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

The Contemporary Reviews

Edited by
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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 *Ash-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 Monro 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