. In any event, it was for this personal rhythm that he valued Eliot so highly: 'Confound it, the fellow can write—we may as well sit up and take notice.'

This essay was the first important attempt to describe the value of Eliot's contribution: it was a judicious endeavour to establish, early in Eliot's career, his true value in relation to his contemporaries and to poetry since Laforgue and Browning. It made clear Eliot's debt to the French and compared his work with that of Joyce. Pound was not afraid to measure Eliot against classical literature, in this case Ovid and Theocritus, or to compare his use of contemporary detail with that of Velasquez, in 'Las Meninas'. In other words, the essay put forward the claims of the moderns, at least as Pound saw the matter, to represent the tradition in the best sense, that modern poetry was alive with the true life of all art, of what ever medium or period. The effect of this insistence on the notion of tradition was to turn it against critics like Waugh and to claim it for the new art.

Eliot himself was to take up the idea and give it a resonance that would be felt in nearly all subsequent criticism. For Pound himself, however, a vision, at once unique and universal, had been made palpable in the rhythmic 'shape' of Eliot's poetic language.

If Pound was the most vigorous and prophetic of Eliot's early defenders, then Conrad Aiken was his most persistent. In his review of Pound's 'Catholic Anthology', a review that appeared in 'Poetry Journal' for April 1916, Aiken stressed that it was the inclusion of poems by Eliot that gave the anthology its value. Of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady' he wrote:

These are remarkable. They are individual to a degree. Mr Eliot uses free rhyme very effectively, often musically; and with the minimum of sacrifice of form conveys a maximum of atmosphere. Both poems are psychologically character-studies, subtle to the verge of insoluble idiosyncrasy, introspective, self-gnawing.

In a later review for the 'Dial' in November 1917 (No. 7), of the 'Prufrock' volume, Aiken again emphasised the psychological subtlety of the poetry. The poems dealt with the reactions of an individual to a situation for which his own character was responsible, and this, according to Aiken, made of the poetry something 'autobiographic' and thereby idiosyncratic, with the attendant dangers of incomprehensibility. Perhaps because of this reiterated sense of Eliot's idiosyncrasy Aiken appeared somewhat wary of Eliot's work at this stage, though he acknowledged the technical ability and general accomplishment of the verse. He emphasised Eliot's skill again in the 'Dial' for 31 January 1918, when reviewing "Others": An Anthology of New Poetry', edited by Alfred Kreymsbourg in 1916. Compared with the rest of the anthology it was 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', together with Wallace Stevens's 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird', that were 'more apparently, and more really, works of art':

It is significant in this connection that Mr Eliot uses rhyme and metre, a telling demonstration that the use of these ingredients may add power and finish and speed to poetry without in any way dulling the poet's tactile organs or clouding his conspicuousness—provided he has the requisite skill.

In this, for Aiken, Eliot surpassed the Poundian aesthetic, in which mood or sensation were expressed as briefly and pungently as possible, with or without the aid of rhyme, metre, syntax or punctuation. In the rest of the review Aiken discussed the work of the Flemish poet Jean de Bosschère, whose volume, 'The Closed Door', had been translated in 1917 by F.S. Flint. Aiken suggested that Eliot had learnt extensively from de Bosschère:

Mr. Eliot's 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' would not have been the remarkable thing it is if it had not been for the work of Jean de Bosschère:

in several respects de Bosschère seems like a maturer and more powerful Eliot.

Pound again returned to the attack a month after Aiken's piece in 'Poetry', this time in the 'Little Review' for December 1917 (No. 8). He ridiculed 'the incredible stupidity, the ingrained refusal of thought!!!!' of the English intelligentsia, referring, as he had done in the two earlier pieces, to the 'Quarterly Review's' obtuseness on the subject of Keats which was now being repeated in Waugh's 'senile slobber against Mr. Eliot'. May Sinclair, also in the 'Little Review' for December 1917, summarised the positions of the contestants and herself joined in on the side of Pound and Eliot (No. 9). She suggested that it was Eliot's 'realism' that had offended the comfortable minds of the adverse reviewers, though it was precisely this realism that she herself saw as Eliot's major strength: 'Reality, stripped naked of all rhetoric, of all ornament, of all confusing and obscuring association, is what he is after.' In fact, by comparing Eliot with Balzac, she was drawing upon a tradition that held little or no importance for Eliot's work, and yet Balzac was none the less a name sufficiently impressive for the purpose of beating down the obtuse stupidity of the English reviewers. An American critic, Babette Deutsch, described Eliot as an 'impressionist' (No. 10), in a further attempt at finding categories in which to place Eliot's work and so relate it to already existing ideas about what literature should or should not be. Marianne Moore also attempted to find painterly equivalents to Eliot's method of presenting the city scene, citing Whistler's post-impressionist studies, but again she returned to the criterion of realism, saying that Eliot remained true to the objects he portrayed (No. 11).

There was in this line of criticism little or no recognition of Eliot's concern for his medium or of the obvious consciousness the poems exhibit of the poetic process itself. Eliot's opponents and his admirers were equally agreed about one thing, that the poetry was to be justified or not in terms of its portrayal of certain aspects of modern life, that the important considerations were those of clarity and obscurity, of truth or falsity to life. Even his more sympathetic critics exuded an atmosphere of bafflement and no one was able to pin-point the problematic qualities of 'The Love Song', that for Eliot language and experience were both fragmented, that the realism so confidently assumed by the critics was exactly what Eliot's poetry did not, and could not, endorse.

It is worth noting also the reaction of William Carlos Williams to 'Prufrock and Other Observations', a reaction initially sparked off by a review of Edgar Jepson's. In May 1918, Jepson, an English literary critic and novelist, had written an adverse account of contemporary American poetry in the 'English Review' (No. 12). He made an exception for Eliot, however, saying that 'Mr. T.S.Eliot is United States of the United States; and his poetry is securely rooted in its native soil'. He pointed to the Americanness of 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock', 'in very truth the lover of the real, up-to-date United States', and approved vehemently of 'La Figlia Che Piange'. To all this Williams took violent exception a year later, in the 'Little



Review' (No. 13). 'And there is always some everlasting Polonius of Kensington forever to rate highly his eternal Eliot.' Apart from the direct assault on Jepson, Williams had a more serious end in view, the attempt to dislodge what he saw as Eliot's 'conformity' in rhythm and beauty, and beyond that, to insist upon the Importance of locality, of place, which should give life to the new art, and which Eliot seemed to have eschewed. Williams expanded on his opposition to Eliot in his 'Autobiography' (1951), where, over thirty years later, the charge remained the same, that Eliot had turned his back on America and the American place in preference for the dead culture of the Old World, and England in particular, a country Williams intensely disliked. Many of the most important poets of post-1945 America took over from Williams that same distrust and dislike of Eliot and his work, their sense being that Eliot was the poet of the academic mind ('Eliot returned us to the classroom') and was thereby dead, an impertinence to any new and living poetry that might arise.

#### BEFORE 'THE WASTE LAND'

Eliot's poetry continued to appear in the small magazines during the last three years of the decade. The 'Little Review' published 'Le directeur', 'Melange aduler de tout', 'Lune de Miel' (all in French) and 'The Hippopotamus' in July 1917. Next year, the same journal, in its September issue, published 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', 'Whispers of Immortality', 'Dans le Restaurant' (a poem in French) and 'Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service'. These poems, with the exception of 'Dans le Restaurant', comprised Eliot's second book of verse, 'Poems' (1919). 'Coterie' published 'A Cooking Egg' in its issue of May Day 1919, while 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar' and 'Sweeney Erect' appeared in 'Art and Letters' (Summer 1919). Early in January 1918, Eliot's 'Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry' appeared anonymously from Knopf in an edition of 1,000 copies, timed to coincide with the publication of Pound's 'Lustra' (1917).

The relations between the two men at this time' were close. In Eeldrop and Appleplex, Eliot gives a witty account of the differences in temperament between Pound and himself:

Appleplex who had the gift of an extraordinary address with the lower classes of both sexes, questioned the onlookers, and usually extracted full and inconsistent histories: Eeldrop preserved a more passive demeanor, listened to the conversation of the people among themselves.... (4)

In reaction against the looseness of free verse, both men decided that they would write in rhymes and regular strophes, in a style based on Gautier's 'Emaux et Camées'. In Pound's case this resulted in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920), while for Eliot it resulted in the Sweeney poems, 'The Hippopotamus', 'A Cooking Egg' and the other quatrain poems of this period.

Pound continued to promote Eliot's poetry. A year after 'The Hippopotamus' had appeared in the 'Little Review', he wrote an article on The New Poetry in the June 1918 issue of 'Future', in which he spoke of 'a new French vitality among our younger writers of poetry'. Of these, Eliot was 'the most finished, the most composed'. The cold sardonic statement of 'The Hippopotamus' was of the school of Gautier, and 'Conversation Galante' was in the manner of Laforgue. None the less, Pound argued, there was much that was personal in Eliot's work, derived neither from the French nor from Webster or Tournour, just as in 'The Hippopotamus' there was much that was not derived from Gautier. Eliot with his book on Pound, and Pound with his articles on Eliot, were engaged in mutual promotion, employing all their resources of wit and abrasiveness to that end.

On 15 November 1918, Eliot met Virginia Woolf for the first time. In May 1919, she and her husband, Leonard, published Eliot's 'Poems' at the Hogarth Press. Though in a small edition, of less than 250 copies, the book sold briskly. 'Poems' was composed of the work published in 1917 and 1918, with the exception of 'Dans le ResRestaurant', which appeared in 'Ara Vos Prec', published by John Rodker at the Ovid Press early in February 1920, in an edition of 264 copies. 'Ara Vos Prec' was composed of the poems that had been included in 'Prufrock and Other Observations' (with the exception of 'Hysteria', which was omitted) and in 'Poems', together with 'Dans le Restaurant', 'Ode' and 'Gerontion'. 'Gerontion' had not appeared separately prior to its publication in 'Ara Vos Prec'. In late February 1920, Knopf published 'Poems' in New York, which was made up of the poetry in 'Ara Vos Prec', except that 'Hysteria' was substituted for 'Ode'. The number of copies in which 'Poems' was published is not now known. In addition to all this activity, the journals accepting reviews from Eliot had increased to include the 'Athenaeum' and the 'Times Literary Supplement'. By the end of 1920 he had contributed about ninety articles and reviews to a dozen journals. His first book of critical essays, 'The Sacred Wood', appeared from Methuen on 4 November 1920. Again, the number of copies is not known. In other words, as Robert Nichols and Desmond MacCarthy show in their reviews of 'Ara Vos Prec' (Nos 18 and 19), Eliot's reputation as poet and man of letters was by this time firmly established. The problem was not one of recognition, but of giving a coherent account of why it was that Eliot so justly merited the attention he had received.

For MacCarthy himself, what was distinctive about Eliot's poetry was its method of conveying elusive emotion or languid feeling by the evocation of vivid objects and scenes. There was no attempt at logical progression: rather, the reader should feel the emotion appropriate to each object as it was presented. In all of this MacCarthy would appear to be following Eliot's own theories in his essay on 'Hamlet', with its famous formulation of the 'objective correlative', which had appeared in September 1919 in the 'Athenaeum', and again, in revised form, in 'The Sacred Wood'. MacCarthy was making the effort to establish connections between the prose and the poetry in order to see Eliot's work as a whole.

Little sense of the seriousness of this approach emerges, however, from the flippant tone of the 'Times Literary Supplement' review of the 1919 'Poems' (No. 14), with its mixture of condescension and confusion, though in the 'Athenaeum' a more thoughtful response was offered (No. 15). However, the 'Times Literary Supplement' (22 May), in a review of the first issue of 'Coterie' (May Day 1919) which contained 'A Cooking Egg', later published in 'Ara Vos Prec', did make an attempt to relate Eliot's prose ('his elegant wit finds its best expression in prose') to the 'superior irony' of the poetry, recognising the sheer vivacity of Eliot's writing in this poem. In February 1920 Middleton Murry reviewed 'Ara Vos Prec' in full assurance that Eliot would be a familiar name, at least to readers of the 'Athenaeum', suggesting that the real interest would be to see what emerged from Eliot when the Eternal Footman, the super-ego of irony and self-limitation had been displaced (No. 16). Murry's review seems evasive and obscure, trying as it does to imply something about Eliot's psychology that never quite gets said.

In America at about this time it would appear that Eliot's name had taken on the proportions of a myth, since the fact that he published in England made it difficult for the American audience to get their bearings. Louis Untermeyer, therefore, welcomed 'Poems' (No. 24) since the book gave the American public a chance to judge Eliot for themselves, and thus to get some idea of his influence, especially the influence of the quatrain poems on writers as diverse as Osbert Sitwell, Herbert Read and Robert Nichols. None the less, Untermeyer finally concluded that Eliot's work was essentially *vers de société*, lacking that 'exaltation which is the very breath of poetry'. For Raymond Weaver, Eliot was 'laboured and dull' (No. 25), while the anonymous reviewer in 'Booklist' (June 1920) dismissed the collection as 'blurred and meaningful as any post-impressionist artist could wish'.

On the other hand Padraic Colum, in a review of 'Poems' and Pound's 'Instigations' (April 1920) together, reacted more sympathetically, seeing Eliot, like Yeats, in the line of the Symbolists, though instead of taking his symbols from the natural world Eliot drew them from the urban world, learning from Laforgue how to make use of these settings as well as to parade 'a mockery of the literary allusion' (No. 26). For E.E.Cummings, 'Poems' showed that Eliot was his own man, not a product of Pound's propaganda, for Eliot had a quality of intensity that put aside the comforts of ordinary reality (No. 22). Cummings responded with enthusiasm to 'Poems', though he was less happy with 'The Waste Land'.

Notwithstanding these two more favourable pieces on him, the American response to Eliot just prior to the publication of 'The Waste Land' was less interesting and less comprehending than the English. Eliot's residence in England and his publishing in London obviously played a great part in this, though Eliot's sophistication and wit, the quality of his self-consciousness and his awareness of cosmopolitan irony, evoked distrust. Even Colum found Eliot to be a poet of decadence: 'the shadows of a long decay are upon it all'.

As opposed to this, Richard Aldington, writing in London for 'Outlook' early in 1922, defended Eliot passionately against charges of incomprehensibility and heartlessness:

His desire for perfection is misrepresented as puritan and joyless, whereas it is plain he discriminates in order to increase his enjoyment. But, of course, refinement will not be applauded by those who cannot perceive it, nor will intelligence be appreciated by those who cannot understand it; literary criticism is not the only human activity wherein ignorance is made a standard. (5)

Aldington placed Eliot's work in a tradition of French poetry that ran through Laforgue and Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière (though making no mention of Baudelaire), and back to Villon and the goliards. At the same time Eliot, like the Elizabethan dramatists, aimed at density of thought. The poetry, therefore, was neither heartless nor obscure, but was instead a healthy reaction against shallowness and the 'affectation of simplicity'.

#### 'THE WASTE LAND'

On the evening of Sunday, 18 June 1922, Eliot dined with the Woolfs, and read a new poem, 'The Waste Land'. Virginia Woolf gave an account of the reading and the poem in her diary entry for 23 June: 'He sang it & chanted it rhythmically. It has great beauty & force of phrase: symmetry; & tensivity. What connects it together, I'm not so sure.' She was left with 'some strong emotion', while Mary Hutchinson, a close friend of Clive Bell's, considered the poem to be 'Tom's autobiography—a melancholy one'.

With the publication of 'The Waste Land' facsimile by Mrs Eliot in 1971 and Lyndall Gordon's biography of Eliot in 1977, it can now be seen that the process of composition of the poem extended back at least as far as 1914. The poem drew together for Eliot many of the preoccupations of the previous decade, preoccupations that in the poem's final form as altered by Pound are not so evident as in the early drafts and fragments. None the less, it was with the final form that the early reviewers were concerned, and in its final form 'The Waste Land' appeared, as Gallup puts it, 'almost simultaneously (i.e. ca. 15 October)' in the first number of the 'Criterion' and in the 'Dial', without the dedication to Pound and also without the Notes. The poem appeared as a book on 15 December that same year, 1922, published by Boni & Liveright in an edition of 1,000 copies, with the Notes, that 'remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship', (6) at the end. A second impression was published early in 1923, with a further 1,000 copies printed. The first English edition appeared on 12 September 1923. About 460 copies were hand-printed by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press.

On 7 September 1922 Gilbert Seldes, managing editor of the 'Dial', met John Quinn and Horace Liveright in Quinn's office, where it was decided that Eliot

should receive the annual 'Dial' award of \$2,000, a turn of events that would seem to have come about through Pound's energetic promptings. (7) On 26 November the 'New York Times Book Review' noted that the 'Dial' award had been given to Eliot in recognition of his able work which had established new currents among younger poets (No. 28). In London, the 'Times Literary Supplement', noting the appearance of the first number of the 'Criterion', remarked especially upon 'The Waste Land's' purgatorial quality and asserted unequivocally that here was a great poem (No. 27).

The predominant impression one gets when reading through the early criticism of 'The Waste Land' is of a response that is both serious and questioning. In America the tone was set very much by the 'Dial', whose comments on the award were written presumably by Seldes, and by Edmund Wilson's review (No. 30), which Seldes commissioned. After the earlier incomprehension and distrust in American criticism, the 'Dial' took its tone from Eliot himself, who had demanded of the good critic 'a creative interest, a focus upon the immediate future'. Further, the 'Dial' recognised and approved in Eliot that absence of 'localism' and provincialism, shown in his lack both of apology and of aggression, which allowed him to take his place in a European as well as an American context (No. 29). It has been suggested that Seldes himself understood very little of the poem, (8) and yet he saw a clear connection between the impersonality theory expressed in 'The Sacred Wood' and the poetry of 'The Waste Land', a connection many later critics were to take up. The language of 'The Waste Land' enacted, for Seldes (No. 31), the cultural effects of the decentering and fragmentation that had followed on the Renaissance. The poem was not a romantic idealisation of the past, but the recognition of an imaginative life whose loss it had been Eliot's peculiar genius to present and explore. Seldes was alert to the discontinuous and interrupted quality of Eliot's writing, though he was none the less drawn towards the search for some inner unity, some 'hidden form' which the text concealed. It is worth noting also that Seldes saw Eliot's pre-eminence as beyond question and fully established. As a critic, Eliot was a man of the living tradition, and no purely American sense of values could do justice to him, a theme taken up by Allen Tate in the first issue of 'Fugitive' (December 1922). Tate considered that 'The Waste Land' raised precisely the same questions about representation as did the work of Picasso or Duncan Grant. Using Eliot's own terminology, he wrote:

It is patent, for instance, that the art of Duncan Grant and of Picasso has no objective validity and *represents* nothing; but perhaps the world as it is doesn't afford accurate correlatives of all the emotional complexes and attitudes; and so the painter and, it may be, the poets are justified in not only re-arranging (witness entire English Tradition) but remaking, remoulding in a subjective order, the stuff they must necessarily work with—the material world.

It was this remaking that justified Eliot's 'aberrant versification' in 'The Waste Land'. Yet, for Tate, there still seemed to be life in the old modes, and the question for the American was to decide which tradition, the old or the modern, he was to accept. Clearly, Tate was not yet certain as to the meaning of tradition for Eliot, nor could he see any connection between the idea of tradition expressed in 'The Sacred Wood' and the poetic procedures of 'The Waste Land'.

In the same month, December 1922, Edmund Wilson published in the 'Dial' his important review, *The Poetry of Drouth* (No. 30). After describing the poem in terms of a spiritual drought and the failure of fertility, Wilson went on to comment that Eliot's work seemed the product of a constricted emotional experience, though as a poet he 'belongs to the divine company'. Wilson saw the poem as a triumph in spite of its lack of structural unity, each fragment being an authentic crystal, in contrast to the bewildering mosaic of the 'Cantos' of Pound. This comparison moved Eliot to write to both Seldes and Wilson to say that he had no wish to be praised at Pound's expense, since he was deeply in Pound's debt, and was also a personal friend. 'I sincerely consider Ezra Pound the most important living poet in the English language.' (9)

That Wilson gave considerable thought to Eliot at this time is amply demonstrated by three of his letters to John Peale Bishop. On 22 September 1922, he described 'The Waste Land' as 'the great knockout up to date', while on 29 November he explained his understanding of 'A Game of Chess', Tiresias and Phlebas, considering the quotation from 'The Spanish Tragedy' 'a miracle of ingenuity'. He recommended Bishop to read his essay in the 'Dial', which, he said, he had just completed. On 13 December, he disagreed with Bishop's view of 'Ode' as being entirely concerned with Eliot's marriage. The style of these letters is free and candid, and he confessed that he found Eliot on the basis of Pound's gossip as relayed by Bishop, 'a dreary fellow'. Furthermore, Wilson considered Eliot's influence too pronounced in Bishop's poetry, an opinion he also held of Tate's work. On 3 January 1923, he wrote to Tate: 'I look forward to something extraordinary from you. But do try to get out of the artistic clutches of T.S. Eliot.' (10)

Another important review was that of Conrad Aiken, *An Anatomy of Melancholy*, in 'New Republic', February 1923 (No. 34). The Casebook reprint of this review is prefaced by a note dated 1966, in which Aiken recalled his longstanding friendship with Eliot and also Eliot's doubts about himself a month or two before his departure for Lausanne. Aiken noted that he had seen passages from 'The Waste Land' as pieces in their own right before the publication of the finished work and felt that he should have mentioned this fact in his review, in order to draw the conclusion that such passages as 'A woman drew her long black hair out tight' were 'not *organically* a part of the total meaning' (Aiken's italics). (11) In the review itself, Aiken made two important points, first, that Eliot's literary roots were in the French poetry of 1870 to 1900, and, second, that the body of Eliot's work presented the consciousness of the twentieth-century poet as very complex and very literary, 'a poetry not more actuated by life itself than by poetry'.

This led on to the recognition that allusion was the fundamental method of the poem, yet Aiken read these allusions as symbols in the usual sense, as concentrations of meaning in an image or images. But what it was that kept these symbols together and guaranteed their unity, Aiken was unable to say, beyond positing a 'dim unity of "personality"' or consciousness that sustained the whole assemblage of fragments. In other words, he was not prepared to re-examine that identification of meaning with unity that his reviews consistently imply and which, it might well be argued, it was Eliot's purpose to displace.

The problem of unity and disunity was raised again by John Crowe Ransom in July 1923 (No. 38). Ransom considered that Eliot was engaged in the destruction of the philosophical and 'cosmical' principles by which we form our usual picture of reality, and that Eliot wished to name cosmos Chaos. 'The Waste Land' was an unnatural inversion of a divinely constituted order, that order of which Wordsworth should be seen as the avatar. Ransom thought of Eliot's problems as essentially American and used the more conservative forms of English poetry, such as those of Robert Graves, as a stick to beat him with, accusing Eliot of what Yvor Winters later called the 'fallacy of imitative form', the attempt to express a state of uncertainty by uncertainty of expression. Ransom's review provoked a letter of reply from Allen Tate, who began by attacking Ransom's romantic assumptions about the creative process, assumptions about imagination and inspiration which Tate found 'superannate' (No. 39). Ransom had attacked Eliot because of his failure to achieve a philosophy and because of his discontinuities of form. However, for Tate, it was precisely in the incongruities, labelled as 'parody' by Ransom, that the 'form' of 'The Waste Land' resided, in the ironic attitude of the free consciousness that refused a closed system.

One can see in this debate the fundamental terms of a controversy concerning the significance of Eliot's enterprise that is still far from dead. For Ransom, there was, or should be, a 'natural' cohesion between the form of the work and the order of things: the imagination, as Coleridge understood it, was the faculty by which such an order revealed itself in the forms of art. For Tate, the possibilities of such 'natural' discourse were over. A much later critic, Michael Edwards, put forward in 1975 a reading of the poem that may enable us to see the issues at stake more precisely. (12) 'The Waste Land', so Edwards argued, displaces discourse centred upon the individual subject through a refusal of linearity and continuous syntax, creating instead through an uncentred writing an act of asceticism that is both personal and, through cultural allusiveness, simultaneously more largely representative. The poem enacts a movement of spirit that is fundamentally Christian, in its ambiguous and self-contradictory language revealing language itself as fallen, so that the poem's scrutiny of itself becomes, at many levels, an act of exemplary recognition, 'a babble of dissonant voices which registers the most intimate loss that the poem is concerned with, the loss of a just, single speech'.

Certainly, the antipathy the poem aroused was strong and violently felt. Clive Bell, for example, an admirer of Eliot's earlier poetry, could react to 'The Waste Land' only by way of polite maliciousness, comparing Eliot to Landor in terms

that seem calculated in their spite and pettiness (No. 42). The stridency of tone in reviewers such as Squire, Powell and Lucas, or Helen McAfee in America, seems out of proportion to their consciously asserted devaluation of the poem. Humbert Wolfe, on the other hand, though not claiming to understand the poem, was prepared to accept it for its beauty and the thrill induced by that beauty (No. 47), while Gorham B. Munson saw the poem as the ‘funeral keen’ of the nineteenth century and an aberration from the realities of the twentieth century, which were to be found in America, not Europe (No. 48).

The conflict of views over ‘The Waste Land’ seems to bear out Gabriel Josipovici’s judgment in ‘The Lessons of Modernism’ (1977) that Eliot’s earlier work resists that fundamental temptation, the temptation to ascribe meaning, and derives its power instead from ‘its embodiment of a sense of awakening’, an awakening ‘that is always frightening’. There was no doubt, however, amongst the hostile reviewers, of Eliot’s importance, and, as George Watson put it in 1965, ‘admirers and detractors were equally agreed about the reality of his reputation’.

(13)

In the autumn of 1922, on 15 November, Eliot wrote to Aldington: ‘As for “The Waste Land”, that is a thing of the past so far as I am concerned and I am now feeling toward a new form and style.’

#### ‘POEMS 1909–1925’

‘Poems 1909–1925’ appeared on 23 November 1925, in an edition of 1,460 copies, published by Faber & Gwyer, and containing ‘Prufrock and Other Observations’, ‘The Waste Land’ and ‘The Hollow Men’. Poems making up the final version of ‘The Hollow Men’ had appeared in ‘Commerce’ and ‘Chapbook’ the previous year.

Commenting on Eliot’s reputation at this point in his career, Edgell Rickword, editor of the ‘Calendar of Modern Letters’, was in no doubt that Eliot’s position was unrivalled, at least amongst those awake to the reality of the art (No. 50). It was as the poet who had come closest to the distresses of a post-war generation that Rickword valued him, an exploration that Eliot had achieved through his struggle with technique, a finer realisation of language which reached its height in ‘The Waste Land’, only to become ‘gnomically disarticulate’ in ‘The Hollow Men’. It was the sense of emancipation afforded by Eliot’s work that was valuable, since it allowed an essential complexity of reaction.

Edwin Muir was less certain about the value of the poetry, though he admired Eliot’s criticism unequivocally. Muir’s essay appeared in the ‘Nation’ (New York) for 5 August 1925, shortly before the new collection of poems was published. He found a separation between the critic and the poet, in that Eliot aimed to restore the fullness of Elizabethan poetry, in accordance with his critical insights, but succeeded only in producing ‘a diversity of rich effects’:



Mr Eliot's poetry is in reality very narrow, and in spite of its great refinement of sensibility, very simple. In the main it is a statement of two opposed experiences: the experiences of beauty and ugliness, of art and reality, of literature and life. To Mr Eliot in his poetry these are simple groups of reality; their attributes remain constant; they never pass into one another; and there is no intermediate world of life connecting and modifying them.

In Muir's view, Eliot aimed at violent contrasts, as in his contrasts between 'formal beauty and psychological obscenity', that achieved an effect of horror. His poetry was inconclusive and fragmentary, lacking seriousness. Muir attacked Eliot for taking up poses and attitudes, not expressing principles and truths, and yet he admitted the work to be unique. This essay was reprinted twice, once that same year in the 'Nation and Athenaeum', 29 August, and in 'Transition', a collection of Muir's essays published in New York in 1926.

Like Muir, Middleton Murry emphasised Eliot's critical achievement at the expense of the poetry. Comparing 'Jacob's Room' and 'The Waste Land' in an essay spread over the February and March issues of the 'Adelphi' for 1926, Murry found 'The Waste Land' the more impressive, being 'the more complete and conscious failure' (No. 52). Both Woolf and Eliot he considered fine critics, tormented by the longing to create, whose intellectual subtleties gave rise only to futilities. Eliot, so far from being a classical writer, voiced 'a cry of grinding and empty desolation' no classical art could possibly give order to. Murry's sense of Eliot's fragmentariness was so strong that he described it as 'self-torturing and utter nihilism', which only the Catholic Church could understand. One is forced to recognise that Murry's notion of classicism was limited and that he thought of Christianity mainly in terms of metaphysical certitude, despite his disclaimer in his final footnote. Thus he failed to see the elements of parody and burlesque in Eliot, taking for personal anguish, like many critics at this time and later, what was rather the exploration of new artistic possibilities. What Murry saw in Eliot's work was a symptom of the breakdown of civilisation, an expression of the sterility and loss of meaning in modern life.

That Eliot's poetry at this stage provoked bewilderment, either of irritation or enthusiasm, is witnessed to by I.A. Richards. In his 'New Statesman' review for 20 February 1926 (No. 53), he attacked Murry's essay for its insistence on unambiguous writing as the canon for good style and adduced the concept of a 'music of ideas' to explain the misunderstandings engendered by the verse, ideas so arranged that they do not tell us about something but instead combine in their effects upon us to create a coherence of feeling and liberation of the will, such as we experience in listening to music. This technique was increasingly evident in Eliot's verse, and at its most extreme in 'The Hollow Men'. In 'Science and Poetry' (1926) Richards was led to assert that Eliot had effected 'a complete severance between his poetry and *all* belief, a view challenged by Eliot himself in 1933, in [chapter 7](#) of 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism'. At the end of the 'New Statesman' review, however, Richards seemed confident that in the articulation

of a generation's sense of impotence Eliot had set healing energies free, and that to realise one's plight was not thereby to succumb to it. This account of Eliot's significance was added as an appendix to 'Principles of Literary Criticism' when it was reprinted that same year.

In the USA, Eliot's indigenous and religious characteristics were emphasised. For Edmund Wilson, Eliot's real significance was less as a prophet of European disintegration than as a poet of the American puritan sensibility, the waste land being the emotional waste land of deprivation and chagrin. He saw in Eliot's characters figures comparable to those of James and Hawthorne and at the same time insisted that Eliot was a poet 'of the first order' (No. 54). These comments come at the end of an essay on the first performance of Stravinsky's 'Les Noces', a context in which thoughts about Eliot seemed not inappropriate. For Allen Tate, the new collection was a spiritual epilogue to 'The Education of Henry Adams', though in Eliot the puritan sense of obligation had withdrawn into private conscience (No. 56). Eliot, in returning to the source of his own culture in Europe, had been forced to confront that source with a degree of general theoretical understanding no European found necessary. As a critic and as editor of the 'Criterion' Eliot had proposed as a remedy for the disorder of the times that critical awareness he envisaged in *The Function of Criticism* (1923). Tate regarded the 'progressive sterilisation' of the poetry as due to a rationalisation of attitude carried over from the critical endeavour, the agony of the earlier poetry being reduced to the chaos of 'The Hollow Men', the inevitable result of a poetry whose fundamental ground was the idea of chaos itself. Tate saw this as a poetry of ideas, in contrast to Richards, and for him poet and critic were one. Both Wilson and Tate tried to see Eliot in context, relating the whole oeuvre to larger considerations of American history and culture.

In 1927, a number of important studies of Eliot appeared. For example, A.L.Morton's *Notes on the Poetry of T.S.Eliot* (an attempt to relate Eliot's spiritual sensibility to his writing) was published in 'Decachord' (March-April), while in 'Sewanee Review' for July George Williamson's *The Talent of T.S.Eliot* linked Eliot to Donne and argued for the unity of his theory and practice. This essay formed the basis of Williamson's book, 'The Talent of T.S.Eliot', published in 1929. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, in 'A Survey of Modernist Poetry', devoted considerable space to Eliot, especially to 'The Waste Land'. An attack by Henry Newbolt, in 'New Paths on Helicon' (1927), on Eliot's 'triviality' was repudiated the next year by an anonymous reviewer in the 'Times Literary Supplement' (19 January). Eliot's importance was by this time beyond all doubt, and in the thoughtful seriousness of his better critics one sees the fact emphasised.

#### 'ASH-WEDNESDAY'

On 29 June 1927 Eliot was received by baptism into the Anglican Church, at Finstock in Oxfordshire. At the end of that year, 'Salutation', later to be reprinted as Part II of 'Ash-Wednesday', appeared in the 'Saturday Review of Literature',

while Part I and Part III appeared in 'Commerce' in 1928 and 1929 respectively. The poem was published as a book in April 1930, with three further parts added, by Faber & Faber.

The question of Eliot's religious beliefs was immediately broached by the reviewers. For Gerald Heard, the poem raised the question of to which tradition in English religious writing Eliot should be ascribed, that of the 'sanctified commonsense' of the Authorised Version, Milton and Dryden, or of the iconographic tradition, found in Crashaw and Donne, and traceable back to 'Pearl' (No. 58). The former commended itself to Heard as the main English Protestant tradition and it was to this that he felt Eliot was returning. Eda Lou Walton considered that the religious search had begun for Eliot in 'The Waste Land', and she saw the intensity of pain in the earlier work muted in 'Ash-Wednesday' into the desire for belief (No. 60). For Edmund Wilson, the imagery was more artificial, because more literary, than in the earlier work, and this seemed to him a 'definite feature of inferiority' (No. 62). Wilson recognised Eliot's honesty, but obviously had little sympathy with Eliot's religious strivings, as his review of 'For Lancelot Andrewes' in the 'New Republic' for 24 April 1929 makes clear.

In an extended review for 'Poetry' (September 1930), taking in not only 'Ash-Wednesday', but also 'Journey of the Magi' (1927), 'A Song for Simeon' (1928), 'Animula' (1929) and the essay on Dante (1929), M.D.Zabel attempted to assess Eliot's career to date (No. 63). The last lines of 'The Hollow Men' represented the conclusion of Eliot's Inferno, while the new volume, with the three pamphlet poems, could be seen as his Purgatorio. In the profound simplicity and visual imagination of the writing Zabel perceived the influence of Dante made manifest upon the poetry, while in Eliot's conversion he recognised the guidance of Dante upon the life. None the less, a feeling of disappointment was expressed in the review, a feeling that of 'profound conviction and the absolute creative certitude of which the early poems partook' there was little to be found here. In his first phase Eliot spoke with an authority lacking in the 'conciliatory' attitude of his later, religious, period. As with Edmund Wilson, Zabel's assumption would appear to have been that Eliot's expression of faith was less authentic than his earlier disillusionment. No attempt was made to show that 'Ash-Wednesday' was poorer than the earlier work, nor was it made clear why Eliot's faith, according to Zabel's own argument implicit in the earlier work, should have had less 'authority' than his uncertainty or doubt.

It is, of course, easy, with the benefit of hindsight, and with new material available, especially 'The Waste Land' drafts, to see in Eliot's career a continuity that contemporary reviewers could not have recognised. And yet implicit or explicit denigration of Eliot for his reception into the Anglican Church was common. William Rose Benét accused Eliot of 'a new Pharisaism' and, implicitly, of 'spiritual snobbery', even though Eliot was one of the few modern poets capable of presenting the evidence of his own soul (No. 65). Brian Howard, though he recognised Eliot's technical skill, felt that 'Ash-Wednesday' lacked the power to transport the reader, which the earlier poetry had possessed in full measure (No.

67). Doubts about Eliot's religious position were mainly focused on 'For Lancelot Andrewes' (1928), by critics such as F.L.Lucas, in 'Life and Letters' for November 1929, Desmond MacCarthy, in the 'Sunday Times' (3 February 1929), and Middleton Murry, in 'New Adelphi' (March-May 1929). An extensive attack on Eliot's influence and reputation was launched by Sherry Mangan in 'Pagany' (Spring 1930), i, 23-36, in an article entitled 'A Note': On the Somewhat Premature Apotheosis of Thomas Stearns Eliot, of which the following is characteristic:

The logical result of this constant desire for rightness and impersonality is the settling on some agreeable form of exterior authority. In Mr. Eliot's case this seems to be 'royalism, classicism, and Anglicanism' —truly an imposing triad. But it is ipso facto a retrogression, a confession of failure to create any personal standards.... If certain Anglo-French circles in Paris which are in close touch with the English scene still consider the best joke of the past three years Mr. Eliot's 'daring' in proclaiming himself a royalist in politics (and after all, for England, it is pretty funny), of how much less interest to our present generation in America are Mr. Eliot's however sincere preoccupations with out-cocteaung M.Cocteau in what is to American-born eyes the so much swankier English Church.

Though pronounced in its ridicule, this attack on Eliot for his presumed betrayal of America is by no means a lone voice in the history of Eliot's reputation.

It was in part to redress these assumptions that Allen Tate wrote his review of 'Ash-Wednesday' in 1931, saying that for Eliot's critics all forms of human action were legitimate for salvation, the historical religious mode alone being disallowed (No. 68). The quality of the poem had been ignored since it had been seen as biography and without social or political use. For these critics, according to Tate, to approve the poem would have been tantamount to accepting the Church of England. They assumed that the poetry was the same kind of formulation as the doctrines acceded to on his reception. For Tate, the seduction scene in 'The Waste Land' pointed up the difficulties. Many critics saw in it evidence of romantic disillusionment on the part of the poet, in which he showed what love really was, a brutal and meaningless act, designed only for procreation. And yet, Tate argued, the scene was not concerned with disillusionment but with irony, with showing what modern man for a moment thought himself to be, with his secularisation of humane and sacramental values. Achieving, by means of this irony, insight into the folly of urbanised, dominating man, Eliot allowed the reader to experience the meaningless repetition and aimless pride of an overweening and purely secular faith. According to Tate, it was this irony that induced humility in the reader, out of the self-respect that proceeded from 'a sense of the folly of men in their desire to dominate a natural force or situation'. The fact that the character, the clerk, the modern mind, could not appreciate his or its own position was what constituted in Tate's sense irony, and the insight into it was humility. While, in moral terms,

irony and humility were one, in artistic terms they had important differences. The recognition of this difference Tate saw as the essentially poetic attitude and one that Eliot, throughout his career, had been approaching with increasing purity. The verse that followed 'The Waste Land' was less spectacular, since Eliot had less frequently objectified his leading emotion, humility, into irony. Only in the opening stanza of 'Ash Wednesday' was there irony of the earlier kind, whereby the poet presented himself as he might think himself to be, in the pose of a Titan too young to be weary of life and yet weary of it none the less. The opening lines, far from being a naive confession, were a technical performance establishing the poet's humility towards his own capabilities. Tate went on to argue that Eliot reduced conventional religious imagery from abstraction to sensation, while at the same time pushing images of his own invention over into abstraction, relating the two in such a way that the idea of the Logos itself took on through the broken and distracted rhythms almost an illusion of presence. In this, Tate tried to point up the subtlety and profundity of the connection between Eliot's understanding of poetic language and the specific nature of his Christian profession.

In the next year, 1932, F.R. Leavis published 'New Bearings in English Poetry' and devoted a lengthy study to Eliot's work, in which he discussed 'The Waste Land' and 'Ash-Wednesday'. In the opening lines of the latter poem Leavis also saw the irony of the self-dramatisation that Tate had pointed to, an irony that Leavis called 'a self-admonition against the subtle treasons, the refinements, of egotism that beset the quest of sincerity in these regions'. A little earlier in the essay Leavis had cited Eliot's remarks to the effect that Proust represented 'a point of demarcation between a generation for whom the dissolution of value had in itself a positive value, and the generation that is beginning to turn its attention to an athleticism, a *training*, of the soul as severe and ascetic as the training of the body of a runner'. Leavis recognised in this the asceticism that informed the devotion and concentration of Part II, and that turned renunciation into something positive:

As I am forgotten  
And would be forgiven, so would I forget  
Thus devoted, thus concentrated in purpose.

Leavis saw this as a spiritual exercise which in its visionary imagery of leopards and unicorns could best be described as a 'disciplined dreaming' of a kind Eliot found in Dante but believed lost to the modern world. In Part III Leavis noted that blending of the conventional and literary that Tate had already recognised, while in the fourth poem he saw how Eliot had created out of ambiguity the precarious base of a rejoicing that turned into doubt and fear in Part V. The breathless circling movement of Part V, with its repeated play upon 'Word', 'world' and 'whirled', was suggestive both of the agonised attempt to seize the unseizable and of the elusive equivocations of what was grasped. Of the sixth poem, Leavis wrote:

In the last poem of the sequence the doubt becomes an adjuvant of spiritual discipline, ministering to humility. But an essential ambiguity remains, an ambiguity inescapable

In this brief transit where the dreams cross.

What had been striven for was realised, for Leavis, in 'Marina' (1930), in the image of the girl who had been lost and then found. And yet even this recognition was an oversimplification: there was in this poem an ambiguity of even greater subtlety than in 'Ash-Wednesday'. The indeterminate syntax of the poem intimated the kind of relation that existed between the various elements, and in that elusiveness was suggested at one and the same time the 'felt transcendence of the vision and its precariousness'. Leavis recognised that this poetry was more 'disconcertingly modern' than 'The Waste Land', and argued that the preoccupation with Christianity and the use of the Prayer Book should not blind the reader to the fact that here were modes of feeling found nowhere earlier. In 'Scrutiny' (Summer 1942) Leavis returned to the question of 'Marina', in which he found a 'tentatively defining exploration' of the apprehension of a reality that was in time, though not of it. In this he recognised Eliot's spiritual discipline, his asceticism, his 'technique for sincerity'. With extraordinary precision and gentleness Leavis expounded Eliot's achievement in the poem:

Thus, in the gliding from one image, evocation or suggestion to another, so that all contribute to a total effect, there is created a sense of a supreme significance, elusive, but not, like the message of death, illusory; an opening into a new and more personal life.

The influence of Leavis in making Eliot into perhaps the most powerful literary figure of the 1930s cannot be overestimated. In 'Scrutiny', begun in 1932, and in his critical writings generally, Leavis saw in Eliot's poetry and criticism the modern literature on which the sensibilities of a critical elite could be formed. In later years Leavis became less certain of Eliot's place, preferring to Eliot's ambivalence the more direct and realistic procedures of D.H. Lawrence, and yet to the end of his life he remained preoccupied with the nature of Eliot's lasting significance.

### THE 1930S

In 1929 E.M. Forster asserted unequivocally that Eliot was the poet of a generation, 'those men and women between the ages of eighteen and thirty whose opinions one most respects and whose reactions one most admires'. Eliot was the most important author of their day, 'they are inside his idiom as the young of 1900 were inside George Meredith's...'. (14) In 1930 William Empson, a pupil of I.A. Richards at Cambridge, used a passage from 'The Waste Land' in 'Seven Types of Ambiguity', thereby putting Eliot's centrality to a modern understanding

of literature beyond question. As we have seen, Leavis, also lecturing at Cambridge, devoted considerable attention to Eliot in 'New Bearings', and as early as 1929 had defended 'For Lancelot Andrewes' in the 'Cambridge Review' against a disparaging piece in the 'New Statesman'. Also in 1929 Bonamy Dobrée devoted some space to 'The Waste Land' in 'The Lamp and the Lute', while George Williamson's 'The Talent of T.S.Eliot' appeared that same year. By 1930, then, Eliot's position as a major, if controversial, figure was fully established.

During this period argument arose concerning Eliot's 'classicism' and his relation to the Humanism of Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More. Eliot was sympathetic to Babbitt and More, and in an essay for the American 'Bookman' in November 1929 Eliot stated: 'The various attempts to find the fundamental axioms behind both good literature and good life are among the most interesting "experiments" of criticism of our time.' He certainly included amongst such experimenters the American Humanists, the French critic Ramon Fernandez, in Britain, Herbert Read, and perhaps F.R.Leavis. In 1930 critics as various as Rascoe Burton, Seward Collins, Franklin Gary, Bernard Heyl and Rebecca West debated the nature of Eliot's intellectual position, while in 1932 More himself, acknowledging that Eliot was 'perhaps the most distinguished man of letters today in the British-speaking world...', commented on what he saw as the split between the earlier and the later Eliot:

There it is, the dilemma that confronts those who recognise Mr Eliot's great powers; somehow they must reconcile for themselves what appears to be an inconsequence between the older poet and the newer critic, or must adjust their admiration to what cannot be reconciled.... And now against this lyric prophet of chaos must be set the critic who will judge the world from the creed of the classicist, the royalist, and the Anglo-Catholic, who sees behind the clouds of illusion the steady decrees of a divine purpose.... (15)

More went on to question whether or not the modern form of 'Ash-Wednesday' was suitable for an experience born of Anglo-Catholic faith, since the metre and punctuation of the poem were designed to present life as being without form and as a void.

Eliot's status was thus assured on several fronts, the appearance of 'Thoughts After Lambeth' (1931) and 'Selected Essays 1917-1932' (September 1932) only serving to confirm his position. Academic criticism had already made much of Eliot, and this was to continue, with F.O.Matthiessen's 'The Achievement of T.S.Eliot' (1935) and Cleanth Brooks's 'Modern Poetry and the Tradition' (1939), while Eliot's influence was felt in the high valuation given to Donne and the 'line of wit', as, for example, in Leavis's 'Revaluation' (1936), in itself an enormously influential work. The only important critic to stand out against these developments was Yvor Winters. In 'Primitivism and Decadence' (1937) he attacked modern poetry generally and Eliot in particular, though with little or no immediate effect on Eliot's reputation, sustained as it was on both sides of the Atlantic and

promulgated in periodicals such as the 'Southern Review', 'Hound and Horn' and 'Scrutiny'.

During this period Eliot turned his attention towards drama, and in 1932 published 'Sweeney Agonistes', which had appeared previously in the 'Criterion' for the issues of October 1926 and January 1927. The play was received with little enthusiasm. D.G. Bridson was disappointed with the undertaking, on the grounds that Eliot had satirized dullness by writing dully (No. 71). Likewise, M.D. Zabel doubted whether Eliot's obviously sincere concern with spiritual matters could justify the dullness of the emptiness and sterile horror of the life presented, and he felt that 'Sweeney Agonistes' was a tactical error after the profundity and beauty of 'Ash-Wednesday' (No. 73). George Barker admired the work for its 'exquisite, and perfectly lucid, decay' (No. 72), while Marianne Moore pointed to the significance of the juxtaposition of Orestes and Sweeney, without saying what exactly the significance of that juxtaposition was (No. 74).

In 1933, after his lecture tour in America, which resulted in 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism' (1933) and 'After Strange Gods' (1934), Eliot wrote to Paul Elmer More of a new project:

Now that these two bad jobs are off my hands, I am working on something which amuses me more: the writing of some verse choruses and dialogues for a sort of play to be given to advertise the campaign for raising money for 45 new churches in London dioceses. If I have a free hand I shall enjoy it. I am trying to combine the simplicity and immediate intelligibility necessary for dramatic verse with concentration under the inspiration of, chiefly, Isaiah and Ezekiel. (16)

This was 'The Rock', and it was performed at Sadler's Wells from 28 May to 9 June 1934. It was a collaboration, as a prefatory note makes clear, Eliot working with E. Martin Browne, Bonamy Dobrée, the Rev. R. Webb-Odell, Frank Morley and the Rev. Vincent Howson, who wrote some of the scenes and played the part of Bert. Eliot himself wrote only one of the scenes, together with the choruses that are reprinted in 'Collected Poems'. The pageant was published by Faber & Faber on 31 May 1934.

The reviews were, on the whole, favourable, though certain critics raised questions as to how Eliot's development as an artist was being influenced by his Christian beliefs. 'The Times' reviewer wrote on 29 May of how Eliot had made use of liturgy for his dramatic form, 'though wisely imitating also the ready and popular stage modes, such as music-hall, ballet and mime...'. The reviewer considered that Eliot had 'created a new thing in the theatre and made smoother the path towards a contemporary poetic drama'. Derek Verschoyle, in the 'Spectator' (1 June), passed strictures on Eliot for not dealing more adequately with the reasons for contemporary dissatisfaction with the Church, such as the Church's attitude to social questions. Eliot replied to this review a week later. In contrast to this, Francis Birrell in the 'New Statesman' (2 June) wrote an



enthusiastic account of Eliot's work, saying that Eliot 'shows himself a greater master of theatrical technique than all our professional dramatists put together'. As E. Martin Browne, in 'The Making of T.S. Eliot's Plays', points out, this review was 'excessively laudatory', and a more restrained, though no less approving, note was sounded in the 'Listener', which was happy to see so great a poet writing for a popular audience (No. 75). An editorial in 'Theology' (No. 78) expressed relief at finding a real faith expressed in living language, though the 'Tablet' found the language of the cockney working men tiresome in the extreme (No. 79). In an important review in 'Scrutiny', D.W. Harding found the prose dialogue distressing, the parody of a class by a class, but in the verse he found innovations of 'tone' that allowed Eliot to remain humble while being impersonally superior to those whom he upbraided. There was here a movement towards a more personal poetry and 'The Rock' represented a stage in Eliot's development that had not yet defined itself (No. 83). Conrad Aiken also felt that Eliot's career was at a transitional stage, but was less happy than Harding with the direction it was taking (No. 84). His review considered 'After Strange Gods' as well as 'The Rock', and together the two works suggested that the original poetic impulse in Eliot was formalised. Even 'Ash-Wednesday', supreme though it was, had to be taken to mark a diminution of vigour and inventiveness, and though he would not want to suggest that Eliot's views had anything to do with this, Aiken's conclusion was unmistakably that Eliot's conversion had undermined his poetic genius.

Among the audience for 'The Rock' had been the Bishop of Chichester, George Bell, who had invited Eliot to stay at the palace in Chichester in December 1930. At that time he had urged Eliot to write for the stage and as a result of seeing 'The Rock' he was convinced that his decision had been the right one. As a consequence, soon after 'The Rock' closed, he offered Eliot a commission to write the first new play for the Canterbury Festival, to be staged the following year, 1935. As Browne puts it, 'the purpose of the play was to be the same as that of most Greek tragedies—to celebrate the cult associated with a sacred spot by displaying the story of its origin'. The first performance of 'Murder in the Cathedral' was in the chapter house of Canterbury Cathedral on the evening of 15 June 1935, the first (acting) edition of the play appearing from Faber & Faber on 10 May 1935, for sale at those early performances. The complete edition of the play was published on 13 June 1935.

The general opinion amongst the critics was that Eliot had successfully entered upon a new phase in his career. Browne cites the reaction of an American critic, whose London Letter for the 'New Yorker' (3 July 1935) gave an account of the first night:

It is a triumph of poetic genius that out of such actionless material—the mere conflict of a mind with itself—a play so deeply moving, and so exciting, should have been written; and so rich, moreover, in the various language of *humanity*. That is perhaps the greatest surprise about it—in the

play Eliot has become human, and tender, with a tenderness and humanity which have nowhere else in our time found such beauty of form. (17)

The 'Times Literary Supplement' reviewer, writing, like the other reviewers considered below, of the published version, was of the opinion that Eliot had assimilated the chorus, so self-consciously used in 'The Rock' (No. 85). I.M.Parsons made a similar point, considering that Eliot's religion, so far from harming his art, as many critics had thought, was in fact the source of its renewal (No. 86). In an interesting and very favourable piece, James Laughlin suggested that Eliot's faith, as expressed in the play, was Thomist, and that he had attempted, at the level of the dramatic writing, a fusion of medieval and classical formulae (No. 87). Edwin Muir analysed at some length the theological significance of the play, and the meaning of martyrdom that it propounded, finding Becket's line 'I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end' crucial, for it declared Becket's purification of will and his freedom from the wheel of life (No. 88). Mark Van Doren found the play a masterpiece, of a seeming simplicity that was not, in fact, simple, and asserted that Eliot had written no better poem (No. 89).

The unity of the work was emphasised by F.O.Matthiessen, who compared it to 'Samson Agonistes', and to Hawthorne and James (No. 90). He considered that Eliot's mode of vision was that characteristic of Dante, whereby not only a part of life was acutely realised but also the total pattern informing life. Matthiessen, unlike some other of the play's critics, approved of the speeches given to the Knights, since these showed men who deferred always to social circumstances and to the State, against which Becket was called to reassert the value of the idea rising above the value of the event. Philip Rahv ('Partisan Review' (June 1936), iii, 11–14) also noted the importance of Eliot's social views to a reading of the play, though he doubted the reality of Eliot's political vision:

We do not feel the 'joyful consummation' heralded as the play ends. The formal cause of the horror expressed by the chorus—the crime of murder absolutized in 'an instant eternity of evil and wrong'—remains an abstraction. The horror is not realized as such, its language is nowise equivalent to the peculiar logic of its indicated motivation. History, ever determinate, will not be cheated of its offspring; though the poem recoils from history, only history can give it life.

Rahv wondered what had become of the Christian vision of man in the singular:

Why does the chorus harp upon the image of the 'common man', the 'small folk'? Throughout the action EliotBecket, the clerical philosopher, answers the complaints of those who acknowledge themselves the type of the 'common man' in contrast to those who walk 'secure and assured' in their fate. Who hatched this heresy of a plural man, veritably a class conception

in disguise? Has Eliot heard of the role of the masses in history, of their refusal to become the fodder of eternity?

Rahv saw in the chorus, chanting the doom of man, a language far in excess of the dogma of Original Sin and of Eliot's conscious ideas about man. It was in Eliot's vision of the disintegration of civilisation, a prophetic sense of the modern age, that reality could be felt. Rahv recognised a creative contradiction in Eliot's work, which those who could only see in terms of their ideology were blind to. Out of the choruses, out of the self-portrayal of the plebeians, burdened with oppression, taxes, failed harvests and so on, emerged a genuine poetry of surprise and humility, that further dislocated the poet's conscious intentions. In all this, Rahv had no doubt that 'Murder in the Cathedral' contained Eliot's finest poetry since 'The Waste Land'.

Criticism of a more formalist nature attempted to see Eliot's play in relation to his general literary development. In 'The Double Agent' (1935), which included a lengthy study of Eliot's work from 'Ash-Wednesday' to 'Murder in the Cathedral', (18) R.P.Blackmur argued that one could see over the years a growth in technique aimed at appealing to more levels of response and at reaching the widest possible audience:

Applying Mr Eliot's sentences about levels of significance, we can say that there is for everyone the expectation (we can hardly call it a plot) and ominous atmosphere of murder and death; for others, there are the strong rhythms, the pounding alliterations, and the emphatic rhymes; for others the conflict, not of character, but of forces characterised in individual types; for others the tragedy or triumph of faith at the hands of the world; and for others the gradually unfolding meaning in the profound and ambiguous revelation of the expense of martyrdom in good *and* evil as seen in certain speeches of Thomas and in the choruses of the old women of Canterbury.

Blackmur considered that the play presented a supreme form of human greatness, the greatness of the martyr, of good and evil and suffering, and that no representation of it could fail of terrible humility and terrible ambiguity. The fundamental question was how the representation of divine realities was to be undertaken in an age without a tradition of such representation. It was only through the chorus, the common denominator of all experience, that the extraordinary experience of Thomas could be seen and made real.

'Mr Eliot steps so reverently on the solemn ground that he has essayed, that austerity assumes the dignity of philosophy and the didacticism of the verities incorporated in the play becomes impersonal and persuasive.' So Marianne Moore concluded her review for 'Poetry' for February 1936, (19) while for John Crowe Ransom, on the other hand, writing in the 'Southern Review' (Winter 1936), Eliot was unable to sustain the religious tone and the play, still bearing the marks of fragmenting modernism as it did, could not really stand comparison with drama

of the older tradition. (20) Ezra Pound had become increasingly doubtful about Eliot over this period, as his letters show, and ‘Murder in the Cathedral’ provoked him too far. Writing to James Laughlin in January 1936, he exploded: ‘Waal, I heerd the “Murder in the Cafedrawl” on the radio lass’ night. Oh them cawkney voices, My Krizz, them cawkney voices. Mzzr Shakzpeer *still* retains his posishun. I stuck it fer a while, wot wiff the weepin and wailin.... My Krrize them cawkney voyces!—.’ (21) (The play was broadcast by the BBC on the evening of 5 January.) The direction Eliot was taking, though in one way aimed at a wider response, had alienated his oldest ally, and for Pound the split between the earlier and the later Eliot was too vast to be overcome. Eliot’s separation from the avantgarde, in Pound’s view, was total.

#### ‘COLLECTED POEMS 1909–1935’

This collection of poems not only included what had been in earlier collections up to 1925, but also ‘Ash-Wednesday’, ‘Ariel Poems’ (published separately a few years earlier), ‘Sweeney Agonistes’ and ‘Coriolan’, together with ‘Minor Poems’ and ‘Choruses from “The Rock”’, and ‘Burnt Norton’. It was published in England by Faber & Faber on 2 April 1936, and in America by Harcourt, Brace on 21 May 1936. ‘Burnt Norton’ had not appeared before and did not appear as a book in its own right until 1941, when the other poems of ‘Four Quartets’ were also coming out as separate publications prior to the appearance of the complete poem in 1943 and 1944.

The reviewers placed their emphasis mainly on the later works, especially ‘Burnt Norton’. For John Hayward, friend of Eliot and closely associated with the writing of ‘Four Quartets’, ‘so much that once seemed obscure now presents only occasional difficulties’ (No. 93). Edwin Muir stressed, as did Hayward, the beauty of ‘Burnt Norton’, finding in Eliot’s poetry after ‘The Hollow Men’ a new kind of obscurity, one that was finally more comprehensible (No. 94). In the ‘New Statesman’ Peter Quennell, in a survey of Eliot’s career, implied a preference for the earlier period, concluding that as far as the poetry was concerned Eliot’s religious faith had added to the delicacy while detracting from the breadth and variety of his work (No. 95). Other critics also took the opportunity to survey Eliot’s career, Malcolm Cowley rather dismissively (No. 97), M.D.Zabel recognising Eliot’s movement towards a more accessible style (No. 99), while for Rolfe Humphries Eliot’s work, great though it was, indubitably sounded the elegy of an age that was passing (No. 100).

In these poems, ‘the underlying experience remains one of suffering, and the renunciation is much more vividly communicated than the advance for the sake of which it was made’, wrote Harding, in a brilliant attempt to suggest the nature of Eliot’s ‘maturity’ in his later work (No. 101). Harding argued that in ‘Burnt Norton’ the poetry was the creation of a new concept, that the words of the poetry could take the place of our usually accepted ideas about ‘love’ and ‘eternity’. Through the subtleties of rhythm and verbal suggestion Eliot had orchestrated a

rich collection of latent ideas, at the same time as he had put forward 'pseudo-statements' in highly abstract language for the purpose of revealing the inadequacy of any ready-made concept that might move towards what the poem allowed, in its elusiveness, to be shown forth. Harding here took up the complexity of Leavis's response to Eliot's language and suggested modes of approaching the poetry that later critics, such as Kenner and Davie, were to employ on 'Four Quartets'. Harding pointed to those qualities in Eliot's writing that forbade the following of 'natural' ways of thought whereby concepts might be formed that would usurp the place of spiritual realities. This, for Harding, was the fundamentally Christian quality of Eliot's art, especially of 'Burnt Norton'. Blackmur also saw the crucial importance of 'Burnt Norton' to an understanding of Eliot's whole work, though he felt there was a problem in the poem, of the relation between the abstract and the concrete, a problem which he, Blackmur, was as yet unable to resolve (No. 103). A wholly opposing view was put forward by W.B. Yeats. In his Introduction to the 'Oxford Book of Modern Verse: 1892-1935' (1936), of which he was editor, Yeats found Eliot's art, especially the earlier work, 'grey, cold, dry'. Not until 'The Hollow Men' and 'Ash-Wednesday', where Eliot was helped by the short lines, did the poetry show any rhythmical animation. Yeats did not consider Eliot's religion an enrichment, since it 'lacks all strong emotion; a New England Protestant by descent, there is little self-surrender in his personal relation to God and the soul'. None the less, Yeats did give Eliot good coverage in the 'Oxford Book', both in the Introduction and in the amount of his poetry included.

In December 1938, writing for the 'Harvard Advocate', Wallace Stevens found Eliot's 'prodigious reputation' a 'great difficulty'. While the complete acceptance of a poet's work, which Stevens saw in Eliot's case, can help to create the poetry of any poet, 'it also helps to destroy it'.

#### 'THE FAMILY REUNION'

'The Family Reunion', Eliot's first play conceived of in terms of existing dramatic convention, was presented at the Westminster Theatre on 21 March 1939, and published by Faber & Faber the same day. As Browne points out, this was the last time Eliot was to publish a play at the moment of production. This procedure had involved a great deal of alteration to later editions of the text of 'Murder in the Cathedral', and though 'The Family Reunion' was not so altered Browne tells us that Eliot regretted not being able to make changes based on the experience of rehearsal and audience-reaction. Eliot himself expected very little in favour of the play after the first night, though he hoped that the acting and production would get the recognition they deserved.

The response of the critics of the daily press was mixed, Charles Morgan recognising Eliot's verse skill, but finding an impression of lifeless smoothness in the second part, W.A. Darlington in the 'Daily Telegraph' faulting the dramatic effectiveness while approving the literary qualities, and Lionel Hale, in the 'News Chronicle', confessing himself 'vexed and exhausted' by the effort demanded of

him. (22) It was desiccated and intellectual, according to the 'Times Literary Supplement' reviewer, who threw Eliot's own words about 'Hamlet's' lack of an 'objective correlative' back in his face (No. 104).

Other critics commented on the introduction of choric and hieratic effects into the context of a realistic drama. Desmond MacCarthy was strongly critical (No. 105), feeling that Eliot had been led astray from his Christian concerns by the introduction of figures from Greek mythology, though for Michael Roberts the verse itself was subtle and flexible enough to sustain great variations in tone and subject matter (No. 108). Frederick Pottle, like MacCarthy, compared the play to Ibsen and to O'Neill's 'Strange Interlude', though he approved of the device for the chorus, whereas MacCarthy did not (No. 111). The play's connection with Eliot's earlier work, especially 'The Waste Land' and 'Burnt Norton', was Cleanth Brooks's theme, and he suggested that Eliot's problems in presenting a religious vision of life to a secularised and rationalistic audience were similar to Harry's in confronting his family's incomprehension (No. 112). Brooks also approved of Eliot's verse, saying that the closeness of texture of the writing allowed shifts of intensity to take place without strain, shifts that were the expression of the central dramatic fact of the play. Another American critic, Philip Horton, felt that 'The Family Reunion' failed, unlike 'Murder in the Cathedral', because there was no adequate motivation to render the action convincing (No. 113). Horton argued that Eliot had used the play as a vehicle for his own speculations about sin, speculations which would have been more effective dramatically if presented through the consciousness of the hero, as in 'Hamlet'. Horton regretted this central weakness, since the verse, in its richness and flexibility, was a considerable advance on contemporary poetic drama.

Horace Gregory drew on Eliot's *Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry* (1928), with its plea for the restoration of the unities, in order to argue that Eliot's drama violated these same unities, in 'Murder in the Cathedral' when the Knights turn to address the audience, and in 'The Family Reunion' when Harry sets off to pursue the Eumenides in his car (No. 115). The more general question of unity, as opposed to the specific problem of the unities, was dwelt on by practically all the play's critics, not least by John Crowe Ransom, who was sure that the Eumenides would not appear believable to a modern, hardboiled audience (No. 114). Ransom did not consider the play to be particularly Christian, and the play's success lay in its giving an impression of a reality deeper than the visible world. In 1940, writing for the 'Southern Review', vi, no. 2, 387-416, C.L. Barber found that Eliot had failed to overcome the cleavage between the modern setting and the supernatural action. As a consequence, the religious meaning of the symbols, of the Furies, remained abstract or vague and obscure, too much a matter of dark hints and furtive suggestions. Eliot had failed to make irrational symbolic significance part of a socially meaningful action, so that 'The Family Reunion' appeared more as a work of fantasy than as a work of art. In an earlier piece that year ('Southern Review', v, no. 3, 562-4), Francis Ferguson had also argued much the same case, though more briefly.

None of the critics, except perhaps Brooks, was prepared to allow that Eliot's use of the mythological figures might be related to his use of myth in his poetry, that the play might be about the relation between the image and the experience of expiation, and that this relation was not susceptible of dramatic unification. The fissures in the play, it could well be argued, are the 'meaning' of the play, since it is here, precisely in the dislocation of unity, that the elusiveness and the problem of meaning are most strongly felt.

#### 'FOUR QUARTETS'

'Burnt Norton' was composed towards the end of 1935, from 'bits left over from "Murder in the Cathedral"', before Eliot began work on 'The Family Reunion', which play he read in draft to the Brownes on the evening of 14 November 1937. Eliot composed 'Burnt Norton' quickly, finishing it only a few weeks before its inclusion in 'Collected Poems 1909-1935'. 'East Coker' was published in a supplement to the 'New English Weekly' Easter number, on 21 March 1940, in the dark days of the war. Hayward wrote to Frank Morley, one of the directors of Faber & Faber, 'Tom's "East Coker" has been received with the greatest possible applause by the few people who knew, or who were told that it could be found in that obscure weekly in which Tom is interested.' The supplement was reprinted in May and June, and in September the poem was published in pamphlet form by Faber & Faber at one shilling. 'Burnt Norton' appeared as a pamphlet from Faber & Faber on 20 February 1941, in a printing of 4,000 copies. 'The Dry Salvages', written, like the other two poems, at high speed, was published in the 'New English Weekly' for 27 February 1941, and by Faber & Faber in pamphlet form on 4 September that same year, with over 11,000 copies being printed. The writing of 'Little Gidding' proceeded with less rapidity. Eliot was weakened by exhaustion occasioned by his wartime duties and by illness, especially bronchitis and feverish colds. At this time also he suffered the extraction of his teeth and the painful adjustment to dental plates. Dame Helen Gardner suggests that, beyond these afflictions, a further reason for Eliot's difficulties

was his realization that the three earlier poems that he had written so easily had grown into a unity, and that the fourth and concluding poem was to be more than a fourth poem of the same kind as its predecessors. It had to gather up the earlier ones and be the crown and conclusion of the series.

The poem finally appeared in the 'New English Weekly' on 15 October 1942 and appeared as a pamphlet on 1 December, in a printing of 16,775 copies. It had taken Eliot just over a year to complete 'Little Gidding'.

'Four Quartets' first appeared in America, published by Harcourt, Brace on 11 May 1943, in two impressions, the first of which was so badly done, as the result of unskilled wartime labour, that all but 988 copies of the 4,165 printed were destroyed. All would have been destroyed, but for the need to meet the publication

date and so preserve copyright. The English edition did not appear until 31 October 1944, and bore on its dust-jacket the statement: 'The four poems which make up this volume have all appeared separately.... The author, however, has always intended them to be published as one volume, and to be judged as a single work.' As Dame Helen has shown, however, this scheme was not present in Eliot's mind when he wrote 'Burnt Norton', nor when he wrote 'East Coker'. It should be noted also that in 'Four Quartets' the Greek epigraphs were printed on the reverse of the Contents page, thus making them seem to refer to the whole poem. In 'Collected Poems 1909–1962' they were returned to being epigraphs for 'Burnt Norton' alone.

Thus it was 'East Coker', the second poem of the sequence, that first appeared singly, as a pamphlet. The general response was to emphasise yet again Eliot's commanding position in the world of letters. Two days after publication, G.W. Stonier was moved to assert that Eliot's authority seemed even more powerful and exclusive than Arnold's had been; it was rather of Claudel that he was reminded (No. 117). 'Mr. Eliot is the only great English poet living', was the opinion of James Kirkup, who found the calm resignation of the poem comparable to that of the aged Goethe or to the visionary humility of Rilke's 'Duino Elegies' (No. 118). On the other hand, the 'Times Literary Supplement' (14 September 1941) was decidedly cool:

[Eliot's] poetry is the poetry of disdain—disdain of the tragic view of life, of the courageous view, of futile sensualists, of poetry, and now even of himself. He is becoming more and more like an embalmer of the nearly dead; he colours their masks with expert fingers to resemble life, but only to resemble.

As Bernard Bergonzi remarks, it was still possible as late as 1940 for doubts to be expressed about the ultimate worth of Eliot's achievements. (23) This review provoked a sharp reply in the correspondence columns on 21 September 1940, from F.R. Leavis, (24) though the 'Times Literary Supplement' remained distinctly unsympathetic towards Eliot at this time. Leavis himself reviewed the poem in the *Cambridge Review* (21 February 1941), lxii, 268, 270, finding it superior to 'Burnt Norton'.

In America, the 'Southern Review' devoted considerable coverage to Eliot. In the issue for Spring 1941, James Johnson Sweeney wrote a long study of 'East Coker' (No. 120), meriting Eliot's praise in a letter to H.W. Eliot jr, that it was 'an excellent detective article', following up every clue, and even discovering source material that Eliot had not read. The essay is an expanded exegesis, which three years later was supplemented by Curtis Bradford ('Southern Review' (Winter 1944), lii, 169–75), both writers treating the poem as a paraphrasable prose discourse and paying little or no attention to the variations in tone and rhythm that work so elusively to give 'East Coker' its life. In the issue of the 'Southern Review' that printed Sweeney's piece, Andrews Wanning reviewed 'Burnt



Norton', finding it superior to 'East Coker': "Burnt Norton" is a poem of suggestion, "East Coker" a poem of argument and explanation' (No. 122).

'The Dry Salvages' revealed, for J.P.Hogan (No. 124), Eliot's humility. Like Kirkup, Hogan compared Eliot to Rilke and saw in the work of both poets a turning inward, a reaching towards an inner kingdom which was not a condition of stasis or passivity but vigilance, not the absence of struggle, but the absence of uncertainty and confusion.

The 'Times Literary Supplement' had reviewed 'Burnt Norton' disparagingly in a short notice on 12 April 1941, finding it difficult to say precisely what Eliot's symbolism meant. This same attitude continued later that year, in a review headed Mr T.S.Eliot's Progress (4 September). Addressing itself with greater emphasis to 'Points of View' (July 1941) than to 'The Dry Salvages', it attacked Eliot's views of the past and tradition, finding in them not a sense of history but despair of the present. Eliot's attitude towards discipline was considered to point to Maurras, whereas the only man fit to rule was 'crowned, indeed, but on a Cross'. As for 'The Dry Salvages', a 'note of quiescence, even of bleak resignation' was in it. It had 'lost that spice of wit which was woven into the logic of the earlier poems'.

The attack on Eliot's ideas of tradition was taken up by other critics. Van Wyck Brooks, in 'Opinions of Oliver Allston' (1941), accused Eliot of being a 'destroyer of tradition', while George Orwell, in late 1942, in 'Poetry London', accused him of a negative acceptance of defeat and a half-hearted conservatism which Orwell, at that date, called 'Pétainism' (No. 128). Kathleen Raine struck back in the same issue of the journal, saying that Eliot, as a poet and Christian, had shown a deeper respect for the ordinary man than could ever be found in the simplifications Orwell offered to a public he inwardly despised (No. 129).

In February 1942, Muriel Bradbrook's *The Lyric and Dramatic in the Latest Verse of T.S.Eliot* appeared in 'Theology', a long study of Eliot as a Christian poet (No. 125), while Helen Gardner's *The Recent Poetry of T.S.Eliot* appeared in 'New Writing and Daylight' the same year (No. 127). In 'Scrutiny' (Summer 1942), F.R.Leavis published a study of the first three poems of the 'Quartets', a study which was reprinted next year in 'Education and the Idea of the University'. Leavis emphasised not the Christian side of Eliot but the way in which the poetry 'makes its explorations into the concrete realities of experience below the conceptual currency', in this consciously following Harding's earlier formulation of the 'creation of concepts'.

On the publication of 'Little Gidding' in December 1942, Muriel Bradbrook presented in 'Theology' (March 1943) what was the conclusion to her essay of the year before. Taken together, the two essays make a sustained study of Eliot's work (Nos 125 and 136). She saw, in the changing use of the 'I' in Eliot's work, an index of Eliot's growing understanding of the theme of renunciation, the *via negativa*. In 'Little Gidding' what emerged was not dogma, but the dramatisation of Christian experience, an experience one felt in the act of reading to be both highly personal and genuinely representative. These essays are early attempts to

see Eliot's work in terms of the tradition of Western spirituality. The Anglican literary revival, associated with Charles Williams, C.S.Lewis and Dorothy Sayers, with Kathleen Raine and David Gascoyne on the poetic fringes of the movement, was making itself felt in this work, as well as in that of Helen Gardner.

The 'Scrutiny' group also saw the religious implications of Eliot's work and yet did not accede to them in expressly Christian terms. Harding, writing in 'Scrutiny' for Spring 1943 (No. 137), recognised in 'Little Gidding' a double movement of repulsion and affirmation, repulsion in Section II from the desolation of a life without spiritual values and affirmation of love in Section III and onwards. The pentecostal fire was noted as central to this experience, but Harding made no attempt to relate it to Eliot's Christian belief, nor did he attempt any analytical justification for his high valuation of the poem. It was this lack of close analysis that led a correspondent, R.N.Higinbotham, to disagree with Harding's estimation of 'Little Gidding' (No. 138). Higinbotham pointed to what he saw as cliché and stock response in Eliot's writing, and argued that the poetry failed to reconcile emotion and thought. In a reply printed immediately after Higinbotham's letter, Leavis came to the defence of 'Four Quartets' and insisted that the intellectual material emerged from the experiential matrix in ways that rendered Higinbotham's distinctions and sense of thought as 'syllogism' altogether too imperceptible (No. 139). The difficulties of the poem lay in its imposing a discipline of self-knowledge and readjustment: in other words, the poem was itself an active force in transforming the reader's life. James Johnson Sweeney, writing for 'Poetry' in July 1943 on the appearance of 'Four Quartets', but with specific regard to 'Little Gidding', traced Eliot's use of a tradition of contemplative writing that reached back to the pseudo-Dionysius, and included Dame Julian of Norwich, 'The Cloud of Unknowing', and St John of the Cross (No. 140).

With the publication of 'Four Quartets' in New York on 11 May 1943, certain American critics responded warmly. Horace Gregory gave an enthusiastic reception to the poem, comparing it to 'The Prelude' less as an autobiographical poem than as a work that recapitulated all that Eliot had written since 'The Waste Land' (No. 143). In the 'New Leader' (19 June 1943), after a survey of the current critical writings on Eliot, Melvin J.Lasky considered that 'as yet no professional reader has adequately conveyed the poem's elements of tragic wisdom and lyrical power, its range of mood and idea and masterly self-consciousness'. F.O.Matthiessen published a lengthy and important analysis of the work as a whole, in the issue for Spring 1943 of the 'Kenyon Review', which later he incorporated into editions of 'The Achievement of T.S. Eliot' from 1947 onwards. The essay was a sustained and sympathetic exegesis of the religious themes, the images and symbols that developed them, and the interconnections between the poems. Like other critics, Matthiessen concluded on an affirmative note:

Essential evil still constitutes more of Eliot's subject-matter than essential good, but the magnificent orchestration of his themes has prepared for that paradisaical glimpse at the close, and thereby makes it no decorative allusion,

but an integrated climax to the content no less than to the form. Such spiritual release and reconciliation are the chief reality for which he strives in a world that has seemed to him increasingly threatened with new dark ages.

The essay did not concern itself with Eliot's linguistic inventiveness or with his artistic self-consciousness. Nor did Matthiessen hint at those elements in the poem that made it seem to later critics one of the great and problematic achievements of modernism in English. It was rather the religious themes that predominated, both in Matthiessen's work and in that of other early reviewers.

Other American critics were less wholehearted in their reception. Such a critic was Malcolm Cowley, in June 1943, who saw the poem as a mystical work and spoke of the ways in which Eliot had presented a sense of ecstatic oneness with the divine (No. 144). For Cowley, however, this seemed to point to qualities that were less Catholic or Anglican than Calvinist and Buddhist, the consequence of which was to take Eliot beyond poetry. Cowley saw the whole as a mixture of prosaic passages, together with some fine poetry in which Eliot was at his best. Delmore Schwartz also reacted with mixed feelings, disturbed by the 'falsity of tone' in passages such as 'East Coker', Section V, while the Dante section in 'Little Gidding' struck him with admiration. He pointed to the 'Buddhist' quality of Eliot's mind, stating that the Incarnation was present to Eliot for the sake of renunciation, not renunciation for greater closeness to God (No. 145). For Paul Goodman, Eliot's despair of the material world and emphasis on the emerging pattern had led towards a despair of Creation itself, and therefore he denied that Eliot was a Christian poet (No. 146). For all Goodman's admiration of Eliot's rhythms and cadences, this review was as doubtful as the others of Eliot's final significance. Again, for John Gould Fletcher, it was Eliot's musical abilities with language that were his only abiding value. Eliot's negative way to salvation was without significance in the face of the world's real problem, to create a true democracy (No. 147). Louis Untermeyer considered that the poem would not be to everyone's taste. Few would doubt the beauty of the poem, but its mysticism would not be easy to comprehend (No. 148). The American response, therefore, was mixed and ambiguous, the main emphasis falling on Eliot's musical effects, with a concomitant distrust of his religious explorations.

On the appearance of 'Four Quartets' in England in October 1944, the response was altogether more admiring, even though the 'Times Literary Supplement' (9 December 1944) carried no review, only a notice of publication. Reginald Snell, however, saw the triumph of an artist who had achieved universality and who by putting off individuality had none the less achieved it. 'Four Quartets' was Eliot's vindication, the poem being a true part of the English tradition. The poem was a meditation on the theme of the incarnation, the finest poem of the four being 'Little Gidding' (No. 149). Snell's review, in the 'New English Weekly', sounded no note of doubt, and unlike some of the American reviews accepted Eliot's religious beliefs without demur. Eliot himself wrote to the 'New English Weekly' on 25 January 1945, adding a few points about the text. Snell's review, taken together

with those on individual poems of the sequence by Helen Gardner, Muriel Bradbrook, and the 'Scrutiny' critics, suggests that Eliot was more respectfully received in England than in America, with less willingness amongst the English to criticise Eliot on either poetic or religious grounds.

### 'THE COCKTAIL PARTY'

In 1948 Eliot published his 'Selected Poems' and 'Notes Towards the Definition of Culture'. In the same year he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, as well as the Order of Merit. It was during this period that 'The Cocktail Party' was composed, and on 22 August 1949 was performed for the first time as part of the Edinburgh Festival, at the Lyceum Theatre.

'The Times' reviewer on 24 August found the play 'brilliantly entertaining', since Eliot had dispensed with the ritual and artifice of his earlier work and in return achieved a 'lucid, unallusive verse'. Other newspaper critics were divided, the 'Daily Telegraph' (23 August) finding it 'one of the finest dramatic achievements of our time', while Ivor Brown, of the 'Observer' (28 August), disliked it totally.

On the basis of the Edinburgh production, the weeklies and periodicals generally approved of 'The Cocktail Party'. Eliot in general and his play in particular were both defended passionately in the first issue of 'Nine' by its editor, Peter Russell, who recognised, as few of Eliot's critics were prepared to do, that the principle of diversity was as important to his work as that of innovation. Russell, who had clearly seen the play in production, found it excellent theatre (No. 152). In the 'New Statesman', Desmond Shawe-Taylor also approved of the theatrical quality of the play, especially the acting of Alec Guinness as Sir Henry, and yet he found Eliot incapable of love towards his characters (No. 153). A certain condescension towards Eliot's more serious preoccupations is quite clearly perceptible in Shawe-Taylor's tone. Robert Speaight, in the 'Tablet' for 3 September, saw the play in the longer perspective of Eliot's career, and spoke professionally of it as a dramatic production, praising the actors and the director, E. Martin Browne (No. 154).

After the Edinburgh performances, the play opened in Brighton on 19 December 1949, with two changes in the cast. Harold Hobson's 'Sunday Times' review on 8 January 1950 referred to this production and to the fact that no theatre could be found to stage the play in London. Although Eliot was at first perturbed by the idea, he finally agreed that the play should open in New York, and in fact it opened there on 21 January 1950, where it proved a success. The play was published in London and New York in March 1950.

It is of this published version that William Carlos Williams wrote in the 'New York Post', on 12 March, with a degree of approval (No. 155). E.M. Forster, in England, found Celia's martyrdom hard to take (No. 156), while Helen Gardner in 'Time and Tide' (25 March 1950) considered the play finally unconvincing, despite its brilliance, because the Guardians were not credible:

In their exchanges with each other the Guardians appear as interfering busybodies, Buchmanite conspirators with classy connections throughout the world, spotters of winners. Their libations and the final toast to Lavinia's aunt are embarrassing evasions. The failure to render the central conception except in terms of fantasy invades the treatment of Celia.... The comedy of manners and the divine comedy fail to coalesce, for the same reason, I believe, which causes 'Murder in the Cathedral' and 'The Family Reunion' to fall apart. Mr Eliot's 'fatal Cleopatra' is his romantic conception of sanctity. What seems needed here is the classic idea of holiness.

William Barrett, in the 'Partisan Review', found the play a disappointment, weak as drama and as poetry, and suggested that the play's American success was due in large part to the actors, in that American playgoers could for once hear English well and naturally spoken (No. 158). Barrett objected to what Carlos Williams had approved of, the fact that the verse was not recognisable as verse. Like other critics, though with greater passion, Barrett contended that Eliot had never shown in his poetry the fullness of love and joy, or that he believed in the possibility of such fullness. At the height of his reputation, Eliot's creative powers seemed at their lowest ebb. Barrett saw himself as speaking for a new generation, which, in Freudian terms, had first to kill its own father. In 'Scrutiny' John Peter found the figures of the Guardians preposterous, since the contrast between the human figures of Julia and Alex in Act I and their spiritual transformation in Acts II and III was so gross as to tear the play apart. He found the verse flaccid, doing nothing to make the concepts it dealt in real or interesting (No. 160). Bonamy Dobrée wrote more favourably, finding the play a disturbing experience and one that caused the reader to feel that some barb had pierced beneath his skin (No. 159).

The play opened in London on 3 May 1950, at the New Theatre, with a new cast, and ran until 10 February 1951, assured of a large audience due to its Broadway success and to its appearance in print. Philip Hope-Wallace in 'Time and Tide' (13 May 1950) found that the question which had angered critics was whether or not the psychiatrist was right to advise Celia to follow the course that led to a martyr's death:

But really Mr Eliot is not the first to return a dusty answer to those who are hot for certainty. I don't myself like particularly the ambiguous figure of the doctor-priest, or the way his 'helpers and servers', the guardians, are incarnated in the apparently silly and therefore unsuspect cocktail party gossips. But that does not mean I do not find it the most fascinating and exciting piece of drama.

In a long study of the play for the 'Hudson Review' (No. 162), William Arrowsmith argued that Eliot could only give real emotional credence to the ascetic part of the Christian tradition, not to the way of the common life, the Chamberlaynes, a point that can be compared with Helen Gardner's opinion of

Eliot's ideas on sanctity. Arrowsmith recognised that Eliot's problem was to write a Christian drama for a world that was secular and distrustful of poetry, and to write in a way that would invite notice and make its point. For this reason he did not condemn Eliot's verse or his use of domestic, marital comedy. It was in this way that Eliot had attempted to repossess popular forms for his greater purpose. This is a sympathetic and important review, dealing with all the issues raised against Eliot by the contemporary critics, including William Barrett. Middleton Murry also thought well of 'The Cocktail Party', since the scheme of salvation and the dramatic contrast worked well and satisfyingly together, though Murry believed that there was more to love than emerged from Eliot's sense of it (No. 163).

The reception of 'The Cocktail Party' was therefore muted, with one or two exceptions, much of the passion having subsided from the critical debate. One or two critics suggested that the play was as important to drama as 'The Waste Land' had been to poetry, though no one was moved to any larger reevaluation of Eliot's importance or meaning.

#### 'THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK'

After the success of 'The Cocktail Party', which had played, according to 'The Times' for 21 December 1952, to close on a million and a half spectators, 'The Confidential Clerk' opened on 25 August 1953 at the Lyceum, as part of the Edinburgh Festival.

The critics were more or less agreed that the play was flawed in various important ways. For Henry Donald, in the 'Spectator' (No. 166), it was no comfort to be told 'The Confidential Clerk' was based on the 'Ion' of Euripides: Eliot's play was broken-backed, though the evening itself was saved by the excellence of the acting. Donald also noted the sets, designed by Hutchinson Scott to give a sense of mysterious depth. Browne links this break with naturalistic convention to the changes that were generally taking place in the theatre, highlighted and developed by George Devine with the English Stage Company in 1954. In Browne's view, Eliot forestalled these developments, so that the set designs, by creating an effect of strangeness and by displacing naturalistic perspective, were intended to emphasise Eliot's own aesthetic purposes.

T.C. Worsley saw the play as more than a Gilbertian comedy of manners, though he believed it to be confused, mainly because of Eliot's abrogation of control over the verse. Eliot would be well advised to emphasise more strongly his poetic powers (No. 167). For John Weightman, reporting on the Edinburgh Festival for 'Twentieth Century' the verse and the acting were excellent: the failure lay in the content, especially in the third act. Eliot seemed unable to establish the level at which the play was to be taken and the result was a confusion both of convention and of tone (No. 168). Richard Findlater, in the same issue of 'Twentieth Century', after dismissing the usual comparisons with Wilde, gave an account of the play as religious drama, but religious drama that failed because it lacked 'emotional

unity', whereby the two levels, of religion and farce, might have been mutually illuminating (No. 169). Findlater thought the time had come for Eliot to impose himself more strongly upon the theatre, a view shared by other critics at that time.

For Bonamy Dobrée, if Eliot's purpose had been to make each member of his audience examine his or her life, then he had succeeded; if it had been to promote any sort of doctrine, then he had failed. Eliot was perhaps the Kyd or Tourneur of his day, and men of letters should recognise and support his 'valiant originality' (No. 170). Dobrée would seem to have reviewed the performance of the play in London, where it opened at the Lyric on Shaftesbury Avenue on 16 September 1953. Nicholas Brooke, also reviewing the play in performance and not the published text, found the work a bitter disappointment. Eliot seemed to have been concerned only to write a West End comedy (No. 171). Helen Gardner's review (No. 172), on the other hand, was concerned with the published version of the play, which appeared from Faber & Faber on 5 March 1954. She found that Eliot had achieved a unity which he had not achieved in his drama before. By setting Mr Eggerson at the spiritual centre of the play Eliot had eschewed the heroics of Celia Coplestone, and instead located his meaning in the whole design of his plot. That romantic presentation of sanctity which had flawed 'The Cocktail Party' so profoundly was no longer apparent.

The anonymous reviewer of 'The Confidential Clerk' in the 'Times Literary Supplement' (19 March 1954) considered that the incidents were organised into an amazingly complex whole, but that the underlying implications of the action were left comparatively unorganised. The connection could only be found with some difficulty beneath the comic surface:

When found, the root of the matter would seem to be that until we know what we really are—and to reach this knowledge we shall usually need the help of others—we cannot expect to make the best of the terms which life offers us and rightly choose the way to self-fulfilment.

The play worked with great comic dexterity on the stage and when read, but left the reader in a state of uncertainty as to its final meaning.

During the latter part of 1954 there was controversy over the value of Eliot's achievement in the 'Times Literary Supplement', centred on a review (10 September) of Aldington's 'Ezra Pound and T.S.Eliot', published in 1954 by the Peacock Press, Reading, but originally given as a lecture fifteen years previously in America. The review spoke of Aldington voicing a contemporary (1954) criticism of the negative emotions in 'The Waste Land', and went on to argue that modernism was superseded, Empson and Graves being the models for a non-modernist poetry of more modest pretensions. On 1 October Graves wrote in to attack Eliot and Pound: '...Pound-Eliot modernism of the twenties is already as dated as a stream-lined pogo-stick with decorative motifs from Tutan-Khamen's tomb.' On 15 October the reviewer argued that Eliot was a great poet, and that Pound also had written great poetry, to which Graves replied (29 October): 'Can

the “Four Quartets” be called good? They are far from good, and their chief appeal is perhaps a macabre one, as when one sees zombies still working posthumously in the old sugar plantation.’ Gordon Wharton defended the ‘Cantos’ on 12 November, Graves attacking them, especially Canto 79, a week later (19 November). During this controversy Pound and Eliot were lumped together as modernists, a term which, in England in the period of the ‘Movement’ poets, had become a term of abuse, in striking contrast to America where a revitalised modernism was beginning to make itself felt, under the influence of Olson and others. On both sides of the Atlantic, however, Eliot’s kind of modernism was being discounted by the poets themselves, even though his reputation amongst critics and the world at large stood very high indeed.

### ‘THE ELDER STATESMAN’

During the early part of 1954 Eliot fell ill with the bronchial complaint that made it difficult, even dangerous, for him to winter in England. None the less, he began a new play during 1956, basing it on ‘Oedipus at Colonus’. During the composition of this work, on 10 January 1957, he married Valerie Fletcher, who for seven years had been his secretary.

As a result, the rehearsal period prior to the first production at Edinburgh on 25 August 1958 was plagued by gossip writers. Eliot had become news, the expectation being that Eliot would provide a ‘human’ play, which on 26 August was precisely what ‘The Times’ reviewer found. The play was a ‘realistic psychological drama of self-revelation’, touched with ‘a gleam of extramundane meaning’.

The general impression given by reviews of the first performances of ‘The Elder Statesman’ was that the play lacked vitality, being old-fashioned and even suggesting Pinero. A strong attack came from Kenneth Tynan in the ‘Observer’ on 31 August:

One’s conclusion must be that, out of the wisdom of his years and the intensity of his cerebration, Mr Eliot has come up with a gigantic platitude. Towards the end, to be sure, he casts over the play a sedative, autumnal glow of considerable beauty, and here and there a scattered phrase reminds us, by its spare precision, that we are listening to a poet. On the whole, however, the evening offers little more than the mild pleasure of hearing ancient verities tepidly restated.

Henry Hewes, of the ‘Saturday Review’, also found Eliot ‘more human’ than before, and followed his review with the report of an interview with Eliot in Edinburgh, to mark Eliot’s approaching seventieth birthday on 26 September 1958 (No. 173). In the same issue of ‘Saturday Review’ Padraic Colum reviewed ‘T.S.Eliot: A Symposium for his Seventieth Birthday’, edited by Neville Braybrooke, saying that what characterised Eliot as a poet was wisdom, ‘a wisdom



that has its roots in the perception that to have integrity people have to take on burdens', the desolate people in his poems being those who refuse that burden. 'The price to be paid', according to Colum, 'is the theme of his plays.' John Weightman also considered 'The Elder Statesman' old-fashioned, as something that could have been written fifty years before (No. 174). Denis Donoghue wrote a lengthy study of the play, based on watching performances at Edinburgh, and insisted that Eliot was not concerned to present a comedy of manners. Donoghue suggested, reminiscent perhaps of a point made earlier by Arrowsmith about 'The Cocktail Party', that Eliot had written an 'ideal comedy', in which love and community were drawn forth from ambiguity. The play pointed, in a mood that was optative rather than indicative, towards an order, but an order based on piety and love. This was the wisest of Eliot's plays, and in it love was defined, not by good deeds, but by a genuinely won illumination. Even so, for Donoghue the play was not without faults, the most important being Eliot's niggardliness in providing a dramatic climax, by which Lord Claverton's recognition of his own emptiness might have been acknowledged with greater theatrical evidence (No. 176). This is a sympathetic review, making an effort to justify Eliot at least at the thematic level.

Frank Kermode, reviewing the first edition, published by Faber & Faber on 10 April 1959, found that Eliot's drama had not succeeded in bringing together his Symbolist poetic inheritance and the demands of the middle-class 'groundlings' for whom he had decided to write. It was Yeats who took the right decision, rejecting the larger audience and writing only for a small elite (No. 175). The subtlest account, the one most attentive to Eliot's understanding of language, was Kenner's in 'Poetry' (No. 178). Kenner proposed that the characters of the play were functions of their language, the tension of which was located in the very idea of privacy, as something held behind a role and as something that could give itself into communion with another person precisely because it was privacy and not that domination which insisted on making its presence felt. In its simplicity, the play, like medieval music, at once intimate and formal, was Eliot's most personal work, so that the lyric dedication to his wife at the beginning of the book was perfectly in keeping. In this review Kenner succeeded in bringing together with great tact Eliot's personal happiness and the accomplishment of his final writing.

#### 'COLLECTED POEMS 1909–1962'

'Collected Poems 1909–1962' was published by Faber & Faber on 25 September 1963, the day before Eliot's seventy-fifth birthday. The publication was noted with satisfaction by the 'Times Literary Supplement', also on 25 September. On 11 October, in the 'New Statesman', Donald Davie identified the crucial characteristic of Eliot's language as 'symboliste', in which, as in Mallarmé, language revealed itself, not as the expressive instrument of some individual or subject, but as preexisting any user of it. The only 'events' in Eliot's poetry were

the events of language, as words erupted into consciousness manifesting and criticising the linguistic system by which the 'world' was created (No. 179). Davie elaborated this view in a later essay, but here, emphasising Eliot's modernism, he gave concrete examples of Eliot's 'symboliste' poetry in operation, distinguishing it from the work of Yeats and Pound. Eliot's poetry foregrounded its language, unlike the work of other poets, who justified their language by its referential content and who therefore regarded their language as transparent to realities beyond it. For Eliot, according to Davie, there was no such access to non-verbal reality, and none sought for. However, Eliot had closed off this particular line of development, and Davie, speaking out of his own experience as a poet, considered Eliot's influence on poetry to be at an end.

Like Davie, John Frederick Nims surveyed the whole career, finding Eliot to be a great poet, but a 'moderately' great one. Eliot's greatest creation was 'Mr Eliot', who now made it difficult for the reader to free the poetry from the heavy-handed seriousness of the commentators. Eliot showed himself, especially in 'Four Quartets', to have moved beyond humanity into prosaic abstractness, confusing the colourless with the spiritual. Nims found only Eliot's earliest poetry fully alive, his later work lacking excitement (No. 180). For Kermode, Eliot was matched only by Yeats and Pound, and the reader who took up 'Collected Poems 1909–1962' should forget Eliot's place as a classic of the modern and try to read the poems as though he had never seen them before. In this way the crystalline purity of language, the true reward of a lifetime's effort, would become visible. On this valedictory note Kermode concluded his review (No. 181).

### ELIOT'S POSTHUMOUS REPUTATION

Eliot died on 4 January 1965. The next day 'The Times' spoke of his achievements, noting that his works had been translated into almost every European language, and that he had been the subject of more books and articles than had ever before been published about an author during his lifetime. On 6 January, tributes flowed in from American writers, including Robert Lowell and Allen Tate. On 4 February, a memorial service was held in Westminster Abbey, at which the choir sang the anthem 'The dove descending breaks the air', set to music by Stravinsky and dedicated to Eliot. A further homage to Eliot was held at the Globe Theatre, London, on 13 June, when certain of his poems were read by Laurence Olivier, Paul Scofield, George Devine and others. Groucho Marx introduced and read 'Gus: The Theatre Cat', and there was a performance of 'Sweeney Agonistes' which included an unpublished last scene.

On 8 January, the 'New Statesman' appeared with a Vicky drawing of Eliot on the front page, and the words *The Age of Eliot* across the lower edge of the drawing. It was the opinion of the anonymous writer of the obituary, *Eliot and the Age of Fiction*, that Eliot had held the same authority in our age as Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold had in their respective ages. What made Eliot's achievement notable, however, was the character of the age: 'That Eliot, who was

neither novelist nor a critic of fiction, should have had such authority in what seems the age of the novel makes his achievement at once more vulnerable and more impressive.' Many of the obituaries, reminiscences and essays published immediately after his death were understandably eager to stress Eliot's, kindness and generosity to younger writers and to those who knew him, and there was general concurrence in the view that his place in literature was beyond challenge. W.H.Auden, for example, considered him a great poet and a good man ('Listener', 7 January). Eliot's achievement, however, was not that of a classical, but an idiosyncratic, poet. He was idiosyncratic both in subject matter and technique, and, like Wordsworth, 'his inspiration for nearly all he wrote arose out of a few intensely visionary experiences, which probably occurred quite early in life'. Brand Blanshard, in the 'Yale Review' (Summer 1965), recalled memories of Eliot at Oxford, where as graduate students they had been contemporaries. Blanshard considered that Eliot had not only been a great man, but also a good one. The chief failure of his life had been that he had never found anything to lift men up as in his earlier writings he had flattened them. He had not succeeded in making Christianity attractive or intelligible, and his greatest success had always lain in his attacks on the 'decent, godless people'. Spender's article, *Remembering Eliot*, in the Spring issue of 'Encounter', combined anecdote with a moving sense of what Eliot's poetry had meant to his readers.

There were many attempts to give the essence of Eliot's career. The reviewer in the 'Times Literary Supplement' (7 January) saw the whole sequence of the serious and non-dramatic poems as 'a kind of spiritual autobiography', in which 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Four Quartets' recorded a process of acceptance of religious belief 'and slow and painful disciplining of the self. Philip Toynbee, in the 'Observer' (10 January), presented Eliot's career in terms of an orderly and harmonious development, without any deep change in stance or attitude from 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' to the last plays. Reed Whittemore ('New Republic', 16 January) saw Eliot as the poet of death, of a sense of death that lodged in the basic intellectual and emotional stance that the poems projected. Whittemore, 'a reluctant long-time admirer', summed Eliot's work up thus:

A poetry of death like his is no more a stance in the bad sense than the surge of the sea may be said to be a stance, the sea to which, to paraphrase the man, there is no end, no beginning—and certainly at the heart of it no contriving. To his admirers Eliot was a great poet of the sea.

For Hugh Kenner, writing in the 'National Review' (26 January), Eliot had effected almost single-handed our century's most massive revolution in taste. Like William Carlos Williams, the poet with whom he had been most usually contrasted, Eliot had performed an operation on English idioms similar to that performed by Williams on the idioms of the New Jersey streets. It was Eliot, who, with Pound, had stood for tradition in an age of revolution and universal literacy and had thus prevented a civilisation from becoming 'lobotomised'.

Frank Kermode, in an essay headed *Eliot's Dream*, written first for the 'New Statesman' of 19 February 1965, compared Eliot to Milton, seeing their similarity in their relation to their respective ages. Eliot was an imperialist poet, 'The Waste Land' being an image of imperial catastrophe wherein disaster, rather than the timeless pattern of history, was to be found. Kermode saw the function of 'The Waste Land' in terms of 'decreation', an idea taken over from Simone Weil, through which the self was purged by suffering of what was merely natural and human. It was a process of clearing the world of 'its stiff and stubborn man-locked set', and characterised the great art works of the early 1920s.

Leonard Unger, editor of 'T.S.Eliot: A Selected Critique' (1948), an important collection of articles, paid tribute to Eliot in the 'Southern Review' (Summer 1965):

The poetry gave Eliot's reader a feeling of excitement and a sense of fulfilment different not only from poets of the past but from other poets of the present. No other poet had given voice so truly to the deepest and most intimate qualities of the modern sensibility—and it is my impression that no poet of our time has equalled Eliot in this particular aspect.

At the end of the year, the 'Sewanee Review' devoted a special number to Eliot, which included reminiscences by I.A.Richards, Herbert Read, Stephen Spender, Bonamy Dobrée, Robert Speaight, Frank Morley and E.Martin Browne, with essays on aspects of Eliot's work by such critics as Helen Gardner and Leonard Unger. Essays on Eliot continued to appear throughout the next year in the same journal, and in 1966 in America and in 1967 in England the whole collection was published as 'T.S.Eliot: The Man and his Work' under the editorship of Allen Tate. Worthy of note is Pound's comment, 'His was the true Dantescan voice.'

In the years since his death, Eliot's reputation has undergone a rapid change that has coincided with the emergence of an insistent American tradition of writing. The attacks made on Eliot by William Carlos Williams during the 1920s, and taken up again in his 'Autobiography', were echoed by Charles Olson in the 1950s, so that those writers who owe their allegiance, by way of Olson, to Williams, Pound and the Objectivists could be said to have taken Eliot as their main enemy, against whom they defined their own aims and priorities. This was due in part to their rejection of the dominant American academic ideology of the 1950s and 1960s, which owed, in the teaching of English, a great deal to Eliot. The rejection of the New Criticism involved also a rejection of Eliot. But clearly, to poets who saw their first priority as the return to, and care for, the American place in all its specificity, Eliot's concern for European tradition and English history would seem at best irrelevant and at worst treachery. In 1972 Charles Tomlinson gave an account of the relations between Eliot and Williams in his Penguin anthology, 'William Carlos Williams', saying that Eliot's and Williams's view of place were antithetical and that while Williams thought in terms of new beginnings Eliot thought in terms of the end. Tomlinson suggested that it was not

a matter for us to take sides in, and yet the issue has been joined in a spirit that is extremely partisan. Robert Creeley and also, at least in 1959, Robert Duncan, rejected Eliot completely. Jack Spicer's 'Book of Magazine Verse', poems rejected by 'reputable' magazines and published in 1966 by White Rabbit Press, opens with the following lines:

Pieces of the past arising out of the rubble. Which evokes Eliot and then  
evokes Suspicion. Ghosts all of them. Doers of no good.

George Oppen, in the final poem of 'Primitive' (1978), dissociated himself and his career from all that Eliot represented. Olson concluded his influential early manifesto, 'Projective Verse' (1951), with an extended attack on Eliot: '...it is because Eliot has stayed inside the non-projective that he fails as a dramatist—that his root is the mind alone, and a scholastic mind at that (no high *intelletto* despite his apparent clarities)...'. For Olson, Eliot's work was secondary and, in a derogatory sense, classical: a poetry of repression.

Despite, or in ignorance of, this disapproval, however, work has continued in many fields on Eliot. Donald Gallup's 'T.S.Eliot: A Bibliography' appeared in 1969, a revised and extended version of the 1952 original. Mildred Martin's 'A Half-Century of Eliot Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Articles in English, 1916–1965' (Lewisburg, Pa., Bucknell University Press, 1972) is, like Gallup's bibliography, indispensable. Donald Gallup's article, 'The "Lost" Manuscripts of T.S. Eliot, "Times Literary Supplement" (7 November 1968), 1238–40, and Mrs Eliot's facsimile edition of 'The Waste Land' drafts and fragments (1971), both drawing on material in the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library, are evidence of a growing need to establish the basis of Eliot's texts. Dame Helen Gardner's 'The Composition of "Four Quartets"' (1978) continued this work.

Biographical studies have also been undertaken. Lyndall Gordon's 'Eliot's Early Years' (1977) places Eliot's work in the context of his life, drawing on material hitherto unavailable. Lyndall Gordon acknowledges her debt to Dame Helen. Work by Ronald Schuchard emphasising the personal nature of Eliot's poetry should also be seen as forming part of the revaluation Dame Helen and Lyndall Gordon have proposed. (25)

Further biographical material has become available with the publication of 'The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell', volumes i and ii, (1967–9), the second volume of Michael Holroyd's 'Lytton Strachey' (1968), and Leonard Woolf's 'Downhill All the Way' (1967). Full details of further printed sources can be found in Gordon's biography. The 'Letters' of Conrad Aiken (1978) also contain glimpses of Eliot at various times in his career. Eliot's early reputation was summarised in a brief but telling article, 'The Triumph of T.S.Eliot', by George Watson, ('Critical Quarterly' (Winter 1965), vii, 328–37). Richard M.Ludwig gave a concise account of Eliot's reputation up to 1974 in 'Sixteen Modern

American Authors: A Survey of Research and Criticism', edited by Jackson R. Bryer (1974).

More general studies of Eliot have appeared frequently since his death. First printed in 1969 and reprinted in 1970, E.Martin Browne's 'The Making of T.S.Eliot's Plays' proceeded from 'The Rock' to 'The Elder Statesman', studying in each case Eliot's drafts, alterations after performance, and correspondence, and giving a wealth of reminiscence. Browne also gives a good account of the newspaper reception of each play on its first appearance. John D.Margolis's 'T.S.Eliot's Intellectual Development: 1922–1939' (1972) was another guide to Eliot's context, this time political and historical, with an extended examination of the 'Criterion'. Another invaluable guide to Eliot's general view of the world and its importance for his poetry was Roger Kojecky's 'T.S.Eliot's Social Criticism' (1971), which established the importance of Eliot's membership of the Moot, a group including Karl Mannheim, W.H.Moberly and H.A.Hodges. Eliot was one of the most regular attenders at the group's meetings, and Kojecky printed as an appendix a paper, *On the Place and Function of the Clerisy*, written by Eliot for discussion in December 1944.

In the public arena, the University of Kent at Canterbury named its first college, opened in 1965, after Eliot and established the annual T.S.Eliot Memorial Lectures through the generosity of Mrs Eliot. The first set of lectures was given by Auden in 1967. Eliot's work has appeared on school syllabuses and has become a standard item on university courses devoted to modern poetry. In response to this growing educational interest, the Casebook series, under the general editorship of A.E.Dyson, published volumes of essays on 'The Waste Land' (1968, reprinted 1972 and 1975), 'Four Quartets' (1969, reprinted 1975), and "'Prufrock", "Gerontion", "Ash-Wednesday" and Other Shorter Poems' (1978).

Critical debate about Eliot's significance has continued. J.Hillis Miller, in 'Poets of Reality' (1966), placed Eliot in relation to other modern poets as one whose work was a recovery of immanence, of the God immanent in reality and revealed by the musical patterns of poetry: 'Like Yeats, Eliot begins in exclusion and deprivation, then expands outward to include all space and time, and finally narrows again to the concrete moment which concentrates everything in the radiant presence of the present.' Leavis, too, addressed himself to the question of Eliot's ultimate value and meaning. In 1968, he gave the opening address at the Cheltenham Festival, *T.S.Eliot and the Life of English Literature*, which was reprinted in the 'Massachusetts Review' (Winter 1969). The text of a previously unpublished lecture Leavis delivered at the Catholic University of Milan on 18 April 1969, *Eliot's Permanent Place*, appeared in the 'Aligarh Journal of English Studies' (October 1977). In 'The Living Principle', published in 1975 and subtitled 'English' as a Discipline of Thought, Leavis devoted the last third of his book to 'Four Quartets'. This essay entered a number of reservations about the strength of Eliot's achievement and should be seen as part of Leavis's continual rethinking of Eliot, especially in relation to Blake and Lawrence, and to English civilisation and culture more generally. For Leavis, Eliot never achieved anything of the order

of the best parts of 'Four Quartets' again, the battle over the issues having been fought, so that Eliot was able to sink back into a world of settled and earned assumptions. For the first time, Leavis's interest seems more concentrated upon Eliot's ideas than upon his language.

A more general attack on 'Four Quartets', and by implication on Eliot's whole oeuvre, was launched in 1976 by Eric Mottram in an essay on Jacques Derrida, in 'Curtains' (numbers 14–17, 38–57). Mottram's essay approved of the work of Pound, Williams and Olson, and he set against Eliot's very different undertaking the poetry practised by Robert Duncan and others, a poetry of myth which, Mottram asserted, Christianity denounced as vehemently as the rationalists of Cambridge, the New Critics and the 'Movement' poets of the 1950s.

'Eliot in Perspective' (1970), edited by Graham Martin, contained essays by critics such as F.W. Bateson, Donald Davie, Gabriel Pearson, Ian Gregor and Terry Eagleton. Davie's essay, *Pound and Eliot: A Distinction*, took up the theme of 'symboliste' poetry from his 1963 'New Statesman' essay and gave it more extensive treatment, distinguishing between Pound's poetry of external reference and Eliot's of linguistic self-consciousness. Davie's work here drew on and extended that of Kenner's 'The Invisible Poet: T.S.Eliot' (1959), and as a result it should no longer be possible to confuse Pound's kind of modernism with that of Eliot, or to separate Eliot's 'personal' Christian concerns from those of his modernist poetry. In an essay entitled *Anglican Eliot in the 'Southern Review'* (January 1973), Davie considered Eliot's language as an embodiment of the Anglican tradition. Davie also contributed to "'The Waste Land" in *Different Voices*' (1974), edited by A.D. Moody from papers given at the University of York in honour of the poem's first publication fifty years before, and considered his own relation as a poet to Eliot's work, concentrating on the question of diction.

The question of Eliot's modernism was further discussed by Hugh Kenner in 'The Pound Era' (1972), where he elaborated on the theme of Eliot as 'symboliste' poet, while in 1975 Stephen Spender's 'Eliot' appeared in the Fontana Modern Masters series. Gabriel Josipovici also considered the same question of Eliot's modernism in 'The World and the Book' (1971), 'The Modern English Novel' (1976) and 'The Lessons of Modernism' (1977), placing Eliot in relation to the modernist practices of 'writers such as Blanchot, Kafka, Proust, Beckett and Borges, as well as Wallace Stevens. These essays are important developments in the understanding of Eliot, in that they are not simply about Eliot but in themselves manifest Eliot's own modes of thought and perception. Peter Ackroyd's 'Notes for a New Culture' (1976) drew on Eliot, as the title suggests, for a view of English cultural history, as did Josipovici in 'The World and the Book'. In an attempt to understand the failure of contemporary England to develop a major modernist literature, Ackroyd brought the work of Lacan and Derrida to a consideration of poets such as Roche, Ashberry and J.H. Prynne in the light of his reading of Eliot and Joyce. One contemporary poet, however, Peter Riley, denounced Ackroyd for his approval of Eliot, considering the displacement of the self, seen by Ackroyd in 'Four Quartets', a 'complete subterfuge' ('Poetry Information', no. 17). Eliot's

modernism was emphasised by the late Veronica Forrest-Thomson, both in her articles and in her poetry, as well as in 'Poetic Artifice' (published in 1979). (26) Like Ackroyd, she saw Eliot as the presence who was to determine the writing to come. Michael Edwards, in 'Eliot/ Language' (1975), reading Eliot's work in terms of ideas derived ultimately from contemporary French criticism, persuasively aligned Eliot's poetry with a Christian understanding of language, whose Fall was explored in 'Gerontion' and 'The Waste Land', and whose redemption was evoked in 'Ash-Wednesday' and in parts of 'Four Quartets'. Edwards's essay, suggestive of a post-modernist revaluation of Eliot's work, can be compared to Denis Donoghue's 'The Sovereign Ghost' (1976). In a chapter reprinted from 'Studies' and Moody's collection, Donoghue also used concepts taken from French criticism, on this occasion that of Roland Barthes, to present 'The Waste Land' as a text, the play of whose meanings was created by the foregrounding of language itself. A.D.Moody, on the other hand, in 'Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet' (1979), was concerned to present Eliot's poetry by means of sustained elucidations of a more traditional kind. He set out Eliot's position thus: 'Mallarmé's ideal was to create the ultimate Word and Book; but Eliot's book remained the Bible, and his ideal was that his words should conform totally to the Word of God'.

Theodore Weiss, discussing M.L.Rosenthal's 'Sailing Into the Unknown' (1978) in the 'Times Literary Supplement' (1 February 1980), gave a view of Pound, Yeats and Eliot in relation to certain poets and critics of the last few years. The current elevation of Hardy and Carlos Williams, he argued, had led to a confusion of life and art, to an idea of the artist as prostrate before life, victim of his own confusions. As against this sense of 'openness', in its current usage derived from Olson, he emphasised the ability of Yeats, Pound and Eliot to exploit their whole beings, 'their minds no less than their instincts, memory and learning no less than the local and the immediate...'. This argument will undoubtedly continue, involving as it does not only the achievement of the early moderns in itself but also the direction and meaning of most subsequent writing.

Recent criticism of Eliot, then, would seem to have divided into either a biographical reading and placing of the poetry, or a criticism that takes its stand on its attitude towards modernism itself, whether for or against. With the exception of Moody's book, little attention has been given to the drama. The publication of Eliot's early criticism, letters and an authorised biography is anticipated as is a properly edited version of his works. The most important criticism seems likely to come from a study of Eliot's understanding of language in terms of his most crucial beliefs, through an illumination of his poetic language by an understanding of his sense of tradition.

Eliot is now a possession of the consciousness of the people, his words and phrases entering into daily use as part of the common currency by which we live and think. Yet because of this we should not judge that the issues raised by his poetry and drama are dead. In many ways they are more urgent now than when first he wrote. His art challenges us to re-examine the processes by which we create



and ascribe those meanings on which our world is founded. That to which Eliot, in all love and humility, offered his response is still, for us as for him, 'The hint half guessed, the gift half understood'.

## NOTES

- 1 Peter Ackroyd, 'Notes for a New Culture' (London, 1976), pp. 48–9. I am also deeply indebted, throughout this early section, to A.D.Moody's 'Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet' (Cambridge, 1979).
- 2 Lyndall Gordon, 'Eliot's Early Years' (Oxford and New York, 1977), p. 68. Gordon gives a disenchanted view of Pound's relation to Eliot, and points to the fundamental differences that lay between the two men, especially on religious matters.
- 3 C.K.Stead, 'The New Poetic' (London, 1964), pp. 81–2.
- 4 T.S.Eliot, Eeldrop and Appleplex, 'Little Review' (May 1917), iv, 7.
- 5 Richard Aldington, *The Poetry of T.S.Eliot*, 'Outlook' (London) (7 January 1922), xlix, 12–13. Reprinted in the 'New York Evening Post Literary Review' (14 January 1922), 350; in 'Literary Studies and Reviews' (New York and London, 1924), pp. 181–91; and Unger, pp. 4–10.
- 6 A remark by Eliot concerning 'The Waste Land' in 'The Frontiers of Criticism' (Minneapolis, 1956), p. 10. Cited in 'Bibliography', p. 31.
- 7 For an account of these transactions, see Mrs Eliot's Introduction to her edition of "'The Waste Land": A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts' (London, 1971), pp. xxiii–xxiv, and B.L.Reid, 'The Man from New York: John Quinn and His Friends' (New York, 1968), pp. 533–40. See also Noel Stock, 'The Life of Ezra Pound' (London, 1970), pp. 248–9, and Daniel H.Woodward, Notes on the Publishing History and Text of 'The Waste Land', 'Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America' (third quarter 1964), lviii, 252–69.
- 8 C.B.Cox and Arnold P.Hinchliffe make this comment in their Introduction to 'T.S.Eliot: "The Waste Land"', a Casebook (London, 1968), p. 12.
- 9 Stock, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–50.
- 10 Edmund Wilson, 'Letters on Literature and Politics: 1912–1972', edited by Elena Wilson (London, 1977), p. 101.
- 11 'T.S.Eliot: "The Waste Land"', a Casebook edited by C.B.Cox and Arnold P.Hinchliffe (London, 1968), p. 93. Reprinted from 'Collected Criticism of Conrad Aiken' (1968).
- 12 Michael Edwards, 'Eliot/Language' (Isle of Skye, 1975), pp. 18–26. This book is Number 4 of 'Prospice', of which Edwards is editor.
- 13 George Watson, *The Triumph of T.S.Eliot*, 'Critical Quarterly' (Winter 1965), vii, 328–37.
- 14 E.M.Forster, *T.S.Eliot and His Difficulties*, 'Life and Letters' (June 1929), ii, 417–25. The essay was reprinted in 'Abinger Harvest' (London 1936), pp. 87–93, and in Unger, pp. 11–17.
- 15 Paul Elmer More, *The Cleft Eliot*, 'Saturday Review' (12 November 1932), ix, 233, 235. Reprinted in Unger, pp. 24–9. For a discussion of Eliot's relation to 'Humanism', see Roger Kojecky, 'T.S.Eliot's Social Criticism' (London, 1971), pp. 72–8.

- 16 Cited by Kojecky, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
- 17 Browne, pp. 63–4.
- 18 R.P.Blackmur, 'The Double Agent' (New York, 1935), pp. 184–218. Reprinted in Unger, pp. 236–62.
- 19 Marianne Moore, *If I Am Worthy, There is No Danger*, 'Poetry' (February 1936), xlvii, 279–81.
- 20 John Crowe Ransom, *Autumn of Poetry*, 'Southern Review' (Winter 1936), i, 619–23.
- 21 Ezra Pound, 'Selected Letters, 1907–1941', edited by D.D.Paige (New York, 1971), p. 277.
- 22 For a detailed account of the newspaper response, see Browne, pp. 148–51.
- 23 'T.S.Eliot: "Four Quartets"', a Casebook edited and introduced by Bernard Bergonzi (London, 1969), p. 13.
- 24 Reprinted in F.R.Leavis, 'Letters in Criticism', edited and introduced by John Tasker (London 1974), pp. 31–3.
- 25 See Ronald Schuchard, 'Our Mad Poetics to Confute': The Personal Voice in T.S.Eliot's Early Poetry and Criticism, 'Orbis Litterarum' (1976), xxxi, 208–31. For further work by Schuchard, see the select bibliography.
- 26 Veronica Forrest-Thomson's 'Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth Century Poetry' has been published by Manchester University Press (1979). Her posthumous collection of poems, 'On the Periphery' (Cambridge, 1976), draws on Eliot's poetry with great brilliance and originality. She died in 1975.

## Note on the Text

Apart from the silent correction of spelling errors and other minutiae which it seemed pointless to reproduce, the texts are printed verbatim. Deletions within the documents are marked by the use of ellipsis and square brackets. Numbered notes are those added by the editor; notes keyed in by letters of the alphabet are those of the original text.

Poetic texts cited in reviews have been corrected where necessary as follows: citations from 'The Waste Land' have been checked against the 1922 edition, given by Mrs Eliot; citations from 'Four Quartets' have been checked against the first English edition (1944) as given by Helen Gardner; all other citations have been checked against CPP. For the sake of convenience, however, all references for deleted material, whether poetic or dramatic, have been made to CPP.

# 'Prufrock and Other Observations'

London, June 1917

1.  
ARTHUR WAUGH, THE NEW POETRY,  
'QUARTERLY REVIEW'  
October 1916, 226

Waugh (1866–1943), English critic, publisher and editor, was the author of 'Reticence in Literature' (1915) and of 'Tradition and Change: Studies in Contemporary Literature' (1919). He was the father of the novelists Alec and Evelyn Waugh. This is an extract from a longer piece and is concerned with the 'Catholic Anthology 1914–1915', edited by Pound and published by Elkin Mathews in 1915. The anthology contained 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', reprinted from 'Poetry' (June 1915), and other poems by Eliot. Pound's vigorous defence of Eliot against Waugh can be found in No. 2.

Cleverness is, indeed, the pitfall of the New Poetry. There is no question about the ingenuity with which its varying moods are exploited, its elaborate symbolism evolved, and its sudden, disconcerting effects exploded upon the imagination. Swift, brilliant images break into the field of vision, scatter like rockets, and leave a trail of flying fire behind. But the general impression is momentary; there are moods and emotions, but no steady current of ideas behind them. Further, in their determination to surprise and even to puzzle at all costs, these young poets are continually forgetting that the first essence of poetry is beauty; and that, however much you may have observed the world around you, it is impossible to translate your observation into poetry, without the intervention of the spirit of beauty, controlling the vision, and reanimating the idea.

The temptations of cleverness may be insistent, but its risks are equally great: how great indeed will, perhaps, be best indicated by the example of the 'Catholic Anthology,' which apparently represents the very newest of all the new poetic movements of the day. This strange little volume bears upon its cover a geometrical device, suggesting that the material within holds the same relation to the art of poetry as the work of the Cubist school holds to the art of painting and design. The product of the volume is mainly American in origin, only one or two of the contributors being of indisputably English birth. But it appears here under the

auspices of a house associated with some of the best poetry of the younger generation, and is prefaced by a short lyric by Mr W.B.Yeats, in which that honoured representative of a very different school of inspiration makes bitter fun of scholars and critics, who

Edit and annotate the lines  
 That young men, tossing on their beds,  
 Rhymed out in love's despair  
 To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

The reader will not have penetrated far beyond this warning notice before he finds himself in the very stronghold of literary rebellion, if not of anarchy. Mr Orrick Johns may be allowed to speak for his colleagues, as well as for himself:

This is the song of youth,  
 This is the cause of myself;  
 I knew my father well and he was a fool,  
 Therefore will I have my own foot in the path before I take a step;  
 I will go only into new lands,  
 And I will walk on no plank-walks.  
 The horses of my family are wind-broken,  
 And the dogs are old,  
 And the guns rust;  
 I will make me a new bow from an ash-tree,  
 And cut up the homestead into arrows.

And Mr Ezra Pound takes up the parable in turn, in the same wooden prose, cut into battens:

Come, my songs, let us express our baser passions. Let us express our envy  
 for the man with a steady job and no worry about the future.

You are very idle, my songs,  
 I fear you will come to a bad end.  
 You stand about the streets. You loiter at the corners and bus-stops,  
 You do next to nothing at all.  
 You do not even express our inner nobility,  
 You will come to a very bad end.  
 And I? I have gone half cracked.

It is not for his audience to contradict the poet, who for once may be allowed to pronounce his own literary epitaph. But this, it is to be noted, is the 'poetry' that was to say nothing that might not be said 'actually in life— under emotion,' the sort of emotion that settles down into the banality of a premature decrepitude:

I grow old.... I grow old...  
 I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.  
 Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
 I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
 I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
 I do not think that they will sing to me.

Here, surely, is the reduction to absurdity of that school of literary license which, beginning with the declaration

I knew my father well and he was a fool,

naturally proceeds to the convenient assumption that everything which seemed wise and true to the father must inevitably be false and foolish to the son. Yet if the fruits of emancipation are to be recognised in the unmetrical, incoherent banalities of these literary 'Cubists,' the state of Poetry is indeed threatened with anarchy which will end in something worse even than 'red ruin and the breaking up of laws.' From such a catastrophe the humour, commonsense, and artistic judgment of the best of the new 'Georgians' will assuredly save their generation; nevertheless, a hint of warning may not be altogether out of place. It was a classic custom in the family hall, when the feast was at its height, to display a drunken slave among the sons of the household, to the end that they, being ashamed at the ignominious folly of his gesticulations, might determine never to be tempted into such a pitiable condition themselves. The custom had its advantages; for the wisdom of the younger generation was found to be fostered more surely by a single example than by a world of homily and precept.

## 2.

# EZRA POUND, DRUNKEN HELOTS AND MR. ELIOT, 'EGOIST'

June 1917, vol. iv, 72–4

Pound (1885–1972), American poet and critic, was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and at Hamilton College in New York State. He met Eliot after the outbreak of war in 1914, and was instrumental in getting Eliot's early poetry into print. Pound also worked on the drafts of 'The Waste Land', profoundly influencing the ultimate shape of the poem. Pound's defence of Eliot was strong-minded and generous, and the two men remained life-long friends.

Genius has I know not what peculiar property, its manifestations are various, but however diverse and dissimilar they may be, they have at least one property in common. It makes no difference in what art, in what mode, whether the most conservative, or the most ribbald-revolutionary, or the most diffident; if in any land, or upon any floating deck over the ocean, or upon some newly contrapted craft in the æther, genius manifests itself, at once some elderly gentleman has a flux of bile from his liver; at once from the throne or the easy Cowperian sofa, or from the gutter, or from the oeconomical press room there bursts a torrent of elderly words, splenetic, irrelevant, they form themselves instinctively into large phrases denouncing the inordinate product.

This peculiar kind of *rabbia* might almost be taken as the test of a work of art, mere talent seems incapable of exciting it. 'You can't fool me, sir, you're a scoundrel,' bawls the testy old gentleman.

Fortunately the days when 'that very fiery particle' could be crushed out by the 'Quarterly' are over, but it interests me, as an archaeologist, to note that the firm which no longer produces Byron, but rather memoirs, letters of the late Queen, etc., is still running a review, and that this review is still where it was in 1812, or whatever the year was; and that, not having an uneducated Keats to condemn, a certain Mr. Waugh is scolding about Mr. Eliot.

All I can find out, by asking questions concerning Mr. Waugh, is that he is 'a very old chap,' 'a reviewer.' From internal evidence we deduce that he is, like the



rest of his generation of English gens-de-lettres, ignorant of Laforgue; of De R gnier's 'Odelettes', of his French contemporaries generally, of De Gourmont's 'Litanies,' of Tristan Corbi re, Laurent Tailhade. This is by no means surprising. We are used to it from his 'b'ilin'.

However, he outdoes himself, he calls Mr. Eliot a 'drunken helot.' So called they Anacreon in the days of his predecessors, but from the context in the 'Quarterly' article I judge that Mr. Waugh does not intend the phrase as a compliment, he is trying to be abusive, and moreover, he in his limited way has succeeded.

Let us sample the works of the last 'Drunken Helot.' I shall call my next anthology 'Drunken Helots' if I can find a dozen poems written half so well as the following:

[Quotes 'Conversation Galante', CPP, p. 33.]

Our helot has a marvellous neatness. There is a comparable finesse in Laforgue's 'Votre  me est affaire d'oculiste,' but hardly in English verse.

Let us reconsider this drunkenness:

[Quotes 'La Figlia Che Piange', CPP, p. 34.]

And since when have helots taken to reading Dante and Marlowe? Since when have helots made a new music, a new refinement, a new method of turning old phrases into new by their aptness? However the 'Quarterly,' the century old, the venerable, the praeclarus, the voice of Gehova and Co., Sinai and 51A Albemarle Street, London, W. 1, has pronounced this author a helot. They are all for an aristocracy made up of, possibly, Tennyson, Southey and Wordsworth, the flunkey, the dull and the duller. Let us sup with the helots. Or perhaps the good Waugh is a wag, perhaps he hears with the haspirate and wishes to pun on Mr. Heliot's name: a bright bit of syzygy.

I confess his type of mind puzzles me, there is no telling what he is up to.

I do not wish to misjudge him, this theory may be the correct one. You never can tell when old gentlemen grow facetious. He does not mention Mr. Eliot's name; he merely takes his lines and abuses them. The artful dodger, he didn't (*sotto voce* 'he didn't want "people" to know that Mr. Eliot was a poet').

The poem he chooses for malediction is the title poem, 'Prufrock.' It is too long to quote entire.

[Quotes 'Prufrock', CPP, pp. 14-15, 'For I have known them' to 'leaning out of windows'.]

Let us leave the silly old Waugh. Mr. Eliot has made an advance on Browning. He has also made his dramatis personae contemporary and convincing. He has been an individual in his poems. I have read the contents of this book over and over, and with continued joy in the freshness, the humanity, the deep quiet culture. 'I have tried to write of a few things that really have moved me' is so far as I know, the sum of Mr. Eliot's 'poetic theory.' His practice has been a distinctive cadence, a personal modus of arrangement, remote origins in Elizabethan English and in the modern French masters, neither origin being sufficiently apparent to affect the

personal quality. It is writing without pretence. Mr. Eliot at once takes rank with the five or six living poets whose English one can read with enjoyment.

The 'Egoist' has published the best prose writer of my generation. It follows its publication of Joyce by the publication of a 'new' poet who is at least unsurpassed by any of his contemporaries, either of his own age or his elders.

It is perhaps 'unenglish' to praise a poet whom one can read with enjoyment. Carlyle's generation wanted 'improving' literature, Smile's 'Self-Help' and the rest of it. Mr. Waugh dates back to that generation, the virus is in his blood, he can't help it. The exactitude of the younger generation gets on his nerves, and so on and so on. He will 'fall into line in time' like the rest of the bread-and-butter reviewers. Intelligent people will read 'J.Alfred Prufrock'; they will wait with some eagerness for Mr. Eliot's further inspirations. It is 7.30 p.m. I have had nothing alcoholic to-day, nor yet yesterday. I said the same sort of thing about James Joyce's prose over two years ago. I am now basking in the echoes. Only a half-caste rag for the propagation of garden suburbs, and a local gazette in Rochester, N.Y., U.S.A., are left whining in opposition.

(I pay my compliments to Ernest Rhys, that he associates with a certain Sarolea, writer of prefaces to cheap editions and editor of 'Everyman.' They had better look after their office boys. I like Ernest Rhys personally, I am sorry to think of him in such slums, but it is time that he apologized for the antics of that paper with which he is, at least in the minds of some, still associated. His alternative is to write a disclaimer. Mr. Dent, the publisher, would also have known better had the passage been submitted to his judgment.)

However, let us leave these bickerings, this stench of the printing-press, weekly and quarterly, let us return to the gardens of the Muses,

Till human voices wake us and we drown,

as Eliot has written in conclusion to the poem which the 'Quarterly' calls the *reductio ad absurdum*:

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.  
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

The poetic mind leaps the gulf from the exterior world, the trivialities of Mr. Prufrock, diffident, ridiculous, in the drawing-room, Mr. Apollinax's laughter 'submarine and profound' transports him from the desiccated new-statesmanly atmosphere of Professor Canning-Cheetah's. Mr. Eliot's melody rushes out like the thought of Fragilion 'among the birch-trees.' Mr. Waugh is my bitten macaroon at this festival.

3.  
UNSIGNED REVIEW, 'TIMES LITERARY  
SUPPLEMENT'

21 June 1917, no. 805, 299

Mr. Eliot's notion of poetry—he calls the 'observations' poems—seems to be a purely analytical treatment, verging sometimes on the catalogue, of personal relations and environments, uninspired by any glimpse beyond them and untouched by any genuine rush of feeling. As, even on this basis, he remains frequently inarticulate, his 'poems' will hardly be read by many with enjoyment. For the catalogue manner we may commend 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night':

[Quotes CPP, p. 244, 'Half-past one' to 'a crooked pin'.]

This recalls other twisted things to the mind, and later the street lamp said:

[Quotes CPP, p. 25, 'Remark the cat' to 'which I held him'.]

Among other reminiscences which pass through the rhapsodist's mind and which he thinks the public should know about, are Must in crevices, smells of chestnuts in the streets, and female smells in shuttered rooms, and cigarettes in corridors, and cocktail smells in bars.'

The fact that these things occurred to the mind of Mr. Eliot is surely of the very smallest importance to any one—even to himself. They certainly have no relation to 'poetry,' and we only give an example because some of the pieces, he states, have appeared in a periodical which claims that word as its title.

4.  
FROM AN UNSIGNED REVIEW,  
‘LITERARY WORLD’  
5 July 1917, vol. lxxxiii, 107

Mr. Eliot is one of those clever young men who find it amusing to pull the leg of a sober reviewer. We can imagine his saying to his friends: ‘See me have a lark out of the old fogies who don’t know a poem from a pea-shooter. I’ll just put down the first thing that comes into my head, and call it “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Of course it will be idiotic; but the fogies are sure to praise it, because when they don’t understand a thing and yet cannot hold their tongues they find safety in praise.’ We once knew a clever musician who found a boisterous delight in playing that pathetic melody ‘Only a Jew’ in two keys at once. At first the effect was amusing in its complete idiocy, but we cannot imagine that our friend would have been so foolish as to print the score. Among a few friends the man of genius is privileged to make a fool of himself. He is usually careful not to do so outside an intimate circle. Mr. Eliot has not the wisdom of youth. If the ‘Love Song’ is neither witty nor amusing, the other poems are interesting experiments in the bizarre and violent. The subjects of the poems, the imagery, the rhythms have the wilful outlandishness of the young revolutionary idea. We do not wish to appear patronising, but we are certain that Mr. Eliot could do finer work on traditional lines. With him it seems to be a case of missing the effect by too much cleverness. All beauty has in it an element of strangeness, but here the strangeness over-balances the beauty.

5.  
UNSIGNED REVIEW, 'NEW STATESMAN'  
18 August 1917, vol. ix, 477

Mr. Eliot may possibly give us the quintessence of twenty-first century poetry. Certainly much of what he writes is unrecognisable as poetry at present, but it is all decidedly amusing, and it is only fair to say that he does not call these pieces poems. He calls them 'observations,' and the description seems exact; for he has a keen eye as well as a sharp pen, and draws wittily whatever his capricious glance descends on. We do not pretend to follow the drift of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' and therefore, instead of quoting from it, we present our readers with the following piece:

[Quotes 'The Boston Evening Transcript', CPP, p. 28.]

This is Mr. Eliot's highest flight, and we shall treasure it.

6.

EZRA POUND, T.S.ELIOT, 'POETRY'

August 1917, vol. x, 264–71

This review was reprinted in 'Literary Essays of Ezra Pound', edited with an introduction by Eliot, and first published by Faber & Faber, London, 1954. It also appeared in 'Instigations', New York, 1920.

Padraic Colum's opinion of Pound's view of Eliot is given in No. 26.

Il n'y a de livres que ceux où un écrivain s'est raconté lui-même en racontant les mœurs de ses contemporains—theurs rêves, leurs vanités, leurs amours, et leurs folies.—Remy de Gourmont (1)

De Gourmont uses this sentence in writing of the incontestable superiority of 'Madame Bovary', 'L'Éducation Sentimentale' and 'Bouvard et Pécuchet' to 'Salammbô' and 'La Tentation de St. Antoine'. A casual thought convinces one that it is true for all prose. Is it true also for poetry? One may give latitude to the interpretation of rêves; the gross public would have the poet write little else, but De Gourmont keeps a proportion. The vision should have its place in due setting if we are to believe its reality.

The few poems which Mr. Eliot has given us maintain this proportion, as they maintain other proportions of art. After much contemporary work that is merely factitious, much that is good in intention but impotently unfinished and incomplete, much whose flaws are due to sheer ignorance which a year's study or thought might have remedied, it is a comfort to come upon complete art, naive despite its intellectual subtlety, lacking all pretence.

It is quite safe to compare Mr. Eliot's work with anything written in French, English or American since the death of Jules Laforgue. The reader will find nothing better, and he will be extremely fortunate if he finds much half as good.

The necessity, or at least the advisability of comparing English or American work with French work is not readily granted by the usual English or American writer. If you suggest it, the Englishman answers that he has not thought about it—he does not see why he should bother himself about what goes on south of the

channel; the American replies by stating that you are 'no longer American', and I have learned by long experience that this is the bitterest epithet in his vocabulary. The net result is that it is extremely difficult to read one's contemporaries. After a time one tires of 'promise'.

I should like the reader to note how complete is Mr. Eliot's depiction of our contemporary condition. He has not confined himself to genre nor to society portraiture. His

lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows  
are as real as his ladies who  
come and go  
Talking of Michaelangelo.

His 'one night cheap hotels' are as much 'there' as are his

four wax candles in the darkened room,  
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,  
An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb.

And, above all, there is no rhetoric, although there is Elizabethan reading in the background. Were I a French critic, skilled in their elaborate art of writing books about books, I should probably go to some length discussing Mr. Eliot's two sorts of metaphor: his wholly unrealizable, always apt, half ironic suggestion, and his precise realizable picture. It would be possible to point out his method of conveying a whole situation and half a character by three words of a quoted phrase; his constant aliveness, his mingling of very subtle observation with the unexpectedness of a backhanded cliché. It is, however, extremely dangerous to point out such devices. The method is Mr. Eliot's own, but as soon as one has reduced even a fragment of it to formula, someone else, not Mr. Eliot, someone else wholly lacking in his aptitudes, will at once try to make poetry by mimicking his external procedure. And this indefinite 'someone' will, needless to say, make a botch of it.

For what the statement is worth, Mr. Eliot's work interests me more than that of any other poet now writing in English. The most interesting poems in Victorian English are Browning's 'Men and Women', or, if that statement is too absolute, let me contend that the form of these poems is the most vital form of that period of English, and that the poems written in that form are the least like each other in content. Antiquity gave us Ovid's 'Heroides' and Theocritus' woman using magic. The form of Browning's 'Men and Women' is more alive than the epistolary form of the 'Heroides'. Browning included a certain amount of ratiocination and of purely intellectual comment, and in just that proportion he lost intensity. Since Browning there have been very few good poems of this sort. Mr. Eliot has made two notable additions to the list. And he has placed his people in contemporary settings, which is much more difficult than to render them with medieval romantic

trappings. If it is permitted to make comparison with a different art, let me say that he has used contemporary detail very much as Velasquez used contemporary detail in 'Las Meninas'; the cold gray-green tones of the Spanish painter have, it seems to me, an emotional value not unlike the emotional value of Mr. Eliot's rhythms, and of his vocabulary.

James Joyce has written the best novel of my decade, and perhaps the best criticism of it has come from a Belgian who said, 'All this is as true of my country as of Ireland'. Eliot has a like ubiquity of application. Art does not avoid universals, it strikes at them all the harder in that it strikes through particulars. Eliot's work rests apart from that of the many new writers who have used the present freedoms to no advantage, who have gained no new precisions of language, and no variety in their cadence. His men in shirt-sleeves, and his society ladies, are not a local manifestation; they are the stuff of our modern world, and true of more countries than one. I would praise the work for its fine tone, its humanity, and its realism; for all good art is realism of one sort or another.

It is complained that Eliot is lacking in emotion. 'La Figlia Che Piange' is sufficient confutation to that rubbish.

If the reader wishes mastery of 'regular form', the 'Conversation Galante' is sufficient to show that symmetrical form is within Mr. Eliot's grasp. You will hardly find such neatness save in France; such modern neatness, save in Laforgue.

De Gourmont's phrase to the contrary notwithstanding, the supreme test of a book is that we should feel some unusual intelligence working behind the words. By this test various other new books, that I have, or might have, beside me, go to pieces. The barrels of sham poetry that every decade and school and fashion produce, go to pieces. It is sometimes extremely difficult to find any other particular reason for their being so unsatisfactory. I have expressly written here not 'intellect' but 'intelligence.' There is no intelligence without emotion. The emotion may be anterior or concurrent. There may be emotion without much intelligence, but that does not concern us.

#### Versification:

A conviction as to the rightness or wrongness of *vers libre* is no guarantee of a poet. I doubt if there is much use trying to classify the various kinds of *vers libre*, but there is an anarchy which may be vastly over-done; and there is a monotony of bad usage as tiresome as any typical eighteenth or nineteenth century flatness.

In a recent article Mr. Eliot contended, or seemed to contend, that good *vers libre* was little more than a skilful evasion of the better known English metres. His article was defective in that he omitted all consideration of metres depending on quantity, alliteration, etc.; in fact he wrote as if metres were measured by accent. This may have been tactful on his part, it may have brought his article nearer to the comprehension of his readers (that is, those of the 'New Statesman', in which the article appeared, people who are chiefly concerned with sociology of the



'button' and 'unit' variety). But he came nearer the fact when he wrote elsewhere: 'No *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job.'

Alexandrine and other grammarians have made cubby-holes for various groupings of syllables; they have put names upon them, and have given various labels to 'metres' consisting of combinations of these different groups. Thus it would be hard to escape contact with some group or other; only an encyclopedist could ever be half sure he had done so. The know categories would allow a fair liberty to the most conscientious traditionalist. The most fanatical *vers-librist* will escape them with difficulty. However, I do not think there is any crying need for verse with absolutely no rhythmical basis.

On the other hand, I do not believe that Chopin wrote to a metronome. There is undoubtedly a sense of music that takes count of the 'shape' of the rhythm in a melody rather than of bar divisions, which came rather late in the history of written music and were certainly not the first or most important thing that musicians tried to record. The creation of such shapes is part of thematic invention. Some musicians have the faculty of invention, rhythmic, melodic. Likewise some poets.

Treatises full of musical notes and of long and short marks have never been convincingly useful. Find a man with thematic invention and all he can say is that he gets what the Celts call a 'chune' in his head, and that the words 'go into it,' or when they don't 'go into it' they 'stick out and worry him.'

You can not force a person to play a musical masterpiece correctly, even by having the notes correctly printed on the paper before him; neither can you force a person to feel the movement of poetry, be the metre 'regular' or 'irregular.' I have heard Mr. Yeats trying to read Burns, struggling in vain to fit the 'Birks o' Aberfeldy' and 'Bonnie Alexander' into the mournful keen of the 'Wind among the Reeds'. Even in regular metres there are incompatible systems of music.

I have heard the best orchestral conductor in England read poems in free verse, poems in which the rhythm was so faint as to be almost imperceptible. He read them with the author's cadence, with flawless correctness. A distinguished statesman read from the same book, with the intonations of a legal document, paying no attention to the movement inherent in the words before him. I have heard a celebrated Dante scholar and medieval enthusiast read the sonnets of the 'Vita Nuova' as if they were not only prose, but the ignominious prose of a man devoid of emotions: an utter castration.

The leader of orchestra said to me, 'There is more for a musician in a few lines with something rough or uneven, such as Byron's

There be none of Beauty's daughters  
With a magic like thee;

than in whole pages of regular poetry.'

Unless a man can put some thematic invention into *vers libre*, he would perhaps do well to stick to 'regular' metres, which have certain chances of being musical

from their form, and certain other chances of being musical through his failure in fitting the form. In *vers libre* his sole musical chance lies in invention.

Mr. Eliot is one of the very few who have brought in a personal rhythm, an identifiable quality of sound as well as of style. And at any rate, his book is the best thing in poetry since... (for the sake of peace I will leave that date to the imagination). I have read most of the poems many times; I last read the whole book at breakfast time and from flimsy and grimy proof-sheets: I believe these are 'test conditions.' Confound it, the fellow can write—we may as well sit up and take notice.

#### Note

- 1 The real books are those where a writer talks of himself in talking about the customs of his contemporaries—their dreams, their vanities, their loves, and their follies.

7.  
CONRAD AIKEN, DIVERS REALISTS,  
'DIAL'

8 November 1917, vol. lxiii, 454–5

Aiken (1889–1973), a contemporary of Eliot's at Harvard, was an American poet, novelist and critic. His reminiscences of Eliot's earlier years are to be found in an essay, *King Bolo and Others*, in 'T.S.Eliot: A Symposium', edited by R.March and Tambimuttu (London, 1947), pp. 20–3, and in 'Ushant, an Essay' (New York, 1952). 'Selected Letters of Conrad Aiken', edited by Joseph Killorin (New Haven, Conn. 1978), contains letters to Eliot and discusses him and his work with other correspondents.

This is an extract from a longer review, dealing with current poetry, which was reprinted complete in 'Scepticisms' (New York, 1919), pp. 203–5.

Mr. T.S.Eliot, whose book 'Prufrock and Other Observations' is really hardly more than a pamphlet, is also a realist, but of a different sort. Like Mr. Gibson, Mr. Eliot is a psychologist; but his intuitions are keener; his technique subtler. For the two semi-narrative psychological portraits which form the greater and better part of his book, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and the 'Portrait of a Lady,' one can have little but praise. This is psychological realism, but in a highly subjective or introspective vein; whereas Mr. Gibson, for example, gives us, in the third person, the reactions of an individual to a situation which is largely external (an accident, let us say), Mr. Eliot gives us, in the first person, the reactions of an individual to a situation for which to a large extent his own character is responsible. Such work is more purely autobiographic than the other—the field is narrowed, and the terms are idiosyncratic (sometimes almost blindly so). The dangers of such work are obvious: one must be certain that one's mental character and idiom are sufficiently close to the norm to be comprehensible or significant. In this respect, Mr. Eliot is near the border-line. His temperament is peculiar, it is sometimes, as remarked heretofore, almost bafflingly peculiar, but on the whole it is the average hyper-aesthetic one with a good deal of introspective curiosity;

it will puzzle many, it will delight a few. Mr. Eliot writes pungently and sharply, with an eye for unexpected and vivid details, and, particularly in the two longer poems and in the 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night,' he shows himself to be an exceptionally acute technician. Such free rhyme as this, with irregular line lengths, is difficult to write well, and Mr. Eliot does it well enough to make one wonder whether such a form is not what the adorers of free verse will eventually have to come to. In the rest of Mr. Eliot's volume one finds the piquant and the trivial in about equal proportions.

8.

EZRA POUND, A LETTER FROM REMY  
DE GOURMONT, 'LITTLE REVIEW

December 1917, vol. ix, 6–7

This is an extract from a longer article, in which Pound compares the attitude of de Gourmont towards art and literature with that of the English intellectuals of the day.

G.W.Prothero (1848–1922), a distinguished historian, was editor of the 'Quarterly Review'.

If only my great correspondent could have seen letters I received about this time from English alleged intellectuals!!!!!! The incredible stupidity, the ingrained refusal of thought!!!!!! Of which more anon, if I can bring myself to it. Or let it pass? Let us say simply that De Gourmont's words form an interesting contrast with the methods employed by the British literary episcopacy to keep one from writing what one thinks, or to punish one (financially) for having done so. Perhaps as a warning to young writers who can not afford the loss, one would be justified in printing the following:

50a. Albemarle Street, London W.  
22 October, '14

Dear Mr. Pound:

Many thanks for your letter of the other day. I am afraid I must say frankly that I do not think I can open the columns of the Q.R.— at any rate at present—to anyone associated publicly with such a publication as 'Blast'. It stamps a man too disadvantageously.

Yours truly,  
G.W.Prothero.

Of course, having accepted your paper on the *Noh*, I could not refrain from publishing it. But other things would be in a different category.

I need scarcely say that the *Quarterly Review* is one of the most profitable periodicals in England, and one of one's best 'connections', or sources of income. It has, of course, a tradition.

It is not that Mr. Keats (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody)—

wrote their Gifford of Keats' *'Endymion'*. My only comment is that the *'Quarterly'* has done it again. Their Mr. A. Waugh is a lineal descendent of Gifford, by way of mentality. A century has not taught them manners. In the eighteen forties they were still defending the review of Keats. And more recently Waugh has lifted up his senile slobber against Mr. Eliot. It is indeed time that the functions of both English and American literature were taken over by younger and better men.

As for their laying the birch on my pocket. I compute that my support of Lewis and Brzeska has cost me at the lowest estimate about £20 per year, from one source alone since that regrettable occurrence, since I dared to discern a great sculptor and a great painter in the midst of England's artistic desolation. (*'European and Asiatic papers please copy'*.)

Young men, desirous of finding before all things smooth berths and elderly consolations, are cautioned to behave more circumspectly.

9.

MAY SINCLAIR, 'PRUFROCK AND  
OTHER OBSERVATIONS': A CRITICISM,  
'LITTLE REVIEW'

December 1917, vol. iv, 8–14.

Sinclair (1870–1946) was an English novelist. She was sympathetic to the new poetry, as is shown by this review and by her short piece on Imagism in the 'Egoist' (1 June 1915).

So far I have seen two and only two reviews of Mr. Eliot's poems: one by Ezra Pound in the 'Egoist', one by an anonymous writer in the 'New Statesman'. I learn from Mr. Pound's review that there is a third, by Mr. Arthur Waugh, in the 'Quarterly'.

To Mr. Ezra Pound Mr. Eliot is a poet with genius as incontestable as the genius of Browning. To the anonymous one he is an insignificant phenomenon that may be appropriately disposed of among the Shorter Notices. To Mr. Waugh, quoted by Mr. Pound, he is a 'drunken Helot'. I do not know what Mr. Pound would say to the anonymous one, but I can imagine. Anyhow, to him the 'Quarterly' reviewer is 'the silly old Waugh'. And that is enough for Mr. Pound.

It ought to be enough for me. Of course I know that genius does inevitably provoke these outbursts of silliness. I know that Mr. Waugh is simply keeping up the good old manly traditions of the 'Quarterly', 'so savage and tartarly,' with its war-cry: 'Ere's a stranger, let's 'eave 'arf a brick at 'im!' And though the behaviour of the 'New Statesman' puzzles me, since it has an editor who sometimes knows better, and really ought to have known better this time, still the 'New Statesman' also can plead precedent. But when Mr. Waugh calls Mr. Eliot 'a drunken Helot,' it is clear that he thinks he is on the track of a tendency and is making a public example of Mr. Eliot. And when the anonymous one with every appearance of deliberation picks out his 'Boston Evening Transcript', the one insignificant, the one negligible and trivial thing in a very serious volume, and assures us that it represents Mr. Eliot at his finest and his best, it is equally clear that we have to do with something more than mere journalistic misadventure. And I think it is something more than Mr. Eliot's genius that has terrified the 'Quarterly' into

exposing him in the full glare of publicity and the 'New Statesman' into shoving him and his masterpieces away out of the public sight.

For 'The Love-Song of J.Alfred Prufrock', and the 'Portrait of a Lady' are masterpieces in the same sense and in the same degree as Browning's 'Romances' and 'Men and Women'; the 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' are masterpieces in a profounder sense and a greater degree than Henley's 'London Voluntaries'; 'La Figlia Che Piange' is a masterpiece in its own sense and in its own degree. It is a unique masterpiece.

But Mr. Eliot is dangerous. Mr. Eliot is associated with an unpopular movement and with unpopular people. His 'Preludes' and his 'Rhapsody' appeared in 'Blast.' They stood out from the experimental violences of 'Blast' with an air of tranquil and triumphant achievement; but, no matter; it was in 'Blast' that they appeared. That circumstance alone was disturbing to the comfortable respectability of Mr. Waugh and the 'New Statesman'.

And apart from this purely extraneous happening, Mr. Eliot's genius is in itself disturbing. It is elusive; it is difficult; it demands a distinct effort of attention. Comfortable and respectable people could see, in the first moment after dinner, what Mr. Henley and Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson and Mr. Rudyard Kipling would be at; for the genius of these three travelled, comfortably and fairly respectably, along the great high roads. They could even, with a little boosting, follow Francis Thompson's flight in mid-air, partly because it was signalled to them by the sound and shining of his wings, partly because Thompson had hitched himself securely to some well-known starry team. He was in the poetic tradition all right. People knew where they were with him, just as they know now where they are with Mr. Davies and his fields and flowers and birds.

But Mr. Eliot is not in any tradition at all, not even in Browning's and Henley's tradition. His resemblances to Browning and Henley are superficial. His difference is twofold; a difference of method and technique; a difference of sight and aim. He does not see anything between him and reality, and he makes straight for the reality he sees; he cuts all his corners and his curves; and this directness of method is startling and upsetting to comfortable, respectable people accustomed to going superfluously in and out of corners and carefully round curves. Unless you are prepared to follow with the same nimbleness and straightness you will never arrive with Mr. Eliot at his meaning. Therefore the only comfortable thing is to sit down and pretend, either that Mr. Eliot is a 'Helot' too drunk to have any meaning, or that his 'Boston Evening Transcript' which you do understand is greater than his 'Love Song of Prufrock' which you do not understand. In both instances you have successfully obscured the issue.

Again, the comfortable and respectable mind loves conventional beauty, and some of the realities that Mr. Eliot sees are not beautiful. He insists on your seeing very vividly, as he sees them, the streets of his 'Preludes' and and 'Rhapsody'. He insists on your smelling them.

[Quotes 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', CPP, p. 24, 'Regard that woman' to 'rancid butter'.]



He is

aware of the damp souls of housemaids  
Sprouting despondently at area gates.

And these things are ugly. The comfortable mind turns away from them in disgust. It identifies Mr. Eliot with a modern tendency; it labels him securely 'Stark Realist', so that lovers of 'true poetry' may beware.

It is nothing to the comfortable mind that Mr. Eliot is

...moved by fancies that are curled  
Around these images, and cling:  
The motion of some infinitely gentle  
Infinitely suffering thing.

It is nothing to it that the emotion he disengages from his ugliest image is unbearably poignant. His poignancy is as unpleasant as his ugliness, disturbing to comfort.

We are to observe that Mr. Eliot's 'Observations' are ugly and unpleasant and obscure.

Now there is no earthly reason why Mr. Eliot should not be ugly and unpleasant if he pleases, no reason why he should not do in words what Hogarth did in painting, provided he does it well enough. Only, the comfortable mind that prefers So and So and So and So to Mr. Eliot ought to prefer Hogarth's 'Paul Before Felix' to his 'Harlot's Progress'. Obscurity, if he were really obscure, would be another matter. But there was a time when the transparent Tennyson was judged obscure; when people wondered what under heaven the young man was after; they couldn't tell for the life of them whether it was his 'dreary gleams' or his 'curlews' that were flying over Locksley Hall. Obscurity may come from defective syntax, from a bad style, from confusion of ideas, from involved thinking, from irrelevant association, from sheer piling on of ornament. Mr. Eliot is not obscure in any of these senses.

There is also an obscurity of remote or unusual objects, or of familiar objects moving very rapidly. And Mr. Eliot's trick of cutting his corners and his curves makes him seem obscure where he is clear as daylight. His thoughts move very rapidly and by astounding cuts. They move not by logical stages and majestic roundings of the full literary curve, but as live thoughts move in live brains. Thus 'La Figlia Che Piange':

[Quotes 'La Figlia Che Piange', CPP, p. 34.]

I suppose there are minds so comfortable that they would rather not be disturbed by new beauty and by new magic like this. I do not know how much Mr. Eliot's beauty and magic is due to sheer imagination, how much to dexterity of technique, how much to stern and sacred attention to reality; but I do know that without such technique and such attention the finest imagination is futile, and that if Mr. Eliot

had written nothing but that one poem he would rank as a poet by right of its perfection.

But Mr. Eliot is not a poet of one poem; and if there is anything more astounding and more assured than his performance it is his promise. He knows what he is after. Reality, stripped naked of all rhetoric, of all ornament, of all confusing and obscuring association, is what he is after. His reality may be a modern street or a modern drawing-room; it may be an ordinary human mind suddenly and fatally aware of what is happening to it; Mr. Eliot is careful to present his street and his drawing-room as they are, and Prufrock's thoughts as they are: live thoughts, kicking, running about and jumping, nervily, in a live brain.

Prufrock, stung by a longing for reality, escapes from respectability into the street and the October fog.

[Quotes 'Prufrock', CPP, p. 13, 'The yellow fog' to 'fell asleep'.]

Prufrock has conceived the desperate idea of disturbing the universe. He wonders

[Quotes 'Do I dare' to 'how should I presume?']

Prufrock realises that it is too late. He is middleaged. The horrible drawing-room life he has entered has got him.

[Quotes CPP p. 15, 'And the afternoon' to 'I was afraid'.]

His soul can only assert itself in protests and memories. He would have had more chance in the primeval slime.

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

As he goes downstairs he is aware of his futility, aware that the noticeable thing about him is the 'bald spot in the middle of my hair'. He has an idea; an idea that he can put into action:—

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

He is incapable, he knows that he is incapable of any action more momentous, more disturbing.

And yet—and yet—  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.  
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Observe the method. Instead of writing round and round about Prufrock, explaining that his tragedy is the tragedy of submerged passion, Mr. Eliot simply removes the covering from Prufrock's mind: Prufrock's mind, jumping quickly from actuality to memory and back again, like an animal, hunted, tormented, terribly and poignantly alive. The Love-Song of Prufrock is a song that Balzac might have sung if he had been as great a poet as he was a novelist.

It is nothing to the 'Quarterly' and to the 'New Statesman' that Mr. Eliot should have done this thing. But it is a great deal to the few people who care for poetry and insist that it should concern itself with reality. With ideas, if you like, but ideas that are realities and not abstractions.

10.  
BABETTE DEUTSCH, ANOTHER  
IMPRESSIONIST, 'NEW REPUBLIC'

16 February 1918, vol. xiv, 89

Deutsch (b. 1895) is an American poet and critic. She gave a general appraisal of Eliot in *Heirs of the Symbolists*, 'This Modern Poetry' (New York, 1935), pp. 117–32.

A slim little book, bound in pale yellow wrapping-paper, 'Prufrock' invites inspection, as much by the novelty of its appearance as the queer syllables of its title. The individual note which these suggest is even more emphatically pronounced in the poems between its covers.

The initial one, which gives its name to the volume, is 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' Mr. Prufrock, as he explains in his amorous discursions, is no longer young; his hair has perceptibly thinned, his figure has lost what Apollonian contours it may have possessed. He is self-conscious, introspective, timid. In a-metrical but fluent lines, embroidered with unique metaphor, he draws himself; his desires, his memories, his fears. 'Do I dare,' he asks,

Disturb the universe?  
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.  
For I have known them all already, known them all—  
Known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee-spoons...

In the end, he does not presume.

The method used in this poem is typical of Mr. Eliot's work. Impressions are strung along on a tenuous thread of sense. A familiar situation: the hesitating amours of the middle-aged, the failure of a certain man to establish the expected relation with a certain woman, is given in poetic monologue. The language has the extraordinary quality of common words uncommonly used. Less formal than prose, more nervous than metrical verse, the rhythms are suggestive of program

music of an intimate sort. This effect is emphasized by the use of rhyme. It recurs, often internally, with an echoing charm that is heightened by its irregularity. But Mr. Eliot, like M.Géraldy, of whom he is vaguely reminiscent, is so clever a technician that the rhymes are subordinated to afford an unconsidered pleasure.

In these 'observations' there is a glimpse of many slight but memorable things: of dirty London streets, crowded with laborers, dilettantes, prostitutes; of polite stupidities in country houses; of satiric fencings; of the stale aroma of familiar things. Mostly they are impressions of a weary mind, looking out upon a crowded personal experience with impartial irony. They have the hall-marks of impressionism: remoteness from vulgar ethics and aesthetics, indifference to the strife of nations and classes, an esoteric humor thrown out in peculiar phrases. Something of Eliot's quality may be got from 'The Boston Evening Transcript,' whimsically suggestive of that fragment of Sappho's: 'Evening, thou that bringest all that bright morning scattered; thou bringest the sheep, the goat, the child back to her mother.'

[Quotes 'The Boston Evening Transcript', CPP, p. 28.]

11.  
MARIANNE MOORE, A NOTE ON  
T.S.ELIOT'S BOOK, 'POETRY'  
April 1918, vol. xii, 36-7

Moore (1887-1972) was the author of several collections of poetry, and her 'Selected Poems' appeared in 1935 with an introduction by Eliot. She was editor of the 'Dial' from 1925 to 1929.

It might be advisable for Mr. Eliot to publish a fangless edition of 'Prufrock and Other Observations' for the gentle reader who likes his literature, like breakfast coffee or grapefruit, sweetened. A mere change in the arrangement of the poems would help a little. It might begin with 'La Figlia Che Piange', followed perhaps by the 'Portrait of a Lady'; for the gentle reader, in his eagerness for the customary bit of sweets, can be trusted to overlook the ungallantry, the youthful cruelty, of the substance of the 'Portrait'. It may as well be admitted that this hardened reviewer cursed the poet in his mind for this cruelty while reading the poem; and just when he was ready to find extenuating circumstances—the usual excuses about realism—out came this 'drunken helot' (one can hardly blame the good English reviewer whom Ezra Pound quotes!) with that ending. It is hard to get over this ending with a few moments of thought; it wrenches a piece of life at the roots.

As for the gentle reader, this poem could be followed by the lighter ironies of 'Aunt Nancy', (1) the 'Boston Evening Transcript', etc. One would hardly know what to do with the two London pieces. Whistler in his post-impressionistic English studies—and these poems are not entirely unlike Whistler's studies—had the advantage of his more static medium, of a somewhat more romantic temperament, and of the fact that the objects he painted half-hid their ugliness under shadows and the haze of distance. But Eliot deals with life, with beings and things who live and move almost nakedly before his individual mind's eye—in the darkness, in the early sunlight, and in the fog. Whatever one may feel about sweetness in literature, there is also the word honesty, and this man is a faithful friend of the objects he portrays; altogether unlike the sentimentalist who really stabs them treacherously in the back while pretending affection.

Note

- 1 So in original.

12.  
EDGAR JEPSON, RECENT UNITED  
STATES POETRY, 'ENGLISH REVIEW'  
May 1918, vol. xxvi, 426–8

Jepson (1863–1938) was a well-known novelist, critic and translator.

This is an extract from a longer essay. A reply from William Carlos Williams is the next item.

But the queer and delightful thing is that in the scores of yards of pleasant verse and wamblings and yawpings which have been recently published in the Great Pure Republic I have found a poet, a real poet, who possesses in the highest degree the qualities the new school demands. Western-born of Eastern stock, Mr. T.S.Eliot is United States of the United States; and his poetry is securely as autochthonic as Theocritus. It is new in form, as all genuine poetry is new in form; it is musical with a new music, and that without any straining after newness. The form and music are a natural, integral part of the poet's amazingly fine presentation of his vision of the world.

Could anything be more United States, more of the soul of that modern land, than 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock'? It is the very wailing testament of that soul with its cruel clarity of sophisticated vision, its thin, sophisticated emotions, its sophisticated appreciation of a beauty, and its sophisticated yearning for a beauty it cannot dare to make its own and so, at last, live.

This is in very truth the lover of the real, up-to-date United States:

In the room the women come and go,  
Talking of Michelangelo.  
And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'  
Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—  
Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?



In a minute there is time  
 For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.  
 For I have known them all already, known them all—  
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;  
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
 Beneath the music from a farther room.  
 So how should I presume?

And then the end:

I have heard mermaids singing, each to each.  
 I do not think that they will sing to me.  
 I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
 When the wind blows the water white and black.  
 We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Never has the shrinking of the modern spirit from life been expressed so exquisitely and with such truth.

Consider, again, that lovely poem, 'La Figlia Che Piange':

[Quotes 'La Figlia Che Piange', CPP, p. 34.]

How delicate and beautiful in the emotion! How exquisite and beautiful the music! This is the very fine flower of the finest spirit of the United States. It would be the last absurdity for such a poet to go West and write for that plopp-eyed bungaroo, the Great-Hearted Young Westerner on the make. It seems incredible that this lovely poem should have been published in 'Poetry' in the year in which the school awarded the prize to that lumbering fakement, 'All Life in a Life.'

13.  
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS,  
PROLOGUE, 'LITTLE REVIEW'  
May 1919, vol. vi, 76–8

Williams (1883–1963), American poet, was a contemporary of Ezra Pound at the University of Pennsylvania. They met during the academic year 1902–3 when Williams was a student of dentistry, though subsequently he changed to medicine which he was to practise in Rutherford, New Jersey. Williams had a life-long antipathy towards Eliot's poetry, a feeling intensified by 'The Waste Land', his reaction to which he described in his 'Autobiography' (1951). In 'I Wanted to Write a Poem' (1958) Williams recalled that he read 'Prufrock' during the composition of 'Kora in Hell' (1920). This review was incorporated into the Prologue to that work.

A somewhat petulant English college friend of my brother's once remarked that Britons make the best policemen the world has ever seen. I agree with him. It is silly to go into a puckersnatch because some brass-button-minded nin-compoop in Kensington flies off the handle and speaks openly about our United States prize poems. This Mr. Jepson—'Anyone who has heard Mr. J. read Homer and discourse on Catullus would recognize his fitness as a judge and respecter of poetry'—this is Ezra!—this champion of the right is not half a fool. His epithets and phrases — slipshod, rank bad workmanship of a man who has shirked his job, lumbering fakement, cumbrous artificiality, maundering dribble, rancid as Ben Hur—are in the main well-merited. And besides he comes out with one fairly lipped cornet blast: the only distinctive U.S. contributions to the arts have been ragtime and buck-dancing.

Nothing is good save the new. If a thing have novelty it stands intrinsically beside every other work of artistic excellence. If it have not that, no loveliness or heroic proportion or grand manner will save it. It will not be saved above all by an attenuated intellectuality.

Our prize poems have been mostly junk—though there is a certain candid indecency of form about Lindsay's work that is attractive. But these poems are

especially to be damned not because of superficial bad workmanship but as Mr. J. again correctly adjudges, because they are rehash, repetition—just as Eliot's more exquisite work is rehash, repetition in another way of Verlaine, Baudelaire, Maeterlinck,—conscious or unconscious:—just as there are Pound's early paraphrases from Yeats and his constant later cribbing from the renaissance, Provence and the modern French: men content with the connotations of their masters.

But all U.S. verse is not bad according to Mr. J: there is 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock.'

It is convenient to have fixed standards of comparison: all antiquity! And there is always some everlasting Polonius of Kensington forever to rate highly his eternal Eliot. It is because Eliot is a subtle conformist. It tickles the palate of this archbishop of procurers to a lecherous antiquity to hold up Prufrock as a New World type. Prufrock the nibbler at sophistication, endemic in every capital, the not quite (because he refuses to turn his back) is 'the soul of that modern land' the United States!

Blue undershirts,  
 Upon a line,  
 It is not necessary to say to you  
 Anything about it—

I cannot question Eliot's observation. 'Prufrock' is a masterly portrait of the man just below the summit but the type is universal, the model in this case might be Mr. J.

No. The New World is Montezuma or, since he was stoned to death in a parley, Guatemozin who had the city of Mexico leveled over him before he was taken:

For the rest, there is no man even though he dare who can make beauty his own and 'so at last live,' at least there is no man better situated for that achievement than another. As Prufrock longed for his silly lady so Kensington longs for its Hardanger dairymaid. By a mere twist of the imagination, if Prufrock only knew it, the whole world can be inverted (why else are there wars?) and the mermaids be set warbling to whoever will listen to them. Seesaw and blind-man's-buff converted into a sort of football.

But the summit of United States achievement, according to Mr. J.—who can discourse on Catullus—is that very beautiful poem of Eliot's 'La Figlia Che Piange': just the right amount of everything drained through, etc., etc., etc., etc., the rhythm delicately studied out and—IT CONFORMS! ergo here we have 'the very fine flower of the finest spirit of the United States.'

Examined closely this poem reveals a highly refined distillation. Added to the already 'faithless' formula of yesterday we have a conscious simplicity:

Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand.

The perfection of that line is beyond cavil. Yet, in the last stanza, this paradigm, this very fine flower of U.S. art is warped out of alignment, obscured in meaning even to the point of an absolute unintelligibility by the inevitable straining after a rhyme!—the very cleverness with which this straining is covered being a sinister token in itself.

And I wonder how they should have been together!

So we have no choice but to accept the work of this fumbling conjurer.

Upon the Jepson filet Eliot balances his mushroom. It is the latest touch from the literary cuisine, it adds to the pleasant outlook from the club window. If to do this, if to be a Whistler at best, in the art of poetry, is to reach the height of poetic expression, then Ezra and Eliot have approached it and *tant pis* for the rest of us.

The Adobe Indian hag sings her lullaby:

The beetle is blind  
 The beetle is blind  
 The beetle is blind  
 The beetle is blind, etc., etc.,

and Kandinsky in his 'Über das Geistige in der Kunst' sets down the following axioms for the artist:

Every artist has to express himself  
 Every artist has to express his epoch.  
 Every artist has to express the pure and eternal  
 qualities of the art of all men.

So we have the fish and the bait but the last rule holds three hooks at once—not for the fish however.

I do not overlook De Gourmont's plea for a meeting of the nations but I do believe that when they meet Paris will be more than slightly abashed to find parodies of the middle ages, Dante and Langue D'Oc foisted upon it as the best in United States poetry. Even Eliot who is too fine an artist to allow himself to be exploited by a blockhead grammaticaster turns recently toward 'one definite false note' in his quatrains, which more nearly approach America than ever 'La Figlia Che Piange' did. Ezra Pound is a Boscan who has met his Navagiero.

# 'Poems'

London, May 1919

14.  
UNSIGNED REVIEW, NOT HERE, O  
APOLLO, 'TIMES LITERARY  
SUPPLEMENT'

12 June 1919, no. 908, 322

The other work under review was 'The Critic in Judgment' by John Middleton Murry, published, like Eliot's 'Poems', by the Hogarth Press.

In spite of the interest now taken in poetry, and the diverse and interesting experiments made in writing it, it still suffers from two defects which troubled it in the Victorian age, namely, that it contains either too little of the content of the writer's mind or much that is not the real content of his mind. Either the poets have a great difficulty in saying anything at all or else they say anything too easily. Mr. Murry, in his 'Critic in Judgment,' says so much, and so easily, that we find it hard to discover what he is writing about. His metre, blank verse, sways him with its memories of past masters— Shakespeare, Milton, Browning, Tennyson. They seem almost to dictate to him what he is to say, so that, as we read, we fade out of one poet into another, aware only of changes of manner, the matter itself escaping us. The Critic, whose purpose and character are always vague, begins in the style of Browning and then passes into Tennyson. It is Browning who says:—

Let him put up that scribble on the wall  
To worry old Belshazzar, till he tired  
With all the tiredness of a lesser man...  
And you, eternal Toby, bark outside  
Weary beside a lamp-post, while the shadows  
Torment me for the thousand millionth time  
There on the wall.

It is Tennyson who follows, soon, with this:—

In them do I believe.  
 Nay, you but mock me. How could they believe  
 Who felt no doubt? How can I not believe,  
 Flung up upon the stage by unseen hands  
 To unheard music, speaking lines unknown  
 Into a void of darkness?

Then there are echoes of Swinburne:—

Not thus may mine eyes sleep, not thus mine arms  
 Slacken, nor thus my broken lips receive  
 The kiss of mortal death desirable.

Then beginnings of Miltonic periods:—

Thou art not he  
 Foretold, that should speak comfortable words—  
 Sweetest most bitter thine, and tongued with fire.

Then early Shakespeare or Marlowe:—

My name is Helen and my spirit is love,  
 By fame once Menelaus' bride ravished  
 By bowman Paris across the Aegean sea  
 To be the doom of ships and many men  
 Imbattled on the plains of Ilium.

Then this passage fades again into Milton. As for the lyrics, they too turn from style into style. One begins pure Swinburne:—

Life holds not any higher thing than love  
 Nor shall men find another rose than this  
 And be immortal, not in the heights above  
 Nor in the deeps, save only where love is.

But the next four lines are like an Elizabethan song:—

For him who seeks believing  
 Love hath no weary days,  
 Love hath no thorny ways  
 But joys beyond receiving.

It is a very curious case of writing made almost automatic by unconscious influences; or are they conscious? Does Mr. Murry mean all these imitations? We do not know, and we are still uncertain of the aim of his poem. But we do know that the fading of influence into influence makes it very hard to read. The very fluency lulls the mind to sleep; and at the end we are left only with the impression that the writer has read many poets, and that they will not let him reach what he has to say. It is like those dreams in which one is continually prevented from packing up and catching a train. These ghosts from the past make Mr. Murry speak with alien jaws, distract him from his purpose, whatever it may be. His task is to forget them.

Mr. Eliot's case is the opposite. We may guess that he is fastidiously on his guard against echoes. There shall not be a cadence in his few verses that will remind anyone of anything. His composition is an incessant process of refusing all that offers itself, for fear that it should not be his own. The consequence is that his verse, novel and ingenious, original as it is, is fatally impoverished of subject matter. For he is as fastidious of emotions as of cadences. He seems to have a 'phobia' of sentimentality, like a small schoolboy who would die rather than kiss his sister in public. Still, since he is writing verses he must say something, and his remarkable talent exercises itself in saying always, from line to line and word to word, what no one would expect. Each epithet, even, must be a surprise, each verb must shock the reader with unexpected associations; and the result is this:—

Polyphiloprogenitive

The sapient sutlers of the Lord  
 Drift across the window-panes.  
 In the beginning was the Word.  
 In the beginning was the Word.  
 Superfetation of, τὸ εἶναι  
 And at the mensual turn of time  
 Produced enervate Origen.

Mr. Eliot, like Browning, likes to display out-of-the-way learning, he likes to surprise you by every trick he can think of. He has forgotten his emotions, his values, his sense of beauty, even his common-sense, in that one desire to surprise, to get farther away from the obvious than any writer on record, be he Donne or Browning, or Benlowes even. We say he has forgotten all these things, because there is no doubt of his talents. They are evident in 'The Hippopotamus,' and even in 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales,' where he carries the game of perversity as far at least as anyone has ever carried it. But poetry is a serious art, too serious for this game. Mr. Eliot is fatally handicapping himself with his own inhibitions; he is in danger of becoming silly; and what will he do then? Or else he is in danger of writing nothing at all, but merely thinking of all the poems he has refused to write; a state which would be for a poet, if not hell, at least limbo. He is probably reacting against poetry like that of Mr. Murry. But you cannot live on reactions;



you must forget them and all the errors which past writers have committed; you must be brave enough to risk some positive follies of your own. Otherwise you will fall more and more into negative follies; you will bury your talent in a napkin and become an artist who never does anything but giggle faintly. The final effect of these two little books is to leave us all the more melancholy because of their authors' cleverness. If they were nothing, it would not matter; but they are something, and they are very laboriously writing nothing.

15.  
FROM AN UNSIGNED REVIEW, IS THIS  
POETRY?, 'ATHENAEUM'  
20 June 1919, 491

'The Critic in Judgment' was again the other work under review.

The 'ordinary man,' the ghostly master or terror of most writers, would certainly ask the same question about Mr. Eliot, and answer it with a decided negative.

Polyphiloprogenitive  
The sapient sutlers of the Lord  
Drift across the window-panes.  
In the beginning was the Word.

Thus begins one of Mr. Eliot's poems, provocative of the question and of the jeering laugh which is the easy reaction to anything strange, whether it be a 'damned foreigner' or a Post-Impressionist picture. Mr. Eliot is certainly damned by his newness and strangeness; but those two qualities, which in most art are completely unimportant, because ephemeral, in him claim the attention of even the serious critic. For they are part of the fabric of his poetry. Mr. Eliot is always quite consciously 'trying for' something, and something which has grown out of and developed beyond all the poems of all the dead poets. Poetry to him seems to be not so much an art as a science, a vast and noble and amusing body of communal feeling upon which the contemporary poet must take a firm stand and then launch himself into the unknown in search of new discoveries. That is the attitude not of the conventional poet, but of the scientist who with the help of working hypotheses hopes to add something, a theory perhaps or a new microbe, to the corpus of human knowledge. If we accept, provisionally, Mr. Eliot's attitude, we must admit that he comes well equipped to his task. The poetry of the dead is in his bones and at the tips of his fingers: he has the rare gift of being able to weave, delicately and delightfully, an echo or even a line of the past into the pattern of his own poem. And at the same time he is always trying for something new, something which has evolved—one drops instinctively into the scientific terminology—out of the

echo or the line, out of the last poem of the last dead poet, something subtly intellectual and spiritual, produced by the careful juxtaposition of words and the even more careful juxtaposition of ideas. The cautious critic, warned by the lamentable record of his tribe, might avoid answering the question: 'And is this poetry?' by asking to see a little more of Mr. Eliot than is shown in these seven short poems and even 'Prufrock.' But, to tell the truth, seven poems reveal a great deal of any poet. There is poetry in Mr. Eliot, as, for instance, in the stanzas:

The host with someone indistinct  
 Converses at the door apart,  
 The nightingales are singing near  
 The Convent of the Sacred Heart,  
 And sang within the bloody wood  
 When Agamemnon cried aloud,  
 And let their liquid siftings fall  
 To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

Yet the poetry often seems to come in precisely at the moment when the scientist and the science, the method and the newness, go out. A poem like 'The Hippopotamus,' for all its charm and cleverness and artistry, is perilously near the pit of the *jeu d'esprit*. And so scientific and scholarly a writer as Mr. Eliot might with advantage consider whether his method was not the method of that 'terrible warning,' P.Papinius Statius. We hope that Mr. Eliot will quickly give us more and remove our melancholy suspicion that is the product of a Silver Age.

# 'Ara Vos Prec'

London, February 1920

16.  
JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY, THE  
ETERNAL FOOTMAN, 'ATHENAEUM'  
20 February 1920, 239

Murry (1889–1957), critic, biographer, novelist and editor, worked for the 'Westminster Gazette', 'Nation' and the 'Times Literary Supplement'. He married Katherine Mansfield in 1913. During 'the brief and brilliant life' (Eliot's words) of the 'Athenaeum' under his editorship he published important early essays by Eliot, who acknowledged his debt to Murry in the Preface to the 1928 edition of 'The Sacred Wood'. Eliot also contributed a foreword to 'Katherine Mansfield and Other Essays' (1959), while Murry wrote on Eliot's drama in 'Unprofessional Essays', published in 1956.

Here is Mr. T.S.Eliot, and here once again is the question: What are we to make of him? It is not a question that even the most assiduous (assiduity is demanded) and interested (interest is inevitable) of his readers would care to answer with any accent of finality. For Mr. Eliot, who is a connoisseur in discrepancy between intention and achievement, is likely to be himself an example of it. Nothing so sharpens one's sensitiveness to false notes in life at large as experience of them in oneself; so that there is more than a remote chance that even in regard to 'Ara Vos Prec' and while we hold it in our hands Mr. Eliot may whisper deprecatingly:

That is not it at all,  
That is not what I meant, at all.

Yes, it seems to us sometimes that the inmost vital core of Mr. Eliot's poetry, the paradoxical impulse of his expression, is his determination to be free to whisper that refrain in our ear; it seems that he is like the chameleon who changes colour infinitely, and every change is protective. True, the range of variation is not truly infinite; there are colours which the chameleon cannot compass. But the chameleon, if he were an artist, would make it an essential of his art not to be lured against a background which he could not imitate.

The question for the critic is to determine whether Mr. Eliot—a conscious artist if ever there was one—has at any moment allowed himself to stray beyond his functional limit. That limit is set in the case of Mr. Eliot at the point where discrepancy ceases between intention and achievement, between soul and body, man and the Universe. At a crucial moment in his beautiful—we insist, precisely beautiful—‘Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock,’

The Eternal Footman snickers.

Since that day Mr. Eliot has fallen deeper and deeper into the clutches of the Footman, who has come to preside over his goings out and his comings in. The Footman has grown into a monstrous Moloch. All that Mr. Eliot most deeply feels is cast into his burning belly—or almost all.

Yet consider the case of men, and of their more perfect exemplars who are poets. It is only when the Eternal footman has given notice, when no longer

Human voices wake us and we drown,

when we pass out of the limbo of discordant futility, that there comes to us all the crash, the collapse, the ecstasy, the peace of surrender. Mr. Eliot is like us, terribly like us, for all that he is much more clever; the difference is that the Footman clings to his service longer. With the truly aristocratic, as we know, the Footman will stay for fifteen shillings when he would leave Mr. Bleistein and fifteen guineas; and we admit the implication that Mr. Eliot is truly distinguished. Another implication is that it is difficult for Mr. Eliot to talk to us, and difficult (as the present essay proves) for us to talk to him.

The further question arises—we continue to speak in parables on a matter hardly susceptible of discussion otherwise—whether we are to accept that Footman or not. Is it polite of us, have we a right, to seek an interview with Mr. Eliot when the Footman is not there? The rightness of an action is fortunately not measured by its ease of execution, but neither can we accept the dogma that the difficult is necessarily the virtuous path. Have we a right to say in our turn: ‘It was not that at all,’ to insist that the Footman in the long run makes everything impossible for us also, to gather up tell tale accents that have escaped, bubble-clear and bubble-frail, from under the Footman’s all-regarding eye? May we, for instance, perpend

The notion of some infinitely gentle  
Infinitely suffering thing.

and seek in it a solvent to the icy brilliance of an all but inexpugnable society manner? May we proceed thence, following a tenuous and evanescent clue, and ask not whether ‘Gerontion’ is solidly and definitely anything, but what it was that brought him to his premature old age? Is there anything other than that which

we found (if indeed we found it) cowering beneath the strange notion, which would be apt

To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition?

The Footman snickers audibly. But do we care? Rather, do we care now? We, who have lost with the capability the desire to be respectable, can stop our ears to him when there is a chance of hearing something that is all important for us to know, whose sub-terrene tremor is not wholly lost.

Think at last  
 I have not made this show purposelessly  
 And it is not by any concitation  
 Of the backward devils.  
 I would meet you upon this honestly.  
 I that was near your heart was removed therefrom  
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition...

Assuredly we are not tempted to think it was purposelessly made. The conviction of purpose remains whether we accept the Footman or reject him. True, we should prefer that he were dismissed, partly because his going (or our sense that he is gone) makes elucidation (or what we think elucidation) easier, but also in part because he can never be wholly abolished. The sense of the Footman belongs to a generation; he is our datum, our constant. But by an effort of imaginative will he can be compressed within the circle of our vision to less than a bogey-size. Mr. Eliot, more ably than ourselves, can stand apart from the Footman and his victim both. Is it necessary that he should turn himself into a bigger Footman still, and yet a bigger when that one too has been compressed, and a bigger *ad infinitum*?

Nowadays it is consciousness that makes cowards of us all. The complexity of our enemy is indicated by the fact of Mr. Eliot's determination that it shall make a brave man of him. But is it possible really? At least, Mr. Eliot would admit that it is a super-cowardice; he would claim that, indeed, as his exact intention. To make virtues of our vices is a good way of disarming them; but is it the best? Surely it cannot be unless with it is preserved the instinct that it must be abandoned when it begins to prey upon the vitals. *Impavidum ferient ruinae*. We do not doubt it for one moment with Mr. Eliot; but we have a motion that in the last resort the ruins will count for more than the impavidity that marks his unflinching diagnosis.

[Quotes 'Gerontion', CPP, p. 38, 'After such knowledge' to 'our impudent crimes'.]

17.

UNSIGNED REVIEW, A NEW BYRONISM,  
'TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT'

18 March 1920, no. 948, 184

The death of Swinburne marked the end of an age in English poetry, the age which began with Blake. It was impossible for any poet after Swinburne to continue the romantic tradition; he carried his own kind of versification and the romantic attitude as far as they could be carried, and both died with him. Now our poets have to make another beginning, to find a method of expression suited to their different attitude; and of this fact they are almost overconscious. They have indeed often been led into an obvious error by that over-consciousness; because they must find new ways of expression and because they react differently to the great facts of life, some of them appear to think that the very subject-matter of their verse must be different. This was the error of the eighteenth century; it sought for a new subject-matter and chose one more suitable for prose than poetry, with the result that it developed a style suited for neither, the style which ended in invocations like—'Innoculation, heavenly maid, descend—' and was parodied in the Loves of the Triangles.

The romantic movement itself was at first a return to the proper subject-matter of poetry and to a poetical technique. In its decline it narrowed the subject-matter of poetry to themes which seemed obviously and easily poetical, and its technique also became obviously and too easily poetical. So the young poets of to-day are apt to insist that they will make poetry of what they choose; but their choice is not always so free as they think. It is conditioned by reaction, disgust, *ennui*; they want no more of La belle dame sans merci, or of King Arthur or Pan or Proserpine, just as they want no more of rhythms such as

By the tideless, dolorous, midland sea—

so they choose themes and rhythms the very opposite of these. Often they seem in their poetry to be telling us merely how they refuse to write poems and not how they wish to write them. It is like the bridge-movement of the Choral symphony; a continual rejection of themes and rhythms, but without anything positive to follow.



Mr. Eliot is an extreme example of this process. His cleverness, which is also extreme, expresses itself almost entirely in rejections; his verse is full of derisive reminiscences of poets who have wearied him. As for subject-matter, that also is all refusal; it can be expressed in one phrase; again and again he tells us that he is 'fed-up' with art, with life, with people, with things. Everyone for him seems to be a parody of exhausted and out-of-date emotions. To read his verse is to be thrown deliberately into that mood which sometimes overcomes one in the streets of a crowded town when one is tired and bewildered, the mood in which all passers-by look like over-expressive marionettes pretending to be alive and all the more mechanical for their pretence. In such a mood one is morbidly aware of town squalor; everything seems to have been used and re-used again and again; the symbol of all life is cigarette ends and stale cigarette smoke; the very conversation is like that, it has been said a thousand times and is repeated mechanically; in fact all things are done from habit, which has mastered life and turned it into an endlessly recurring squalor.

[Quotes 'Portrait of a Lady', CPP, p. 20, 'You will see me' to 'ideas right or wrong?']

'Recalling things that other people have desired'—Mr. Eliot's verse is always doing that; and, like jesting Pilate, he will not wait for an answer to his own question—'Are these ideas right or wrong?' He asks it and goes on to something else with a hope, that is too like despair, that something may come of it. But nothing does come—

And I must borrow every changing shape  
 To fing expression...dance, dance,  
 Like a dancing bear,  
 Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.  
 Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance—

That may be satire on some one else, but it does exactly express the effect of his own verse, not once or twice but all the time. The habit of those whom he describes has got into his own technique, into his very way of experiencing; he, like the lesser romantics, has found too easy a way of functioning, and he functions and functions just as narrowly as if he were still writing about the Holy Grail:—

[Quotes 'Preludes', CPP, p. 22, Part II.]

This might be a prelude to something, some passion or reality that would suddenly spring out of it; but with Mr. Eliot it is not. Near the end, after an enumeration of all the squalors he can think of, he says:—

I am moved by fancies that are curled  
 Around these images and cling:  
 The motion of some infinitely gentle  
 Infinitely suffering thing.

That being so, why does he not tell us about it? It might be interesting; but no. After this momentary relenting, this flicker of natural feeling, he ends:—

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;  
The worlds revolve like ancient women  
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

But if that is so, why write verse about it; why not commit suicide? Art presumes that life is worth living, and must not, except dramatically or in a moment of exasperation or irony, say that it isn't. But Mr. Eliot writes only to say that it isn't; and he does not do it so well as the author of Ecclesiastes, who at least keeps the momentum and gusto of all the experiences he pretends to have exhausted. For Mr. Eliot—

Midnight shakes the memory  
As a madman shakes a dead geranium,

There we are reminded a little of his countryman Poe, and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is like Poe even in its curious and over-conscious metrical effects. They seem to be, as so often in Poe, independent of the poem itself, as if the writer could not attain to a congruity between the tune beating in his head and any subject-matter. In this poem he is really, with the poet part of him, questing for beauty, but the other part refuses it with a kind of nausea:—

[Quotes 'Prufrock', CPP, pp. 16–17, 'Shall I part my hair' to end.]

So it ends. Human voices for Mr. Eliot drown everything; he cannot get away from his disgust of them; he is 'fed up' with them, with their volubility and lack of meaning. 'Words, words, words' might be his motto; for in his verse he seems to hate them and to be always expressing his hatred of them, in words. If he could he would write songs without words; blindly he seeks for a medium free of associations, not only for a tune but also for notes that no one has sung before. But all this is mere habit; art means the acceptance of a medium as of life; and Mr. Eliot does not convince us that his weariness is anything but a habit, an anti-romantic reaction, a new Byronism which he must throw off if he is not to become a recurring decimal in his fear of being a mere vulgar fraction.

18.  
ROBERT NICHOLS, AN IRONIST,  
'OBSERVER'  
18 April 1920, 7

Nichols (1893–1944) was a minor Georgian poet.

Mr. Eliot is known to the world at large through the columns of the 'Athenaeum' as a widely erudite critic possessed of a natural distinction in style and such a mordant perspicacity as is hardly to be matched in British or North American letters to-day. To some few else he is known also as the poet of 'Prufrock.' The Ovid Press has now gathered up 'Prufrock' and the later 'Poems,' and displays them to the world in one of the most beautiful productions of the modern press. The paper and printing (with initials and colophon by Mr. E.A.Wadsworth) are superb.

Let me say it at once: Mr. Eliot is, more especially in his later work, emphatically not an 'easy' poet. Nor is the reason far to seek. Mr. Eliot mostly does not deal with what are popularly considered the main streams of emotion. Not for him the generalised joys or sorrows of a Whitman or a Shelley, nor such rhythms as roll the consenting reader he scarcely knows whither upon the bosom of the flood. No; Mr. Eliot is not going to appear to lose his head or suffer the reader to lose his. Mr. Eliot, like the poet in 'Candida,' muses to himself and the world overhears him; but not before he wishes it to; no, not by a long chalk. For, you see, the stuff of his musings is complicated, and Mr. Eliot does not pretend it is easy. 'The primrose by the river's brim' is for Mr. Eliot most emphatically neither a simple primrose nor a possible ingredient in a Disraelian salad. It is primarily something that someone else has written about, and which has thus become invested with such associations as can but destroy the innocence of Mr. Eliot's eye and apprehension. The pity is, he seems to hint, that there have been so many poems and, yes, it must be confessed, so few really satisfactory salads:—

[Quotes 'Prufrock', CPP, pp. 14–15, 'And I have known the eyes' to 'how should I begin?']

It is, perhaps, this sense of everything having happened a trifle earlier in the day that gives me an impression of there being a preponderance of afternoons in Mr. Eliot's poetry:—

[Quotes 'Portrait of a Lady', CPP, p. 18, 'Among the smoke' to 'left unsaid'.]  
Or, if not of afternoons, of early evenings:—

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table.

Ah, that patient etherized upon the table! It is not the evening only lying there in such lassitude; it is Mr. Eliot's perpetual spectator; it is the wistful and ironic evocation of all super-sophisticated persons; it is, alas! our cultured selves at this late and almost, it would sometimes seem, deliquescent stage of civilisation. Under the spell of Mr. Eliot's gentle and wavering rhythms we become slightly etherized, and when the spell has sufficiently o'ercrowed our animal spirits we proceed, at once investigator and investigated, to inspect our emotions 'as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen'; a doleful piece of introspective dissection, a lamentable appraisal. Our scientific precision but informs us the nature of our trouble:—

You will see me any morning in the park  
Reading the comics and the sporting page.  
Particularly I remark  
An English countess goes upon the stage.  
I keep my countenance,  
I remain self-possessed  
Except when a street piano, mechanical and tired  
Reiterates some worn-out common song  
With the smell of hyacinths across the garden  
Recalling things that other people have desired.

And when the scientist has done the artist steps in with his comedian melancholy to draw this conclusion:—

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,  
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;  
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and  
snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid.

The irony of things-as-they-are haunts the poet as it haunted his forerunner Laforgue and levies board-wages upon all his emotions. Yet the poet has his moments:—

I am moved by fancies that are curled  
 Around these images and cling:  
 The notion of some infinitely gentle  
 Infinitely suffering thing.

The moment, however, will not last, and I cannot but puzzle whether it is not that capacity for enjoying the quintessential emotions precipitated from the still of literature which Mr. Eliot so superabundantly possesses and cultivates, that has vitiated his taste for those distractingly heterogeneous emotions which are the material offered him as an artist by Life itself. Irony is a good servant, but a bad master; the Footman, however eternal, should be kept in his place even if one is only the perennially passing visitor to the earthly mansion. Mr. Eliot has a taste for the more terrible realities—if he would only indulge it. He has the power of evoking ‘the still, sad music of humanity’ from the most quotidian, sordid, and apparently unpromising of materials. Here is an interior—as unqualified in statement as a Sickert, but in addition informed with something of the understanding and compassion of a Rembrandt:—

[Quotes ‘Preludes’, CPP, pp. 22–3, Part III.]

It is a pity, I feel, that Mr. Eliot seems in his later poems to have acquired a habit of sheering away from so immediate and poignant a reality in order to make remote and somewhat generalised fun about ‘The Boston Evening Transcript,’ the visit of a Cambridge intellectual to New England, the editor of the ‘Spectator,’ and the Established Church.

19.  
DESMOND MacCARTHY, NEW POETS,  
T.S.ELIOT, 'NEW STATESMAN'  
8 January 1921, vol. xvi, 418–20

Sir Desmond MacCarthy (1877–1952) was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became a friend of G.E.Moore, Bertrand Russell, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf and others. He was a distinguished literary and drama critic. He edited 'Life and Letters' and contributed regularly to the 'New Statesman', of which he was literary editor in the 1920s.

When two people are discussing modern poetry together the name of T.S.Eliot is sure to crop up. If one of them is old-fashioned, and refuses to see merit in the young poets who attempt to do more than retail 'the ancient divinations of the Muse,' the other is sure to say sooner or later: 'But what about Eliot? You may dislike vers *libre* (I admit it is easy to write it badly) and attempts to manipulate in verse the emotional coefficients of modern experience, still what do you think of Eliot? You cannot dismiss him.' And the other (I do not think I am attributing to him an unusual amount of sensibility or judgment) will reply: 'Well...yes... Eliot...I grant you there seems to be something in him.' I wish to try to find out here what that 'something' is which recommends the poems of Mr. Eliot, if not to the taste, at least to the literary judgment of even those who think the young poets are, for the most part, on the wrong path.

Mr. Eliot, like Mr. Ezra Pound, is an American. This is not a very important fact about him, still it has its importance. Both poets resemble each other in two respects, one of which I will deal with at once, in connection with their nationality. When either of them publishes a book, they publish at the same time that they are scholars, who have at least five languages at command, and considerable out-of-the-way erudition. The allusions in their poems are learned, oblique, and obscure; the mottoes they choose for their poems are polyglot, the names that occur to them as symbolic of this or that are known only to book-minded people. In short, they both share the national love of bric-à-brac. A half-forgotten name, an echo from a totally forgotten author, a mossy scrap of old philosophy exercise over their

imaginations the charm that the patina of time upon a warming-pan or piece of worm-eaten furniture does upon their more frivolous compatriots. Both poets are illegitimate descendants of the poet Browning, in whom the instinct of the collector was equally strong—with a difference I shall presently mark. Both share with Browning a passion for adapting the vivid colloquialism of contemporary speech to poetic purposes. It has not been grasped so far as I know by critics, that linguistically Browning stands in the same relation to Victorian poets as Wordsworth *thought* he himself did as a poet, and in a measure truly, to the poets of the eighteenth century. Mr. Eliot has woven a very remarkable literary style, composed in almost equal parts of literary and erudite allusions and crisp colloquialisms, in which to clothe the emotions he wishes to express. Let me make here at once the most adverse comment I have to make on his work, namely, that he is always in danger of becoming a pedant, a pedant being one who assumes that his own reading, wide or narrow, is common property or ought to be, so that any reference he makes is of general validity and bound to wake the same echoes in his reader's mind as it does in his own. Collector of bric-à-brac, mystifier, mandarin, loving to exclude as well as to touch intimately and quickly his readers, he would be lost as a poet were it not for his cautious and very remarkable sincerity. When a reader seizes an obscure reference he is flattered; it gives him a little thrill. But though this thrill may seal him one of the poet's admirers, it is not an aesthetic thrill. In the same way even the verbal obscurity of a poet may tell in his favour, once he has convinced us that his meaning is worth grasping; in the effort to get at his meaning we may actually get his phrases by heart, and the phrase which sticks always acquires merit in our eyes. I do not say that Mr. Eliot's reputation owes much to these causes, but that they have helped it in some quarters I believe. Certainly he is a poet whom to admire at all fervently marks one down as among those who are certainly not a prey to the obvious.

FitzGerald did not like Browning (partly because he knew Tennyson very well perhaps), and in one of his letters he throws out a phrase about 'that old Jew's curiosity shop.' Now Browning's curiosity shop is a huge rambling place, cobwebby, crammed, Rembrandtesque, while Mr. Eliot's reminds one rather of those modern curiosity shops in which a few choice objects, a white Chinese rhinoceros, a pair of Queen Anne candlesticks, an enamelled box, a Renaissance trinket or two, a small ebony idol are set out at carefully calculated distances on a neat cloth in the window (one sees at a glance they are very expensive—no bargains here); but there is behind no vast limbo of armour, cabinets, costumes, death-masks, sword-sticks, elephants' tusks, dusty folios, gigantic cracked old mirrors, sedan chairs, wigs, spinets, and boxes, containing pell-mell, watch-keys, miniatures, locketts, snuffers, and tongue-scrapers. The man who keeps the shop is not a creature with a Rabelaisian gusto for acquisition, whose hand shakes with excitement as he holds up the candle, expatiating volubly, but a sedate, slightly quizzical, aloof individual—a selector, perhaps, rather than a collector to whose maw the most indigestible treasures are delicious nutriment. Such is the difference between Browning's and Mr. Eliot's attitude towards the harvest of erudition.

I have compared them so far only to differentiate them, moreover Mr. Eliot's subject is always the ingredients of the modern mind and never, as was often the case with Browning, of the minds and souls of men and women who lived long ago. But it is instructive to compare them also at points in which they resemble each other, always remembering that the temperament of the elder poet is hot, responsive, ebullient, and simple, while that of the younger is subtle, tender, disillusioned, complicated and cool. Both are possessed by the passion of curiosity to a greater degree than is common with poets; in both the analytical interest is extremely strong. Consequently, Mr. Eliot, too, loves to exploit that borderland between prose and poetry which yields as much delight to the intellect as to the emotions—if not more. Most of his work is done in that region, and the most obvious thing to say about it as a whole is that even when it is not poetry it is always good literature. Reread 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' or 'Portrait of a Lady'; it will be obvious that he not only owes much to the diction and rhythm of Browning, but that he is doing the same thing as Browning for a more queasy, uneasy, diffident, complex generation. Here is the opening of the 'Portrait':

[Quotes CPP, p. 18, 'Among the smoke' to 'hair and fingertips'.]

'The latest Pole transmit the Preludes, and through his hair and finger-tips'—is not that pure Browning? Like Browning, too, Mr. Eliot's favourite form is a soliloquy of the spirit or monologue. Many of his poems thus fall between the lyrical and the dramatic form; they are little mental monodramas, broken now and then after the manner of Browning by a line or two of dialogue or by exclamations such as are common in Browning's poems ('Here comes my husband from his whist'), or by asides to the reader; but these asides never have the argumentative, buttonholing quality of Browning's. There is nothing of the impassioned advocate, so characteristic in Browning, in Mr. Eliot. He is rather a scrupulous, cool analyst of extremely personal and elusive modes of feeling, and his method (this is his most distinctive characteristic as a writer) is to convey an elusive shade of feeling, or a curious, and usually languid, drift of emotion, by means of the rapid evocation of vivid objects and scenes. He does not care whether or not there is a logical or even a casual association between these objects he presents to us one after the other. He is like a dumb man who is trying to explain to us what he is feeling by taking up one object after another and showing it to us, not, intending that we should infer that the object is the subject of his thoughts, but that we should feel the particular emotion appropriate to it. This makes his poems hard even when they are not (and they often are) too obscure. The reader is always liable to dwell too long on these scenes or objects which he evokes so skilfully, instead of just skimming swiftly off them, as it were, an emotion they suggest, and then passing on to the next. A poet who thinks in pictures and allusions, and expects us to understand his mood and thought by catching one after the other the gleams of light flashed off by his phrases must often be obscure, because compact phrases (Mr. Eliot's are extraordinarily compact) are apt to scatter refracted gleams which point in different directions. Indeed, we are often expected to catch not one of these flashes but several. First, however, let me give an example of his method of



thinking in pictures or symbols. Take one of his later poems, 'Gerontion.' The whole poem is a description at once of an old man's mind, and of a mood which recurs often in Mr. Eliot's poems, namely, that of one to whom life is largely a process of being stifled, slowly hemmed in and confused; to whom experience, truthfully apprehended, gives only tantalisingly rare excuses for the exercise of the lyrical faculty of joy within him. His (Mr. Eliot's) problem as a poet is the problem of the adjustment of his sense of beauty to these sorry facts. His weakness as a poet is that he seems rather to have felt the glory of life through literature; while his reflection of all that contrasts with it has the exciting precision of direct apprehension. 'The contemplation of the horrid or sordid by the artist,' he says in one of his criticisms, 'is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse towards beauty.' In him this impulse in a negative direction is far the strongest of the two.

[Quotes 'Gerontion', CPP, p. 37, 'Here I am' to 'windy spaces'.]

Now, in the first verse of what proves later a dark intricate poem the symbolism is obvious; yet it is an example of the characteristics which make Mr. Eliot obscure. When the old man says he has not fought in the salt marshes, etc., we know that he means that he has not tasted the violent romance of life. We must not dwell too literally on the phrases by which he builds up the impression of sinister dilapidation and decay—'Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London,' etc. In reading Mr. Eliot an undue literalness must at all costs be avoided.

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom  
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.  
 I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it  
 Since what is kept must be adulterated?

These lines, which occur in the same poem, are perhaps the most personal he has published. Mr. Eliot has something of the self-protective pride, reserve and sensibility of the dandy—like Laforgue. His impulse is not to express himself in poetry, but to express some mood, some aspect of life which needs expression. He sets about it coolly, like a man making up a prescription, taking down now this bottle, now that from the shelf, adding an acid from one and a glowing tincture from another. He belongs to that class of poets whose interest is in making a work of art, not in expressing themselves; and the fact that his subject-matter, on the other hand, is psychological and intimate, makes the result particularly piquant. But even the works of the most detached poet, if he is not imitating old poems, have an affinity to each other which has its roots in temperament. The temperament, as in Laforgue's work, which shows itself in Mr. Eliot's is that of the ironic sentimentalist.

But where is the penny world I bought  
 To eat with Pipit behind the screen?

he asks, after concluding that he will not want Pipit in Heaven.

Where are the eagles and the trumpets?

Buried beneath some snow-deep Alps.  
Over buttered scones and crumpets  
Weeping, weeping multitudes  
Droop in a hundred A.B.C.'s.

The contrast between peeps into glory and the sordidness of life is never far from his mind. (It is in literature that he himself has seen the eagles and heard the trumpets—not in life.) His style has two other marked characteristics. His phrases are frequently echoes, yet he is the reverse of an imitative poet. They are echoes tuned to a new context which changes their subtlety. He does not steal phrases; he borrows their aroma.

Defunctive music under sea  
Passed seaward with the passing bell  
Slowly: the God Hercules  
Had left him, that had loved him well.  
The horses, under the axletree  
Beat up the dawn from Istria  
With even feet. Her shuttered barge  
Burned on the water all the day.

Just as 'weeping, weeping multitudes' in the other poem quoted above, is an echo from Blake, so 'Defunctive music' comes from 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' and 'Her barge burned on the water' of course from 'Antony and Cleopatra.' But the point is that the poet means to draw a subtle whiff of Cleopatra and poetic passion across our minds, in order that we may feel a peculiar emotion towards the sordid little siren in the poem itself, just as he also uses later a broken phrase or two from 'The Merchant of Venice' for the sake of reminding us of Shakespeare's Jew, compared with the 'Bleistein' of the poem. His other characteristic is the poetic one of intensity; it is the exciting concision of his phrasing which appeals especially to his contemporaries:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas  
  
...the smoke that rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt sleeves, leaning out of windows.

He is master of the witty phrase, too,

My smile falls heavily among the bric-à-brac,  
and is, to my mind, the most interesting of 'the new poets.'

20.

CLIVE BELL, PLUS DE JAZZ, 'NEW  
REPUBLIC'

21 September 1921, vol. xxviii, 94

Bell (1881–1964) was an English art critic and journalist. In 1906 he married Vanessa, the sister of Virginia Woolf. An important member of the Bloomsbury Group, his central ideas were set out in 'Art' (1914) and 'Civilization' (1928).

This is an extract from a very much longer essay on jazz and its influence on modern art.

Similarly, it may claim Mr. T.S.Eliot—a poet of uncommon merit and unmistakably in the great line—whose agonizing labors seem to have been eased somewhat by the comfortable ministrations of a black and grinning muse. Midwifery, to be sure, seems an odd occupation for a lady whom one pictures rather in the rôle of a flapper: but a midwife was what the poet needed and in that capacity she has served him. Apparently it is only by adopting a demurely irreverent attitude, by being primly insolent, and by playing the devil with the instrument of Shakespeare and Milton, that Mr. Eliot is able occasionally to deliver himself of one of those complicated and remarkable imaginings of his: apparently it is only in language, of an exquisite purity so far as material goes, but twisted and ragged out of easy recognition that these nurslings can be swathed. As for surprise, that, presumably, is an emotion which the author of 'Ara Vos Prec' is not unwilling to provoke. Be that as it may, Mr. Eliot is about the best of our living poets, and, like Stravinsky, he is as much a product of the Jazz movement as so good an artist can be of any.

# 'Poems'

New York, February 1920 (the American edition of 'Ara Vos Prec')

21.  
MARION STROBEL, PERILOUS LEAPING,  
'POETRY'

June 1920, vol. xvi, 157–9

Marion Strobel (1895–1966), an American novelist, poet and critic, was associate editor of 'Poetry' from 1919 to 1924, and co-editor from 1943 to 1949.

Mr. Eliot evidently believes that a view from a mountain cannot be appreciated unless the ascent is a perilous leaping from crag to crag. At least the first pages of his latest book (an American reprint, with a few additions, of 'Prufrock and Other Observations,' published in 1917 by the London 'Egoist') are filled with intellectual curios—curios that form a prodigious array of hazards leading up to the big poems. Lovers of exercise will find their minds flexed, if not inert, after following the allusions and ellipses of 'Gerontion.' It is as though, in this initial poem, Mr. Eliot went through his morning callisthenics saying: 'This, my good people is a small part of what I do to give you a poem;' or more accurately perhaps: 'Come—work with me—show you deserve true beauty.' And with a 'Whoop-la'—for he is in beautiful condition—he swings from romance to realism, to religion, to history, to philosophy, to science, while you and I climb pantingly, wearily, after him, clinging to a few familiar words, and looking from time to time at signposts along the way to reassure ourselves of the fact that this does lead us to true beauty.

The poems guaranteed-to-produce-white-blood-corpuscles- in-any-brain come before page 37 (a specific hint for the faint-hearted). Fortified by a dictionary, an encyclopedia, an imagination, and a martyr's spirit, even these may be enjoyed. They are certainly remarkable for their mystifying titles, their coy complexities of content, and their line-consuming words. What, for instance, could be more naive than the introduction to Sweeney in 'Sweeney Erect':

Paint me a cavernous waste shore  
Cast in the unstilled Cyclades,

Paint me the bold anfractuons rocks  
 Faced by the snarled and yelping seas.  
 Display me Aeolus above  
 Reviewing the insurgent gales  
 Which tangle Ariadne's hair  
 And swell with haste the perjured sails.  
 Morning stirs the feet and hands  
 (Nausicaa and Polypheme).  
 Gesture of orang-outang  
 Rises from the sheets in steam....  
 Sweeney addressed full length to shave....

However, in among these stepping-stones to the poems that are worth a great deal of trouble to get—though one resents being reminded of the fact by Mr. Eliot himself—are one or two resting-places, such as the whimsical pathos of 'A Cooking Egg,' the gentle crudity of 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales,' and the sophisticated humor of 'The Hippopotamus.' And I must further acknowledge that Mr. Eliot's humor is the cultivated progeny of a teasing spirit of fun and a keen audacity—the mixture of the Zoo and the True Church in 'The Hippopotamus' will tickle the palate of the most blasé epicurean.

And now, feeling that the ascent has been long and hard, we reach the summit, and are repaid by reading 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady.' These two poems are so far superior to the gymnastics that precede, and to the interesting versatilities that follow them, that they must be classed alone.

'Prufrock,' which was first published by 'Poetry' in 1915, is a psychological study of that rather piteous figure, the faded philandering middle-aged cosmopolite; a scrupulous psychological study, for the pervasive beauty of the imagery, the rhythms used, and the nice repetitions, all emphasize the sympathetic accuracy of the context. For instance the three lines:

I grow old.... I grow....  
 I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

In 'Portrait of a Lady' we find a like startling acuteness for details, with a dramatic ending which is a fitting example for the definition, '*L'art est un étonnement heureux.*'

And possibly—possibly—it is wise to work up to J.Alfred Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady,' and to slide pleasantly down again on the humor and ironies of the poems following; for we might become dizzy if we found ourselves on a mountain without the customary foundations.

## E.E.CUMMINGS, T.S.ELIOT, 'DIAL'

June 1920, vol. lxxviii, 781-4

Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962) emerged as a leading poet of the American avant-garde during the 1920s. His 'Selected Poems, 1923-1958' was published by Faber & Faber in 1960. Eliot gave his opinion of Cummings in a letter to Charles Norman dated 13 September 1957: 'I have a very high opinion of Mr Cummings as a poet, in spite of my dislike of his typography' (cited by Charles Norman in 'E.E.Cummings: The Magic-Maker' (New York, 1964), p. 120). Norman also reports some remarks of Malcolm Cowley's, dealing with Cummings's view of 'The Waste Land'; 'E.E.Cummings asked me why Eliot couldn't write his own lines instead of borrowing from dead poets. In his remarks I sensed a feeling almost of betrayal.'

Reprinted in 'A Miscellany', edited by George J.Firmage and published in 1958 as a privately printed edition. The essay may be found in the edition of 1966, published in London by Peter Owen, on pp. 25-9.

The somewhat recently published 'Poems' is an accurate and uncorpulent collection of instupidities. Between the negative and flabby and ponderous and little bellowings of those multitudinous contemporaries who are obstinately always 'unconventional' or else 'modern' at the expense of being (what is most difficult) alive, Mr. T.S.Eliot inserts the positive and deep beauty of his skilful and immediate violins...the result is at least thrilling.

He has done the trick for us before. In one of the was it two 'Blasts' skilfully occurred, more than success-fully framed by much soundness noise, the 'Rhapsody' and 'Preludes.' In one of the God knows nobody knows how many there will be 'Others', startlingly enshrined in a good deal of noiseless sound 'Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady' carefully happened. But 'this slim little volume' as a reviewer might say achieves a far more forceful presentation, since it competes



with and defeats not mere blasters and differentists but τὸ 'έν-s and origins and all that is Windily and Otherwise enervate and talkative.

Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe are, to a student of Mr. T.S., unnecessarily illuminating:

...this style which secures its emphasis by always hesitating on the end of caricature at the right moment...

...this intense and serious and indubitably great poetry, which, like some great painting and sculpture, attains its effects by something not unlike caricature.

Even without this somewhat mighty hint, this something which for all its slipperiness is after all a door-knob to be grasped by anyone who wishes to enter the 'some great' Art-Parlours, ourselves might have constructed a possibly logical development from 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' along 'J.Alfred' and 'Portrait' up the two Sweeneys to let us say 'The Hippopotamus.' We might have been disgracefully inspired to the extent of projecting as arithmetical, not to say dull, a classification of Eliot as that of Picasso by the author of certain rudimentary and not even ecclesiastical nonsense entitled 'The Caliph's Design.' But (it is an enormous but) our so doing necessarily would have proved worthless, precisely for the reason that before an Eliot we become alive or intense as we become intense or alive before a Cézanne or a Lachaise: or since, as always in the case of superficial because vertical analysis, to attempt the boxing and labeling of genius is to involve in something inescapably rectilinear—a formula, for example—not the artist but the 'critic.'

However, we have a better reason. The last word on caricature was spoken as far back as 1913. 'My dear it's all so perfectly ridiculous' remarked to an elderly Boston woman an elderly woman of Boston, as the twain made their noticeably irrevocable exeunt from that most colossal of all circusses, the (then in Boston) International. (1) 'My dear if some of the pictures didn't look like something it wouldn't be so amusing' observed, on the threshold, the e.B.w., adding 'I should hate to have my portrait painted by any of those "artists"! 'They'll never make a statue of me' stated with polyphiloprogenitive conviction the e.w.o.B.

Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.

Says Mr. Eliot.

In the case of 'Poems,' to state frankly and briefly what we like may be as good a way as another of exhibiting our numerous 'critical' incapacities. We like first, to speak from an altogether personal standpoint, that any and all attempts to lassoo Mr. Eliot with the Vorticist emblem have signally failed. That Mr. E.Pound (with whose Caesarlike refusal of the kingly crown we are entirely familiar) may not have coiled the rope whose fatal noose has, over a few unfortunate Britons, excludingly rather than includingly settled, makes little or no difference since the

hand which threw the lariat and the brone' which threw the steers alike belong to him. Be it said of this peppy gentleman that, insofar as he is responsible for possibly one-half of the most alive poetry and probably all of the least intense prose committed, during the last few years, in the American and English languages, he merits something beyond the incoherent abuse and inchoate adoration which have become his daily breakfast-food—merits in fact the doffing of many kelleys; that insofar as he is one of history's greatest advertisers he is an extraordinarily useful bore, much like a rivetter which whatever you may say asserts the progress of a skyscraper; whereas that insofar as he is responsible for the overpasting of an at least attractive manifesto, 'Ezra Pound,' with an at least pedantic warcry, 'Vorticism,' he deserves to be drawn and quartered by the incomparably trite brush of the great and the only and the Wyndham and the Lewis—if only as an adjectival garnish to that nounlike effigy of our hero by his friend The Hieratic Buster. Let us therefore mention the fact, For it seems to us worthy of notice—that at no moment do T.S.Eliot and E.P. propaganda simultaneously inhabit our consciousness.

Second, we like that not any of 'Poems' fifty-one pages fails to impress us with an overwhelming sense of technique. By technique we do not mean a great many things, including: anything static, a school, a noun, a slogan, a formula, These Three For Instant Beauty, Ars Est Celare, Hasn't Scratched Yet, Professor Woodberry, Grape Nuts. By technique we do mean one thing: the alert hatred of normality which, through the lips of a tactile and cohesive adventure, asserts that nobody in general and some one in particular is incorrigibly and actually alive. This some one is, it would seem, the extremely great artist: or, he who prefers above everything and within everything the unique dimension of intensity, which it amuses him to substitute in us for the comforting and comfortable furniture of reality. If we examine the means through which this substitution is allowed by Mr. Eliot to happen in his reader, we find that they include: a vocabulary almost brutally tuned to attain distinctness; an extraordinarily tight orchestration of the shapes of sound; the delicate and careful murderings—almost invariably interpreted, internally as well as terminally, through near-rhyme and rhyme—of established tempos by oral rhythms. Here is an example of Eliot's tuning:

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees  
 Letting his arms hang down to laugh,  
 The zebra stripes along his jaw  
 Swelling to maculate giraffe.

Here is a specimen of his compact orchestration:

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
 When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Here is Eliot himself directing the exquisitely and thoroughly built thing:

His laughter was submarine and profound  
 Like the old man of the sea's  
 Hidden under coral islands  
 Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down in the green silence,  
 Dropping from fingers of surf.

To come to our final like, which it must be admitted is also our largest—we like that no however cautiously attempted dissection of Mr T.S.'s sensitivity begins to touch a few certain lines whereby become big and blundering and totally unskilful our altogether unnecessary fingers:

[Quotes 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', CPP, p. 25, 'The lamp hummed' to 'a paper rose'.]

At the risk of being jeered for an 'uncritical' remark we mention that this is one of the few huge fragilities before which comment is disgusting.

#### Note

- 1 The International Exposition of Modern Art, better known as the Armory Show, was held in the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City from 15 February to 15 March 1913. A portion of the exhibition later travelled to Chicago and Boston. The show was highly controversial and of major importance in awakening Americans to the new art of modernism.

23.

MARK VAN DOREN, ANGLO-SAXON  
ADVENTURES IN VERSE, 'NATION'  
(NEW YORK)

26 June 1920, vol. ex, 856a

Mark Van Doren (1894–1972), an American critic and poet, was literary editor of the 'Nation' from 1924 to 1928. His 'Collected Poems' was published in 1939.

This is an extract from a longer review which surveyed current productions in poetry.

But the most amazing man is T.S.Eliot, whose first formally collected volume, long awaited by those who think they recognize downright, diabolical genius when they see it, is distinctly and preciously an event. It is not known how long the author of 'The Hippopotamus,' 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales,' 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock,' 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night,' and 'The Boston Evening Transcript' will remain in England, whither he went two years ago to set up as a critic. Whatever happens, it is hoped that he keeps somehow to poetry. For he is the most proficient satirist now writing in verse, the uncanniest clown, the devoutest monkey, the most picturesque ironist; and aesthetically considered, he is one of the profoundest symbolists. His sympathy and his vision travel together, striking like bitter lightning here, flowering damply and suddenly like mushrooms there. Three extracts from the twenty-four poems are not enough, but must do: [Quotes 'Prufrock', CPP, p. 13, 'The yellow fog' to 'fell asleep'; 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', CPP, p. 25, 'Halfpast two' to 'I held him'; 'Morning at the Window', CPP, p. 27.]

Mr. Eliot will never be popular at this rate. But when will he not have readers?

24.

LOUIS UNTERMAYER, IRONY DE LUXE,  
'FREEMAN'

30 June 1920, vol. i, 381–2

Untermeyer (1885–1977), an American poet and critic, gave a general account of Eliot's work up to and including 'Murder in the Cathedral' in 'Modern American Poetry' (New York, 1942), pp. 420–4.

For two or three years the poetry of T.S.Eliot has been championed warmly by a few protagonists and condemned even more heatedly by many who suspected the young author of all things from charlatanry to literary anarchism. Those who have read it have talked of this product, not as poetry, but as a precipitant, a touchstone; they pronounced 'Eliot' as though the name were either a shibboleth or a red flag. Controversy was difficult. For, with the exception of two longish poems and half a dozen scattered verses, this native of St. Louis continued to publish his occasional pieces in England and threatened at the age of thirty-one to take on the proportions of a myth. This volume then, is doubly welcome, for it enables one not only to estimate Eliot's actual achievement but to appraise his influence.

This influence, although exceedingly limited, is indisputable. And it is even more remarkable when one perceives that the present volume, including all of Eliot's poetical works, contains just twenty-four examples, five of them being in French. In these two dozen pieces there can be heard, beneath muffled brilliancies, two distinct and distinctive idioms. The first embodies the larger curve, the more flexible music; in it are held the shifting delicacies and strange nuances of 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' and the sensitized 'Portrait of a Lady.' It is the idiom which Conrad Aiken has exploited (and amplified) in 'The Jig of Forslin,' 'Senlin,' and 'Nocturne of Remembered Spring.' The second accent is sharper, swifter, more obviously sparkling. A far more definite tone of voice, it lends itself so easily to imitation that it has quickly captivated most of the younger British insurgents. Osbert Sitwell, whose antiwar verses are still remembered, frankly models his new quatrains on the plan of 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' and gives us (in part) such experiments in satiric futurism as:

The dusky king of Malabar  
 Is chief of Eastern potentates;  
 Yet he wears no clothes, except  
 The jewels that decency dictates....  
 But Mrs. Freudenthal, in furs,  
 From Brioche dreams to mild surprise  
 Awakes; the music throbs and purrs.  
 The 'cellist with albino eyes  
 Rivets attention; is, in fact,  
 The very climax; pink eyes flash  
 Whenever, nervous and pain-racked,  
 He hears the drums and cymbals clash.

Herbert Read, another of the younger poets, echoes the strain with slight variations in his recent 'Huskisson Sacred and Profane.' Even Robert Nichols, turning from his precise Shakespearian sonnets, his academic nymphs and correctly English fauns, indites 'The Spring Son,' the quatrains of which run like:

Sinclair has bought a new top hat,  
 A jetty coat and honey gloves,  
 A cane topped by a glass-eyed cat,  
 And Sinclair goes to meet his loves.  
 Sinclair would make his muslin choice,—  
 Spring and his father say he must:  
 Corah has ankles and a voice,  
 Nancy has French and a neat bust.

It is but a step to the more acerb original. Here are two illustrative segments from Eliot himself:

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees  
 Letting his arms hang down to laugh,  
 The zebra stripes along his jaw  
 Swelling to maculate giraffe...  
 Grishkin is nice: her Russian eye  
 Is underlined for emphasis;  
 Uncorseted, her friendly bust  
 Gives promise of pneumatic bliss.

It is this vein that tempts him most—and is his undoing. For irony, no matter how agile and erudite—and Eliot's is both—must contain heat if it is to burn. And heat is one of the few things that can not be juggled by this acrobatic satirist. With amazing virtuosity, he balances and tosses fragments

of philosophy, history, science, tea-table gossip, carelessly screened velleities. There are times when he discards his flashing properties, changes his vocabulary of rare words for a more direct irony which is not only amusing but incisive. 'The Hippopotamus,' that audacious whimsicality, is an example, with its:

[Quotes CPP, p. 49, stanzas 1, 2, 3 and 6.]

But at least two-thirds of Eliot's sixty-three pages attain no higher eminence than extraordinarily clever—and eminently uncomfortable—verse. The exaltation which is the very breath of poetry—that combination of tenderness and toughness—is scarcely ever present in Eliot's lines. Scarcely ever, I reiterate, for a certain perverse exultation takes its place; an unearthly light without warmth which has the sparkle if not the strength of fire. It flickers mockingly through certain of the unrhymed pictures and shines with a bright pallor out of the two major poems.

These two are the book's main exhibit, its jewelled medallion. Medallion, too, in the sense that both of them complement each other, obverse and reverse. The 'Portrait of a Lady,' the franker and more easily communicable, is a half-sympathetic, half-scornful study in the impressionist manner of the feminine dilettante, the slightly-faded *précieuse* hovering tremulously on the verge of an abortive 'affair.'

[Quotes 'Portrait of a Lady', CPP, p. 18, 'Among the smoke' to 'the conversation slips'.]

'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' is even more adroit though less outspoken. Sensitive to the pitch of concealment, this is an analysis of the lady's sexual opposite—an inhibited, young-old philanderer, tired of talk and the eternal tea-tables; a prey to boredom that breeds its own revulsion, a victim too sunk in himself to escape it. For him, eternally, it seems that

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.

Prufrock would shatter the small talk, pierce the whispered inanities, cry out!

But he can neither discharge his protest nor find words for it. He listens politely; he accepts the proffered cup; he chatters on aimlessly. It is the quiet tragedy of frustration, the *revolté* buried in the gentleman.

[Quotes CPP, p. 16, 'No! I am not' to 'trousers rolled'.]

Yet Prufrock is not all psychology. Eliot can be delicately fantastic and purely pictorial when the mood is on him. He can speak of early morning with

...the damp souls of housemaids  
Sprouting despondently at area gates.

He hears the laughter of Mr. Apollinax (who sounds suspiciously like Bertrand Russell) ‘tinkling among the teacups’ and he thinks of

...Priapus in the shrubbery  
Gaping at the lady in the swing.

He watches the fog rubbing its back upon the windowpanes.

[Quotes CPP, p. 13, ‘The yellow smoke’ to ‘fell asleep’.]

But these are the exceptional moments. For the most part, Eliot cares less for his art than he does for his attitudes. Disdaining the usual poetic cant, he falls into another tradition; he leans towards a kind of versifying which, masquerading under the title of ‘occasional’ or ‘social’ verse may be found in many a *Lyra Elegantiarum*. Pliny had in mind this type when he wrote: ‘These pieces commonly go under the title of poetical amusements; but these amusements have sometimes gained as much reputation to their authors as works of a far more serious nature.’ And some two thousand years later, Locker-Lampson described their qualities again: ‘The tone should not be pitched too high; it should be terse and rather in the conversational key; the rhythm should be crisp and sparkling, the rhyme frequent and never forced...’ Both Pliny and Locker-Lampson might have been reviewing Eliot’s conversational ironies. For Eliot’s gift is seldom the poet’s. His contribution is related to poetry only at rare intervals. His lines, for the most part, are written in a new *genre* or, to be more accurate, in a modernization of a surprisingly old one. They are, primarily, a species of mordant light verse; complex and disillusioned vers de société.



25.

RAYMOND WEAVER, WHAT AILS  
PEGASUS?, 'BOOKMAN' (NEW YORK)

September 1920, vol. lii, 59

Weaver (1888–1948), an American critic, is known particularly for his study of Melville, first published in 1921.

This passage is taken from a longer review of contemporary poetry.

The 'Poems'—ironically so-called—of T.S.Eliot, if not heavy and pedantic parodies of the 'new poetry', are documents that would find sympathetic readers in the waiting-room of a private sanatorium. Clinically analyzed they suggest in conclusion one of Mr. Eliot's lines: 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' As a parodist, Mr. Eliot is lacking in good taste, invention, and wit. Compared with Rudyard Kipling, Thackeray, and Phoebe Cary (among the most accomplished parodists in the language) Mr. Eliot is prodigiously labored and dull. General incomprehensibility and sordidness of detail (defects not difficult to imitate, but excessively difficult to parody) are Mr. Eliot's distinguishing traits. He is usually intelligible only when he is nasty. His similes are without humor and without point:

He laughed like an impossible [sic] foetus.

Midnight shakes the memory  
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.  
The world revolves like ancient women  
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

Mr. Eliot may cynically have perpetrated this slim volume in order to glean from the tributes of his admirers material for a new 'Dunciad'.

PADRAIC COLUM, STUDIES IN THE  
SOPHISTICATED, 'NEW REPUBLIC'

8 December 1920, vol. xxv, 54

Colum (1881–1973) was a playwright for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, who spent much of his life in the United States.

The review from which this extract is taken opened with a consideration of Pound's 'Instigations' (1920), which reprinted Pound's 'Poetry' (August 1917) review of 'Prufrock and Other Observations' (No. 6).

To give prose the precedence of verse in a review that deals with both is possibly wrong, but there is an excuse for it in the present case. The 'Instigations' of Ezra Pound deal in many places with the poems of T.S.Eliot. Some of these passages make the best introduction that could be written for the poems. They are eulogistic, and at least in one passage, possibly extravagantly eulogistic. Mr. Eliot's form is compared to Ovid's form in the 'Heroides,' and to Browning's form in 'Men and Women.' 'The form of "Men and Women" is more alive than the epistolary form of the "Heroides,"' Mr. Pound says, and then he goes on to suggest that the present-day poet has made a certain advance on Browning's form—'Browning included a certain amount of ratiocination and of purely intellectual comment, and in just that proportion he lost intensity.' Mr. Eliot has stripped away the ratiocination and the intellectual comment.

His first volume has been published in the present year—a small collection of twenty-four pieces, four being in French. Had Mr. Eliot excluded such pieces as 'The Boston Evening Transcript,' 'Hysteria,' 'Cousin Nancy,' one would be able to judge his poetry without making a reference to The Smart Set. That he has included these is evidence that he is not amongst the super-sophisticated.

I do not know if these poems mark the beginning of a cycle in poetry, but I am sure that they mark the end of one. Twenty years ago Mr. Yeats published 'The Wind Among the Reeds.' He brought a new set of symbols into poetry. He heard 'the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake, their hoofs heavy with tumult.' Today Mr. Eliot sees that 'The red-eyed scavengers are creeping from Kentish

Town and Golder's Green.' The cycle is complete: the vague and visionary territory has become defined as points on a subway, and municipal employees have taken the place of creatures out of a myth.

And the truth is that our imaginations are put at no loss by the change in symbols. Mr. Eliot, like the Mr. Yeats of 'The Wind Amongst the Reeds,' is a symbolist. He, too, has his Aedh, his Hanrahan, his Michael Robartes. But he calls them Sweeney, J.Alfred Prufrock, Mr. Apollinax. The Hippopotamus of the Zoo takes the place of the boar with bristles and the deer with no horns. The change, of course, would not be real if there were no poetry transmitted through the symbols. Poetry is transmitted. In such poems as 'Gerontion,' 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock,' 'Portrait of a Lady,' 'Cooking Egg,' we get a glimpse of the visions and tragedies that are in the soul—it does not matter that the soul in these situations has to look out on restaurants instead of on temples, and on 'rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds,' instead of on the mountains and the sea.

Mr. Eliot has learned from Jules Laforgue how to make modern settings as well as how to parade a mockery of the literary allusion. This by itself would serve to put him with the modernists. But he is modern in a way that is more significant. He has the modern approach to the soul, or, let us say, to the psyche—to the soul that is not an entity but a collection of complexes—the soul that is at once positive and reticent, obscured and clairvoyant. The poet is well aware of the tragedy that is marked by a yawn, and the dreadful dismissal that is in a cliché repeated. His art is indeed achieved when he can give us such revelations in the medium of verse.

For a generation there have been attempts to do this kind of thing in English, and verse in which ennui turns upon disillusion has gone the rounds. But now that Mr. Eliot has published we see that in this verse there were only approaches. Mr. Eliot's work is complete; he has adapted a modern technique, and his personae are stabilized into types. The group in the workshop were aware that he was completing a tendency, and for that reason they were speaking of him with Ovid and Browning before he had published a book. I have said that if he does not mark the beginning of a cycle he certainly marks the end of one. This poetry of his will act in the body literary like those tremendous fellows, the corpuscles in the blood that seize upon and devour the de-vitalized corpuscles. Romantic poetry, in its spent stages, will encounter Sweeney and Prufrock and will not know what has happened to it. But that comparison is wrong: the poetry of Mr. Eliot, in spite of its being so well exercised and so well disinfected, belongs after all to Byzantium; the shadows of a long decay are upon it all.

# 'The Waste Land'

'Criterion', London, October 1922, vol. i, 50–64;  
'Dial', New York, November 1922, vol. lxxiii, 473–85;  
first edition, New York, 15 December 1922

UNSIGNED NOTICE OF THE FIRST ISSUE  
OF THE 'CRITERION' AND REVIEW OF  
'THE WASTE LAND', 'TIMES LITERARY  
SUPPLEMENT'

26 October 1922, no. 1084, 690

If we are to judge by its first number, the 'Criterion' is not only that rare thing amongst English periodicals, a purely literary review, but it is of a quality not inferior to that of any review published either here or abroad. Of the seven items which make up this number there are at least five that we should like to see preserved in a 'permanent' form. And of these five there are two, the long poem by Mr. T.S.Eliot called 'The Waste Land' and Dostoevski's 'Plan of a Novel,' now first translated into English, that are of exceptional importance. We cannot imagine a more untidy plan for a novel or anything else than this one by Dostoevski, and yet, even on a first reading, one has a confused impression of having passed through an exciting and significant experience. To the student of Dostoevski this so-called 'plan' will reveal much; it is full of hints of spiritual discoveries which, we may be confident, Dostoevski would have fully revealed. And it is very interesting to see how entirely the *points d'appui* of a Dostoevski novel consist of such flashes. Of orderly planning in the ordinary or even in the Jamesian sense there is no trace. He must have found composition extremely difficult. There is no machinery of which the momentum carries him on. He had to create every page.

Mr. Eliot's poem is also a collection of flashes, but there is no effect of heterogeneity, since all these flashes are relevant to the same thing and together give what seems to be a complete expression of this poet's vision of modern life. We have here range, depth, and beautiful expression. What more is necessary to a great poem? This vision is singularly complex and in all its labyrinths utterly sincere. It is the mystery of life that it shows two faces, and we know of no other modern poet who can more adequately and movingly reveal to us the inextricable tangle of the sordid and the beautiful that make up life. Life is neither hellish nor heavenly; it has a purgatorial quality. And since it is purgatory, deliverance is possible. Students of Mr. Eliot's work will find a new note, and a profoundly interesting one, in the latter part of this poem.

Of the other items in this number we may single out an excellent short story by May Sinclair, an interesting literary study by Sturge Moore, and a maliciously

urbane and delightful article on Dullness,' by George Saintsbury. What literary school, then, does this new quarterly represent? It is a school which includes Saintsbury, Sturge Moore, and T.S.Eliot. There is no such school, obviously. It becomes apparent that the only school represented is the school of those who are genuinely interested in good literature.

28.

UNSIGNED COMMENT ON THE 'DIAL'  
AWARD OF \$2,000 TO 'THE WASTE  
LAND', 'NEW YORK TIMES BOOK  
REVIEW'

26 November 1922, 12

Note the mistake over Eliot's middle name.

The annual award of the 'Dial,' amounting to \$2,000, has been given this year to T.S.Eliot, the American poet living in England. This award, which is not presented as a prize, but in recognition of able work, was given last year to Sherwood Anderson, the novelist. Thomas Seymour Eliot, to give him his full name, is a Harvard graduate and a writer who may be regarded as the poetical leader of the Younger Generation. His volume, 'Poems,' containing such unusual efforts as 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' and the 'Portrait of a Lady,' appeared several seasons ago. A new volume from his pen, 'The Waste Land,' a single poem of some length, is shortly to be published by Boni & Liveright. Mr. Eliot's work is marked by an intense cerebral quality and a compact music that has practically established a movement among the younger men.

29.

UNSIGNED ACCOUNT OF WHY ELIOT  
WAS AWARDED THE 'DIAL'S' PRIZE,  
'DIAL'

December 1922, vol. lxxiii, 685-7

The next item (No. 30) is Edmund Wilson's essay on 'The Waste Land'. This is the discussion that appeared elsewhere in the same issue of the 'Dial'.

The editors have the pleasure of announcing that for the year 1922 the 'Dial's' award goes to Mr T.S.Eliot.

Mr Eliot has himself done so much to make clear the relation of critic to creative artist that we hope not to be asked whether it is his criticism or his poetry which constitutes that service to letters which the award is intended to acknowledge. Indeed it is our fancy that those who know one or the other will recognize the propriety of the occasion; those who know both will recognize further in Mr Eliot an exceedingly active influence on contemporary letters.

Influence in itself, however, is no service, and what makes Mr Eliot a significant artist is that his work, of whatever nature, is an indication of how ineffective the temptation to do bad work can, for at least once, become. Few American writers have published so little, and fewer have published so much which was worth publication. We do not for a moment suspect Mr Eliot of unheard-of capacities; it is possible that he neither has been pressed to nor can write a popular novel. But the temptation not to arrive at excellence is very great; and he is one of the rare artists who has resisted it. A service to letters peculiarly acceptable now is the proof that one can arrive at eminence with the help of nothing except genius.

Elsewhere in this issue will be found a discussion of Mr Eliot's poetry, with special reference to his long work, 'The Waste Land,' which appeared in the 'Dial' of a month ago; in reviewing 'The Sacred Wood,' and elsewhere, we have had much to say of his critical work, and may have more. At this moment it pleases us to remember how much at variance Mr Eliot is with those writers who having themselves sacrificed all interest in letters, are calling upon criticism to do likewise in the name of the particular science which they fancy can redeem the world from every ill but themselves. As a critic of letters Mr Eliot has always had preeminently



one of the qualifications which he requires of the good critic: 'a creative interest, a focus upon the immediate future. The important critic is the person who is absorbed in the present problems of art, and who wishes to bring the forces of the past to bear upon the solution of these problems.' This is precisely what Mr Eliot has wished, and accomplished, in his function as critic of criticism. It is impossible to read the opening essays of 'The Sacred Wood' without recognizing that it is from these pages that the attack upon perverted criticism is rising. The journalists who wish critics to be for ever concerned with social laws, economic fundamentals, and the science of psychoanalysis, and never by any chance with the erection into laws of those personal impressions which are the great pleasure of appreciation, would do well to destroy Mr Eliot first; for it is from him that new critics are learning 'that the "historical" and the "philosophical" critics had better be called historians and philosophers quite simply' and that criticism has other functions, and other pleasures to give.

There is another, quite different sense, in which Mr Eliot's work is of exceptional service to American letters. He is one of a small number of Americans who can be judged by the standards of the past—including therein the body of Occidental literature. It is a superficial indication of this that Mr Eliot is almost the only young American critic who is neither ignorant of nor terrified by the classics, that he knows them (one includes Massinger as well as Euripides) and understands their relation to the work which went before and came after them. There are in his poems certain characters, certain scenes, and even certain attitudes of mind, which one recognizes as peculiarly American; yet there is nowhere in his work that 'localism' which at once takes so much of American writing out of the field of comparison with European letters and (it is often beneficial to their reputations) requires for American writers a special standard of judgement. We feel nothing aggressive and nothing apologetic in his writing; there is the assumption in it that the civilized American no less than the civilized German can count Shakespeare and even Poe as part of his inheritance.

When 'Prufrock' in paper covers first appeared, to become immediately one of the rarest of rare books (somebody stole our as early as 1919) Mr Eliot was already redoubtable. Since then, poet with true invention, whom lassitude has not led to repeat himself, critic again with invention and with enough metaphysics to draw the line at the metaphysical, his legend has increased. We do not fancy that we are putting a last touch to this climax; we express gratitude for pleasure received and assured. If pleasure is not sufficiently high-toned a word, you may, in the preceding paragraphs, take your pick.

Mr Eliot's command of publicity is not exceptional, and we feel it necessary to put down, for those who care for information, these hardily gleaned facts of his biography. In 1888 he was born in St. Louis; in 1909 and 1910 he received, respectively, the degrees of Bachelor and of Master of Arts at Harvard; subsequently he studied at the Sorbonne, the Harvard Graduate School, and Merton College, Oxford. He has been a lecturer under both the Oxford and the London University Extension Systems, and from 1917 to 1919 he was assistant

editor of the 'Egoist.' We have heard it rumoured that he is still 'A Londres, un peu banquier'; those who can persuade themselves that facts are facts will find much more of importance in the 'Mélange Adultère de Tout,' from which the quotation comes; as that poem was written several years ago it omits the names of Mr Eliot's books: 'The Sacred Wood,' 'Poems,' and 'The Waste Land' (not to speak of the several volumes later incorporated in 'Poems') and omits also the fact that Mr Eliot is now editor of the 'Criterion,' a quarterly which we (as it were *en passant*) hereby make welcome. The most active and, we are told, the most influential editorcritic in London found nothing to say of one of the contributions to the first number except that it was 'an obscure, but amusing poem' by the editor. We should hate to feel that our readers can judge of the state of criticism in England by turning to the first page of our November issue and reading the same poem there.

## EDMUND WILSON, THE POETRY OF DROUTH, 'DIAL'

December 1922, vol. lxxiii, 611–16

Wilson (1895–1972), an important American critic, wrote extensively on Eliot, including T.S.Eliot, 'New Republic' (13 November 1929), lx, 341–9, a fuller version of which appeared in 'Axel's Castle' (1931). He wrote on Eliot as poet and public figure in 'The Bit Between My Teeth' (1966), and on 'The Waste Land' drafts in 'The Devils and Canon Barham' (1973).

Mr T.S.Eliot's first meagre volume of twenty-four poems was dropped into the waters of contemporary verse without stirring more than a few ripples. But when two or three years had passed, it was found to stain the whole sea. Or, to change the metaphor a little, it became evident that Mr Eliot had fished a murex up. His productions, which had originally been received as a sort of glorified *vers de société*, turned out to be unforgettable poems, which everyone was trying to rewrite. There might not be very much of him, but what there was had come somehow to seem precious and now the publication of his long poem, 'The Waste Land,' confirms the opinion which we had begun gradually to cherish, that Mr Eliot, with all his limitations, is one of our only authentic poets. For this new poem—which presents itself as so far his most considerable claim to eminence—not only recapitulates all his earlier and already familiar motifs, but it sounds for the first time in all their intensity, untempered by irony or disguise, the hunger for beauty and the anguish at living which lie at the bottom of all his work.

Perhaps the best point of departure for a discussion of 'The Waste Land' is an explanation of its title. Mr Eliot asserts that he derived this title, as well as the plan of the poem 'and much of the incidental symbolism,' from a book by Miss Jessie L.Weston called 'From Ritual to Romance.' 'The Waste Land' 'it appears, is one of the many mysterious elements which have made of the Holy Grail legend a perennial puzzle of folk-lore; it is a desolate and sterile country, ruled over by an impotent king, in which not only have the crops ceased to grow and the animals to reproduce their kind, but the very human inhabitants have become unable to

bear children. The renewal of the Waste Land and the healing of the 'Fisher King's' wound depend somehow upon the success of the Knight who has come to find the Holy Grail.

Miss Weston, who has spent her whole life in the study of the Arthurian legends, has at last propounded a new solution for the problems presented by this strange tale. Stimulated by Frazer's 'Golden Bough'—of which this extraordinarily interesting book is a sort of offshoot— she has attempted to explain the Fisher King as a primitive vegetable god—one of those creatures who, like Attis and Adonis, is identified with Nature herself and in the temporary loss of whose virility the drouth or inclemency of the season is symbolized; and whose mock burial is a sort of earnest of his coming to life again. Such a cult, Miss Weston contends, became attached to the popular Persian religion of Mithraism and was brought north to Gaul and Britain by the Roman legionaries. When Christianity finally prevailed, Attis was driven underground and survived only as a secret cult, like the Venus of the Venusberg. The Grail legend, according to Miss Weston, had its origin in such a cult; the Lance and Grail are the sexual symbols appropriate to a fertility rite and the eerie adventure of the Chapel Perilous is the description of an initiation.

Now Mr Eliot uses the Waste Land as the concrete image of a spiritual drouth. His poem takes place half in the real world—the world of contemporary London, and half in a haunted wilderness—the Waste Land of the mediaeval legend; but the Waste Land is only the hero's arid soul and the intolerable world about him. The water which he longs for in the twilit desert is to quench the thirst which torments him in the London dusk.—And he exists not only upon these two planes, but as if throughout the whole of human history. Miss Weston's interpretation of the Grail legend lent itself with peculiar aptness to Mr Eliot's extraordinarily complex mind (which always finds itself looking out upon the present with the prouder eyes of the past and which loves to make its oracles as deep as the experience of the race itself by piling up stratum upon stratum of reference, as the Italian painters used to paint over one another); because she took pains to trace the Buried God not only to Attis and Adonis, but further back to the recently revealed Tammuz of the Sumerian-Babylonian civilization and to the god invited to loosen the waters in the abysmally ancient Vedic Hymns. So Mr Eliot hears in his own parched cry the voices of all the thirsty men of the past—of the author of Ecclesiastes in majestic bitterness at life's futility, of the Children of Israel weeping for Zion by the unrefreshing rivers of Babylon, of the disciples after the Crucifixion meeting the phantom of Christ on their journey; of Buddha's renunciation of life and Dante's astonishment at the weary hordes of Hell, and of the sinister dirge with which Webster blessed the 'friendless bodies of unburied men.' In the centre of his poem he places the weary figure of the blind immortal prophet Tiresias, who, having been woman as well as man, has exhausted all human experience and, having 'sat by Thebes below the wall and walked among the lowest of the dead,' knows exactly what will happen in the London flat between the typist and the houseagent's clerk; and at its beginning the almost

identical figure of the Cumaean Sibyl mentioned in Petronius, who-gifted also with extreme longevity and preserved as a sort of living mummy—when asked by little boys what she wanted, replied only ‘I want to die.’ Not only is life sterile and futile, but men have tasted its sterility and futility a thousand times before. T.S.Eliot, walking the desert of London, feels profoundly that the desert has always been there. Like Tiresias, he has sat below the wall of Thebes; like Buddha, he has seen the world as an arid conflagration; like the Sibyl, he has known everything and known everything vain.

Yet something else, too, reaches him from the past: as he wanders among the vulgarities which surround him, his soul is haunted by heroic strains of an unfading music. Sometimes it turns suddenly and shockingly into the jazz of the music-halls, sometimes it breaks in the middle of a bar and leaves its hearer with dry ears again, but still it sounds like the divine rumour of some high destiny from which he has fallen, like indestructible pride in the citizenship of some world which he never can reach. In a London boudoir, where the air is stifling with a dust of futility, he hears, as he approaches his hostess, an echo of Anthony and Cleopatra and of Aeneas coming to the house of Dido—and a painted panel above the mantel gives his mind a moment’s swift release by reminding him of Milton’s Paradise and of the nightingale that sang there.—Yet though it is most often things from books which refresh him, he has also a slight spring of memory. He remembers someone who came to him with wet hair and with hyacinths in her arms, and before her he was stricken senseless and dumb—‘looking into the heart of light, the silence.’ There were rain and flowers growing then. Nothing ever grows during the action of the poem and no rain ever falls. The thunder of the final vision is ‘dry sterile thunder without rain.’ But as Gerontion in his dry rented house thinks wistfully of the young men who fought in the rain, as Prufrock longs to ride green waves and linger in the chambers of the sea, as Mr Apollinax is imagined drawing strength from the deep sea-caves of coral islands, so in this new poem Mr Eliot identifies water with all freedom and illumination of the soul. He drinks the rain that once fell on his youth as—to use an analogy in Mr Eliot’s own manner—Dante drank at the river of Eunoë that the old joys he had known might be remembered. But—to note also the tragic discrepancy, as Mr Eliot always does—the draught, so far from renewing his soul and leaving him pure to rise to the stars, is only a drop absorbed in the desert; to think of it is to register its death. The memory is the dead god whom—as Hyacinth—he buries at the beginning of the poem and which—unlike his ancient prototype—is never to come to life again. Hereafter, fertility will fail; we shall see women deliberately making themselves sterile; we shall find that love has lost its life-giving power and can bring nothing but an asceticism of disgust. He is travelling in a country cracked by drouth in which he can only dream feverishly of drowning or of hearing the song of the hermit-thrush which has at least the music of water. The only reappearance of the god is as a phantom which walks beside him, the delirious hallucination of a man who is dying of thirst. In the end the dry-rotted world is crumbling about him—his own soul is falling apart. There is nothing left to prop it up but some dry stoic Sanskrit maxims and the

broken sighs from the past, of singers exiled or oppressed. Like de Nerval, he is disinherited; like the poet of the 'Pervigilium Veneris,' he is dumb; like Arnaut Daniel in Purgatory, he begs the world to raise a prayer for his torment, as he disappears in the fire.

It will be seen from this brief description that the poem is complicated; and it is actually even more complicated than I have made it appear. It is sure to be objected that Mr Eliot has written a puzzle rather than a poem and that his work can possess no higher interest than a full-rigged ship built in a bottle. It will be said that he depends too much upon books and borrows too much from other men and that there can be no room for original quality in a poem of little more than four hundred lines which contains allusions to, parodies of, or quotations from, the Vedic Hymns, Buddha, the Psalms, Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, Luke, Sappho, Virgil, Ovid, Petronius, the 'Pervigilium Veneris,' St Augustine, Dante, the Grail Legends, early English poetry, Kyd, Spenser, Shakespeare, John Day, Webster, Middleton, Milton, Goldsmith, Gérard de Nerval, Froude, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Swinburne, Wagner, 'The Golden Bough,' Miss Weston's book, various popular ballads, and the author's own earlier poems. It has already been charged against Mr Eliot that he does not feel enough to be a poet and that the emotions of longing and disgust which he does have belong essentially to a delayed adolescence. It has already been suggested that his distaste for the celebrated Sweeney shows a superficial mind and that if he only looked more closely into poor Sweeney he would find Eugene O'Neill's Hairy Ape; and I suppose it will be felt in connexion with this new poem that if his vulgar London girls had only been studied by Sherwood Anderson they would have presented a very different appearance. At bottom, it is sure to be said, Mr Eliot is timid and prosaic like Mr Prufrock; he has no capacity for life, and nothing which happens to Mr Prufrock can be important.

Well: all these objections are founded on realities, but they are outweighed by one major fact—the fact that Mr Eliot is a poet. It is true his poems seem the products of a constricted emotional experience and that he appears to have drawn rather heavily on books for the heat he could not derive from life. There is a certain grudging margin, to be sure, about all that Mr Eliot writes—as if he were compensating himself for his limitations by a peevish assumption of superiority. But it is the very acuteness of his suffering from this starvation which gives such poignancy to his art. And, as I say, Mr Eliot is a poet—that is, he feels intensely and with distinction and speaks naturally in beautiful verse—so that, no matter within what walls he lives, he belongs to the divine company. His verse is sometimes much too scrappy—he does not dwell long enough upon one idea to give it its proportionate value before passing on to the next—but these drops, though they be wrung from flint, are none the less authentic crystals. They are broken and sometimes infinitely tiny, but they are worth all the rhinestones on the market. I doubt whether there is a single other poem of equal length by a contemporary American which displays so high and so varied a mastery of English verse. The poem is—in spite of its lack of structural unity—simply one triumph

after another—from the white April light of the opening and the sweet wistfulness of the nightingale passage—one of the only successful pieces of contemporary blank verse—to the shabby sadness of the Thames Maidens, the cruel irony of Tiresias' vision, and the dry grim stony style of the descriptions of the Waste Land itself.

That is why Mr Eliot's trivialities are more valuable than other people's epics—why Mr Eliot's detestation of Sweeney is more precious than Mr Sandburg's sympathy for him, and Mr Prufrock's tea-table tragedy more important than all the passions of the New Adam—sincere and carefully expressed as these latter emotions indubitably are. That is also why, for all its complicated correspondences and its recondite references and quotations, 'The Waste Land' is intelligible at first reading. It is not necessary to know anything about the Grail Legend or any but the most obvious of Mr Eliot's allusions to feel the force of the intense emotion which the poem is intended to convey—as one cannot do, for example, with the extremely ill-focussed Eight Cantos of his imitator Mr Ezra Pound, who presents only a bewildering mosaic with no central emotion to provide a key. In Eliot the very images and the sound of the words—even when we do not know precisely why he has chosen them—are charged with a strange poignancy which seems to bring us into the heart of the singer. And sometimes we feel that he is speaking not only for a personal distress, but for the starvation of a whole civilization—for people grinding at barren officieroutine in the cells of gigantic cities, drying up their souls in eternal toil whose products never bring them profit, where their pleasures are so vulgar and so feeble that they are almost sadder than their pains. It is our whole world of strained nerves and shattered institutions, in which 'some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing' is somehow being done to death—in which the maiden Philomel 'by the barbarous king so rudely forced' can no longer even fill the desert 'with inviolable voice.' It is the world in which the pursuit of grace and beauty is something which is felt to be obsolete—the reflections which reach us from the past cannot illumine so dingy a scene; that heroic prelude has ironic echoes among the streets and the drawing-rooms where we live. Yet the race of the poets—though grown rarer—is not yet quite dead: there is at least one who, as Mr Pound says, has brought a new personal rhythm into the language and who has lent even to the words of his great predecessors a new music and a new meaning.

31.  
GILBERT SELDES, T.S.ELIOT, 'NATION'  
(NEW YORK)

6 December 1922, vol. cxv, 614–16

Seldes (1893–1970), an American critic, was managing editor of the 'Dial' from 1920 to 1923. For an account of the part he played in publishing 'The Waste Land', see Noel Stock, 'The Life of Ezra Pound' (London, 1974), pp. 313–15. See also the Introduction to T.S.Eliot, 'The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts', edited by Valerie Eliot (London, 1971).

The poems and critical essays of T.S.Eliot have been known to a number of readers for six or seven years; small presses in England have issued one or two pamphlet-like books of poetry; in America the 'Little Review' and the 'Dial' have published both prose and verse. In 1920 he issued his collected 'Poems,' a volume of some sixty pages, through Knopf, and the following year the same publisher put forth 'The Sacred Wood,' a collection of fourteen essays devoted to two subjects, criticism and poetry. This year a volume no larger than the first, containing one long poem, is issued. The position, approaching eminence, which Mr. Eliot holds is obviously not to be explained in terms of bulk.

It is peculiarly difficult to write even the necessary journalism about Mr. Eliot. From its baser manifestation he is fortunately immune and his qualities do not lend themselves to trickery. The secret of his power (I will not say influence) as a critic is that he is interested in criticism and in the object of criticism, as a poet that he understands and practices the art of poetry. In the first of these he is exceptional, almost alone; in both, his work lies in the living tradition and outside the wilfulness of the moment. We are so far gone in the new movement that even to say that he practices aesthetic criticism and impersonal poetry will be confusing. I can only explain by distinguishing his work from others.

At the present moment criticism of literature is almost entirely criticism of the ideas expressed in literature; it is interested chiefly in morals, economics, sociology, or science. We can imagine a critic *circa* 1840 declaring that 'Othello' is a bad play because men should not kill their wives; and the progress is not very



great to 1922 when we are as likely as not to hear that it is a bad play because Desdemona is an outmoded kind of woman. To be sure the economic, sociological, and psychoanalytical interest has largely displaced the moral one, and critics (whether they say a book is good or bad) are inclined to judge the importance of a writer of fiction by the accuracy of his dream-interpretations or the soundness of his economic fundamentals. Their creative interest is in something apart from the art they are discussing; and what Mr. Eliot has done, with an attractive air of finality, is to indicate how irrelevant that interest is to the art of letters. He respects these imperfect critics in so far as they are good philosophers, moralists, or scientists; but he knows that in connection with letters they are the victims of impure desires (the poet *manqué* as critic) or of impure interests (the fanatical Single-taxer (1) as critic). 'But Aristotle,' he says, 'had none of these impure desires to satisfy; in whatever sphere of interest, he looked solely and steadfastly at the object; in his short and broken treatise he provides an eternal example—not of laws, or even of method, for there is no method except to be very intelligent, but of intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition.' Again, more specifically, 'The important critic is the person who is absorbed in the present problems of art, and who wishes to bring the forces of the past to bear upon the solution of these problems. If the critic considers Congreve, for instance, he will always have at the back of his mind the question: What has Congreve got that is pertinent to our dramatic art? Even if he is solely engaged in trying to understand Congreve, this will make all the difference: inasmuch as to understand anything is to understand from a point of view.' Criticism, for Mr. Eliot, is the statement of the structures in which our perceptions, when we face a work of art, form themselves. He quotes Remy de Gourmont: 'To erect his personal impressions into laws is the great effort of man if he is sincere.'

The good critic, as I understand Mr. Eliot, will be concerned with the aesthetic problem of any given work of art; he will (I should add) not despise ideas, but if he is intelligent he will recognize their place in a work of art and he will certainly not dismiss as paradoxical nonsense Mr. Eliot's contention that his baffling escape from ideas made Henry James the most intelligent man of his time. It is not an easy task to discover in each case what the aesthetic problem is; but that is the task, precisely, which every good critic of painting, let us say, is always compelled to attempt and which no critic of letters need attempt because he can always talk (profoundly, with the appearance of relevance, endlessly) about ideas. Mr. Eliot has accomplished the task several times, notably in his essay on 'Hamlet,' about which essay a small literature has already been produced. I have not space here to condense the substance of that or of the other critical essays—they are remarkably concise as they are—nor to do more than say that they are written with an extraordinary distinction in which clarity, precision, and nobility almost always escaping magniloquence, are the elements.

In turning to Mr. Eliot as poet I do not leave the critic behind since it is from his critical utterances that we derive the clue to his poetry. He says that the

historical sense is indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet after the age of twenty-five, and follows this with a statement which cannot be too closely pondered by those who misunderstand tradition and by those who imagine that American letters stand outside of European letters and are to be judged by other standards:

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

This is only the beginning of 'depersonalization.' It continues:

What happens is a continual surrender of himself (the poet) as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality ...the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.... The intensity of the poetry is something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience it may give the impression of.... Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality....

And finally:

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life.... The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all.... Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of a personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

The significant emotion has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet; and recognition of this, Mr. Eliot indicates, is the true appreciation of poetry. Fortunately for the critic he has written one poem, 'The Waste Land,' to which one can apply his own standards. It develops, carries to conclusions, many things in his remarkable earlier work, in method and in thought. I have not that familiarity

with the intricacies of French verse which could make it possible for me to affirm or deny the statement that technically he derives much from Jules Laforgue; if Remy de Gourmont's estimate of the latter be correct one can see definite points of similarity in the minds of the two poets:

His natural genius was made up of sensibility, irony, imagination, and clairvoyance; he chose to nourish it with positive knowledge (*connaissances positives*), with all philosophies and all literatures, with all the images of nature and of art; even the latest views of science seem to have been known to him.... It is literature entirely made new and unforeseen, disconcerting and giving the curious and rare sensation that one has never read anything like it before.

A series of sardonic portraits—of people, places, things—each the distillation of a refined emotion, make up Mr. Eliot's 'Poems.' The deceptive simplicity of these poems in form arid in style is exactly at the opposite extreme from false naivete; they are unpretentiously sophisticated, wicked, malicious, humorous, and with the distillation of emotion has gone a condensation of expression. In 'The Waste Land' the seriousness of the theme is matched with an intensity of expression in which all the earlier qualities are sublimated.

In essence 'The Waste Land' says something which is not new: that life has become barren and sterile, that man is withering, impotent, and without assurance that the waters which made the land fruitful will ever rise again. (I need not say that 'thoughtful' as the poem is, It does not 'express an idea'; it deals with emotions, and ends precisely in that significant emotion, inherent in the poem, which Mr. Eliot has described.) The title, the plan, and much of the symbolism of the poem, the author tells us in his 'Notes,' were suggested by Miss Weston's remarkable book on the Grail legend, 'From Ritual to Romance'; it is only indispensable to know that there exists the legend of a king rendered impotent, and his country sterile, both awaiting deliverance by a knight on his way to seek the Grail; it is interesting to know further that this is part of the Life or Fertility mysteries; but the poem is self-contained. It seems at first sight remarkably disconnected, confused, the emotion seems to disengage itself in spite of the objects and events chosen by the poet as their vehicle. The poem begins with a memory of summer showers, gaiety, joyful and perilous escapades; a moment later someone else is saying 'I will show you fear in a handful of dust,' and this is followed by the first lines of 'Tristan und Isolde,' and then again by a fleeting recollection of loveliness. The symbolism of the poem is introduced by means of the Tarot pack of cards; quotations, precise or dislocated, occur; gradually one discovers a rhythm of alternation between the visionary (so to name the memories of the past) and the actual, between the spoken and the unspoken thought. There are scraps, fragments; then sustained episodes; the poem culminates with the juxtaposition of the highest types of Eastern and Western asceticism, by means of allusions to St. Augustine and Buddha; and ends with a sour commentary on the

injunctions 'Give, sympathize, control' of the Upanishads, a commentary which reaches its conclusion in a pastiche recalling all that is despairing and disinherited in the memory of man.

A closer view of the poem does more than illuminate the difficulties; it reveals the hidden form of the work, indicates how each thing falls into place, and to the reader's surprise shows that the emotion which at first seemed to come in spite of the framework and the detail could not otherwise have been communicated. For the theme is not a distaste for life, nor is it a disillusion, a romantic pessimism of any kind. It is specifically concerned with the idea of the Waste Land—that the land *was* fruitful and now is not, that life had been rich, beautiful, assured, organized, lofty, and now is dragging itself out in a poverty-stricken, and disrupted and ugly tedium, without health, and with no consolation in morality; there may remain for the poet the labor of poetry, but in the poem there remain only 'these fragments I have shored against my ruins'—the broken glimpses of what was. The poem is not an argument and I can only add, to be fair, that it contains no romantic idealization of the past; one feels simply that even in the cruelty and madness which have left their record in history and in art, there was an intensity of life, a germination and fruitfulness, which are now gone, and that even the creative imagination, even hallucination and vision have atrophied, so that water shall never again be struck from a rock in the desert. Mr. Bertrand Russell has recently said that since the Renaissance the clock of Europe has been running down; without the feeling that it was once wound up, without the contrasting emotions as one looks at the past and at the present, 'The Waste Land' would be a different poem, and the problem of the poem would have been solved in another way.

The present solution is in part by juxtaposition of opposites. We have a passage seemingly spoken by a slut, ending

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May.

Goonight.

Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.

and then the ineffable

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

Conversely the turn is accomplished from nobility or beauty of utterance to

The sounds of horns and motors, which shall bring Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.

And in the long passage where Tiresias, the central character of the poem, appears the method is at its height, for here is the coldest and unhappiest revelation of the assault of lust made in the terms of beauty:

[Quotes 'The Waste Land', CPP, pp. 68–9, 'At the violet hour' to 'the stairs unlit'.]

It will be interesting for those who have knowledge of another great work of our time, Mr. Joyce's 'Ulysses,' to think of the two together. That 'The Waste Land' is, in a sense, the inversion and the complement of 'Ulysses' is at least tenable. We have in 'Ulysses' the poet defeated, turning outward, savoring the ugliness which is no longer transmutable into beauty, and, in the end, homeless. We have in 'The Waste Land' some indication of the inner life of such a poet. The contrast between the forms of these two works is not expressed in the recognition that one is among the longest and one among the shortest of works in its genre; the important thing is that in each the theme, once it is comprehended, is seen to have dictated the form. More important still, I fancy, is that each has expressed something of supreme relevance to our present life in the everlasting terms of art.

#### Note

- 1 Single Tax: a reform proposed by the American economist Henry George in his book 'Progress and Poverty' (1879). George's proposal was 'to abolish all taxation save that upon land values'.

LOUIS UNTEKMEYER, DISILLUSION VS.  
DOGMA, 'FREEMAN'

17 January 1923, vol. vi, 453

The 'Dial's' award to Mr. T.S.Eliot and the subsequent book-publication of his 'The Waste Land' have occasioned a display of some of the most enthusiastically naive superlatives that have ever issued from publicly sophisticated iconoclasts. A group, in attempting to do for Mr. Eliot what 'Ulysses' did for Mr. Joyce, has, through its emphatic reiterations, driven more than one reader to a study rather than a celebration of the qualities that characterize Mr. Eliot's work and endear him to the younger cerebralists. These qualities, apparent even in his earlier verses, are an elaborate irony, a twitching disillusion, a persistent though muffled hyperaesthesia. In 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' and the extraordinarily sensitized 'Portrait of a Lady,' Mr. Eliot fused these qualities in a flexible music, in the shifting nuances of a speech that wavered dexterously between poetic colour and casual conversation. In the greater part of 'Poems,' however, Mr. Eliot employed a harder and more crackling tone of voice; he delighted in virtuosity for its own sake, in epigrammatic velleities, in an incongruously mordant and disillusioned *vers de société*.

In 'The Waste Land,' Mr. Eliot has attempted to combine these two contradictory idioms with a new complexity. The result—although, as I am aware, this conclusion is completely at variance with the judgment of its frenetic admirers—is a pompous parade of erudition, a lengthy extension of the earlier disillusion, a kaleidoscopic movement in which the bright-coloured pieces fail to atone for the absence of an integrated design. As an echo of contemporary despair, as a picture of dissolution of the breaking-down of the very structures on which life has modelled itself, 'The Waste Land' has a definite authenticity. But an artist is, by the very nature of creation, pledged to give form to formlessness; even the process of disintegration must be held within a pattern. This pattern is distorted and broken by Mr. Eliot's jumble of narratives, nursery-rhymes, criticism, jazz-rhythms, 'Dictionary of Favourite Phrases and a few lyrical moments. Possibly the disruption of our ideals may be reproduced through such a *mélange*, but it is doubtful whether it is crystallized or even clarified by a series of severed narratives—tales from which the connecting tissue has been carefully cut—and familiar

quotations with their necks twisted, all imbedded in that formless plasma which Mr. Ezra Pound likes to call a Sordello-form. Some of the intrusions are more irritating than incomprehensible. The unseen sailor in the first act of 'Tristan und Isolde' is dragged in (without point or preparation) to repeat his 'Frisch weht der Wind'; in the midst of a metaphysical dialogue, we are assured

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—  
 It's so elegant  
 So intelligent.

Falling back on his earlier *métier*, a species of sardonic light verse, Mr. Eliot does not disdain to sink to doggerel that would be refused admission to the cheapest of daily columns:

When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
 Paces about her room again, alone,  
 She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
 And puts a record on the gramophone.

Elsewhere, the juxtaposition of Andrew Marvell, Paul Dresser and others equally incongruous is more cryptic in intention and even more dismal in effect:

But at my back from time to time I hear  
 The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring  
 Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.  
 O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter  
 And on her daughter  
 They wash their feet in soda water  
*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*

It is difficult to understand the presence of such cheap tricks in what Mr. Burton Rascoe has publicly informed us is 'the finest poem of this generation.' The mingling of wilful obscurity and weak vaudeville compels us to believe that the pleasure which many admirers derive from 'The Waste Land' is the same sort of gratification attained through having solved a puzzle, a form of selfcongratulation. The absence of any verbal acrobatics from Mr. Eliot's prose, a prose that represents not the slightest departure from a sort of intensive academicism, makes one suspect that, were it not for the Laforgue mechanism, Mr. Eliot's poetic variations on the theme of a superrefined futility would be increasingly thin and incredibly second rate.

As an analyst of desiccated sensations, as a recorder of the nostalgia of this age, Mr. Eliot has created something whose value is, at least, documentary. Yet, granting even its occasional felicities, 'The Waste Land' is a misleading document. The world distrusts the illusions which the last few years have destroyed. One

grants this latter-day truism. But it is groping among new ones: the power of the unconscious, an astringent scepticism, a mystical renaissance—these are some of the current illusions to which the Western World is turning for assurance of their, and its, reality. Man may be desperately insecure, but he has not yet lost the greatest of his emotional needs, the need to believe in something—even in his disbelief. For an ideal-demanding race there is always one more God—and Mr. Eliot is not his prophet.



ELINOR WYLIE, MR. ELIOT'S SLUG-  
HORN, 'NEW YORK EVENING POST  
LITERARY REVIEW'

20 January 1923, 396

Elinor Wylie (1885–1928), married to William Rose Benét, was a poet and novelist. Her 'Collected Poems' appeared in 1932.

The reviewer who must essay, within the limits of a few hundred temperate and well-chosen words, to lead even a willing reader into the ensorcelled mazes of Mr. T.S. Eliot's 'Waste Land' perceives, as the public prints have it, no easy task before him. He will appear to the mental traveller as dubious a guide as Childe Roland's hoary cripple with malicious eye; he lies in every word, unless by some stroke of luck, some lightning flash of revelation, he succeeds in showing forth the tragic sincerity and true power of that mysterious and moving spectacle, 'The Waste Land,' the mind of Mr. Eliot, the reflected and refracted mind of a good—or rather a bad—quarter of the present generation.

Amazing comparisons have been drawn between Mr. Eliot and certain celebrated poets; his admirers do not couple him with Pound nor his detractors with Dante, and both are justified in any annoyance which they may feel when others do so. His detractors say that he is obscure; his friends reply that he is no more cryptic than Donne and Yeats; his detractors shift their ground and point out with perfect truth that he has not the one's incomparable wit nor the other's incomparable magic; his friends, if they are wise, acquiesce. It is stated that he is not so universal a genius as Joyce; the proposition appears self-evident to any one who believes with the present reviewer, that Joyce is the sea from whose profundity Eliot has fished up that very Tyrian murex with which Mr. Wilson rightly credits him. Some comparisons, indeed, suggest the lunatic asylums where gentlemen imagine themselves to be the authors of Caesar's Commentaries and the Code Napoléon.

But when we begin to inquire what Mr. Eliot is, instead of what he is not—then if we fail to respond to his accusing cry of '*Mon semblable—mon frère!*' I am inclined to think that we are really either hypocrite readers or stubborn ones closing deliberate eyes against beauty and passion still pitifully alive in the midst of horror. I confess that once upon a time I believed Mr. Eliot to be a brutal person: this was

when I first read the 'Portrait of a Lady.' I now recognize my error, but my sense of the hopeless sadness and humiliation of the poor lady was perfectly sound. I felt that Mr. Eliot had torn the shrinking creature's clothes from her back and pulled the drawing-room curtains aside with a click to admit a flood of shameful sunlight, and I hated him for his cruelty. Only now that I know he is Tiresias have I lost my desire to strike him blind as Peeping Tom.

This power of suggesting intolerable tragedy at the heart of the trivial or the sordid is used with a skill little less than miraculous in 'The Waste Land,' and the power is the more moving because of the attendant conviction, that this terrible resembling contrast between nobility and baseness is an agony in the mind of Mr. Eliot of which only a portion is transferred to that of the reader. He is a cadaver, dissecting himself in our sight; he is the god Atthis who was buried in Stetson's garden and who now arises to give us the benefit of an anatomy lesson. Of course it hurts him more than it does us, and yet it hurts some of us a great deal at that. If this is a trick, it is an inspired one. I do not believe that it is a trick; I think that Mr. Eliot conceived 'The Waste Land' out of an extremity of tragic emotion and expressed it in his own voice and in the voices of other unhappy men not carefully and elaborately trained in close harmony, but coming as a confused and frightening and beautiful murmur out of the bowels of the earth. 'I did not know death had undone so many.' If it were merely a piece of virtuosity it would remain astonishing; it would be a work of art like a fine choir of various singers or a rose window executed in bright fragments of glass. But it is far more than this; it is infused with spirit and passion and despair, and it shoots up into stars of brilliance or flows down dying falls of music which nothing can obscure or silence. These things, rather than other men's outcries, are shored against any ruin which may overtake Mr. Eliot at the hands of Fate or the critics. As for the frequently reiterated statement that Mr. Eliot is a dry intellectual, without depth or sincerity of feeling, it is difficult for me to refute an idea which I am totally at a loss to understand; to me he seems almost inexcusably sensitive and sympathetic and quite inexcusably poignant, since he forces me to employ this horrid word to describe certain qualities which perhaps deserve a nobler tag in mingling pity with terror. That he expresses the emotion of an intellectual is perfectly true, but of the intensity of that emotion there is, to my mind, no question, nor do I recognize any reason for such a question. A very simple mind expresses emotion by action: a kiss or a murder will not make a song until they have passed through the mind of a poet, and a subtle mind may make a simple song about a murder because the murder was a simple one. But the simplicity of the song will be most apparent to the subtlest minds; it will be like a queer masquerading as a dairy maid. But as for Mr. Eliot, he has discarded all disguises; nothing could be more personal and direct than his method of presenting his weariness and despair by means of a stream of memories and images the like of which, a little dulled and narrowed, runs through the brain of any educated and imaginative man whose thoughts are sharpened by suffering. I should perhaps have doubted the suitability of such a stream as material for poetry, just as I do now very much doubt the suitability of Sanskrit amens and

abracadabras, but these dubieties are matters of personal taste and comparatively unimportant beside the fact that, though Mr. Eliot may speak with the seven tongues of men and of angels, he has not become as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. His gifts, whatever they are, profit him much; his charity, like Tiresias, has suffered and foresuffered all. If he is intellectually arrogant and detached—and I cannot for the life of me believe that he is—he is not spiritually either the one or the other; I could sooner accuse him of being sentimental. Indeed, in his tortured pity for ugly and ignoble things he sometimes comes near to losing his hardness of outline along with his hardness of heart; his is not a kindly tolerance for weakness and misery, but an obsessed and agonized sense of kinship with it which occasionally leads him into excesses of speech, ejaculations whose flippancy is the expression of profound despair.

Were I unable to feel this passion shaking the dry bones of 'The Waste Land' like a great wind I would not give a penny for all the thoughts and riddles of the poem; the fact that Mr. Eliot has failed to convince many readers that he has a soul must be laid as a black mark against him. Either you see him as a parlor prestidigitator, a character in which I am personally unable to visualize him, or else you see him as a disenchanting wizard, a disinherited prince. When he says *Shantih* three times as he emerges from 'The Waste Land' you may not think he means it: my own impulse to write *Amen* at the end of a poem has been too often and too hardly curbed to leave any doubt in my mind as to Mr. Eliot's absorbed seriousness; he is fanatically in earnest. His 'Waste Land' is Childe Roland's evil ground, the names of all the lost adventurers his peers toll in his mind increasing like a bell. He has set the slug-horn to his lips and blown it once and twice: the squat, round tower, blind as the fool's heart, is watching him, but he will blow the horn again.

CONRAD AIKEN, AN ANATOMY OF  
MELANCHOLY, 'NEW REPUBLIC'

7 February 1923, vol. xxxiii, 294–5

Mr. T.S.Eliot is one of the most individual of contemporary poets, and at the same time, anomalously, one of the most 'traditional.' By individual I mean that he can be, and often is (distressingly, to some) aware in his own way; as when he observes of a woman (in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night') that the door 'opens on her like a grin' and that the corner of her eye 'Twists like a crooked pin.' Everywhere, in the very small body of his work, is similar evidence of a delicate sensibility, somewhat shrinking, somewhat injured, and always sharply itself. But also, with this capacity or necessity for being aware in his own way, Mr. Eliot has a haunting, a tyrannous awareness that there have been many other awarenesses before; and that the extent of his own awareness, and perhaps even the nature of it, is a consequence of these. He is, more than most poets, conscious of his roots. If this consciousness had not become acute in 'Prufrock' or the 'Portrait of a Lady,' it was nevertheless probably there: and the roots were quite conspicuously French, and dated, say, 1870– 1900. A little later, as if his sense of the past had become more pressing, it seemed that he was positively redirecting his roots—urging them to draw a morbid dramatic sharpness from Webster and Donne, a faded dry gilt of cynicism and formality from the Restoration. This search of the tomb produced 'Sweeney' and 'Whispers of Immortality.' And finally, in 'The Waste Land,' Mr. Eliot's sense of the literary past has become so overmastering as almost to constitute the motive of the work. It is as if, in conjunction with the Mr. Pound of the 'Cantos,' he wanted to make a 'literature of literature'— a poetry not more actuated by life itself than by poetry; as if he had concluded that the characteristic awareness of a poet of the 20th century must inevitably, or ideally, be a very complex and very literary awareness able to speak only, or best, in terms of the literary past, the terms which had moulded its tongue. This involves a kind of idolatry of literature with which it is a little difficult to sympathize. In positing, as it seems to, that there is nothing left for literature to do but become a kind of parasitic growth on literature, a sort of mistle-toe, it involves, I think, a definite astigmatism—a distortion. But the theory is interesting if only because it has colored an important and brilliant piece of work.

'The Waste Land' is unquestionably important, unquestionably brilliant. It is important partly because its 433 lines summarize Mr. Eliot, for the moment, and demonstrate that he is an even better poet than most had thought; and partly because it embodies the theory just touched upon, the theory of the 'allusive' method in poetry. 'The Waste Land' is, indeed, a poem of allusion all compact. It purports to be symbolical; most of its symbols are drawn from literature or legend; and Mr. Eliot has thought it necessary to supply, in notes, a list of the many quotations, references, and translations with which it bristles. He observes candidly that the poem presents 'difficulties,' and requires 'elucidation.' This serves to raise at once, the question whether these difficulties, in which perhaps Mr. Eliot takes a little pride, are so much the result of complexity, a fine elaborateness, as of confusion. The poem has been compared, by one reviewer, to a 'full-rigged ship built in a bottle,' the suggestion being that it is a perfect piece of construction. But is it a perfect piece of construction? Is the complex material mastered, and made coherent? Or, if the poem is not successful in that way, in what way is it successful? Has it the formal and intellectual complex unity of a microscopic 'Divine Comedy'; or is its unity—supposing it to have one—of another sort?

If we leave aside for the moment all other considerations, and read the poem solely with the intention of understanding, with the aid of the notes, the symbolism, of making out what it is that is symbolized, and how these symbolized feelings are brought into relation with each other and with the other matters in the poem; I think we must, with reservations, and with no invidiousness, conclude that the poem is not, in any formal sense, coherent. We cannot feel that all the symbolisms belong quite inevitably where they have been put; that the order of the parts is an inevitable order; that there is anything more than a rudimentary progress from one theme to another; nor that the relation between the more symbolic parts and the less is always as definite as it should be. What we feel is that Mr. Eliot has not wholly annealed the allusive matter, has left it unabsorbed, lodged in gleaming fragments amid material alien to it. Again, there is a distinct weakness consequent on the use of allusions which may have both intellectual and emotional value for Mr. Eliot, but (even with the notes) none for us. The 'Waste Land,' of the Grail Legend, might be a good symbol, if it were something with which we were sufficiently familiar. But it can never, even when explained, be a good symbol, simply because it has no immediate associations for us. It might, of course, be a good *theme*. In that case it would be *given* us. But Mr. Eliot uses it for purposes of overtone; he refers to it; and as overtone it quite clearly fails. He gives us, superbly, a waste land—not the Waste Land. Why, then, refer to the latter at all—if he is not, in the poem, really going to use it? Hyacinth fails in the same way. So does the Fisher King. So does the Hanged Man, which Mr. Eliot tells us he associates with Frazer's Hanged God—we take his word for it. But if the precise association is worth anything, it is worth *putting into the poem*; otherwise there can be no purpose in mentioning it. Why, again, Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata? Or Shantih. Do they not say a good deal less for us than 'Give: sympathize: control'

or 'Peace'? Of course; but Mr. Eliot replies that he wants them not merely to mean those particular things, but also to mean them in a particular way—that is, to be remembered in connection with a Upanishad. Unfortunately, we have none of us this memory, nor can he give it to us; and in the upshot he gives us only a series of agreeable sounds which might as well have been nonsense. What we get at, and I think it is important, is that in none of these particular cases does the reference, the allusion, justify itself intrinsically, make itself felt. When we are aware of these references at all (sometimes they are unidentifiable) we are aware of them simply as something unintelligible but suggestive. When they have been explained, we are aware of the material referred to, the fact, (for instance, a vegetation ceremony,) as something useless for our enjoyment or understanding of the poem, something distinctly 'dragged in,' and only, perhaps, of interest as having suggested a pleasantly ambiguous line. For unless an allusion is made to live identifiably, to flower, where transplanted, it is otiose. We admit the beauty of the implicational or allusive method; but the key to an implication should be in the implication itself, not outside of it. We admit the value of esoteric pattern: but the pattern should itself disclose its secret, should not be dependent on a cypher. Mr. Eliot assumes for his allusions, and for the fact that they actually allude to something, an importance which the allusions themselves do not, as expressed, aesthetically command, nor, as explained, logically command; which is pretentious. He is a little pretentious, too, in his 'plan,'—'qui pourtant n'existe pas.' If it is a plan, then its principle is oddly akin to planlessness. Here and there, in the wilderness, a broken finger-post.

I enumerate these objections not, I must emphasize, in derogation of the poem, but to dispel, if possible, an illusion as to its nature. It is perhaps important to note that Mr. Eliot, with his comment on the 'plan,' and several critics, with their admiration of the poem's woven complexity, minister to the idea that 'The Waste Land' is, precisely, a kind of epic in a walnut shell: elaborate, ordered, unfolded with a logic at every joint discernible; but it is also important to note that this idea is false. With or without the notes the poem belongs rather to that symbolical order in which one may justly say that the 'meaning' is not explicitly, or exactly, worked out. Mr. Eliot's net is wide, its meshes are small; and he catches a good deal more—thank heaven—than he pretends to. If space permitted one could pick out many lines and passages and parodies and quotations which do not demonstrably, in any 'logical' sense, carry forward the theme, passages which unjustifiably, but happily, 'expand' beyond its purpose. Thus the poem has an emotional value far clearer and richer than its arbitrary and rather unworkable logical value. One might assume that it originally consisted of a number of separate poems which have been telescoped—given a kind of forced unity. The Waste Land conception offered itself as a generous net which would, if not unify, at any rate contain these varied elements. We are aware of a superficial 'binding'—we observe the anticipation and repetition of themes, motifs; 'Fear death by water' anticipates the episode of Phlebas, the cry of the nightingale is repeated, but these are pretty flimsy links, and do not genuinely bind because they do not reappear naturally, but arbitrarily.

This suggests, indeed, that Mr. Eliot is perhaps attempting a kind of program music in words, endeavoring to rule out 'emotional accidents' by supplying his readers, in notes, with only those associations which are correct. He himself hints at the musical analogy when he observes that 'In the first part of Part V three themes are employed.'

I think, therefore, that the poem must be taken,—most invitingly offers itself,—as a brilliant and kaleidoscopic confusion; as a series of sharp, discrete, slightly related perceptions and feelings, dramatically and lyrically presented, and violently juxtaposed, (for effect of dissonance) so as to give us an impression of an intensely modern, intensely literary consciousness which perceives itself to be not a unit but a chance correlation or conglomerate of mutually discolorative fragments. We are invited into a mind, a world, which is a 'broken bundle of mirrors'; a 'heap of broken images,' Isn't it that Mr. Eliot, finding it 'impossible to say just what he means,'—to recapitulate, to enumerate all the events and discoveries and memories that make a consciousness,—has emulated the 'magic lantern' that throws 'the nerves in patterns on a screen'? If we perceive the poem in this light, as a series of brilliant, brief, unrelated or dimly related pictures by which a consciousness empties itself of its characteristic contents, then we also perceive that, anomalously, though the dropping out of any one picture would not in the least affect the logic or 'meaning' of the whole, it would seriously detract from the value of the portrait. The 'plan' of the poem would not greatly suffer, one makes bold to assert, by the elimination of 'April is the cruellest month,' or Phlebas, or the Thames daughters, or Sosostris or 'You gave me hyacinths' or 'A woman drew her long black hair out tight'; nor would it matter if it did. These things are not important parts of an important or careful intellectual pattern, but they are important parts of an important emotional ensemble. The relations between Tiresias (who is said to unify the poem, in a sense, as spectator) and the Waste Land, or Mr. Eugenides, or Hyacinth, or any other fragment, is a dim and tonal one, not exact. It will not bear analysis, it is not always operating, nor can one with assurance, at any given point, say how much it is operating. In this sense 'The Waste Land' is a series of separate poems or passages, not perhaps all written at one time or with one aim, to which a spurious but happy sequence has been given. This spurious sequence has a value—it creates the necessary superficial formal unity; but it need not be stressed, as the Notes stress it. Could one not wholly rely for one's unity,—as Mr. Eliot has largely relied— simply on the dim unity of 'personality' which would underlie the retailed contents of a single consciousness? Unless one is going to carry unification very far, weave and interweave very closely, it would perhaps be as well not to unify at all; to dispense, for example, with arbitrary repetitions.

We reach thus the conclusion that the poem succeeds— as it brilliantly does— by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan; by virtue of its ambiguities, not of its explanations. Its incoherence is a virtue because its 'donnée' is incoherence. Its rich, vivid, crowded use of implication is a virtue, as implication is *always* a virtue;—it shimmers, it suggests, it gives the desired strangeness. But when, as often,

Mr. Eliot uses an implication beautifully—conveys by means of a picture-symbol or action-symbol a feeling—we do not require to be told that he had in mind a passage in the Encyclopedia, or the color of his nursery wall; the information is disquieting, has a sour air of pedantry. We 'accept' the poem as we would accept a powerful, melancholy tone-poem. We do not want to be told what occurs; nor is it more than mildly amusing to know what passages are, in the Straussian manner, echoes or parodies. We cannot believe that every syllable has an algebraic inevitability, nor would we wish it so. We could dispense with the French, Italian, Latin and Hindu phrases—they are irritating. But when our reservations have all been made, we accept 'The Waste Land' as one of the most moving and original poems of our time. It captures us. And we sigh, with a dubious eye on the 'notes' and 'plan,' our bewilderment that after so fine a performance Mr. Eliot should have thought it an occasion for calling 'Tullia's ape a marmosyte.' Tullia's ape is good enough.



HAROLD MONRO, NOTES FOR A STUDY  
OF 'THE WASTE LAND': AN IMAGINARY  
DIALOGUE WITH T.S.ELIOT,  
'CHAPBOOK'

February 1923, no. 34, 20–4

Monro (1879–1932), English poet and editor, founded the 'Poetry Review' in 1912, and edited 'Poetry and Drama' (1914). He opened the Poetry Bookshop, and was the publisher of the five volumes of 'Georgian Poetry'. His 'Collected Poems' (1933) contained a biographical sketch by F.S.Flint and a critical note by Eliot. An obituary by Pound appeared in the 'Criterion' in July 1932.

I.

An Imaginary Dialogue with T.S.Eliot (*Mr. Eliot's answers are in Italics*).

I have just read your poem 'The Waste Land' five or six times. I don't suppose you consider me capable of understanding it?—*Well?*—I was much interested in your new periodical the 'Criterion,' in which it appeared, and I also saw it in the American 'Dial.'—*Well?*—I observed that in England it was treated chiefly with indignation or contempt, but that the 'Dial' awarded you its annual prize of two thousand dollars.—*Well?*

I suppose it is not very easy for those who have not read your book 'The Sacred Wood' to understand your poetry. Some insight into your mind is advisable.—*Possibly.*—An article appeared in a recent number of the 'Dial' purporting to elucidate your poem. Do you think that Mr. Edmund Wilson, Jr., the writer of that article, was justified in stating that (though it consists of little more than four hundred lines) it 'contains allusions to, parodies of, or quotations from' (here he enumerates thirtythree sources)?—*Possibly.*—I can only recognize a dozen or so. This may be because my reading is not sufficiently wide.—*Possibly.*—*Well?*

I have heard it suggested that you write for one hypothetical intelligent reader.—*Well?*—Do you think such a reader at present exists?—*I'm not sure.*—Do you think perhaps that he is yet to be born?—*That depends.*

I think you do your public an injustice. Presumably the Editors who awarded you that prize may be gifted with some intelligence?—*I am not prepared to judge.*—And Mr. Edmund Wilson, Jr., makes the assertion that your ‘trivialities are more valuable than other peoples’ epics.’ He at any rate has an instinct for appreciation.—*I am not prepared to judge.*—Myself, I am inclined to think that some of your favourable critics, however unwillingly, do as much damage to your repu—*That doesn’t matter anyway.*

Did you submit your poem to the ‘London Mercury’?—*No.*—If you had, do you think the ‘L.M.’ would have accepted it?—*No.*—But if some friend of yours had submitted it for you, and if it had been accepted, would you have minded?—*Yes.*—Why?—*I don’t know. It doesn’t concern me.*

Let me see: where are we now? I was saying—*I haven’t heard you say anything much yet.*—Very well: I was about to say that ‘The Waste Land’ seems to me as near to Poetry as our generation is at present capable of reaching. But, thinking about it the other evening, I suddenly remembered a sentence from ‘The Sacred Wood’: ‘the moment an idea has been transferred from its pure state in order that it may become comprehensible to the inferior intelligence it has lost contact with art.’ And then, another: ‘It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting.’ These and other similar passages almost make one feel that one ought not to be appreciative, as if, indeed, it were low and vulgar to enjoy a work of literature for its own sake. That *depends upon the condition of your mind, and the kind of enjoyment you feel.*—You, no doubt, felt nothing personal in writing ‘The Waste Land’?—*No doubt.*—But, Mr. Eliot, surely your disgust for the society that constitutes the world of to-day may be described as a personal emotion?—*If you refer to ‘The Sacred Wood’ again you will find this sentence: ‘Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry.’*

I am completely in agreement with it.

May I direct some criticism upon your poem? But first I should mention that I know it was not written for me. You never thought of me as among your potential appreciative audience. You thought of nobody, and you were true to yourself. Yet, in a sense, you did think of me. You wanted to irritate me, because I belong to the beastly age in which you are doomed to live. But, in another sense, your poem seems calculated more to annoy Mr. Gosse, or Mr. Squire, than me. I imagine them exclaiming: ‘The fellow *can* write; but he *won’t.*’ That would be because just when you seem to be amusing yourself by composing what they might call *poetry*, at that moment you generally break off with a sneer. And, of course, they can’t realise that your faults are as virtuous as their virtues are wicked, nor that your style is, as it were, a mirror that distorts the perfections they admire, which are in truth only imitations of perfections. Your truest passages seem to them like imitations of imperfections. I am not indulging in personalities, but only using those gentlemen as symbols.—*Well, direct your criticisms anywhere you like. You are becoming slightly amusing, but not yet worth answering....*

## 2.

Most poems of any significance leave one definite impression on the mind. This poem makes a variety of impressions, many of them so contradictory that a large majority of minds will never be able to reconcile them, or conceive of it as an entity. Those minds will not go beyond wondering why it so often breaks itself up violently, changes its tone and apparently its subject. It will remain for them a *pot-pourri* of descriptions and episodes, and while deprecating the lack of *style*, those people will console themselves with soft laughter. That influential London Editor-critic who dismissed it as 'an obscure but amusing poem' is an instance.

Obscure it is, and amusing it can be too; but neither quite in the way he seems to have meant. They who have only one definition for the word poem may gnash their teeth, or smile. One definition will not be applicable to 'The Waste Land.' Of course, most poets write of *dreaming*, and use the expression that they *dream* in its conventional rhetorical sense, but this poem actually is a dream presented without any poetic boast, bluff or padding; and it lingers in the mind more like a dream than a poem, which is one of the reasons why it is both obscure and amusing. It is not possible to see it whole except in the manner that one may watch a cloud which, though remaining the same cloud, changes its form repeatedly as one looks. Or to others it may appear like a drawing that is so crowded with apparently unrelated details that the design or meaning (if there be one) cannot be grasped until those details have been absorbed into the mind, and assembled and related to each other.

## 3.

A friend came to me with the discovery that he and I could not hope to understand Mr. Eliot's poems; we had not the necessary culture: impossible for us to recognise the allusions. I asked him whether the culture could be grown in a bottle or under a frame, or in the open. Mr. Edmund Wilson, Jr., tells us, on the other hand, that 'it is not necessary to know...any but the most obvious of Mr. Eliot's allusions to feel the force of the intense emotion which the poem is intended to convey.' I was inclined to side with Mr. Wilson, so we confined ourselves to discussing the permissibility of introducing, as Mr. Eliot does, into the body of a poem, wholly or partly, or in a distorted form, quotations from other poems. 'In the absence of inverted commas,' said my friend, 'the ignorant, when they are French quotations (seeing that Mr. Eliot has written several French poems) or German even, might mistake them for lines belonging to the poem itself. It is simple cribbing. The distortions are more serious still. For instance

When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
 Paces about the room again, alone,  
 She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
 And puts a record on the gramophone.

is an outrage, and a joke worthier of 'Punch' than of a serious poet. Also I much prefer the Bible, Spenser, Shakespeare, Marvell and Byron to Eliot. Marvell wrote:

But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near.

Eliot writes:

But at my back in a cold blast I hear  
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

Well, that is simply a meretricious travesty of one of the most beautiful couplets in English poetry. It is wicked.'

I answered: 'It is only a natural jeer following upon an exposure of emotion. A schoolboy is hardly as nervous of showing his feelings. The matter cannot be judged in your manner. What we have to find out is whether T.S. Eliot is a sufficiently constructive or imaginative, or ingenious poet to justify this freedom that he exercises.'

He answered: 'Yes, but...

But at my back I always hear  
Eliot's intellectual sneer.

—Now I'm doing it myself.'

#### 4.

This poem is at the same time a representation, a criticism, and the disgusted outcry of a heart turned cynical. It is calm, fierce, and horrible: the poetry of despair itself become desperate. Those poor little people who string their disjointed ejaculations into prosaic semblances of verse—they pale as one reads 'The Waste Land.' They have no relation to it: yet, through it, we realise what they were trying, but have failed, to represent. Our epoch sprawls, a desert, between an unrealised past and an unimaginable future. The Waste Land is one metaphor with a multiplicity of interpretations.

#### 5.

These are the opening lines:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering  
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dried tubers.

36.  
HARRIET MONROE, A CONTRAST,  
'POETRY'

March 1923, vol. xxi, 325–30

Harriet Monroe (1860–1936), a minor American poet, was the founder and editor of 'Poetry: A Magazine of Verse'. Pound, as foreign editor, sent her a copy of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' in October 1914. In spite of her considerable opposition, Pound was able to persuade her to publish the poem, and it finally appeared in June 1915.

This review contrasts 'The Waste Land' with 'The Box of God' by Lew Sarett, to the advantage of the latter. Sarett (1888–1954) was a minor American poet.

It happens that I have read these two books—but neither for the first time—under the same lightly veiled sunshine of this mild winter afternoon; and the contrasts between them are so complete and so suggestive that I am tempted toward the incongruity of reviewing them together.

In the important title-poems of the two we have an adequate modern presentation of two immemorial human types. One might call these types briefly the indoor and the outdoor man, but that would be incomplete; they are also the man who affirms and the man who denies; the simple-hearted and the sophisticated man; the doer, the believer, and the observant and intellectual questioner. These two types have faced each other since time began and they will accuse each other till quarrels are no more. Both, in their highest development, are dreamers, men commanded by imagination; seers who are aware of their age, who know their world. Yet always they are led by separating paths to opposite instincts and conclusions.

Mr. Eliot's poem—kaleidoscopic, profuse, a rattle and rain of colors that fall somehow into place—gives us the malaise of our time, its agony, its conviction of futility, its wild dance on an ash-heap before a clouded and distorted mirror.

I will show you fear in a handful of dust,

he cries, and he shows us confusion and dismay and disintegration, the world crumbling to pieces before our eyes and patching itself with desperate gayety into new and strangely irregular forms. He gives us, with consummate distinction, what many an indoor thinker thinks about life today, what whole groups of impassioned intellectuals are saying to each other as the great ball spins.

Yet all the time there are large areas of mankind to whom this thinking does not apply; large groups of another kind of intellectuals whose faith is as vital and constructive as ever was the faith of their crusading forefathers. To the men of science, the inventors, the engineers, who are performing today's miracles, the miasma which afflicts Mr. Eliot is as remote a speculative conceit, as futile a fritter of mental confectionery, as Lyly's euphemism must have been to Elizabethan sailors. And these men are thinkers too, dreamers of larger dreams than any group of city-closeted artists may evoke out of the circling pipesmoke of their scented talk. These men are creating that modern world which the half-aware and over-informed poets of London and Montmartre so darkly doom.

It is their spiritual attitude which Mr Sarett's poem presents—not statedly and consciously, but by a larger and more absolute implication than he may be aware of. 'The Box of God' is an outdoor man's poem of faith—the creed of the pioneer, of the explorer, the discoverer, the inventor in whatever field; of the man who sees something beckoning ahead, and who must follow it, wherever it leads; of the hero who has the future in his' keeping, who, though called by different names in different ages, is always the same type. Mr. Sarett makes an Indian guide his spokesman—an Indian guide who rebels against confinement in that ritualistic 'box of God', the little Catholic church in the mountains in which his 'conversion' has been registered.

Somebody's dere.... He's walk-um in dose cloud....  
 You see-um? Look! He's mak'-um for hees woman  
 De w'ile she sleep, dose t'ing she want-um most—  
 Blue dress for dancing. You see, my frien'?...ain't?  
 He's t'rowing on de blanket of dose sky  
 Dose plenty-plenty handfuls of white stars;  
 He's sewing on dose plenty teet' of elk,  
 Dose shiny looking-glass and plenty beads.  
 Somebody's dere...somet'ing he's in dere...  
 Sh-sh-sh-sh! Somet'ing's dere!.... You hear-um? ain't?  
 Somebody—somebody's dere, calling...calling...  
 I go... I go...me! ...me... I go....

In primitive times the bard was aware of this man—he sang his deeds in heroic song. If the modern bard is not aware of him, the lack is due, not to superior intellectual subtlety, but to myopic vision, narrow experience and closely imprisoned thought. Mr. Eliot lives with specialists—poets of idle hands and legs and supersensitized brains; varied by a bank clerk routine with secondrate minds.

One can not imagine him consorting with heroes or highwaymen, or getting on intimate terms with Thomas A.Edison if he were granted a confidential hour; and it is hopeless to expect an all-round great poem of our time from a man who could not thrill at such a contact.

Mr. Sarett's poem is not about Thomas A.Edison either; but the spirit of such men is in it, and something of the force of the world-builder, wherever he is found. We live in a period of swift and tremendous change: if Mr. Eliot feels it as chaos and disintegration, and a kind of wild impudent dance-of-death joy, Mr. Sarett feels it as a new and larger summons to faith in life and art. This poet has lived with guides and Indians; last summer, while taking his vacation as a forest ranger of the government, he chased a pair of bandits through Glacier Park for forty-eight hours alone, and single-handed brought them back to camp for trial. He could talk with Thomas A. Edison, or perhaps with a sequoia or a skyscraper. He has the experience and character-equipment to write poems expressive of the particular kind of heroic spirit which is building the future while nations are painfully digging their way out of the past. 'The Box of God' is one such poem; and in it his art, while less fluid and fluent and iridescent than Mr. Eliot's, is of a rich and nobly beautiful pattern and texture which suggests that he may prove adequate to the task. One feels that he is merely at the beginning, that he is just getting into his stride.

But I would not be understood as belittling the importance of Mr. Eliot's glistening, swiftly flowing poem of human and personal agony because it does not say the whole thing about the age we live in. Mr. Eliot would be the first to disclaim such an intention—he would probably say that 'The Waste Land' is the reaction of a suffering valetudinarian to the present after-the-war chaos in Europe, with its tumbling-down of old customs and sanctities. It is a condition, not a theory, which confronts him; and he meets the condition with an artist's invocation of beauty. One would expect a certain deliberateness in Mr. Eliot's art, but this poem surprises with an effect of unstudied spontaneity. While stating nothing, it suggests everything that is in his rapidly moving mind, in a series of shifting scenes which fade in and out of each other like the cinema. The form, with its play of many-colored lights on words that flash from everywhere in the poet's dream, is a perfect expression of the shifting scenes which fade in and out of each other like the cinema. The form, with its play of many-colored lights on words that flash from everywhere in the poet's dream, is a perfect expression of the shifting tortures in his soul. If one calls 'The Waste Land' a masterpiece of decadent art, the word must be taken as praise, for decadent art, while always incomplete, only half-interpretive, is pitifully beautiful and tragically sincere. The agony and bitter splendor of modern life are in this poem, of that part of it which dies of despair while the world is building its next age.

If Mr. Eliot's subject is essentially a phantasmagoric fade-out of God, Mr. Sarett's is the search for God, for a larger god than men have ever entrapped in the churchly boxes they have made for him. Both poems are, in a sense, the poet's meditations, interrupted by the intrusion of remembered words once uttered by



others: in Sarett's case by the long-dead Indian guide, in Eliot's by Lil's husband, by Mrs. Porter, by Shakespeare, Spenser, Dante, Baudelaire, and many other poets of many languages. And both poems have a certain largeness and finality: they do excellent-well what they set out to do, and they suggest more than they say—they invite to thought and dreams.

37.  
J.M., REVIEW, 'DOUBLE DEALER'  
May 1923, vol. v, 173-4

Burton Rascoe's review appeared in the 'New York Tribune', 5 November 1922, section 5, 8.

Here, said she,  
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor.

'The Waste Land' is, it seems to me, the agonized outcry of a sensitive romanticist drowning in a sea of jazz. When Mr. Burton Rascoe calls it 'perhaps the finest poem of this generation,' one is compelled to challenge the verdict because comparisons in the arts are unjust in the first place and 'The Waste Land' is not as a whole superb. But one would be very foolish indeed who would deny that it contains magnificent elements and supremely beautiful lines.

This medley of catch-phrases, allusions, innuendoes, paraphrase and quotation gives unmistakable evidence of rare poetic genius. One is certain that, read by Mr. Eliot, to whom every allusion is clear, for whom every catchword has a ghostly portent, for whom every quotation has an emotional and intellectual connotation of intense significance, 'The Waste Land' is a great poem. To us who cannot read with Mr. Eliot's spectacles, colored as they are by Mr. Eliot's experience, it must remain a hodge-podge of grandeur and jargon. It cannot, from the standpoint of the average reader or of the average writer of verse, be appraised as a complete success.

Mr. Eliot, an immortal by instinct, finds himself submerged—a 'drowned Phoenician Sailor'—in the garish and to him not charming swirl of animalistic, illiterate human life, now seething on both sides of the Atlantic. Caught in this maelstrom, he catches glimpses of the world of drama and romance and stable beauty which he would prefer and which, no question, he has found in books. From that ideal world come floating ghostly cadences, images and reminders. To these straws he clings, as a sort of salvation.

O swallow swallow  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*  
 These fragments I have shored against my ruins

The fragments from the other world which Mr. Eliot clings to in 'The Waste Land,' like the fragments which he quotes in 'The Sacred Wood,' are of the very heart of poetry: 'Those are pearls that were his eyes,' echoes throughout.

Taking the poem as a whole, the average reader will object that many passages, as pure art, are not satisfactory. I venture to repeat that Mr. Eliot's own intellectual or emotional associations give to some of the language used in 'The Waste Land' a significance which it does not and cannot have for another individual. The discords, in Mr. Eliot's opinion and in that of certain readers, no doubt, have their place in the pattern, adding a beauty of contrast, heightening the effect of the harmonies. To me the discords seem unsatisfactory discords. 'The Waste Land' is a poem containing passages of extreme beauty, but I believe there are few persons who can read it all with sustained delight.

It opens:

[Quotes CPP, p. 61, 'April is' to 'shower of rain'.]

A little farther on Mr. Eliot writes:

[Quotes CPP, p. 61, 'What are the roots' to 'sound of water'.]

In 'Death by Water' (Part IV of the poem) one finds:

[Quotes CPP, p. 71.]

In 'A Game of Chess' (Part II) one finds:

'Do  
 You know nothing? Do you see nothing?  
     Do you remember  
 Nothing?  
     I remember  
 Those are pearls that were his eyes.

Many of us have contended for a long time that T.S. Eliot is one of the most exceptional men of letters of his epoch. 'The Waste Land' confirms that belief. How much of it or of his previous work is indelible I would not venture to estimate. That that work reveals a genius and a personality extremely rare, I am certain. And that Mr. Eliot, as poet or as critic or as scholar, eminently deserved such an award as the Dial prize, seems to be incontrovertible.

JOHN CROWE RANSOM, WASTE LANDS,  
‘NEW YORK EVENING POST LITERARY  
REVIEW’

14 July 1923, vol. iii, 825–6

Ransom (1888–1976) was a distinguished American poet and critic, author of ‘The World’s Body’ (1938) and ‘Selected Poems’ (1945). He was an influential editor of the ‘Kenyon Review’.

This review was reprinted in ‘Modern Essays, Second Series’, edited by Christopher Morley (New York, 1924), pp. 345–59.

The imagination of a creative artist may play over the surface of things or it may go very deep, depending on the quality and the availability of the artist’s mind. Here is fiction, for example, wherein the artist, its author, is going to recite a local body of fact; and this core of fact is not more definitely related to space and time by the illusions of his realism than it already has been related to the whole emotional and philosophical contexts of his life. The thing has been assimilated into his history. It is no longer pure datum, pure spectacle, like a visitation of the angels or like categorical disaster; it does not ravish nor appall him; for it has been thoroughly considered by the artist, through processes both conscious and unconscious, and has been allowed to sink infallibly into its connections.

An appalling thing to Hamlet evidently was death. But Claudius enjoyed the insuperable advantage of being elder to the Prince of Denmark, and therefore could invite him to consider the King’s death in the light of authentic evidence of the common mortality of fathers: *sub specie omnium patrum obitorum*. And Horatio, a man of superior practical instincts, to him marvelling how the grave digger could sing at his trade, was enabled to return the inspired answer: ‘Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.’

A property of easiness is what the artist must come to, against even the terrible and the ecstatic moments of history. A great discrimination of nature against America is this requirement, in the field of the comparative literatures; in pioneering America a tribal ethic pronounces that life is real, life is earnest. The property of easiness in the mind is one of the blessings that compensate an old and perfected society for the loss of its youth. And likewise with the individual

artist, it comes with experience, and it comes notably with age; though not entirely as reckoned by the Gregorian calendar. The young artist is not to think that his synthesis of experience is worth as much as the old one's. He is not to put an extravagant value on the freshness of his youthful passions, but to make sure that the work of art wants for its material the passion mellowed and toned and understood long after the event: 'recollected in tranquillity,' to use the best of all the literary dogmas. A soul-shaking passion is very good if the artist will wait for it to age; the bigger the passion the deeper it will go in the integrating processes of the mind, and the wider will be the branching associations it will strike out. When it comes forth eventually it will have depth and context, too. It has been fertilized and romanticized. It has been made musical, or symphonic, where, before it gained its subsidiary pieces and was itself subdued to harmony, it was only monotone and meant nothing to delicate ears.

There is a subterranean chamber where the work of artistic gestation takes place. It has always been held that the artist draws for his sources from a depth beyond the fathom of the consciously reasoning mind. An immense literature to this effect—or at least the English fraction of it—has recently been minutely reported by Professor Prescott in 'The Poetic Mind'; and it is an application of the same principle, though quite spontaneous and fresh, which gives the English poet Robert Graves his doctrine of inspiration. We are not to dogmatize about this subliminal consciousness; the psychologists are terribly at sea in defining it; probably it is wrong to refer to it at all as a subconsciousness. Here we inevitably enter the province of pure theory; but critics have to have a revelation of first principles if they are going to speak with any authority about art.

Possibly the following statement of the case might be defended. At one moment we are conscious; but at the next moment we are self-conscious, or interested in the moment that is past, and we attempt to write it down. Science writes it down in one way, by abstracting a feature and trying to forget all the rest. Art writes it down in another way, by giving the feature well enough but by managing also to suggest the infinity of its original context. The excellence of science is its poverty, for it tries to carry only the abstractions into the record, but the excellence of art is its superfluity, since it accompanies these abstractions with much of that tissue of the concrete in which they were discovered. It is as if the thing will not live out of its own habitat, it is dead as soon as science hauls it up and handles it, but art tries to keep it alive by drawing up with it a good deal of its native element.

Today we are superbly in a position to consent to such a doctrine. Since James and Bradley and Bergson, since Kant if we have always had ears to hear, since the Carus Lectures of John Dewey if we only began to listen yesterday, it is borne in upon us that abstract science is incapable of placing the stream of consciousness—the source of all that is—upon the narrow tablets of the record. Art, too, in the last analysis is probably incapable, since at any moment it only complements the record of science and at no moment denies it, so that Coleridge, defining poetry as more than usual emotion, added the remarkable qualification, 'with more than usual order.' But art, if it is not destructive, is at least gently revolutionary. The

specific of art which is enough to create its illusion and make it miraculous among the works of the mind is that it fishes out of the stream what would become the dead abstraction of science, but catches it still alive, and can exhibit to us not only its bones and structures but many of the free unaccountable motions of its life. These motions are the contributions that art makes to the record; these free and unpredictable associations discovered for the thing in its stream. They are impertinences to the scientific temper, but delightful to the soul that in the routine of scientific chores is oppressed with the sense of serving a godless and miserly master.

But returning to the level of practice, or the natural history of art. A man repeatedly must come to points where his science fails him, where his boasted intellect throws its little light and still leaves him in darkness; there is then nothing for him to do but to go off and sound the secret cavern for an oracle. That is to say, he abandons his problem to mysterious powers within him which are not the lean and labored processes of his selfconscious reason. And if this abandonment is complete the oracle will speak. After brief silence, after a sleep and a forgetting, but at all events with what must be considered an astonishing celerity, the answer comes out. It is a kind of revelation. He submitted facts, and he receives them related into truths. He deposited a raw realism; he receives it richly romanticized. Evidently the agency which worked for him simply referred his datum to a perfectly organized experience, where no item was missing, and returned it with a context of clinging natural affinities.

But the principle for the artist to proceed upon is that he must *release* his theme to the processes of imagination—a hard principle for the narrow-minded! He must wait like a non-partisan beside his theme, not caring whether it comes forth pro or con; and inevitably, of course, it will be neither. The truth that comes by inspiration is not simply the correct conclusion to premises already known; the Pythian never comes down to mono-syllables and answers yes and no. The whole matter is worked over freshly by an agent more competent than reason and the conclusion is as unpredictable as the evidence was inaccessible. The man with a cause must abdicate before his genius will work for him. The history of inspiration does not offer cases where passions, even righteous passions, spasms of energy, rages and excitements, and even resolutions that seem likely to remove mountains have enabled artists to call the spirits from the vasty deep. History offers cases like Goethe's, who wrote, recalling certain moments in the composition of Faust: 'The difficulty was to obtain, by sheer force of will, what in reality is obtainable only by a spontaneous act of nature.' But this faculty of release is rare, and by the same token the artists are rare. Probably the history of most of the abortive efforts at art is the history of wilful men who could not abandon their cause, but continued to worry it as a dog worries a bone, expecting to perform by fingers and rules what can come by magic only. And release is peculiarly difficult for the hot blood of youth. The young artist stakes everything upon the heat of his passion and the purity of his fact. Very limited is the assistance which he is capable of receiving

from his elders in speeding the tedious rites of time; he is convinced that *alla stoccata* will carry it away.

Other formulas would carry such first principles as well as these, and indeed, ideally, every critic could find them for himself. He needs them if he is to speak with a greater authority than we now hear him speaking. He needs to have a theory of inspiration in order that he may trace error back to its course, and show that the artist must always sin unless his heart is pure. The field of literature in our day—perhaps beyond all other days—is an unweeded garden, in which the flowers and weeds are allowed to grow side by side because the gardeners, who are the critics, do not know their botany. The commonest and fatallest error in the riot of our letters is the fundamental failure of the creative imagination, and it ought always to be exposed. Is it held that this sort of criticism would be too brutal? Is it equivalent to telling the artist that he is congenitally defective in the quality fundamental to art? It is not so bad as that; a part of the total error by which the artist misses his art may be due to the fact that his gift, which is genuine, is under the cloud of some inattention or poor policy, or, above all, immaturity, which is capable of treatment. But it does not matter; criticism should attend to its business anyway; criticism should be prepared to make an example of bad artists for the sake of the good artists and the future of art.

But what a congenial exercise is furnished the critic by that strange poem, 'The Waste Land.' In the first place, everybody agrees beforehand that its author is possessed of uncommon literary powers, and it is certain that, whatever credit the critic may try to take from him, a flattering residue will remain. And then his poem has won a spectacular triumph over a certain public and is entitled to an extra quantity of review. Best of all, Mr. Eliot's performance is the apotheosis of modernity, and seems to bring to a head all the specifically modern errors, and to cry for critic's ink of a volume quite disproportionate to its merits as a poem.

The most notable surface fact about 'The Waste Land' is of course its extreme disconnection. I do not know just how many parts the poem is supposed to have, but to me there are something like fifty parts which offer no bridges the one to the other and which are quite distinct in time, place, action, persons, tone, and nearly all the unities to which art is accustomed. This discreteness reaches also to the inside of the parts, where it is indicated by a frequent want of grammatical joints and marks of punctuation; as if it were the function of art to break down the usual singleness of the artistic image, and then to attack the integrity of the individual fragments. I presume that poetry has rarely gone further in this direction. It is a species of the same error which modern writers of fiction practice when they laboriously disconnect the stream of consciousness and present items which do not enter into wholes. Evidently they think with Hume that reality is facts and pluralism, not compounds and systems. But Mr. Eliot is more enterprising than they, because almost in so many words he assails the philosophical or cosmical principles under which we form the usual images of reality, naming the whole phantasmagoria Waste Land almost as plainly as if he were naming cosmos Chaos.

His intention is evidently to present a wilderness in which both he and the reader may be bewildered, in which one is never to see the wood for the trees.

Against this philosophy—or negation of philosophy—the critic must stand fast. It is good for some purposes, but not for art. The mind of the artist is an integer, and the imaginative vision is a single act which fuses its elements. It is to be suspected that the author who holds his elements apart is not using his imagination, but using a formula, like a scientist anxious to make out a ‘case’; at any rate, for art such a procedure suggests far too much strain and tension. For imagination things cohere; pluralism cannot exist when we relax our obsessions and allow such testimony as is in us to come out. Even the most refractory elements in experience, like the powerful opposing wills in a tragedy, arrive automatically at their ‘higher synthesis’ if the imagination is allowed to treat them.

There is a reason besides philosophical bias which makes the disconnection in the poem. The fragments could not be joined on any principle and remain what they are. And that is because they are at different stages of fertilization; they are not the children of a single act of birth. Among their disparities one notes that scraps from many tongues are juxtaposed; and yet one knows well that we are in different ‘ages of intelligence’ when we take the different languages on our lips; we do not quote Greek tragedy and modern cockney with the same breath or with the same kinds of mind. We cannot pass, in ‘The Waste Land,’ without a convulsion of the mind from ‘O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag,’ to ‘Shantih shantih shantih.’ And likewise, the fragments are in many metres, from the comparatively formal metre which we know as the medium of romantic experiences in the English thesaurus to an extremely free verse which we know as the medium of a halfhearted and disillusioned art. But, above all, some fragments are emotions recollected in tranquillity and others are emotions kept raw and bleeding, like sores we continue to pick. In other words, the fragments vary through almost every stage, from pure realism to some point just short of complete fertilization by the romantic imagination, and this is a material which is incapable of synthesis.

A consequence of this inequality of material is a certain novelty of Mr. Eliot’s which is not fundamentally different from parody. To parody is to borrow a phrase whose meaning lies on one plane of intelligence and to insert it into the context of a lower plane; an attempt to compound two incommensurable imaginative creations. Mr. Eliot inserts beautiful quotations into ugly contexts. For example:

When lovely woman stoops to folly, and  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone.

A considerable affront against aesthetic sensibilities. Using these lovely borrowed lines for his own peculiar purposes, Mr. Eliot debases them every time; there is not, I believe, a single occasion where his context is as mature as the quotation



which he inserts into it; he does not invent such phrases for himself, nor, evidently, does his understanding quite appreciate them, for they require an organization of experience which is yet beyond him. The difficulty in which he finds himself is typically an American one. Our native poets are after novelty; they believe, as does Mr. Eliot in one of his prose chapters, that each age must have its own 'form.' The form in which our traditional poetry is cast is that of another generation and therefore No-thoroughfare. What the new form is to be they have not yet determined. Each of the new poets must experiment with a few usually, it appears, conceiving forms rather naïvely, as something which will give quick effects without the pains and delays of complete fertilization. Mr. Eliot has here tried out such a form and thereby reverted to the frailties of his nativity. The English poets, so far as they may be generalized, are still content to work under the old forms and, it must be said in their favor, it is purely an empirical question whether these are unfit for further use; the poets need not denounce them on principle. But it may be put to the credit of Mr. Eliot that he is a man of better parts generally than most of the new poets, as in the fact that he certainly bears no animus against the old poetry except as it is taken for a model by the new poets; he is sufficiently sensitive to its beauties at least to have held on with his memory to some of its ripest texts and to have introduced them rather wistfully into the forbidding context of his own poems, where they are thoroughly ill at ease.

The criticism does not complete itself till it has compared 'The Waste Land' with the earlier work of its author. The volume of 'Poems' which appeared a year previously hardly presaged the disordered work that was to follow. The discrepancy is astonishing. Sweeney and Prufrock, those heroes who bid so gayly for immortality in their own right, seem to come out of a fairly mature and at any rate an equal art. They are elegant and precious creations rather than substantial, with a very reduced emotional background, like the art of a man of the world rather than of a man of frankly poetic susceptibilities; but the putative author is at least responsible. He has 'arrived'; he has by self-discipline and the unconscious lessons of experience integrated his mind. The poem which comes a year later takes a number of years out of this author's history, restores him intellectually to his minority. I presume that 'The Waste Land,' with its burden of unregenerate fury, was disheartening to such critics as Mr. Aldington, who had found in the 'Poems' the voice of a completely articulate soul; I presume that for these critics' the 'Poems' are automatically voided and recalled by the later testament; they were diabolically specious, and the true heart of the author was to be revealed by a very different gesture. But I prefer to think that they were merely precocious. They pretended to an intellectual synthesis of which the author was only intellectually aware, but which proved quite too fragile to contain the ferment of experience. One prefers 'The Waste Land' after all, for of the two kinds it bears the better witness to its own sincerity.

'The Waste Land' is one of the most insubordinate poems in the language, and perhaps it is the most unequal. But I do not mean in saying this to indicate that it is permanently a part of the language; I do not entertain that as a probability. The

genius of our language is notoriously given to feats of hospitality: but it seems to me it will be hard pressed to find accommodations at the same time for two such incompatibles as Mr. Wordsworth and the present Mr. Eliot; and any realist must admit that what happens to be the prior tenure of the mansion in this case is likely to be stubbornly defended.

39.

ALLEN TATE, A REPLY TO RANSOM,  
'NEW YORK EVENING POST LITERARY  
REVIEW'

4 August 1923, vol. iii, 886

Tate (1899–1979), an important American poet and critic, was associated with Ransom in the Fugitive Group. After Eliot's death he edited a collection of essays by various hands which appeared first in the 'Kenyon Review' and was later published as 'T.S.Eliot: The Man and His Work' (New York, 1966).

This item is a letter from Tate to the literary editor disagreeing with Ransom's earlier review.

SIR: John Crowe Ransom's article, *Waste Lands*, in the 'Literary Review' of July 14, violates so thoroughly the principle of free critical inquiry and at the same time does such scant justice to the school of so-called philosophic criticism, to which one supposes he belongs, that it may be of interest to your readers to consider the possible fallacy of his method and a few of the errors into which it leads him. Mr. Ransom begins by building up a rather thoroughgoing schematism of the origin and process of artistic creation, and though he grants that 'other formulas would carry first principles just as well as these,' he urges that the critic, 'needs a theory of inspiration, in order that he may trace error back to its source.' The maker of these phrases evidently knows nothing of the genetic criticism since the day of Wundt or of the Freudian emphasis of later days on the psychological origins of art as a standard of aesthetics; at any rate, he is unaware of the ultimate futility of this kind of inquiry when its results are dragged in to serve as critical arbiters. Theories of inspiration are valuable, though less so than interesting, but Mr. Ransom, it seems to me, has offered only an abstract restatement of superannate theories of consciousness, which do not constitute a theory of inspiration—whatever such a theory may be: all to the end that a philosophy of discontinuity is not only lamentable but entirely wrong. What this has to do with aesthetics it is hard to conceive. But Mr. Ransom rightly says that the critic 'should be prepared to make an example of the bad artists for the sake of the good artists'; but this example cannot be made by exorcising pluralism to the advantage of a

gentler but equally irrelevant ghost: 'For the imagination things cohere; pluralism cannot exist when we relax our obsessions and allow such testimony as is in us to come out.' In other words, no honest man can be a pluralist—which is not only palpably untenable but quite outside the course of his argument. And if we have heeded too little the Carus lectures of John Dewey or failed to let the mire of Kantianism cling to our feet, what is Mr. Ransom going to do about the writings of Remy de Gourmont and, closer home, certain words uttered as far back as 1896 by Mr. George Santayana? And isn't it difficult to see how Professor Prescott and Robert Graves (!) can be heeded along with Kant and Bradley?

And coming to 'The Waste Land' itself, Mr. Ransom is quite consistent in so far as he condemns the poem for its anti-philosophical *mélouge*. He wonders why T.S.Eliot is chaotic in his verse and so rigidly coherent in his prose, and accounts for the discrepancy on the doubtful ground that T.S.Eliot is determined to exploit pluralism at all costs, even at the risk of being charged with insincerity. Doubtless Mr. Ransom knows the difference between the instrument, Logic, and the material, Reality; but I do not believe he shows it here. I take it that Keats wrote about as incoherent prose as we have, yet in certain odes he gives us Mr. Ransom's 'higher synthesis': how would Mr. Ransom explain this? I suppose Keats was insincere in his letters because he exposes a multiverse. Mr. Ransom asks whether this sort of criticism would be too brutal. Well not so brutal as irrelevant.

The real trouble with Mr. Ransom's article comes out when he proceeds to comment on specific aspects of 'The Waste Land.' Mr. Eliot is a pluralist; he has not 'achieved' a philosophy; *argal*, he is immature, and his poem is inconsiderable. I take it that Anatole France is immature. But Mr. Ransom's worry on this point really is his inability to discover the form of the poem, for, says he, it presents metres so varied and such lack of grammar and punctuation and such a bewildering array of discrete themes, that he is at loss to see the poem as one poem at all. Whatever form may be, it is not, I dare say, regularity of metre. Artistic forms are ultimately attitudes, and when Mr. Ransom fails to understand Mr. Eliot's purpose in using lines from other poets, like 'When lovely woman stoops to folly,' calling it parody, we are aware of a naivete somewhat grosser than that which he ascribes elsewhere in his essay to modern experimentation generally. He makes his point by a highly imaginative *petitio principii*: the fragments are at different stages of 'fertilization' and represent different levels of intelligence; and then, too, Eliot inserts these quotations into a context never so rich as their proper abode. Is it possible that Mr. Ransom thinks that these beautiful fragments were put into 'The Waste Land' simply to lend it a 'beauty' which its author could not achieve for himself? And is he confusing parody with irony? His definition of parody, without the dogmatic implication that one plane of consciousness is 'higher' than another, is really a definition of irony: the incongruous is not always the deformed or ludicrous. And it is probably true that metres are never more than an organic scaffolding upon which the poet hangs an attitude; the 'form' of 'The Waste Land' is this ironic attitude which Mr. Ransom relegates to the circus of Carolyn Wells.

My remarks here are excessive; at this point in Mr. Ransom's argument we suspect that he should not be taken seriously.

It is to be regretted also that T.S.Eliot repudiates his first volume *ipso facto* by writing 'The Waste Land.' The only discoverable difference between 'Poems' and 'The Waste Land' is certainly not one of central attitude. Mr. Eliot, an intellectual romanticist, need not commit himself to the same intuition of the world to-day as yesterday; he must shift all the time, for his motive is curiosity, not prepossession, even though he is driven always by the same thirst. The free intelligence cannot harbor a closed system.

And if tradition means sameness, then Mr. Eliot cannot survive with Wordsworth. But Mr. Ransom doesn't say just where it is that poems survive. However, it is likely that the value of 'The Waste Land' as art is historical rather than intrinsic; but the point of my objection to John Crowe Ransom's essay is that the method he employs is not likely to give T.S.Eliot much concern. And my excuse for this extended objection is that Mr. Ransom is not alone. He is a *genre*.

## HELEN McAFEE, THE LITERATURE OF DISILLUSION, 'ATLANTIC'

August 1923, vol. cxxxii, 227

Helen McAfee (1884–1956), an American literary critic, was managing editor of the 'Yale Review'.

This is an extract from a longer article concerned with the general disillusionment of literature after the war.

Under pressure of war emotion we did undoubtedly idealize one another,—at least, all those on one side,—and we sometimes forgot to judge men's motives on the basis of our accumulated knowledge of human nature. The rebound to self-criticism and cynicism had to come. But another element has entered in during these last five years. 'Happy is he who suffers and knows why,' says one of Claudel's dying heroines. With the spectacle of the peace before them, and its aftermath in Europe, some men no longer see why they suffered.

Certainly the most striking dramatization of this depth of confusion and bitterness is Mr. Eliot's 'The Waste Land.' As if by flashes of lightning it reveals the wreck of the storm. For this effect it is clear that the author has consciously striven—indeed he refers to his work as 'my ruins.' The poem is written in what is called the Expressionist manner—a manner peculiarly adapted to the present temper. It does not present the social order in a series of concentric circles, as in Dante, with the individual passing from one to the other in mathematical succession; or as a wall against which the individual dashes himself,—usually in vain,—as in Tolstoy or Ibsen. It rather presents his mind, or his mood, as the centre around which the world gyrates wildly, and with which it makes few contacts, and those chiefly enigmatic. To students of psychology the method of procedure in 'The Waste Land' must be highly significant. Impressions, fragments of experience, memories of other men's writings, drift through the author's consciousness at the bidding of the subconsciousness. There is little attempt at completion of any one pattern out of the mass of details and allusions, or at logical climax. But the parts move with a certain rhythm,—the rhythm of daydreams,—and, dream-fashion, resolve one into another and so achieve a whole. It is mood more than idea that gives the poem

its unity. And that mood is black. It is as bitter as gall; not only with a personal bitterness, but also with the bitterness of a man facing a world devastated by a war for a peace without ideals. The humor—for it has humor—is sordid, grotesque. Yet even in the barren ugliness of 'The Waste Land' there is redeeming grace. After quoting a bit from that most delightful of all spring poems, the 'Pervigilium Veneris,' and two other lines equally fine, Mr. Eliot seems content to rest his case —'These fragments,' he writes, 'I have shored against my ruins.'

41.  
EDGELL RICKWORD, UNSIGNED  
REVIEW, A FRAGMENTARY POEM,  
'TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT'  
20 September 1923, no. 1131, 616

Rickword (b. 1898), an English poet and critic, was editor of the *Calendar of Modern Letters*. His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1967.

This review was reprinted in *'PN Review'* (1979), no. 1, vi, supplement xi–xii. The magazine devoted a special supplement to Rickword's work. The review also reappeared in Rickword's *'Essays and Opinions 1921–31'*, edited by Alan Young (Manchester, 1974), 42–4.

Between the emotion from which a poem rises and the reader there is always a cultural layer of more or less density from which the images or characters in which it is expressed may be drawn. In the ballad 'I wish I were where Helen lies' this middle ground is but faintly indicated. The ballad, we say is *simpler* than the 'Ode to the Nightingale'; it evokes very directly an emotional response. In the ode the emotion gains resonance from the atmosphere of legendary association through which it passes before reaching us. It cannot be called better art, but it is certainly more sophisticated and to some minds less poignant. From time to time there appear poets and a poetic audience to whom this refractory haze of allusion must be very dense; without it the meanings of the words strike them so rapidly as to be inappreciable, just as, without the air, we could not detect the vibration of light. We may remember with what elaboration Addison, among others, was obliged to undertake the defence of the old ballads before it was recognized that their bare style might be admired by gentlemen familiar with the classics.

The poetic personality of Mr. Eliot is extremely sophisticated. His emotions hardly ever reach us without traversing a zig-zag of allusion. In the course of his four hundred lines he quotes from a score of authors and in three foreign languages, though his artistry has reached that point at which it knows the wisdom of sometimes concealing itself. There is in general in his work a disinclination to awake in us a direct emotional response. It is only, the reader feels, out of regard for some one else that he has been induced to mount the platform at all. From there



he conducts a magic-lantern show; but being too reserved to expose in public the impressions stamped on his own soul by the journey through the Waste Land, he employs the slides made by others, indicating with a touch the difference between his reaction and theirs. So the familiar stanza of Goldsmith becomes

When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone.

To help us to elucidate the poem Mr. Eliot has provided some notes which will be of more interest to the pedantic than the poetic critic. Certainly they warn us to be prepared to recognize some references to vegetation ceremonies. This is the cultural or middle layer, which, whilst it helps us to perceive the underlying emotion, is of no poetic value in itself. We desire to touch the inspiration itself, and if the apparatus of reserve is too strongly constructed, it will defeat the poet's end. The theme is announced frankly enough in the title, 'The Waste Land'; and in the concluding confession,

These fragments I have shored against my ruins,

we receive a direct communication which throws light on much which had preceded it. From the opening part, 'The Burial of the Dead,' to the final one we seem to see a world, or a mind, in disaster and mocking its despair. We are aware of the toppling of aspirations, the swift disintegration of accepted stability, the crash of an ideal. Set at a distance by a poetic method which is reticence itself, we can only judge of the strength of the emotion by the visible violence of the reaction. Here is Mr. Eliot, a dandy of the choicest phrase, permitting himself blatancies like 'the young man carbuncular.' Here is a poet capable of a style more refined than that of any of his generation parodying without taste or skill—and of this the example from Goldsmith is not the most astonishing. Here is a writer to whom originality is almost an inspiration borrowing the greater number of his best lines, creating hardly any himself. It seems to us as if the 'The Waste Land' exists in the greater part in the state of notes. This quotation is a particularly obvious instance:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down  
*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam ceu chelidon—O swallow swallow*  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie.*

The method has a number of theoretical justifications. Mr. Eliot has himself employed it discreetly with delicious effect. It suits well the disillusioned smile which he had in common with Laforgue; but we do sometimes wish to hear the

poet's full voice. Perhaps if the reader were sufficiently sophisticated he would find these echoes suggestive hints, as rich in significance as the sonorous amplifications of the romantic poets. None the less, we do not derive from this poem as a whole the satisfaction we ask from poetry. Numerous passages are finely written; there is an amusing monologue in the vernacular, and the fifth part is nearly wholly admirable. The section beginning

What is that sound high in the air...

has a nervous strength which perfectly suits the theme; but he declines to a mere notation, the result of an indolence of the imagination.

Mr. Eliot, always evasive of the grand manner, has reached a stage at which he can no longer refuse to recognize the limitations of his medium; he is sometimes walking very near the limits of coherency. But it is the finest horses which have the most tender mouths, and some unsympathetic tug has sent Mr. Eliot's gift away. When he recovers control we shall expect his poetry to have gained in variety and strength from this ambitious experiment.

## CLIVE BELL, T.S.ELIOT, 'NATION AND ATHENAEUM'

22 September 1923, vol. xxxiii, 772-3

This review also appeared as *The Elusive Art of T.S.Eliot* in 'Vanity Fair', September 1923, 53.

To be amongst the first to think, say, or do anything, is one of the silliest and most harmless of human ambitions: I was one of the first in England to sing the praises of Eliot. I shall not forget going down to a country house for the Easter of 1916—or was it '17?—with 'Prufrock' in my pocket, and hearing it read aloud to a circle of guests with whose names I am too modest to bribe your good opinion. Only this I will say, no poet could ask for a better send off, 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' was read aloud two or three times and discussed at intervals; it was generally admired or, at any rate, allowed to be better than anything of the sort that had been published for some time: and it pleases me to remember that its two most ardent admirers were a distinguished mathematician (not Bertrand Russell) and an exquisite lady of fashion.

To me 'Prufrock' seemed a minor masterpiece which raised immense and permissible hopes: my opinion has not changed, but my hopes have dwindled slightly. For, as yet, Eliot has written nothing better than 'Prufrock,' which seems less surprising when we discover that, in a sense, he has written nothing else;—for the last seven years, I mean, he has been more or less repeating himself. He has lost none of the qualities which made me then describe him as 'about the best of our younger poets'; his intelligence and wit are as sharp as ever, and his phrasing is still superior to that of any of his contemporaries: but he has not improved.

Eliot, it seems to me, has written nothing wittier, more brilliantly evocative of a subtle impression, than 'Mr. Apollinax'; and that, I believe, he wrote before he came to England. It is proper to add that if in this style he has not improved upon himself, neither has anyone, in the interval, improved upon him. As for phrasing—a term which in his case I prefer to 'diction' (musicians will understand why)—it is his great accomplishment; and if you will open 'Prufrock' at the very first page you will come on the following passage:

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
 The muttering retreats  
 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
 And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
 Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
 Of insidious intent  
 To lead you to an overwhelming question...

than which, in my opinion, he has done nothing better. Before contradicting me let the reader count at least ten, and give his memory a jog. In Mr. Eliot's later poems he will find, to be sure, better phrases than any of these; but is he sure they are by Mr. Eliot? The poet has a disconcerting habit of omitting inverted commas., 'Defunctive music,' for instance, is from Shakespeare; and not only the Elizabethans are laid under contribution. The other day a rather intemperate admirer quoted at me the line,

'The army of unalterable law,'

and declared that no modern could match it. You know it is by Meredith.

If you will read carefully Eliot's three longer poems— 'Prufrock,' 'Gerontion,' and 'The Waste Land'—I think you will see what I mean—even if you do not agree with me—in saying that he has been more or less repeating himself. And here we come at Eliot's essential defect. He lacks imagination; Dryden would have said 'invention,' and so will I if you think it would sweeten my discourse. Eliot belongs to that anything but contemptible class of artists whose mills are perfect engines in perpetual want of grist. He cannot write in the great manner out of the heart of his subject; his verse cannot gush as a stream from the rock: birdlike he must pile up wisps and straws of recollection round the tenuous twig of a central idea. And for these wisps and straws he must go generally to books. His invention, it would seem, cannot be eked out with experience, because his experience, too, is limited. His is not a receptive nature to experience greatly. Delicate and sensitive admirers have found, I know, the key to a lifelong internal tragedy in those lines with their choice Elizabethan tang:

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom  
 To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.  
 I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it  
 Since what is kept must be adulterated?

But for my part, I cannot believe they are wrung from the heart of tragic experience. The despairing tone which pervades Eliot's poetry is not, it seems to me, so much the despair of disillusionment as the morbidity of 'The Yellow Book.'

But how the man can write! And the experience, if it be small, is perfectly digested and assimilated; it has gone into the blood and bones of his work. Admit that the butter is spread unconscionably thin; at least the poet may claim, with the mad hatter, that it was the best butter. By his choice of words, by his forging of phrases, by his twisting, stretching, and snapping of rhythms—manipulations possible only to an artist with an exact ear—Eliot can make out of his narrow vision and meagre reaction things of perpetual beauty.

At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives  
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea.  
The typist home at tea time, clears her breakfast, lights  
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.

(Mark the transition—the technical one I mean—the stress and scarcely adumbrated stress—‘HOMEward, and brings the sailor *home* from sea, the typist home at teatime,’ so as to run on in a breath ‘clears her breakfast.’ A less dexterous artist would have had to break the flow with a full stop to show that he had changed the subject.) The line,

Her drying combinations touched by the sun’s last rays,

is a piece of obvious comic-weekly humour, unworthy of so fastidious a writer. But try a line or two lower down:

He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,  
A small house-agent’s clerk, with one bold stare,  
One of the low on whom assurance sits  
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.

In its own modern way it is as neat as Pope, and one can almost see Mr. Arnold Bennett going to the races. I should be surprised if Eliot were ever to write a great poem; but he might easily write three or four which would take their places amongst the most perfect in our language.

Eliot reminds me of Landor: I believe he will not disdain the comparison. Landor wrote half-a-dozen of the most perfect poems in English, and reams of impeccable dullness. Like Eliot he had very little imagination or invention; a narrow vision and, as a rule, tepid reactions; unlike Eliot he was incontinent. Spiritually, he looked out of the window of a suburban villa on the furniture of a suburban garden: the classical statue he set up in the middle of the grass plot was more often than not a cast. No, it was something more spacious than a villa garden; but it bore a horrid likeness to a public park. Yet, on the rare occasions when Landor could apprehend the hum-drum world he inhabited with something like passion, his art enabled him to create a masterpiece. There is not much more feeling or understanding of feeling in ‘The Maid’s Lament’ than may be found in a prize

copy of elegiacs by an accomplished sixth-form boy; most of the sentiments have grown smooth in circulation, and the images ('the shades of death,' 'this lorn bosom burns,' 'tears that had melted his soft heart,' 'more cold than daisies in the mould') have been the small change of minor poetry these three hundred years: yet 'The Maid's Lament' justly takes its place in 'The Oxford Book of Verse.'

Eliot is said to be obscure; and certainly 'The Waste Land' does not make easy reading. This I deplore, holding, with the best of English critics, that 'wit is most to be admired when a great thought comes dressed in words so commonly received that it is understood by the meanest apprehensions.' Only let us not forget that 'Prufrock,' which at first seemed almost unintelligible, now seems almost plain sailing, and that 'Sweeney Erect,' which was described as 'gibberish,' turns out to be a simple and touching story; so when we cudgel our brains over his latest work let us hesitate to suppose that we cudgel in vain. It was decided, remember, that Gray's odes were quite incomprehensible; so were 'In Memoriam' and 'The Egoist'; and the instrumentalists—those practical experts—assured the conductor that no orchestra ever would play Beethoven's symphonies, for the very simple reason that they were unplayable. I respect the man who admits that he finds Eliot's poetry stiff; him who from its obscurity argues insincerity and mystification I take for an ass.

Turn to Eliot's criticism ('The Sacred Wood') if you want proof of his sincerity, and of one or two more qualities of his. Here he gives you some of the most interesting criticism and quite the silliest conclusions going. Here is a highly conscious artist, blessed with an unusually capable intellect and abnormal honesty, whose analysis of poetical methods is, therefore, bound to be masterly; who is never flabby, and who never uses well-sounding and little-meaning phrases to describe a quality in a work of art or a state of his own mind. Eliot is an exceptional critic. Unluckily, he is a cubist. Like the cubists, he is intent upon certain important and neglected qualities in art; these he detects unerringly, and he has no eyes for any others. His vision, you remember, was said to be narrow. He has an *a priori* theory, which is no sillier than any other *a priori* theory, and he applies it unmercifully. It leads him into telling us that 'Coriolanus' is better than 'Hamlet' and 'The Faithful Shepherdess' than 'Lycidas'—it leads him into absurdity. His conclusions are worthless; the argument and analysis by which he arrives at them are extraordinarily valuable. As in his poetry, in criticism his powerful but uncapacious mind can grasp but one thing at a time; that he grasps firmly. He disentangles with the utmost skill an important, hardly come at, and too often neglected quality in poetry; and if it were the only quality in poetry he would be almost the pontiff his disciples take him for. Not quite—for no aesthetic theory can explain his indiscreet boasting of the insignificant Miss Sinclair and the lamentable Ezra Pound. These predilections can be explained only by a less intelligent, though still perfectly honourable, misconception.

43.

J.C.SQUIRE ON ELIOT'S FAILURE TO  
COMMUNICATE, 'LONDON MERCURY'

October 1923, vol. viii, 655–6.

Sir John Squire (1884–1958) was a Georgian poet, parodist and editor of the 'London Mercury'. He was profoundly opposed to modernism in all its forms.

This passage is taken from a longer review. The other poets considered were Lindsay, Millay and Alice Meynell.

I read Mr. Eliot's poem several times when it first appeared; I have now read it several times more; I am still unable to make head or tail of it. Passages might easily be extracted from it which would make it look like one of those wantonly affected productions which are written by persons whose one hope of imposing on the credulous lies in the cultivation of a deliberate singularity. It is impossible to feel that when one reads the whole thing: it may bewilder and annoy, but it must leave the impression on any open-minded person that Mr. Eliot does mean something by it, has been at great pains to express himself, and believes himself to be exploring a new avenue (though we may think it a dark cul-de-sac) of poetic treatment. The work is now furnished with an extensive apparatus of notes. There are references to Ezekiel, Marvell, 'The Inferno,' Ovid, Wagner, St. Augustine, Sir James Frazer, and the Grail legend. But though these will tell those who do not know where Mr. Eliot got his-quotations and symbolism from, they do not explain what these allusions are here for. The legend about the Cumæan Sibyl, which Rossetti paraphrased in verse, combined with the title and one casual reference, suggest that Mr. Eliot believes the poem to be about the decay of Western civilisation and his own utter sickness with life. But even with this knowledge I confess that I do not see where it comes in. There is a vagrant string of drab pictures which abruptly change, and these are interspersed with memories of literature, lines from old poets, and disconnected ejaculations. This is a fair specimen of the poem's progress:

[Quotes 'What the Thunder said', CPP, pp. 67–8, 'While I was fishing' to 'Tereu'.]

After which we proceed to the Smyrna currant merchant who asked Mr. Eliot (or somebody else perhaps) to tea at the Cannon Street Hotel, and we conclude with 'Shantih shantih shantih,' which, we are told, is 'a formal ending to an Upanishad.' Conceivably, what is attempted here is a faithful transcript, after Mr. Joyce's obscurer manner, of the poet's wandering thoughts when in a state of erudite depression. A grunt would serve equally well; what is language but communication, or art but selection and arrangement? I give it up; but it is a pity that a man who can write as well as Mr. Eliot writes in this poem should be so bored (not passionately disgusted) with existence that he doesn't mind what comes next, or who understands it. If I were to write a similar poem about this poem the first line from another work which would stray into the medley would be Mr. Chesterton's emphatic refrain 'Will someone take me to a pub?' The printing of the book is scarcely worthy of the Hogarth Press.



WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT, AMONG THE  
NEW BOOKS. POETRY AD LIB, 'YALE  
REVIEW'

October 1923, vol. xiii, 161–2

William Rose Benét (1886–1950), together with his wife, Elinor Wylie, and his brother, Stephen Vincent Benét, were important American critics, especially in New York during the 1930s.

This is an extract from a longer review.

The books before me are all interesting. The most important seem to me to be 'The Waste Land,' by T.S.Eliot, 'Introducing Irony' and 'The Sardonic Arm,' by Maxwell Bodenheim, and 'Roman Bartholow,' by Edwin Arlington Robinson. There has been much discussion of Eliot's book already, and the best and last word upon it—to my mind—was said by Conrad Aiken in the 'New Republic.' I myself have but one thing to say about 'The Waste Land'—that I found it deeply emotional underneath all attitudinizing, that it moved me (for all its eccentricity), and that its oddity fascinated.

That is *one* opinion. These feelings of mine about 'The Waste Land' overcame my irritation at the pedantic 'Notes' and at certain other posturings. After all, there may be beauty, pathos, the springs of sincere spiritual agony in

Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends  
Or other testimony of summer nights

—just as beauty and pathos are undeniable in

... Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water.

You ask me just exactly what 'The Waste Land' means in every line and phrase, and I can give you but a botched explanation. Go to Mr. Aiken for the best discussion of its peculiar structure or lack of structure. 'The Waste Land' means in general no more than Mr. Eliot's earlier 'Gerontion' meant, in 'Ara Vos Prec.' I have always cared strongly for Mr. Eliot's 'apeneck Sweeney,' whether among the nightingales or not, and for his apocalyptic hippopotamus. The jungle of his mind seems to me very fertile. And he can do remarkably moving things with reticences and sharply struck discords. For pendants to Aiken, look up the reviews of 'The Waste Land' by Edmund Wilson, Jr. and Elinor Wylie: the former having appeared in the 'Dial,' and latter in the 'Literary Review.' I am one of those who feel that Mr. Eliot earned his two thousand dollar 'Dial' prize....

45.  
CHARLES POWELL, REVIEW,  
'MANCHESTER GUARDIAN'  
31 October 1923, 7

Powell (1878–1951), the son of a Methodist minister, was appointed to the 'Manchester Guardian' as an editorial assistant in 1915. His obituary in the 'Guardian' of 19 September 1951 says of him: 'He was in fact an austere Nonconformist, and his moral attitude would have made him more at home in the stern Puritan England of the Commonwealth or in some strict Dissenting sect of the eighteenth century than in the lax world he knew.' He wrote a book of parodies with John Drinkwater, 'The Poets in the Nursery' (1920). At the time of writing this review he was literary critic for the 'Manchester Guardian'.

This poem of 430 lines, with a page of notes to every three pages of text, is not for the ordinary reader. He will make nothing of it. Its five sections, called successively 'The Burial of the Dead,' 'A Game of Chess,' and so on, for all they will signify to him, might as well be called 'Tom Thumb at the Giant's Causeway,' or 'The Devil among the Bailiffs,' and so on. The thing is a mad medley. It has a plan, because its author says so; and presumably it has some meaning, because he speaks of its symbolism; but meaning, plan, and intention alike are massed behind a smoke-screen of anthropological and literary erudition, and only the pundit, the pedant, or the clairvoyant will be in the least aware of them. Dr. Frazer and Miss J.L. Weston are freely and admittedly his creditors, and the bulk of the poem is under an enormously composite and cosmopolitan mortgage: to Spenser, Shakespeare, Webster, Kyd, Middleton, Milton, Marvell, Goldsmith, Ezekiel, Buddha, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, St. Augustine, Baudelaire, Verlaine, and others. Lines of German, French, and Italian are thrown in at will or whim; so, too, are solos from nightingales, cocks, hermit-thrushes, and Ophelia. When Mr. Eliot speaks in his own language and his own voice it is like this at one moment: [Quotes CPP, p. 61, 'April is' to 'dried tubers'.] and at another moment like this:

[Quotes CPP, p. 68, 'Unreal City' to 'at the Metropole'.]

For the rest one can only say that if Mr. Eliot had been pleased to write in demotic English 'The Waste Land' might not have been, as it just is to all but anthropologists and literati, so much waste paper.

F.L.LUCAS, REVIEW, 'NEW STATESMAN'  
3 November 1923, vol. xxii, 116–18

Lucas (1894–1967), an English literary critic, was best known for his work on Greek and Elizabethan drama. A Fellow of King's College, he taught English at the University of Cambridge.

'Solitudinem faciunt, *poëma* appellant.'

Among the maggots that breed in the corruption of poetry one of the commonest is the bookworm. When Athens had decayed and Alexandria sprawled, the new giant-city, across the Egyptian sands; when the Greek world was filling with libraries and emptying of poets, growing in erudition as its genius expired, then first appeared, as pompous as Herod and as worm-eaten, that *Professorenpoesie* which finds in literature the inspiration that life gives no more, which replaces depth by muddiness, beauty by echoes, passion by necrophily. The fashionable verse of Alexandria grew out of the polite leisure of its librarians, its Homeric scholars, its literary critics. Indeed, the learned of that age had solved the economic problem of living by taking in each others' dirty washing, and the 'Alexandra' of Lycophron, which its learned author made so obscure that other learned authors could make their fortunes by explaining what it meant, still survives for the curious as the first case of this disease and the first really bad poem in Greek. The malady reappears at Rome in the work of Catullus' friend Cinna (the same whom with a justice doubly poetic the crowd in 'Julius Caesar' 'tears for his bad verses'), and in the gloomy pedantry that mars so much of Propertius; it has recurred at intervals ever since. Disconnected and ill-knit, loaded with echo and allusion, fantastic and crude, obscure and obscurantist— such is the typical style of Alexandrianism.

Readers of 'The Waste Land' are referred at the outset, if they wish to understand the poem or even its title, to a work on the ritual origins of the legends of the Holy Grail by Miss J.L. Weston, a disciple of Frazer, and to the 'Golden Bough' itself. Those who conscientiously plunge into the two hundred pages of the former interesting, though credulous, work, will learn that the basis of the Grail story is the restoration of the virility of a Fisher King (who is an incarnation, like

so many others in Frazer, of the Life-spirit), and thereby of the fertility of a Waste Land, the Lance and the Grail itself being phallic symbols. While maintaining due caution and remembering how

Diodorus Siculus  
 Made himself ridiculous,  
 By thinking thimbles  
 Were phallic symbols,

one may admit that Miss Weston makes a very good case. With that, however, neither she nor Mr. Eliot can rest content, and they must needs discover an esoteric meaning under the rags of superstitious Adam. Miss Weston is clearly a theosophist, and Mr. Eliot's poem might be a theosophical tract. The sick king and the waste land symbolise, we gather, the sick soul and the desolation of this material life.

But even when thus instructed and with a feeling of virtuous research the reader returns to the attack, the difficulties are but begun. To attempt here an interpretation, even an intelligible summary of the poem, is to risk making oneself ridiculous; but those who lack the common modern gift of judging poetry without knowing what it means, must risk that. 'The Waste Land' is headed by an allusion from Petronius to the Sibyl at Cumae, shrunk so small by her incredible age that she was hung up in a bottle and could only squeak, 'I want to die.' She typifies, I suppose, the timeworn soul's desire to escape from the 'Wheel' of things. The first of the five sections opens in spring with one of the snatches of poetry that occur scattered about the poem:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
 Memory and desire, stirring  
 Dull roots with spring rain.

The next moment comes a spasm of futile, society conversation from a Swiss resort, followed by a passionate outburst at the sterile barrenness of life, though not without hope of its redemption. This is far the best passage in the book:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
 A heap of broken images where the sun beats,  
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
 And the dry stone no sound of water.

Then, suddenly, a verse of 'Tristan und Isolde' and an echo of Sappho (the vanity of human love?). Next instant there appears a clairvoyante, and in the mystic

'Tarot' cards of her fortune-telling are revealed those mysterious figures that flit through the poem, melting into each other in a way that recalls Emerson's 'Brahma'—the Phoenician sailor, who 'is not wholly distinct from Prince Ferdinand of Naples' and seems to be reincarnate in the Smyrna currant-merchant; the Fisher King; and the Frazerite Hanged Man or sacrificed priest, who merges later into the Christ of the walk to Emmaus.

Then we are thrust into the squalid, 'unreal' Inferno of London Bridge.

The second section contains a dialogue between two jaded lovers in luxury, an interlude about the rape of Philomela the nightingale (spiritual beauty violated by the world?), and a pothouse story of a wrangle between two women about the husband of one of them. In the third part the Fisher King appears fishing in the first person behind the gashouse, and there recur the *motifs* of the nightingale and of unreal London, also:

Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant  
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants  
*C.i.f.* London.

But before the reader has time to breathe, 'I, Tiresias,' is watching the seduction of a tired typist after tea by a 'young man carbuncular'—a typical instance of that squalor which seems perpetually to obsess Mr. Eliot with mixed fascination and repulsion. A note explains that Tiresias, being a person of double sex, unites in some way all the other persons in the poem. There is more suburban sordidness, and the section ends gasping half a sentence from St. Augustine and another half from Buddha.

In 'IV.—Death by Water' (one of the stock ways, in Frazer, of killing the vegetation king and ensuring rain by sympathetic magic) the Phoenician sailor is duly drowned. Section V., which brings the rain of deliverance to the Waste Land, is, by the author's account, a mixture of the Walk to Emmaus, of the approach to the Chapel Perilous in Arthurian Legend (taken by Miss Weston to signify initiation into the mysteries of physical and spiritual union), and of the state of Eastern Europe! Deliverance comes with the magic formula; 'Datta, dayadhvam, damyata— give, sympathise, control', and the poem ends:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down  
*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam ceu chelidon*—O swallow, swallow  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie*  
These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih

(The punctuation largely disappears in the latter part of the poem—whether this be subtlety or accident, it is impossible to say. ‘Shantih’ is equivalent to the ‘Peace that passeth understanding’—which in this case it certainly does.)

All this is very difficult; as Dr. Johnson said under similar circumstances, ‘I would it were impossible.’ But the gist of the poem is apparently a wild revolt from the abomination of desolation which is human life, combined with a belief in salvation by the usual catchwords of renunciation—this salvation being also the esoteric significance of the savage fertility-rituals found in the ‘Golden Bough,’ a watering, as it were, of the desert of the suffering soul.

About the philosophy of the poem, if such it be, it would be vain to argue; but it is hard not to regret the way in which modern writers of real creative power abandon themselves to the fond illusion that they have philosophic gifts and a weighty message to deliver to the world, as well. In all periods creative artists have been apt to think they could think, though in all periods they have been frequently harebrained and sometimes mad; just as great rulers and warriors have cared only to be flattered for the way they fiddled or their flatulent tragedies. But now, in particular, we have the spectacle of Mr. Lawrence, Miss May Sinclair, and Mr. Eliot, all sacrificing their artistic powers on the altar of some fantastic Mumbo-Jumbo, all trying to get children on mandrake roots instead of bearing their natural offspring.

Perhaps this unhappy composition should have been left to sink itself: but it is not easy to dismiss in three lines what is being written about as a new masterpiece. For at present it is particularly easy to win the applause of the *blasé* and the young, of the coteries and the eccentricities. The Victorian ‘Spasmodics’ likewise had their day. But a poem that has to be explained in notes is not unlike a picture with ‘This is a dog’ inscribed beneath. Not, indeed, that Mr. Eliot’s notes succeed in explaining anything, being as muddled as incomplete. What is the use of explaining ‘laquearia’ by quoting two lines of Latin containing the word, which will convey nothing to those who do not know that language, and nothing new to those who do? What is the use of giving a quotation from Ovid which begins in the middle of a sentence, without either subject or verb, and fails to add even the reference? And when one person hails another on London Bridge as having been with him ‘at Mylae,’ how is the nonclassical reader to guess that this is the name of a Punic sea-fight in which as Phoenician sailor, presumably, the speaker had taken part? The main function of the notes is, indeed, to give the references to the innumerable authors whose lines the poet embodies, like a mediaeval writer making a life of Christ out of lines of Virgil. But the borrowed jewels he has set in its head do not make Mr. Eliot’s toad the more prepossessing.

In brief, in ‘The Waste Land’ Mr. Eliot has shown that he can at moments write real blank verse; but that is all. For the rest he has quoted a great deal, he has parodied and imitated. But the parodies are cheap and the imitations inferior. Among so many other sources Mr. Eliot may have thought, as he wrote, of Rossetti’s ‘CardDealer,’ of ‘Childe Harold to the Dark Tower Came,’ of the ‘Vision of Sin’ with its same question:



To which an answer peal'd from that high land,  
 But in a tongue no man could understand.

But the trouble is that for the reader who thinks of them the comparison is crushing. 'The Waste Land,' adds nothing to a literature which contains things like these. And in our own day, though Professor Santayana be an inferior poet, no one has better reaffirmed the everlasting 'No' of criticism to this recurrent malady of tired ages, 'the fantastic and lacking in sanity':

Never will they dig deep or build for time  
 Who of unreason weave a maze of rhyme,  
 Worship a weakness, nurse a whim, and bind  
 Wreaths about temples tenantless of mind,  
 Forsake the path the seeing Muses trod,  
 And shatter Nature to discover God.

47.

HUMBERT WOLFE, WASTE LAND AND  
WASTE PAPER, 'WEEKLY  
WESTMINSTER'

17 November 1923, n.s., vol. i, 94

Wolfe (1885–1940) was an English poet, critic and essayist. He published his autobiography 'And Now a Stranger' in 1933.

The other book reviewed was 'The Poetical Works of Gilbert Frankau'.

I begin by admitting that I do not understand Mr. Eliot's poem in the sense that I could not pass an examination upon it. If, for example, I were set the following three questions (two compulsory),

(1) What relation does the expressed desire of the Cumæan Sibyl to die bear to the poem that it prefaces?

(2) How far does each part of the poem carry on the meaning of its predecessor and point on to the conclusion?

(3) Is it really necessary, in order to understand the poem, to make a detailed study of the literature of anthropology? Illustrate your reply by reference to Miss Jessie L. Weston's book 'From Ritual to Romance,' 'Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America,' and Bradley's 'Appearance and Reality.'

I should be prepared to give answers, and I am certain that they would be quite unlike the answers that others who, equally with me, admire the poem, would give, and, like all the answers, would be unsatisfactory to Mr. Eliot. But that doesn't bother me in the least. Part of the truth about poetry is its beautiful and essential unintelligibility, just as obscurity is its most fatal defect. Unintelligibility, in my use of the word here, conveys that rushing sense of suggestion hiding behind the actual written word that almost stuns the receptive mind, as might a too bright light projected upon a sensitive eye. All poetry worthy of the name shakes just perceptibly beyond the ordinary power of the mind, but it shakes in brightness not in darkness. It is not that the poet can't make himself clear to us, but it is that true poetry is always reaching out beyond itself to the thoughts and feelings for which no words have yet been found. There is about it always an unprospected land, no-man's because it is trodden, in default of fools, by angels. From all of which it

follows that everybody who cares for poetry must always fail in an examination of a strict kind. To confess, therefore, that I don't understand Mr. Eliot's poem seems to me to be no more a criticism of it than to say that (in the same sense) I don't understand Shakespeare's sonnets. Neither needs in that sense to be understood.

But that is not to say that I don't get from 'The Waste Land' just those thrills that I associate with what I believe to be poetry. I do emphatically, and if they come by unusual channels that after all is the best tribute that could be paid to any work of art. Let me first show how indisputably in the recognised fashion Mr. Eliot can produce his effect:

...yet there the nightingale  
 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice  
 And still she cried, and still the world pursues,  
 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.  
 To Carthage then I came  
 Burning burning burning burning  
 O Lord thou pluckest me out  
 O Lord thou pluckest  
 burning  
 Gentile or Jew  
 O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,  
 Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as  
 you.

That is the old recognisable way of beauty, and having shown himself master of it, Mr. Eliot is at liberty to play any tricks that he chooses. Nobody can accuse him of writing queerly because he won't compete in the open. The queer stuff can now be approached with an easier mind. And what are we to suppose is hidden under these excursions from the Starnbergersee by way of a hyacinth garden and fortune-telling by cards to 'the brown fog of a winter dawn' in London? Is it the soul sprawling from mountains out of spring past a viscous summer into the drabest of winters? I don't interpret, because even as I attempt interpretation Mr. Eliot assaults me with

You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!

Well, if I am his brother I shall proceed by saying that the next movement, 'The Game of Chess,' is the symbol of nightingale of beauty singing in the ears of all of us, choked with the dirt of the common burdens of mortality. Ending how? Why thus:

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good

night, good night.

(That line hits me between the eyes. It is (to me) poetry's closing-time.)  
As to the third movement, 'The Fire Sermon,' nightingale sings again:

Twit twit twit  
Jug jug jug jug jug jug  
So rudely forced.  
Tereu

between the rats in the slime, the wanton typist in her sodden attic and

where the walls  
of Magnus Martyr hold  
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and  
gold.

Rats, lust, inexplicable splendour all in one tumbled heap:

la la  
To Carthage then I came.

So then the fourth movement, 'Death by Water,' and how things lovely endure by dying before loveliness decays, and here no nightingale need sing. Fifth movement and last, 'What the Thunder said.' Here are the 'falling towers,' the black end when:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight  
And fiddled whisper music on those strings  
And bats with baby faces in violet light.

Thus we have progressed through every form of ruin and despair over the Waste Land to where:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling  
down.

As I began by saying, I don't pretend to understand, but end with the sense that the five movements are knit together by some invulnerable strand. There remains in my mind a sound of high and desolate music. So poetry should end.

It is just worth while perhaps mentioning Mr. Frankau's book at the end of this attempt to understand Mr. Eliot's poems. Because there is nothing unintelligible about Mr. Frankau, except in so far as he thinks well to reprint verse of the Visitors' Book type from some Eton journal and 'The Wipers Times.' But the intelligibility

of Mr. Frankau is interesting side by side with Mr. Eliot's unintelligibility. It wouldn't be true to say that Mr. Eliot begins where Mr. Frankau leaves off, because Mr. Frankau seems never to leave off. But it would be true to say that by every standard which Mr. Frankau's verse professes Mr. Eliot is wrong, and that by every true standard he is right. Mr. Frankau still believes that volubility, hearty emotionalisms, and a Kipling metre are ingredients of poetry. Mr. Eliot does not think so. Mr. Frankau likes length without depth. Mr. Eliot does not. Mr. Frankau reports what is immediately under his eyes without seeing it. Mr. Eliot is looking elsewhere.

Finally, under the stress of one emotion, Mr. Frankau writes a verse like this:

Whether it last for the Seven Years,  
 Or whether it end in a day,  
 Peoples of Earth, let us swear an oath,  
 'No truce with the Beasts in Grey.'

Under the stress of another thus:

Woman o' mine, heart's anodyne  
 Against unkindly fate,  
 Love's aureole about my soul,  
 Wife, mistress, comrade, mate.  
 Mr. Eliot is unlikely to write similar verses.

48.

GORHAM B. MUNSON, THE  
ESOTERICISM OF T.S. ELIOT, '1924'

1 July 1924, no. 1, 3–10.

Gorham Bert Munson (1896–1969), an American critic, was the founder and editor of 'Secession', a magazine of the avant garde. In 1938, he organised the American Social Credit Movement.

Some expert—my choice would be Mr. Ezra Pound—should write a moderately long brochure on the versification of T.S. Eliot. Mr. Eliot wrote such a brochure on the metric of Pound and it sharpened considerably our insight into the construction and finesse of his poetry. We need much more of this precise service. Mr. Pound, for example, could show us very exactly the crossing of Mr. Eliot's style by French influences, he could discuss at length what he has already mentioned; 'Mr. Eliot's two sorts of metaphor: his wholly unrealizable, always apt, half ironic suggestion, and his precise realizable picture,' he could elaborate on Mr. Eliot's thematic invention.

Surely in reading the 'Poems' and 'The Waste Land' all serious students of poetry feel what Mr. Pound calls the sense of an unusual intelligence working behind the words. I shall make a trial at placing this intelligence in relation to the complicated and confused literary and cultural currents of our era. We can make a start toward such placement if we examine closely the peculiar esotericism of 'The Waste Land.' It is permissible to concentrate only on 'The Waste Land' because that poem is a summation of Mr. Eliot's intellectual and emotional attitudes: it recapitulates almost all the themes which were given shape in the collected 'Poems.'

The full purport of esoteric writing is concealed from the 'average reader.' It requires for comprehension a more or less stringent initiation in certain ways of feeling, thinking and expressing, which are not common. To the uninitiated such writing is simply obscure. But esotericism is not properly a term of reproach, for it may be inescapable.

One type, that arising from the nature of the subject-matter, Mr. Pound has admirably explained. 'Obscurities inherent in the thing occur when the author is

piercing, or trying to pierce into, uncharted regions; when he is trying to express things not yet current, not yet worn into phrase; when he is ahead of the emotional, or philosophic sense (as a painter might be ahead of the color-sense) of his contemporaries.' I think this is true of certain modern writers, whom I call the higher Romantics. If they have an intense desire to communicate experience, they suffer peculiarly, for their desire is constantly frustrated by the undeveloped emotional or philosophical sense of their readers.

Another type arises from obscurities inherent in the treatment. The author is an experimenter and tries to pierce into uncharted regions of technic and form. He tries to arrange the non-representative properties of literature in vacuo, to devise what Mr. Eliot in his essay on Jonson calls a 'creative fiction.' The subject-matter perhaps has little logic of its own, and the author's structural logic is ahead of the contemporary aesthetic sense.

Either type of esotericism is highly commendable. Each represents an advance and each if well done is complete in itself. The demand upon the reader is legitimate, for he has only to find the proper key in his own sensibility or in his own experience, and then turn it with his own intellect. If the reader fails, it is he who is deficient, not the work.

But the esotericism of 'The Waste Land' is different: it is deliberate mystification. For in structure the poem is loose: it is full of interstices. Episode does not inevitably follow episode: transitions do not carry us, willy-nilly, from theme to theme, from movement to movement. Its unity depends upon Mr. Eliot's personality, not upon the poem's functions and their adjustments and relations. The structural effect is very much like that given by a revolving light: a sequence of flashes and blanks without significance until referred to the purpose of the lighthouse and the controlling hand of the keeper. I say this in spite of certain formal achievements within the poem: the firm Virgilian outline of the seduction scene witnessed by Tiresias, the triumphant progression through most utterly banal chatter, speeded up by the bartender's cries, 'HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME,' to the cool and lovely line from 'Hamlet,' 'Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.' Themes are stated, caught up later, recur. There is a general cumulative movement, the poem has a half-visible crescendo. It dies nicely with 'shantih shantih shantih.' But the two planes on which 'The Waste Land' moves—the plane of myth and the plane of present day London—are not strictly related. Passages of fine poetry may be deleted without spoiling one's aesthetic pleasure of the whole, though diminishing the sum total derived from the detail. Symbols, characters, and associations appear quite arbitrarily.

I am compelled to reject the poem as a sustained harmoniously functioning structural unit.

On the other hand, it is amazing how simple is the state of mind which these broken forms convey. The poet is hurt, wistful, melancholy, frail: modern civilization is a waste land, a sterile desert, in which he wanders forlornly: there is no water to slake his spiritual drouth. Yet there was water once, there was beauty, and the poem shifts to the plane of the past, to the plane of great mythology.

When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
 Paces about her room again, alone,  
 She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
 And puts a record on the gramophone.

The stanza is a minute simulacrum of the central process of the poem which is to take ancient beauty by the neck and twist it into modern ugliness. Mr. Eliot is very fatigued. There can be no question that he suffers, at moments his cry is as sharp as that of a man mangled by the speeding wheels of a subway express, it is bitter as a confession extorted by wheel and rack. We respect that cry.

But about the nature of this state of mind there is nothing occult. It is in fact a very familiar mood. We have had a great deal of the poetry of melancholy and drouth in the last half century, most of it inferior to Mr. Eliot's, but nevertheless it has worn into common currency its emotions.

Assuming that Mr. Eliot wished to convey such emotions to the reader, to make them still more deeply a part of our general experience, it should not have been difficult for him to escape opacity. Classical lucidity was entirely possible. How shall we account then for the obstacles he has placed to the reader's ready comprehension?

To win a complete understanding of 'The Waste Land,' the reader must scan eleven pages of notes, he must have a considerable learning in letters or be willing to look up references in Milton, Ovid, Middleton, Webster, Spenser, Verlaine, St. Augustine, etc., etc., in order to associate them with their first context, he must read Latin, Greek, French and German, he must know Frazer's 'Golden Bough' and steep himself in the legend of the Holy Grail, studying in particular Miss Weston's 'From Ritual to Romance.' The texture of 'The Waste Land' is excessively heavy with literary allusions which the reader of good will, knowing that it is not unjust to make severe requisitions upon his knowledge, will diligently track down. But our reader of good will is entitled, I think, to turn sour when he discovers that after all his research he has not penetrated into some strange uncharted region of experience but has only fathomed the cipher of a quite ordinary and easily understandable state of mind.

I know that more whole-hearted admirers of the poem than I are exclaiming at this point: 'But you are missing the point! Mr. Eliot wished to give a cumulative effect to his cries of hurt and barrenness. He wished to give a sense of one long cry of protest throughout history, a sense of dryness running through the ages, a yearning passed on from one individual to another until it reaches him in twentieth-century London.' To that my answer is that the sense of outcry reinforced by outcry is simply not created in the text. It is added to the text, by deliberate processes of memory and learning by Mr. Eliot. It is added to the text by equally deliberate processes on the part of the reader. It is dependent on something too removed from the actual lines, and so I cannot feel it as integral.



The conclusion must be that the esotericism of 'The Waste Land' derives neither from abstruseness of subject nor from abstruseness of technic. It is artificially concocted by omissions, incompletions and unnecessary specialization in the assembling of those circumstances which ought to evoke in the reader the whole effect of the given emotion. Again the question rises, why does Mr. Eliot tamper with these circumstances so as to make them not explicable in themselves?

It is a reasonable conjecture to say that Mr. Eliot does not want to communicate his suffering to the general reader. To such he desires to be incomprehensible. His obfuscation of the circumstances which react together as a formula for his emotion is an example of dandyism. In his desire to make his suffering inscrutable to all but a chosen coterie of his similars, he is affecting what is commonly called a romantic mannerism, a mannerism that cannot be credited, however, to the great romantics. He constructs a mask for himself.

Our ideas of aristocracy have become sentimentalized. In its healthy state, the idea of aristocracy is a union of some idea of what is best in human nature with the idea of rule or control. For our purpose I suppose we can agree that the highest value is intelligence, so I can be more precise and say that the union of the ideas of intelligence and control constitutes the idea of aristocracy. In certain epochs the vortices of intelligence and social power have coincided, and the idea of aristocracy has been healthy. But in our epoch it is a truism that social power is vested in men of an inventive acquisitive narrow nature whose general intelligence is relatively low, whose care for humane values is slight, whose cunning is abnormally developed. The men of creative intelligence are thus forced to work against the grain of a society ruled by the acquisitive impulse. Many of them have become depressed at the odds against them and have pinned the insignia of an aloof defeat upon their work. Depression and even collapse in this state of affairs are certainly marks of a sensitive spirit. But it is a sentimentality of which I suspect Mr. Eliot guilty to believe that depression is a symptom of aristocracy. For the aristocrat cannot take pride in a dandyism of defeat, he cannot relinquish the effort to control. With the whole force of his being he seeks to understand: to understand the forces in himself, the forces of his age. With the whole force of his being he seeks to externalize his knowledge of these so lucidly and powerfully that it wins a place as leaven in the general cultural experience. He does not accept the crucifixion of his sensibility as a proof of superiority. He finds his proof in the transcendence of his crucifixions. Joy, serenity, the tokens of victory are his distinguishing marks. In the surrender to despair of its creative will the European mind loses its aristocracy.

Mr. Eliot, we know, has taken great pains to blend with the European mind. Who will dispute his thorough naturalization? But the mind into which he has been assimilated is in wretched case. Founded upon classicism, it has been shaken by the tremendous challenges issued to classical authorities from revolutionary science. It lacks the vitality to surrender the old and to make adjustment to the new. The upheavals of war and politics have agonized it to the last point. It has no hope, no vision. In 'Der Untergang des Abendlandes' Oswald Spengler

crystallizes its resignation into an attitude. Herr Spengler is a fatalist. Cultures, he believes, obey definite biological laws. They are rigidly deterministic. They live out a birth, growth, brilliant maturity, decay, death, and these processes cannot be halted. Decay he calls 'Civilization': it is the stage of huge cities and their nomadic life, of great wars and dictators, of the advent of formless traditionless masses. We are in it: 'We must will the inevitable or nothing': the inevitable is fellaahdom.

It is easy to see that in part 'The Waste Land' is a poetic equivalent to 'Der Untergang des Abendlandes.' Mr. Eliot recalls the brilliant apogee of culture, he portrays in contrast the sterile decay of contemporary 'civilization,' he makes his own positive assertion in the detestable apeneck guffawing Sweeney, symbol of the formless and the traditionless. Before the age, which he has characterized elsewhere as singularly dull, the poet is weary.

The reader has observed that I have been shifting the interest in 'The Waste Land' from the aesthetic to the moral and cultural, and that we are now wholly involved in the poem as a summary of the modern cultural situation. The possibility not allowed for by the mind of Mr. Eliot is this: the entrance into consciousness of some new factor. We can only say, the future will be so and thus, provided no indeterminable elements of human consciousness, now dormant, commence to function. The fallacy of rationalism of the determinist type is that it is not rational enough. It does not question its assumptions. Trace back far enough and its fundamental entities turn out to be matter and motion, both as a matter of fact unknowns, and defined in terms of each other. This type of rationalism is not a coordinating part of the complex vision of the whole human being: it is really uncontrolled and amok.

We may take heart in surveying 'The Waste Land' and the defunct state of the European mind if we turn again to science in the name of which some very leaden messages have been offered us in the past. I quote from that acute scientific observer, J.W.N.Sullivan.

'Once a crack has appeared in a closed universe, it goes on spreading. Since Maxwell's day the cracks have so multiplied and spread that already nothing remains of the old Newtonian universe except a few fragments. It has not even the validity of a first sketch, for the main lines in a sketch are right. But the modern universe of physics is *essentially* different from the universe of the eighteenth century. All the primary entities are quite different. The directions in which explanations are sought are quite different. The relation of man to the universe is quite different. The universe of modern science has fundamentally nothing in common with the scientific universe on which rationalism was built. It is not merely that hypotheses have changed. The role of the hypothesis has changed. The universe, which was to be explained in terms of little billiard balls and the law of the inverse square is now a universe where even mystics, to say nothing of poets and philosophers, have a right to exist. The present scientific picture of the universe, although incomparably more profound than that of the eighteenth century, allows much more room to possibilities. It allows them, and is not concerned to conflict with them.

'So that we reach the conclusion that mysticism and science can quite well live together. Except on the basis of a rationalism whose foundations have long since crumbled there is no conflict whatever between mystical insight and science. And the man who prides himself on the complete absence of mystery in his view of the world is not only not representing the scientific outlook but will speedily become quite unable to understand it.'

Let us not take too seriously the 'scientific' pretensions nor grant too much authority to those who tell us that in view of our future the arts are twaddle, for the future belongs to mechanics, technology, economics and especially politics.

How far the American mind reproduces the vision or rather the supine attitude of the European mind is a speculation. I say speculation, because in spite of the best will to discover it I cannot say that there exists, in the sense that the European mind exists, an American mind. There are in my estimation several American writers who contain the nucleus for a striking and vastly important American mind, but America is not yet an intelligent community. Europe is: it has a consensus of intelligent opinion which I have called its mind: I can find no such consensus in America to compare with it. But although we cannot make distinctions in thought, we can in those things that nourish thought. America has a fresh boundless energy which Europe has lost. Most of it is quantitative, but the possibility always exists of converting some of it to qualitative. Energy is the first requisite to meet the elastic situation of today. America has hope, whereas Europe moves toward hopelessness and resignation. Hope is the spur of energy. America has laxer traditions than Europe. Ordinarily, this is deplorable. But if we are called upon to put away old traditions and to formulate new, it is an advantage. There is less inertia to overcome. And from the laxness of traditions in America, it follows that we are by temperament probably romantics. In chaos, it is generally agreed, the romantic is better able to find footing than the less flexible classicist.

Consequently, it is not surprising that such a viewpoint as that published by Mr. Eliot does not initiate any movement in America, does not even secure a general passive acceptance, does not least of all awake anything in our experience which impulsively corroborates it. Nay, we are scarcely enough affected to make a serious contradiction. A decade ago, smarting with a sense of inferiority, blaspheming our environment on which we transferred our weaknesses, we looked to Europe as the determinator of values. It was the heyday of the exile and the cosmopolitan mind. Today, our painters, writers and intellectuals know that they are deeply implicated in the unformed and unpredictable American destiny. They hibernate in Europe and rush back as from a feast which has unexpectedly turned out to be a famine. They are conscious of a great though unarticulated difference between the activity of the American scene and that of Europe. They have even met Europeans who have calmly declared that Europe is dead and the future belongs to America. They realize that the power of initiative has crossed the Atlantic.

America has energy and hope. It has weak traditions and a romantic temperament. It is becoming conscious of a fundamental difference between it

and Europe. In the words of the Cumaean Sibyl, inscribed at the top of 'The Waste Land,' Europe 'wants only to die.' America wants to live.

But America has not realized its responsibility in the present crisis. It has not realized that its national destiny is more than a matter of national self-respect. It has not recognized clearly that the leadership of the human spirit has been resigned and that it, if anyone, must assume it. It has the primary qualifications: untapped energetics and spiritual naivete. It has lately acquired self-reliance. It seems not fanciful to predict that it will next acquire a sense of international responsibility.

And then perhaps it will at last be ready to receive Whitman. It will be expectant and humble, waiting for the Word that will release it, for the Word that will spell a new slope of human consciousness. Whitman is not the Word, but he formed syllables of it, immense generative syllables. America will wait while these do their deep hidden work, arousing latent power. On the threshold of creative vision one must wait.

Mr. Eliot lacks those deeper dimensions that the new slope will utilize. He is almost purely a sensibility and an intellect: he seems a unified man: at least one gets no sense of a disastrous internecine conflict in him. He loves beauty, he is wounded by ugliness: the age is severe on 'beauty-lovers' who cannot go below the surface. It lacerates unmercifully those whose intellects work only at the tips of their sense, who make an ideal of the senses thinking, of sensuous thought. This formula Mr. Eliot believes accounts for much of the excellence of Elizabethan literature.

The formula for literary masterwork in our age will be more complex, more inclusive, much more difficult than that. It will involve the correlated functions of the whole human consciousness and it will demand the utmost purification of that consciousness. On a tremendous scale our age duplicates some of the features which introduced so much zest into Elizabethan life. Our vital source in antiquity will be, perhaps, the religious and philosophical cultures of the East instead of Graeco-Roman culture. Our New World will be Higher Space, and our explorers, our Columbuses and Magellans, will be such scientists as Einstein and Bohr. Our artists will have a wealth of new materials: our intellectual world expands and fills with possibilities: it is a time for curiosity and daring. 'The Waste Land' is a funeral keen for the nineteenth century. In the twentieth it is a subjective aberration from the facts.

# 'Poems 1909–1925'

London, 23 November 1925

LEONARD WOOLF, 'JUG JUG' TO DIRTY  
EARS, 'NATION AND ATHENAEUM'

5 December 1925, vol. xxxviii, 354

Woolf (1880–1969), an English literary critic and essayist, married Virginia Woolf in 1912. In 1919 they published Eliot's 'Poems' at the Hogarth Press.

This is from a longer review that considered poetry by Hardy and Blunden as well as Eliot. Eliot's work, however, received the larger part of Woolf's attention.

To the Victorian and to most of his ancestors the poet was a nightingale. The bird and the man did but sing because they must, and, though the song might be sad, it must also be sweet—indeed the sweetest songs are those which tell of saddest thought. We have changed all that: Mr. Eliot, who is a long way the best of the modern poets, makes his nightingales sing

'Jug Jug' to dirty ears,

and tells us how

The nightingales are singing near  
The Convent of the Sacred Heart,  
And sang within the bloody wood  
When Agamemnon cried aloud  
And let their liquid siftings fall  
To stain the stiff, dishonoured shroud.

The dirty ears and the liquid siftings are now as essential a part of the nightingale's song as the magic casements, the perilous seas, the verdurous glooms, and the winding mossy ways....

There are many who will welcome this collected edition of Mr. Eliot's poems. Personally I *like* Mr. Eliot's poems so much that I am afraid of appearing

exaggerated in criticizing them. When I get a book of his into my hands, I become fascinated; I simply cannot stop rereading the poems until something physical from outside forces me to shut the book. Naturally I think that there is something rare in the book itself to cause so rare a reaction. In the first place I believe it to be poetry, for real poetry is very rare. Mr. Eliot is a real poet. That he is difficult to understand, I admit; and this difficulty will cause many people to miss the poetry. But if anyone will read the opening of 'The Waste Land,' and the whole of 'Gerontion,' without fussing very much about whether or not he is understanding exactly what the author means, he will suddenly be amazed and delighted by the mere beauty of the poetry:-

[Quotes 'Gerontion', CPP, p. 37, 'Here I am' to 'flies, fought'.]

Secondly, Mr. Eliot has not only got the poetry, but he has found the instrument, the tune, the measure, the method which exactly fit the singing of 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears. I feel the spirit of 1922 moving in 'The Waste Land' more violently and potently than in any other contemporary poem: the spirit of the age is breathed into it much as the spirit of 1850 was breathed into 'In Memoriam.'

I have admitted that Mr. Eliot's poetry is difficult to understand, but I admit it with so many qualifications that the admission is valueless. I am sure that I understand every poem which Mr. Eliot has written; I could not tell you exactly what every word and line mean, but that is not necessary for an understanding and appreciation of the poems. In fact, the real criticism of Mr. Eliot is that he is too easy to understand, because he is always saying the same thing in different ways. His method, which alone involves obscurity, consists in keeping two tunes going at the same time, often one against the other. First, he works persistently through allusions: in the simplest case four words, lifted from Shakespeare and inserted in a poem called 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar,' evoke the image of Cleopatra and how her barge burned on the water, an image which is flung in the face of the Princess Volupine, the 'Chicago Semite Viennese' Bleistein, and Sir Ferdinand Klein. Secondly, he attempts to communicate rather subtle emotions by the crude and violent juxtaposition of discordant scenes, thoughts, emotions. My only criticism of him is that the theme which he plays on these subtle strings is always the same and is very old. The splendour and romance of our desires and imaginations, the sordidness of reality—that is the theme of Prufrock, of Sweeney, of Burbank, of The Waste Land, of the Hollow Men. The nightingale never sings anything but 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears. The mind is eternally 'aware of the damp souls of housemaids sprouting despondently at area gates,' while eternally looking for the barge of Cleopatra burning all day upon the water. The end of life is 'an old man driven by the Trades to a sleepy corner,' with 'thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season,' and the world when it ends, will end 'not with a bang but a whimper.'

50.

EDGELL RICKWORD, THE MODERN  
POET, 'CALENDAR OF MODERN  
LETTERS'

December 1925, vol. ii, 278–81

This review was reprinted in 'Towards Standards of Criticism', edited by F.R.Leavis (London, 1933), pp. 100–6. Rickword was mainly concerned with 'The Waste Land.' The review was also reprinted in a collection of Rickword's critical writings edited by Alan Young, 'Essays and Opinions 1921–31' (Manchester, 1974), pp. 180–4.

If there were to be held a Congress of the Younger Poets, and it were desired to make some kind of show of recognition to the poet who has most effectively upheld the reality of the art in an age of preposterous poeticising, it is impossible to think of any serious rival to the name of T.S.Eliot. Yet, to secure the highest degree of unanimity, such a resolution would have to be worded to the exclusion of certain considerations, and it would concentrate attention on the significance of this work to other poets, rather than on its possession of that quality of 'beauty' for which the ordinary reader looks, though we do not doubt that on this count, too, perhaps the final one, it will slowly but certainly gain the timid ears which only time can coax to an appreciation of the unfamiliar.

'That Mr. T.S.Eliot is the poet who has approached most nearly the solution of those problems which have stood in the way of our free poetic expression,' and 'that the contemporary sensibility, which otherwise must have suffered dumbly, often becomes articulate in his verse,' are resolutions which express a sort of legal minimum to which individual judgments must subscribe.

The impression we have always had of Mr. Eliot's work, reinforced by this commodious collection in one volume, may be analysed into two coincident but not quite simultaneous impressions. The first is the urgency of the personality, which seems sometimes oppressive, and comes near to breaking through the so finely-spun aesthetic fabric; the second is the technique which spins this fabric and to which this slender volume owes its curious ascendancy over the bulky monsters of our time. For it is by his struggle with technique that Mr. Eliot has been able to get closer than any other poet to the physiology of our sensations (a



poet does not speak merely for himself) to explore and make palpable the more intimate disresses of a generation for whom all the romantic escapes had been blocked. And, though this may seem a heavy burden to lay on the back of technique, we can watch with the deepening of consciousness, a much finer realisation of language, reaching its height in passages in 'The Waste Land' until it sinks under the strain and in 'The Hollow Men' becomes gnomically disarticulate.

The interval is filled with steady achievement, and though the seeds of dissolution are apparent rather early, there is a middle period in which certain things are done which make it impossible for the poet who has read them to regard his own particular problems of expression in the same way again; though he may refuse the path opened, a new field of force has come into being which exerts an influence, creates a tendency, even in despite of antipathy. Such a phenomenon is not in itself a measure of poetic achievement; Donne produced it in his generation; much smaller men, Denham and Waller, in theirs.

Let us take three main stages in this development of technique, the three poems which are, in essence, Mr. Eliot's poem, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' 'Gerontion' and 'The Waste Land.' (The neo-satiric quatrains do not raise any fundamental queries, they are the most easily appreciated of Mr. Eliot's poems, after 'La Figlia Che Piange.' The French poems remind us of Dryden's prefaces (vide Swift), and there are half-a-dozen other mere *jeux d'esprit*.)

'Gerontion' is much nearer to 'The Waste Land' than 'The Love Song' is to 'Gerontion.' The exquisite's witty drawing-room manner and the deliberate sentimental rhythms give way to more mysterious, further-reaching symbols, and simpler, not blatantly poetic rhythms. As an instance, we have in 'The Love Song':-

For I have known them all already, known them all—  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

But in 'The Waste Land':-

And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
And walked among the lowest of the dead.

The relation and the differences of these passages hardly need stressing, but, though I had not intended to enter into an examination of the psychological content of these poems, I find that this subject of fore-knowledge is cardinal to the matter. Fore-knowledge is fatal to the Active man, for whom impulse must not seem alien to the end, as it is to the vegetative life of the poets, whose ends are obscured in the means. The passage in 'Geron-tion' beginning: 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' and the remainder of the poem are such profound commentary on

the consequent annihilation of the will and desire that they must be left to more intimate consideration. The passage is a dramatic monologue, an adaptation one might hazard of the later Elizabethan soliloquy, down even to the Senecal:-

Think

Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices  
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues  
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.

'Gerontion' is a poem which runs pretty close to 'The Waste Land,' and it is free from the more mechanical devices of the later poem, but lacks its fine original verse-movements. In the Sweeney quatrains, especially in the last stanzas of 'Among the Nightingales,' the noble and the base, the foul and fine, are brought together with a shock; the form has little elasticity, and tends to become, like the couplet, stereotyped antithesis. In the fluid medium of 'The Waste Land' the contrast may be brought about just as violently, or it may be diffused. This contrast is not, of course, the whole content of the poem, but Mr. Eliot has most singularly solved by its means the problem of revoking that differentiation between poetic and real values which has so sterilised our recent poetry. His success is intermittent; after a short passage of exquisite verse he may bilk us with a foreign quotation, an anthropological ghost, or a mutilated quotation. We may appreciate his intention in these matters, the contrast, the parody, enriches the emotional aura surrounding an original passage, but each instance must be judged on its own merits; whether the parody, for instance, is apposite. On this score Mr. Eliot cannot be acquitted of an occasional cheapness, nor of a somewhat complacent pedantry, and since we cannot believe that these deviations are intrinsic to the poetic mind, we must look for their explanation elsewhere. We find it in the intermittent working of Mr. Eliot's verbal imagination. He has the art of words, the skill which springs from sensitiveness, and an unmatched literary apprehension which enables him to create exquisite passages largely at second-hand (lines 60-77). It is when this faculty fails of imaginative support, as it must at times, that certain devices are called in, the intellect is asked to fill in gaps (possibly by reference to the notes, when they are, as they rarely are, helpful) which previous poets have filled in with rhetoric, perhaps, but at any rate by a verbal creation which stimulates the sensibility. The object of this verbal effort is not merely to stimulate the sensibility, since disjunctive syllables can do that, but to limit, control, and direct it towards a more intense apprehension of the whole poem. That is where a failure in verbal inventiveness is a definite poetic lapse. In a traditional poet it would result in a patch of dull verse, in Mr. Eliot's technique we get something like this:-

To Carthage then I came  
Burning burning burning burning  
O Lord thou pluckest me out

O Lord thou pluckest  
burning.

Whether this is better or worse than dull verse I need not decide; that it is a failure, or the aesthetic scheme which would justify it is wrong, can I think be fairly upheld.

Though we may grasp the references to Buddah's Fire Sermon and Augustine's 'Confessions,' and though Mr. Eliot may tell us that 'the collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident,' we find it difficult to be impressed. It is the danger of the aesthetic of 'The Waste Land' that it tempts the poet to think the undeveloped theme a positive triumph and obscurity more precious than commonplace. The collocation of Buddah and Augustine is interesting enough, when known, but it is not poetically effective because the range of their association is only limited by widely dispersed elements in the poem, and the essential of poetry is the presence of concepts in mutual irritation.

This criticism might be extended to the general consideration of the technique of construction used in 'The Waste Land'; it is still exploited as a method, rather than mastered. The apparently free, or subconsciously motivated, association of the elements of the poem allows that complexity of reaction which is essential to the poet now, when a stable emotional attitude seems a memory of historical grandeur. The freedom from metrical conformity, though not essential as 'Don Juan' shows, is yet an added and important emancipation, when the regular metres languish with hardly an exception in the hands of mechanics who are competent enough, but have no means of making their consciousness speak through and by the rhythm. Mr. Eliot's sense of rhythm will, perhaps, in the end, be found his most lasting innovation, as it is the quality which strikes from the reader the most immediate response.

LOUISE MORGAN, THE POETRY OF MR.  
ELIOT, 'OUTLOOK' (LONDON)

20 February 1926, vol. lvii, 135–6

Louise Morgan, an English critic, published a study of writers contemporary with Eliot, entitled 'Writers at Work', in 1931. The book by Untermeyer referred to is 'American Poetry since 1900' (New York, 1923).

No poet of the present generation has been more violently attacked or more passionately admired, and more perfectly misunderstood than Mr. T.S.Eliot. Over and over again the critics, some of them poets, 'new poets,' themselves, have repeated that he is merely clever, very very clever, that he is an erudite charlatan, often incomprehensible and obscure, that he has a brain and no heart. Since the publication of his collected poems the same criticisms have reappeared in the reviews; once more we are told that he is a cerebralist only, and a disillusioned one besides. Indeed, a facile but grotesquely irrelevant analogy which originated two years ago with Mr. Louis Untermeyer, in his book on 'American Poetry,' is employed again in the current quarterlies by two critics, both poets—the comparison of 'The Waste Land' to a cross-word puzzle.

Incredible that any reader sensitive to poetry should not be aware of the profound emotional quality in Mr. Eliot's work. To have emerged untouched from 'Preludes,' or 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night,' or 'Morning at the Window,' or 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock,' or 'The Waste Land,' is a feat comparable with strolling in full evening dress through a tropical tornado or an arctic blizzard unscathed. There are various reasons for this strange insensibility. One is the popular fallacy that feeling and thought are incompatible, that when a man begins to use his brain he must cease to feel. As if, when the blood goes racing to the brain, the heart is not obliged to beat faster! The peculiar emotional force in Mr. Eliot's poetry is mainly due to the mental control he constantly exercises over his feelings, giving the effect so to speak of the hounds of feeling straining at the taut leash of the mind. Or to vary the figure, the source of his poetry is deep in his heart as the source of the spring is deep in the bowels of the mountain, but as it issues

it is filtered and purified by the active sunlight of his brain. Another current fallacy allied to the one just mentioned is that poetry does not flourish on disillusion. But what did 'Hamlet', which is stuffed full of the world's finest poetry, spring from! The chiefest reason, however, is that this poet is as uncompromisingly and as self-awarely new as were Wordsworth and Coleridge in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

In Mr. Eliot we have evidence of one of those renewals of poetry which happen roughly once in a century, and which spring from direct and deliberately made contact with the common life and speech of the moment. That actual life and speech which gives poetry a fresh vitality becomes in its turn literesque and sterile, until another contact creates another renewal. The test of Mr. Eliot's power is that he gives the sense of his own time in no local or provincial way, but as a part of all the time that has gone before it, implying inevitably the timeless in time. With a kind of dramatic tenderness he isolates the essential human thing from all its infinite varieties of manifestations. Actaeon and Diana are but different symbols for Sweeney and Mrs. Porter. The poor little typist, torpidly seduced by the carbuncular clerk, is lovely woman that stoops to folly. It is as if he had opened all the tight little bundles into which we parcel up our consciousness—parchment and seals for our knowledge of history, white tissue and ribbon for our aesthetic functions, brown paper and string with double knots for our physiological—had opened them and strewn their contents flat under the midday sun, Leicester's velvet cloak near the typist's drying combinations, the singing mermaids from the chambers of the sea next to Prufrock's trousers with the bottoms rolled. An important peculiarity of his method in procuring this effect of the life of all time expressing itself in the particular disguise of the moment, is the use of literary quotations. He is the first poet to set echoing in his lines the overtones of an experience which is often richer and sharper than our direct encounter with life and nature—our experience with literature.

We have alluded to his dramatic quality; no other poet since Shakespeare has put dauntlessly cheek by jowl the sublime and the commonplace. In a minor way, and necessarily much more condensed form, the same intensely dramatic effect of reality is achieved by the setting together in Prufrock's mind of his white flannel trousers and the siren beauty of the sea, as by the juxtaposition of the drunken porter and Macbeth's terrible ecstasy. It is by his daring to make use of this dualism which is so integral a part of all life but which has only rarely before been considered the proper material for poetry, that Mr. Eliot secures his most deeply moving effects, sincere and simple effects which because they do not understand them are labelled 'obscure' and 'merely clever' by the worldly-wise critics. His instrumentation, to mention only one other detail of his technique, is constantly varied, as often as not from line to line; apparently wilful, it is carefully and subtly calculated. He rhymes or does not rhyme, uses assonance, repetition, the latter with singular beauty, or ignores all the accepted mechanical means of conjuring up the poetic mood, entirely to suit his own turn. He contrives to cap a tragic stanza powerfully with the doggerel rhyme of 'visit' with 'is it?'; he succeeds with such

novel experiments as making rhymes out of a grammatical ending, as in the opening lines of 'The Waste Land'; he employs the refrain to help achieve a deeply exciting sound pattern in Lil's friend's monologue in the same poem. The following passage will serve as an indication of his tonal quality in which there is a magic rarely heard since 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel':-

[Quotes CPP, p. 73, 'A woman drew' to 'exhausted wells'.]

Without doubt for many and lamentable decades still we shall have variations on the familiar themes, on sentimental old, unhappy, far off things and romantic peaks in Darien, just as couplets in the prescribed eighteenth century manner persisted far down into the nineteenth. But in the meantime the generation of 1925 has as clear and deliberate a statement of a new order of poetic values in the 'Poems' of Mr. T.S.Eliot as had the generation of 1798 when Wordsworth and Coleridge challenged the old order of that day with the 'Lyrical Ballads.'

JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY ON ELIOT  
AND THE 'CLASSICAL' REVIVAL,  
'ADELPHI'

February-March 1926, vol. iii, 585–95, 648–53

This article, spread over two issues, attempts to place Eliot in relation to his contemporaries. It is interesting also to note Murry's response to 'The Hollow Men', which he read in the course of composing this piece.

I.

One reads not seldom nowadays of a 'classical' revival in modern literature. There is a certain justification for the term. A fairly definite tendency can be observed among modern writers since the publication of Mr. Lytton Strachey's 'Eminent Victorians.' In biography the line of descent passes from Mr. Strachey through Mr. Geoffrey Scott with his 'Portrait of Zélide' to Mr. Bonamy Dobrée with his 'Essays in Biography'—subjects, standards, and methods all taken from the eighteenth century; in fiction we have the amusing exercises of Mr. David Garnett in imitation of Defoe. These are all in their way good books; Mr. Strachey's two—'Eminent Victorians' and 'Queen Victoria'—are more than good books: I should understand anyone who called them perfect ones. In the theatre, too, on the more popular levels, there has been the remarkable success of 'The Beggar's Opera' at the Hammersmith and the present revival of Dibdin: on the more esoteric, the persistent revival of Restoration plays, sometimes in public, as 'The Way of the World,' more often by the efforts of the new play-producing societies.

There is no reason why this large and general movement of the public taste should not be called a 'classical' revival, save that the phrase suggests much more than the reality. It suggests, moreover, that the new wave of classicism succeeds a previous romanticism. Actually this is not the case. What went before the new classical movement was not anything that could be usefully called romanticism: but rather a literature of social optimism and religious nullity, (a) Mr. Wells, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Shaw, Mr. Galsworthy, all represent an extreme phase of confidence in modern society. They are, of course, social reformers: they do not believe the

social machine is perfect—far from it—but they do believe the machine can be perfected, and that, when it is perfected, all will go well.

That was the last phase of the pre-war mentality. The classical revival belongs to the after-war period. It is an expression of a universal scepticism. In so conscious a practitioner as Mr. Strachey it is the manifestation of a certain amused contempt for the Victorian equivocations; and the reason why his remarkable books have had a vogue beyond all expectation for writings of their kind is that people in general share this contempt. On the still more popular levels—represented by ‘The Beggar’s Opera’—there is a corresponding weariness of social problems and seriousness, and an inarticulate conviction that idealism and high-falutin’ did not save us from disaster, but rather took us into it. The universal desire is to be amused without *arrière-pensée*. The ‘classical’ revival is an expression or a satisfaction of this universal desire.

Therefore it is far better to call it an Augustan than a ‘classical’ revival, since classicism stands for a good deal more than scepticism and amusement. The Augustan revival represents the reaction from a collapsed, and consequently a false, idealism; and probably the impulse would, in times of greater energy, have produced a movement of realism. But precisely at this moment the chaos of consciousness is so extreme that the effort necessary to deal with modern life realistically would be prodigious; on the other hand, the general lassitude among men of ability is such that even a moderate effort of the kind would be refused. More than this, the scepticism of the *intelligentsia* is so complete that it involves the art of literature itself. Why make an effort? What is the point? Why not remain content with amusing ourselves and giving amusement to others? Why take literature seriously? Isn’t that a part of the old Victorian humbug?

So the scepticism, because it is complete, naturally takes the line of least resistance. Idealism, even the writer’s idealism for his craft, in other than a superficial sense, is the enemy. It is not to be required of literature that it should aim at discerning and expressing some beauty which is the truth in the welter of contemporary life. Hence the vogue of the eighteenth century, wherein human beings can be contemplated, as it were, in a condition of paradisaic ignorance of the complexities which now assail them: and, to correspond with this, in the writers who affect to give some picture of contemporary life, a complete cynicism and detachment. The human beings they depict are mere talking machines: intellectual marionettes. They are not given, and they are not intended to have, any creative truth: their purpose is not to reveal, but to amuse.

Such a scepticism is a very complete thing: it is really impervious to criticism, for any criticism directed against it must proceed from some sort of idealism, which a complete scepticism rejects out of hand. So long as its practitioners do not tire of it themselves, so long as the mood of the *intelligentsia* is such that it is amused by it—so long the Augustan revival will endure; and that may be a very long time. For a change from an absolute scepticism must, by the nature of the case, be a profound change indeed—of the same order as a revivalist conversion. At the mere mention of such a possibility the Augustans would—on their own



principles very legitimately—burst, not into Homeric laughter (for that is scarcely in their line), but into a discreet and annihilating smile.

Probably it will never happen to them; but it may one day happen to the public which reads them: for its time is not so fully taken up as theirs. Whereas they have the occupation of doing what they do so well, their readers have not. They read in a day what costs a year to write. There are not, or are not yet, 365 Augustans to succeed each other throughout the revolving year; and even with the liberal supply of plays and dances there may be a few blank days. The blank day is the devil, and the devil's chosen moment. Blank days are not so harmless as blank cartridges: one of them may easily blow the 'classical' revival sky-high in the souls of its devotees. Then they would change into *dévots*: and the last state would be worse than the first. Which God forbid.

The 'classical' revival, in so far as it is homogeneous, is based upon an absolute scepticism, and is, like the hedonistic philosophy with which it is allied, impervious to criticism. Criticism of its postulates can be rejected as a begging of the question; while its actual literary achievements seldom fall conspicuously short of the circumscribed perfection which is their aim.

But the 'classical' movement is not really homogeneous, not wholly Augustan. It has a 'serious' wing. The cynical and the serious classicists are lumped together by a perfunctory criticism. Nothing is more remarkable in the utterances of journalists who affect the classical revival than an indiscriminate juxtaposition of the names of Mr. Lytton Strachey, Mrs. Virginia Woolf, Mr. Aldous Huxley, Mr. David Garnett, and Mr. T.S.Eliot. Mr. Strachey, Mr. Garnett, and Mr. Huxley do indeed belong together, though there are signs of incipient *malaise* in Mr. Huxley: but Mrs. Virginia Woolf and Mr. Eliot are of another kind. They are serious, while the others are cynical, 'classicists.'

We shall have later most sharply to distinguish between Mrs. Woolf and Mr. Eliot, for their seriousness has important points of difference. Mrs. Woolf, being a woman, is serious as Falstaff was a coward, on instinct: Mr. Eliot rather by premeditation. But a similar seriousness finds a similar manifestation in both of them: each desires to be loyal to what we can only call the modern consciousness—a complex state of mind, a spiritual 'atmosphere' which exists now, and has never existed before. Each endeavours to create something adequate to the welter of dissatisfactions and desires which has invaded the sensitive mind during and since the war. Mrs. Woolf's 'Jacob's Room' and Mr. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' belong essentially to the same order. Both are failures; though 'The Waste Land' is the more impressive, because the more complete and conscious failure. One might almost say that Mr. Eliot's poem is permeated (and made remarkable) by a sense that the mere writing of it was a blasphemy.

But, not to indulge in subtleties of criticism, the immediate effect of these two works is the same: the exercise of a prodigious intellectual subtlety to produce the effect of a final futility. The word is just, however harsh it may appear to those who are aware of the gifts of the authors. Both are unusually fine critics; both are tormented by the longing to create. But their creations, despite the approval of the

*quidnuncs* and the *claqueurs*, are futile. Fifty, ten years hence no one will take the trouble (no small one) to read either of these works, unless there should be some revolutionary happening in their authors—some liberation into a real spontaneity—which will cause these records of their former struggle in the wilderness to be studied with the sympathy and curiosity which a contemporary now bestows upon them.

These two writers are indeed interesting. The contradiction between so much serious intention, so much proved ability, and so paradoxical an outcome—*parturiunt montes; nascetur ridiculus mus*—is at first sight scarcely less than portentous; so is the contrast between the failure, intrinsic and external, of these serious classicists and the twofold success of the cynical classicists with whom they are so indiscriminatingly confused.

Yet the contradiction and the contrast are easy to explain. It is precisely because Mrs. Woolf and Mr. Eliot *are* more serious than their fellow-classicists (b) that they fail. For to be serious is not to be cynical; and not to be cynical is to be lacking in the attitude which gives the possibility of perfection to contemporary classicism. The attitude must be congruous with the method. In the cynical classicists it is: a technique of detachment for an attitude of detachment. With the complexities and heart-searchings of modern life they are ostentatiously unconcerned; they turn their backs upon it and seek their relaxation in the trim parterres of the Augustans. By these same complexities and heart-searchings the serious classicists are deeply perturbed. Life attracts them in their own despite, they cannot ignore it.

They cannot but remember these things are  
And they are precious to them.

They strive to grapple with the modern consciousness: they become experimental, alembicated, obscure. They achieve nothing.

Yet why not? The question is not answered. The case is not simply that they use an inappropriate technique for their subject-matter; indeed, that is not the case at all. For neither the method of Mrs. Woolf in 'Jacob's Room' nor that of Mr. Eliot in 'The Waste Land' is classical in any known sense of the word. Nor can it be supposed that they believe it is. The classicism, if classicism there is, is of some novel and esoteric kind, and a classicism which is at once novel and esoteric would be a very queer classicism indeed.

Actually the reason of their failure is simple. Their works are over-intellectualized; they lack spontaneity; they are overladen with calculated subtleties (which are quite different from the instinctive subtleties of the writer who is master of his purpose, his instrument and himself); and they fail to produce any unity of impression. The reader is compelled, in the mere effort to understand, to adopt an attitude of intellectual suspicion, which makes impossible the communication of feeling. The works offend against the most elementary canon of good writing: that the immediate effect should be unambiguous.

But why, being classicists, should they offend in this most unclassical way? The answer to that is that they are *not* classicists. As critical intelligences, they have, and have given utterance to, pro-classical velleities— for order and clarity and decorum; as creative writers they are, in spite of all the restraint they impose upon themselves, disordered, obscure, indecorous. It is not their fault, they are children of the age against which they rebel. Above all, they are serious. They wish to express their real experience. And it happens that their real experience is such that it gives rise to classical velleities and defies classical expression.

For there is no *order* in modern experience, because there is no accepted principle of order. The obvious paradox of Mr. Eliot the classicist writing 'The Waste Land' is a mere trifle compared to the inward contradiction between the profession of classical principles such as his and the *content* of that poem, (c) The poem expresses a self-torturing and utter nihilism: there is nothing, nothing: nothing to say, nothing to do, nothing to believe, save to wait without belief for the miracle. Once its armour of incomprehensibility is penetrated the poem is found to be a cry of grinding and empty desolation. Nothing could conceivably be more remote from the complacent scepticism of the cynical Augustans. This is a voice from the Dark Night of the Soul of a St. John of the Cross—the barren and dry land where no water is.

To order such an experience on classical principles is almost beyond human powers. It might conceivably be done, by an act of violence, by joining the Catholic Church. St. John of the Cross *was a Catholic*. But the stupendous difference is that St. John of the Cross was born a Catholic, who thought and felt instinctively in the categories of the Church. Mr. Eliot was not; he was born into the same tormenting fluidity as the rest of us. And it is not likely that he will sell his equivocal birthright; like the rest of us, sooner or later he will be forced to crystallize his miracle out of himself, (d)

But what in the name of all incomprehensibles has such a man, in such a condition, to do with classicism? What can classicism mean for him? A spiritual technique he envies and cannot use; a certainty he longs for and cannot embrace—it could mean either of these things. But to envy classicism is not to be a classicist; it is to be, most unenviably, a romantic: a romantic who is conscious of sin in being what he is, and cannot take the plunge into the unknown; whose being knows that there is but one way, but whose mind, fascinated by ancient certitudes, can discern only nothingness along the only way.

'The Waste Land,' with a vengeance: but surely Mr. Eliot must know that no classicist ever got there. That is a station on the mystic path. The only classicism that knows anything about it is the classicism of the Catholic Church: and its knowledge derives from the fact that it has managed to include most romanticisms. If he requires a nearer precedent it is to the romantics that he must go.

This profound and absolute contradiction lies beneath all Mr. Eliot's professions of classicism. He is, essentially, an unregenerate and incomplete romantic; and he must remain unregenerate and incomplete so long as he professes classicism: for so long will his professions and his reality remain utterly divorced.

The overcoming of this divorce between his understanding and his being is precisely the miracle he asks for in 'The Waste Land.' It will not happen: such miracles never do happen, (e) A man has to create his own miracles, by paying for them, outwardly in the eyes of men and inwardly in his own soul's eye. The outward price Mr. Eliot is called upon to pay is a public recantation of his 'classicism.' It is unfortunate for him that his recantation must be public; but, since his profession was public, it is inevitable.

We have pressed home the analysis of Mr. Eliot's condition because he is the most striking example of the self-stultification involved in the profession of a serious classicism to-day. 'Classicism' is all very well; but to be coherent, to be viable, it must not be serious. A serious classicism is a contradiction in terms for a modern mind; and since, when one is serious, errors of thought have their direct consequences upon the whole of the inward man, no criticism of Mr. Eliot can be serious unless it follows home the visible contradiction of his professions and his practice to their source in an internecine conflict between his understanding and his being. That conflict will never be resolved, can never be resolved, save at the cost of a sacrifice. There is a moment, in life and in letters, when a man must lose his life to save it.

## II.

Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall;  
 Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall.  
 And all the King's horses and all the King's men  
 Couldn't put Humpty together again.

We have tried to show in the particular case of Mr. T.S. Eliot that a serious classicism at the present time is self-contradictory and sterile. The objection may, however, be urged that the inward contradiction which is so palpable and distressing to a serious reader of Mr. Eliot's work is not a *necessary* contradiction: that the striking discrepancy between his critical professions and his creative practice is peculiar to himself.

It is true, Mr. Eliot is a peculiar case; but his peculiarity lies simply in the fact that he is the only classicist among us who is not superficial. Hence his importance. How far one may regard him as typical of 'the modern mind' is, of course, a matter of opinion. Mr. Eliot is not superficial, while 'the modern mind,' regarded as general average, certainly is. Nevertheless, Mr. Eliot, in the most significant part of him, is typical of 'the modern mind.' He is completely sceptical and antinomian. He differs from the Augustans because his sceptical and antinomian condition is a torment to him: he cannot acquiesce in it.

The disposition is admirable; the results unsatisfactory. He proceeds to proclaim principles that he finds it impossible to obey. The intellectual part of him desiderates an ordered universe, an ordered experience, and an ordered society;

the living, emotional, creative part of him goes its own disordered way. And the spectacle is disturbing because he thus lowers himself to the level of those 'aesthetic' converts who are received into the Catholic Church, but whose lives are no more edifying afterwards than before. For if Mr. Eliot really *believed* in his classical principles he must surely have refrained from publishing his recent poems, with their confession of the utter absence of that conviction on which a solid classicism must be based. He might not be able to refrain from writing them: after all, a man creates as he can, not as he wills. But to publish them shows that Mr. Eliot is unwilling to submit himself to the discipline he professes as an ideal. Therefore he makes the impression of one who loves the prestige and refuses the obligations of classicism.

In a simpler man this would be hypocrisy. But Mr. Eliot has brought the separation of his intellect and his being to a fine art. Often it gives him pain: but we fancy he sometimes finds an exquisite pleasure in living the double life—to have classicism for his wife and romanticism for his mistress—ô les *oaristys!*—to walk with Mr. Charles Whibley on his one arm and Miss Gertrude Stein on the other. As a feat of good-fellowship it is considerable; as a contribution to modern thought it is impressive chiefly by an unconscious cynicism. For classicism, of the fundamental kind which Mr. Eliot professes, imposes moral obligations. It is not something to which one can give intellectual assent and ethical repudiation.

Mr. Eliot might say he can, because he does. So doubtless a priest can ingeminate austerity on Sundays and disport himself in night-clubs in between. When he is found out, however, men cease to listen to his preaching, and his ecclesiastical superior takes disciplinary action.

There's the rub. Mr. Eliot has no spiritual superior. The apostle of authority has no authority to submit to. He has to find out what is right and what is wrong for himself. Excellent, but not very classical: yet not so excellent when one reflects he has not yet got so far on his voyage of spiritual discovery as to know that in an apostle a total divorce between one's principles and one's practice is a cardinal sin.

How is Humpty-Dumpty to be mended? There seem to be but two ways. The one more obviously indicated is that he should make a blind act of faith and join the Catholic Church: there he will find an authority and a tradition. The other is that he should make a different act of faith, trust himself, and see what happens: a principle of authority may come to birth.

In short, Humpty-Dumpty must choose. Since all the king's horses and all the king's men have failed he must try Catholicism or—but what is the name for the alternative? Let us not call it Romanticism. There are many romanticisms, as there are many classicisms. And most of them have the same relation to true Romanticism as Augustanism holds to a true Classicism. It is the way (in literature) of Shakespeare, the way of Keats, the way of all men who have had to face the universe alone, and win their way from unbelief to belief, the way of which this magazine is the small and solitary voice in this country. Along this way a tradition, and a great tradition, may be found—as great, though not so outwardly

impressive, as the great Catholic tradition; but one far more truly congenial to the English genius.

England rejected Catholicism four centuries ago. And with the rejection of Catholicism English literature began. It was the expression of the free and freely inquiring spirit of man. For Catholicism was rejected, not because it was essentially false in its view of man's nature, but because it would not allow men to find out things for themselves. Under this star English literature was born: it is, through and through, an individualistic literature. Twice in its progress it has come near to accepting an ordered system for human experience, in the eighteenth century, when it believed that the mysteries of life could be solved by the light of reason and that man was a mechanism; and in the Victorian age, when it believed that the individual and society automatically achieved a mysterious something called progress. Neither of these systems (if the second can be called a system at all) is anything but superficial compared to the Catholic. They are based either on a violence done to man's nature, or to the world he experienced, or to both. But the system of the eighteenth century was at least coherent; it had a philosophy—sensationalism—and an ethic—that nothing was wrong except a crime.

This was called the 'classical' period of English literature: in a sense legitimately, for it was the only period when an ordered and uniform theory of experience was generally accepted by educated men. But the system was too narrow and too unnatural to endure. It broke down eventually because men insisted on believing that they were not machines, but organisms, and that the most vital part of man lay beyond the scope of reason. Nevertheless, this is the only period of English literature that can, not altogether stupidly, be called classical. On its own ground and principles it achieved much, and much that was perfect. If ever men come to believe in that system again, they must return to the Augustan period for their models in life and in letters.

This the Augustans of to-day actually do, and they are right. They return to the Augustan period not because they want to be 'classical'—no man in his senses *wants* to be either classical or romantic for their own sakes, he wants only to function freely—but because the Augustan period suits them: its philosophy, its behaviour, its ideals are congruous with their own. But that Augustan attitude, which was serious enough in its own day, is no longer serious in ours; we know that real experience cannot be confined within the limits of this system. Therefore the serious modern classicist must, by reason of his seriousness, seek his affinities elsewhere than in the Augustan period. But where?

He *might* go to Milton—to the Puritan tradition. Milton has generally been the refuge of English writers who have felt the need of a concrete and palpable tradition. Keats stretched out to Milton when he shrank from the chaos of self-annihilation; Gray and Collins before him had done the same. The Poet Laureate to-day is an avowed disciple of Milton. But Mr. Eliot is a Puritan by descent, and it is precisely against Puritanism that he has been struggling all his life. The classicism he desires is more august and more flexible—it is a Catholic classicism.

There is no such classicism in English literature; there cannot be. You cannot find an English classicism on Chaucer, for all that he was the most truly classical writer we have ever had; because the spiritual certainty which Chaucer possessed and which gave him the freedom to see life steadily and see it whole has disappeared for ever. Chaucer's work, as surely as Dante's, was made possible by the theology of mediaeval Catholicism. These men, because they were bound, were free: they had a theory of the universe in which they believed. Dante could trust his own intellectualism because he believed in that suprainTELlectual reality which he used it to articulate. His theology was, so to speak, a metaphysic *of which he was certain*.

Enviably, thrice enviable! But it belongs to the past. That glorious aptitude of the human mind has been lost. The modern trouble is not to accept (or to invent) a theology, but to believe in God. Without that belief theology is vain. Mr. Eliot, as his poems amply reveal, is in a Godless condition. So are thousands of others to-day. They do not care; Mr. Eliot does. To be without a knowledge of God is an agony to him. Wherever 'The Waste Land' is, it is not situated in Bloomsbury. It is a place where a lonely and tormented soul awaits the coming of the living water.

It will not come, it cannot come, because Mr. Eliot will dictate the way it must come. His intellect must be satisfied; he must know all about it; it must come to him by the aqueduct he has elaborately prepared. But there is a gap between the end of his aqueduct and the river of life. That flows in one dimension; he builds in another.

It is not possible for a man so sensitive and so scrupulous as Mr. Eliot to reach a belief in God by the grand old ways. Those grand old ways were not built from man to God, but from God to man. The belief was there, the intellectual explication of it came afterwards. It is easy for a man who inherits a faith to be classical; it is impossible for a man without one to achieve a faith through classicism. Yet classicism without belief in God is Augustanism—or nothingness. In Mr. Eliot it is nothingness; but not so absolute a nothingness that the rebirth of the Phoenix may not be delayed for many years.

P.S.—Throughout this essay I have used the phrase 'belief in God' as the most convenient shorthand for the certainty of a supra-intellectual reality, which cannot, in the ordinary sense of the word, be *known*, but only experienced. That this experiencing is, indeed, the highest form of man's knowing is my conviction; but since it is an *operative* knowledge (i.e., one that reconciles, and is born of the reconciliation of, instinct and intellect), and thus involves a change in kind, it is perhaps better not to call it knowledge.

## Notes

- a I am not unmindful of the fact that critics of repute—Babbitt, Seillière, Lasserre—French, or of French inspiration, maintain that precisely this is 'romanticism.' But romanticism and religious nullity are, in my judgment, mutually exclusive. Whatever

we may think of Rousseau, it is foolish to deny the reality of his religious consciousness. To *blame* him for the democratic optimism of the nineteenth century is uncritical; almost as uncritical as it would be to blame Jesus because his disciples quarrelled about their places in the Kingdom of Heaven. Similarly, I refuse the name of 'classical' to a movement based on a religious nullity. Ultimately, I hold that classicism assumes the existence of God, and strives to understand Him; in other words, it keeps firmly before it the problem of good and evil and seeks demonstrably to justify the ways of God to men, as in classical Greek drama and Dante: whereas romanticism seeks to discover the existence of God, and is content ineffably to know Him, and in the act of knowledge transcends the distinction between good and evil, as in the high drama of Shakespeare—'Lear' and 'Antony.' For a true classicism the existence of God is a real intellectual postulate; for a true romanticism a real spiritual experience.

- b There is no reason to suppose that Mrs. Woolf or Mr. Eliot themselves accept inclusion among the Augustans. The grouping is not mine, and, as I hope to show, it is utterly uncritical.
- c I do not imply that Mr. Eliot is himself unconscious of the contradiction. That is hardly possible. His is not the first case of *Video meliora proboque; Deteriora sequor*. But whether a critic ought at one and the same time to proclaim classical principles and publish poetry that defies them is a point in ethics I cannot decide. My opinion is, pretty emphatically, in the negative.
- d Of course, not out of himself *alone*: the miracle— regeneration—is precisely the knowledge that he is not alone.
- e Even as I write these words a new complete edition of Mr. Eliot's poems comes to my hand (Faber & Gwyer, 7s. 6d. net). It contains one poem written later than 'The Waste Land': 'The Hollow Men' (1925). Nothing could more painfully confirm my statement that the miracle will not happen. This is a more absolutely *barren* poem than 'The Waste Land.' The utterance is more naked, as though Mr. Eliot had no longer the energy to cover himself.

Between the desire  
 And the spasm  
 Between the potency  
 And the existence  
 Between the essence  
 And the descent  
 Falls the shadow



I.A.RICHARDS, MR. ELIOT'S POEMS,  
'NEW STATESMAN'

20 February 1926, vol. xxvi, 584–5

Richards (1893–1979), one of the seminal figures of modern literary criticism, was an influential teacher in the Cambridge of the 1920s. His more important works of that time include 'Principles of Literary Criticism' (1924), 'Science and Poetry' (1926) and 'Practical Criticism' (1929). He was one of the founders of Basic English.

This review was reprinted in 'Living Age' on 10 April 1926. It also appeared as an appendix in 'Principles of Literary Criticism', reissued that same year.

We too readily forget that, unless something is very wrong with our civilisation, we should be producing three equal poets at least for every poet of high rank in our great-great-grand-fathers' day. Something must indeed be wrong; and since Mr. Eliot is one of the very few poets that current conditions have not overcome, the difficulties which he has faced and the cognate difficulties which his readers encounter, repay study.

Mr. Eliot's poetry has occasioned an unusual amount of irritated or enthusiastic bewilderment. The bewilderment has several sources. The most formidable is the unobtrusiveness, in some cases the absence, of any coherent intellectual thread upon which the items of the poem are strung. A reader of 'Gerontion,' of 'Preludes' or of 'The Waste Land' may, if he will, after repeated readings, introduce such a thread. Another reader after much effort may fail to contrive one. But in either case energy will have been misapplied. For the items are united by the accord, contrast, and interaction of their emotional effects, not by an intellectual scheme that analysis must work out. The only intellectual activity required takes place in the realisation of the separate items. We can, of course, make a 'rationalisation' of the whole experience, as we can of any experience. If we do we are adding something which does not belong to the poem. Such a logical scheme is, at best, a scaffolding which vanishes when the poem is constructed. But we have so built

into our nervous systems a demand for intellectual coherence, even in poetry, that we find a difficulty in doing without it.

This point may be misunderstood, for the charge most unusually brought against Mr. Eliot's poetry is that it is over-intellectualised. One reason for this is his use of allusion. A reader who in one short poem picks up allusions to: 'The Aspern Papers,' 'Othello,' 'A Toccata of Galuppi's,' Marston, 'The Phoenix and the Turtle,' 'Antony and Cleopatra' (twice), 'The Extasie,' 'Macbeth,' 'The Merchant of Venice' and Ruskin feels that his wits are being unusually well exercised. He may easily leap to the conclusion that the basis of the poem is in wit also. But this would be a mistake. These things come in, not that the reader may be ingenious or admire the writer's erudition (this last accusation has tempted several critics to disgrace themselves) but for the sake of the emotional aura which they bring. Allusion in Mr. Eliot's hands is a technical device for compression. 'The Waste Land' is the equivalent in content to an epic. Without this device twelve books would have been needed. But these allusions and the notes in which some of them are elucidated have made many a petulant reader turn down his thumb at once.

This objection is connected with another, that of obscurity. To quote a recent pronouncement upon 'The Waste Land' from Mr. Middleton Murry: 'The reader is compelled, in the mere effort to understand, to adopt an attitude of intellectual suspicion, which makes impossible the communication of feeling. The work offends against the most elementary canon of good writing: that the immediate effect should be unambiguous.' Consider first this 'canon.' What would happen, if we pressed it, to Shakespeare's greatest Sonnets or to 'Hamlet'? The truth is that very much of the best poetry is necessarily ambiguous in its immediate effect. Even the most careful and responsive reader must re-read and do hard work before the poem forms itself clearly and unambiguously in his mind. An original poem, as much as a new branch of mathematics, compels the mind which receives it to grow, and this takes time. Any one who upon reflection asserts the contrary for his own case must be either a demi-god or dishonest; probably Mr. Murry was in haste. His remarks show that he has failed in his attempt to read the poem, and they reveal, in part, the reason for his failure, namely, his own over-intellectual approach. To read it successfully he would have to discontinue his present self-mystifications.

The critical question in all cases is whether the poem is worth the trouble it entails. For 'The Waste Land' this is considerable. There is Miss Weston's 'From Ritual to Romance' to read, and its 'astral' trimmings to be discarded—they have nothing to do with Mr. Eliot's poem. There is Canto XXVI of the 'Purgatorio' to be studied—the relevance of the close of that Canto to the whole of Mr. Eliot's work must be insisted upon. It illuminates his persistent concern with sex, the problem of our generation as religion was the problem of the last. There is the central position of Tiresias in the poem to be puzzled out—the cryptic form of the note which Mr. Eliot writes on this point is just a little tiresome. It is a way of underlining the fact that the poem is concerned with many aspects of the one fact of sex, a hint that is perhaps neither indispensable nor entirely successful.

When all this has been done by the reader, when the materials with which the words are to clothe themselves have been collected, the poem still remains to be read. And it is easy to fail in this undertaking. An 'attitude of intellectual suspicion' must certainly be abandoned. But this is not difficult to those who still know how to give their feelings precedence to their thoughts, who can accept and unify an experience without trying to catch it in an intellectual net or to squeeze out a doctrine. One form of this attempt must be mentioned. Some, misled no doubt by its origin in a Mystery, have endeavoured to give the poem a symbolical reading. But its symbols are not mystical but emotional. They stand, that is, not for ineffable objects but for normal human experience. The poem, in fact, is radically naturalistic; only its compression makes it appear otherwise. And in this it probably comes nearer to the original Mystery which it perpetuates than transcendentalism does.

If it were desired to label in three words the most characteristic feature of Mr. Eliot's technique this might be done by calling his poetry a 'music of ideas.' The ideas are of all kinds, abstract and concrete, general and particular, and, like the musician's phrases, they are arranged, not that they may tell us something but that their effects in us may combine into a coherent whole of feeling and produce a peculiar liberation of the will. They are there to be responded to, not to be pondered or worked out. This is, of course, a method used intermittently in very much poetry, and only an accentuation and isolation of one of its normal resources. The peculiarity of Mr. Eliot's later, more puzzling, work is his deliberate and almost exclusive employment of it. In the earlier poems this logical freedom only appears occasionally. In 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock,' for example, there is a patch at the beginning and another at the end, but the rest of the poem is quite straightforward. In 'Gerontion,' the first long poem in this manner, the air of monologue, of a stream of associations, is a kind of disguise and the last two lines:

Tenants of the house,  
Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season,

are almost an excuse. The close of 'A Cooking Egg' is perhaps the passage in which the technique shows itself most clearly. The reader who appreciates the emotional relevance of the title has the key to the later poems in his hand. 'The Waste Land' and 'The Hollow Men' (the most beautiful of Mr. Eliot's poems, if we reserve a doubt as to the last section, astonishing though it is) are purely a 'music of ideas,' and the pretence of a continuous thread of associations is dropped.

How this technique lends itself to misunderstandings we have seen. But many readers who have failed in the end to escape bewilderment have begun by finding on almost every line that Mr. Eliot has written (if we except certain youthful poems on American topics) that personal stamp which is the hardest thing for the craftsman to imitate and perhaps the most certain sign that the experience, good or bad, rendered in the poem is authentic. Only those unfortunate persons who are incapable of reading poetry can resist Mr. Eliot's rhythms. The poem as a whole

may elude us while every fragment, as a fragment, comes victoriously home. It is difficult to believe that this is Mr. Eliot's fault rather than his reader's, because a parallel case of a poet who so constantly achieves the hardest part of his task and yet fails in the easier is not to be found. It is much more likely that we have been trying to put the fragments together on a wrong principle.

Another doubt has been expressed. Mr. Eliot repeats himself in two ways. The nightingale, Cleopatra's barge, the rats and the smoky candle-end recur and recur. Is this a sign of a poverty of inspiration? A more plausible explanation is that this repetition is in part a consequence of the technique above described, and in part something which many writers who are not accused of poverty also show. Shelley, with his rivers, towers and stars, Conrad, Hardy, Walt Whitman and Dostoevsky spring to mind. When a writer has found a theme or image which fixes a point of relative stability in the drift of experience, it is not to be expected that he will avoid it. Such themes are a means of orientation. And it is quite true that the central process in all Mr. Eliot's best poems is the same: the conjunction of feelings which, though superficially opposed—as squalor, for example, is opposed to grandeur—yet tend as they develop to change places and even to unite. If they do not develop far enough the intention of the poem is missed. Mr. Eliot is neither sighing after vanished glories nor holding contemporary experience up to scorn. Both bitterness and desolation are superficial aspects of his poetry. There are those who think that he merely takes his readers into the Waste Land and leaves them there, that in his last poem he confesses his impotence to release the healing waters. The reply is that some readers find in his poetry not only a clearer, fuller realisation of their plight, the plight of a whole generation, than they find elsewhere, but also through the very energies set free in that realisation a return of the saving passion.

EDMUND WILSON, STRAVINSKY AND  
OTHERS, 'NEW REPUBLIC'

10 March 1926, vol. xlvi, 73-4

These comments come at the end of a consideration of Stravinsky's ballet, 'Les Noces', which communicates 'an exhilaration as impossible to the jazz orchestra as to the accomplished modern composer of disintegration and defeat'.

This is perhaps not an inappropriate place to speak of the collected edition of T.S.Eliot's poems which has just been published in England. This volume contains nothing new except a set of poems called 'The Hollow Men,' which represents an even more advanced stage of the condition of demoralization already given expression in 'The Waste Land': the last of these poems—the disconnected thoughts of a man lying awake at night—consists merely of the barest statement of a melancholy self-analysis mixed with a fragment of the Lord's Prayer and a morose parody of 'Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush.' 'This is the way the world ends,' the poet concludes, 'Not with a bang, but a whimper.'

No artist has felt more keenly than Mr. Eliot the desperate condition of Europe since the War nor written about it more poignantly. Yet, as we find this mood of hopelessness and impotence eating into his poetry so deeply, we begin to wonder whether it is really the problems of European civilization which are keeping him awake nights. Mr. Eliot has lived abroad so long that we rarely think of him as an American and he is never written about from the point of view of his relation to other American authors. Yet one suspects that his real significance is less that of a prophet of European disintegration than of a poet of the American Puritan temperament. Compare him with Hawthorne, Henry James, E.A.Robinson and Edith Wharton: all these writers have their Waste Land, which is the aesthetic and emotional waste land of the Puritan character and their chief force lies in the intensity with which they communicate emotions of deprivation and chagrin. The young men of Eliot's earlier poems, with their prudence and their inability to let themselves go, are like the young men of Henry James's early novels and like the Hawthorne of the Note-Books; and the later creations of Eliot, with their regrets

for having dared too little, correspond exactly to the middle-aged men of the later Henry James, of 'The Ambassadors' and 'The Beast in the Jungle.' What is most important about Mr. Eliot, however, is that even in his deepest dejections and tending, as he seems to do here, to give his emotions a false significance, he remains a poet of the first order. One is struck, in going through this new edition, by the fact that he survives rereading better than almost any of his contemporaries, American or English.

55.  
J.C.SQUIRE ON ELIOT'S  
MEANINGLESSNESS, 'LONDON  
MERCURY'

March 1926, vol. xiii, 547-8

This is from a review not only of Eliot's 'Poems' but also of Blunden's 'English Poems'. The contrast, obviously enough, works in Blunden's favour.

Mr. Eliot's work is mainly an elaborate expression of disgust. He ends his volume with these lines:

This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.

and he calls his longest poem 'The Waste Land,' its apparent object being to reflect in a vagrant and fatigued sequence of images the exhaustion of our civilisation. The mood is familiar enough: it is what thirty years ago they used to call 'fin-de-siècle': Baudelaire without his guts. It is a dyspeptic mood, the mood of a man of low vitality, a man feeling 'below par.' The diagnosis on which it is nominally founded seems to me unsound. Our civilisation appears at least as vigorous as it was a century ago, and the urban ugliness and the emptiness of the lives of many people, rich and poor, is no new thing—neither is the exaggeration of it from outside. And what new complexion has recently come over our situation versus the universe I do not make out. Nevertheless a poet must be granted his opinions and his mood, though an obstinate pessimism or fierce despair is more likely to produce moving literature than the muted dejection which appears habitual with Mr. Eliot, who seems unable to love anything or, by the same token, to hate. In the last resort we have to ask ourselves what are the qualities of his work and what pleasure does it give us.

Certain powers of intellect and craftsmanship he obviously possesses. There is an acute, if perverse, mind in these poems, and a faculty, too seldom employed, for

a faint individual music: Mr. Eliot observes closely, and he has a vocabulary which will do anything he wants, a vocabulary which, perhaps, might be richer if it were poorer, for it is stuffed with terms drawn from obscure penetralia of learning which are no assistance to his toiling reader. Unhappily Mr. Eliot has very little regard for his reader. In one of the poems of his earliest period, when his poems were weary, and comparatively lucid, reveries over the vacuity of daily life in general and cultivated tea parties in particular, he depicted himself as mounting his aunt's doorstep and

turning  
Wearily, as one would turn to nod good-bye to  
Rochefoucauld  
If the street were time and he at the end of the  
street.

The lucidity, of late, has vanished, but whenever there is an opening in the mists which surround the later Mr. Eliot, he is still to be observed nodding good-bye to Rouchefoucauld—who stands at the end of a street sparsely populated with pale typists, cats, barrel-organs, and footmen going out for a drink. It is not a very infectious attitude; nor does it generate the simple, sensuous, and passionate. In the later poems Mr. Eliot has reinforced his detachment by a further detachment of speech. Now and again he is comprehensible and strong (as in the stanzas about Webster and Donne) or comprehensible and melodious (as in the first lines of 'The Waste Land' and the last stanza of 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales'): usually he is obscure, so inconsequent, that the kindest thing one can suppose is that he is experimenting with automatic writing. Why on earth he bothers to write at all is difficult to conceive: why, since he must write, he writes page after page from which no human being could derive any more meaning (much less edification or pleasure) than if they were written in Double-Dutch (which parts of them possibly are) is to me beyond conjecture. Why to the Waste Land add a Valley of peculiarly Dry Bones?



56.

ALLEN TATE, A POETRY OF IDEAS,  
'NEW REPUBLIC'

30 June 1926, vol. xlvii, 172–3

The article by Edwin Muir to which Tate refers was published in 'Nation' (New York) (5 August 1925), cxxi, 162–4.

'Poems: 1909–1925' by Mr. T.S.Eliot is a spiritual epilogue to 'The Education of Henry Adams.' It represents a return of the Anglo-French colonial idea to its home. A pervasive sense of public duty led Adams into morally and politically active life, but it was not strong enough to submerge the 'finer grain,' with which his hereditary European culture had endowed him. The conflict was disastrous; he repudiated the American adventure too late. But in Mr. Eliot puritan obligation withdraws into private conscience; a system of conduct becomes a pattern of sensibility; his meagre romanticism, like the artificially constructed ruin of the eighteenth century, is strictly an affair of the past, it has nothing whatever in common with a creed of practical romanticism like that of William James. Going home to Europe, Mr. Eliot has had to understand Europe; he could not quite sufficiently be the European simply to feel that he was there; he has been forced to envisage it with a reminiscent philosophy. And it is not insignificant that the quarterly of which he is the editor is the first British journal which has attempted to relate the British mind to the total European mind; that has attempted a rational synthesis of the traditions of Roman culture; that has, in a word, contemplated order. Mr. Eliot's position in this scheme of recapitulation, of arranging the past when the future seems to him only vaguely to exist, is in some respects particularly fortunate. It has enabled him to bring to England, in his poetry, the sense of a contemporary spiritual crisis, which shell-shock had already rendered acute, but of which the English Channel had perhaps kept out the verbally conscious signification. The essays of Maurras, Valéry, Massis, the philosophy of Spengler, all may variously attest to the reality of European disorder. It is nevertheless the special poetical creation of Mr. Eliot's cultural disinheritance and gloom. It has not, I believe, been pointed out that Mr. Eliot's poetry is principally a poetry of ideas, that these ideas have steadily anticipated the attitude of a later essay on

the Function of Criticism. 'The Sacred Wood' was written in the years of this anticipatory verse, but this volume is singularly devoid of its chief issues. For the early essays presuppose a static society and the orderly procession of letters: Tradition and the Individual Talent presupposes a continuity of traditional culture as literature. The baroque agony of the poetry in the corresponding period was preoccupied, however, with the anarchy which he has subsequently rationalized and for which he has proposed as remedy the régime of a critical dictatorship, in The Function of Criticism.

The critical idea of disorder began, in the poetry, as the desperate atmosphere of isolation. It was obviously conviction prior to reflection, but to one in Mr. Eliot's spiritual unrest it speedily becomes a protective idea; it ceases to be emotion, personal attitude; one ceases reiterating it as such. This rationalization of attitude puts in a new light the progressive sterilization of his poetry. It partly explains the slenderness of his production: a poetry with the tendency to ideas betrays itself into criticism, as it did in Arnold, when it becomes too explicit, too full. His collected poems is the preparation for a critical philosophy of the present state of European literature. As this criticism becomes articulate, the poetry becomes incoherent. The intellectual conception is now so complete that he suddenly finds there is no symbolism, no expressive correspondence, no poetry, for it. An emotional poetry uncensored by reason would be intolerable to his neo-classical predilections. For Mr. Eliot apprehends his reality with the intellect, and the reality does not yield a coherent theme. This is evidently the formula of 'The Waste Land' (1922), where the traditional mythologies are no longer forms of expression, but quite simply an inexplicable burden the meaning of which the vulgar brutality of modern life will not permit the poem to remember. The mythologies disappear altogether in 'The Hollow Men' (1925), for this series of lyrics stands at the end of his work as the inevitable reduction to chaos of a poetry of the idea of chaos:

*Here we go round the prickly pear....  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

The series is substantially an essay on contemporary Europe.

Throughout Mr. Eliot's poetry two principal devices advance the presentation of spiritual disorder. They were previously exploited, the one by Guillaume Apollinaire not later than 1913, the other by André Salmon in 1910. Very little of Mr. Eliot's poetry was written before the latter year. The first is the device of shifted movement, or of logically irrelevant but emotionally significant conclusion, used with typical success at the end of the 'Preludes'; I quote from Mr. Malcolm Cowley's unpublished translation of Apollinaire's 'Marizibill':

Through the Hochstrasse of Cologne  
Evenings she used to come and pass

Offering herself to who would own  
 Then tired of walking streets she drank  
 All night in evil bars alone....  
 People I've seen of every sort  
 They do not fit their destiny  
 Aimless mechanical as wires  
 Their hearts yawn open like their doors  
 Their eyes are half-extinguished fires.

For the second device, that of projecting simultaneously events which are separated in time, destroying the commonplace categorical perception of time and space and erecting the illusion of chaos—a device of tremendous effect in the Tiresias passage and the Sweeney poems—I quote stanzas from Salmon's 'Les Veufs de Rose':

La duègne a secoué ses jupons  
 (Chargez le ciel!—Le herse flambe.)  
 Le rat de Hamlet, ce bouffon,  
 Vient de passer entre ses jambes.  
 Chassez le rat, chassez les veufs,  
 La vieille fermera la porte,  
 Rose enfile le maillot neuf  
 D'une soeur rivale enfin morte.

Here is the rhythm of Sweeney, Grishkin, Burbank; also a system of imagery too specific in its properties to have been learned directly from Laforgue, supposedly Mr. Eliot's chief French influence.

While he has all along been under the influence of Laforgue and Corbière, it has not given him his two major effects. From these poets he has borrowed, not tricks of construction so much as attitudes and particular lines; for example, Mr. Eliot's beautiful line

Simple and faithless as a smile or shake of the hand— is a paraphrase, in which the metaphor is made a definite image, of

Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour.

The line was Laforgue's, but now because Eliot has improved it, it is his. And the Elizabethan element is impure. Webster's varied complexity of pattern, its fusion of heterogeneous sensations, breaks down under Mr. Eliot's treatment. It has undoubtedly served him as a model of diction, but the physical presentation of psychological terror and the sense of formal beauty, fused in Webster, are in Eliot, as Mr. Edwin Muir has pointed out, simply mixed, alternately recurring. His Elizabethanism has indubitably been too ingenuously appraised by some critics,

and it has thus been objected that such a formula is inadequate to contemporary 'problems'; but even were the formula of most of Eliot's poetry what these critics suppose it to be, criticism might as well assert that Dryden was not the poet of his age because he did not permit the lately 'discovered' law of gravitation to alter the quality of sensitivity in his verse. Mr. Eliot's poetry has attempted with considerable success to bring back the total sensibility as a constantly available material, deeper and richer in connotations than any substance yielded by the main course of English poetry since the seventeenth century.

He has borrowed intelligently from a great many sources; it is only because of an interested romantic criticism that the privilege has fallen into dishonor. Those aspects of recent French poetry which reappear in Eliot have been impugned as echo and faddism; it is forgotten that some of Massinger's best lines are revisions of Tourneur, are unoriginal. And it is not merely as a skilful borrower that Mr. Eliot is the most traditional poet of the age. For him and for all sound criticism down to Pater the body of literature in the GraecoRoman culture lives as an organism; he has deliberately employed such of its properties as extend, living, into the creative impulse of his age. His attention in both criticism and poetry has been to the poetry, not to the poet; to the essence and not to the momentary vicar of the essence. The attitude is self-contained, impersonal, classical, and the critics of opportunity and private obsession have regretted the lack of personal exploitation; his unfamiliar system of metaphor has offered a great deal for a vulgar age to misunderstand. His conviction that the traditional inspiration, in immediately inherited forms, is exhausted produced the transition poem, 'The Waste Land': it exhibits this inspiration as it now exists in decay, and it looks by implication toward a new world-order the framework of which Mr. Eliot lacked the excessive divination to supply. He is traditional, but in defining tradition as life, as a living cultural memory, instead of a classical dictionary stocked with literary *dei ex machina*, he is also the type of contemporary poet.

Mr. Eliot's is a scrupulous, economical mind. It is possible that he has nothing more to say in poetry. 'The Hollow Men' ends at least a phase. Whether the difficulty is the personal quality of his puritan culture, as Mr. Edmund Wilson seems to believe, or lies in the tangle of contemporary spiritual forces, it would be hazardous just now to say. But it is evident that he for some reason—like Gray who also lived in a critical transition—cannot 'speak out.' Arnold's remarks on Gray in this connection are of considerable contemporary interest:

It [the poetry of his age] was intellectual, argumentative, ingenious...not interpretative. Maintaining and fortifying [his mind] with lofty studies, he could not fully educe and enjoy them; the want of a genial atmosphere, the failure of sympathy in his contemporaries, were too great.... A man born in 1608 [Milton] could profit by the larger and more poetic scope of the English spirit in the Elizabethan age.... Neither Butler nor Gray could flower. They *never spoke out*.

CONRAD AIKEN, FROM THE POETIC  
DILEMMA, 'DIAL'

May 1927, vol. lxxxii, 420–2

It has been often enough, perhaps too often said, of late, that the almost fatal difficulty which confronts the poet nowadays is the difficulty of finding a theme which might be worth his power. If he be potentially a 'major' poet, this difficulty is thought to be particularly formidable, if not actually crippling; but for even the 'minor' poet (to use minor in no pejorative sense) it is considered serious. Mr T.S.Eliot, whose 'Poems' have been reprinted by Mr Knopf, has himself contributed something to this theory. In his admirable note on Blake, in 'The Sacred Wood,' he suggests that Blake was potentially a major poet who was robbed of his birthright by the mere accident of there not being, at the moment, a prepared or traditional cosmology or mythology of sufficient wealth to engage, or disengage, his great imaginative power. He was compelled, in the absence of such a frame, to invent a frame for himself; and in this was, perhaps inevitably, doomed to failure. Had he been born to a belief as rich and profound as that which Dante inherited, might he not have been as great a poet?...

This is an ingenious idea; but it is possible to take it too seriously. It is obvious enough that some sort of tradition is a very great help to a poet—it floats him and sustains him, it carries him more swiftly and easily than he could carry himself, and it indicates a direction for him. But a fact too often lost sight of, at the present time, is that the great poet may be, precisely, one who has a capacity to find, at *any* given moment, a theme sufficient for the proper exercise of his strength. There were contemporaries of Dante who were excellent poets, but for whom the cosmology which enchanted Dante was not evocative. If Blake scanned his horizon in vain for 'huge cloudy symbols,' Goethe, scanning the same horizon, was not so unsuccessful. It is true enough that, with the decay of religion as a force in human life, poetry must be robbed of that particular *kind* of conviction, as has been noted by Mr I.A.Richards; but to assume from this that the poetry of the future must inevitably be a poetry of scepticism or negation is perhaps to oversimplify the issue. Poetry has always shown itself able to keep step easily and naturally with the utmost that man can do in extending his knowledge, no matter how destructive of existing beliefs that knowledge can be. Each accretion of

knowledge becomes, by degrees, a part of man's emotional attitude to the world, takes on affective values or overtones, and is then ready for use in poetry. The universe does not become each year simpler or less disturbing; nor is there any reason to suppose that it ever will. The individual who is born into it will continue to be surprised and delighted by it, or surprised and injured; and in direct ratio with this surprise and delight or surprise and injury, he will continue to be a poet.

The wail of contemporary criticism, therefore, to the effect that poetry can find nothing to cling to, leaves one a little sceptical: though it is easy enough to sympathize with the individual poets who, suffering from that delusion, have for the moment lost themselves in self-distrust. Mr Pound and Mr Eliot are perhaps very typical victims of this kind. But whereas Mr Pound has evaded the issue, seeking asylum in a sense of the past (rather half-heartedly held) Mr Eliot has made a poetry of the predicament itself. His poetry has been from the outset a poetry of self-consciousness; of instinct at war with doubt, and sensibility at odds with reason; an air of precocious cynicism has hung over it; and his development as a poet has not been so much a widening of his field— though at first sight 'The Waste Land' might suggest this—as a deepening of his awareness of it. Prufrock, who antedated by a decade the later poem, could not give himself to his emotions or his instincts because he could not bring himself, *sub specie aeternitatis*, quite to believe in them: he was inhibited, and preferred to remain a despairing spectator: but at the same time he wished that he might have been a simpler organism, 'a pair of ragged claws.' The theme of 'Gerontion,' a good many years later, is the same: it is again the paralysing effect of consciousness, the 'after such knowledge, what forgiveness?' And 'The Waste Land' is again a recapitulation, reaching once more the same point of acute agony of doubt, the same distrust of decision or action, with its 'awful daring of a moment's surrender, which an age of prudence can never retract.'

The reissue of 'Poems' is not the occasion for a detailed review of Mr Eliot's early work, however; for our present purpose it is sufficient to note that Mr Eliot has conspicuously shared the contemporary feeling that there are no 'large' themes for the poet, and that he has had the courage and the perspicacity to take as his theme precisely his themelessness. Why not—he says in effect—make a bitter sort of joke of one's nihilism and impotence? And in making his bitter joke, he has written some of the most searchingly unhappy and vivid and individual of contemporary poetry. One feels that his future is secure, by virtue of his honesty quite as much as by virtue of his genius....

# 'Ash-Wednesday'

London and New York, 24 April 1930

58.

GERALD HEARD, T.S.ELIOT, 'WEEK-  
END REVIEW

3 May 1930, vol. i, 268–9

Heard (1889–1972) was an English historian and writer, whose publications include 'Science in the Making' (1935) and 'The Third Morality' (1937).

Mr. Eliot is so serious a poet that he deserves, like all who have escaped from the idle singing through an empty day, to be noted, not for the way he says things, but for the things themselves. His style is that most living style, a language distinctive because it is fitted so closely to a personal thought. It is a symptom and can only be justly criticised if an attempt is made to judge the thought from which it springs. So his poetry, though highly stylised, may be appreciated by the ordinary thinking man. Mr. Eliot's poems are not written as exercises in prosody or illustrations of new sound-patterns; they are his philosophy. What he says, he says because not otherwise could he give expression to his strong conviction. 'The Waste Land' could only be understood if it was realised how deeply the poet had suffered because of the war's desolation.

The clue to these six poems called 'Ash-Wednesday' seems to be that the poet has entered on a new stage of his life. *Adhesit pavimento* might still be written over them, but also *De profundis*, for the strongest feeling that they give is of a spirit's communing. They do not seem addressed to any public, still less to appreciators of verse.

This, of course, is not to say that they will not interest poetry lovers; but certainly such will be distracted from their love of pure expression by the way that philosophy will keep breaking in. Indeed, it does not seem that it is possible to appreciate this verse unless one can first discover to which of the traditions of English religious verse Mr. Eliot really belongs. On the one side we have the broad organ notes of the main tradition, the expression of a people whose main characteristic is that they have cared for the word rather than the rite, for statement rather than for symbol. It is the tradition which gave the Authorised Version and which speaks through Milton, and through Dryden, though a Catholic. Religion



to it is not so much a mystery to be shown forth by symbols and ritual, but is rather 'sanctified common-sense' to be set forth in the most stately language. On the other side is what may be called the iconographic tradition, the tradition which uses words, not for argument or for rhetoric, but to raise visual images, to create hard clear symbols, for it believes the infinite can only so be approached and words may only so be used to shadow it forth.

In English poetry, this tradition runs alongside our main canon. We can trace it back from Hopkins and Thompson, to Crashaw and Donne, back even to the author of the 'Pearl.' Now to which of these two does Mr. Eliot belong? For some time he seemed to be attached to the visual school, but it is only possible to be a true visualiser if the main current is given a wide berth. In English it flows so strongly that for a poet to approach it is to be drawn into its tideway. Francis Thompson realised that. It seems to have been a deliberate attempt to free himself of the associative sound tradition that made him take for his greatest expression of the search for the strayed soul by the divine lover, not the perfect simile of the Good Shepherd, which has followed man for a hundred generations, but the violent, contradictory simile of the dog hunting down its prey.

It is therefore very remarkable that through these verses of Mr. Eliot the Authorised Version breaks out on every hand. 'And God said, "Shall these bones live?"' 'The burden of the grasshopper.' 'Redeem the time.' 'The Word within the world... The Light in darkness.' 'O, my people, what have I done unto thee!' 'And let my cry come unto Thee.' Who can say how these rhythms would sound to ears which have never echoed to the lectionary's cadences, and who can say that a poet who takes into his verse such phrases entire is not already passing into the main English tradition?

Such a symptom compels speculation as to the poet's spiritual bourne. The process of those who move in the direction of system and meaning is too often assumed to be Anglican, High Anglican, Roman, and probably the chances are in favour of such a solution for those who think visually and not orally. But it is really an accident that poets should so think—and even then the end is not certain. William Morris, a poet of the eye and not the ear, who called Milton a damned rhetorician, and a furious romantic to boot, did not charge into Catholicism from his unhistorical notion of the middle ages, but into Socialism. Taken as a whole, poets should be primarily artists of the ear, and if so they will tend to find their meaning and system in utterance rather than in rite, in prophecy rather than in symbol. Protestantism, because it suspects plastic art, must express its supreme feeling and intuition in poetry. In the richness of Arabic, Mohammedanism found an art medium which compensated it for its plastic art-denying ordinance. The nations to whom a rite and a sacrament are the supreme manifestations of reality must take to plastic expression to symbolise their religious feeling. The major poets must be poets of the ear, and they will always be prophetic, not priestly. That is why England is the home of Protestantism, supreme poetry, and of only a secondary sculpture and painting.

The future of Mr. Eliot's muse is therefore of interest to philosophy as well as to poetry. Will the main English tradition reassert itself with this returned New Englander? It seems to be doing so. If it does, when it wins him his allegiance will mean more than a turn in poetic fashion.

59.

FRANCIS BIRRELL, MR. T.S.ELIOT,  
'NATION AND ATHENAEUM'

31 May 1930, vol. xlvii, 292–3

Francis Birrell (b. 1889) is a British critic, translator and biographer. He wrote an essay on Diderot for the 'Criterion' (July 1933), xii, 632–41.

When Mr. T.S.Eliot started out on a poetical career which was to astonish many and ravish some, he was primarily a satirist and a 'wit,' not merely in choice of subject, as in 'Mr. Apollinax,' but in the definite sardonic quality with which, by the arts of juxtaposition or abnormal stressing, he invested words that had not yet had such a significance:-

Princess Volupine extends  
A meagre, blue-nailed, phthisic hand  
To climb the waterstair. Lights, lights,  
She entertains Sir Ferdinand  
Klein.

The sombre melody is intentionally out of key with the poet's ironic intention. This satire, though less marked in 'The Waste Land,' still informs some of the more sumptuous passages:-

On the divan are piled (at night her bed)  
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.  
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs  
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—  
I too awaited the expected guest.

But in 'Ash-Wednesday'—the ironic intent has completely vanished from the poems of Mr. Eliot, and with it perhaps the superficial qualities that made him appeal to the younger generation. He is now out for what is known as 'beauty,'

and 'beauty' is less in request than wit. The six short poems that make up 'Ash-Wednesday' are an elaborate study in pure form; and to my mind contain many passages of great loveliness:-

At the first turning of the second stair  
 I turned and saw below  
 The same shape twisted on the banister  
 Under the vapour in the fetid air  
 Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears  
 The deceitful face of hope and of despair,

or again:-

Who walked between the violet and the violet  
 Who walked between  
 The various ranks of varied green  
 Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,  
 Talking of trivial things.

The main difficulty I have in facing this remarkable poem is that I do not understand what it is all about. What are the 'three white leopards...under a juniper tree,' what exactly are the three staircases, and the veiled sisters? Are they mystical or liturgical images with which I ought to be acquainted, or are they merely private associations in the sensibility of Mr. Eliot? On the second assumption, are they permissible? And on the first, how much information is an author justified in assuming his reader to possess? Does not such a great poet as Donne positively suffer in the extravagance of his sensibility? Though to be sure, Mr. Eliot would answer this last question with a violent negative. Then perhaps the difficulties will clear themselves up. When I first read 'The Waste Land' or even 'Prufrock,' I could hardly make head or tail of them, yet they now present no particular difficulty.

A short poem like 'Ash-Wednesday' can only be appreciated by being read all through, and read more than once. Only thus will the reader be able to absorb the complexity of its texture, the elaboration of its prosody, the richness and violence of its internal rhymes, its liturgical sombreness (for I suppose the liturgies of the Church dictate the form as well as the inspiration of the poem).

Mr. Eliot, very early in his career, developed a vocabulary. There was about his works, almost from the start, that authentic smell which enables one to tell them almost from a distance. No poet has 'arrived' till he has developed his vocabulary, and some poets have not done so till late in life. But with the success comes the danger. The poet may rest content with his vocabulary and develop a manner and a mannerism. He becomes repetitive. Mr. Eliot is too inquisitive, emotionally as well as linguistically, for this to be a danger. On the other hand his temptation is

to be too constantly on the move and keep the reader continually guessing. It is the best danger for a poet.

EDA LOU WALTON, T.S.ELIOT TURNS  
TO RELIGIOUS VERSE, 'NEW YORK  
TIMES BOOK REVIEW'

20 July 1930, 9

Walton (1896–1962), American literary critic and poet, was educated at the University of California, Berkeley. She taught at New York University from 1924 to 1960.

It is worth comparing this review with her comments on Pound's 'A Draft of XXX Cantos' in the 'New York Times Book Review' (2 April 1933), sect, v, 2, and reprinted in 'Ezra Pound: The Critical Heritage', ed. Eric Homberger (London, 1972), pp. 256–9. Homberger writes: 'this review indicates Eliot's authority in New York in 1933. He has become (though oversimplified) a weapon to be used against Pound'.

The later manner of T.S.Eliot is actually a direct outgrowth of his earlier poetic manner as seen in 'The Waste Land.' When Eliot defined his three creeds as Royalism in politics, Classicism in art, and Anglo-Catholicism in religion, he did not in truth step out of his position as 'the greatest poet of non-belief,' for the simple reason that he never actually held that position or aspired to it. Any one who cares to analyze 'The Waste Land' will find in it the seeds of the religious poetry to which Eliot has of late given himself. For 'The Waste Land,' with its devastating picture of modern life without beauty and without faith, with its statement of hopeless inability to grasp values in modern civilization, with its renunciation of the present, was actually the beginning of the search Eliot was soon to make after God. There were only two possibilities for this poet from the very start, either a reiteration—to which there would have been little point—of the imputed sordidness of our day, or a search for something more fundamental in the way of an old or a new faith. To be sure, Eliot might have developed, as some expected him to do, a new creed based on an affirmation of a modern intellectual and scientific outlook. That he would do this was, however, never very likely, since his cry was for romance, beauty and a golden past. That he did finally accept one of the oldest religions (we should not be surprised to hear that he had

become Roman Catholic) is in accord with his reverence for the past. The only difficulty lies in understanding how so analytical an intellect came to acceptance of unquestioning faith. And there seems some reason for believing that Eliot remains as frustrated and as sad in his later religious poems as he seemed in 'The Waste Land.' For in these too the theme of death is everywhere and the desire toward oblivion as strong as ever and stronger. No one of these poems but states some feeling of incompetence to accept life, some yearning after nothingness. All that has been lost from Eliot's poetry is the intensity of pain which was expressed in 'The Waste Land,' and which, in these later poems, is muted into a desire-to-believe.

'Ash-Wednesday' is, as its title indicates, a poem of repentance and renunciation. Its various sections are a ritualistic chanting working through the personal desire for oblivion toward some universal statement of the meaning of death in life, and life in death. The poem never achieves ecstasy of that type of mysticism which frees one, momentarily, from the awareness of anything else but the Vision. The poem is pitched low; the tone is one of grief rather than of wild sorrow, and faith is arrived at only by acceptance of the Word. 'Ash-Wednesday' is a difficult poem, much more difficult, although simply enough written, than is the type of mystic poetry sometimes called 'verbal mysticism,' which achieves its effects by the projection of the mind through space by means of a rapidly evolving series of images. Its difficulty is due to the fact that the poet asks one to understand not only Catholic symbolism and medieval literary expression, but a personal symbolism also. To say, therefore, just what the leopards, the Lady, the rocks, &c., may mean is almost impossible. One can merely surmise. But the emotion of the poem is obvious.

It opens with the poet's renunciation of life; it rises through the rising desire toward Faith. There is always the undercurrent of the wish for oblivion. There is birth moving toward death and death moving toward spiritual birth. Will the Church forgive the children who walk in darkness? With this question unanswered, the poet closes on a prayer for himself that he need not care for life sufficiently to cling to it, and yet may care enough to live it and be at peace in God's will.

And let my cry come unto Thee

The whole poem is remote and sad. It has, of course, Eliot's beauty of rhythm and sound. It is not the poem of a religious teacher, but of an intellectual man who would wish to renounce any intellectual conception of life and finds the task very difficult.

61.  
ORGILL McKENZIE, REVIEW, 'NEW  
ADELPHI'

June-August 1930, n.s., vol. iii, 336–8

Mrs Orgill McKenzie, British poet and story writer, published the bulk of her work during the 1930s.

It is a pity that the publishers of 'Ash-Wednesday' have been so prodigal of paper, for when the reader, having patiently turned seven all-but-virgin pages, arrives at the opening line, he is in a mood to purloin for his own irreverent ends its 'Because I do not hope to turn again.' But there the frisking ends. Beauty calls us to heel and keeps us there, except when, in resentment almost, we deliberately hold back. Mr. Eliot is a poet who has at times bidden us go study tomes if we want to understand him. Not that he does that here, but he is here still the poet who has done it.

It is just that a poet should have the patience and humility of the reader. It is good that the first shock of the words be only a surface beauty—the smooth flat beauty of the thing heard, but good only if the patience and humility of the reader are at last rewarded; if the words that were smooth like waters suddenly sharpen like barbs, and strike the beauty home so that the thing heard becomes the thing perceived. Enlightenment may come in needle-pricks or in whole arrow-heads till the poem is lodged entire in the reader. And then he feels as happy as in mediaeval paintings the pincushion looks. The disciple experiences something of the pain-edged joy of the creator. He too has had a kind of travail. The poem he receives cannot be quite the poet's poem, certainly not in degree, and probably not altogether in kind; for each individual has a different set of ideas that rush to answer the same summoning bell. But the important thing is that the mob of released ideas should come to satisfying unity in the dispersed air and to a graspable completeness in infinite space, and not be lured to charge up a blind alley and be discomfited by a blank wall which the poet has cleared on the borrowed wings of erudition. If that happens the reader feels he has been cheated. He will come to heel again when beauty whistles, but warily this time, like a dog mindful of bygone kicks that seemed to him unreasonable. A poet's symbolism if it is self-contained may justly



be obscure. There is no sense of frustration in that soft dusk. Where the reader needs wings and lacks them, the poet cannot provide ridiculous and necessarily inadequate step-ladders. But where a poet by intellectual steps reaches a height we cannot in one bound come by, we feel that he has kicked away the scaffolding. That is why, when I come to an obscure place in Mr. Eliot's poems, I remember that formidable list of annotations and references in a previous volume and ask myself: 'Am I to go on? Is it worth while going on, or has he kicked away the scaffolding?'

Through 'Ash-Wednesday' ranges the ghost of Ecclesiastes, a ghost of such sturdy stuff that at times it becomes wide alive; and then 'Ash-Wednesday' is the ghost ranging through Ecclesiastes. The ear feels balked when it has been made hungry for the older beauty, and waits for the words of that translator who must have written wrapped about with fire.

Biblical phrases come twisted a little—the burden of the grasshopper becomes apparently the *bourdon* of the grasshopper. The thought is tweaked a little. The dry bones that in Ezekiel's valley lived clothed again with sinew here live

Forgetting themselves and each other, united  
In the quiet of the desert.

'Prophecy to the wind' is not that thereby the slain may live, but 'for only the wind will listen.'

The preacher says: 'That which now is, in the days to come shall all be forgotten.' And Mr. Eliot:

Because I know that time is always time  
And place is always and only place  
And what is actual is actual only for one time  
And only for one place.

Both poets concentrate on the Now which is the only actuality. The past has an existence only in so far as it is synthesised in the present. The twist is in the conclusion:

'Therefore I hated life' and 'I rejoice that things are as they are.' Yet it is only a little twist, for Ecclesiastes cannot remain negative: 'a man should rejoice in his own works for that is his portion.'

Everything in life has its counterpart. If the powers grow single towards one aim, the opposite weighs down the balance. Youth is the positive time when one thing is hotly pursued. Disillusionment comes when the debit column is first seen to be as positive as what youth thought alone positive. 'La Peau de Chagrin' grants fulfilment of a wish, but the skin is shrunken thereby, and the realisation of the shrinking is set over against the joy of satisfied desire.

'To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose.' Ecclesiastes sums up the opposites. There is the balance. God has set one thing over against the other. 'Whoso removeth a stone shall be hurt thereby.' And Mr. Eliot prays for 'those

who are torn on the horn between season and season, time and time.’ The silent Word is the centre about which whirls the restlessness of opposites.

Both poets concentrate on the norm that is the only peace. ‘Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself over-wise. Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?’ ‘Teach us to care and not to care. Teach us to sit still.’ But even sitting still is positive and has its positive debit.

Both poets know the uselessness of that search. ‘And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things...and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit.’

And I pray that I may forget  
Those matters that with myself I too much discuss.

But both know that they must go on seeking, not only in the future, but in the past.

From the window towards the granite shore  
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying  
Unbroken wings.  
And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices  
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices.

There is no discharge in that war.

But the search is not the search for life. It is life, the justification of life and its redemption from vanity.

Mr. Eliot finds something beyond the first stair of youth. Beyond it, beyond the second stair of darkness and disillusion are vision and strength, and something waited for in the

Lord I am not worthy  
but speak the word only.

Even if the poet were to stop at fall is vanity,’ yet, by the mere beauty of his saying, somehow we could know, however blindly, that all is *not* vanity. The keenness of that joy-pain which, while it comes from the hurling of our slipping selves into the fiery proclamation of a truth that was dim-lit in us, is (though it cannot be proof) conviction that here is life with opposites so sharply mixed that there is something that looks like stasis, but nothing that is vanity.

There are many lovely things in these six poems that are in mood and thought one poem. One of the loveliest is a stanza in the fourth beginning: ‘Here are the years that walk between.’ It flows exquisitely down to the weighted slowness of the last line: ‘While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.’

We may not be able to find out with our feet all the ways of Mr. Eliot’s garden, but even if we were beggars obliged to sit, because of our intellectual poverty,

without the gate, we could yet fill our eyes with beauty from peering through the cold twistings of the iron gate. For Mr. Eliot's poetry is greater than his cleverness.

EDMUND WILSON, REVIEW, 'NEW  
REPUBLIC'

20 August 1930, vol. lxiv, 24–5

The three short and pious poems which T.S.Eliot has brought out as Christmas cards, since 'The Hollow Men' announced the nadir of the phase of despair and desolation given such effective expression in 'The Waste Land,' seemed comparatively uninspired and mild—far below his earlier level. One felt that the humility of his new religious phase was having the effect of enfeebling his poetry. But his new poem, or group of poems, 'AshWednesday,' which follows a scheme somewhat similar to that of 'The Waste Land' and makes a sort of sequel to it, is a not unworthy successor.

The poet begins with the confession of the bankruptcy of his former hopes and ambitions:

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', I, CPP, p. 89, 'Because I do not' to 'usual reign?', and p. 90, 'Because these wings' to 'of our death'.]

There follow passages in which the prayer is apparently being answered: the poet's humility and pious resignation are rewarded by a series of visions which first console, then lighten his heart. We find an imagery new for Eliot, a symbolism semi-ecclesiastical and not without a PreRaphaelite flavor: white leopards, a Lady gowned in white, junipers and yews, 'The Rose' and 'The Garden,' and jewelled unicorns drawing a gilded hearse: these are varied by an interlude which returns to the imagery and mood of 'The Waste Land':

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', III, CPP, p. 93, 'At the first turning' to 'and of despair'.]

and a swirling, churning, anguished passage which suggests certain things of Gertrude Stein's:

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', V, CPP, p. 96, 'If the lost word is lost' to 'the Silent Word'.]

At last the themes of the first section recur: the impotent wings of the aged eagle seem to revive, as,

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', VI, CPP, p. 98, 'From the wide window' to 'the sandy earth'.]

The broken prayer, at once childlike and mystically subtle, with which the poem ends seems to imply that the poet has come closer to the strength and revelation he craves. Grace is about to descend.

[Quotes, 'Ash-Wednesday', VI, CPP, pp. 98-9, 'Blessed sister' to 'come unto Thee'.]

The literary and conventional imagery upon which 'AshWednesday' so largely relies and which is less vivid, because more artificial, than that of Eliot's earlier poems, seems to be a definite feature of inferiority: the 'devil of the stairs' and the 'shape twisted on the banister,' which are in Eliot's familiar and unmistakable personal vein, somehow come off better than the jewelled unicorn, which incongruously suggests Yeats. And I am made a little tired by hearing Eliot, only in his early forties, present himself as an 'aged eagle' who asks why he should make the effort to stretch his wings. Yet 'AshWednesday,' though less brilliant and intense than Eliot at his very best, is distinguished by most of the qualities which made his other poems remarkable: the exquisite phrasing in which we feel that every word is in its place and that there is not a word too much; the metrical mastery which catches so naturally, yet with so true a modulation, the faltering accounts of the supplicant, blending the cadences of the liturgy with those of perplexed brooding thought; and, above all, that 'peculiar honesty' in 'exhibiting the essential sickness or strength of the human soul' of which Eliot has written in connection with Blake and which, in his own case, even at the moment when his psychological plight seems most depressing and his ways of rescuing himself from it least sympathetic, still gives him a place among those upon whose words we reflect with most interest and whose tones we remember longest.

MORTON D.ZABEL, T.S.ELIOT IN MID-  
CAREER, 'POETRY'

September 1930, vol. xxxvi, 330-7

Zabel (1901-64) was Professor of English at Chicago and editor of 'Poetry'.

Other works considered, apart from 'Ash-Wednesday', were 'Journey of the Magi' (1927), 'A Song for Simeon' (1928), 'Animula' (1929) and 'Dante' (1929).

If only because the history of Mr. Eliot's mind was for over a decade regarded as typical of the ordeal of the Twentieth Century intelligence progressing down the *via obscura* of the modern world, his latest encounters must command the attention of every contemporary. The hand that produced 'Sweeney,' 'Prufrock,' and 'The Waste Land' unquestionably left its thumb-print on the thought and art of a generation. However little Eliot's former disciples may be able to follow the recent submissions of the poet from whom they learned the final accents of disillusionment, his experience remains one of the few authentic records of intellectual recovery in our time. For five years, that is, since his last appearance as a poet, he has perplexed his readers by a slow reversion (announced as fully achieved in the preface of 'For Launcelot Andrewes') to the moral absolutism of which 'The Hippopotamus' was an inverted parody, the 'Sunday Morning Service' a social indictment, 'Gerontion' a broken and pathetic echo, and the chorus of 'The Hollow Men' a derisive denial. What had long been implicit in his work was at length fully disclosed: Eliot had never succeeded in cutting the roots of native puritanism which bound him to the soil of Christianity. His nostalgia for the heroic and sanctified glories of the past, when man's rôle in the universe was less equivocal and his destiny mystically shrouded by the doctrine of redemption, had finally led him not to suicide but to the affirmations of faith. His explorations had never been conducted as far afield as those of a self-deluded des Esseintes or of Verlaine. His realism, though crossed with the subtle lineage of Donne, was in the more immediate line of Arnold, of the author of 'The City of Dreadful Night,' of Housman and Hardy. Yet his return to faith might have been forecast by the

courageous a dozen years ago. His early poems implicitly forecast a conversion as imminent as the deathbed avowals of those *fin-de-siècle* apostates who ended by espousing the creeds whereof they had made at worst a travesty, at best a rich and sensuous symbolism for their emotional adventures. In their luxuriating intoxications Eliot took no share. If anything made his reaction surprising it was the clear-eyed confrontation of reality in 'The Waste Land,' or the withering and totally unflattering self-portraiture, singularly unlike the elaborate conceit of the 'esthete,' in 'Prufrock.' But the element of self-pity was not lacking, and with it went an assumption of premature senility, a Byronesque mockery of conventions, and the extraordinary imaginative audacity which are unmistakable vestiges of a romanticism always mistrusted and finally rejected by Eliot in his literary philosophy. The finality of his despairing self-scrutiny implied a reserve of idealism to which, escaping suicide, he must some day fly for recourse. 'The eagles and the trumpets' might be 'buried beneath some snow-deep Alps,' but the possibility of digging them out remained. 'The old man in a dry month, being read to by a boy, waiting for rain' did not release his last hope of a reviving shower, even where, across the parched acres of the waste land, it failed to fall. The straw-stuffed men in their idiotic dance around the prickly pear, waiting for the world to end 'not with a bang but a whimper,' could not forget the phrases of a liturgy promising the resurrection and the life.

This poem, 'The Hollow Men' of 1925, serves as a link between the earlier poems and 'Ash-Wednesday.' In its complete form it not only provides an endpiece to the age of desolation and emptiness, but contrives a plea for conciliation.

[Quotes 'The Hollow Men', CPP, p. 84, 'This is the dead land' to 'a fading star'.]

Reality had claimed of its victim his last desire, but hope sent a persistent echo through his brain.

[Quotes CPP, p. 85, 'Sightless, unless' to 'empty men'.]

And

[Quotes CPP, p. 85, 'Between the desire' to '*Thine is the Kingdom*'.]

Here were probably the final lines of Mr. Eliot's 'Inferno.' His present volume, along with the three pamphlet poems lately published, may be considered the opening cantos of his 'Purgatorio.' These terms are not applied fortuitously. They are suggested both by Mr. Eliot's long and penetrating study of Dante, whereof his recent essay is a record, and by a symbolism which combines liturgical allusion with the properties of the 'Commedia': the 'multifoliate rose,' the turning staircases, the 'blue of Mary's color' which suffuses the prospects of the future. From Dante Mr. Eliot has endeavored to derive the profound and salient simplicity which, in his own early poems, baffled so many readers by its resemblance to the ineluctable precision of Laforgue and Corbière; he has likewise seen in Dante the triumph of the visual imagination upon which the poet must rely for his direct, unequivocal, and *symbolical* approach to truth: a method natural to Mr. Eliot's creative temperament and wholly at variance with the discursive expositions of neoclassicism. 'Gerontion,' 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales,' and 'Burbank' employed that method on a miniature but precise scale, and 'The Waste Land' cut

cleanest to the core of its inner meaning when it found symbolical instruments of unqualified accuracy (for instance, the first twenty, lines; 11. 77–110; 257–265; and the first half of part V). In Mr. Eliot's mind Dante's stylistic splendor is indissoluble from his mediaeval inheritance, the condition and certitude of his religious avowals, and the immediate veracity of his imagery. Dante has provided not only a tutelage for Mr. Eliot's literary concepts, but a guide toward the conversion which has now capped his career.

It was likely that Mr. Eliot should find this guide, not among the exigencies of material life or through flaying his conscience with the rods of logic and dialectic, but in a great poem. One is not debating his sincerity when one recalls that his former despairs were tutored by tragic and decadent poets, whose thoughts and feelings were imposed on his mind as ineffaceably as their phrases were imposed on his poems. From the desolation into which Webster, Donne, de Nerval, and Baudelaire led him, Dante (not to mention the Bishops Bramhall and Andrewes) stood ready to conduct him back to safety. The cure was apparently as ready at hand as the torture. It remains to be seen if it was adopted out of as extreme and inevitable a necessity, and if it has yielded a poetry as distinguished by passion and clairvoyance, by discipline in phrase and outline, by those qualities of 'equipoise, balance and proportion of tones' which in the 'Homage to John Dryden' won for Marvell Mr. Eliot's incisive praise.

Mr. Eliot's approach to the doctrine of the Incarnation is presented in 'Journey of the Magi;' his persistent weariness in the face of the world's burden—a weariness and a failure in moral courage hitherto counterbalanced by the rigorous integrity of his craftsmanship—reappears in 'A Song for Simeon,' where, with his 'eighty years and no tomorrow,' the tyranny of age and rationality still oppresses him. In 'Ash-Wednesday' the torment of confusion and of exhausting intellectual scruples alike begin to disappear.

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', I, CPP, p. 89, 'Because I do not hope' to 'usual reign?', and pp. 89–90, 'Consequently I rejoice' to 'words answer'.]

The poem, which is in six brief parts, is constructed around a paradoxical petition:

Teach us to care and not to care.

Thus, by several allegorical devices the rejection of material concerns is described. The bones of mortal curiosity, 'scattered and shining,' sing 'We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other.' The spirit, climbing three staircases to the cadence of 'Lord, I am not worthy, but speak the word only,' leaves behind the deceitful demons of hope and despair. 'Mary's color' becomes the signal of promise as the poet reproaches himself with the memory of his gospel of desolation: 'O my people, what have I done unto thee.'

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', V, CPP, p. 97, 'Will the veiled sister' to 'withered apple-seed'.]



The final phrases, rejecting again the desperate realism of disillusionment, almost capture peace, the *Shantih* of 'The Waste Land,' in an evening of beatitude, charity, and exaltation, with 'Let my cry come unto Thee' on the poet's lips.

Mr. Eliot's religious experience has not thus far impressed one as conceived in intellectual necessity, or as imposed through other than esthetic forces on a crowded and exhausted mind. He will never be capable of forming a slovenly concept or judgment: his present essay and poems are distinguished by lucid statement and wellreasoned concision. They contain passages of subtle beauty. But of the impact of profound conviction and the absolute creative certitude of which the early poems partook and which still remains for Mr. Eliot's study in 'The Extasie,' 'The Coy Mistress,' in Baudelaire's 'La Mort,' or even in the mathematical complexities of 'Charmes,' one finds little here. The facility of design that made 'The Hollow Men' a flagging and dispirited declamation, devoid of organic fusion, has led to a desultory kind of allegory, subtle enough in itself, but unsharpened by wit or emotional intensity, undistinguished by the complete formal synthesis which Aquinas advocated as a moral property and Dante exemplified in his slightest allusion. As a consequence, the contour of the design, as well as the clean accuracy of reference and the pure aphoristic subtlety, which alone would sustain the key of exaltation demanded by this quest for illusion and transfiguration, is lacking. Eliot spoke with complete authority in his first phase. In his second he displays a conciliatory attitude which may persuade few of his contemporaries but which, as a worse consequence, deprives his art of its once incomparable distinction in style and tone. These brief poems, however, find their place in a remarkable personal document which already contains some of the finest poetry and some of the most significant entries in modern literature.

THOMAS MOULT, FROM CONTRASTS IN  
CURRENT POETRY, 'BOOKMAN'  
(LONDON)

September 1930, vol. lxxviii, 354–5

Moult (1885–1974), a British critic and novelist, was best known for his poetry compilations, though in none of these did he include work by Eliot.

The review includes a discussion of 'Anabasis', translated by Eliot from the French of St-John Perse, and published in London on 22 May 1930. The other poets reviewed were E.A. Robinson and Richard Aldington.

Critics of Mr. Aldington will say that he is indebted to Mr. T.S. Eliot for his manner. He was once, but now no longer. Mr. Eliot has influenced more than one writer of to-day's poetry, but he cannot really be imitated. This we may perceive in two remaining books on our list—a collection of six poems entitled (enigmatically) 'Ash Wednesday,' and a translation of a poem from the French which he considers 'one of the most remarkable poems of this generation.' About 'Ash-Wednesday' we need say little except that those who seek to find plain meanings in it do so at their peril. Mr. Eliot has not published the book for the plain man. It is for those who are willing to follow the drift of a cultured, uncommonly sensitive philosopher's thoughts in poetry. A scientist's thoughts too; for poetry is not so much an art to him as an expression of communal interest in verse:

Because these wings are no longer wings to fly  
But merely vans to beat the air  
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry  
Smaller and dryer than the will  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still.

Mr. Eliot has returned from his quest of new discoveries to reflect in his subtly intellectual and spiritual fashion on the need of faith in human existence—and it

must be faith dressed in austere colours, as the fourth of his six poems intimates quite plainly.

It is foolish to speculate, but we cannot help feeling that the parched, tropical colouring of 'Anabasis' was one of the chief factors in its attraction for Mr. Eliot, and a stimulus to his desire to translate it. No description of St.-J.Perse's oratorical poem would be valid, any more than a description of the 'Song of Solomon' has ever been valid. All that may usefully be said is that it reads like an Old Testament book, sublime and arid, lofty and harsh:

Men, creatures of dust and folk or divers devices, people of business and of leisure, folk of the frontiers and foreign men, O men of little weight in the memory of these lands; people from the valleys and the uplands and the highest slopes of this world to the shore's end; Seers of signs and seeds, and confessors of the western winds, trackers of beasts and of seasons, breakers of camp in the little dawn wind, seekers of water-courses over the wrinkled rind of the world, O seekers, O finders of seasons to be up and be gone....

The best way to approach this remarkably well translated piece of 'script' (which the publishers took care to have remarkably well produced), is to wipe away in our thought as many centuries as divide civilised man from the rude crude life of limitless and timeless deserts of scalding heats and unspeakable cruelties which have never yet been absorbed and lost in the utilitarian activities of the modern world. Then in a gold-hot flash we know at once what the poet means when he writes: 'I have seen the earth parcelled out in vast spaces, and my thought is not estranged from the navigator.' He is at one with Eternity yawning on the sands.

65.

WILLIAM ROSE BENET, FROM ROUND  
ABOUT PARNASSUS, 'SATURDAY  
REVIEW'

18 October 1930, vol. vii, 249

The most distinguished volume of poetry that has come to us recently is T.S.Eliot's 'Ash-Wednesday,' though it is a very brief series of flights. The second movement appeared originally in the 'Saturday Review of Literature.' (1) 'Ash-Wednesday' is another distillation of Eliot's despair mixed with a rather hopeless appeal for aid from the Christian religion. 'Teach us to sit still,' he reiterates. Let us give up, let us sit still. If that is the most modern and refined interpretation of how we should feel since once God so loved the world, we can only say that we violently disagree with it. In fact, even a superficial perusal of the New Testament will reveal a Christ who was ever a source of action. This other attitude smacks of a new Pharisaism. The Church, indeed, as it has developed, is not exempt from snobbery, a spiritual snobbery that we particularly detest. That the religion of Jesus Christ should ever be even faintly associated with this or with a dead-end philosophy is inconceivable. But the ascetics have always entirely misinterpreted him. Eliot is a modern anchorite. Also he strives with none, for none is worth his strife, partaking of Landor's high conceit of himself. But our old conception of a prophet from the desert was that the locusts and wild honey had played the office of a burning coal of fire upon the tongue. Revelation was spoken upon the prophets' return. There was no injunction to sit still. Quite the opposite. There was a wrathful summons to get up and do something.

Of course, Mr. Eliot and myself differ so fundamentally in our attitude toward life, especially in our approach to the mystic, that, though we may deeply admire the strange, moving music and majestic sombreness of some of Mr. Eliot's verse, we cannot share at all his continuous vast disillusionment that approaches apathy. When we are feeling a particularly good health we feel like praising God, and usually do so. Also, we have encountered no little stark tragedy in the course of our life, but it has not led us to ask to be allowed to sit still. At that, we are not known as being notably active. No, as Mr. Dudley Fitts says, in a recent 'Hound and Horn,' 'What "metaphysical measure" can relate... Eliot and W.R.Bené' (among others included in Miss Taggard's 'Circumference: Varieties of Metaphysical Verse')—and incidentally we had supposed that Miss Taggard's

subtitle was intended to point out that fact that within *was* variety. The answer is, quite aside from other considerations, None at All. Which makes more remarkable the strong impress that the writing of T.S.Eliot leaves on our mind. We are leagues removed from his disciples, as we are from all the snobbish modern literary cliques, including the Proustian. We regard it as so-easy-that-it-is-not-worth-doing to write a parody of Eliot. But not one of the busy little boys who have gone around copying him has come anywhere near to him. For a man's soul, whatever it is worth, is his own single possession. It is one thing that no one else, save perhaps the Devil, can steal from him. What is left out of the imitations of Eliot is merely everything, because what is necessarily omitted is the evidence of the soul. He is one of few modern poets who truly present it.

#### Note

- 1 10 December 1927, iv, 429.

66.

E.G.TWITCHETT, REVIEW, 'LONDON  
MERCURY'

October 1930, vol. xxii, 557

Twitchett (b. 1896), an English critic and historian, is best known for his study of Frances Brett Young, published in 1936.

This is taken from a longer review.

The solution of Mr. Eliot's verse demands persistence, some intellectual spade-work, and, occasionally, prayer. A mood of irritable unhappiness, a questing intellectual misery, rewards these exertions; but it must be granted that an interesting tune often beguiles and encourages them. Workers on 'The Waste Land' toil to some taking jazz, and students of the Sweeney poems are at times arrested by snatches of rich melody rising from the general grotesqueness with an effect as much of oddity as of beauty, as if saxophones were suddenly soaring in ecstasy. Mr. Eliot's new sequence, 'Ash-Wednesday', contains some gratifying Swinburnian passages, but chiefly agitates to a new and original music, composed out of erudite little rhythmical tricks. Phrases are hovered over, snatches of them are repeated, extended, abbreviated, turned inside out, and then all goes forward with a burst:

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', I, CPP, p. 89, 'Because I know' to 'rejoice'.]

That passage, which is typical, is not without a meandering charm, and communicates very well the ineffable sadness which looks back, with a doubtful regret, to the certainties of youth, and forward, with a faint stirring, to the consolations of religion. It seems fair to say, however, that there is too much ineffability about it, as about the whole sequence. Practically everything that Mr. Eliot sets down offers a choice of meanings, and it is clear from his withholding punctuation almost entirely that he is indifferent which meaning one chooses....

BRIAN HOWARD, MR. ELIOT'S POETRY,  
'NEW STATESMAN'

8 November 1930, vol. xxxvi, 146

Howard (1905–57) was an English journalist and writer. Aspects of his life are recorded in 'Brian Howard: Portrait of a Failure', edited by Marie-Jacqueline Lancaster (London, 1968).

It has been the delightful, but exhausting, task of the writer of this article to collect, during the past year, an anthology of verse by the younger English poets: one of the most exhausting things about it has been the numberless variations, generally in the treble key, upon Mr. Eliot's renowned poem, 'The Waste Land.' Most of these, of course, have had to be rejected. It became such a plague that the moment the eye encountered, in a newly arrived poem, the words 'stone,' 'dust' or 'dry,' one reached for the waste-paper basket. But there were a number of poems that came, showing an equally marked influence, towards which one felt very differently. These authors had read their Eliot, but they had profited. It was not the stones, the dustiness, and the droughts that affected them so much as the thought that lies behind this passage from Mr. Eliot's latest poem:

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', I, CPP, p. 89, 'Because I know that time' to 'which to rejoice'.]

This, perhaps, is the pith, not only of 'Ash-Wednesday,' but of the whole of Mr. Eliot's poetic message. It is the fearless, the truly modern, thought behind it that is influencing many of our better young poets, and influencing them for their good.

It is now some ten years since 'The Waste Land' appeared, like some austere and unfamiliar flower, in that blown-up cottage garden which was English poetry immediately after the war. The Georgian poets were busy planting hardy perennials where hardy perennials grew before. Not even Mr. Siegfried Sassoon, sedulously slipping weedkiller into their watering-cans, was successful in deterring their dreary reconstruction. 'Wheels' itself creaked in vain. (1) The young poets, who, because of their age, had escaped alive, were dazedly trooping up to help. Suddenly—'The Waste Land,' and it may be said, with small

exaggeration, that English poetry of the first half of the twentieth century began. It is a pity that it was written by an American, but there you are. We are not quite so original as we were.

It was Mr. Eliot who suggested to our young poets, more by his poetry than by his admirable critical work, that they should begin seriously to think of what poetry really was. Granted that the guns had stopped, and that it was possible to hear again the nightingale, and granted that to 'get into a state' about nightingales is the poet's function, the time had undoubtedly come to consider the general nightingale situation, so to speak. Of course, there is no time at which a poet should not consider it, but poetry has a way of deciding about the nightingale situation, and then leaving it. In England, as it happened, it had been decided by the Romantics, and left for a hundred years. The result was Georgian poetry. The nightingale had become a mocking-bird. What was to be done? It was largely Mr. Eliot who supplied the answer. One must begin again, he suggested, to *think* about the nightingale. To begin with, what is it? The poet who asks himself this question at once becomes, unlike Keats, a metaphysical poet. Keats, you will say, had no need to ask such a question. Being the particular sort of poet he was, living at his particular time, and being a genius into the bargain—you are quite right. But you are quite wrong if you think that it was not high time for all who confuse a partiality for bird-songs with an apprehension of Nature to go into the question of what a nightingale is.

In short, at a time when it was long overdue, it was Mr. Eliot who introduced the present limited, but definite, metaphysical revival. It was he who reminded our young poets—taking them, as it were, by the lapel as they were yawningly replacing the bird baths—that the poetic transcription of natural history is all the better, occasionally, for a thought or two about the nature of reality.

This newest among Mr. Eliot's longer poems has, it must be admitted, a certain flamelessness. It rarely transports. But the level kept is a high one, and if one seldom crosses a peak, it is a mountain road. As a technician, no one to-day excels its author in the writing of free verse. The rhythms are held and broken with the control of a master, and the interior rhyming is as refreshing as it is beautiful. As an illustration of this, the following is perhaps the best example from 'Ash-Wednesday':

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', V, CPP, p. 96, 'Where shall the word be found' to 'deny the voice'.]

The comparative absence of adjectives in the foregoing, and the inclination towards one-syllable words are both things to be noted. It is like seeing—feeling—one sound stone being placed exactly, firmly, and permanently upon another, and there are many of us who believe that it is with such stones as these that the seriously damaged temple of English poetry must be repaired.

Woven into the text are several liturgical fragments. The Hail Mary,

Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.



The priest's preparation for Holy Communion,

Lord, I am not worthy.

Then from the Bible, Ezekiel,

And God said,  
Shall these bones live?

St. Paul,

Redeem the time.

No charge of plagiarism, however, could be brought against Mr. Eliot any more than it could against Gray. Mr. Eliot fulfils the one condition upon which the incorporation by a poet of the work of others is allowed. The total result is entirely his own.

We will not end without saying that 'Ash-Wednesday' is, in the sum, an important and beautiful poem. That it is grave, that it is what is termed 'intellectual,' is true. But it is this very quietness, this very severity, which imparts to it that particular quality of beauty so gratefully devoured by the sensitive modern mind. The courage for fine frenzies is already, let us hope, returning. It is being given to us, a trifle savagely, by Mr. Roy Campbell. But it is Mr. Eliot—and you may see how in the first quotation in this article—who will have made these future frenzies possible and valuable again, if valuable they prove to be. Because, upon reflection, it was not the guns that had silenced the nightingale. It was the mocking-bird.

#### Note

- 1 'Wheels': an anthology of verse edited by Edith Sitwell (Oxford, 1916–21) in 6 vols.

ALLEN TATE, IRONY AND HUMILITY,  
'HOUND AND HORN'

January-March 1931, vol. iv, 290–7

This essay is reprinted in many books, including 'Reactionary Essays' (1936), 'The Limits of Poetry' (1948), 'Collected Essays' (1960), 'T.S.Eliot: Twentieth Century Views', edited by Hugh Kenner (1962), and Unger, pp. 289–95.

Every age, as it sees itself, is the peculiarly distracted one: its chroniclers notoriously make too much of the variety before their own eyes. We are now inclined to see the variety of the past as mere turbulence within a fixed unity, and our own surface standardization as the sign of a profound disunity of impulse. We have discovered that the chief ideas that men lived by from about the twelfth to the eighteenth century were absolute and unquestionable, and that the social turmoil of European history was simply shortsighted disagreement as to the best ways of making these deep assumptions socially good. The temper of literary criticism in the past appears to bear out this belief. Although writers were judged morally, no critic expected the poet to give him a morality. The standard of judgment was largely unconscious; a poem was a piece of free and disinterested enjoyment for minds mature enough—that is, convinced enough of a satisfactory destiny—not to demand of every scribbler a way of life. Dante invented no formula for society to run itself; he only used a ready-made one. Turn to the American Humanists, and you will find that literature is the reflection of a secular order that must be controlled. But Mr. John Dos Passos has been far-sighted enough to detect the chief aim of modern criticism of nearly every school. This is: to give up the European and 'belle-lettristic' dabbling with the arts, and all that that involves, and to study the American environment with a view to making a better adaptation to it.

To discuss the merits of such a critical outlook lies outside my argument. It would be equally pointless to attempt an appraisal of any of its more common guides to salvation, including the uncommon one of the Thirty-nine Articles, which have been subscribed to by Mr. T.S.Eliot, whose six poems published under the title

'Ash-Wednesday' are the occasion of this review. For it is my thesis that, in a discussion of Mr. Eliot's poetry, his doctrine has little to command interest in itself. Yet it appears that the poetry, notwithstanding the amount of space it gets in the critical journals, receives less discussion each year. The moral and religious attitude behind it has been related to the Thirty-nine Articles, to an intellectual position that Eliot has defended in prose. The poetry and the prose are taken together as evidence that the author has made a rather inefficient adaptation to the modern environment; or at least he doesn't say anything very helpful to the American critics in their struggles to adapt themselves. It is an astonishing fact that, in an atmosphere of 'aesthetics,' there is less discussion of poetry in a typical modern essay on that fine art than there is in Johnson's essay on Denham. Johnson's judgment is frankly moralistic, but he seldom capitulates to a moral sentiment because it flatters his own moral sense. He requires the qualities of generality, invention, and perspicuity. He hates Milton for a regicide, but his judgment of 'Paradise Lost' is the most disinterested in English criticism. Mr. Eliot's critics are a little less able each year to see the poetry for Westminster Abbey; the wood is all trees.

I do not pretend to judge how far our social and philosophical needs justify this prejudice, which may be put somewhat summarily as follows: all forms of human action, economics, politics, even poetry, and certainly industry, are legitimate modes of salvation, but the more historical religious mode is illegitimate. It is sufficient here to point out that the man who expects to find salvation in the latest lyric or a well-managed factory will not only not find it there; he is not likely to find it anywhere else. If a young mind is incapable of moral philosophy, a mind without moral philosophy is incapable of understanding poetry. For poetry, of all the arts, demands a serenity of view and a settled temper of the mind, and most of all the power to detach one's own needs from the experience set forth in the poem. A moral sense so organized sets limits to the human enterprise, and is content to observe them. But if the reader lack this sense, the poem will be only a body of abstractions either useful or irrelevant to that body of abstractions already forming, but of uncertain direction, in the reader's mind. This reader will see the poem chiefly as biography, and he will proceed to deduce from it a history of the poet's case, to which he will attach himself if his own case resemble it; if it doesn't, he will reject it. Either way, the quality of the poem is ignored. But I will return to this in a moment.

The reasoning that is being brought to bear upon Mr. Eliot's recent verse is as follows: Anglo-Catholicism would not at all satisfy me; therefore, his poetry declines under its influence. Moreover, the poetry is not contemporaneous; it doesn't solve any labor problems; it is special, personal, and it can do us no good. Now the poetry *is* special and personal in quality, which is one of its merits, but what the critics are really saying is this—that his case-history is not special at all, that it is a general form of possible conduct that will not do for them. To accept the poetry seems to amount to accepting an invitation to join the Anglican Church. For the assumption is that the poetry and the religious position are identical. If

this were so, why should not the excellence of the poetry induce them to join the Church, in the hope of writing as well, since the irrelevance of the Church to their own needs makes them reject the poetry? The answer is, of course, that both parts of this fallacy are common. There is an aesthetic Catholicism, and there is a Communist-economic rejection of art because it is involved with the tabooed mode of salvation.

The belief is that Mr. Eliot's poetry is a simple record of the relation of his personality to an environment, and it witnesses the powerful modern desire to judge an art scientifically, practically, industrially, according to how it works. The poetry is viewed as a pragmatic result, and it has no use. Now a different heredityenvironment combination would give us, of mechanical necessity, a different result, a different quantity of power to do a different and perhaps better work. Doubtless this is true. But there is something disconcerting in this simple solution to the problem when it is looked at more closely. Two vastly different records or case-histories might give us, qualitatively speaking, very similar results: Baudelaire and Eliot have in common many qualities but *no history*. Their 'results' have at least the common features of irony, humility, introspection, reverence—qualities fit only for contemplation and not for judgment according to their desirability in our own conduct.

It is in this, the qualitative sense, that Eliot's poetry has been, I believe, misunderstood. In this sense, the poetry is special, personal, of no use, and highly distinguished. But it is held to be a general formula, not distinct from the general formula that Eliot subscribed to when he went into the Church.

The form of the poems in 'Ash-Wednesday' is lyrical and solitary, and there is almost none of the elaborate natural description and allusion which gave 'The Waste Land' a partly realistic and partly symbolic character; These six poems are a brief moment of religious experience in an age that believes religion to be a kind of defeatism and puts its hope for man in finding the right secular order. The mixed realism and symbolism of 'The Waste Land' issued in irony. The direct and lyrical method of the new poems creates the simpler aesthetic quality of humility. The latter quality comes directly out of the former, and there is a nice continuity in Mr. Eliot's work.

In 'The Waste Land' the prestige of our secular faith gave to the style its peculiar character. This faith was the hard, coherent medium through which the discredited forms of the historic religions emerged only to be stifled; the poem is at once their vindication and defeat. They are defeated in fact, as a politician may be defeated by the popular vote, but their vindication consists in the withering irony that their subordinate position casts upon the modern world.

The typical scene is the seduction of the typist by the clerk, in 'The Fire Sermon.' Perhaps Mr. J.W.Krutch has not discussed this scene, but a whole generation of critics have, and from a viewpoint that Mr. Krutch has recently made popular: the seduction betrays the romantic disillusion of the poet. The mechanical, brutal scene shows what love really is—that is to say, what it is scientifically, since science is Truth; it is only an act of practical necessity, for procreation. The telling

of the story by the Greek seer, who is chosen from a past of illusion and ignorance, permits the scene to become a *satire on the foolish values of the past*. The values of the past were absurd and false; the scientific Truth is both true and bitter. This is the familiar romantic dilemma, and the critics have read it into the scene from their own romantic despair.

There is none in the scene itself. The critics, who being in the state of mind I have described are necessarily blind to an effect of irony, have mistaken the symbols of an ironic contrast for the terms of a philosophic dilemma. Mr. Eliot knows too much about classical irony to be overwhelmed by a doctrine in literary biology. For the seduction scene shows, not what man is, but what *for a moment* he thinks he is; in other words, the clerk stands for the secularization of the humane and qualitative values in the modern world. And the meaning of the contrast between Tiresias and the clerk is not disillusion, but irony. The scene is a masterpiece; perhaps the most profound vision that we have of modern man.

The importance of this scene as a key to the intention of 'Ash-Wednesday' lies in the moral identity of humility and irony and in an important difference between them artistically. Humility is subjective, a quality of the moral character, an habitual attitude. Irony is the particular and objective instance of humility—that is, it is an event or situation which induces humility in the mind of a spectator; it is that arrangement of experience, either premeditated by art or accidentally appearing in the affairs of men, which permits to the spectator an insight superior to that of the actor, and shows him that the practical formula, the special ambition, of the actor is bound to fail. Humility is thus the self-respect proceeding from a sense of the folly of men in their desire to dominate a natural force or situation. The seduction scene is the picture of the modern and dominating man. The cleverness and the pride of conquest of the 'small house agent's clerk' are the badge of science, bumptious practicality, overweening secular faith. The very success of his conquest witnesses its aimless character; it succeeds as a wheel succeeds in turning; he can only do it over again.

His own failure to understand his position is irony, and the poet's insight into it is humility. This is essentially the poetic attitude, an attitude that Mr. Eliot has been approaching with increasing purity. It is not that his recent verse is better or more exciting than that of the period ending with 'The Waste Land.' Actually it is less spectacular and less complex in subject-matter; for Eliot less frequently objectifies his leading emotion, humility, into irony. His form is simple, expressive, homogeneous, and direct, and without the usual elements of violent contrast.

There is a single ironic passage in 'Ash-Wednesday,' and significantly enough it is the first stanza of the first poem. This passage presents objectively the poet *as he thinks himself for the moment to be*. It establishes that humility towards his own merit which sets the whole mood of the poems that follow. And the irony has been overlooked by the critics because they take the stanza as a literal exposition of the latest phase of the Eliot 'case-history'—at a time when, in the words of Mr.

Edmund Wilson, 'his psychological plight seems most depressing. 'Thus, here is the pose of a Titan too young to be weary of strife, but weary of it nevertheless:

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', I, CPP, p. 89, 'Because I do not hope to turn again' to 'usual reign?'.]

If the six poems are taken together as the focus of a specific religious emotion, the opening stanza, instead of being a naïve personal 'confession,' becomes only a modest but highly effective technical performance. This stanza has two features that are necessary to the development of the unique imagery which distinguishes the religious emotion of 'Ash-Wednesday' from any other religious poetry of our time and which, in fact, probably makes it the only valid religious poetry we have. The first feature is the regular yet halting rhythm, the smooth uncertainty of movement which may either proceed to greater regularity or fall away into improvisation. The second feature is the imagery itself. It is trite; it echoes two familiar passages from English poetry. But the quality to be observed is this: it is secular imagery. It sets forth a special ironic emotion, but this emotion is not identified with any specific experience. The imagery is thus perfectly suited to the character of the rhythm. The stanza is a device for getting the poem under way, starting from a known and general emotion, in a monotonous rhythm, for a direction which to the reader is unknown. The ease, the absence of surprise, with which Mr. Eliot brings out the subject to be 'discussed' is admirable. After some further and ironic deprecation of his wordly powers, he goes on:

And pray to God to have mercy upon us  
 And I pray that I may forget  
 These matters that with myself I too much discuss  
 Too much explain

We are being told, of course, that there is to be some kind of discourse on God, or a meditation; yet the emotion is still general. The imagery is even flatter than before; it is imagery at all only in that special context; for it is the diction of prose. And yet, subtly and imperceptibly, the rhythm has changed; it is irregular and labored. We are being prepared for a new and sudden effect, and it comes in the first lines of the second poem:

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree  
 In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety  
 On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained  
 In the hollow round of my skull. And God said  
 Shall these bones live? shall these  
 Bones live?

From here on, in all the poems, there is constant and sudden change of rhythm, and there is a corresponding alternation of two kinds of imagery—the visual and tactile imagery common to all poetry and without significance in itself for any

kind of experience, and the traditional religious symbols. The two orders are inextricably fused.

It is evident that Mr. Eliot has hit upon the only method now available of using the conventional religious image in poetry. He has reduced it to metaphor, to the plane of sensation. And corresponding to this process, there are images of his own invention which he almost pushes over the boundary of sensation into abstractions, where they have the appearance of conventional symbols. The passage I have quoted above is an example of this: for the 'Lady' may be a nun, or even the Virgin, or again she may be a beautiful woman; but she is presented, through the serious tone of the invocation, with all the solemnity of a religious figure. The fifth poem exhibits the reverse of the process; it begins with a series of plays on the Logos, which is the most rarefied of all the Christian abstractions, and succeeds in creating an *illusion of sensation* by means of a broken and distracted rhythm:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent  
 If the unheard, unspoken  
 Word is unspoken, unheard;  
 Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,  
 The Word without a word, the Word within  
 The world and for the world....

# 'Marina'

London, 25 September 1930



69.

MARIANNE MOORE, A MACHINERY OF  
SATISFACTION, 'POETRY'

September 1931, vol. xxxviii, 337–9

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands  
What water lapping the bow  
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog  
What images return  
O my daughter.

This inquiry, without question mark, is the setting of 'Marina.' It is a decision that is to animal existence a query: death is not death. The theme is frustration and frustration is pain. To the eye of resolution

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning  
Death  
Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning  
Death  
Those who sit in the sty of contentment, meaning  
Death  
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning  
Death  
Are become unsubstantial.

T.S.Eliot is occupied with essence and instrument, and his choice of imagery has been various. This time it is the ship, 'granite islands' and 'woodthrush calling through the fog.' Not sumptuous grossness but a burnished hedonism is renounced. Those who naively proffer consolation put the author beyond their reach, in initiate solitude. Although solitude is to T.S.Eliot, we infer, not 'a monarchy of death,' each has his private desperations; a poem may mean one thing to the author and another to the reader. What matters here is that we have, for both author and reader, a machinery of satisfaction that is powerfully affecting, intrinsically and by association. The method is a main part of the pleasure: lean cartography; reiteration

with compactness; emphasis by word pattern rather than by punctuation; the conjoining of opposites to produce irony; a counterfeiting verbally of the systole, diastole, of sensation—of what the eye sees and the mind feels; the movement within the movement of differentiated kindred sounds, recalling the transcendent beauty and ability, in ‘Ash-Wednesday,’ of the lines:

One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing  
 White light folded, sheathed about her, folded.  
 The new years walk, restoring  
 Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring  
 With a new verse the ancient rhyme.

As part of the revising of conventionality in presentment there is the embedded rhyme, evincing dissatisfaction with bald rhyme. This hiding, qualifying, and emphasizing of rhyme to an adjusted tempo is acutely a pleasure besides being a clue to feeling that is the source, as in ‘AshWednesday,’ of harmonic contour like the sailing descent of the eagle.

‘Marina’ is not for those who read inquisitively, as a compliment to the author, or to find material for the lecture platform. Apocalyptic declaration is uncompliant to parody. If charged by chameleon logic and unstudious didacticism with creating a vogue for torment, Mr. Eliot can afford not to be incommoded, knowing that his work is the testament of one ‘having to construct something upon which to rejoice.’

# 'Triumphal March'

London, 8 October 1931

MORTON D.ZABEL, THE STILL POINT,  
'POETRY'

December 1932, vol. xli, 152–8

Zabel also considered 'Difficulties of a Statesman', which appeared in 'Commerce' (Paris) (Winter 1931/2), xxix, 79–87, with the English text and French translation (by Georges Limbour) on opposite pages. The English text was reprinted in 'Hound and Horn' (October-December 1932), vi, 17–19.

The dubiety of Mr. Eliot's friends and the exultation of his baiters are both reproved by these new poems of the past year. They reinforce the impression of personal distinction conveyed by 'Marina' and the finest passages of 'Ash-Wednesday,' and thus go far to correct the sensations aroused by the three desultory productions which marked the approach of those poems.

'Triumphal March' and 'Difficulties of a Statesman' are two further installments of 'a poem of some length' whose crisis is barely passed. In his pamphlet, 'Thoughts after Lambeth' (1931), Mr. Eliot was encouraged by the confused efforts of a reviewer in the venerable 'Times Literary Supplement' (of London) to disavow any intention of acting as the 'voice of his generation,' and to congratulate himself that at last religion had become officially divorced from literature in England and could renew affiliations on its own terms. It is unlikely that these terms will be understood in the next decade, any more than in the past, except by sensibilities of the most unflinching sincerity. The reaction of the critics to 'Ash-Wednesday' was an expense of strength which, fortunately for themselves but regrettably for the state of contemporary poetry, will not often have to be repeated.

The question, not of Eliot's sincerity, but of his authority to persuade us of it as a poet, is not, however, finally solved. He has exchanged his recent mystical ambition for a deliberate recall of past and exhausted agony. No one would have objected had several eminent poets of the past returned to the style of their first flights: Swinburne, for example, from the bloated verbosity of 'Thalassius' to the limpid enchantment of 'Atalanta,' or Tennyson from the 'Idyls' to 'Ulysses.' A

growth in stylistic means equivalent to one in mature intellectual certitude is a correspondence which may be ideally desirable, but despite the logic of rules and their makers, is not always possible even in a remarkable poet. Thus 'Marina' achieved its beauty by being an episode of exquisite, but deceptively lucid, elegaic lyricism in the key of 'La Figlia Che Piange,' while the present poems aim to rehabilitate the historic complexity and irony, and the refracted impressionism, in 'Gerontion' and 'The Waste Land.' It will doubtless remain Eliot's tragedy that his sensibility was formed under circumstances which had inevitably to be outgrown, and that the style thereby perfected sprang from the center of his personality. The repudiation of its defects entailed the loss of its strength, in other words of its essential personality. This loss he has not consented to suffer. The experience is not novel to distinguished poetry. But it is an admission of moral and creative limitation almost equivalent to defeat.

Yet the renewed authority behind Eliot's work since 'The Hollow Men' and 'Animula' (both admittedly intervals of fatigue and painful gestation) has doubtless derived from what must be the satisfactory sensation of this stylistic self-determination. The structure of association and correspondence underlying his manner remains one of the few forms produced by the modern analysis of consciousness. 'Memory and desire' have had scores of exponents besides Proust and Eliot; it would be difficult to distinguish other masters. (Joyce, Pound, Werfel, and Larbaud, like Picasso and Stravinsky, belong to a different order of artist, and convey a different poetic problem.) The illimitable distension of Proust's memory and its capacity for oblique inference produced qualities of dubious merit and certainly of ruinous influence. But they gave him what is still his private distinction, a form imposed by and coeval with its materials. Eliot has perhaps never been a singly sustained *poetic* talent: it is more and more apparent that his expression is essentially episodic and fragmentary, and his impulse speculative. The construction of 'The Waste Land' tells as much. The method is too spasmodic and arbitrary to carry a poem through moments of vision longer than those of extreme pathos, or through intervals of lucidity sustained by something more than rare occasions of association and recollection. Basically he is prey to fits of pity and anguish, to those 'broken images,' 'dry thoughts,' and 'memories shored' so frequently mentioned by way of explanatory deference or apology in his earlier works. If Eliot has voiced anything for 'his generation' it is their voluntary surrender to a type of sensibility which is fundamentally chaotic and ruinous. His measure of genius, like Proust's, lies exactly in his recognition of this danger, in his critical (although to obvious minds seductive) depiction of it in his work. 'Triumphal March' and 'Difficulties of a Statesman' are not without organic defect, but they revive the inherited, multiplied, and brilliantly compacted experience of 'The Waste Land' as only their author could revive it, and having done so, it is to be hoped that they have brought him past the crisis of indecision and conscientious masochism they record, and thus nearer to the goal which they, like 'Ash-Wednesday,' seek.

[Quotes 'Triumphal March', CPP, p. 127, 'Stone, bronze' to 'our sausages' and 'There he is now' to 'perceiving, indifferent'.]

It would be a rare mechanism that could convey these ideas and sensations perfectly, and this one is not perfect. It is not the logic of poetic resolution and decision, but of rearranging a jumbled stage-set for an agonistic exhibition. The following passage from the second of these poems is an astonishingly explicit diagram of exactly those components of irony, self-pity, and enchanted recollection which never appear so specious as when they thus betray their self-conscious combination:

[Quotes 'Difficulties of a Statesman', CPP, pp. 129–30, 'Meanwhile the guards' to 'among these heads'.]

It is unedifying to find Mr. Eliot encouraging those commentators who have held that his poems are to be taken at their face-value.

It is far more than face-value that is discernible in their finest passages. The pure pathos in 'Marina' is echoed in their surest lines, and where this pathos collides with the distorted utterance and jargon of contemporary civilization—its military inventories, diplomatic and political phrases, statistical reports, etc.—the impingement is logical and the effect powerful. They succeed in converting the inbred historical and literary derivations which have so often threatened Eliot's art with haemophilia into a synthesis of extraordinary energy. As portions of a consecutive document they manage to define a decisive stage of their author's progress, and propel him closer to the central and focal certitude of whose achievement his poems may still be our period's most remarkable record. His faith in the existence of that certitude has never been more beautifully stated:

O hidden under the dove's wing, hidden in the turtle's breast,  
Under the palmtree at noon, under the running water  
At the still point of the turning world. O hidden.

# 'Sweeney Agonistes'

London, 1 December 1932

71.

D.G.BRIDSON, REVIEW, 'NEW ENGLISH  
WEEKLY'

12 January 1933, vol. ii, 304

Bridson (b. 1910), an English critic and writer, has worked for the BBC as a radio producer.

It is difficult to criticise Mr. Eliot. It is difficult, in fact, to fix him 'pinned and wriggling on the wall.' His elusiveness, needless to say, is invaluable to him. No sooner has a critic pronounced his later work a manifestation of his return to the fold, than a true disciple ups and denies the assertion flatly. The form is more regular, it seems, yet the implication is more subtle than ever. So let it be with Sweeney. But when Mr. Eliot labels his work 'fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama,' he gives us an axis of reference.

In the first place, then, we do not readily think of Mr. Eliot as the modern Aristophanes. Aristophanic his moods may be, but Aristophanic they have certainly never appeared. The belly-shaking laughter of many passages in 'Ulysses' are as Aristophanic as we choose to call them. But an Aristophanic melodrama by Mr. Eliot...! Sooner a parody of the Sermon on the Mount by St. Thomas Aquinas! And when a man of high seriousness (such we esteem Mr. Eliot) turns himself (as Mr. Eliot has done) to satiric melodrama or farce on the broad scale, we can hazard a guess at the result. We can remember Flaubert's dreary 'Candidate.' And we can remember also the tremendous 'Apes of God' which Mr. Lewis gave us in a spell of disgusted mirth. How will Mr. Eliot's humour compare with Mr. Lewis's? We know very well (say, we suspect) that it won't compare at all.

A good deal might be said about the form of the fragments now published,—reprinted, by the way, from the 'Criterion.' In the first place, their nature suggests that the whole is not conspicuous for (what Frere called) 'the utter impossibility of the story.' They appear to be rather fragments of a 'melodrama' in which 'an adherence to the probabilities of real life is an essential requisite.' Such a 'melodrama,' it would seem, is more of Menander than of Aristophanes. Mr. Eliot's staging of nine characters simultaneously is defensible. His suppression of a separate chorus in favour of duets replete with tambo and bones is excusable.



But Aristophanic or not, his melodrama has every appearance of being decidedly dull. His choice of epigraphs would suggest that he is no more in love with Sweeney to-day than he was in 1920. But the terseness and compression of the Sweeney poems was the most remarkable thing about them. Their tension was more interesting than their content. But Sweeney in melodrama is rather less impressive than Sweeney in lyric. Sweeney in melodrama, be it admitted, sprawls.

That the people he describes annoy Mr. Eliot intensely we can well believe. But it is less the people described than Mr. Eliot's description of them that annoys his reader. To describe dullness in an interesting, even in an amusing manner, is defensible as possible art. So Mr. Eliot has done in many of his earlier poems. But to describe dullness accurately and in detail, fully and at length, is a different matter.

[Quotes 'Sweeney Agonistes', CPP, p. 115, 'Dusty: How about Pereira?' to 'Dusty: Well that's true'.]

Thus opens the 'Fragment of a Prologue.' It is all very clever, all very cutting, all very true, and all very futile,—as Mr. Eliot, no doubt, intended it to be. In so far as he has achieved with it what he (apparently) intended to achieve, the technique of the passage may therefore be justified forthwith. But the value of the passage remains suspect. The best way to satirise dullness is not, necessarily, to record it dully.

Klipstein and Krumpacker, two Americans over in London on business, awake an expectancy (if only by their names) for work of the Burbank and Bleistein order. But the following remark of Klipstein is not very reassuring:-

Yes we did our bit, as you folks say,  
I'll tell the world we got the Hun on the run.

It is rather more obvious, as humour, than we might have desired. That Klipstein should be wearing Musichall horn-rimmed glasses and chewing Music-hall gum seems inevitable.

Perhaps the easiest thing in the work to praise is its rhythm. This is pure barrel-organ, and with its constant repetition in Music-hall crosstalk, makes no bad medium for the whole. The parodies of popular song are also well enough in their way, but again rather obvious. A mildly amusing feature of the dialogue, however, is its accurate recording of inflexion. Snow remarks that he is very interested in a tale of Sweeney's. Loot Sam Wauchope is described as being 'at *home* in London.' A conversation by telephone gives rise to this:-

Oh I'm so sorry. I *am* so sorry  
But Doris came home with a terrible chill  
No, just a chill  
Oh I *think* it's only a chill  
Yes indeed I hope so too—

Well I *hope* we shan't have to call a doctor....

Once again, we can suppose the humour very clever, very cutting and very true. Once again it seems rather feeble. It is not, perhaps, Aristophanic.

If 'Sweeney Agonistes' were completed, no doubt the effect of the whole would be sufficient justification for every fault we can find in these fragments. But that is not sufficient justification for them in itself. That they give a fair picture of banality is the most that can be said for them. And this is not exactly the sort of criticism we should prefer to pass on a work of so peculiar a genius as Mr. Eliot's. There are not many living poets who could not have equalled the achievement, and we may suspect that there are quite a number who could have bettered it. Mr. Eliot has written no other work of which this could be said.

GEORGE BARKER, FROM A REVIEW,  
‘ADELPHI’

January 1933, vol. v, 310–11

Barker (b. 1913), an English poet, is the author of ‘Poems’ (1935), ‘Calamiterror’ (1936) and *Collected Poems*’ (1957).

Swill, guzzle, and copulate: ‘Birth, copulation, and death’—equivalent terms. Eliot, for all I can see to the contrary, wrote ‘Sweeney Agonistes’ with the coccyx of that spine, fear. Of birth, of death, and of that potent mobility in which birth and death find some kind of union and some kind of interpretation. I am compelled by my youthful respect of such elemental things, to refrain from comment on the ‘perfectly slick’ texture and architecture of the verse: but I am correspondingly compelled by that respect to state that in this poem (so far, for me, his most *easily* admirable work) Eliot has got down to the reservoirs of subject which lie nearer to exoteric earth than his detached intelligence. By this I mean that although the most unpoetic, everyday person might be annoyed by the new Eliot idiom, such a person could not but receive most of the inspiring emotion which, of itself, informs the poem. To reduce that emotion to a phrase, as near as one can, the queer shivering of a hand in fear of performing its function as a hand. Sweeney, afraid, sits describing his fear. Of birth, and copulation, and death.

I feel that in ‘Sweeney Agonistes’, we observe poetry dissolving into a condition of exquisite, and perfectly lucid, decay. About it I perceive a pallor not only of subject, but as well of treatment: Eliot has contrived as deathly an elegy of his poetic decease, as he composed triumphal ode of his birth, ‘The Waste Land’. The loveliness, so proximate to inanition, of ‘Ash-Wednesday’, in ‘Sweeney Agonistes’ has become a sort of valediction from death. Contemplate these words, with which the poem is introduced:

Orestes: You don’t see them, you don’t—but *I* see them: they are hunting me down, I must move on.—*Choephoroi*.

Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.—*St. John of the Cross*.

MORTON D.ZABEL, A MODERN  
PURGATORIO, 'COMMONWEAL'

19 April 1933, vol. xvii, 696-7

The quotation from Saint John of the Cross which Mr. Eliot prefixes to his latest book of verse goes farther than the hint of parody in his title or the apologetic compromise of his sub-title to explain his motive in republishing these two desultory fragments of satire from the 'Criterion.' 'Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.' Mr. Eliot's portrayal of 'created beings' has in the past been sufficiently scathing; its purpose must be understood by anyone who wishes to grasp the nature and process of his spiritual experience. In the desolation and vacuity of 'A Cooking Egg,' 'The Hippopotamus,' 'Gerontion,' 'Prufrock' and 'The Waste Land,' he achieved that ruthless notation of reality without mastering which no knowledge of material fact may be gained and no renunciation of it justified. These were records of a self-scrutiny bordering on spiritual masochism. They explored with an ironic intensity unknown to most of Mr. Eliot's contemporaries the material ambition and depravity of his time. They found their climax in the empty monotony of 'The Hollow Men' and their justification in the regenerative impulse of 'Ash-Wednesday.' It is difficult to see how his new long poem (of which two sections have already appeared: 'Triumphal March' and 'Difficulties of a Statesman') or the present operatic burlesque improves on the earlier presentation, or, indeed, justifies a repetition of what has already found its logical place in a remarkable personal and historical record.

The method of Eliot remains his own; his imitators cannot dispute that fact. A poet should also be granted his diversions. These facts do not, however, improve the dulness which 'Sweeney Agonistes' offers in fully twenty of its thirty pages. The Aristophanic element is hardly authentic enough to enliven a kind of satire already over-exploited in recent years, whereas the use of 'jazz as a medium for tragedy' attributed to these fragments by one critic is not only a dubious venture, but a venture at which Mr. Eliot, despite his mastery of topical accents and banality, has not conspicuously succeeded. The fact that he has already depicted that tragedy in classic terms renders this book a tactical error to any reader who has followed him into the beautiful and profound passages of 'Ash-Wednesday.'

There is one purpose which may justify these poems, however. Most modern readers require a great quantity of repetition before an effect is achieved in their minds. If Mr. Eliot still thinks it possible to reach this audience, there can be no question that even an obtuse reader will leave these pages without admitting the emptiness, tedium and depravity of the elements in contemporary life which they describe. The renunciation of 'the love of created beings' is not only a painful process, but a slow one. Since the evidence guaranteeing Mr. Eliot's sincerity exists, he should doubtless be allowed not only the amusement but the thoroughness by which he will achieve that spiritual triumph. To those who cannot accept the sterile horrors here presented, he offers another quotation, this time from the 'Oresteia': 'You don't see them, you don't—but I see them: they are hunting me down, I must move on.' The last phrase here contains, of course, one of the most important declarations in modern poetry.

## MARIANNE MOORE, REVIEW, 'POETRY'

May 1933, vol. xlii, 106–9

In 'Sweeney Agonistes' Mr. Eliot comes to us as the men of the neighboring tribes came to Joshua under a camouflage of frayed garments, with mouldy bread in the wallet. But the point is not camouflaged. Mortal and sardonic victims though we are in this conflict called experience, we may regard our victimage with calmness, the book says; not because we don't know that our limitations of correctness are tedious to a society which has its funny side to us, as we have our slightly morbid side to it, but because there is a moment for Orestes, for Ophelia, for Everyman, when the ego and the figure it cuts, the favors you get from it, the good cheer and customary encomium, are as the insulting wigwagery of the music-halls.

Everyman is played by Pereira, an efficiently inconspicuous, decent, studious chap. Well, not so decent, since he pays the rent for Doris and Dusty, who are an unremarkable, balky, card-cutting pair of girls whose names symbolize society's exasperating unanimity of selfishness. Shakespeare's 'lecherous as a monkey' is rather strong, but in a world of buncombe and the fidgets, where you love-a me, I love-a you, 'One live as two,' 'Two live as three'—and there is no privacy—under the bamboo tree, the pair of given names go well with the surnames of a laidly, shallow set of heroes from America, London, Ireland, Canada, who became intimate at the time they 'did' their 'bit' and 'got the Hun on the run.' There is, as the author intended, an effect of Aristophanic melodrama about this London flat in which the visitors play with the idea of South Sea languor and luxury—work annihilated, personality negated, and conscience suppressed; a monkey to milk the goat and pass the cocktails—woman in the cannibal-pot or at hand to serve.

It is correct and unnotorious for the race to perpetuate itself; committing adultery and disclaiming obligation is the suicide of personality, and the spirit wearies of clarity in such matters. The Furies pursuing Orestes are abler casuists than the King of Clubs and Queen of Hearts of Dusty and Doris. 'They are hunting me down,' he said.

A stark crime would not be so difficult to commit as the mood of moral conflict is difficult to satisfy. One is dead in being born unless one's debts are forgiven; and equipoise makes an idiot of one. The automatic machinery of behavior undoes

itself backwards, putting sinister emphasis on wrong things, and no emphasis on the right ones.

If he was alive then the milkman wasn't  
 and the rent-collector wasn't,  
 And if they were alive then he was dead.  
 Death or life or life or death—  
 Death is life and life is death.

Is one to become a saint or go mad?—remain mad, we should say. 'The soul cannot be possessed of the divine union until it has divested itself of the love of created beings,' St. John of the Cross says; as all saints have said. If one chooses God as the friend of the spirit, does not the coffin become the most appropriate friend for the body? 'Cheer him up? Well here again that don't apply,' says Sweeney. 'But I gotta use words when I talk to you.' This plucky reproach has in it the core of the drama. In their graveyard of sick love which is no love, which is loneliness without solitude, the girls can't understand what Pereira has to do with it and that it is a lucky eclecticism which cuts him off from what the Krumpackers and Horsfalls call a good time. A man should not think himself a poor fish or go mad, Sweeney maintains, because two girls are blockheads. He should answer a question as often as they ask it and put in as good an evening as possible with them. If by saying, 'I gotta use words when I talk to you,' he insults them and they don't know they've been insulted, they, not he, should go mad.

When the spirit expands and the animal part of one sinks, one is not sardonic, and the bleak lesson here set forth is not uncheerful to those who are serious in the desire to satisfy justice. The cheer resides in admitting that it is normal to be abnormal. When one is not the only one who thinks that, one is freed of a certain tension.

Mr. Eliot is not showy nor hard, and is capable at times of too much patience; but here the truculent commonplace of the vernacular obscures care of arrangement, and the deliberate concise rhythm that is characteristic of him seems less intentional than it is. Upon scrutiny, however, the effect of an unhoodwinked self-control is apparent. The high time half a dozen people of unfastidious personality can seem to be having together, is juxtaposed with the successful flight of the pursued son of Agamemnon, and it is implied, perhaps, that 'he who wonders shall reign, he who reigns shall have rest.' One is obliged to say 'perhaps'—since Sweeney in conflict is not synonymous with Sweeney victorious.

# ‘The Rock’

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## UNSIGNED REVIEW, 'LISTENER'

6 June 1934, vol. xi, 945

The immediate object of 'The Rock', the pageant play now being performed at Sadler's Wells, for which Mr. T.S. Eliot has written the words, is to raise money for the Forty Five Churches fund of the Diocese of London—a purpose which dictates the main theme of the play, the building of a church, against which are shown certain 'experiments in time' which illustrate the growth of the churches in London from the time of the conversion of the AngloSaxons. But beyond this main object, which deserves all support, the play raises the whole issue of dramatic poetry to-day, an issue which the author himself has discussed as thoroughly as any contemporary critic. In the course of a dialogue on that subject, written a few years ago, Mr. Eliot put forward certain general propositions with which his dramatic poetry in this 'Rock' can now be compared. One was the necessity for something more than pure entertainment. 'The Rock' most certainly does entertain; as well as its choruses and historical pictures, it has Cockney backchat, topical references to Redshirts and Blackshirts and the Douglas Credit Scheme, a music-hall song and dance, and even a ballet (of Whittington and his Cat). But the energy which carries through its diverse scenes and gives the whole performance shape is (as it was in Mr. Auden's 'Dance of Death') the writer's conviction of the importance of his theme. The fault with poetic dramatists of the Stephen Phillips kind was that they never seemed to care two pins about their subject; but Mr. Eliot obviously does have very strong feelings about those who 'stray, in high-powered cars, on a by-pass way', and does care very much about 'A Church for us all and work for us all and God's world for us all even unto this last'. A second observation, that 'Drama springs from religious liturgy and cannot afford to depart far from religious liturgy' is amply illustrated, not only by the actual introduction of parts of the Church service (in the scene showing the blessing of the Crusaders, and in the climax where the Bishop of London blesses the audience) as by the use of the rhythms of the liturgy in certain of the choruses. And this links up with the third proposition, the necessity of providing a verse that will be as satisfactory for us as blank verse was for the Elizabethans. There is no one form of verse in 'The Rock'; it comprehends a variety, from the measures of the Psalms to those of the

music hall; but the point is that they are familiar rhythms, to which the audience's ear is attuned. And so, either sung, or spoken with beautiful clearness by the Chorus which links up the scenes, they present no difficulty in acceptance. Those to whom Mr. Eliot's name is synonymous with 'modernist' and 'difficult' poetry may be surprised that audiences of bishops, aldermen, church workers, school children and 'general public', most of whom are probably unfamiliar with his other works, should be able to join in anything written by him as they do in the last chorus of all. Those, however, who remember the smart rhythms of 'Sweeney Agonistes', or the clear lines of the 'Journey of the Magi', will not be in the least surprised; but simply pleased that a great contemporary poet should have been given the opportunity of writing directly for a popular audience.

UNSIGNED REVIEW, MR. ELIOT'S  
PAGEANT PLAY, 'TIMES LITERARY  
SUPPLEMENT'

7 June 1934, no. 1688, 404

Evidently Mr. Eliot has prepared, step by step, to enter the theatre. 'The Rock' is not actually a drama, being first a pageant; but it is a work for the stage, and may be regarded—Mr. Eliot having advanced so far—as a notable demonstration of possibilities. That his approach has been deliberate, preceded by much critical examination, is apparent from previous writings.

The contemporary theatre presented him with two obstacles: first, the dislike or fear of poetry on the stage; second, the lack of a recognized morality either on the stage or in the audience. The dramatists of to-day mostly write for 'plutocratic St. Moritzers.' The regular theatre therefore did not provide an immediate objective: for without poetry or traditional morals he could not work. Perhaps, in order to seek guidance for his advance, he made his study of former dramatists, especially the Elizabethan; and within recent years enunciated his discovery that poetry and drama are not contradictory, as this century assumes: the best drama is in fact that which comes nearest to poetry, and vice versa. This declaration gave confidence for experiment, and he wrote several fragments. But now the request to write for a church audience, in support of a church extension campaign, solved for him the second problem—at least for the occasion: Christianity was present on both sides of the curtain.

Mr. Eliot is not alone among modern writers in desiring a poetic drama. And internal evidence shows him sensitive to what others are doing, to the ground won, the methods employed. His genius, indeed, might be said to rest on a careful regard of other artists, predecessors and contemporaries. He balances two forms of awareness, which might be described as horizontal and vertical, more nicely than anyone to-day. In this play the vertical (or past) influences are obvious and gloried in. Liturgy, which gave birth to English drama, is a model; there is antiphonal use of choric speaking; and many scenes, which are all linked on the theme of church-building, contain portions of actual liturgy. The Latin ritual for taking the Cross for the Crusades is bodily inserted. There are also bits of sermons. Early moralities authorize comic relief to the most serious intentions; and that relief, naturally enough, is expressed in terms of the music-hall and pantomime we know. The

cockney builders of a church, which is gradually erected as the pageant proceeds, are ready to indulge in jokes, arguments, songs and humble reverence, as required. Each difficulty in church-building is illustrated by a scene showing a similar (or worse) difficulty overcome in the past. Liturgical chanting and mime are used in these scenes, which include such occasions as Mellitus's conversion of London, Rahere's building of St. Bartholomew's, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Danish invasion of England.

As already suggested, awareness of present writers is shown. With them, what might be called the modest or nonsublime approach to poetic drama has become almost a convention. They take the popular stage forms to-day (the modern 'folk' forms), such as musical comedy or *revue*, and use them as a basis. There was recently Mr. O'Casey's 'Within the Gates'; and echoes of its sing-song choruses, its pervasive harping on modern down-and-outs find their way into 'The Rock,' as:

In this land  
There shall be one cigarette to two men,  
To two women one half pint of bitter  
Ale.

Mr. W.H.Auden is another experimenter; he is marked by strangeness and an arrogant threatening of a doomed society, as he sees it. Him, too, Mr. Eliot recalls on occasion:-

Though you forget the way to the Temple  
There is one who remembers the way to your door.

His gift of parody may unconsciously lead him to this. But conscious parody appears elsewhere, as in the Communists' verses—typographically parodied also.

The scene where this occurs, set in 1934, is most characteristic of the Eliot known through his poems. (It should be made clear that the scenario is by another hand, Mr. E.Martin Browne; Mr. Eliot is author 'only of the words.' As he explains, 'Of only one scene am I literally the author,' and this modern scene is presumably the one.) The chorus, despondent, wonder if the young offer hope of better things. Bands of Redshirts and Blackshirts are questioned. Their replies are, with exaggeration, unsatisfactory. The chorus says: 'There seems no hope from those who march in step.' A Plutocrat enters, criticizes the Church and, instead, offers to the crowd a golden calf, for which they fight. As a comment on our modern situation, it cannot be said that in this the pessimism of 'The Waste Land' has been abandoned.

Mr. Eliot takes a hard view of the Christian struggle. The emphasis of his chorus counters the optimistic scenario, an emphasis such as is expressed in:-

The desert is not remote in southern tropics,

The desert is not only around the corner,  
 The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,  
 Squeezed like tooth-paste in the tube-train next to you.

These choruses, as the publisher points out, exceed in length any of his previous poetry; and on the stage at Sadler's Wells they prove the most vital part of the performance, being excellently spoken. They combine the sweep of psalmody with the exact employment of colloquial words. They are lightly written, as though whispered to the paper, yet are forcible to enunciate.

[Quotes 'The Rock', Chorus III, CPP, p. 155, 'Where My Word' to 'lost golf balls'.]

In 'The Rock' Mr. Eliot's success is certainly lyrical; the action scenes have immaturities and faults, for which, on account of collaborators, he may not be entirely blameworthy. The cockney humour is often curiously feeble; sometimes alien points of view, such as the Agitator's are thinly projected. But with his use of the chorus he has regained a lost territory for the drama. Nor is it only satiric, as the tender music of the closing scene may exemplify:-

In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light. We are glad when the day ends,  
 when the play ends; and ecstasy is too much pain.

We are children quickly tired: children who are up in the night and fall  
 asleep as the rocket is fired; and the day is long for work or play.

We tire of distraction or concentration, we sleep and are glad to sleep.

Mr. Eliot, having at last entered the theatre, may well continue towards a proper play in verse. There is exhibited here a command of novel and musical dramatic speech which, considered alone, is an exceptional achievement.

MICHAEL SAYERS, MR. T.S.ELIOT'S  
'THE ROCK', 'NEW ENGLISH WEEKLY'  
21 June 1934, vol. v, 230–1

Sayers, a theatre critic, wrote book reviews and drama criticism for the 'Criterion'.

Before attending at the theatre to see this Pageant performed, I read the text carefully; and it seemed to me then, that though the book contained many passages of poetic worth, interest and beauty, yet on the whole the verse was of such strained lucidity, that it would provide an extremely thin, flat or lymphatic dialogue when spoken aloud in the process of dramatic action.

I speak from the point of view of a critic of stage entertainments. I believe that Mr. Eliot's poetry is the best of its kind, but also that Mr. Eliot's poetic style, if it is to be adopted generally for dramatic purposes (which, fortunately, is unlikely), will result in a vitiation of the serious stage comparable only to that brought about by the *Scribe-and-Dumas-fils*—adorers of the last generation.

French influence has rarely improved our English drama. Concerning the literature of the stage, at least, it is true to say that the Entente exemplifies little more than a reciprocal exchange of misunderstandings. Modern or fairly modern French criticism and poetry, I learn, have impressed Mr. Eliot to the extent of reproduction; and certainly they have led him to dispense as far as possible with the essentially English poetic device which, by a combination of precise communications and evocative suggestions, yields a language continuously creative. Mr. Eliot has struggled nobly and brilliantly against the deterioration, imprecision and misuse of language in our time; but, not satisfied by this excellent work, he went on to elevate his negative critical principles into a theory of poetry, and to practise his own teaching. He commenced by deliberately smothering those magnificent sonorities, (Even when our poetry snored it was magnificent!) which has become the test of good poetry; and substituted in their place the witty café-table rattle, the morbid whine and the mere boudoir coo characteristic of his favourite French verses. Consequently, even when most earnest, much of Mr.

Eliot's poetical writing still strikes the eye more forcibly than the ear. These lines from the text under review are a case in point. The reference is to a Temple:-

And the lamp thereof is the Lamb.  
And there with us is night no more, but only  
Light  
Light  
Light of the Light.

The passage looks more interesting than it sounds.

Nevertheless this poet is capable of producing at times extremely lovely-sounding lines, as those beginning:-

O greater light we praise thee for the less,

And that he is well aware of what might be a deficiency in his work may account for his frequent use of liturgical movements, with rather monotonous results.

For my purposes, then, Mr. Eliot's verses lack that precipitation of the spirit without which stage dialogue is tedious and flat. His verse 'stays on the ground'; it walks, with irregular steps, in a circle. It does not stir us by a bold advance, though it may disappoint us by a feeble recession (or Tchekovian anti-climax); at best it keeps steadily to an improgressive circumambulation. Its emotional gamut is restricted, dropping from satiric levity down to hopeless despondency, but reaching neither really comic impetuosity on the one hand, nor tragic contemplativeness on the other hand. And in this play 'The Rock,' at any rate, the content is equally as uninspiring as the form.

Mr. Eliot allows certain limits to be set to his thought and feelings by his beliefs. He does not seek to justify the ways of his God to us; this, it appears, he would consider a piece of impertinence to attempt. He does not concern himself very deeply with the mystery of our existence; this, it appears, would be contrary to his orthodoxy. Not to phrase it irreverently, Mr. Eliot's dramatic verse, in its most moving expressions, is the incantation of a Dean manqué, who would call strayed Christians into the Catholic Church of England.

Again, these beliefs of Mr. Eliot cause him to voice in most melodramatic utterances (which too often, in this book, take the place of intense feeling), a series of mediaeval platitudes decked out in canonicals; as, for instance, when he expresses his horror at the hygienic practice of brushing the teeth; and also when he declares that our culture is decadent because it ignores the Church, though it is more probable that the Church is degenerate because it has lost touch with our culture. One can only share the lament, of the other critics, upon the passage of this great literary gentleman into 'the Wasteland of Futile Superstition'; and murmur, in the words of the Talmudic funeral oration pronounced upon Rabbi Hillel: 'Alas, the humble and pious man, the disciple of Ezra!'

I know that there is a tendency among modern critics to desire to confine the subject-matter of art to an accepted number of abstractions from common experience. Just as we speak in our debates of Communism, instead of the different disciples of Karl Marx; and of Social Credit, instead of individual exponents of Major Douglas's Theory; so, if we wish to make a play or novel about 'love,' to take a lively example, we shall no longer create a Romeo and Juliet, a David and Agnes, a Lady Chatterley and the Gamekeeper, embodying our particular experiences and observations of the sexual impulse; but rather choose to deal with universal affections; and write, as it might be, the tragedy of Lingham and Yoni, where only whatever is common to collective experience of sex is allowed. It seems to me that this modern inclination to restrict the field of artistic enquiry would reduce our Western art to the static condition of Chinese aesthetics, which we might call the science of trifling; and we should come to agree—with Voltaire that Shakespeare was altogether a barbarian. If, however, some of our dramatists welcome this limitation of material, then in that case they may find Mr. Eliot's forms of verse to be indicative of the sort of vehicle necessary for the conveyance of mass emotions. I think that these verse-forms might be suitable for Comedy, but a very specialised kind of comedy:—a Collective Comedy of Manners—e.g., the Calf of Gold episode in the play under review. The tragic experience, like that of the mystic, the poet and the lover, will remain an individual revelation; and the experiments going forward in the Soviet Russian Theatre appear to bear me out in this speculation.

As a special kind of comedic poet, then, Mr. Eliot indicates in a few passages in 'The Rock' how talent, insight, wit, information, chastened sentiment and proper dignity may be put to use in the modern drama, although it still remains to be done. Yet it may be that an adequate dramatic poetry will result from the impact between this collective or mass consciousness and, what I might call, the Shakespearian apprehension of particulars; a new Drama combining the grim, intellectual candour of the first with the human plentitude of the latter.

Mr. Eliot's pageant-play was performed at Sadler's Wells by a number of amateur players. They acted admirably at the one or two opportunities provided for them by the author. I shall never be able to follow the thoughtprocesses of stage costumiers, and I have no explanation to offer why The Rock, one of the characters in the play, appeared to carry a set of organ-pipes upon his back, or maybe a hot-water central-heating radiator. Both may here be represented in order to supply music and heat to the frequently flat and frigid dialogue. As my kindly colleagues say, 'it would be invidious to single out any one actor from so great a number' (and then proceed to select the friends of their friends); but I might mention Rev. Vincent Howson, part author of the prose dialogue, who brought the house down, or, to speak with more exactness, woke the house up, with his rendering of an excellent burlesque upon an old-time Variety duet and dance: 'When I was a lad what 'ad almost no sense'; together with Miss Phyllis Woodcliffe, who was delightful, complete with bonnet and boa and boots.



The leaders of the Chorus, Miss Janet Lewis and Mr. Stewart Cooper, delivered their lines with intelligence and grace, in spite of their whitewashed faces, which made them resemble an ensainted Nigger Minstrel Troupe, with skins washed whiter than snow!

The production was under-rehearsed; and the scenes of pageantry, like all spectacles when the onlookers are in no other relation except that of passive submission to the proceedings, distressed the intelligent members of the audience by their dullness, and bored everybody by their protraction.

78.

UNSIGNED EDITORIAL ON 'THE ROCK',  
'THEOLOGY'

July 1934, vol. xxix, 4-5

The text of the Sadler's Wells London Church Pageant, 'The Rock', by T.S.Eliot, is now available, and very good reading it is. Our only criticisms are that it is difficult to grasp at a single hearing, and that the modern London working-man does not speak as he is here made to do. Ethelbert, Alfred and young Edwin are at once too intelligent and too illiterate. But what a blessed relief, after the Wardour Street lamb-doodle sometimes put forward as the language of Church-plays, to have words with a bite in them, full of wit, satire and poetry. It is a genuine modern exposition of belief in the Church, as an ancient, unpopular, hard-pressed, conquering, divine society. It is modern in that it is aware of the modern situation (we even have the Douglas scheme of Social Credit—'that bein' the case, I say: to 'ell with money'), and of Red Shirts, Black Shirts and so forth, but in a deeper sense it is modern in that we have in it the *confessio fidei* of a modern Churchman, a real faith expressed in the language of to-day. Above all it is a pageant, with Mellitus, Rahere and even Nehemiah to reassure the builders of to-day. The time-series is used with freedom. Bishop Blomfield comforts the leader of the Chorus with a reminder of the Crusades, and we at once see a mediaeval Bishop giving the Cross, with Latin prayers and benediction, to two young Crusaders, and the next moment the twentieth-century builders are patting one another on the back because the difficulties have miraculously vanished. We congratulate the diocese of London on having secured Mr. Eliot to write their book.

79.

UNSIGNED REVIEW, 'TABLET'

4 August 1934, vol. clxiv, 138

If we had been among the spectators of the 'Pageant-play' recently presented by our Anglican friends at Sadlers Wells we might be able to write more favourably of 'The Rock' by T.S.Eliot in which the full text of the play is printed. As the performances were in aid of the Protestant Bishop of London's 'Forty-five Churches Fund,' Mr. Eliot and his collaborator, Mr. Martin Browne, have used the notion of three cockney bricklayers in 'colloquy with one another; with contemporaries (including an anti-God agitator); and with ghostly visitants from the past, such as Mellitus, Bishop of London, and Rahere, the founder of St. Bartholomew's. The scanty action and copious talk are expressed partly in not very successful *vers libre* and partly in a cockney dialect with the omitted aspirates so laboriously indicated as to make the very long speeches of the bricklayers exceedingly tiresome to read. Unhappily, there is little freshness and beauty of thought to mollify the exacerbating diction.

80.

UNSIGNED REVIEW, 'EVERYMAN'

17 August 1934, 189

One may guess, impertinently perhaps, that Mr. Eliot has chosen a hard path to tread in coming out into the open to assist in the production of a pageant play meant to raise funds for London churches. The admiration of the honesty and courage needed to emerge from the study to engage in such a broil must condition all criticism of 'The Rock' considered as pure poetry and he himself, by the admission of clerical collaborators with embarrassingly fertile pens, has provided a loophole for a more cautious criticism than if he had presented his piece as an individual achievement. Many of the choruses of 'The Rock' are of a moving solemnity, and the gusts of strangulated song bear witness that a force which he has never yet allowed to move with its own momentum still exists, though now subdued to a direction which, it is to be feared, will range him with a secondary Herbert rather than a primary Smart or Crashaw. The trappings of a doctrinal humility do not at all become a poet of Mr. Eliot's standard. We ask for at least a dash of purple. Well, he understands his own genius best, and the ways of a serious experimenter are always worth watching, even when they give the impression of being wrong ones.

81.  
A.M., REVIEW, 'BLACKFRIARS'  
September 1934, vol. xv, 642-3

Mr. Eliot has come out of the Waste Land.

His sojourn in the desert was not, as his less intelligent disciples seem to have thought, an intellectual antic: it was a necessary asceticism, and an asceticism for poetry. Analogous renunciations are observable in other arts. All are stripping to structure in order to regain tradition. But the desert is a dangerous place: there are devils in it as well as God. *Surréalist* paintings suggest that it is the devil whom the painters have met in the desert.

Mr. Eliot has come out of the Waste Land a Christian. This play, which ran for a fortnight at Sadler's Wells, with crammed audiences (and was reported in 'Blackfriars'), is an explicitly Christian play, it is vulgar propaganda, it is to collect cash for Church extension. It is a phenomenon to be noted when the greatest living English poet finds it an honour for poetry to be an *ancilla Fidei*.

The play is built on several planes. In the foreground two Cockney bricklayers are trying to build a church in a swamp. On another plane are the appearances of great church-builders of the past who come to encourage the workmen—Rahere, Nehemiah, Blomfield. Then there is the contemporary 'world,' with its aimlessness and lucre lust, and its panaceas of Fascism and Communism. And behind all is the mysterious figure of the Rock. The Rock is Peter.

Mr. Eliot has always claimed that the poet should be in organic relation with the community: in this play he has achieved that relation, and without any loss to his poetry, for the great choruses which weld the play together contain some of the noblest poetry he has written. Only the language of the Cockneys is a little uninteresting: Cockney is more than misplaced h's, and Mr. Eliot would do well to rely on his own judgment in this matter, since the advice he says he has taken seems not to have been very helpful. But this is to carp at a work which as a whole is a magnificent and thrilling success. The temptation to quote is furious, but we must be content to conclude with the refrain which is the 'motive' of the entire play: 'A Church for us all and work for us all and God's world for us all even unto this last.'

82.

UNSIGNED REVIEW, 'SUNDAY TIMES'

30 September 1934, 12

Mr. Eliot's previous fragments of dramatic dialogue have now blossomed into a pageant play, though he is careful to explain that he has supplied nothing but the text for the scenario by Mr. E. Martin Browne.

The pageant is a succession of scenes, some historical, some contemporary, in which the builders of a new church figure or which they are inspired to see. Some of the dialogue is in prose, some in verse, and both are interlinked with choruses. The rhythm of these choruses, in which the author can be most directly heard, is haunted by the whimper already familiar, as if even now he was unable to get away from the futility against which he has reacted so bitterly and to give his verse the joy of the old affirmations that his intelligence has rediscovered. Such drama as there is is that of the erection of the new church in spite of every difficulty, a work accomplished under the inspiration of previous builders, such as Rahere, who return to remind the workmen that they had similar difficulties in their own time. The talk of the workmen is so consistently aitchless as to read like a literary convention, but here, we are told, the dialogue has been 're-written' by another hand.

'The Rock' is more interesting for its promise than for its performance, and it appears that Mr. Eliot is trying for much the same effect as that which Mr. Sean O'Casey achieved by 'Within the Gates' triumphantly. Let us hope this example will continue to spread.

83.  
D.W.HARDING, 'THE ROCK',  
'SCRUTINY'  
September 1934, vol. iii, 180–3

Harding (b. 1906), Emeritus Professor of Psychology, University of London, was a member of the editorial board of 'Scrutiny' from 1933 to 1947. He has written a number of important works of literary criticism, including 'Experience into Words' (1963) and 'Words into Rhythm' (1976).

'The view that what we need in this tempestuous turmoil of change is a Rock to shelter under or to cling to, rather than an efficient aeroplane in which to ride it, is comprehensible but mistaken.' The attitude expressed by Dr. Richards here is one that many people now find less alluring than once they did, and to them the general theme of 'The Rock' will be welcome. The whole book bears witness to the conviction that the only possible advance at the present time is a 'spiritual' one and has little to do with anything specifically modern, nor any appeal for those who

...constantly try to escape  
From the darkness outside and within  
By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.

Mr. Eliot's subtle tone of humble and yet militant contempt could hardly be improved upon. What is not convincing, however, is his suggestion that the Church is the only alternative, for his pleading relies upon false antitheses. It puts the plight of the uncultured vividly but it does not show what the Church would do for them. A description of the breakdown of social and particularly of family life ends

But every son would have his motor cycle,  
And daughters ride away on casual pillions.

But the alternative to the pillion is not suggested. As far as we can judge from the time when such families were more stable, it would be the horsehair sofa, in a front parlour left vacant by the rest of the family with appropriate pleasantries. The only alternatives to godless restlessness that this book gives are the rough diamond piety of the builder's foreman, and more impressive, the satisfactions of the highly cultured who happen to be within the Church:

Shall we not bring to Your service all our powers  
For life, for dignity, grace and order,  
And intellectual pleasures of the senses?

But the plight of people capable of appreciating such culture and still outside the Church is not put. In so far as 'The Rock' is pleading for certain attitudes which the Church at its best supports it is undoubtedly effective, but as an assertion of the necessity of the Church to the establishing or maintenance of those attitudes it is invalidated by its false antitheses. Undoubtedly it is more effective in its denunciatory description of things as they are, of the misery of the poor and the spiritual vacuity of the well-to-do, than in the remedy it proffers. And it is in the choruses where these descriptions occur that the greatest intrinsic value of the work is to be found.

The prose dialogue which maintains the action of the pageant is distressing. It is difficult to believe that the spinsterish Cockney of the builders was written by the author of the public house scene in 'The Waste Land', and the speeches of the Agitator and the fashionable visitors to the Church are just the usual middle-class caricatures of a reality that has never been accurately observed. They are the caricatures of a class by a class, and wellworn and blurred they are, inevitably. The reach-me-down character of the dialogue is partly responsible for and partly derived from—in fact is one with—the banal and sentimental treatment of a scene like The Crusaders' Farewell, which offers so painful a contrast to the dignity of the liturgical Latin that comes next. Only in some of the ingenious pastiches of archaic styles which Mr. Eliot introduces from time to time is the prose readable with even mild pleasure.

The verse is altogether more interesting. Naturally in a work written to order and presumably in a limited time there is included some which is not as fine as most of what Mr. Eliot has published. Necessarily, too, this verse cannot have the concentration and subtlety of a short poem intended for many attentive readings. Its interest lies rather in its experimentation with a tone of address. Innovations of 'tone' (in Richards' sense) are at least as significant as innovations of 'technique' in the restricted sense, and in the addresses of the Chorus and The Rock to the decent heathen and the ineffectual devout, who are taken as forming the audience, Mr. Eliot achieves a tone that is new to contemporary verse. Its peculiar kind of sermonizing is especially welcome in contrast to the kind the young communist poets offer us: in particular it succeeds in upbraiding those it addresses while still remaining humble and *impersonally* superior to them:



The Word of the Lord came unto me, saying:  
 O miserable cities of designing men,  
 O wretched generation of enlightened men,  
 Will you build me a house of plaster, with corrugated roofing,  
 To be filled with a litter of Sunday newspapers?

And again:

Do you need to be told that even such modest attainments  
 As you can boast in the way of polite society  
 Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their significance?

Just occasionally the tone verges on the sententious:

The lot of man is ceaseless labour,  
 Or ceaseless idleness, which is still harder...

but usually its poise is perfect.

Closely bound up with the tone of address is the texture of the language. The idiom Mr. Eliot has developed here is admirably suited to, and has evidently emerged from pressure of, the practical circumstances of the work: its dramatic presentation before an audience whose muzzy respect for the devotional had to be welded to a concern for contemporary realities. A particularly successful and characteristic trick of idiom is the quick transition from vaguely Biblical language to the contemporary colloquial. It can be seen in this:

I have trodden the wine-press alone, and I know That it is hard to be really  
 useful

and in this:

And they write innumerable books; being too vain and distracted for silence;  
 seeking every, one after his own elevation, and dodging his emptiness.

This passage also illustrates the dominant feeling of the denunciatory choruses, a dry contempt which has passed beyond the stage of tiredness and now has a tough springiness:

O weariness of men who turn from God  
 To the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your action,

Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,

Engaged in working out a rational morality,  
Engaged in printing as many books as possible,  
Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,  
Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm  
For nation or race or what you call humanity; ...

'The Rock' is in many ways typical of Mr. Eliot's later work. Far less concentrated, far less perfect, far more easy-going than the earlier work, it has an increased breadth of contact with the world which takes the place of intensity of contact at a few typical points. The change is not one that can be described briefly. It can be roughly indicated by saying that the earlier work seemed to be produced by the ideal type of a generation, and asked for Mr. Eliot to be looked upon almost as an institution, whereas this later work, though not more individual, is far more personal. What seems certain is that it forms a transition to a stage of Mr. Eliot's work which has not yet fully defined itself.

84.  
CONRAD AIKEN, AFTER 'ASH-  
WEDNESDAY', 'POETRY'  
December 1934, vol. xlv, 161-5

Aiken considered not only 'The Rock' but also 'After Strange Gods'  
(London, 22 February 1934; New York, 19 April 1934).

To read these two new books of Mr. Eliot's together is to be made more than ever uncomfortable about his present predicament, his present position and direction. It is unfair to examine a lecture as closely as one would an essay in criticism, and 'After Strange Gods' consists, of course, of three lectures delivered at the University of Virginia. It is equally unfair to judge the printed text of a pageant, a pageant written in co-operation with others and for performance on a special occasion, as one would judge a new book of poems presented in the ordinary way. In other words, one must begin by discounting both books as not quite 'pure' Eliot. Nevertheless, there they are, they must be fitted into the Eliot tradition, they fall into line, and Mr. Eliot himself invites the comparison by publishing them; and it must be confessed that they leave one with a feeling of dissatisfaction and uncertainty.

The lectures consist chiefly of an extension and elaboration of the now famous essay in 'The Sacred Wood' —Tradition and the Individual Talent. It is difficult to see that they add much of importance, whether in refinement of perception, or in division or addition; if anything, they are a dilution of the earlier work, they seem a little thin. Of course, as we all know, Mr. Eliot has turned to religion in the interval of thirteen years between 'The Sacred Wood' and 'After Strange Gods,' and it is not without a melancholy interest to consider the later book in this special light. From 'tradition' to 'orthodoxy' was, in the circumstances, a natural semantic and mantic step to take; Mr. Eliot takes it, and is at no pains to conceal it. Everywhere here is the implication that not only is it of vital importance for the artist (as individual) to remain in a sort of conscious connection with the tradition from which he springs, but also that if this contact can be further or more deeply extended to include a connection with the Church he will be safer still. Leaving aside, as one must, the whole question of religious belief, or of orthodox religion,

nevertheless one is at once aware that the change in Mr. Eliot's critical attitude is decidedly in the direction of limitation. Already, in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, his emphasis was not so much on the *freedom* offered the artist by tradition as on the restrictions; the use of tradition was rather to hold one back than to release one for a forward step of exploration; in short, the position was a cautious one. The effect of orthodoxy is not unnaturally to deepen this timidity. If little room was then left for the individual's 'free play,' there is now very much less. As a mother of the arts, Mr. Eliot's 'tradition' would be a very anxious and possessive one indeed; and (one is afraid) very crippling. Individualism must go by the board—if such a program should become universal—and the creative renewal of the arts fall to so low a level as to lead inevitably to stagnation. With the death of the individual would come the death of tradition; and art would be simply a history.

A curious state of things, a curious attitude in one who has himself been one of the most pronouncedly and creatively 'individual' of contemporary writers, and himself therefore a pretty violent *creator* of tradition; and one immediately begins to wonder what effect his doctrines will have on his own poetry. 'The Rock' alone cannot give us much of an answer, for as observed above, it is not a 'pure' offering, but an amalgam. In conjunction, however, with the handful of poems which Mr. Eliot has given us in the twelve years since he published 'The Waste Land,' it is enough to make one uneasy. Without in any way detracting from the extraordinary beauty of 'AshWednesday' or 'Marina,' or from the occasional brilliance of other of the later poems, one cannot fail to notice a contraction both of interest and power in the recent work. 'Ash-Wednesday,' let it be said at once, is perhaps the most beautiful of all Mr. Eliot's poems: it seems not unlikely that its 'value' will outlast that of 'The Waste Land.' It is purer and less violent; it depends less on shock, though elements of shock are still there, enough of them to give energy; in Mr. Eliot's own sense, it is more absolutely a poem, has a new being and constitutes a new experience, and is so much more without 'reference,' or conscious reference, and so much more heavily weighted with unconscious reference (or *affect*) as to approach the kind of heavenly meaninglessness which we call pure poetry. But, though we can like it better than 'The Waste Land,' or feel it to be finer, we also feel it to mark the beginning of a diminution of vigor and variousness: the circle has narrowed, and it has gone on narrowing.

We cannot, of course, argue that this change is due to the change in Mr. Eliot's views, any more than we can argue that some deeper diminution of energy led to the change of view; all we can do is observe that the two things have gone together. In 'The Rock,' the choruses are not the very best Eliot, though they are skilful and beautiful; they are admirably calculated for declamation; they have an excellent hardness and plainness; but at times one feels the cunning of the rhetoric and the rhythm to be almost too glib and easy, and as if usurping the place of what would formerly have been a richer and more natural inventiveness.

Mr. Eliot remarks, in 'After Strange Gods,' that to write religious poetry is one of the most difficult of all things. *Orthodox* religious poetry, yes: for that is merely to state, or to state by referring, or to argue: which is propaganda, or something

very like it, as long as it remains within that given frame of traditional or taught conviction, as it must. It is this that makes one uneasy about Mr. Eliot's future: this and his converse belief that poetry, or the poetic genius, cannot be a substitute for religion. To many of us it must appear that 'orthodox religion,' on the one hand, and 'tradition,' on the other, are simply nothing but a temporary conservatism, or freezing in formula, of the initial poetic impulse. Beyond a certain point, or for more than a given time, it *cannot* be formalized: along comes a poet who reaches through it to the thing itself. Perhaps Mr. Eliot's experiment with dramatic form in 'The Rock,' which must have been as highly suggestive to himself as to his auditors and readers, will release him once more in ways which neither he nor ourselves can foresee.

# ‘Murder in the Cathedral’

First performed in the chapter house, Canterbury Cathedral, on the evening of 15 June 1935;

first (acting) edition, London, 10 May 1935;

first complete edition, London, 13 June 1935;

first American edition, New York, 19 September 1935

UNSIGNED REVIEW, MR. ELIOT'S NEW  
PLAY, 'TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT'

13 June 1935, no. 1741, 376

Mr. Eliot's new work of poetic drama has moved farther from the theatre than his previous attempts and come nearer to the Church. It is written for production in Canterbury Cathedral this week. Its conventions have more in common with ritual than with the stage, as in the earliest English drama; and these conventions which he has adopted, including strong use of a chorus, are well assimilated to the whole texture. In 'The Rock' they were often self-conscious, but here they have become subordinate, natural, appropriate. The play might be described as a poem for several voices used liturgically.

The subject covered by a title that echoes detective fiction is Thomas Becket's assassination. It is told without an obvious propagandist intention, which was not the case with 'The Rock.' We open with Becket returning after seven years abroad, to a scene which has been prepared by a chorus of Canterbury women, who speak in strikingly simple language:-

[Quotes CPP, p. 243, 'Here is no continuing city' to 'return to France'.]

But Becket, who is shown throughout as one ready for death, will not accept any warning. Tempters appear. One tempter would have him revive the worldly pleasures of his youth, and when rejected remarks:- 'I leave you to the pleasures of your higher vices.' Another tempter would have him re-seek the power he once held as Chancellor. To whom Becket replies:-

Those who put their faith in worldly order  
Not controlled by the order of God,  
In confident ignorance, but arrest disorder,  
Make it fast, breed fatal disease,  
Degrade what they exalt.

A third tempter would have him lead rebellion against the king; a fourth makes a subtler appeal—to triumph over his enemies by martyrdom:-

Think, Thomas, think of enemies dismayed,  
 Creeping in penance, frightened by a shade..,  
 Think of miracles, by God's grace,  
 And think of your enemies in another place.

But Becket is aware of the danger of this last temptation: 'to do the right deed for the wrong reason.'

As an interlude we see him preaching in the cathedral on Christmas morning, 1170, when he pronounces his view that a Christian martyrdom is not the effect of man's will to become a saint. He says:-

A martyr, a saint, is always made by the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways...the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom.

He concludes his sermon by saying he does not think he will ever preach to them again.

In Part II, the murder takes place. First, the four knights accuse Becket. The priests try to persuade him to take sanctuary, but he is more than ready for death: 'I have had a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper, And I would no longer be denied.' When the priests carry him by force into the cathedral, he makes them unbar the doors. The knights enter, slightly tipsy, and kill him. They then, in mock-elaborate prose, justify themselves, urging that their act is disinterested, that Becket's crime was his failure to unite temporal and spiritual office (Chancellor and Archbishop), 'an almost ideal State,' and that by his attitude he more or less killed himself.

All through the play the two main notes are of Becket with his *idée fixe* of fulfilment in death and of the chorus exhibiting a sense of approaching death. Mr. Eliot's talent seems to be most effective in this second note, of imminent desolation:-

The forms take shape in the dark air:  
 Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear,  
 Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyena waiting  
 For laughter, laughter, laughter.

Or, again, a recurrence of the undersea imagery of his early work:-



I have lain on the floor of the sea and breathed with the breathing of the sea-anemone, swallowed with ingurgitation of the sponge. I have lain in the soil and criticized the worm.

But those former contradictions which were the special surprise of Mr. Eliot's verse are here fused. This is his most unified writing. He has admirably brought to maturity his long experimenting for a dramatic style, the chief merit of which lies in his writing for a chorus.

I.M. PARSONS, FROM POETRY, DRAMA  
AND SATIRE, 'SPECTATOR'

28 June 1935, vol. cliv, 1112

Parsons (1906–80) was chairman of Chatto & Windus from 1954 to 1974. He is known particularly for his anthology of First World War poetry, 'Men Who March Away' (1965). In the 'Spectator' for 22 October 1932, he entered into controversy with Rebecca West over Eliot's 'Selected Essays 1917–1932', which he had reviewed and defended against her in the 'Spectator' on 8 October.

In this review Parsons also considered Auden and Isherwood's 'The Dog Beneath the Skin', which he found 'a shoddy affair, a half-baked little satire which gets nowhere'.

Artists, it has been said, usually know what is best for themselves. And certainly Mr. Eliot's preoccupation with religion, in which many critics saw the end of his poetry and the stultification of his criticism, wears a different aspect in the light of his latest work. 'Murder in the Cathedral' is an historical episode, or series of episodes, dealing with the life and death of Thomas à Becket. The action takes place alternately in the Archbishop's Hall and in the Cathedral at Canterbury, and covers the last few weeks of Becket's life. The episodes are linked by a chorus of Women of Canterbury, and divided into two parts by a prose interlude in which Becket preaches in the Cathedral on Christmas Day, 1170. So much for the frame of the piece. To suggest its essential quality is not so simple. One might begin by referring to the choruses, used in the Greek manner to create an atmosphere of impending evil, among an audience expectantly acquainted with the outcome of the plot.

Some presage of an act  
Which our eyes are compelled to witness, has forced our feet  
Towards the Cathedral. We are forced to bear witness.

Or to Becket's tempters, advocates in turn of luxury, temporal power, and spiritual glory through martyrdom, whose arguments are used both to reveal Thomas's character and to introduce relevant details of his past life:

If you will remember me, my Lord, at your prayers,  
I'll remember you at kissing-time below the stairs.

Or to the Christmas sermon, Becket's final affirmation of his position, which acts as a bridge between the psychological action of Part I and the physical action of Part II. All these are important to the play's effectiveness, contribute to its atmosphere, construction and presentation of character. But equally one might mention those passages of the chorus in which the stress is not on the fate that is foreboded, but on the fate that is the portion of the common man:

Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire,

passages in which Mr. Eliot's particular touch is most revealing and most assured. Or to the skilful variety of tone and modulations of rhythm in the Tempter's speeches; or to the scene immediately following the murder when the four knights advance and address the audience in justification of their act: a scene whose satire gives point to the main theme of the play, while relieving the tension created by the climax and providing a smooth elision to the exaltation of the final chorus. All these again are part of the play's quality, though still only part. Its main quality is bound up inextricably with the written word, which cannot be paraphrased. And if one were to start quoting it would be hard to know where to begin or where to stop. For the play is a dramatic poem, and has an imaginative unity which does not lend itself to brief quotation. An imaginative unity...there perhaps is the essence of the matter. Many people could have made a play out of Becket's murder—an instructive play, a witty play, a good thriller or a moral tale. Mr. Eliot has done more: he has reanimated a literary form which in England has been dead or dormant for nearly three hundred years, and in doing so he has found himself anew as a poet, only with an added ease, lucidity and objectiveness.

87.

JAMES LAUGHLIN, MR. ELIOT ON HOLY  
GROUND, 'NEW ENGLISH WEEKLY'

11 July 1935, vol. vii, 250–1

Laughlin (b. 1914) founded *New Directions* in 1936, and became the leading American publisher of the avantgarde.

...wherever a martyr has  
given his blood for the blood of Christ,  
There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it  
Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come with guide-books  
looking over it...

However you want to feel about Mr. Eliot's 'position,' 'Murder in the Cathedral' proves that he is still a great master of metric and that he knows how to put together a play. These new lines do not sparkle as do those of 'The Waste Land,' but in their quiet way they are perfect.

The mind jumps at once to the problem of poetry and belief, but I don't want to get myself entangled in that. Mr. Eliot himself has treated it quite adequately in his essay on Dante. It is enough to say that although an Anglican vicar will naturally feel more excited about this play than others would, agnostics and heretics need not abstain, as it contains enough intellectual pabulum to hold all their attention. For example, you can do a lot of thinking about Mr. Eliot's blending of Aristotelian tragedy with Christian dogma.

The play begins in the best Greek manner with a Chorus (of the women of Canterbury) chanting of bad things to come and a Herald ushering in the Protagonist. But with A'Becket's first speech you realize that here is no Oedipus about to be battered from all sides by blind fate, but a Christian martyr forging his own destiny with eyes open to the forces moving against him.

Thomas: (to the priests who have rebuked the women for their 'croaking like frogs in the tree-tops.')

[Quotes CPP, p. 245, 'Peace. And let them be' to 'forever still'.]

These lines deserve your careful analysis, for they are not only the principle motif of the play, but as well, I think, a deliberate expression of the poet's philosophy. Roughly I interpret them as orthodox Thomism; in any case they indicate the intellectual nature of Eliot's faith.

Reading Sophocles I always get the impression of flyswatting—of a superhuman hand suddenly reaching down from nowhere to crush a bewildered little animal. Thus in the Greek frame such a line as

And which all must suffer that they may will it...

is all out of drawing. What is Eliot's purpose in this distortion?

An examination of the psychological angle provides the clue. Aristotle's criteria call for pity and terror to induce the catharsis. But the fall of A'Becket produces neither; he forsores his doom and declines escape though it is offered—hence no terror; he is obviously ready for death and glad to fulfill his faith—and so no pity. And yet the play's action does release emotion within the observer. Of what kind? The same, I think, as is aroused by a Medieval Mystery or Miracle, one of religious exaltation, of completion of faith. It is clear then that Eliot has attempted a fusion of the Classic and Medieval dramatic formulae. Perhaps this will offend the purist, but for me it is curious and thought-provoking.

Is this fusion purely a technical matter, or does Eliot intend a deeper meaning? Does he wish to indicate a fundamental affinity between the Classic and Christian tempers? Does this duality reflect a similar tendency in his own thought? Or is he, in blending an act of faith with tragedy, merely recalling that Greek drama had its origin in the religious ritual of the Goat Song, in which masked priests induced a mystic ecstasy in the celebrants by their chant and pantomime? I guess you would have to ask him.

To make his work completely solid Eliot presents through the assassins' after-murder speeches a clear analysis of the historical forces conditioning the event. A'Becket would not compromise between Church and State and was put on the spot. The knights speak in prose.

Throughout 'Murder in the Cathedral' the versification is of a high and even quality. There are few lines which will catch in your memory and stick there, as do so many of those of the 'Waste Land,' and the poems in 'Prufrock,' but neither is there a faulty line. There is no fixed metre, but there is, in the best sense, a fine free metric. Mr. Eliot has been to school and knows his language-tones and sound-lengths as few others do. He can cut a line of sound in time so that it comes off the page to you as a tangible design. His cadences are soft and cool and flowing, but there is never an unnecessary word. The language is highly charged with meaning, but there is no looseness of rhetoric. The craftsmanship of the verse is so unostentatious that you must look closely to see all the richness of detail.

[Quotes CPP, p. 257, 'We are not ignorant women' to 'drinking and laughter'.]

Yes, it's a long, long way to 'Prufrock,' it's a long long way from here. There has been much change, but I think it is in the nature of a fertile evolution and not sterile decline.

And yet is the change so great? 'Murder in the Cathedral'...hardly a title chosen by a religious recluse! And even back in 1917 (with apologies to the HIPPOPOTAMUS) we find that

the True Church can never fail  
For it is based upon a rock.

88.  
EDWIN MUIR, NEW LITERATURE,  
'LONDON MERCURY'  
July 1935, vol. xxxii, 281–3

Muir (1887–1959) was a poet, critic and translator. In 1965, Faber & Faber published his 'Selected Poems', edited and with a preface by Eliot.

Mr. Eliot's latest play is an interesting and moving piece of work and, unlike 'The Rock', a unified one. The drama is simple, direct and closely knit, and it proceeds within an intellectual scheme which is stated quite early in the play and is never forgotten during the rest of the action, which in turn is circumscribed by it and takes its governing significance from it. The scheme of the action, that is to say, is related to or rather becomes part of a scheme of human action in general, seen timelessly. This scheme of human action is tentatively stated in the first chorus by the poor women of Canterbury with which the play opens:

[Quotes CPP, p. 240, 'We wait, we wait' to 'pattern of time'.]

It is stated more definitely by Thomas at his first entrance, in a reply to one of the priests who had reproved the women for 'croaking like frogs in the tree-tops':

[Quotes CPP, p. 245, 'Peace. And let them be' to 'forever still'.]

This image of the wheel recurs again in Thomas's reply to the First Tempter:

[Quotes CPP, p. 247, 'Men learn little' to 'on which he turns'.]

And a little farther on he says:

You come twenty years too late.

This is Mr. Eliot's image of earthly life: the wheel that turns and is forever still. But as man is a spirit he is not completely bound to this wheel with every power; and this is the other aspect of the intellectual scheme of the play. The first clear statement of it comes at the end of the first act, when Thomas deliberately embraces his martyrdom, which he sees is bound to follow:

[Quotes CPP, pp. 258–9, 'I know what yet remains' to 'the sword's end'.]

The last line is the crucial one, for it declares that Thomas, by purification of the will, has set himself free from the wheel. This mystery is dealt with more fully in the sermon which follows, forming an interlude between the first and the second (and last) act, and dealing with martyrdom. 'Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men.... A martyrdom is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God.' These quotations should make clear the main lines of the action, which is both earthly and transcendental, a matter therefore both for grief and rejoicing (part of the sermon deals with this question, how believers can sorrow and rejoice at the same action). The meaning of the whole play is summed up in a few lines spoken by Thomas before his death:

I give my life  
 To the Law of God above the Law of Man.  
 Those who do not the same  
 How should they know what I do?

That expresses both the nature of Thomas's action and the mystery implied in it. And this is what Mr. Eliot is mainly concerned with, and without bearing it in mind the drama loses most of its meaning.

It is not for a reviewer to agree or disagree with the intellectual scheme of a work of imagination; all that he need be concerned with is its consistency, and its imaginative and dramatic force. From the outline I have given I think it will be clear that the intellectual fabric of this play is quite unusually consistent and closely knit, and also imaginatively impressive. But it is the dramatic force that it conveys to the action that is perhaps most striking of all; for one might almost say that the action owes its ultimate force to the consistency with which Mr. Eliot's imagination has moved within the bounds of his general conception of human action, stated abstractly in the passages which I have quoted. It may be said, of course, that every work of imagination moves within the limits of its author's general conception of human action; but here the conception is held far more clearly and consistently than in most dramatic works, and the result is not only a greater intellectual, but a greater dramatic intensity, for every utterance of the actors being given its exact place in the scheme, is given also a more packed and full meaning. Sometimes, it seems to me, Mr. Eliot secures this precision at the expense of imaginative freedom, particularly in the figures of the four knights, who represent the ordinary man of action. But the action itself as he conceives it is truly dramatic; the figure of Thomas in particular is beautifully imagined: the scene between him and the Tempters being probably the finest in the play.

Obviously a play conceived on such terms as these must have a number of meanings apart from or flowing from the main one. 'I give my life To the Law of God above the Law of Man' clearly expresses one of them and one which at present



is of the utmost urgency: the rival claims of religion and politics. In this question one feels that Mr. Eliot is on the same side as Thomas Becket; but what he has written is a play, and so he has to state both sides. In the first act both sides are finely balanced, and that is what makes it so strong dramatically; in the second the murderers of Becket are somewhat burlesqued and belittled, and even though they may have been in themselves quite commonplace or even ridiculous characters, Mr. Eliot by making them actually so loses the feeling, which he catches so finely in the scene of the Tempters, of the deep and permanent worldly power which they represent: they have not enough behind them. He holds the balance between the two powers in the first act, but in the second he actually gives the impression of making Becket's triumph too easy, perhaps a strange complaint to make about a dramatic representation of martyrdom. The Chorus immediately preceding the murder, on the other hand, is one of the finest in the whole play. But this poetic drama, unlike 'The Rock', does not depend on the choruses. It is a unified work, and a work of great beauty.

MARK VAN DOREN, THE HOLY BLISFUL  
MARTIR, 'NATION' (NEW YORK)

9 October 1935, vol. cxli, 417

It is only in a minor sense that the action of Mr. Eliot's play can be understood as taking place at Canterbury. The stage directions put it there; the chorus is composed of women from the town; the Archbishop stands and talks in his own hall, and at the end is murdered by four English knights while he prays before the cathedral altar; and the date, 1170, is displayed with sufficient prominence. But the peculiar merit of the poet has little to do with all this. It has rather to do with the fact that Mr. Eliot has confined himself with a strict and icy purity to the one aspect of the story which he was equipped to treat. This aspect is such as not even to suggest a comparison with Shakespeare, whose kind of humanity Mr. Eliot nowhere attempts. It suggests only Mr. Eliot, who achieves perfection here to the degree that he explores his own mind and employs his own art.

He is concerned first and last with the morality, or perhaps it is the theology, of martyrdom. Chaucer's 'holy blisful martir' is so far from blissful in these pages as to strike a kind of silent terror in the spectator's heart through the spectacle of his bleak and puzzled loneliness. And as for his holiness—ah, that is a question which Mr. Eliot is unable to answer. Indeed the impossibility of answering it is the theme of the play. For who can say that Thomas Becket was without spiritual pride when he determined to obey his instinct of martyrdom? Who can say that he exposed himself to the swords for any better reason than a certain tempter gave him—this tempter being the last of four, and the most deadly of them because he urges 'the right deed,' namely martyrdom, for 'the wrong reason,' namely glory? The point is plainly made that if Thomas suffered death for the sake of power and glory he was not holy; and there is abundant evidence, both before and after the catastrophe at the altar, that most of England felt a fanaticism in his final act. But the point is as plainly made that this particular martyrdom may have been designed in heaven, where 'the Saints are most high, having made themselves most low.' As for an earthly solution to the problem, there is and can be none; nor can Thomas's own words to himself be taken as testimony, since he dies a man and not a saint, and speaks accordingly—as one, that is to say, who desires to know rather than knows.

'Murder in the Cathedral' has been compared with 'Saint Joan,' but it is both higher and thinner than that; higher because it rises above the merely political problem of obedience to authority, and thinner because theology must always be thin on any stage, even the stage to which Mr. Eliot adapts himself with such dignity, simplicity, and skill. Within its limits the play is a masterpiece, a thing of crystal whose appearance of flawlessness is not altered by the weird reality of the four speeches in prose delivered by the murderers after their job is done. For the irony which tinkles through those speeches is merely the accompaniment of an irony pervading the whole, and reaching its deepest tones in the last words of Becket. Mr. Eliot has written no better poem than this, and none which seems simpler. It is of course not simple; but that is another of its ironies.

F.O.MATTHIESSEN, T.S.ELIOT'S DRAMA  
OF BECKET, 'SATURDAY REVIEW'

12 October 1935, vol. xii, 10–11

Matthiessen (1902–1950), an American critic, wrote extensively on American literature. 'The Achievement of T.S. Eliot', first published in 1935, has since become a standard work. H.A.Mason's review of it in 'Scrutiny' (4 December 1935), iv, 311–12, gives a good sense of the 'Scrutiny' group's marked antipathy towards what was seen as Eliot's appropriation by an 'academic' mentality. 'It is this success in detail due to careful research (there is a very neat chapter on the "influences"), and this failure in presenting a total valuation that I consider academic.'

That 'Murder in the Cathedral' was produced at this summer's Canterbury Festival with apparently considerable success, should not surprise anyone who has tried reading it aloud. For not only do its lines fall naturally into spoken patterns, but, even more importantly, its structure is dramatically conceived as a *whole*, each of its two parts building strongly up to a climax. In this respect it is in marked contrast with Eliot's two previous experiments with drama. 'Sweeney Agonistes,' 1927, which broke away from the packed intricacy of his former poetry by attempting to utilize music-hall rhythms, was left as a fragment. 'The Rock,' which was written for production at Sadler's Wells last year, was more in the nature of a ritualistic pageant than a play.

But in this play presenting the martyrdom of Becket, the poet has worked out an original and effective form. Its general construction and its choruses bear a kinship to the kind of classical drama represented by Milton's 'Samson'; in its characterization by types, especially in the four Tempters in the first part and the four Knights in the second, it shows a relationship also to the medieval morality plays. But it is naturally far more supple than these latter. The varied movement of its long lines seems often to have sprung from the response of the poet's ear to the cadences of the Bible and the Catholic Mass. As a result it demonstrates at last the fruitfulness of the belief that Eliot voiced in his Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry

in 1928, that the essentially dramatic quality of church ritual might again furnish a stimulation and release for poetic drama.

Recent criticism has tended to insist that a poet should find his material in his immediate surroundings, claiming that otherwise he takes refuge in a world of his own fancy and fails to portray an authentic relation with the urgent problems of society. And it is probably a matter of considerable skepticism to many readers as to wherein the career of a twelfth-century archbishop can have much relevancy to existence as they know it. What Eliot argued, in pointing out that Pound's translations from the early Italian poets are often much more 'modern' than his contemporary sketches, seems to me far more searching: that 'it is irrelevant whether what you see, really see, as a human being is Arnaut Daniel or your greengrocer'; the important consideration is to grasp the permanent elements in human nature. To what degree Eliot has grasped and portrayed such elements in this poem can be briefly suggested by a speech in which Thomas, addressing one of his Priests, meditates on the lot of the Chorus, the working women of Canterbury:

[Quotes CPP, p. 245, 'They speak better' to 'forever still'.]

The full weight and meaning of such a passage can be appreciated only in its context; but it is at once apparent how closely its assumptions relate to Eliot's long absorption in the view of life that has been best expressed in poetry by Dante. Here, in this speech of Becket's, Eliot reveals an increased share of the depth of understanding which also characterizes Dante, not merely of an acute part of life but of its total pattern, a pattern that embraces not only 'the eternal burden' but 'the perpetual glory' as well. Here is a voicing of the subtle interweaving of suffering, striving, and acceptance that unite to form the attitude that finds expression in such a line in the 'Paradiso' as

la sua voluntade è nostra pace.

Here, in this mature reflection on the incalculably intricate relation between feeling and action, is the poetic statement of what Eliot has in mind when, discussing the relation of the individual to society, he refers to 'the Catholic paradox: society is for the salvation of the individual and the individual must be sacrificed to society. Communism is merely a heresy, but a heresy is better than nothing.'

The dramatic conflict in the first part of the work is an inner one, of a sort that shows Eliot even more clearly than ever in the tradition of Henry James, and, more especially here, of Hawthorne. For the conflict is Becket's struggle against pride and his final transcendence over it. The last Tempter speaks to him insidiously in words that had often been Becket's own thoughts, luring him on to martyrdom not as a result of losing his will in God's, but as an act of self-aggrandizement, as a final overweening of his pride. Tortured by a dilemma in which it seems to him that he can 'neither act nor suffer without perdition,' and where all existence consequently seems unreal, he fights his way through to his final resolve:

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:  
 Temptation shall not come in this kind again.  
 The last temptation is the greatest treason:  
 To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

Thus fortified, his will at last made perfect in acceptance of God's will, he continues to maintain the supremacy of the law of God above the law of man, and goes forward, in the second part, to his death at the hands of the Knights.

It is upon his consecration to perseverance in his career and the world's denial of its value that the dramatic conflict of the second part hinges. Immediately after the murder, in the most effectively unexpected passage of the play, the Knights themselves turn to the audience, and, speaking in prose, conduct a systematic defense of their act. The writing of their speeches is masterly in its wit and irony: the Knights fall naturally into all the clichés of an actual present day parliamentary debate.

The contrast between them and Becket is thoroughly presented. Becket argues throughout—in passages which illuminate Eliot's apprehension of human history—that the Knights, by judging only from results, by deferring always to the appearance of social circumstance, have blurred all distinction between good and evil. In consequence of their conception of deterministic process, no individual can be blamed for oppression, exploitation, or crime that he undertakes in the cause of the State. There are only social forces and expediency, the responsibility of a human will for its own actions has been utterly lost. But in opposing this doctrine with his life, in reasserting the value of the idea as rising above that of the fact, Becket's is never a plea for the individual without the deepest obligations to society. His most characteristic tones sound in his experienced thoughts, again concluding in the image of the turning wheel, on the inexorability of man's fate as part of a force far greater than himself:

[Quotes CPP, p. 247, 'We do not know' to 'on which he turns'.]

The samples of the verse that I have been able to include here by no means suggest its freedom and variety. Never departing in any of his variations far enough from the norm of blank verse to break down his formal pattern, Eliot reveals throughout the controlled mastery of technique that, among other living poets writing in English, only Yeats can rival.

The lines quoted are sufficient, however, to show this play's principal defect. Though the language is both sharp and precise, it is extremely bare. It avails itself very little of the new life that comes from sensuous imagery; and compared with Eliot's early work, many passages, particularly those spoken by the Priests, seem attenuated. A relative lack of density also emerges in comparing the play as a whole with 'The Waste Land.' This is partly owing to the fact that in 'The Waste Land' the poet employed symbols which maintained the action continually in the present at the same time that he was exploring analogies with the past. In the play, though centering throughout on problems that reveal the 'permanent in human

nature,' he has not made that complete fusion. His imagination has not created the illusion of a four-dimensional world; the characters remain partly abstractions. Putting it in terms of the usual objection to historical fiction, one could say that the life represented is lacking something in immediacy and urgency, an objection that is forgotten only in the face of a 'Coriolanus' or a 'Phèdre.' Nevertheless, this play—the title of which, with its unfortunately smart suggestion of a detective story I have done my best to avoid—even though it does not reach the rank of Eliot's most nearly perfect work of art, 'Ash-Wednesday,' demonstrates how Eliot has survived both popularity and unpopularity, both generously bestowed frequently for the wrong reasons. He has gone on undistracted, cultivating and perfecting his craft, and bringing to bear upon it his accruing experience.

91.  
EDWARD SHILLITO, REVIEW,  
'CHRISTIAN CENTURY'  
2 October 1935, vol. lii, 1249–50

Shillito (1872–1948), an Anglican clergyman, and poet, published a number of works of Christian apologetics, including 'Man's Other Religion' (1933) and 'The Way of the Witnesses' (1936).

At the Canterbury festival in June, Mr. T.S.Eliot's play, 'Murder in the Cathedral,' was produced. It marks an advance in the work of this poet. Last year he wrote 'The Rock,' but in his new play he has done what he could not do in that; he has shaped a drama which has a unity throughout, such as a Greek drama had. In his earlier work it was chiefly in the choruses that the reader looked for the mind of Mr. Eliot. The new drama, which deals with the death of Archbishop Thomas Becket, is of one piece and everywhere shows the same creative imagination. Mr. T.S.Eliot in his new work has won for religious drama a fresh hearing. Whether we admire it or not, we cannot ignore it. In my judgment it is a noble drama of enduring worth.

Like other supposed revolutionaries in literature, Mr. Eliot is in reality a reverent student of the great traditions. His method is in many ways like that of the Greek tragedians and yet it is new, since it is handled by a new thinker living in new spiritual realms.

It is strictly historical and yet while all the time the reader is in the Canterbury of 1170, he is haunted by the thought that the conflict is still taking place. All the great spiritual conflicts are never finally answered. It belongs to the greatness of a play that, even when the modern scene is not mentioned, it should be before the reader's inner eye. While he thinks of Canterbury 1170, he may be in Moscow or Munich 1935. There is still the question before us how the two kingdoms are to be related, the kingdom of nature and the kingdom of grace; the state and the church; the prince and the spiritual ruler; the law of man and the law of God.

The one supreme difficulty for the writer of religious drama is to find a scene of action in which the spiritual world shall find true and indeed inevitable expression. The murder of Becket in the cathedral provides such an action. It was



no accident; the deed was not done by some madmen with no intelligible purpose. As the poet tells the story, it was a significant deed, taking its place as a crisis in a drama, which deals with one of the great issues for man, not in that age but in all ages. St. Thomas himself sees clearly what his death means:

It is not in time that my death shall be known;  
 It is out of time that my decision is taken  
 If you call that decision  
 To which my whole being gives entire consent.  
 I give my life  
 To the law of God above the law of Man.  
 Those who do not the same  
 How should they know what I do?

There had been times in the life of Becket, in which the loyalties of his life had been disordered. He had submitted himself to the temporal power to secure his ends as a servant of God. Now he resists one by one the tempters who call him back to this and other passages of his life. He stands before us in the play not as a man who has kept one way from youth. Thomas says of himself:

[Quotes CPP, p. 258, 'Thirty years ago' to 'equally desirable'.]

And afterwards ambition had come to him to win power as the servant of a king. But then the call had come to him to serve God above all other services. It is with this Thomas Becket we have to do. Tempters in the play call him back to the easier ways of his past. But he scorns them. One tempter alone makes an appeal to him and this because he interprets to him the secret thoughts and desires against which he has always to fight.

Why is he ready to die? What motive is moving him? Why do martyrs die? The fourth tempter reveals the temptation which may come to the servant of God who is set in a place where he may retreat or be faithful even unto death. Thomas may win a kingly rule from his tomb; at his glittering shrine men would bend the knee. The time would come when that sanctuary would be pillaged; yet he would be in a glory surpassing all that earth would give. Who would not suffer the brief pain of death for this glory? The tempter says:

Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest  
 On earth, to be high in heaven.

Thomas knows what these voices mean. He knows that the man who is faced by death for the sake of God may be tempted to do the right thing for the wrong motive. But in the sermon which he preaches on Christmas morning he tells what Christian martyrdom is and in the spirit of his own words he makes perfect his will:

Ambition fortifies the will of man to become ruler over other men; it operates with deception, cajolery and violence, it is the action of impurity upon

impurity. Not so in Heaven. A martyr or saint is always made by the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. A martyrdom is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom.

In this faith the archbishop offers himself to God, ready to suffer with his blood.

This is the sign of the church always,  
 The sign of blood. Blood for blood.  
 His blood given to buy my life,  
 My blood given to pay for His death,  
 My death for His death.

It is not hard, even for those who have not seen the drama, to imagine how impressive it must have been. Not since 'St Joan' has there been any play on the English stage in which such tremendous issues as this have been treated with such mastery of thought, as well as dramatic power.

The chorus consists of women of Canterbury; they use the same splendid incantations which were used in 'The Rock.' These women let the spectator see how the common folk are involved in this murder. Every sorrow has a kind of end, for there is no time in life to grieve long.

But this, this is out of life, this is out of time  
 An instant eternity of evil and wrong. It shows a world that is 'wholly foul.'

But as the book is put down, the outstanding memory is of the discussion of martyrdom and of the way in which the martyr must bear himself if he is not to sin even in his high calling. The higher the spiritual destiny the more terrible is the sin of the man who does not make his calling and election sure. The martyr has not the same temptation as other men; he has his own; and that is a more searching temptation than any other he has known before.

Thomas Becket will die; but how will he die?

The question has a curiously modern value. In India Mahatma Gandhi believes in martyrdom; but he believes in seeking it as a way of winning the dull and listless children of men to his cause. This is not martyrdom in the Christian use of the word.

A Christian must be ready to die for his faith, and he must die gladly, for this is the only way in which under certain conditions he can serve. But he must not seek death to win spiritual glory, nor must he die as a deliberate way of serving a cause. He must suffer in pure love to God. If I give my body to be burned and have not love, I am nothing.

Canterbury is a city in which no one can escape from the memory of that hour in which the knights killed the archbishop. It is fitting that such a martyr should be remembered there. It is no less fitting when it is recalled through what stages Thomas Becket had passed before he won his crown. The church of Christ rightly remembers the last act into which the martyr puts his heart:

For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has  
    given his blood for the blood of Christ,  
There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart  
    from it  
Though armies trample over it, though sightseers come  
    with guide-books looking over it.

From such places the earth is forever renewed. Let us praise the noble army of martyrs.

But it is also a true theme for drama to show how in that last hour the soul of the martyr met and conquered the last temptation, which is to do right from the wrong motive.

FREDERICK A.POTTLE, FROM DRAMA  
OF ACTION, 'YALE REVIEW'

December 1935, vol. xxv, 426–9

Pottle (b. 1897), an American academic, was Professor of English at Yale from 1930 to 1966.

Drama in our days is struggling towards a new birth; the change can best be described by saying that our most gifted authors are deeply dissatisfied with drama of character and are turning to drama of plot. Their lively interest in Greek tragedy is symptomatic. Mr. MacLeish studies Sophocles and Mr. O'Neill refers to Aeschylus. But to write genuine drama of plot, of action, in our days is not altogether a matter of choice. The essence of Greek drama is religious certainty; an unshaken conviction that there is an order of things in the universe more real and more important than the individual hero. The difficulty which most modern playwrights face is that, lacking religious certainty, they have to invent an equivalent—to set up deliberately the external sanctions by which alone drama of plot can be organized. They start with a considerable—perhaps an insuperable—handicap. An artist who really feels dogmatic Christianity will have the advantage; and so also, it appears, will a convert to that most striking of modern religions—communism.

In June, 1934, Mr. T.S.Eliot published his first completed drama, 'The Rock,' a pageant-play written and produced in the interest of a London church fund. 'The Rock' was admitted Anglican propaganda. A clergyman furnished Mr. Eliot with a scenario for which he wrote words. The internal evidence of collaboration is abundant. No one, familiar with Eliot's earlier works, would expect him to have chosen just that subject matter, not to have put it together in just that way. Yet the foreign matter is, to a remarkable extent, dominated by his astringent personality, and the overtones of the piece are so characteristic that one wonders whether they may not have caused his clerical sponsors some misgivings. He introduced a chorus, and within the speeches of the chorus (which probably contain the best Christian poetry of our time) he moved freely, reiterating that arid and austere Christian faith which he had announced in 'Ash-Wednesday.' His scenario, one

fancies, must have tended towards a facile optimism, but for him the air was still thoroughly small and dry. He repudiated the notion of progress in the Church Militant. Churches must be always building, not as part of a slow but ultimately triumphant penetration of the powers of darkness, but because churches are always decaying and we must bear witness.

If the blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps  
 We must first build the steps;  
 And if the Temple is to be cast down  
 We must first build the Temple.

Man's duty is simple and single: it is to 'make perfect his will.'

In 'Murder in the Cathedral' Eliot resumes that text and founds an entire action upon it. The murder of Thomas à Becket is only a terminus, clearly announced from the very beginning of the piece. Far from striving to escape martyrdom, Thomas welcomes it. His struggle is to make perfect his will before the events; to purge himself of the last and most deadly manifestation of pride, which is 'to do the right thing for the wrong reason.' Parallel with his struggle runs another, expressed in the speeches of the chorus of poor Canterbury women: the struggle of the ordinary unsaintly mortal to nerve himself for the bloody working out of Destiny. The Archbishop is only too eager for the consummation; the women in sick and shuddering suspense beseech him to depart out of their coasts and spare them the awful intrusion of the Divine Will into the tolerable pattern of their lives. With this starkly simple plot, Eliot achieves a drama perhaps more nearly Greek in its method than anything hitherto written in English.

In dramatic writing Eliot deliberately avoids that obscurity, both of style and sequence, which makes 'The Waste Land' and 'Ash-Wednesday' such slow reading. 'Murder in the Cathedral' can be read rapidly, but like other good verse tragedies it contains some lines which give up their full content only after patient study and some others concerning the meaning of which there will always be difference of opinion. The method is completely unhistorical and unrealistic: Thomas's Four Tempters instance 'The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat, The prizes given at the children's party, The prize awarded for the English Essay' as examples of life's disappointments; and the Third Knight, justifying himself to the audience for the murder, shows that he has heard of the execution of Archbishop Laud and the humiliation of Archbishop Davidson in the rejection of the Revised Prayer-Book. Some of the lines assigned to the chorus have no dramatic propriety—as, for example, that extremely powerful and metaphysical passage in which the women proclaim the identity of their flesh with the worms of the soil and the living creatures of the deep. In this it may be thought that Mr. Eliot has been too clever. The chorus which follows immediately after the murder is peculiarly in character for the 'scrubbers and sweepers of Canterbury,' and seems to gain tremendously thereby:

Clean the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take stone  
from stone and wash them.  
The land is foul, the water is foul, our beasts and  
ourselves defiled with blood.

The verse shows Eliot's curious and inexhaustible resourcefulness in both rhymed and unrhymed measures, and he reveals in addition a fertility of dramatic invention which will surprise those who have not read 'Sweeney Agonistes' and 'The Rock' with attention. To devote an entire scene to a Christmas sermon preached by Thomas in the cathedral four days before his death was daring, but the device succeeds. Even more audacious is that of having the Four Knights, after the murder, step forward in turn and justify their deed in Shavian prose—a device for bringing various modern historical judgments of Thomas into the framework of the play. But to my mind the most impressive of all Eliot's feats are his liturgical adaptations in the Second Part of the play: the three introits at the beginning; the parody of the '*Dies Irae*' spoken by the chorus outside the cathedral against the singing of the hymn inside; the concentration of blasphemy achieved just before the murder by having the Four Knights, slightly tipsy, speak in turn lines from a revivalist hymn and a negro spiritual....

# ‘Collected Poems 1909–1935’

London, 2 April 1936; New York, 21 May 1936

JOHN HAYWARD, LONDON LETTER,  
 'NEW YORK SUN'  
 28 March 1936, 19

Hayward (1905–65) was editorial adviser to the Cresset Press, vice-president of the Bibliographical Society and editorial director of the 'Book Collector'. He edited Eliot's 'Selected Prose' in 1953. For a sympathetic account of his life and friendship with Eliot, see Helen Gardner, 'The Composition of "Four Quartets"' (London, 1978), pp. 5–13.

...If you are as tired as I sometimes feel of the twitterings of the fledgling poets about whom so much has been written in the last year or so, you will turn eagerly to Eliot's new volume. To those who are already familiar with his work, this volume offers three things. In the first place it enables one to trace the evolution of his poetry over a period of twenty-five years, from 'Prufrock' (1917), to the beautiful mystical poem, 'Burnt Norton,' which was completed only a month or so ago. Secondly, it provides, for the first time, a collection of a number of pieces that have hitherto been scattered in various, not always easily accessible places—notably the 'Ariel Poems,' which originally appeared separately as Christmas pamphlets, and the Choruses from 'The Rock,' which lose nothing, indeed gain from being isolated from the text of the pageant-play in which they were incorporated. And finally, it contains besides 'Burnt Norton'—the longest and most important poem Eliot has written, apart from the dramatic choruses in 'The Rock' and 'Murder in the Cathedral,' since the sequence 'Ash Wednesday' (1930)—a number of short lyrics, which have only been privately printed. Here is 'Usk,' the third of five 'Landscapes' (The Usk, by the way, is an English river, in Monmouthshire on the border of Wales, which Eliot visited last summer). [Quotes 'Usk', CPP, p. 140.]

What I think must strike anyone who reads, or rather rereads Eliot's poems is the fact that so much that once seemed obscure now presents only occasional difficulties. I remember so well the frenzied discussions at Cambridge when 'The Waste Land' was published. And now I cannot help wondering what they were



all about. I do not deny that difficulties still exist—‘Burnt Norton’ with its allusions to St. John of the Cross and the London Underground is not a ‘simple’ poem—but they do not seriously interfere with one’s enjoyment. The beauty of Eliot’s poetry is apparent; but its beauty is not surface deep. The more one turns it over in one’s mind the richer it becomes. For this is no dross lightly sprinkled with gold, but the ore itself.

EDWIN MUIR, MR. ELIOT'S POETRY,  
'SPECTATOR'

3 April 1936, vol. clvi, 622

The first eighty pages in this volume are taken up by the poems which have already appeared in 'Poems 1909–1925'; the remaining hundred pages contain Mr. Eliot's poetic production for the last ten years, except for 'Murder in the Cathedral,' which is not included. This second part begins with 'Ash-Wednesday,' embraces two unfinished poems, 'Sweeney Agonistes' and 'Coriolan,' ten choruses from 'The Rock,' four 'Ariel Poems,' thirteen 'Minor Poems,' and ends with 'Burnt Norton,' which is in some ways different from any of Mr. Eliot's other poems, and is one of the most remarkable, I think, that he has yet written.

It will be seen from this that Mr. Eliot has been considerably more productive during the last ten years than during the sixteen years before; but it is very difficult to judge whether he has been productive on the same level, firstly because a writer of such individuality as his changes the taste of his readers, and they come to his later work with a different mind, and secondly because his style has altered. The alteration has been towards a greater explicitness of statement; 'Ash-Wednesday' is far more explicit than any poetry that Mr. Eliot wrote before it, and it represents, I think, a turning point in his development. 'The Waste Land' is no doubt his greatest work, but there is in it, compared with his later work, a certain blindness both in the despair it expresses and in turning away from despair at the end. Since 'The Hollow Men,' where that despair reached its lowest depths, Mr. Eliot has never expressed it again; he has taken it as a theme, certainly, in 'Sweeney Agonistes' and other poems; but though he is still in the midst of it, he is no longer within it. That is to say that he is not so firmly under the influence of his time and is more deliberately concerned with permanent things. The difference may be seen by setting side by side:

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

from 'The Waste Land,' and

Redeem the time, redeem the dream  
The token of the word unheard, unspoken

from 'Ash-Wednesday.' This difference, the difference between despair and faith, is so great that it is very hard to compare the two kinds of poetry that derive from it. A good deal of the second kind is obscure, like the first, but with a different obscurity: not the obscurity of deep darkness, but rather that of darkness against light. It is consequently less heavily charged and more easy to understand, more finally comprehensible. This must be admitted to be in its favour, unless we are to regard obscurity in itself, deep and total obscurity, as a poetic virtue.

The second half of the volume is nevertheless more unequal than the first. 'Sweeney Agonistes,' brilliant as it is, is definitely in a lower class of poetry than the rest, and doubtless is intended to be. The choruses from 'The Rock' are first of all choruses, that is compositions intended to be spoken and to be comprehensible as soon as spoken. They contain some beautiful poetry, they are original in form, but they naturally lack the condensation which Mr. Eliot's poetry has at its best. On the other hand, almost all the shorter poems have intense concentration and perfect clarity at the same time; 'Ash-Wednesday' and the four 'Ariel Poems' are works of great beauty; and 'Burnt Norton' is surely one of the best poems that Mr. Eliot has ever written. Its subject is Time and its main text a quotation from Herakleitos to the effect that the road upwards and downwards is one and the same road. This poem is different from the others inasmuch as it is not at all dramatic, being a pure intellectual enquiry into the nature and forms of Time. It alternates between the most close argument and the most vivid imagery expressing the contradiction of Time, a contradiction implicit in the recurring phrase, 'At the still point of the turning world.' It contains lines of great beauty:

We move above the moving tree  
In light upon the figured leaf  
And hear upon the sodden floor  
Below, the boarhound and the boar  
Pursue their pattern as before.

That is a far more rarefied poetry than

In the juvenescence of the year  
Came Christ the tiger  
In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,

but it has something in common with it, a sense of the fabulous; the difference is that the second kind is very much more figured and patterned (to use words that recur frequently in it), which means that it is more thoroughly worked out. Imagery which is thoroughly worked out often becomes mechanical and lifeless; but in this

poem both the thought and the imagery are intensely concentrated, and gain immensely from the development. Whether this poem owes anything to Dante I do not know, but one might chance the guess that Mr. Eliot's later development as a poet has been away from the Elizabethans, by whom he was so much influenced at the beginning, towards Dante.

Mr. Eliot's position as a poet is established, and his work has been more thoroughly discussed than that of any of his contemporaries. His influence on poetry has been decisive. That influence was due chiefly to his genius for poetry, but it was due also to certain qualities which he held in common with some other men in his age. He has had an influence on the form and on the attitude of poetry. By this I do not mean that he has encouraged a kind of poetry in which all sorts of poetical quotations and reminiscences alternate with realistic descriptions of contemporary life. This method was employed very effectively in 'The Waste Land' because it was a natural part of the scheme; it has not been employed successfully by any of Mr. Eliot's imitators, and as a set poetic method it is obviously ridiculous. Mr. Eliot's dramatic approach has influenced the form of poetry away from the purely lyrical, and his exercise of the historical sense has influenced the attitude of poetry. The first influence has been entirely salutary; it has led to a necessary reform of poetic language and a spirit of objectivity which had been buried in the degeneration of Romanticism. The reliance on the historical sense Mr. Eliot himself seems to have lost in his later work; it does not go with religious poetry; it cannot survive the vision of 'the still point of the turning world.' But even in 'The Waste Land' he used it conditionally, for there too, if less explicitly, he was concerned with permanent things, which are not affected by history. When the historical sense is employed without reference to these permanent things it leads to a shallowness of the imaginative faculty, for it robs the individual existence of meaning and can in itself give no meaning to society, since society is still in becoming, and by the laws of history will always be. Where the historical sense has been used in this way, the responsibility is not Mr. Eliot's; but it partly explains why his influence should be so great with poets who do not hold his beliefs.

PETER QUENNELL, MR. T.S.ELIOT, 'NEW STATESMAN'

18 April 1936, vol. xi, 603–4

Quennell (b. 1905), an English poet and critic, wrote quite frequently for the 'Criterion', especially on the poetry of the French Symbolists.

This review also contains a discussion of Eliot's 'Essays Ancient and Modern', published in London on 5 March 1936.

Were a bibliography to be composed of the various critical studies that have been devoted to Mr. T.S.Eliot during the last ten or fifteen years, it would make up a fairly considerable volume. For almost every modern critic has had his say. There are, indeed, very few literary undergraduates who have not, at one time or another, voiced their appreciation of his poems; and, even in the Far East, solemn spectacled faces are earnestly bent, and round shaven skulls dolorously scratched, over 'The Waste Land', 'Prufrock' or 'Ash-Wednesday'. At Oxford, ten years ago, admiration of 'The Waste Land' had given rise to a new and, now and then, extremely tiresome form of intellectual snobbism. The intelligentsia were as knowledgeable and talkative about the relationship and precise significance of Mr. Eugenides and Phlebas the Phoenician as their Bullingdon equivalent about the genealogical complications of the Stud Book; 'La Figlia Che Piange' provided the *leit-motif* of a dozen adolescent love-affairs. And yet, although the mass of writing around Mr. T.S.Eliot is by now probably much more voluminous than the whole corpus of his published verse and prose, it is still possible to retrace one's steps through his poems, experiencing as one reads a continuous movement of pleasure, interest and surprise. Perhaps surprise is the final criterion of poetic excellence. However hackneyed it may have become, no poem of real quality can quite lose the power of administering that kind of salutary emotional shock which, if only for a few minutes, possesses the brain and shows us the familiar universe in a refreshing light. 'Collected Poems' embraces Mr. T.S.Eliot's entire poetic output between 1909 and 1935. It covers the same ground as 'Poems', published several years back, but includes 'Ash-Wednesday', four poems published in the

Ariel Series, a quantity of minor and unfinished work, as well as a new and remarkably accomplished poem, 'Burnt Norton'.

Here is a panorama of Mr. Eliot's poetic achievement. Beginning with the section headed 'Prufrock', 1917, one is at first startled by the brilliance and liveliness of those early poems—we know them so well; yet, even today, how well they stand re-reading!—then a little puzzled and disconcerted because, although certain elements in 'Prufrock' have continued to develop until we reach the uncommon rhythmic virtuosity of 'Burnt Norton' (written nearly twenty years later) they contain another element that has very largely disappeared. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Mr. Eliot displays a gaiety, energy and satirical versatility that he has long since discarded. The influence of Jules Laforgue is extremely strong; but this is a Laforgue with additions and, I think, at least from the Anglo-Saxon point of view, very definite improvements. He has Laforgue's wit and dexterity without his fragility—Laforgue's skill without the touch of flatness and thinness that gives so many of Laforgue's *vers libre* essays a slightly consumptive and debilitated air. For there is a background of something we can best describe as *gusto*—a sense of enjoyment that may co-exist with a knowledge of human suffering, a love of life not incompatible with the horror of humanity; and from more recent works that element of *gusto* proved strangely lacking. The *peur de vivre* had broken down his poetic defences; the poet was in full retreat through 'The Waste Land'.

Having entered it, he was obliged to find an issue. If the influence of Laforgue had done much to shape 'Prufrock' and 'Poems', 1920, even to the extent of suggesting images, lines and whole passages, Baudelaire (with Tristan Corbière as a secondary influence) was the presiding spirit of that extraordinary poem which burst, like an organ cactus dominating an herbaceous border, from among the pleasant flower-beds and meandering grass-walks of Georgian poetry. But now compare the methods of master and disciple. When I ventured to observe that Eliot lacked *gusto*, I did not, of course, mean to complain that he lacked optimism, that he was a perverse and atrabilious highbrow malcontent. No poet has ever expressed a deeper or more unrelieved despair, a more uncompromising and embittered attitude towards contemporary society, than the author of 'Les Fleurs du Mal'. And yet how solid, sensuous and—in spite of condemnation, disgust and disenchantment—how almost *appreciative* is his rendering of the real world! The nightmare metropolis of 'Tableaux Parisiens' reveals a depth of light and shade, hints at a beauty, cruelty and oddity, that evoke the mingled squalor and splendour of a modern industrial city, as they have been evoked by no other poet or novelist. Nineteenth-century Paris, with the old struggling against the new, as Haussmann ploughed his way, amid dust and rubble, through the labyrinth of ancient quarters, was a city full of phantoms and stalking memories:

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,  
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant...

There was no end to the emotions of wonder and horror that it aroused; it was intensely real to the poet, even though its reality may have been intensely unpleasing; whereas the landscape of twentieth-century London, glimpsed in 'The Waste Land', seems, by comparison, as drab, lowtoned and shadowily inconsequent as the stream of spiritless human automata trudging to their work over London Bridge:

[Quotes 'The Waste Land', CPP, p. 62, 'Unreal City' to 'stroke of nine'.]

For Mr. Eliot shares the malady of his epoch; and that malady—at any rate, among intellectuals—comes not so much from a positive misdirection of energy as from a mere lack of vitality, not so much from any failure of sensitiveness as from a general lowering of temperature that leaves us face to face with a world where the good is flavourless, the bad insignificant, where our values, slowly and quietly, seem to be crumbling away to form part of a general desert-level of indifference and ill-will. Such is the predominant mood of 'The Waste Land'. And a historian of the future may find that the poem affords him interesting material for a study of the period, noting, moreover, that when Mr. Eliot escaped from the wilderness he did so by taking refuge in a narrow and sectarian, but evidently absorbing and satisfying, faith, and that, under the influence of this new faith, he was to achieve some of his most exquisite and finely balanced later poems. We may regret that the gaiety and gusto of 'Prufrock' should already have begun to disappear in 'The Waste Land', and we may regret that, on emerging from 'The Waste Land', he should have limited himself to a smaller poetic field; but a poet, after all, can only progress along the lines that his individual temperament lays down; and, by remaining faithful to his temperament—one of Protestant and transatlantic puritanism, exasperated by contact with an alien culture—Mr. Eliot has continued to perfect his gift. 'Collected Poems', then, is a valuable and fascinating book because it gives a bird's-eye view of his poetic progress, from his early, brilliant but derivative excursions, right up to the present day. It is particularly interesting, for example, to see the admirable choruses of 'The Rock' divorced from their somewhat less stumbling context, and to be able to trace Mr. Eliot's link with the main tradition of English devotional verse. About the poems in 'Ash-Wednesday' there was an occasional touch of almost pre-Raphaelite prettiness; and, personally, I prefer the choruses; since Mr. Eliot must be numbered among the very few modern poets who have learned to combine eloquence and simplicity of statement with a feeling for poetic expression in its more allusive form:

[Quotes 'The Rock', Chorus III, CPP, pp. 154–5, 'A Cry from the North' to 'lost golf balls'.]

Nor is 'Burnt Norton' disappointing. In harmony and flexibility it is the equal of Mr. Eliot's earlier poems; and, though the first section opens in a style rather too reminiscent of the text-book:

Time present and time past

Are both perhaps present in time future,  
 And time future contained in time past.  
 If all time is eternally present  
 All time is unredeemable.

it closes with a long passage of remarkable felicity, to which quotation and abbreviation do less than justice:

[Quotes 'Burnt Norton', CPP, pp. 171–2, 'What might have been' to 'in your mind', 'Other echoes' to 'are looked at' and 'Go, said the bird' to 'is always present'.]

But, if the acquisition of faith has added to the delicacy—while detracting, I believe, from the breadth and variety—of Mr. Eliot's poetic method, it has had another effect on his discursive and critical work. 'The Sacred Wood' and 'Homage to John Dryden', though often abused by academic journalists, were among the most exciting and illuminating critical products of their time. 'For Lancelot Andrewes', which contained a suggestion that Andrewes was a finer stylist than John Donne (apparently because he was the more orthodox theologian) struck a sad shock through the heart of many a hopeful reader, who expected something as good as Mr. Eliot's essays on the Elizabethan dramatists and seventeenth-century poets. 'Essays Ancient and Modern' is 'Lancelot Andrewes' revised, corrected and brought up to date. The all-too-famous foreword—plumping for classicism in literature, royalism in politics and Anglo-catholicism in religion—is now judged to have served its purpose and has been removed. Studies of Machiavelli and Crashaw, which their author considers unsatisfactory, have also been deleted; while a paper on Middleton does not appear since it has found a place in 'Elizabethan Essays'. To fill the gap, we have two articles written round religious or semireligious themes, Religion and Literature and Catholicism and International Order, an essay—sound, but not particularly exciting—entitled Modern Education and the Classics, an introduction to 'The "Pensées" of Pascal' (in which Mr. Eliot explains the dangerous fascination of Montaigne by comparing that unfortunate sage to 'a fog, a gas, a fluid, insidious element') and a note, in his best manner, on the poetry of Tennyson. Here the critic uses only aesthetic arguments; and the result is wise, sensitive and brilliantly expounded.



96.

CYRIL CONNOLLY, A MAJOR POET. THE  
INFLUENCE OF MR ELIOT, 'SUNDAY  
TIMES'

3 May 1936, 8

Connolly (1903–74), a well-known English critic and man of letters, was founder-editor of 'Horizon' from 1939 until 1950.

A good way to gauge the importance of a writer is to try to imagine what his subject would have been like without him. Let us suppose Mr. Eliot had never existed, what would English poetry be like to-day? I think it would have advanced no further from the Georgian poets than they had progressed from the 'nineties. There would be Yeats, of course, but otherwise we would still be reading Flecker and Housman and Ralph Hodgson, and writing like them. They would have been the intellectual poets, themselves in advance of the other Georgians, with Sassoon and the Sitwells as the last word in youthful and ferocious opposition. Pound, without Eliot's appreciation and adaptation of him, would not be important. Auden would have been no more than a young Kipling of the Left (which he may yet become), Spender a deflated Rupert Brooke, Day Lewis a baby W.J. Turner, while MacNeice and Barker could not have existed at all.

Dignity and Distinction

The theme of poetry would still be the lyrical expression of simple nostalgia; Babylon, Popocatepetl, Innisfree, Grantchester, Sussex—'The meadows of England shining in the rain'—we would not have got beyond them, and the best poetry would still consist of exercises in homesickness and be written by old laureates or young medallists, or by imitative and large-hearted women. Eliot, in fact, has brought to English poetry dignity and intellectual distinction, without which it might well have gone the way of most modern English music, novel-writing, and architecture. But he has brought to it as well an exquisite lyrical gift: that real beauty of diction which provides the aesthetic reader with a unique emotion, and to which hardly any other modern poet, except Yeats, can lay claim.

How many single lines, for instance, can you remember from Auden, Spender, and Day Lewis, or, for that matter, from more conservative poets? Yet Eliot is

packed with them. 'There will be time to murder and create,' 'The troubled midnight and the noon's repose,' 'Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe,' 'The infirm glory of the positive hour,' 'The awful daring of a moment's surrender.'

I often think what an experience it must have been, during the second year of the war, to have come upon that small paper-covered, biscuit-coloured volume with the odd title, 'Prufrock,' and to have opened it at the first poem:-

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table,

It must have provided one or two people with the fine shock of discovering a new talent, such as a Roman must have had from another opening couplet:-

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis  
Contactum nullis ante cupidinibus.

#### The Maker of Mysteries

Unfortunately, the extraordinary freshness, the special gaiety of 'Prufrock,' a gaiety partly due to the influence of Laforgue, from which much is imitated, and partly to the dandyism of those young men of 1913 (we find it also in 'Crome Yellow' and in Ronald Firbank) disappears from the later Eliot. This is largely due to the influence of Pound, who brings, after the 'clever' period of the 'Sweeney' poems, in which his dandyism is finally stifled by his horror for life, two new features into Eliot. They are the introduction of unassimilated quotations into the body of his work, and the more serious introduction of a mystical, but also rather muddy and disingenuous bardic quality into his thought. He is no longer the pleasant young man who confides in the reader, but the prophet, the maker of mysteries, descending only to tell us, as of Shantih, for instance, that 'The Peace which passeth understanding is a feeble translation of this word.' Through the despair of the 'cactus' poems, the hopefulness of 'Ash-Wednesday,' and the severity of the choruses from 'The Rock,' the same lyrical power persists however, and it is found in equal purity in the long new poem, 'Burnt Norton,' a philosophical meditation on Time, with which this book closes,

The Eagle soars in the summit of heaven,  
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit,  
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,  
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons  
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying.

—From 'The Rock.'

Time and the bell have buried the day,

The black cloud carries the sun away,  
 Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis  
 Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray clutch and cling?  
 Chill  
 Fingers of yew be curled  
 Down on us? After the kingfisher's wing  
 Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still  
 At the still point of the turning world.

—From 'Burnt Norton.'

### The Next Station

The work of any great writer is like a train running through various stations. At each station some admirers get out and begin to say, 'Such a pity the train ever went on to the next station.' Sometimes if they say this loud enough they do actually stop the train from going any further, and then all is over with it. This is particularly true of Eliot, who has one lot of passengers still waiting at the terminus of the Waste Land, and another which is not willing to follow him into the Drama, with his two Church of England plays, 'Murder in the Cathedral' and 'The Rock.'

It is obvious, however, that the art of Mr. Eliot is still a living spiritual force, anything may happen to it, and whatever happens will be vastly interesting. There is no reason even, now that he has found peace of mind in religion, why his early lyrical and ironical high spirits, driven out by post-war depression, should not return, or else why his mastery of language, and his incessant and conscientious experiment and adaptation (for Mr. Eliot is one of the few writers who deliberately imitate, yet are able to absorb and give, unlike Pound, an added power and meaning to the thing imitated) should not lead him into unpredictable discoveries. For he is gifted with that great rarity of these days: an imaginative and emotional staying power, poetical long-life.

MALCOLM COWLEY, AFTERTHOUGHTS  
ON T.S.ELIOT, 'NEW REPUBLIC'

20 May 1936, vol. lxxxvii, 49

Cowley (b. 1898), American critic and poet, was a member of the staff of 'New Republic' from 1929 to 1944.

In 'New Republic' (3 January 1934), lxxvii, 216–18, he described the reaction of some of the younger writers against Eliot after 'The Waste Land', because it seemed to them as though Eliot considered the present inferior to the past. The essay was reprinted in 'Exile's Return' (1934) and in Unger, pp. 30–3. In the review printed below Cowley developed his earlier doubts about the nature of Eliot's lasting importance.

T.S.Eliot's early poems are beginning to seem less cosmically important than they did in 1925, when they first appeared in a collected volume. It is harder now to admire their deliberate obscurity, and this is particularly true in the case of 'The Waste Land,' which has been discussed and elucidated at greater length than any other modern poem, without answering half the questions that it raises. Just what is the function in it of the drowned man, Phlebas the Phoenician? Why are we told in a note that he suggests the Western asceticism of St. Augustine? Are we meant to identify Eliot himself with the Fisher King—that is, with the legendary monarch of a country that had been rendered waterless and desolate at the very moment when its king was struck with impotence for the sin of falling in love with a pagan maid? In that case, has the pagan any connection with the Russian noblewoman remembered longingly by Eliot in the first episode? The more I study the poem as a whole, the more it seems personal and arbitrary, not so much the embodiment of a great contemporary problem as a private diary written in rebuses.

On the other hand, it is quite possible that both 'The Waste Land' and other poems of the same period have been partly spoiled for me by all the imitations they have called forth. Some of these are actually better than Eliot's own work, in the sense of being more sustained in mood and richer in images: he is beginning to suffer by comparison with his ablest followers. Moreover, I am beginning to doubt

whether his enormous influence over his contemporaries is a just or accurate measure of his own poetical achievement. Some of the very greatest poets—Shakespeare, Milton, for example—have had a less tangible effect on other writers than anyone would judge from their personal eminence. A possible explanation is that they did their job too well: nobody else was impelled to do it again or felt sure of doing it better. Eliot, with his habit of making suggestions that he never developed and of changing every subject without exhausting it, has tempted others to continue his work. In the past, his very faults have attracted disciples.

The poems he has written since 1930, which occupy more than half of the new collected edition, have been much less widely imitated. Most of them are devotional poems, a fact which many critics might assume to be connected with their indifferent quality as verse. But the connection here, which really exists, is a result of Eliot's personal reaction to his new faith. He has developed into a peculiarly doleful type of Christian, given more to describing the sorrows of this world than to celebrating the joys of the next. Even when he writes a Christmas poem, 'Journey of the Magi,' he fills it with lamentations—it was the worst time of the year for such a long trip, the camel men were mutinous, the inns were dirty and expensive, and the very birth of the Christ Child was 'hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.' Yet this is one of Eliot's happier and more factual pieces; elsewhere he loses himself in a mist of abstract sorrows. During the last half-century there have been several distinguished Catholic poets in France, but their best works have been poems of repentance, of pity, or of abuse directed against the infidels. Eliot has simply not sinned enough to make his repentance interesting as literature. He writes poems of pity for nobody but himself, and he is too frigidly polite to abuse his enemies. His Anglo-Catholicism has so far been intellectual rather than emotional or sensuous, with the result that his religious poems have no more color than a New England sermon. As compensation for this lack of appeal to eye and touch and taste, he has tried to give his verse a more complicated music, but in achieving this effect he depends too much on simple repetition:

Only through time time is conquered...  
 Distracted from distraction by distraction...  
 World not world but that which is not world...

But 'Murder in the Cathedral'—his latest work and the only one not included in this volume—seems to show that his talents are being revived. There are still too many repeated words, too many abstract words; there is an almost terrifying absence of sensuous impressions; but there is also more energy and more deftness in meter than he has shown since 'The Waste Land.' The murder of Thomas Becket, which is the central incident of the play, is handled with a sequence of surprising effects. First the chorus chants while the Archbishop is being killed, then the four murderers come forward and excuse themselves to the audience in the language of modern politicians (and the satire here is exceptionally keen), then

the First Priest asks who shall guide us now that the Church lies bereft, then finally the Third Priest, after answering that the Church is only fortified by persecution, thunders a malediction against the assassins:

Go, weak sad men, lost erring souls, homeless in earth or heaven.  
 Go where the sunset reddens the last gray rock  
 Of Brittany, or the Gates of Hercules...  
 Or sit and bite your nails in Aquitaine.

It is a magnificent curse, yet it forces comparison with another passage that I vastly prefer to it, the passage in 'Femmes Damnées' where Baudelaire, after reporting the courtship of two Lesbians, suddenly rises in his own person and thunders against them:

O lamentable victims, go ye down,  
 Down, down the pathway to eternal hell—

In Baudelaire's passage there is no mechanical listing of countries to which the culprits might flee: Gibraltar, Morocco, Norway, Aquitaine. Instead there is indignation bursting forth in sometimes extravagant and sometimes homely metaphors; there is a warmth of feeling that makes the climax of Eliot's poetic drama seem chilly and academic. Yet 'Murder in the Cathedral' is the best verse that he has written since 1922. The shorter pieces collected in this new volume make me feel for the first time that Eliot is a minor poet; that his apparent greatness was forced upon him by the weakness of his contemporaries and their yearning for a leader.

98.

MARIANNE MOORE, IT IS NOT  
FORBIDDEN TO THINK, 'NATION' (NEW  
YORK)

27 May 1936, vol. cxlii, 680–1

A fuller version of this review was published in *Predilections*  
(London, 1956), pp. 47–51.

The grouping of these poems—chronological through 1930, and inclusive except for 'Murder in the Cathedral'—seems to point to a mental chronology of evolvment and deepening technique. But two tendencies mark them all: the instinct for order and certitude, and 'contempt for sham.' 'I am not sure,' Mr. Eliot says in 'The Uses of Poetry,' 'that we can judge and enjoy a man's poetry while leaving wholly out of account all the things for which he cared deeply, and on behalf of which he turned his poetry to account.' He detests a conscience, a politics, a rhetoric, which is neither one thing nor the other. For him hell is hell in its awareness of heaven; good is good in its distinctness from evil; precision is precision as triumphing over vagueness. In 'The Rock' he says, 'Our age is an age of moderate virtue And of moderate vice.' Among Peter the Hermit's hearers were 'a few good men Many who were evil And most who were neither.' Although as a critic, confronted by apparent misapprehension, he manifests what seems at times an almost pugnacious sincerity, by doing his fighting in prose he is perhaps the more free to do his feeling in verse. But in his verse, also, judgment remains awake. His inability to be untormented by 'the Demon of Thought' as action, in Prufrock, posits an overwhelming question:

Oh, do not ask what is it,  
Let us go and make our visit;

and as writing is satirized in 'Lines for Cuscuscaraway and Mirza Murad Ali Beg':

How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!  
With his features of clerical cut,

And his conversation, so nicely  
 Restricted to What Precisely  
 And If and Perhaps and But.

One sees in this collected work conscience—directed toward ‘things that other people have desired,’ asking ‘are these things right or wrong’—and an art which from the beginning has tended toward drama. ‘The Waste Land’ (1922) characterizes a first period. In ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and later Mr. Eliot is not warily considering ‘matters that I with myself too much discuss Too much explain’; he is in them; and ‘Ash-Wednesday’ is perhaps the poem of the book, as submitting in theme and technique to something greater than itself.

And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,  
 Suffer me not to be separated  
 And let my cry come unto Thee.

This is a summit; an instance, as well, of increased pliancy in rhythm, the lengthened phrase and gathered force of rhymes suddenly collided being characteristic of the later poems.

Mr. Eliot’s aptitude for mythology and theology sometimes pays us the compliment of expecting our reading to be more thorough than it is; but correspondences of allusion provide an unmistakable logic: stillness, intellectual beauty, spiritual exaltation, the white dress, ‘the glory of the humming bird,’ childhood, concentration and wholeness of personality—in contrast with noise, darkness, drugs, dreams, drowning, dust on the rosebowl, Dusty the makeshift enchantress, cards, clairvoyants, serpents, evasiveness, aimlessness, fog, intrusiveness, temptation, unlogic, scattered bones, broken pride, rats, drafts under the door, distortion, ‘the sty of contentment.’ Horror, which is unbelief, is the opposite of ecstasy; and wholeness, which is the condition of ecstasy, is to be ‘accepted and accepting.’ That is to say, we are of a world in which light and darkness, ‘appearance and reality,’ ‘is and seem,’ are ineludable alternatives.

And there are words of special meaning which recur with the force of a theme: ‘hidden,’ referring to poetry as the revelation of a hidden life; ‘the pattern’ continuing the Aristotelian concept of ‘form’ as the soul, the invisible actuality of which the body is the outward manifestation. Fire, the devourer, can be a purifier; water has in it the thought of drowning or of drought ended by inundation; as God’s light is for man, the sun is life for the natural world. Concepts and images are toothed together and the poems are so consistently intricately that one rests on another and is involved with what was earlier; the musical theme at times being separated by a stanza, as the argument sometimes is continued from the preceding poem—‘O hidden’ in ‘Difficulties of a Statesman’ completing the ‘O hidden’ in ‘Triumphal March.’ The period containing ‘Ash-Wednesday,’ concerned with ‘the infirm glory of the positive hour,’ is succeeded by the affirmative one to which



'Murder in the Cathedral' belongs; also 'Burnt Norton,' a new poem which is concerned with the thought of control ('The high road and the low are one and the same') embodied in Deity and in human equipoise, its temporal counterpart:

[Quotes 'Burnt Norton', II, CPP, p. 172, 'We move above' to 'among the stars'.]

In 'Usk', also, Mr. Eliot expresses the conviction that the *via media* of discipline and self-control is the valuable one:

Where the roads dip and where the roads rise  
 Seek only there  
 Where the gray light meets the green air  
 The hermit's chapel, the pilgrim's prayer.

One notices here the compactness, four thoughts in one—the visible, the invisible, the indoors, the outdoors; and that in the later poems, although statement is simpler, the rhythm is more complex.

Mr. Eliot has tried 'to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or...so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem *points at* and not on the poetry.' He has not dishonored 'the deepest terrors and desires,' depths of 'degradation' and heights of 'exaltation,' or the fact that it is possible to have 'walked in hell' and 'been rapt to heaven.'

Those who have power to renounce life are those whose lives are valuable to a community; one who attains equilibrium in spite of opposition to himself from within is in a stronger position than if there had been no opposition to overcome; and in art, freedom evolving from a liberated constraint is stronger than if it had not by nature been cramped. Indigenous skepticism, also constraint are part of Mr. Eliot's temperament; but at its apex art is able to conceal the artist while it exhibits his 'angel'; like the unanticipatedly limber florescence of fireworks as they expand into trees or bouquets with the abandon of 'unbroke horses', and this effect we have in 'Cape Ann'—denominated a minor poem, perhaps as being a mood or aspect rather than part of a thought-related sequence:

[Quotes 'Cape Ann', CPP, p. 142.]

MORTON D.ZABEL, FROM POETS OF  
FIVE DECADES, 'SOUTHERN REVIEW'

Summer 1936, vol. ii, 168–71

The review opens with a consideration of 'Selected Poems' by AE (George E.Russell), a *fin de siècle* poet associated with Yeats.

When Eliot began to write, the moment for this kind of spiritual illusion had passed from the serious poets of the English scene. He subtitles his 'Collected Poems' with the dates '1909–1935,' and by 1909 whatever heroic assumptions remained among the older poets (Swinburne, Meredith, or Moody) passed with the deaths of those men. It had in any case been long reproved by the tragic sarcasm of Hardy, Housman, and Robinson, or—for Eliot more forcibly—by the withering irony of the later Symbolists. There was no further opportunity to lean toward dreams and visions, or upon the ennobling humility of public confession and absolution. If the heroic emerged from the past it did not console the poet either when he borrowed its language or adapted its legends. It diminished to further frailty his dispossession and mediocrity. But curiously, where the promise of oblivion and oneness in 'the Dream' deceived AE into making ineffectual splendor of his own destiny, the extreme contempt of human meanness in a poet like Eliot led to a tangible grasp of what there was in him to be exalted. This produced in the end an illumination of selfhood which achieved the hard and concrete performance of a legend. It is to legend that Prufrock and Sweeney belong. They cleanse the conscience of modern man by a species of critical purgation. Long as we have read and pondered them, they still give the pleasure of severe epitomes of the meaning of experience. But as everyone knows, Eliot has moved far from the style and spirit of those poems. 'The Waste Land' showed his transition toward a less personal idiom, and a less sympathetic participation in the modern problem. 'The Hollow Men' marked a release from, and a disintegration of the critical intelligence of the earlier verse, showing this not only by its greater flexibility of structure and cadence, but by the words employed. These words begin to modify the sharp epithet and accent of the satires, and to weave around the sensibility within the poems a subtle web of logical complexity and the casuistries of dialectic argument. It is not too much to claim

that this development in Eliot's style reveals the exchange of his powers of introspection for something superior to and beyond personality. His themes change from the dramatic situation of 'The Love Song,' and 'Portrait of a Lady,' where self-scrutiny is remorseless and laconic, to the delirium of 'The Hollow Men,' the self-effacing abnegation of 'Ash Wednesday,' and finally to the abstract considerations on the nature and meaning of Time in his latest long poem, 'Burnt Norton.' Here also is a growth away from the meagerness of personal agony toward the freedom of impersonal speculation. But the best quality of 'Burnt Norton' resides in its reminders of how severe, strenuous, and practical was the poet's approach toward the present enlargement of his philosophic vision.

Eliot's poems show remarkably changes in these two hundred pages. While they have become more abstract and intricate in their ideas, they have grown simpler and more expository in method. They have exchanged the pithy terseness of the early allegories for the sinuous devices of metaphysical search. Their language has almost entirely lost the colloquial formality of the 'Prufrock' volume. Where this persists, and where he still employs the contrasts of cheap modernity with past greatness (as in the two 'fragments of an Aristophanic melodrama' or the two poems—'Triumphal March' and 'Difficulties of a Statesman'—now grouped as parts of an unfinished work called 'Coriolan'), the yoking seems to have the obvious violence of a patented device. By contrast this gives a superior effect to later poems that avoid such conjunction, 'Ash-Wednesday' and 'Marina.' Oblique humor has also disappeared from the later work (though not entirely from the volume, for Eliot here prints a number of nonsense pieces, 'Five-Finger Exercises,' which hardly impress as important.) He has become on the whole a more patient and explicit—that is, a more popular—poet. No doubt there are derivations concealed in his later work which will enlist the services of future Williamsons and Matthiessens. I have not traced them far; 'Burnt Norton' seems to derive its Time-theme as much from speculators like Whitehead and Dunne as from the lines of Heraclitus printed below the title. But these poems, like the choruses from 'The Rock' and 'Murder in the Cathedral,' impose no such task of identification on the studious reader as was demanded by every line and page of 'The Waste Land.' Their subtleties are organic to themselves; the poem's whole problem is contained within the poem and does not fly off at the tangent of each literary echo or historical reference. And at times, as in 'Animula' and 'Marina,' the feeling and utterance of the poet concentrate into passages of superb lyric vision.

When Eliot stood isolated and dispossessed among the ruins of a familiar universe, every nerve and sensation quivered with its own life. The antennae of his intelligence were alive with nervous vitality. This resulted in images and allegories of great focal sharpness. In more recent years, approaching stranger territory, this grip on identity is no longer held, and with its relaxation the nervous sensibility of his diction and cadence has lessened. He writes either a more relaxed and speculative verse, or a sort of argument which attempts to extend his intellectual problems beyond their own limits. He has become a poet of more

public qualities, of religious responsibilities, and even (in 'The Rock') of social concerns. These have entailed a change from a style of cryptic historical reference and erudition to one of dialectic lucidity, or even of popular simplification. He also has doubtless felt 'a drift in the times.' He has been compelled, as churchman and citizen, toward popularizing and clarifying his language, even though he has not descended to simplifying his metaphysical vision. But that his address has broadened is obvious. One has only to recollect his essays on poetic drama in 'The Sacred Wood,' or his remarks on poetic popularity in the study of Tennyson in his new book 'Essays Ancient and Modern,' to be aware of his long-standing inclination to enlist the moral support and affirmation of a wide human public.

There remains the question of which of these two kinds of poetry—the personal and allegorical or the more human and explicit—he shows greater mastery in. 'AshWednesday' and 'Murder in the Cathedral' are brilliant achievements. They may bear the more lasting signs of poetic authority. They rise above that poetic value which is restricted to the circle of initiates. But Eliot's creative temperament still stands in its original and fundamental quality in the poems before 1925, and is corroborated there by the essays of the same period. Moreover, those earlier poems were in their way primary creations. They embodied a specific poetic method, and the form of the poems exactly conveyed the matter presented and the kind of experience defined. In later works the hortatory or penitential style is often weakened by such pastiche of his own earlier manner as mars the pages of 'The Rock.' Humor and skepticism now seem to sprout artificially from the thicker stem of religious faith, and we are left uncertain of just what is essential and what is not....

100.  
ROLFE HUMPHRIES, ELIOT'S POETRY,  
'NEW MASSES'  
18 August 1936, vol. xx, 25–6

Humphries (b. 1894), an American poet, edited, in 1936, a collection of poems entitled 'And Spain Sings'.

Half this book is a reprint of Eliot's 'Poems: 1909–1925.' That work formed the basis of the finest Marxist criticism of poetry in this reviewer's experience, D.S.Mirsky's essay on T.S.Eliot and the End of Bourgeois Poetry. Concerning this half of the present collection, it is sufficient here to refer the reader to the version of Mirsky's essay which appeared in the 'New Masses' (November 13, 1934), or, if he knows French, to the fuller statement in the files of the Paris magazine 'Echanges.'

'What distinguishes Eliot,' Mirsky sums it up, 'is that with him a rare poetic gift is allied with a social theme of real significance, with indeed the sole historically valid and sincere theme accessible to a bourgeois poet of today. His contemporaries are but manifestations of the death of bourgeois poetry and civilization; he alone has been able to create a poetry of this death.'

The risk run by such a poet is that of exposing himself to the infection of his material. Eliot, who has created a poetry of death, may survive to demonstrate, in his personal history, the death of poetry. In the poems from 'Ash-Wednesday' on, there is perceptible evidence of the fatal trend. There is repetition, if not self-imitation: the minor poems, 'Eyes That Last I Saw in Tears,' and 'The Wind Sprang up at Four O'clock,' for instance, contain phrases that seem like scraps left over from their use in 'The Hollow Men' or 'The Waste Land.' There is doggerel and triviality: Items IV and V of 'Five-Finger Exercises,' for instance, seem a bit unworthy of one who may aspire to saintliness, and the spectacle of an ascete copying the attitudes of Edward Lear is ghastly incongruous rather than genuinely comic or edifying. The much-admired choruses from 'The Rock' seem to me to contain, rather than to be, poetry; taken as wholes, they illustrate what Eliot was talking about (in his introduction to Perse's 'Anabase') when he told us we needed a term to complete the series verse, poetry, prose.

If we elevate Eliot above his contemporaries and entitle him the ideal classical poet of an age in break-up, we do not thereby intend to accept his own valuation of himself as classicist—a romantic and pathetic gesture in the teeth of his time. But his genius, unusually sensitive to an atmosphere of disintegration, has contrived to resist its attraction by his art, to make aesthetic use of the phenomena of dissolution. He has a power of dealing with fragments; both in their invention and synthesis, Eliot has elevated the status of the fragmentary from accident to design. ‘These fragments I have shored against my ruins’ runs the last completely intelligible sentence of ‘The Waste Land’; and in subsequent work he seems to take comfort in their creation as well as in their use. Thus we have before us fragments of an agon, fragments of a prologue, unfinished poems, five-finger exercises as such; ‘Ash-Wednesday’ includes scraps of the litany, the choruses from ‘The Rock’ of the ‘Te Deum.’ ‘A Song for Simeon of the Nunc Dimittis’; and elsewhere can be found, as mentioned, lumps of Edward Lear, or Gertrude Stein.

[Quotes ‘Ash-Wednesday’, V, CPP, p. 96, ‘Where shall the word’ to ‘deny the voice’.]

Here, too, there are signs of a reduction of temperature from the white-hot fervor of energy which fused and smelted the scrap-metal in ‘The Waste-Land’ to a durable poetic amalgam. Or, to vary the metaphor, what we are permitted to see at times now in Eliot is the undigested substance in the crop of the dissected bird rather than its conversion to formal discharge of energy in poetic flight.

There is more light and less heat in Eliot now, more radiance and less candor, but whatever details of weakness appear in his work are in it, rather than of it. They are there as tendencies which will perhaps be magnified and accelerated as Eliot attains to that state of senile blessedness to which he professes to aspire; at present they reside in him only in the same sense that a man in the prime of life houses, barring accident, his own peculiar dissolution, predictable enough by the expert in prognosis.

‘Little by little we see rising against the Laforguian atmosphere that pervades the verse of the young Eliot a poetry altogether different, freed from the vacillating ambiguity of the decadent, a poetry in which irony cedes before the tragic, and the sexual ambivalence of the consumptive is replaced by the renunciation of the aesthete.’ Eliot’s later work confirms the accuracy of Mirsky’s prediction. We are not yet beyond earshot of ambivalence: the ‘Sweeney’ fragments in the present collection, placed after the ‘Ash-Wednesday’ and ‘Ariel’ sequences, testify to the temptations assailing the soul, which ‘cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.’ This, curiously, is the same note that sounds in the central philosophy of the American poet Jeffers—‘Humanity needs to fall in love outward’; the same philosophy that Shaw puts in the mouth of his Ancients in ‘Back to Methuselah’ applies to the aspirations of Eliot’s art—‘on towards a religion of pure mind, free from all vitalism, a religion purely spiritual, mystic in the strictest sense of the term, and also rigorously intellectual.’ Reaching the final impasse, bourgeois aestheticism is compelled to

make the desperate attempt to transcend the inexorable laws of material considerations. In Eliot's case, as the attractions of high austerity and low vulgarity make war on each other, out of their conflict he achieves his finest poetry; his spirit announces 'the completion of its partial ecstasy, the resolution of its partial horror' in the beautiful musical despair of the final poem, 'Burnt Norton.'

'All the arts,' Eliot has quoted Pater to us, 'aspire to the condition of music and their meaning reaches us through ways not directly traceable by the understanding.' More than ever, Eliot seems to feel that words fail him; more than ever, he grows in his capacity to make them assume the functions of music. There is a sense in which the Collected Poems are one whole—a symphony, with deliberately introduced dissonances, with studied repetitions of theme and phrase (as, for example, the cry, 'Resign, resign!' appears both in the political satire 'Difficulties of a Statesman' and the simple nature lyric 'Cape Ann'). How beautifully, in 'Burnt Norton,' Eliot winds the theme, from the simple statement that perhaps any dialectical materialist would accept:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.

to the conclusion that any revolutionist might find difficulty in understanding:

[Quotes 'Burnt Norton', V, CPP, pp. 175–6, 'Words move' to 'before and after'.]

How beautifully it is done!

We must not let ourselves become insensitive to this means of communication, no matter how thoroughly we are bent on understanding that the apparent motions of Eliot's art and the real motions are by no means identical. It would be too easy to let Eliot's sense of moral resignation conduce to our sense of moral outrage, and declare a boycott on all his works: but if Marxist criticism of poetry is presumed to partake of the nature of economic science, it would be poor economics. To that science, wrote Engels, 'moral indignation, however, justifiable, cannot serve as an argument, but only as a symptom.' Eliot is not a proletarian poet, nor has he urged a classless society even in heaven. Still, he is a prophet of revolution; he has written, with poetic authority too great to be questioned, the elegy of an age that is passing. Let us not be so boisterous shouting our war songs that we fail to hear from the citadel of our enemies the cry of capitulation.

101.  
D.W.HARDING, T.S.ELIOT, 1925–1935,  
‘SCRUTINY’  
September 1936, vol. v, 171–6

This review was reprinted in ‘The Importance of Scrutiny’, edited by Eric Bentley (New York, 1948), pp. 262–6.

This new volume is an opportunity, not for a review—for ‘The Poetry of T.S.Eliot’ begins to have the intimidating sound of a Tripos question—but for asking whether anything in the development of the poetry accounts for the change in attitude that has made Mr. Eliot’s work less *chic* now than it was ten years ago. Perhaps the ten years are a sufficient explanation—obvious changes in fashionable feeling have helped to make the sort-of-communist poets popular. But on the other hand it may be that these poets gratify some taste that Mr. Eliot also gratified in his earlier work but not in his later. If so it is surely a taste for evocations of the sense of protest that our circumstances set up in us; for it seems likely that at the present time it is expressions of protest in some form or other that most readily gain a poet popular sympathy. And up to ‘The Waste Land’ and ‘The Hollow Men’ this protest—whether distressed, disgusted, or ironical—was still the dominant note of Mr. Eliot’s work, through all the subtlety and sensitiveness of the forms it took. Yet already in these two poems the suggestion was creeping in that the sufferers were also failures. We are the hollow men, but there are, besides,

Those who have crossed  
With direct eyes, to death’s other Kingdom

And in all the later work the stress tends to fall on the regret or suffering that arises from our own choices or our inherent limitations, or on the resignation that they make necessary. Without at the moment trying to define the change more closely one can point out certain characteristics of the later work which are likely to displease those who create the fashions of taste in poetry to-day, and which also contrast with Mr. Eliot’s earlier work. First it is true that in some of the poems (most obviously in the ‘Choruses from “The Rock”’) there are denunciation and



preaching, both of which people like just now. But there is a vital difference between the denunciation here and that, say, in 'The Dog Beneath the Skin': Mr. Eliot doesn't invite you to step across a dividing line and join him in guaranteed rightness—he suggests at the most that you and he should both try, in familiar and difficult ways, not to live so badly. Failing to make it sound easy, and not putting much stress on the fellowship of the just, he offers no satisfaction to the craving for a life that is ethically and emotionally *simpler*.

And this characteristic goes with a deeper change of attitude that separates the later work from the earlier. Besides displaying little faith in a revolt against anything outside himself, Mr. Eliot in his recent work never invites you to believe that everything undesirable in you is due to outside influences that can be blamed for tampering with your original rightness. Not even in the perhaps over-simple 'Animula' is there any suggestion that the 'simple soul' has suffered an avoidable wrong for which someone else can be given the blame. Mr. Eliot declines to sanction an implicit belief, almost universally held, which lies behind an immense amount of rationalization, self-pity and childish protest—the belief that the very fact of being alive ought to ensure your being a satisfactory object in your own sight. He is nearer the more rational view that the process of living is at its best one of progressive dissatisfaction.

Throughout the earlier poems there are traces of what, if it were cruder and without irony and impersonality, would be felt at once as self-pity or futile protest: for example,

Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life.  
The last twist of the knife.

or,

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;  
The worlds revolve like ancient women  
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

or again,

The nightingales are singing near  
The Convent of the Sacred Heart,  
And sang within the bloody wood  
When Agamemnon cried aloud,  
And let their liquid siftings fall  
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

Obviously this is only one aspect of the early poetry, and to lay much stress on it without qualification would be grotesquely unfair to 'Gerontion' especially and to other poems of that phase. But it is a prominent enough aspect of the work to

have made critics, one might have thought, more liable to underrate the earlier poems than, with fashionable taste, the later ones. For there can be no doubt of the greater maturity of feeling in the later work:

And I pray that I may forget  
 These matters that with myself I too much discuss  
 Too much explain  
 Because I do not hope to turn again  
 Let these words answer  
 For what is done, not to be done again  
 May the judgment not be too heavy upon us

This may be called religious submission, but essentially it is the submission of maturity.

What is peculiar to Mr. Eliot in the tone of his work, and not inherent in maturity or in religion, is that he does *submit* to what he knows rather than welcoming it. To say that his is a depressed poetry isn't true, because of the extraordinary toughness and resilience that always underlie it. They show, for instance, in the quality of the scorn he expresses for those who have tried to overlook what he sees:

...the strained time-ridden faces  
 Distracted from distraction by distraction  
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning  
 Tumid apathy with no concentration  
 Men and bits of paper...

But to insist on the depression yields a half-truth. For though acceptance and understanding have taken the place of protest the underlying experience remains one of suffering, and the renunciation is much more vividly communicated than the advance for the sake of which it was made. It is summed up in the ending of 'Ash-Wednesday':

[Quotes 'Ash-Wednesday', VI, CPP, pp. 98–9, 'Blessed sister' to 'come unto Thee'.]

This is the cry of the weaned child, I suppose the analysts might say; and without acquiescing in the genetic view that they would imply one can agree that weaning stands as a type-experience of much that Mr. Eliot is interested in as a poet. It seems to be the clearer and more direct realization of this kind of experience that makes the later poems at the same time more personal and more mature. And in the presence of these poems many who liked saying they liked the earlier work feel both embarrassed and snubbed.

However, all of this might be said about a volume of collected sermons instead of poems. It ignores Mr. Eliot's amazing genius in the use of words and rhythms and his extraordinary fertility in styles of writing, each 'manner' apparently perfected from the first and often used only once (only once, that is, by Mr. Eliot,

though most are like comets with a string of poetasters laboriously tailing after them). One aspect of his mastery of language may perhaps be commented on here because it reaches its most remarkable expression in the latest of the poems, 'Burnt Norton.' Here most obviously the poetry is a linguistic achievement, in this case an achievement in the creation of concepts.

Ordinarily our abstract ideas are over-comprehensive and include too wide a range of feeling to be of much use by themselves. If our words 'regret' and 'eternity' were exact bits of mosaic with which to build patterns much of 'Burnt Norton' would not have had to be written. But

... Words strain,  
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden  
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
 Will not stay still.

One could say, perhaps, that the poem takes the place of the ideas of 'regret' and 'eternity.' Where in ordinary speech we should have to use those words, and hope by conversational trial-and-error to obviate the grosser misunderstandings, this poem is a newly-created concept, equally abstract but vastly more exact and rich in meaning. It makes no statement. It is no more 'about' anything than an abstract term like 'love' is about anything: it is a linguistic creation. And the creation of a new concept, with all the assimilation and communication of experience that that involves, is perhaps the greatest of linguistic achievements.

In this poem the new meaning is approached by two methods. The first is the presentation of concrete images and definite events, each of which is checked and passes over into another before it has developed far enough to stand meaningfully by itself. This is, of course, an extension of a familiar language process. If you try to observe introspectively how the meaning of an abstract term—say 'trade'—exists in your mind, you find that after a moment of blankness, in which there seems to be only imageless 'meaning,' concrete images of objects and events begin to occur to you; but none by itself carries the full meaning of the word 'trade,' and each is faded out and replaced by another. The abstract concept, in fact, seems like a space surrounded and defined by a more or less rich collection of latent ideas. It is this kind of definition that Mr. Eliot sets about here—in the magnificent first section for instance—with every subtlety of verbal and rhythmical suggestion.

And the complementary method is to make pseudo statements in highly abstract language, for the purpose, essentially, of putting forward and immediately rejecting ready-made concepts that might have seemed to approximate to the concept he is creating. For instance:

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there  
 the dance is

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it  
fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement  
from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline.

Or

Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
Not that only, but the co-existence,  
Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
And the end and the beginning were always there  
Before the beginning and after the end.  
And all is always now.

In neither of these methods is there any attempt to state the meaning by taking existing abstract ideas and piecing them together in the ordinary way. Where something approaching this more usual method is attempted, in the passage beginning 'The inner freedom from the practical desire,' it seems a little less successful; admirable for the plays, where the audience is prominent, it fails to combine quite perfectly with the other methods of this poem. But it is Mr. Eliot himself who, by the closeness of his approach to technical perfection, provides a background against which such faint flaws can be seen.

LOUIS UNTERMAYER, FROM NEW  
POETRY, 'YALE REVIEW'  
September 1936, vol. xxvi, 165–6

T.S.Eliot has become a symbol of all that is advanced in poetry, and yet he is an anachronism in the sense that he is both futurist and *fin de siècle*. No one, as far as I know, has compared him to the aesthetes of the Nineties; yet his course and theirs are curiously similar. They mixed Anglican intellectuality and Parnassian impressionism; he combined academic erudition and French symbolism. They found their own times ugly, and retreated into the remote and exotic; he, equally horrified by his world, pitted a beautiful past against an evil present, and explored an unreal limbo where even the brutal was bizarre. They—Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley—could no longer face their own distortions and turned to the Catholic church, which supplied them with new color as well as a new impetus; he, unable to dwell in his Waste Land, with its nightmares of vulgarity, has found an Anglo-Catholic haven, and in return, the church has given him another kind of subsistence as well as fresh subject matter. With their desperate audacities they marked the end of the century; with his confused desperation he marks the end of an epoch.

Eliot's 'Collected Poems,' including all the poetic work he wished to print with the exception of 'Murder in the Cathedral,' his simplest and most moving creation, presents a still further paradox. The early poems—the poems of contempt, frustration, and horror,—are more compelling than the later penitences and salvations. Eliot communicates his aversions through Sweeney and Bleistein far more successfully than his resignations through Burnt Norton. 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,' that remarkable study of futility, written when Eliot was an undergraduate, scarcely depended on abstractions. Here, and in the poems that immediately succeeded it, Eliot expressed his hatred of his times in biting, if bewildering, stanzas. 'The Waste Land,' with its sequential 'The Hollow Men,' was the impasse; the poet could descend no further into boredom, emptiness, drought. 'Ash-Wednesday' points the way out; 'A Song for Simeon' and the choruses from 'The Rock' define it.

And what is the sum of the contrasts and shiftings now they are collected in one volume? Is the final effect a growth or incongruity? It is an uncertain mixture of

all. Eliot can be the most solemn of poets; there are times when his solemnities are sillier than his purposeful nonsense. The burlesque of third-rate comic opera in 'Sweeney Agonistes' is mildly amusing, but prefixing his absurdities with a quotation from St. John of the Cross is both pretentious and funny. There is no fusion, not even a 'lunar synthesis.' There are remarkable images, strange and exciting juxtapositions, sweet and acidulous discords, bleak hope matched with no final faith, the words of other men shaped into new cadences. Eliot's very idiom—and there can be no doubt of its individuality—is a paradox, being largely composed of idioms not originally his own. His lines are a mosaic of fragments from poets as incongruously joined as Browning and Paul Dresser (Theodore Dreiser's brother and composer of 'On the Banks of the Wabash'), Shakespeare and the Upanishads, Ovid and Verlaine, Dante and Edward Lear. Certain borrowed lines, often without benefit of quotation, appear again and again; for example Dante's 'At the still point of the turning world' occurs in 'Triumphal March' and the still more recent and seemingly autobiographical 'Burnt Norton.'

Yet there is no questioning Eliot's influence or his authority. The authority, however, lies not so much in what Eliot says as in his manner of saying it, even in his manner of making others say it. It lies in the very amalgam of accents, in his timely sense of confusion, and his peculiarly persuasive techniques of escape. In spite of major sonorities and an often exalted pitch, Eliot is not a major poet, but a new kind of minor poet—a minor poet in the grand manner.

103.  
R.P.BLACKMUR, THE WHOLE POET,  
'POETRY'

April 1937, vol. 1, 48–51

Blackmur (1904–65), an American literary critic, wrote a number of essays on Eliot, among the most important being T.S.Eliot: From 'Ash-Wednesday' to 'Murder in the Cathedral' in 'The Double Agent' (New York, 1935), pp. 184–218, reprinted in Unger, pp. 236–62.

It is always a pleasant exercise, with a poet of any scope, to run over the bulk of his work all at once, and especially if, as is the case with Mr. Eliot's present collection, there is a small quantity of new or relatively unfamiliar work to add to the old stock as a fresh ferment. A man's poems act upon each other specifically as the works of different poets act upon each other generally. From the whole body of poetry we get an idea—a fading or quickening image—of what poetry is like; not a demonstrable idea but an idea of which we are perfectly possessed however we may come to alter it. From the works of one poet, as we increase our ability of response, we get similarly an indestructible haunting idea of what his work is about. Shakespeare is about all his plays, sonnets, and poems. Eliot is about all his poems and plays. There is a fundamental limited, or stretched, habit of response, of objective expression of that response, which is the actual subject of a man's work. It is by no legerdemain but by a deep absorptive process of the intelligence that we come to speak most satisfyingly of a man's work by the mere abstract handle of his name. With the name, as we are able, we put on the power; forgetting the name we sometimes come on the glory; or again, if we can enough divest ourselves, come on both the ignominy and the glory.

It is astonishing, generally, how much the poems here collected tell about each other in the way of prediction and illumination, of obsession and insight, of the strength of form and the agony of formulation, of poverty, of means and of the riches secured and even predetermined by those means. The unity of the work taken together as a form of response is indefeasible, and creates, among the fragments of the separate poems, a kind of inevitable involvement which is a virtual unity of substance. It is the more astonishing, specifically, how much the

latest poem in the book, 'Burnt Norton', both depends on all the earlier poems as their inalienable product and adds to them critically and emphatically. 'Burnt Norton' makes the earlier poems grow and diminish, as it illuminates them or shows them up. Yet it is not easy to say what the poem is about as a matter of fact. There is a central image, the whole of part III, of a number of people riding in a subway train; it is an image of a spiritual, or nonspiritual, condition of which inescapable analogues assault us all. Associated with this image is an image of a rose garden with a pool, various flowers, singing birds and laughing children. Superimposed throughout are Eliot's intense and elaborated meditated versions of the two fragments of Heraclitus which form his epigraph, one about words and the other about the identity of the soul in change. Thus we get a great deal about time, a great deal in one place about the pattern or form of words (the problem of the imagination faced with actuality), and a great deal about the still point of the turning world. The poem is what happens when these elements and others not easy to name unite under the impact of the most Eliot is able to apply of the auditory imagination: that imagination which reaches down into the syllables of words, into the roots both of meaning and sound, and brings the words up newly alive.

I do not know how far, on this new level of abstraction, Mr. Eliot has made his words new and how far he has been compelled to use words worn, or moribund, or plainly dead; there are passages which read like emptied formulae from other poems; time will tell the responsive ear and the waiting intelligence. Meanwhile, it seems to me conspicuously important to say that the frames of the words used, the specific symbols, the obsessive feelings, the whole apparatus of Eliot's private clues to reality are the same here as in the earlier poems. It is the same material throughout that the poetic process is meant to make actual. I do not mean that Eliot is re-working 'AshWednesday' or that 'Ash-Wednesday' re-worked 'The Waste Land', or that 'Lear' re-worked 'Hamlet'. I mean that the identity of poetic means shows a fundamental response to identical material made on different levels of a unifying sensibility. A different level is secured by the incorporation of a different or *specific* approach into the poetic process. Here Eliot attempts to incorporate the approach of the abstracting, schematizing intellect into a process essentially dramatic and concrete. The question is how far the abstract can reach into the realm of the concrete without benefit of a driving or dramatic form—which is here absent; and the specific difficulty would seem to be to make the outline or regimen of such a meditation clear without that benefit. 'Burnt Norton' will seem successful, perhaps, if the earlier poems supply the lack; it will fail if it remains a mere appended commentary upon the material of the other poems.



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