

T. S. Eliot

The Contemporary Reviews

Edited by Jewel Spears Brooker

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The American Critical Archives is a series of reference books that provide representative selections of contemporary reviews of the main works of major American authors. Specifically, each volume contains both full reviews and excerpts from reviews that appeared in newspapers and weekly and monthly periodicals, generally within a few months of the publication of the work concerned. There is an introductory historical overview by a volume editor, as well as checklists of additional reviews located but not quoted.

T. S. Eliot is widely regarded as one of the most important and influential poets of the twentieth century. He was also extremely prolific. *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews* is a testament to both of these aspects of Eliot's work. In it, Jewel Spears Brooker presents the most comprehensive gathering of newspaper and magazine reviews of Eliot's work ever assembled. It includes reviews from both American and British journals. Brooker expands on the major themes of the reviews and shows how the reviews themselves influenced not only Eliot, but also literary history in the twentieth century.

AMERICAN CRITICAL ARCHIVES 10

T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews

The American Critical Archives

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T. S. Eliot

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Edited by
Jewel Spears Brooker

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For Ralph,
Rebecca, Allison, Jennifer, Caroline, Erika, and Amy
with love and gratitude

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Series Editor's Preface

The American Critical Archives series documents a part of a writer's career that is usually difficult to examine, that is, the immediate response to each work as it was made public by reviewers in contemporary newspapers and journals. Although it would not be feasible to reprint every review, each volume in the series reprints a selection of reviews designed to provide the reader with a proportionate sense of the critical response, whether it was positive, negative, or mixed. Checklists of other known reviews are also included to complete the documentary record and allow access for those who wish to do further reading and research.

The editor of each volume has provided an introduction that surveys the career of the author in the context of the contemporary critical response. Ideally, the introduction will inform the reader in brief of what is to be learned by a reading of the full volume. The reader then can go as deeply as necessary in terms of the kind of information desired—be it about a single work, a period in the author's life, or the author's entire career. The intent is to provide quick and easy access to the material for students, scholars, librarians, and general readers.

When completed, the American Critical Archives should constitute a comprehensive history of critical practice in America, and in some cases the United Kingdom, as the writers' careers were in progress. The volumes open a window on the patterns and forces that have shaped the history of American writing and the reputations of the writers. These are primary documents in the literary and cultural life of the nation.

M. THOMAS INGE

Introduction

When T. S. Eliot died in London in 1965, he was widely regarded as the most important poet to have written in English in the twentieth century. His obituary in the London *Times* was entitled “The Most Influential English Poet of His Time” and in *Life* magazine, a memorial essay ended with “Our age beyond any doubt has been, and will continue to be, the Age of Eliot.”¹ Although vociferously challenged, such assessments were still in place at the end of the century. In June 1998, *Time* magazine published a special issue on artists and entertainers of the past one hundred years. Picasso was named the artist of the century, Stravinsky the composer, Joyce the novelist, and Eliot the poet.² This list is a reminder that Eliot is part of a watershed in the history of Western art, and that *The Waste Land* (1922), his early showpiece, is the century’s signature poem. Eliot was also a formidable literary critic, and his “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is perhaps the century’s most noted essay in criticism. In the 1930s and 1940s, he turned to verse drama and social and religious criticism and made significant contributions to those genres as well. In the 1950s and 1960s, he became the focal point for a reaction against Modernism, and for several decades after his death, it became as fashionable to vilify him as it had once been to praise him. By century’s end, the reaction against Modernism had itself become part of the ebb and flow of cultural history, and as suggested by the *Time* special issue, Eliot and his fellow modernists had settled down among the classics.

One of the most valuable perspectives on Eliot’s career can be discovered by tracking the contemporary reviews of his work. These reviews provide a moving mirror reflecting the curve of his reputation as he was accepted as a man of letters, first in the United Kingdom, but rapidly thereafter in America, and also as he became a polarizing figure in post-Second World War literary politics. In retrospect, one can see that a few brief reviews of *Prufrock and Other Observations* were crucial in shaping the reception of Eliot’s poetry; they created a place for it and generated the sort of discussion that made reviewers eager to see more of his work. The reviews of *The Sacred Wood*, his first collection of literary journalism, were also important, for they quickly confirmed his authority as a critic, and this authority underpinned his reputation as a poet and prepared the way for the reception of *The Waste Land*. Conversely,

in the 1930s, the reviews of *After Strange Gods* and other religious and cultural essays complicated his authority and clouded judgments about his poetry and plays. These early reviews do more, however, than document the contemporary reception of Eliot's work. They anticipated to a remarkable extent the issues that would be raised in future criticism of his poetry and in future accounts of literary Modernism.

Eliot's first volume, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published in London in June 1917 by the Egoist Press, but it was preceded by the publication in 1915 of several major poems, including "Preludes" and "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (in the short-lived Vorticist magazine *Blast*), "Portrait of a Lady" (in two different collections, *Catholic Anthology* and *Others*), and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (in *Catholic Anthology* and in Chicago-based *Poetry* magazine). The general response to Eliot's first poems was that they represented something "new" in English poetry, something uniquely "Modern," and the first readers struggled to name the quality that accounted for the newness. Two of the first reviewers, Conrad Aiken and Ezra Pound, were especially heartening, and their brief comments anticipated two persistent strains of Eliot criticism, the first emphasizing subjectivity, the second, objectivity. Both of these reviewers were Americans, both were poets, both were to prove consequential in Eliot's reception, and both were to remain Eliot's friends for life. Aiken was Eliot's Harvard classmate and one of his first literary confidants. They had worked together on Harvard's literary magazine, the *Harvard Advocate*, and when Eliot went to Paris for a year at the Sorbonne in the fall of 1910, Aiken arranged to visit him. In August 1911, Aiken arrived in Paris, and when shown a draft of "Prufrock," he was immensely enthusiastic. A couple of months later, both young poets were back at Harvard, and during the academic year of 1911–12, they met regularly for dinner and discussion of their work.

The second early reviewer was Ezra Pound, who came to the attention of Eliot and Aiken through his writings in *Poetry*. In the January 1913 issue, Pound maintained that the best poetry being written was by Yeats and the "Imagistes."³ Aiken wrote a letter to the editor protesting Pound's "high-handed" and "propagandistic" views. He accused "the Editor and Mr. Pound" of caring more about self-promotion than about nurturing poetry and scolded them for using the magazine "too egotistically, . . . to give expression . . . to their own personalities." He insisted that Pound's poetry, while interesting enough, was not the touchstone by which all poetry should be measured. Harriet Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*, was unimpressed and chose not to print this mild complaint (it is preserved, however, in Aiken's published letters).⁴

In June 1914, Aiken went to London to try to make literary connections, not only for himself, but for Eliot. He took a typescript of "Prufrock" and "La Figlia che Piange," neither of which he was "able to sell," but he did succeed in having tea with Pound and telling him about Eliot's poetry.⁵ Eliot

himself arrived in London on 21 August 1914, and on 22 September, with an introduction from Aiken, he called on Pound in Kensington and showed him the typescript of "Prufrock." Pound, like Aiken, was impressed, and he immediately began a campaign to publicize Eliot's talent. He arranged for the publication of "Prufrock" in the June 1915 issue of *Poetry* and included it and several other Eliot poems in his *Catholic Anthology* (1915). In a review written a few months later, Aiken claimed that Pound's *Catholic Anthology* "blows the horn of revolution in poetry." With Eliot's poems in mind, he called his review "Esoteric Catholicity," and singled out "Prufrock" and "Portrait of a Lady" as two poems that exemplify both universality and idiosyncrasy (foreshadowing, perhaps, Eliot's "tradition" and "individual talent"): "Mr. Eliot . . . with a minimum of sacrifice to form conveys a maximum of atmosphere. Both poems are psychological character-studies, subtle to the point of insoluble idiosyncrasy, introspective, self-gnawing."⁶ Aiken understood the early Eliot better than most readers, including Pound, and here, in miniature, is a brilliant bit of literary analysis. In describing Eliot's work as "psychological character-studies . . . introspective, self-gnawing," Aiken was associating these early poems with the great tradition that includes Shakespeare's soliloquies and Browning's dramatic monologues. Eliot's peculiar way of turning his portraits inside out is what makes him so modern, what gives him his "insoluble idiosyncrasy," and at the same time, what accounts for his universality and deep humanity. Aiken's account of Eliot's poems as portraits of interior states suggests that he was thinking in terms of modern painting, particularly in terms of the mood pieces of the Expressionists. Like the canvases of Edvard Munch, poems such as "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" objectify moods, such as melancholy, or feelings, such as disgust or alienation. What Munch accomplished with color and line, Eliot accomplished with music and image.

Pound's *Catholic Anthology* also attracted the attention of mainstream critic Arthur Waugh, who considered Pound's poets as anarchists, "literary Cubists" bent on destroying English tradition. Writing in October 1916, with the Battle of the Somme still raging just across the English Channel, Waugh had reason to be alarmed about revolutionaries and the survival of the United Kingdom. He pointed to "Prufrock" as especially dangerous because especially subversive of authority. Waugh concluded with a parable comparing Eliot to the drunken slaves that wealthy men used to bring out as negative examples for the benefit of their own sons.

Waugh's review was a godsend for Pound, for it gave him an excuse to join in the public discussion of his own book, increasing its notoriety and visibility. In June 1917, in the *Egoist*, he responded to Waugh with "Drunken Helots and Mr. Eliot." Pound's strategy was to embrace Waugh's barbs and proclaim them the hallmark of the new poetry. He loved being called a "literary Cubist," and characterized the contrast between Waugh and Eliot as an archetypal struggle between old and young, stodgy and imaginative, Victorian and modern. By the

time *Prufrock and Other Observations* appeared in June 1917, Pound had a review ready to go, and it was published in the August issue of *Poetry*. Enlarging on his position from “Drunken Helots and Mr. Eliot,” he goes into detail about Eliot’s tradition—the Elizabethans and the French, with a dash of Browning—and his modernity. Pound praises Eliot’s realism, saying that “all good art is realism of one sort or another,” and his ability to observe and capture the objective world in language.

A few months later, in November 1917, Aiken followed up with a review in the *Dial*. He too lauds Eliot’s “realism,” but with a difference. In an extension of his comments of the previous year, he claims that Eliot’s strength lies in the precision with which he maps mental and moral landscapes: “This is psychological realism, but in a highly subjective or introspective vein; . . . Mr. Eliot gives us . . . the reactions of an individual to a situation for which to a large extent his own character is responsible.” Here in this brief first review of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, Aiken reveals a deeply disturbing quality of Eliot’s poetry, one never really caught by Pound and by many Modernist critics. Aiken goes on to characterize these poems as “purely autobiographic,” but “bafflingly peculiar” because they objectify something essentially private. He describes Eliot’s temperament as “hyper-aesthetic . . . with a good deal of introspective curiosity.”

Aiken’s Eliot is modern (Anglo-American, personal, subjective, psychological, Expressionistic), whereas Pound’s is Modernist (European, impersonal, objective, realistic, Post-Impressionistic, Cubistic, avant-garde). Both perspectives are valuable, so much so that entire schools of commentary have formed themselves around this basic polarity. (Eliot himself, one of the most self-reflexive and self-ironizing of poets, dealt with this binary in his criticism, most notably in his commentary on the English metaphysical poets).⁷

By the time the *Prufrock* volume appeared, then, it was already the topic *du jour* in literary circles. In struggling to describe Eliot’s style, a number of reviewers followed Pound and Aiken in drawing on analogies with the visual arts. May Sinclair, for example, writing in the December 1917 *Little Review*, focused on Eliot’s realism, particularly in “Preludes” and “Rhapsody on a Windy Night.” Defending him against the charge that his images are ugly, she insisted on his integrity in forcing the reader to see urban reality as it is. He does in words, she claimed, what Hogarth did in painting, and, as in Hogarth, there is in his juxtapositions a mixture of irony and social criticism.

Reality stripped of all rhetoric, of all ornament, . . . 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.

Sinclair praised his ability to convey the thoughts of an exceptionally intelligent character without resorting to abstractions. She noted the political undercurrent in the assessment that Eliot is dangerous. “Mr. Eliot is associated with an unpopular movement and with unpopular people. His ‘Preludes’ and ‘Rhapsody’ appeared in *Blast* . . . That circumstance alone was disturbing to the comfortable respectability of Mr. Waugh.”

If May Sinclair is closer to Pound in her reading of the Prufrock volume, the American reviewer, Babette Deutsch, is closer to Aiken. Focusing on Eliot’s technical achievement, she argues in the *New Republic* that it has the “hallmarks of impressionism.”

Impressions are strung along on a tenuous thread of sense . . . 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.

Marianne Moore also compared the poems with paintings, and like Pound, she saw an Eliot who is a true friend of the object. His poems are like Whistler’s Post-Impressionistic English canvases, but just as Eliot’s portraits are an improvement on Browning, his city scenes are an improvement on Whistler, for Eliot refuses to hide his objects “under shadows and the haze of distance.”

Another enduring debate about Eliot’s poetry was initiated by Edgar Jepson and William Carlos Williams. In the *English Review*, Jepson distinguished English poetry from “United States poetry,” and added, “Mr. Eliot is United States of the United States; and his poetry is securely rooted in its native soil.” Williams, who had already conceived of himself as the quintessential American poet and of Eliot as his opposite, responded in the *Little Review* by labeling Eliot a “subtle conformist.” He too compared Eliot with Whistler, not (as Moore did) to praise him, but to show that he was a Europeanized American. Williams’s review of Eliot’s first volume did not appear until May 1919, and by that time, most of the poems that were to comprise Eliot’s second volume, *Poems* (1919), had appeared. Williams must have seen them, for like his own comments on “Prufrock,” they were published in the *Little Review*, and he must have felt that the quatrain poems confirmed his low opinion of Eliot. Williams’s view, which was to gather steam after the Second World War, was entangled with resentment of Eliot and of critics who praised his poetry, including Pound.

The next cluster of Eliot reviews, coming in 1920 and 1921, had two *foci*, poetry and criticism. His second group of poems was published in 1919/1920 in three overlapping books—*Poems*, *Ara Vos Prec*, and *Poems* (1920). His first book of criticism—*The Sacred Wood*—appeared at the same time. The combination of opaque and avant-garde poetry with translucent and authoritative

prose puzzled some readers and dazzled others. From this time forward, Eliot's reception as poet and his authority as critic would be indissolubly linked.

The publication of Eliot's new work was to follow the pattern of the publication of the *Prufrock* poems. Individual pieces were published separately in periodicals and discussed in previews. By the time they appeared in book form, they had already become objects of interest and controversy. Between 1917 and 1919, Eliot wrote a great deal of literary journalism—not only book reviews, but substantial essays including “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” These pieces, published in little magazines and respected journals, were increasingly noticed and admired. He continued to write poetry during this period too, with most of the new poems appearing in the *Little Review*. In May 1919, Leonard and Virginia Woolf published his *Poems*, a slender volume of recent work (four quatrain poems and three poems in French). In February 1920, this collection was enlarged to include the already published *Prufrock* volume and a few new poems (notably, “Gerontion”) and published as *Ara Vos Prec* in London and as *Poems (1920)* in New York. A few months later, in November 1920 (London) and February 1921 (New York), the best of his literary journalism appeared under the title *The Sacred Wood*. This flurry of publication was related in part to Eliot's need to justify to his parents his decision to live abroad, but in part to a shrewd sense of timing in regard to his career.

The reviewers of the new poems, like the reviewers of *Prufrock*, groped for words to describe Eliot's work, and most used analogies from the visual arts. Robert Nichols compared the poems to canvases by Walter Sickert and Rembrandt, and Clive Bell compared Eliot to Matisse, Picasso, and Braque. Neither Aiken nor Pound reviewed these volumes, but their general points of view were evident. Aiken's psychological slant can be seen in the review of *Ara Vos Prec* by John Middleton Murry, who suspected that there was something deeply personal in these poems, that the poet was a chameleon moving against protective backgrounds and contexts. He saw this chameleon as Prufrockian—intelligent, subtle, and ironic, a “connoisseur in the discrepancy between intention and achievement.” Desmond MacCarthy, similarly, praised Eliot's uncanny talent for projecting the modern mind, and he tried to describe the techniques through which Eliot simultaneously conceals and reveals the self. Pound's Modernist slant, on the other hand, can be seen in the review by Clive Bell, who emphasized impersonality and wit. Bell associated Eliot with such figures as Stravinsky, Joyce, and Picasso. Richard Aldington, similarly, underscored Eliot's place in a movement that included these same figures. Babette Deutsch, whose views resembled Aiken's, introduced Eliot's “weird and brilliant book” to American readers by praising “Prufrock” as “a piece of psychological analysis of extraordinary delicacy and brilliance” and by classifying the quatrain poems as stilted and strange.

The reception of Eliot's early poetry was greatly enhanced by his growing prestige as a critic. Robert Nichols's review of *Ara Vos Prec*, written seven

months *before* the publication of *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot's first volume of criticism, began by assuring readers that the author of these unusual verses "is known to the world at large . . . 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 today." Nichols was writing in April 1920, just after the March publication of *Three Critical Essays on Modern English Poetry*, a special edition of *Chapbook* containing essays by Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and F. S. Flint.⁸ This special issue had been previewed in *Chapbook* in February by Douglas Goldring, who lamented criticism's loss of prestige and expressed the belief that a young American now settled in London might be able to make a difference.

Mr. Eliot has a scientific, analytical brain, and approaches his task with . . . the detachment of the great surgeon who, knife in hand, advances towards the exposed flesh of the anaesthetized "case." He rarely makes a cut in the wrong place, he dissects with an unhurried precision, and remorselessly reveals the structure and the content of the book on which he operates. His learning is prodigious . . . ; he has undoubtedly one of the most distinguished critical minds of our time.

Goldring's description of Eliot's criticism—detached, impersonal, scientific, analytical, surgical—was accepted by an increasing number of critics, including the anonymous reviewers of the *Times Literary Supplement*, who joined the chorus, praising Eliot's concept of criticism as "just and high."

When *The Sacred Wood* was published a few months later, Leonard Woolf was one of the first reviewers, and he reiterated the view that Eliot represented a post-war recovery of detachment. Writing in the *Athenaeum*, Woolf claimed that Eliot's work "seems to cry aloud, 'Back to Aristotle,' and . . . brings us up with a shock against the satisfying, if painful, hardness of the intellect." For Eliot, as for Aristotle, he insisted, "criticism is a science, and it must . . . rely upon the two great scientific instruments, comparison and analysis." Woolf, like Pound, stressed the virtue of impersonality, quoting with approval Eliot's statement that "it is in . . . depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science." Aldington and other reviewers echoed Woolf's position.

But Aiken demurred. In "The Scientific Critic," a long and substantial review in the *Freeman*, he contended that criticism is not a science, but an art, and it does not begin with an analysis of aesthetics, but with an understanding of life. Aiken complimented Eliot, but tempered his praise by calling into question two central tenets celebrated in the reviews by Woolf and his friends. First, he rejected the notion that art can be impersonal and expressed dissatisfaction with Eliot's "vague" use of the word "impersonality." Second, he denied that a great poet or even a great critic could ever really be "scientific." Regarding Eliot's stated desire "to see the object as it really is," Aiken asks "Is poetry

an object, or an experience?” Criticism, he claimed, must begin in the human sciences with an attempt to understand “the function of art, social[ly] and psychologically . . . in the community, in the life of the artist.”

In 1922, Eliot’s most famous poem, *The Waste Land*, was published, first in periodicals, and immediately thereafter in book form. In the United Kingdom, it appeared in October in the inaugural issue of the *Criterion*, and in America, it came out in November in the *Dial*, in both cases without the dedication to Pound and without the “Notes.” It was published as a book on 15 December in New York by Boni and Liveright, and on 12 September 1923 in London by the Woolfs at Hogarth Press. The poem outraged some readers, baffled some, and dazzled still others. For the most part, the first group considered it to be either meaningless or dangerous, whereas the second and third groups welcomed it as either a mirror of modernity or a bold experiment. The tone in a good number of these reviews was urgent and polemical, as if something much bigger was at stake than the fate of a single poet and a single poem.

As was the case with Eliot’s earlier publications, *The Waste Land* entered literary discussion in the United Kingdom and America many months before the poem itself appeared in print. The London literary establishment knew that Eliot was working on a “long poem.” Several friends, notably Pound and Aiken, had seen drafts of the fragments that were to make up the poem. The Bloomsbury set also knew the poem before it was published. On 18 June 1922, Eliot read it aloud to Virginia and Leonard Woolf and their friend Mary Hutchinson.⁹ In America, Gilbert Seldes, editor of the *Dial*, had become an admirer, and in September, he arranged for Eliot to receive the *Dial* award for literature.¹⁰

The Waste Land made its presence felt almost immediately. Within a couple of weeks of its appearance in the *Criterion*, it was hailed by the *Times Literary Supplement* as a “great poem,” “its vision singularly complex,” “its labyrinths utterly sincere.” The anonymous reviewer added, “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.” Such an introduction guaranteed serious reviews, and scores were forthcoming. Several raised issues and themes that were to exercise Eliot studies for the rest of the century. As was the case with Eliot’s earlier work, the most powerful reviews were by his fellow Americans—Aiken, Seldes, and Edmund Wilson.

The first few reviews included several related directly or indirectly to the 1922 *Dial* award. The award was announced in the *New York Times* on 26 November and in *Dial* in the December issue. Seldes wrote a piece on Eliot for the 6 December issue of *Nation* and commissioned Edmund Wilson to write a review of *The Waste Land* to accompany the announcement of the award in *Dial*. Wilson’s essay was his second on Eliot in less than a month; both were brilliant and both prophetic of the direction future discussions would take. Wilson’s first review, “The Rag-Bag of the Soul,” appeared 25 November in

the *New York Evening Post*. Like other critics in the 1910s and 1920s, he was trying to pinpoint the distinguishing characteristic of modern art. A number of reviewers, citing Eliot's poetry and criticism, maintained that the modern element was a new objectivity, a new classicism. Wilson, on the other hand, argued that the modern element was a new subjectivity. Beginning in the late nineteenth century with Expressionism, painters and writers began to show more interest in the world within the self than in the world of objects or of society, and they developed new forms to project their thoughts and feelings. Wilson suggested that "The characteristic literary form today . . . is a cross-section of the . . . consciousness of a single specific human being, usually carried through a very limited period, such as a day or a week." For support, he pointed to such works as "Prufrock" and "Gerontion," Pound's *Eight Cantos*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*. Several critics, in discussing modern literature, had used the image of a "stream of consciousness." In describing Eliot's achievement in *The Waste Land*, Wilson changes the metaphor from a stream to a rag-bag, a repository of scraps haphazardly saved for possible use. The fragments in this rag-bag are spiritual and mental—"chunks of human consciousness." Some are personal—particles of passion or pieces of self-knowledge; some are cultural—nursery rhymes or bits of Shakespeare; many are accidental—shards found in a particular place at a particular time. Wilson's image is helpful, for whereas a stream suggests time, a rag-bag suggests space. The first allows for narrative, for sequence and order, for beginnings and ends, but the second suggests only juxtaposition and chance. Wilson's review, interestingly, represents a synthesis of the approaches to Eliot's work by Aiken and Pound. Like Aiken, he insists that the poem is personal, taking its origin and its material from Eliot's "soul." And like Pound, he argues that the poem is impersonal, a reflection of post-war culture, of "our present condition of disruption."

Wilson's second review, "The Poetry of Drouth," appeared in December in the *Dial*. One of his objectives was to preempt the argument that *The Waste Land* is either unreadable or too obscure to make it worth the trouble. Using Eliot's own notes, he wrote a primer on the mythical method, with explanations of the myth of the waste land drawn from Frazer and Weston.¹¹ He suggested that, for Eliot, the arid land where almost nothing can grow is a symbol, a concrete image, of a "spiritual drouth." He insisted that one does not have to know Eliot's allusions. "For all its complicated correspondences and recondite references . . . , *The Waste Land* is intelligible at first reading. . . . the very images and sounds of the words—even when we do not know why he has chosen them—are charged with a strange poignancy." As in his previous review, Wilson argued convincingly that *The Waste Land* is at once personal and impersonal, local and universal, temporal and timeless. It is marked by "the hunger for beauty and the anguish at living which lie at the bottom of all his work." At

the same time, the poet is speaking “not only for a personal distress, but for the starvation of a whole civilization. . . . a whole world of strained nerves and shattered institutions.”

Wilson’s two reviews anticipate much of the best criticism of *The Waste Land* of the next half century. He identified the themes that make the poem seem so universal and described the structure that makes it seem so formidable. Chaos, he insisted, was not in the poem, but in the poet and the culture. In explaining the monomyth as narrative and relating it to history and religion, he provided the paradigm that the New Critics and many others would use in interpreting the poem. A decade later, in *Axel’s Castle*, Wilson expanded his discussion of Eliot as part of a now classic genealogy of Modernism, correctly placing Eliot, Yeats, and other Modernists as heirs of the French Symbolists.¹²

Seldes’s piece on Eliot appeared in the 6 December issue of the *Nation*. His purpose was to introduce Eliot to Americans and, further, to call attention to the *Dial* award. He discussed Eliot’s criticism, with emphasis on the “historical sense,” “depersonalization,” and allusiveness. Claiming that “it is from his critical utterances that we derive the clue to his poetry,” Seldes proceeded to use these concepts to interpret *The Waste Land*. He conceded the poem’s brokenness, but argued that it has a “hidden form,” that “each piece falls into place” when the reader knows Eliot’s criticism and understands the title metaphor of the waste land. “Every great and original writer,” Wordsworth said in 1807, “in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished.”¹³ Seldes’s essay suggested that Eliot had succeeded in creating such a taste and, with the help of his well-placed friends, had fostered a climate in which his poem could be appreciated.

A couple of months after Wilson and Seldes had reviewed *The Waste Land*, Aiken published his review, “An Anatomy of Melancholy,” in the *New Republic*. This piece, like the two reviews by Wilson, raised issues which would remain under discussion for the rest of the century. As a reader of *The Waste Land*, Aiken was an insider. He had been a confidant throughout the entire period of the poem’s composition, and in the fall and winter of 1921–22, while living in London, he had lunched with Eliot several times a week. He knew of Eliot’s health and marital problems, and he had seen some of the fragments that were to be incorporated into the finished poem. In a note to a 1958 reprinting of his review, Aiken said that although he knew the background of the poem, he felt that it would have been a betrayal to have used this knowledge in the review.¹⁴

In retrospect, the complexity of Aiken’s relationship with Eliot can be detected as an undercurrent in his evaluation of the poem. Aiken was lavish in praising *The Waste Land*, describing it as “unquestionably important, unquestionably brilliant”; at the same time, he also considered it “pretentious.” His main objection related to its self-reflexivity, its learning, its “Notes.” It is literature made of literature, and moreover, many of the allusions are too obscure

to be meaningful. If allusions are to be effective, he argued, they “must flower where they are transplanted.” But in spite of his reservations about the allusions, Aiken had no doubts about the poem’s overall power. That power, he suggested, derives from its origins in Eliot’s personal life, and he tried to say so obliquely by applauding its “emotional value.” He contended that the poem has unity, not because it is built on some literary sub-structure, but because it is supported by a “dim unity of personality.” It consists (as Wilson had also said) of fragments of consciousness, memories, and desires. It invites the reader “into a mind, a world, which is a ‘broken bundle of mirrors,’ a ‘heap of broken images.’” Picking up on Prufrock’s metaphor, Aiken maintained that in *The Waste Land*, Eliot had succeeded in throwing his nerves in patterns on the screen of the poem. He acknowledged a certain incoherence, if judged by standards of logic or narrative, but suggested that such standards are not relevant in modern poetry. *The Waste Land* “succeeds by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan.” Aiken also emphasized the poem’s tonal qualities. Understanding the poem’s structure, he claimed, is less dependent upon knowing the monomyth than upon having a good ear. It is “an emotional ensemble,” “a melancholy tone poem,” and its coherence is musical. He also used a visual analogy—*The Waste Land* is a “brilliant and kaleidoscopic confusion . . . a series of sharp, discrete, slightly related perceptions and feelings, dramatically and lyrically presented and violently juxtaposed.”

The reviews of *The Waste Land* by Wilson and Aiken are the best of the sixty or more considered for this collection, but numerous others are also insightful. Burton Rascoe, who considered it the “finest poem of a generation” and wrote several good reviews, was amused to be considered part of a dark conspiracy to palm off “an unintelligible work by an obscure scribbler as the great poetic work of the year”; Elinor Wylie and Edgell Rickword, like Aiken, read the poem as the projection of a uniquely modern sensibility. Rickword, again like Aiken, used Prufrock’s image of a magic lantern show in which the poet’s nerves are thrown in patterns on a screen.

The negative reviewers of *The Waste Land* objected mainly to its allusiveness (its learning), its tone (its negativity), and its form (its incoherence and fragmentation). Louis Untermeyer took up all three points in a withering review, “Disillusion vs. Dogma,” published 17 January 1923 in *Freeman*. Untermeyer had appreciated the *Prufrock* poems for their combination of irony and “poetic color,” but he had been disappointed in the quatrain poems, with their “epigrammatic velleities” and “crackling” tone.¹⁵ He was appalled by *The Waste Land*, which he saw as an attempt to combine these two styles, with disastrous consequences. Impatient with the allusions, he dismissed them as forming “a pompous parade of erudition,” “cryptic in intention and dismal in effect.” He was distressed by the lack of decorum shown by mixing high and low culture, combining genres and styles, “mingling . . . willful obscurity and weak vaudeville.” Untermeyer maintained that the tone, though “an extension of

[Eliot's] early disillusion," was too pessimistic, too colored by "contemporary despair." And finally, he objected to the form of the poem. While accepting the notion that the chaos in the poem was a reflection of the chaos in contemporary culture, he insisted that the duty of an artist is "to give form to formlessness," not simply to reproduce it. This critique would later be christened the "fallacy of imitative form" by Yvor Winters. Other reviewers—F. L. Lucas, J. C. Squire, even John Crowe Ransom—were offended by various aspects of the poem. Still, by the time the cycle of reviews had run its course, Eliot had acquired an impressive reputation, with such knowledgeable critics as Clive Bell and Leonard Woolf calling him the best of modern English poets.

In 1925, Eliot published his second cumulative collection, *Poems 1909–1925*. It included the Prufrock poems, the 1920 poems, *The Waste Land*, and one important new work, "The Hollow Men." The reviews of this volume reveal a growing consensus regarding his work, and that consensus is overwhelmingly positive. There were dissenters, of course, but they were no match for Eliot's energetic admirers. His earlier reviewers picked up their pens again, and they were joined by the critic and psychologist, I. A. Richards. On the American side, the best reviews are by Edmund Wilson, Conrad Aiken, and Allen Tate; on the British, by Leonard Woolf, John Middleton Murry, and I. A. Richards. Wilson's review, like his brief pieces on *The Waste Land*, is brilliant, and he adds a new insight: Eliot can be seen as one of the American writers shaped by the Puritan mind. Aiken resumed his sometimes cantankerous but always insightful commentary, asserting that Eliot's theme was the "paralyzing effect of self-consciousness." Tate argued that Eliot is a poet of ideas. Among the British critics, Woolf and Murry resumed the discussion begun in their earlier reviews. Woolf maintained that Eliot perfectly represents the "spirit of 1922," and Murry argued that Romanticism and idealism died on the Somme, and that writers such as Eliot and Virginia Woolf reflect a "new classicism," a new realism and cynicism born of having weathered personal and national catastrophe.

Richards wrote a brief but impressive review for the *New Statesman*, and, a few months later, he included it as an appendix to the second edition of *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926). Like Wilson and Aiken, Richards argued that the modern element in Eliot's poetry is a special subjectivity that controls structure, imagery, and mood. The structure is based on the coalescence and contrast of emotional effects; the central technique is "conjunction of feeling." The symbols are psychological, not mystical; the topic is not culture but sex, "the problem of our generation as religion was the problem of the last." The allusions are not important in themselves, but for the "emotional aura which they bring." Richards suggested that Eliot had marked his work with a "personal stamp, which is a certain sign of authenticity" in art.

By the middle 1920s, Eliot had achieved distinction as a man of letters; as an individual human being, however, he was close to collapse from a decade

of stress and overwork. He had arrived in England in August 1914, the very month in which the Great War began, and for three years from September 1915, he suffered the hardships of life in a city under aerial bombardment. His closest friend was killed at Gallipoli, and many of his English friends were slaughtered or maimed. His marriage in June 1915 brought more grief than bliss, and, by the early 1920s, it had crumbled. His wife was ceaselessly ill, and the personal and financial strain of supporting her contributed to his own breakdown in 1921. All of this and more reached a climax in the mid-1920s, and in June 1927, as part of an attempt to reclaim his life, he entered the English Church. Both his crisis and his recovery can be traced in his writings. In 1928, he published a new collection of essays, *For Lancelot Andrewes*, with a preface stating that his “general point of view” could now “be described as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion.”¹⁶ In the months that followed, he published in pamphlet form his great essay on Dante (1929) and his poetic sequence *Asb-Wednesday* (1930). In addition, he contributed several Christmas poems, including “Journey of the Magi,” to Faber’s *Ariel* series. Both the essays and the poems reflect his new commitment to Christianity.

The new Eliot was greeted with respect by a few, with astonishment by many more, and with a strange combination of admiration and disdain by others. When *For Lancelot Andrewes* appeared in November 1928, Jacob Bronowski wrote a review bemoaning Eliot’s attack on humanism and challenging his connection of classicism and Christianity. In what would become a refrain in subsequent criticism, the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer noted a contradiction between Eliot the critic and Eliot the poet, the first shaped by classical ideals and the second by romantic longing. The anonymous reviewer found the profession of Christianity “from the author of *The Waste Land* . . . astonishing, to say the least,” and although he found much to praise in Eliot’s new work, he clearly found much to regret. He also felt a sense of betrayal, for the most modern of all poets had “abdicated from his high position; he rejects Modernism for medievalism.”

One of the most powerful voices emerging from the reviews of *For Lancelot Andrewes* was that of F. R. Leavis. In a rebuke to condescending reviewers, he reminded critics that Eliot was a poet of profound originality and a critic of immense intelligence. Wilson concurred, calling Eliot “the most important literary critic in the English-speaking world.” Wilson said that he understood Eliot’s disenchantment with modern materialism and substitute religions; at the same time, he argued that the turn to “medieval theology” was not one that modern intellectuals could follow. The most striking review of *For Lancelot Andrewes* was written by Eliot’s old friend Conrad Aiken. Entitled “Retreat,” it was published in the *Dial*, the very periodical that had done so much to launch *The Waste Land*. Aiken suggested that while it is impossible to read Eliot without respect, it is also impossible to read him without “misgivings.”

Accusing Eliot of being “in retreat from the present and all that it implies,” he concluded with comments that must have been painful for Eliot to have read. Aiken claimed that Eliot’s new position represented “a complete abdication of intelligence. And with this abdication goes a striking change in Mr. Eliot’s whole outlook and style. A note of withered dogmatism sounds repeatedly in these pages.” Aiken expressed hope that Eliot would return to the present and resume his role as an “intrepid explorer” of modern life.

Aiken did not review *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), but later, somewhat surprisingly, he called it Eliot’s “most beautiful” poem.¹⁷ Most readers were struck by the discontinuity between it and Eliot’s earlier poetry, but several of the poet’s more astute critics noted that the surface discontinuity concealed a deeper continuity. Morton Zabel, for example, maintained that, in hindsight, Eliot’s conversion was predictable and that it should be understood at least partially in terms of his deep identification with Dante. Anticipating a number of later critics, Zabel saw *The Waste Land* as a modern *Inferno* and *Ash-Wednesday* as a modern *Purgatorio*. The best of the *Ash-Wednesday* reviews are by two seasoned American reviewers of Eliot’s work, Edmund Wilson and Allen Tate. Emphasizing continuity between *The Waste Land* and *Ash-Wednesday*, Wilson conceded that the poem is brilliant and a worthy successor to Eliot’s earlier work. He saw the poem as a masterpiece of Symbolism and praised its musical values, its infinitely suggestive images, its appropriation of ritual, and most of all, the peculiar honesty it brought to the representation of the human soul. More formalist in orientation, Tate insisted that Eliot’s poetry should be read as poetry and not as a commentary on Eliot’s conversion. He did not argue that content and feeling are irrelevant, but simply that they should be sought in the poem and not in the poet. In a particularly valuable insight, he noted that the irony in the early poems is transfigured as humility in *Ash-Wednesday*.

The next cluster of reviews can be associated with Eliot’s return to America in 1932. He had left the United States in 1914, and except for a brief trip home immediately after his marriage in 1915, he had not been back. This was due, in the first instance, to the war, but after the war, to a variety of economic and personal circumstances. When he sailed for Europe in the summer of 1914, he was a student; when he returned in 1932, he was one of the most distinguished men in the English-speaking world. The occasion for his return was an invitation to give the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University for 1932–33. While in the United States, he was showered with awards and feted in glittering settings. In the spring of 1933, he gave the Page-Barbour lectures at the University of Virginia.

Three major publications, all in prose, can be associated with Eliot’s homecoming. The first, *Selected Essays*, was a collection of his early journalism. Published in September 1932, it was timed to coincide with his arrival in the United States. The second, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, consisting of the Norton lectures, was published by Harvard University Press in

1933. The third, *After Strange Gods*, consisting of the Page-Barbour lectures, appeared in 1934. The cumulative effect of the reviews of these books was negative, with even the most admiring readers expressing concerns about Eliot's views on religious and cultural subjects.

For American readers, *Selected Essays* provided both a reminder of Eliot's eminence and an occasion to reassess his importance in modern literary culture. The London *Sunday Times* published a cordial review by R. A. Scott-James praising Eliot's "cool sanity," "analytical judgment," "fastidiousness," and his scrupulous attention to the object. In America, the *New York Times* joined the long list of papers paying homage to Eliot. Peter Monro Jack's review, "The Cream of T. S. Eliot's Literary Criticism," while not original, was upbeat and positive. R. P. Blackmur suggested in *Poetry* that Eliot was a valuable model, because "without insulting our intelligence or diminishing his own, he supplies us with something different from ourselves."

Many reviewers, however, seemed perplexed by *Selected Essays*. Their primary concern was the long-perceived discontinuity between Eliot's poetry and his prose, further complicated by his inclusion in *Selected Essays* of non-literary writings. In a generally positive piece in the *Saturday Review*, Paul Elmer More tried to come to terms with the "cleft Eliot." Edgell Rickword, one of Eliot's earliest and best reviewers, lamented the discontinuity between the poet's literary and moral imaginations. He maintained that when Eliot writes about literature, he has no equal, but when he writes about humanism, he becomes less interesting, less valuable. Some critics argued that there were at least "three Eliots"—a modern poet, a classic critic, and a mediocre thinker. Henry Hazlitt suggested in the *Nation* that it was almost unthinkable that these three could be the same person. Even Eliot's most admiring reviewers were forced to acknowledge the dissociation. Bonamy Dobrée, on the defensive for Eliot's sake, insisted that the poetry and criticism should be seen as the reflection of one mind, one sensibility. But even while praising Eliot's urbanity, clarity, and strength, he admitted that the essays on humanism diluted Eliot's greatness. Robert Hillyer, writing in the *New England Quarterly*, was less charitable. He saw the split in Eliot's prose collection as the reflection of a man divided against himself, and submitted that "Mr. Eliot's vogue" was due to the fact that his admirers were "similarly disorganized." Hillyer questioned Eliot's expatriation, seeing it as "a symbol of that homelessness which has obsessed his mind for so long" and has caused him to seek sanctuary in the Church.

The mixed reviews of *Selected Essays* modulated into the largely negative ones of the Harvard lectures, published in 1933 as *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. A handful of reviews were positive, including that by Peter Monro Jack in the *New York Times*, and, more substantially, by Cleanth Brooks in the *Southwest Review*. Brooks, a pioneer of the New Criticism, was at the beginning of his distinguished career. Considering Eliot's work as a whole, he argued that it represented an attempt, largely successful, to reassess and

reorder English poetry. But most reviewers demurred. The tenor is caught in the opening sentences of Richmond Lattimore's review in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*. *The Use of Poetry*, he suggested, "is on the whole disappointing, not so much because of its defects as because of the false hopes that may be raised in the reader's mind by the association of Mr. Eliot's known abilities with . . . his title. Mr. Eliot does not tell us what the use of poetry is, and he almost manages to convey a certain feeling of contempt for anyone who expects to be told." The expectations raised by Eliot's distinction were too high, and as Lattimore's comment indicates, his "known abilities" worked against him.

Lattimore identified three main criticisms of Eliot's new book. First, as noted by both American and British reviewers, the book seemed to have no thesis. *The Sacred Wood* and *Selected Essays* had been presented as collections of separate essays, but *The Use of Poetry* was advertised as a book, a series of interconnected lectures. A number of powerful reviewers, including John Crowe Ransom, Montgomery Belgion, and D. G. Bridson, in addition to Lattimore, pointed out that Eliot had failed to say what the use of poetry is or should be. Second, the book had an unfortunate tone, a feature pointed out by several reviewers, including Stephen Spender. And third, Eliot's habit of negative definition, of saying what a thing is not rather than what it is, irritated some reviewers. Joseph Wood Krutch, for example, remarked that this habit is more provocative than helpful, more destructive than constructive.

Admirers of Eliot's early work expressed special unhappiness with *The Use of Poetry*. Some of these reviewers, notably Aiken and Pound, were compromised by their ideological divergence—Aiken by his distaste for religion and Pound by his obsession with economics. Still their reviews are telling and worth noting. Writing in the *Yale Review*, Aiken focused on Eliot's disagreement with I. A. Richards on the value of psychological readings of poetry and on the value of poetry as a modern religion. Aiken confessed that he himself "agrees entirely with Mr. Richards," especially in the view "that mankind, having shed religious dogma and arbitrary faith, will find through poetry a sufficient communication with the world and a sufficient source for belief." Pound, writing in the *New English Weekly*, was much harsher, sarcastically referring to his old friend as the "Dean of English Criticism" and the "Editor of Britain's Brightest Quarterly." He insisted that Eliot "shows no perception whatever" of the "obfuscation of literary perceptions" caused by "economic putridity." The reader of *The Use of Poetry*, he maintained, "would do well to read the first part [introduction and first chapter] and chuck the rest into the waste basket."

Reviews of *After Strange Gods*, the third book associated with Eliot's homecoming, mark the low point in his reception. In these essays, written as the Page-Barbour lectures for the University of Virginia, Eliot revisits his notion of tradition and tries to integrate his insights regarding culture and religion into his understanding of modern literature. The response was

overwhelmingly negative. Reviewers chastised him for changing his notion of tradition, for mixing religion and literature, for a prejudicial reference to Jews, and for harsh judgments about contemporary writers. Neither of the American books (*The Use of Poetry* and *After Strange Gods*), cried Leavis, was worthy of the author. They contain much of value, he conceded, but at the same time, much that is “painfully bad, disablingly inadequate, often irrelevant and sometimes disingenuous.” S. I. Hayakawa expressed a similar view: “To one who has sat unashamed at Mr. Eliot’s feet for years, his latest volume is perplexing and distressing.” He affirmed his admiration, insisting that “Mr. Eliot is a great writer . . . it is not without reason that everything he . . . writes commands the immediate and respectful attention of the entire English-speaking world”; at the same time, he lamented Eliot’s negativity, especially his preoccupation with the darker aspects of religion, such as sin and damnation. Hayakawa voiced the fear “that [Eliot] will grow narrower and more disapproving in tone as he grows older.” Pound, predictably, deplored Eliot’s religious turn, and William Troy, writing in the *Nation*, was brutally negative. In “T. S. Eliot: Grand Inquisitor,” Troy argued that Eliot was self-deceived and “morally reprehensible.” He associated Eliot’s earlier comment about royalism with fascism and the sentence about “free-thinking Jews” in *After Strange Gods* with anti-Semitism. A mild attempt at compromise was offered by Horace Gregory in the *New Republic*. He suggested that the real split in Eliot is not between the poet and the critic, but between the poet and the public figure. The first Eliot is real, but the second is bogus, an accidental result of the first.

In 1936, to the relief of most reviewers, the “real Eliot” resurfaced. *Collected Poems 1909–1935* brought together his work from 1920 and 1925 and added significant new poems, including “Journey of the Magi,” “Marina,” *Ash-Wednesday*, and “Burnt Norton.” This volume, the first collection after his conversion and concurrent stylistic turn, provided an opportunity to assess his development. In both the United Kingdom and America, the reviews were largely positive, most confirming Eliot’s centrality in modern poetry. Reviewers speculated on his poetic forebears, some discussing his descent from the Elizabethans, some his kinship with the French Symbolists, and some his similarities to the Decadents. Cyril Connolly, writing in the *Sunday Times*, asked the reader to imagine what English poetry would have been like in 1935 if T. S. Eliot had never existed. He suggested that it would have been far less prestigious and claimed that its future was brighter because Eliot was still writing. In one of the most interesting British assessments, D. W. Harding, in *Scrutiny*, asked why Eliot’s early work was considered more *chic* than his later work. His response was that the early poetry lends itself more easily to protest, to readers who feel themselves victims of history, while the later poetry suggests that suffering arises from one’s own choices. American reviews by Marianne Moore, Babette Deutsch, Morton Zabel, and Peter Monroe Jack ranked Eliot as the most influential poet of his generation. Jack, writing in the *New York*

Times, described the poet's stylistic change from, say, *The Waste Land* to "Burnt Norton" as a welcome move toward greater accessibility, a move from being a "poet's poet" to being a "people's poet." The Marxist critic Rolfe Humphries, writing in *New Masses* and echoing D. S. Mirsky, praised Eliot for bringing his rare gifts to social themes (alienation, poverty, urban decay) of real significance. While admitting that Eliot himself never urges a classless society, he suggested that Eliot "has written, with poetic authority too great to be questioned, the elegy of an age that is passing."

Eliot's main creative energy in the 1930s, however, was not devoted to poetry. When he returned to England after the American tour, he turned to poetic drama, a genre that had interested him for two decades. Several of his early poems, including "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," consist of interior dialogues, and *The Waste Land*, as suggested by its working title ("He Do the Police in Different Voices"), is an arrangement of various voices. Eliot's early criticism, similarly, shows a keen interest in drama, and some of his well-known critical formulations, including the "objective correlative," arose from his reflections on Renaissance plays.¹⁸ His first attempt to write a play resulted in *Sweeney Agonistes*, a fragment published in 1932 and intended as a dark comedy of contemporary life. His second effort, *The Rock*, published in 1934, was a pageant for several voices, written to raise money for church-building in London. His third dramatic endeavor was a fully realized play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, written by invitation and first performed in Canterbury Cathedral in 1935. His fourth, *The Family Reunion*, published in 1939, was his first venture for the secular stage. The response to these works followed a trajectory from negative to mixed to positive, followed by a retreat to mixed.

Sweeney Agonistes received few reviews, and most were negative. Reviewers felt that the characters and plot were dull; at the same time, some noted with interest Eliot's experimentation with music-hall and jazz rhythms. In regard to *The Rock*, reviewers were divided between an inclination to give due regard to Eliot the poet and a reluctance to define as art a work written to raise money for churches. Conrad Aiken, to mention one of the poet's earliest admirers, liked the choruses, but felt uncomfortable with the idea that art was being used as a handmaiden to religion. Some commentators upgraded their evaluation after seeing *Murder in the Cathedral*, deciding in retrospect that the pageant had been a warm-up for a landmark play.

The reception of *Murder in the Cathedral* was positive in both the United Kingdom and America. The *Times Literary Supplement*, which often set the tone for response to Eliot's new work, said that the play was the culmination of his experiments in dramatic style. I. M. Parsons, writing in the *Spectator*, claimed that Mr. Eliot "has reanimated a literary form which in England has been dead or dormant for nearly three hundred years, and in so doing he has found himself anew as a poet, only with an added ease, lucidity, and objectiveness." Edwin Muir emphasized the play's "intellectual scheme," and James

Laughlin commented on Eliot's evolution as an artist. The American reviews were substantial and lavish. Even Aiken, writing (hiding?) in the *New Yorker* under the pseudonym of Samuel Jeake, Jr., was enthusiastic.

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

Mark Van Doren, writing in the *Nation*, remarked that Eliot “has written no better poem than this.” The title of Peter Monro Jack's review in the *New York Times* sums up his response: “T. S. Eliot's Drama of Beauty and Momentous Decision.” Philip Rahv, in the *Partisan Review*, praised the play and commented on the “crudeness” of those who dismiss Eliot's poetry because they cannot share his religious beliefs. Reviews of the first New York performance were also positive.

Fortified by his success with *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot returned to the idea of doing a play about contemporary life for a secular audience. In *The Family Reunion*, published in 1939 and set in a drawing room in northern England, he revisited several of his old themes—the divided self, alienation, family and community, and perhaps most of all, the nature of evil/sin. Once again, the *Times Literary Supplement* set the tone. The anonymous reviewer lamented that Eliot had retreated to the naturalism he had earlier abandoned. Several British reviewers focused on Eliot's use of the *Oresteia* as a backdrop for the play, and most felt that the experiment was not successful. Desmond MacCarthy, writing in the *New Statesman*, opined that the Greek myth was implausible in a modern drawing room. Maud Bodkin, on the other hand, defended Eliot's use of Aeschylus, maintaining in *Adelphi* that he used the Furies to convey what he could not have conveyed through ordinary techniques. American reviewers were similarly divided on the use of the myth. Some, such as John Crowe Ransom, writing in *Poetry*, insisted that Eliot's Eumenides are “too ‘literary’ to express the metaphysical realities” he is struggling to convey and predicted that modern audiences would not accept them. Horace Gregory, in *Life and Letters*, called the play one of Eliot's “successful failures.” He applauded the theme and the will to experiment with myth, but claimed that the use of the Eumenides was not satisfactorily realized. Other American reviewers focused on characterization and theme. In the *Kenyon Review*, Philip Horton argued that the characters were inadequately motivated, and the theme of “sin and expiation” was unintelligible. The problem of characterization was also taken up by Desmond Hawkins who, writing in the *New English Weekly*, related it to Eliot's much earlier discussion of *Hamlet*. Eliot's Harry, like Shakespeare's

Hamlet, is dominated by an emotion “in excess of the facts,” by an “all-pervasive and universally diffused disgust . . . which overwhelms everything else in the play.” To use the language of Eliot’s essay on Hamlet: Harry’s emotion lacks an objective correlative. Hawkins concluded that Harry is Eliot’s Hamlet, “a Mona Lisa of literature.” Many American reviewers, conversely, admired the play. Cleanth Brooks, writing in the *Partisan Review*, commented on its effective symbolism and its continuities with Eliot’s earlier work. George Anthony, writing in the *Sewanee Review*, called it “far and away the best dramatic work Eliot has given us,” and Frederick Pottle said in the *Yale Review* that it was a technical triumph.

Eliot’s main concern during the 1930s, however, was not with dramas for Broadway or London’s West End, but with the conflict shaping itself in the European political theatre. By the end of the decade, he knew that he and his generation were lost in the middle of the dark wood, “having had twenty years—/ Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l’entre deux guerres*” (“East Coker”). In January 1939, in deep despair, he published his last issue of *The Criterion*. Prevented by the war from writing another play, he returned to the solitary work of writing poems and completed *Four Quartets*, an ambitious sequence of four poems. The first quartet, “Burnt Norton,” grew from a passage cut from *Murder in the Cathedral*. Written in 1935 as a single poem, it was the primary new piece in *Collected Poems 1909–1935*. The remaining three quartets appeared during the Second World War. “East Coker,” written on the “Burnt Norton” model, appeared in 1940. While working on “East Coker,” Eliot conceived of a musical sequence of four poems, based on the four seasons and the four elements. “Burnt Norton” was republished as a separate work in 1941 and the third quartet, “The Dry Salvages,” appeared in the same year; the fourth, “Little Gidding,” in 1942; and the four together under the title *Four Quartets* in 1943.

Because the quartets were published over a period of several years, reviews appeared over an extended period, culminating in overviews of the sequence as a whole, the “complete consort dancing together” (“Little Gidding,” V). As reviews go, the pieces on *Four Quartets* are unusually substantial. One reason is that they reflect the cumulative understanding of scattered reviewers in the process of coming to understand Eliot’s larger scheme. Another is that they include an awareness of Eliot’s earlier work, including the *Prufrock* poems, *The Waste Land*, “Ash-Wednesday,” *Murder in the Cathedral*, the critical essays, and most significantly, the first three quartets. A final reason for the richness of these reviews is that they show a consciousness of the bleak and serious context, which included not only the war in Europe, but the deaths of Joyce and Yeats. Ian Jack, in a “review of reviews” for the *New York Times*, remarked that no poem “in many years has been so completely, exhaustively, and earnestly reviewed.” “Now that Yeats is no longer writing,” there is no poet to compare with Eliot and no poem to compare with *Four Quartets*. Jack noted the “almost

unanimous decision in favor of the *Quartets*. One might think the critics had held a caucus and emerged with their separate opinions clearly coordinated.”

The reviews of “Burnt Norton” are imbedded in reviews of *Collected Poems 1909–1935*. One of the most perceptive, written by D. W. Harding, appeared in *Scrutiny*. Harding admired Eliot’s ability to create concepts at once religious and philosophic. Several reviewers of the wartime quartets, as the last three are sometimes called, referred back to Harding’s fine review. For example, F. R. Leavis, writing six years later in *Scrutiny*, began his review of “The Dry Salvages” with Harding’s insights on the religious nature of Eliot’s later work. The second and third quartets, “East Coker” and “The Dry Salvages,” were published only in the United Kingdom, and most of the reviews are British. The reviewers of “East Coker,” including G. W. Stonier in the *New Statesman*, James Kirkup in *Poetry* [London], and Stephen Spender in *Horizon*, noted the recurrence of themes from the first two quartets, including the problem of time and the process of aging. Spender’s review pointed to the poem’s self-reflexivity, a theme that has become central in Eliot studies.

The reviewers of “The Dry Salvages” continued the discussion begun in the reviews of “East Coker.” In a long essay in *Scrutiny*, F. R. Leavis used the publication of the third quartet as an occasion for reflecting on the first three and for speculating on the fourth and culminating poem that was on the way. Commenting retrospectively on much of Eliot’s later poetry, he included substantial commentary on “Ash-Wednesday” and “Marina.” He concluded by remarking that “it should by now be impossible to doubt that Eliot is among the greatest poets of the English language.” “The Dry Salvages” appeared in 1941, and several reviewers, Muriel Bradbrook, for example, noted that it was in important ways a war poem. The third quartet sparked a debate between George Orwell and Kathleen Raine, both writing in *Poetry* [London]. Orwell claimed that Eliot’s poetic sequence represents a “deterioration in [his] subject matter.” Whereas the early poems reflect “a glowing despair,” the *Quartets* reflect “a melancholy faith.” The despair, Orwell suggested, seems more genuine, for it is the response of a civilized intellectual to the “ugliness and spiritual emptiness of the machine age.” Raine chided Orwell, a Marxist, for expecting the *Quartets* to serve the interests of politics. She focused on the poetry’s Modernist techniques, notably the blurring of material and psychological boundaries.¹⁹

By the time *Four Quartets* appeared in 1943, then, a body of reviews had prepared the way, and several of the new reviews deepened the evolving public discussion of the poem. Muriel Bradbrook, in *Theology*, and D. W. Harding, in *Scrutiny*, emphasized the religious significance of the sequence. Harding explained the levels of meaning at work in the poem and discussed Eliot’s uneasiness with humanism. Malcolm Cowley, in the *New Republic*, associated the poem with the mystical tradition. Several emerging New Critics reviewed the poem. F. O. Matthiessen noted in the *Kenyon Review* the formal and thematic importance of puzzles, paradoxes, and the reconciliation of opposites.

In *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, James Johnson Sweeney analyzed the form of the poems and related form to the theme of theodicy that culminates in “Little Gidding.” Louis Untermeyer, in the *Yale Review*, claimed that *Four Quartets* was at once simpler and more complex than Eliot’s early work, simpler in form, but more subtle in meaning. Some critics disliked the sequence, dismissing it as “poetry of direct statement.” As Delmore Schwartz put it in the *Nation*, the poem contains long passages that are simply boring, passages representing a failure of the poet’s ear and a relaxation of his sensitivity.

Eliot’s war poems, including the *Quartets*, were framed by two prose works in which he attempted to come to terms with the social, political, and religious implications of the resumption of war in Europe. On the eve of the war, at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, he gave the “Boutwood Lectures,” published in 1939 as *The Idea of a Christian Society*. After the war, he surveyed the ruins in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, published in 1948. Fully aware in 1939 that the United Kingdom and other nations were again on a collision course with Germany, Eliot tried to imagine a way to understand and to counter Nazi values. One of his central points, based in part on his analysis of the Munich Crisis of September 1938, was that “neutrality” would not lead to “peace in our time,” but to disaster. He maintained that pagan values could only be successfully countered with positive values, and wondered if democracy, as then conceived, had enough positive content to stand against dictatorship. In an attempt to imagine an alternative more likely to secure peace, he articulated an “idea” of a Christian society, not a society in which everyone would be Christian but one that would have an ethics and public policy grounded in Christian values. His arguments reached a broad audience, in part because they were summarized by most reviewers. The *Times Literary Supplement*, a bellwether for so much of his work, expressed admiration for Eliot’s courage in addressing real problems in a real world. Other reviewers, even those who had reservations about Eliot’s religion, were also appreciative. Malcolm Cowley, writing in the *New Republic*, said that “you find, even when you are hostile to the main trend of [Eliot’s book], that it is full of moderation and worldly wisdom.”

In 1948, Eliot offered a post-war analysis of culture in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. The critical reaction was mixed. A number of reviewers complained that Eliot was excessively tentative, noting that although he said many interesting things about “culture,” he never got around to defining it. Some critics, including E. M. Forster in the *Listener* and W. H. Auden in the *New Yorker*, resurrected the old line that there were three Eliots. For Forster, there was the poet, the literary critic, and the social analyst. The poet and the literary critic were brilliant, but the social critic was mediocre. For Auden, the three Eliots were an archdeacon with cool manners, a violent and passionate old man who had witnessed the horrors of history, and a young boy who liked to play practical jokes. Auden suggested that the value of Eliot’s book was not the conclusions he reached but the issues he raised. Several critics, including George

Orwell in the *Observer* and R. P. Blackmur in the *Nation*, focused on Eliot's attitudes about class. In an illuminating review, Blackmur examined the poet's continuing concern for "the recovery of individual life from mass or collective life." He also stressed the importance of "prestige" in Eliot's appreciation of individual life, and the importance of religion as the source of all prestige.

A comprehensive understanding of Eliot's post-war reception should include an awareness of his own prestige, both as poet and as spokesman for values. For nearly a decade, since the deaths in quick succession of Yeats and Joyce, he had been considered the most distinguished writer in the English language. After the war, his prestige was officially acknowledged by a string of public honors, including in 1947 an honorary degree from Harvard and in 1948 both the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for Literature. Eliot's prestige was solidly anchored in decades of achievement as a man of letters, but in the post-war period, his prestige bred a less attractive stepchild—stardom. Although he was by nature modest and reserved, Eliot suddenly found himself lionized by an international public, and most of them knew little to nothing about his poetry. His fame became a major issue in the reception of his post-war work, consisting mainly of three comedies. In 1949, he published *The Cocktail Party*; in 1954, *The Confidential Clerk*; and in 1959, his valedictory, *The Elder Statesman*.

Eliot's "star" status is particularly evident in the response to *The Cocktail Party*. In a season that included *South Pacific* and Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*, *The Cocktail Party* was a genuine hit. It was the topic *du jour* at the best cocktail parties in Edinburgh, New York, and London, and was reviewed all over Europe and the English-speaking world. When it opened in New York for the first of its 409 performances, the sold-out audience included Ethel Barrymore and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. In New York, it won the Drama Critics Circle award and three Tony awards, and Eliot made the cover of *Time* magazine (22 December 1952). In London, the play ran for 325 performances to capacity audiences and won the *Sunday Times* literary prize for best play. All told, according to the *Times* (21 December 1952), it was seen by a million and a half spectators. There were innumerable reviews, with most combining commentary on a specific performance with an assessment of the play as theatre. Of the several hundred examined for the present volume, only the 165 or so appearing between the first performance in August 1949 and the end of 1950 have been included or itemized in the checklist of additional reviews.

The prestige/stardom issue can be seen in most reviews of *The Cocktail Party*, with attitudes ranging from celebration to resentment. Some reviewers, such as Bonamy Dobrée, made a thoughtful case for the play, analyzing its accomplished layering of meanings; Robert Speaight, who had played Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*, argued convincingly that *The Cocktail Party* was "profound and subtle" and "among the rare masterpieces of the modern stage." Many reviewers, on the other hand, embraced the play uncritically, showering

it with unsupported superlatives. Still others, often as a preface to dissent, foregrounded the issue, asking how far it is possible to separate one's response to the play from Eliot's fame. Writing in the *Partisan Review*, William Barrett suggested that Eliot, once a dragon-slayer, had become the dragon that must be slain. He noted that many of the reviewers were self-congratulatory, pleased to have liked what they *ought* to have liked. Preferring the early, more existential, Eliot, Barrett went on to say that by the standard of his earlier work, *The Cocktail Party* is "the weakest poetry that Eliot has yet written." Several reviewers, Stephen Spender, for example, joined Barrett in comparing the verse in the play to Eliot's earlier poetry and concurred that there had been a falling off in quality. On the other hand, a few reviewers, most notably William Carlos Williams, suggested that *The Cocktail Party* was better than the early work. For more than three decades, Williams had been denouncing Eliot's work, including *The Waste Land*, as a disaster for modern poetry, repeatedly claiming that the early Eliot had missed the pulse of common life. In a review for the *New York Post*, "It's About Your Life and Mine, Darling," Williams praised *The Cocktail Party*, saying that Eliot had finally "come down to his audience with humility . . . and success."²⁰

The troubling issues that had emerged in reviews of *The Cocktail Party* were taken up with greater intensity when Eliot's next play, *The Confidential Clerk*, was first performed in 1953. There was the usual adulation, but, overall, there were fewer reviews, fewer defenders, more grumblers. A few praised the poet for being so down to earth, so accessible. Some puzzled over the question of genre, others rehearsed Eliot's dramatic theories, and still others dwelt on his themes. Russell Kirk, in a generally sympathetic review for *Month*, saw the play as a reworking of Eliot's old existential themes of alienation, loneliness, and identity, but predicted that *The Confidential Clerk* would not be remembered as one of the poet's "principal works." Richard Findlater, writing in *Twentieth Century*, dubbed it another "brilliant failure" for Eliot, adding that his "failure is of considerably greater importance to the future of English drama than the easier successes of other, luckier dramatists." Many reviewers insisted that *The Confidential Clerk* was boring and would have been ignored had it not been for the marquee value of Eliot's name. In a mixed review in the *New Statesman*, T. C. Worsley expressed a concern that Eliot's public authority was skewing audience response. Similarly, but with a hint of sarcasm missing in Worsley's review, Burke Wilkinson noted in the *New York Times* that audiences came "in droves" to pay homage to the "pontiff of modern poets."²¹ The issue of Eliot's authority was underscored in the fall of 1954 by a debate that erupted in the *Times Literary Supplement*. The debate was sparked by a review of Richard Aldington's *Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot* (10 September) that suggested Eliot/Pound Modernism was dead. Robert Graves wrote letters to the editor attacking Eliot (1 October, 29 October) and Pound (19 November), and several

critics rushed to defend him (15 October, 12 November). In retrospect, one can see that the writing was on the wall in regard to literary Modernism.

Eliot's final play, *The Elder Statesman*, appeared in 1958. Following what had become a familiar pattern, it opened in Edinburgh in August to warm reviews. In contrast to his earlier comedies, *The Elder Statesman* had a short run (92 performances) in London and was not even produced in New York. (*The Cocktail Party* had run for 325 performances in London and 409 in New York.) A few reviewers resumed their attacks on Eliot's authority, but most responded less harshly and quite a few displayed affectionate appreciation. The softer tone, however, seems not to have reflected a surge in enthusiasm. Two other factors were obviously at play in these reviews. The first was Eliot's May–December marriage, and the second was the awareness that *The Elder Statesman* would probably be Eliot's valedictory. In January 1957, he had married his longtime secretary Valerie Fletcher, and in a surprisingly personal poem, he dedicated the play to her. Many critics were intrigued with the transformation of Eliot's attitude toward marital love. The titles of reviews are revealing; for example, the title in *Time* is "Love and Mr. Eliot"; in the London *Times*, "Mr. Eliot's Most Human Play"; and in the *New Leader*, "Affirmation and Love in Eliot." The play opened in London on 25 September 1958, a day before Eliot's seventieth birthday, an occasion that reminded reviewers that the end of an era was at hand.²² The end of the "Age of Eliot" was greeted with relief by some, but with nostalgia by others. Eliot, after all, was the elder statesman of literary Modernism. A number of reviews incorporated birthday conversations with the poet, and virtually all of the interviewers conveyed astonishment at Eliot's marital bliss and nostalgia for the age that was passing into history. Henry Hewes, for example, begins his review/interview by remarking that those who think of Eliot as cynical and despairing are going to be surprised by *The Elder Statesman*. In response to Hewes's observation that he seemed heartier than he had for years, Eliot replied that the change in both his work and his health was due to his marriage and added, "Love reciprocated is always rejuvenating." Hewes asked about Eliot's early masterpieces, by this time among the signature pieces of high Modernism. Helen Gardner's interview/review for the *Sunday Times*, "The 'Aged Eagle' Spreads His Wings," also combined appreciation of the love motif with respect for the now aged poet. Hugh Kenner's review in *Poetry* used the love motif to connect life and art, arguing that there is a mimetic relationship between Eliot's joy in his marriage and the new language of intimacy in *The Elder Statesman*. Eliot published a few essay collections during the 1950s, but for the most part, they were retrospective and thus contributed to the sense of closure at the end of his life's work.²³ In the same vein, he published his "complete" poems and plays (1953). The few reviews that appeared contain little that had not been said before and thus are not included in the present volume.

This volume is the most comprehensive collection of contemporary reviews of T. S. Eliot's work as it appeared. It includes reviews of all of his work except a few brief pamphlets, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, and late collections of previously published work. Since Eliot's work was published first in London, this collection includes British and Irish reviews; they are identified by an asterisk (*). Reviews published in both the United States and the United Kingdom are identified by two asterisks (**). Spelling and punctuation have been changed to American style throughout, but there has been no other attempt to impose uniformity on the original reviews. With rare exceptions, the collection does not include reviews from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada; nor does it reprint reviews in languages other than English. Regrettably, I have had to exclude some review essays, particularly on *Four Quartets*, simply because of length. These longer pieces, often twenty pages or more, are included in the "Checklist of Additional Reviews."

Each section of this volume includes the reviews of a single book, arranged in chronological order of original publication and followed by a checklist of additional reviews. Many of the reprinted reviews have been edited, with all omissions indicated by ellipses. The primary omissions are long quotations of the poetry, plot summaries of the plays, and obvious redundancies. Redundancies abound in the unedited reviews, in part because as Eliot's work became fashionable in the 1920s, and similarly, as it lost some of its glamour in the 1940s and 1950s, reviewers tended to imitate each other and even to compete with each other, first, in praise, and second, in carping. I have included the most original and provocative reviews and have included excerpts of others, where special insights so warranted. In some cases, I have included reviews because the reviewer was especially important in Eliot's career (for example, Ezra Pound, Conrad Aiken), especially astute in anticipating subsequent opinion (Edmund Wilson, Gilbert Seldes), or important in scholarly assessment of Eliot's work (Cleanth Brooks, Helen Gardner).

Scattered reviews of Eliot's poetry, particularly his earlier work, can be found in numerous casebooks and, more comprehensively, in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Michael Grant (1982), and *T. S. Eliot: Critical Assessments*, edited by Graham Clarke (1990). The first is a collection of reviews, and the second, a selection of memoirs, interviews, and early responses; both are valuable resources for Eliot studies.

Notes

1. "The Most Influential English Poet of His Time," *Times* (London), 5 January 1965; Conrad Aiken, "T. S. Eliot," *Life*, 15 January 1965, p. 93.
2. "Artists and Entertainers of the 20th Century," *Time* (June 1998).
3. Ezra Pound, "Status Rerum (I)," *Poetry* 1. no. 4 (January 1913), 123, 126.
4. *Selected Letters of Conrad Aiken*, ed. Joseph Killorin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 21–23.

5. Aiken, *Selected Letters*, p. 38.
6. Quotations from reviews contained in this volume are not separately documented.
7. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Essays* (1932) (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 241–50.
8. The reviews of *Three Critical Essays* are included in this volume with the reviews of *The Sacred Wood*, pp. 51–73.
9. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), II.178.
10. For an account of the history behind the publication of the poem, see "Introduction," *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), ix–xxx; and Lawrence Rainey, "The Price of Modernism: Publishing *The Waste Land*," *Institutions of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 77–106.
11. James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd edn. 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1911–15); Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge University Press, 1920).
12. Edmund Wilson, "T. S. Eliot," *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870–1930* (1931) (New York: Scribner's, 1959), 93–131.
13. Letter to Lady Beaumont, 21 May 1807, in *Letters of William Wordsworth*, ed. Philip Wayne (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 94.
14. Aiken, "Prefatory Note to 'An Anatomy of Melancholy,'" in *A Reviewer's ABC* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 176.
15. See "Irony de Luxe," Untermeyer's review of *Poems 1920* in *Freeman* 1 (30 June 1920), 381–82, reprinted in this volume, pp. 44–46.
16. *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928), ix.
17. See Aiken's review of Eliot's *The Rock*, reprinted in this volume, pp. 312–14.
18. For a discussion of the "objective correlative," see Eliot's "Hamlet and His Problems," *Selected Essays*, new edn. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 121–26.
19. For an attempt to mediate between Orwell and Raine, see the letter to the editor from Irene Brown, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Orwell and Miss Raine," *Poetry* [London] 2, no. 9 (February–March 1943), 61.
20. William Arrowsmith, in an essay published in the *Hudson Review* in 1950, offered the most substantial commentary on the play. His analysis, informed by impressive knowledge of classical literature and modern theatre, addresses most of the issues raised by Barrett and other critics. Arrowsmith's essay is too long to be reprinted in this volume, but it is listed in the "Checklist of Additional Reviews," p. 543, and highly recommended to anyone interested in the play.
21. Bonamy Dobrée has an excellent essay on *The Confidential Clerk*, published in the *Sewanee Review* in 1954. It is too long for reprinting here, but is included in the "Checklist of Additional Reviews," p. 562.
22. Several collections of tributes were published to mark the occasion, notably *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium for His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Neville Braybrooke (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958). This volume, which included tributes from old friends and enthusiastic scholars, was timed to coincide with his birthday, 26 September 1958.
23. Denis Donoghue's fine essay, "Eliot in Fair Colonus," in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 48 (Spring 1959), 49–58, is too long for reprinting here. See "Checklist of Additional Reviews," p. 583.

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The Christian Century, v. 49 (12 October 1932), "Humanism Criticizes Itself" by W. E. Garrison; v. 52 (18 December 1935), "*Murder in the Cathedral*" by Edward Shillito.

- Christian Science Monitor* (14 November 1934), “A Classical Contemporary Pageant from Mr. Eliot” by Robert Peel.
- The Hudson Review*, v. 3 (Summer 1950), “Notes on the Theatre” by Frederick Morgan.
- New England Quarterly*, v. 6 (June 1933), “Book Reviews” by Robert Hillyer.
- New Republic*, v. 33 (7 February 1923), “An Anatomy of Melancholy” by Conrad Aiken; v. 41 (7 January 1925), “T. S. Eliot and the Seventeenth Century” by Edmund Wilson; v. 46 (10 March 1926), “Stravinsky and Others” by Edmund Wilson; v. 47 (30 June 1926), “A Poetry of Ideas” by Allen Tate; v. 58 (24 April 1929), “T. S. Eliot and the Church of England” by Edmund Wilson; v. 64 (20 August 1930) [untitled review] by Edmund Wilson; v. 72 (26 October 1932), “The ‘Universe’ of T. S. Eliot” by Waldo Frank; v. 79 (16 May 1934), “The Man of Feeling” by Horace Gregory; v. 98 (3 May 1939), “Original Sin” by Louis MacNeice; v. 102 (17 June 1940), “Tract for the Times” by Malcolm Cowley; v. 108 (7 June 1943), “Beyond Poetry” by Malcolm Cowley; v. 129 (21 September 1953), “*The Confidential Clerk*” by Philip Mairet.
- New Statesman*, for *Nation & Athenaeum*, v. 33 (22 September 1923), “T. S. Eliot” by Clive Bell; v. 38 (5 December 1925), “‘Jug Jug’ to Dirty Ears” by Leonard Woolf; v. 47 (31 May 1930), “Mr. T. S. Eliot” by Francis Birrell.
- New Statesman*, v. 22 (3 November 1923), “*The Waste Land*” by F. L. Lucas; v. 26 (20 February 1926), “Mr. Eliot’s Poems” by I. A. Richards; v. 32 (29 December 1928), “For Mr. T. S. Eliot”; v. 36 (8 November 1930), “Mr. Eliot’s Poetry” by Brian Howard; v. 4 (1 October 1932), “T. S. Eliot the Critic” by Peter Quennell; v. 6 (18 November 1933), “The Use of Poetry” by Stephen Spender; v. 11 (18 April 1936), “Mr. T. S. Eliot” by Peter Quennell; v. 17 (25 March 1939), “Some Notes on Mr. Eliot’s New Play” by Desmond MacCarthy; v. 20 (14 September 1940), “Mr. Eliot’s New Poem” by G. W. Stonier; v. 25 (20 February 1943), “Little Gidding” by Edwin Muir; v. 38 (3 September 1949), “The Edinburgh Festival—I” by Desmond Shaw-Taylor; v. 46 (5 September 1953), “*The Confidential Clerk*” by T. C. Worsley; v. 47 (20 March 1954), [untitled review] by Helen Gardner.
- New York Times* (29 January 1933), “The Cream of T. S. Eliot’s Literary Criticism” by Peter Monro Jack; (3 December 1933), “Mr. Eliot’s New Essays in the Field of Poetry” by Peter Monro Jack; (27 October 1935), “T. S. Eliot’s Drama of Beauty and Momentous Decision” by Peter Monro Jack; (29 March 1936), “Strange Images of Death” by Brooks Atkinson; (14 June 1936), “T. S. Eliot: Poet of Our Time” by Peter Monro Jack; (16 May 1943), “Fare Forward Voyagers” by Horace Gregory; (29 January 1950), “Mr. Eliot’s Party” by Brooks Atkinson; (19 March 1950), “After *The Cocktail Party*” by Stephen Spender; (7 February 1954), “A Most Serious Comedy by Eliot” by Burke Wilkinson.
- Partisan Review* (Summer 1939), “Sin and Expiation” by Cleanth Brooks.

Punch Ltd (5 October 1932), “A Critic of Poets.”

Sewanee Review, v. 57 (Autumn 1949), “Culture and Reconstruction” by Richard M. Weaver; v. 67 (Winter 1959), “The London Stage” by Bonamy Dobrée.

Southwest Review, v. 19 (January 1934), “Eliot’s Harvard Lectures” by Cleanth Brooks.

Time (3 March 1923), “*Shantih, Shantih, Shantih*”; (8 September 1958), “Love and Mr. Eliot.”

Times Literary Supplement (20 September 1923), “A Fragmentary Poem” by [Edgell Rickword]; (6 December 1928), “Mr. Eliot’s New Essays”; (13 October 1932), “Mr. T. S. Eliot”; (7 June 1934), “Mr. Eliot’s Pageant Play”; (13 June 1935), “Mr. Eliot’s New Play”; (25 March 1939), “Mr. Eliot in Search of the Present”; (4 November 1939), “A Christian Society: Mr. Eliot on Ideals and Methods”; (31 March 1950), “Entertainment and Reality.”

PRUFROCK AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS
1917

PRUFROCK
AND
OTHER OBSERVATIONS

BY
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Conrad Aiken.
“Esoteric Catholicity.”
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[Review of *Catholic Anthology*]

As anthologies go nowadays, Mr. Pound’s *Catholic Anthology* is an interesting one.

[. . .]

Dull things there are, of course,—each critic will find his own—but for the present critic the *Catholic Anthology* seems worth while if only for the inclusion of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and the “Portrait of a Lady” by T. S. Eliot. These are remarkable. They are individual to a degree. Mr. Eliot uses free rhyme very effectively, often musically; and with the minimum of sacrifice to form conveys a maximum of atmosphere. Both poems are psychological character-studies, subtle to the verge of insoluble idiosyncrasy, introspective, self-gnawing. Those who are constitutionally afraid to analyze themselves, who do not think, who are not psychologically imaginative, will distrust and perhaps dislike them.

[. . .]

[A]ny anthology, which, like this, blows the horn of revolution in poetry, whether sound or unsound, is at the least certain to interest all poets, even the most conservative; and will, perhaps, be of value to them.

*Arthur Waugh.
“The New Poetry.”
Quarterly Review 226
(October 1916), 386.

[Review of *Catholic Anthology*]

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.

[. . .]

[T]he *Catholic Anthology* . . . 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.

[. . .]

The reader will not have penetrated far . . . 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 a song of youth,
This is the cause of myself;
I knew my father well and he was a
fool . . .

[. . .]

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 . . .
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 recognized 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.” . . . [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.

*Ezra Pound.
“Drunken Helots
and Mr. Eliot.”
Egoist 4, no. 5
(June 1917), 72–74.

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 ribald-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 aether, 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 economical 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 Régnier's *Odelettes*; of his French contemporaries generally . . . 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: [quotation in full of "Conversation Galante."]

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

Let us reconsider this drunkenness: [quotation in full of "La Figlia che Piange."]

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."

[Quotation of lines 49-72]

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 pretense. Mr. Eliot at once takes rank with the five or six living poets whose English one can read with enjoyment.

[. . .]

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 Channing-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.

**Times Literary Supplement* 805
(21 June 1917), 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.”

[. . .]

Among other reminiscences which pass through the rhapsodist’s mind and which he thinks the public should know about, are “dust 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 anyone—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.

*“Recent Verse.”
Literary World 83
(5 July 1917), 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 willful outlandishness of the young revolutionary idea. We do not wish to appear patronizing, 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 overbalances the beauty.

E. P. [Ezra Pound].
"T. S. Eliot."

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse 10 (August 1917),
264–71.

[. . .]

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 pretense.

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.

[. . .]

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 por-

traiture. His "lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" are as real as his ladies who "come and go / Talking of Michelangelo." 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 mediaeval 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 Velázquez 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 refutation 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.

[. . .] [T]he 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 this 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 overdone; 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 [. . .] that good *vers libre* was little more than a skillful evasion of the better known English meters. [. . .] But he came nearer the fact when he wrote elsewhere: "No *vers* is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job."

[. . .]

On the other hand, I do not believe 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.

[. . .]

Unless a man can put some thematic invention into *vers libre*, he would perhaps

do well to stick to “regular” meters, 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.

*“Shorter Notices.”
New Statesman 9
(18 August 1917), 477.

Mr. Eliot may possibly give us the quintessence of twenty-first-century poetry. Certainly much of what he writes is unrecognizable 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: [quotation in full of “The *Boston Evening Transcript*”]. This is Mr. Eliot’s highest flight, and we shall treasure it.

Conrad Aiken. “Divers Realists.” *Dial* 63
(8 November 1917),
453–55.

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.

May Sinclair.
"Prufrock and
Other Observations:
A Criticism."
Little Review 4, no. 8
(December 1917), 8-14.

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 behavior 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* can also 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 traveled, 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 signaled 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 two-fold; 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 "Rhapsody." He insists on your smelling them.

"Regard that woman
Who hesitates toward you in the light
of the door
Which opens on her like a grin.
You see the border of her dress
Is torn and stained with sand,
And you see the corner of her eye
Twists like a crooked pin."

[Quotation of lines 23–37 of
"Rhapsody on a Windy Night"]

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 notion 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 that 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 "curls" 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 when 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.

[Quotation in full of "La Figlia che Piange"]

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 ["La Figlia che Piange"] 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.

[. . .]

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 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.

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.

Conrad Aiken.
"New Curiosity
Shop—and a Poet."
Dial 64 (31 January
1918), 112.

[Review of *Others* anthology]

Who it was that started the current poetic fad for curio-collecting is a question not hard to answer: Ezra Pound is the man, let the Imagists and others deny it as loudly as they will. Pound has from the outset, both as poet and as critic been a curio-collector—a lover of trinkets, *bijoux* of phrase, ideographic *objets*

de vertu, carved oddities from the pawnshops of the past, aromatic grave-relics, bizarre importations from the Remote and Strange. There is no denying, either, that it is a delightful vein in verse. No great exertion is demanded of the reader; he is invited merely to pause before the display-window and to glance, if only for a moment, at the many intriguing minutiae there arranged for him in trays.

[. . .]

This method in the writing of poetry is to be seen at its purest in the *Others* anthologies, the second of which Mr. Alfred Kreymborg has now edited, apparently undeterred by the success of the first . . . There is much here, of course, that is merely trivial, and a measurable quantity of the proudly absurd and naively preposterous; but if there are no such outstandingly good things here as "The Portrait of a Lady" by T. S. Eliot in the earlier issue, or Wallace Stevens's "Peter Quince at the Clavier," . . . [we can] pause with admiration and delight before the "Preludes" and "Rhapsody of a Windy Night" by T. S. Eliot, and "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Wallace Stevens. It is not that one is at all indifferent to the frequent charm and delicious originality (at least regards sensibility) of the *Others* poets, but that one finds in the two last mentioned not only this delicate originality of mind but also a clearer sense of symmetry as regards both form and ideas: their poems are more apparently, and more really, works of art. In comparison, most of the other work in this volume looks like happy improvisation. It is significant in this connection that Mr. Eliot uses rhyme and meter, 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 consciousness—provided

he has the requisite skill. Mr. Eliot's "Preludes" and "Rhapsody" are, in a very minor way, masterpieces of black-and-white impressionism. Personality, time, and environment—three attributes of the dramatic—are set sharply before us by means of a rapid and concise report of the seemingly irrelevant and tangential, but really centrally significant, observations of a shadowy protagonist.

[. . .]

B. D. [Babette Deutsch].
"Another Impressionist."
New Republic 14
(16 February 1918), 89.

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?"

[Quotation of lines 47–51]

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. G eraldy, 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." [. . .]

When evening quickens faintly in the
street,
Wakening the appetites of life in some
And to others bringing the *Boston
Evening Transcript*,
I mount the steps and ring the bell,
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,
And I say, "Cousin Harriet, here is the
Boston Evening Transcript."

M. M. [Marianne Moore].
"A Note on
T. S. Eliot's Book."
*Poetry: A Magazine of
Verse* 12 (April 1918),
36–37.

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 "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 "Cousin Nancy," "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.

*Edgar Jepson.
"Recent United
States Poetry."
English Review 26 (May
1918), 419–28.

There is in the United States today a new school of poetry—United States Poetry; and its seat is fittingly Chicago, the typical city. It is claimed for its poets that they are "securely rooted in their native soil"; that their poetry is "so much concerned with United States life and so much a part of it that it may be said to be becoming genuinely national"; that it is "creating a new diction, a new idiom, and it is going to be a much more fluid thing than English critics have any idea of"; that it has "unique features"; and that "unless one realizes the new, autochthonic note" in United States poetry today—in the most

distinctive United States poetry, that is— one realizes nothing of the subtle impulses and forces that are at work to create a new poetic environment for the coming generation.

[. . .]

[T]he school has its accredited masters, stamped authentic by the award of prizes for poems by the school itself. They are its chief representatives; their poetry is the fine flower of its growth—Messrs. Vachel Lindsay, Edgar Lee Masters, and Robert Frost.

[Discussion of representative lines by Lindsay, Masters, and Frost]

[T]his poor music is common to the great bulk of all the recent United States poetry I have read.

[. . .]

But the queer and delightful thing is that in the scores of yards of pleasant verse and wambings 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 rooted in its native soil; it has a new poetic diction; it is 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, to live.

[Quotation of lines 35–40, 45–54, 123–30 of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"]

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": [quotation in full]. How delicate and beautiful is the emotion! How exquisite and beautiful the music! This is the very fine flower of the finest spirit of the United States . . . 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 [by Masters], "All Life in a Life."

William Carlos Williams.
"Prologue."

Little Review 6 (May 1919), 76–78.

[Response to Jepson's "Recent United States Poetry"]

[. . .]

[A]ll U.S. verse is not bad according to Mr. J[epson]: 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!

[. . .]

As Prufrock longed for his silly lady so Kensington longs for its Hardanger dairy-maid. 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-bluff converted into a sort of football.

But the summit of the United States achievement, according to Mr. J[e]p[son]—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 file 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 [Pound] and Eliot have approached it and *tant pis* for the rest of us.

[. . .]

Checklist of Additional Reviews

Little Review 4, no. 4 (August 1917), 24–25. [Unsigned letter]

Ezra Pound. “A Letter from Rémy de Gourmont.” *Little Review* 4, no. 8 (December 1917), 6–7.

Edgar Jepson. “That International Episode.” *Little Review* 5, nos. 10–11 (February–March 1919), 62–64.

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