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"The Criterion" 1922-1939

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THE CRITERION
1922-1939

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Margaret Beckman Benton
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

The Criterion was a quarterly review founded by T. S. Eliot in London in 1922, and edited by him until it ceased publication in 1939. This study examines the meaning and significance of its self-defined "intellectual" function, and of its successes, and failures, in achieving such a status and function.

During its first six or seven years, the Criterion was a respected and highly influential periodical. It succeeded modestly in each of its three carefully defined aims: to publish and encourage new "modern" poetry and prose; to translate important work by other European writers into English; and to present a coherent ideological "tendency" by which it intended to preserve and advance the European cultural tradition, and the 'critical place of artists and intellectuals within that tradition.

In the 1930s, however, the Criterion's influence and stature waned. Political issues and crises undermined its primary principle of "disinterestedness," while Eliot's own personal conviction that "right politics" depends first upon "right theology" prevented the Criterion from easing its principles and taking a firm stand in the conflict between fascism and communism.

Its ultimate failure in 1939 revealed the irreconcilable conflict between Eliot's private dogma, the Criterion's founding principles and policies, and the needs and demands of its contemporary world. In retrospect, the Criterion's course and fate demonstrate the evolving course of modern European culture: its generic assumptions, methods, and aims—welcomed and supported in the 1920s—were no longer relevant, or tolerated, by the end of the 1930s.
THE CRITERION:

1922–1939
INTRODUCTION

The two decades between the First and Second World Wars were a lively and passionate period for the intellectual and literary communities of Europe and America. An array of distinctly "modern" ideas and methods emerged during those years, reflecting both a distaste for prevailing but outworn intellectual patterns and a desire to assert new and dynamic alternatives.

Like many of his intellectual contemporaries, T. S. Eliot, an expatriate American poet and critic living in London, sought to define and apply standards and principles that he believed could best preserve as well as advance Western culture. In 1922 he established a critical quarterly, the Criterion, and edited it until it ceased publication in 1939. The Criterion not only outlines the development of many of Eliot's celebrated and controversial ideas, but was one of the last of a style of periodical that presumed—and was expected—to define, document, and direct intellectual activity on an international scale.

The Criterion, therefore, is not only important today for Eliot's particular activity within that genre, but also for the cultural presumptions, methods, and ambitions that it embodied. While Eliot claimed more than two decades after its end that "the seventeen volumes of the Criterion constitute a valuable record of the thought of that period between two wars,"* the publication itself—its advent, growth,


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decline, and demise, as well as its printed contents— inadvertently offers a more subtle commentary on the course of Western intellectual development during those years.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Criterion examined and judged contemporary ideas and events. It exercised a certain presumed authority that was inherent to, and necessary for preserving, its important function. In retrospect, however, the insights that the Criterion provides for readers today are ironically heightened by its increasingly provocative resistance to many of those developments. The Criterion's unyielding defense of its many cultural presumptions, which became increasingly anachronistic, eventually committed it to a course less of recording the thought of the interwar period than of resisting or rebuking it.

That opposition proved fatal to the Criterion; when the intellectual and historical trends that it opposed—the pervasive application of "democratic" values and standards, the violent polarity between Left and Right in European politics, the priority of scientific, industrial, and technical concerns, and so on—became impossible to resist, the Criterion conceded defeat for the values it espoused. The antagonism it perceived, however, was largely irrelevant in the light of the crises of 1939.

But when the Criterion began in 1922, it was less specific and less rigid in its ideology, and its ambitions and assumptions were far more tolerated, even prevalent, than when it ceased in 1939. Its interim course reflects above all the inevitable consequences of Eliot's decisions to fortify rather than modify those features and attitudes of the Criterion that most of its contemporaries could no
longer condone by the 1930s. The Criterion began as a respected and familiar kind of critical quarterly, and ended seventeen years later a self-acknowledged anachronism, offensive to some of its followers and merely benignly eccentric to others. The cultural course of that interwar period rendered the nature of the Criterion obsolete, and its dogmatic resistance to those historical developments alienated many of those who had earlier shared its ambitions.

Yet the path that the Criterion traces through those interwar years is instructive. Retrospection provides a certain judgment of its "value" according to its "success," and by those terms the Criterion is often characterized as arrogant, unrealistic, and alienating. Its editor usually earns the blame for its "self-destructive" course because he failed to recognize or endorse "true" trends in European art and thought. Therefore, this line of criticism concludes, the Criterion illustrates Eliot's errors of assumption about the tradition and structure of European culture and the legitimacy of his ideas within it.

What is usually most apparent about the Criterion today is its awkward, stubborn divergence from the mainstream of Western intellectual development after 1930 or so. Unfortunately, this often obscures what it also reveals about those emerging concerns and orientations, both initially as a leading participant and later as a dissenting critic. One must view the Criterion within the context of its own time and perspective, both in order to judge its ideas and assumptions, and to observe, from within one ideological framework, that vivid transitional period of modern history. Today we know what preceded and what followed those two decades, but in 1922 few could predict the
the eventual fate, and its connotations, of the new Criterion. At its inception it was welcomed and its aspirations encouraged; by 1939 it was often disclaimed and its aspirations denounced. Between those years there evolved a complex, inherent conflict between the cultural changes of two decades and the implicit nature—-and deliberate stance—of the Criterion. To understand the gradual development of that conflict, one must look closely at the decisions and circumstances that plotted the Criterion's course.
I.

FRAGMENTS SHORED AGAINST THE RUIN:

THE CREATION OF THE CRITERION, 1922

In July 1920 Eliot agreed to establish and edit a new periodical that Lady Lilian Rothermere, wife of a wealthy London newspaper magnate, wished to finance. Eliot mentioned the terms of this initial arrangement only once, in a private letter to his close friend and associate, Herbert Read. Written shortly after Rothermere suspended her support in 1925, the letter explained that she had expected the magazine to be "a more chic and brilliant Arts and Letters, which might have had a fashionable vogue among a wealthy few."¹

Eliot's own hopes, however, were far more serious and deeply rooted. His creation of the Criterion late in 1922 was the product of two similar, simultaneous ambitions, one essentially private and the other very much shared by other literary intellectuals. They felt a general discontent with the lack of established literary standards for "modern" work—a lack of effective, accepted criteria by which new literary styles and ideas could be judged and measured. While many reviews attempted to pronounce and apply new standards, they usually failed, either through an inherent weakness or narrowness in their effort, or because they quickly succumbed to financial difficulties. With the creation of the Criterion, therefore, Eliot hoped both to offer his ideas and values to a diffuse intellectual community,

and to reinvigorate an important medium of literary society, the authoritative quarterly review. The Criterion was as much shaped and prompted by that postwar cultural situation as by Eliot's ambitions.

In the several years preceding the advent of the Criterion in 1922, both Europe and America supported a lively variety of "little magazines" and reviews. Many were short-lived or frequently redefined, but all existed to articulate and promote a particular ideological perspective. Those little magazines followed a long English tradition of literary reviews and quarterlies, in which editors, contributors, readers, and even nonreaders understood and accepted the underlying assumptions of the periodicals. They supported the premise that such magazines were deliberately "elite" in that they existed to define the criteria of literary excellence and to direct cultural taste. As a recent critic has observed, readers acknowledged the periodicals' general responsibility "for maintaining the cultural dialogue" and "for giving a public currency to ideas and discussion." Most significantly, these critical reviews and journals addressed a disproportionately important minority of interested, enlightened, and influential readers—the traditional "aristocracy" of intelligence and education.

The proliferation of little magazines in the 1910s and 1920s largely reflects the profound cultural effects of the years surrounding

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2 Some of the many little magazines that flourished, often briefly, in the era preceding the Criterion were, in America, the Little Review, Poetry, Others, the Seven Arts, the Masses, the Dial, the Freeman, Broom, and Secession. Among those in England were the Egoist, the New Age, Athenæum, Wheels, the Enemy, Blast, the Adelphi, the London Mercury, and Arts and Letters.

3 Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York, 1930).

the First World War. The magazines shared a general dissatisfaction with the intellectual "establishment," and with those ideas that had been formed during and based upon prewar conditions and faiths. Many could no longer reconcile those ideas to their own experience, and so sought to establish new principles that could better organize intellectual responses to postwar culture. But while many could agree on what must be rejected, no generally acknowledged replacements emerged.

It was a time, paradoxically, both of earnest creativity and lively philosophies, and of transient, even superficial, intellectual endeavors. Conrad Aiken described it as "an era of legend and myth-making, of cutthroat jealousies and vendettas, and, of course, of the all-too-eager joinings and belongings as well." This was the first era of the little magazines, which "sprouted on all sides, quarreled, debated, made their own little private and esoteric splashes and died."

Those little magazines that hoped to express and direct intellectual activity tended instead only to reflect the splintered postwar culture. Unintentionally, these little magazines of the 1910s and 1920s usually "were produced by coteries and appealed to particular sectional interests." And yet repeated efforts were made to reestablish a recognized base for intellectual leadership. Each successive wave of new little magazines asserted some new program of old or avant garde standards.

Amid this profusion of London's literary magazines, Eliot pursued a tentative but fruitful "career" from 1916 to 1922. While working in the Foreign and Colonial Department of Lloyd's Bank, he contributed

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7Ibid.
numerous essays and reviews to various literary journals. Those years of contributing essays, reviews, and even editorial assistance proved to be a valuable editorial apprenticeship for him. This experience, and the professional contacts, helped strengthen Eliot's perception of what was needed and of what he could do. The Criterion eventually emerged as his effort to offer a periodical whose scope and content might help restore a sense of a Western intellectual community.

His hopes of establishing such a periodical, however, depended upon his first gaining some foundation of personal and professional stability. Without extraordinary individual and collective support from his friends, his Criterion work may have never been possible—physically, emotionally, and financially. Eliot's American mentor, Ezra Pound, sponsored him initially in England. Pound introduced Eliot to some of the most influential members of London's literary circles and urged the recognition he felt Eliot's literary potential deserved. In fact, Richard Aldington suggests that Pound inadvertently groomed Eliot for the pivotal position in English letters that he himself might have enjoyed had he remained in London. As Aldington recalled: "Eliot started in the enormous confusion of war and post-war England, handicapped in every way. Yet by merit, tact, prudence, and pertinacity he succeeded in doing what no American had ever done—imposing his personality and taste and even many of his opinions on literary England." It was Pound who urged Harriet Weaver Shaw to take on Eliot as an assistant editor of the Egoist in 1917, a position that Pound himself had held at the magazine's inception in 1913.

While affiliated with the Egoist, Eliot gained considerable

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Those five hundred copies of Prufrock strengthened the tiny but influential group of Eliot's admirers. John Middleton Murry later declared that it was on the basis of Prufrock that he wanted Eliot to join his staff when he became editor of the Athenaeum in 1919. Although Murry was unable to offer him a salaried position, Eliot was enlisted as a valuable and frequent contributor who often devoted three weekends a month to work for the Athenaeum. This association kindled both a warm personal friendship and a more famous ideological dispute, the long course of which would leave an important imprint on the Criterion.

Eliot's critical and creative reputation grew slowly, still within a very small community of writers and critics, as his new friends advanced him through their own connections, just as Pound had done. Richard Aldington executed a "most complicated piece of diplomacy" to bring Eliot to the attention of Bruce Lyttleton Richmond, editor of the Times Literary Supplement. Aldington recalled that Eliot "capti-

11The debate, involving several articles by both men published in the Criterion between 1923 and 1930, is discussed in chap. II, pp. 36-39.
vated Richmond as he can captivate any intelligent person" and became the T.L.S. reviewer specializing in Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry. The relationship was further fruitful for Eliot, as he later incorporated many of Richmond's editorial principles into his work with the *Criterion*. From Richmond's example he learned that it is the business of an editor to know his contributors personally, to keep in touch with them, and to make suggestions to them. I tried to form a nucleus of writers (some of them, indeed, recruited from the *Times Literary Supplement*, and introduced to me by Richmond) on whom I could depend, differing from each other in many things, but not in love of literature and seriousness of purpose.13

Yet even as Eliot acquired valuable editorial "understudy" experience, developed many professional principles, and cultivated influential friendships, the general desire for a stable and authoritative periodical persisted. In 1919 J. C. Squire proclaimed in the inaugural editorial of a new literary monthly called the *London Mercury* that "the more intense the troubles of society, the more uncertain and dark the future, the more obvious is the necessity for periodicals which hand on the torch of culture and creative activity."14 But the *London Mercury* failed to satisfy Eliot and many others; it soon became staid and dull, too "establishment" to champion what they considered the most important new literature. The problem remained; periodicals either aimed their appeal toward a more middlebrow readership, like the *London Mercury*, or they lasted only a short time. The *Egoist*, for instance, endured only until 1919. Another much-missed journal, *Arts and Letters*, was suspended in the summer of 1920. Since that time, Herbert Read remembered, "the foundation of a new and better magazine

was constantly discussed" in London's many literary circles.\footnote{Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, 101.}

Finally, in 1922, despite serious financial, personal, and health problems,\footnote{Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, 103.} Eliot inaugurated the periodical that was his response. As Read, one of Eliot's closest friends and disciples in those earliest *Criterion* days, observed, Eliot had decided "the time was right. He surveyed the scanty field and chose his team with great deliberation."\footnote{Read, *Cult of Sincerity*, 103.}

The *Criterion* culminated Eliot's editorial apprenticeship in London literary society. During those years he had acquired a keen sense of the editorial function through his work on the *Egoist*, with Murry at the *Athenaeum*, and with Richmond at the *T.L.S.*, and had sharpened his ideas about the proper function of the "ideal literary review." He had witnessed the faltering, usually failing, efforts of a host of little magazines to overcome the divisive "coterie spirit" of the age and to assert instead a program of coherent and authoritative principles. Each of those attempts, in Eliot's and others' opinion, had either demonstrated or sensed its inadequacy to the enormous task. That task, the *Criterion* "team" believed, was little less than to be the articulate agent of modern civilization, whose object, as the *Criterion* intended to cultivate it, is

> not to create more experts, more professors, more artists, but a type of man or woman for whom their efforts will be valuable and by whom they may be judged. . . . the judgment of a cultivated aristocracy is likely to be enlightened and has immense influence, because its ideas and manners gradually penetrate the mass of society. Attempts to act directly on the whole are chimerical and even harmful; the voices of reason and beauty are drowned in the shouts of charlatans; and the

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\footnote{Eliot suffered many personal difficulties during this pre-*Criterion* phase. For a thorough account and analysis of these problems, see James E. Miller, Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land: Exorcism of the Demons* (University Park, Pa., 1977).}
mass of the nation, without authority and without judgment, authorizes and supports an intellectual chaos, a spiritual inferiority.

Many of Eliot's friends warmly supported his ambitions. When she heard of his Criterion plans, the novelist May Sinclair promptly offered one of her "best ghost stories" and assured him:

It is time a really good quarterly was started, and I can't think of anyone better fitted to edit it than you. At last there'll be a chance for the people who matter most to get a hearing; and for the London Mercury not to have its own way.

Eliot knew from the Criterion's beginning that he had assumed a difficult and treacherous responsibility with its editorship. "To maintain the autonomy, and the disinterestedness, of every human activity, and to perceive it in relation to every other," he wrote, "require a considerable discipline." Yet he felt prepared to edit a review that would attempt

to maintain the autonomy and disinterestedness of literature, and at the same time to exhibit the relations of literature—not to "life," as something contrasted to literature, but to all the other activities, which, together with literature, are the components of life.

In the fall of 1922 a notice on freshly printed stationery was sent out from the offices of the Criterion, 17 Thavies Inn, London.

Delivered to the first issue's contributors—George Saintsbury, T. Sturge Moore, May Sinclair, Hermann Hesse, and Valery Larbaud—as well as to many others, it announced the scheduled appearance of the first issue for October 15, 1922. Although distribution was

18 Richard Aldington, "Literature and the 'Honnete Homme'," Criterion, I (1923), 421.


delayed a few weeks so that Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" could be printed simultaneously in the November number of the American Dial, the "bulky and dignified" 103-page number appeared as promised, sporting a bright red title across a light yellow cover and a rather steep price of "seven-and-six the copy."21

"It is not," Eliot wrote in 1923, clarifying the initial premises and principles of the Criterion, "the function of a literary review to provide material for the chat of coteries—nor is a review called upon to avoid such appeal. A literary review should maintain the application, in literature, of principles which have their consequences also in politics and in private conduct; and it should maintain them without tolerating any confusion of the purposes of pure literature with the purposes of politics or ethics."22 It remained for the pages of the Criterion themselves to demonstrate its stature and to measure its success by the terms Eliot so established for it. Those pages also would reflect, ironically, the evolving cultural and intellectual conditions that gradually challenged the Criterion's announced function and ultimately rendered it obsolete.


II.

THE TIME AND THE TENDENCIES: 1922-1930

The Criterion survived for seventeen years, sustained mostly by the conviction with which it was created—the belief that an intellectual review could contribute significantly to the cultural health of its time. As its editor, T. S. Eliot dedicated those years to assembling the literature and opinion that he felt best represented and directed the "tendencies" of contemporary Western thought. "A review," he wrote in 1926, 

should be an organ of documentation . . . the bound volumes of a decade should represent the development of the keenest sensibility and the clearest thought of ten years. Even a single number should attempt to illustrate, within its limits, the time and the tendencies of the time. . . . Its contents should exhibit heterogeneity which the intelligent reader can resolve into order.1

The Criterion was far more than a mute sampling of those years filtered through Eliot's editorial judgment; it demonstrated the success, and eventually the fading relevance, of the principles and practices that Eliot hoped could govern intellectual exchange and growth.

The early years of the Criterion are clearly distinct from its final decade. From 1922 to 1926 it existed precariously, barely escaping the predators to which such ventures usually succumb, such as financial losses, internal disputes over policy or practices, and an inability to solicit work from important contributors. In fact, the Criterion did flounder once, missing an issue in 1925 when its initial

patron, Lady Rothermere, withdrew her funding, but it soon resumed publication with new support and was never again hampered by financial straits. The early Criterion survived several personal crises and near emotional collapses of its editor, and an early dispute, largely private, between Eliot and his assistant editor Richard Aldington. Yet in 1939 the Criterion did not fall prey to any of these more explicable menaces. Eliot simply disbanded the effort when he conceded that the world no longer generated much interest in a critical quarterly like the Criterion.

That Criterion of 1939 was, of course, very much the product of its initial "formula," as any deliberately "intellectual review" often is. One must therefore examine carefully the premises and the process as well as the final product that comprise the Criterion.

The postwar decade was a time of manifestos, new definitions, and new allegiances as well as a time to refute the outgrown ones. A part of this climate, the Criterion was highly self-scrutinizing and anxious to clarify constantly its exact function and nature. "It is not enough," Eliot warned, "to present a list of distinguished contributors; . . . it is not enough to define a 'policy.' The essential preliminary is to define the task to be attempted and the place to be occupied."2 One must attempt to select and organize pieces of literature into "coherent thought in pursuit of principles," a task that, as Allen Tate later agreed, "will appal [sic] even the stoutest editorial heart."3

Yet in 1922 Eliot launched a critical quarterly with precisely those intentions. Like Tate, he knew that its contents must "supply

2 Ibid., 1.

its readers with coherent standards of taste and examples of taste in operation. Elliot established in the Criterion certain fundamental values and "tendencies" that characterized it from the start, that identified its critics and supporters, and that directed discussion wherever the Criterion was known and read.

The Criterion was born in a spirit of both adventure and conviction. The adventure, generated mostly by Elliot's friends who had supported and encouraged his earlier ventures, proved to be the buoy that helped Elliot's conviction survive the first three precarious years. Yet the early praise that greeted the Criterion was tempered by a knowledge of the financial problems that regularly crippled or curtailed sophisticated, "highbrow" artistic and literary efforts. Elliot himself, his friends well knew, was still struggling both emotionally and financially when he began the Criterion. Yet they saw it as an admirable beginning, and one that promised literary excellence and permanence. As John Quinn decided, "It's a beautiful thing, beautifully printed and on good paper. That first number will be memorable. I hope you can keep it up." Response from others was equally positive, but not exuberant. The Times Literary Supplement remarked that "if we are to judge by its first number, the Criterion ... is of a quality not inferior to that of any review published either here or abroad." Ezra Pound called it a "magnificent piece of editing" that "ought to yield him an income in time." And Conrad Aiken wrote, "Elliot's magazine is well received, and his poem called 'great.' Great it may not be, but it's certainly delicious ... Get the Criterion." 5

4 Ibid.

5 John Quinn to Elliot, Dec. 4, 1922, in B. L. Reid, ed., The Man from New York: John Quinn and his Friends (New York, 1968), 540;
The sentiments were clearly supportive but hardly jubilant. Others believed that the Criterion would likely succumb to Eliot's unstable personal fortunes and the popular apathy toward such ventures. The following three years were very difficult for Eliot personally; he was unable to accept Virginia Woolf's and others' efforts to secure him new employment, his wife's failing health required constant attention and treatment, and Eliot himself suffered severe emotional distress. Less than six months after the first Criterion he confessed:

In order to carry on the Criterion I have had to neglect not only the writing I ought to be doing but my private affairs of every description which for some time past I have had not a moment to deal with. . . . I am worn out. I cannot go on.6

With good reason, then, the early followers of the Criterion hesitated to endorse its permanent value until they could be sure that it would last long enough to acquire one.

The future of the Criterion rested, ultimately, on the outcome of a struggle between Eliot's determination that there be an organ to publish important voices and ideas of the day, and the general apathy of its financial patron toward such rigorous intellectual aims. As Eliot confided to Herbert Read, his editorial principles hardly coincided with Lady Rothermere's vision of a "chic and brilliant" quarterly for "the wealthy few." Aware that their intentions would eventually clash, Eliot admitted that the Criterion "might easily become a heart-


breaking struggle. In 1925 Lady Rothermere summoned Eliot to Switzerland to discuss the periodical; he returned and, over lunch at a pub where Criterion collaborators regularly met, announced that the patron's subsidy had been abruptly discontinued. He did not elaborate to his friends on the specific causes or conditions of the decision.

Earlier that year Eliot had at last managed to leave his job at the bank and to join the publishing firm of Faber and Gwyer. Although not hired initially as a literary advisor, Eliot quickly settled into the firm, finally comfortable within a professional environment compatible with his interests and skills, and he remained with Faber and Faber (as it became in 1929) as an editor and later as a director until his death in 1965. The change was a crucial upswing in Eliot's fortunes, and proved to rescue the Criterion as well. When Lady Rothermere withdrew her money, Faber and Gwyer, "encouraged" and "startled" by Eliot's refusal to plead for his self-interests to the firm, and by the discovery that "there were more people interested in the continuation of the Criterion than anybody had supposed," assumed publication responsibilities of the quarterly. Frank Morley, Eliot's colleague in the firm, interpreted the gesture as a shrewd business move more than a charity:

Not a great deal of money was involved. Faber and Gwyer were prepared to lose larger sums on experiments of less importance; for though the business value of the Criterion was indirect, an indirect return was assuredly there.

Regardless of the sentiment that prompted the publishers to back the Criterion, the relationship between editor and publisher remained

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9 Ibid., 62, 64. Morley suggests that Eliot was hired for his experience and merits "as a man of business" rather than for his literary
secure and mutually advantageous. Eliot suddenly found himself in a position virtually unique among editors of the day. The Criterion was free from continual financial pressures; Eliot was able to devote his editorial energies to the further pursuit and refinement of his relationship to Criterion contributors and to the "time and tendencies" of the age.

During the twenties, described by Conrad Aiken as "a time of blooming, of profusion, of hard work and endless debate," writers everywhere witnessed the changes and uncertainties in modern culture, particularly evident in the welter of little magazines. It was

a time of competitive stress. . . Which of them would survive? . . . The various cliques formed or fell apart, new coteries rose and fell; but central among them, and in the end omnipotent, was the group that erratically and fluctuatingly arranged itself, or rearranged itself, round the Tsetse's [Eliot's] quarterly, and the lunches and dinners that intermittently celebrated its appearances.10

That nucleus of writers "arranged round" the Criterion most clearly represent, apart from Eliot's own statements, the directions and purpose of the quarterly's early years.

In the 1926 essay "The Idea of a Literary Review," which became the pivotal statement for the early Criterion, Eliot outlined his notions of what such a review should be and do. He emphasized that "in the world of ideas, no individual, no small group, is ever good or wise enough to deserve" to propagate solely their own "views and fancies." Instead, distinct from a "miscellany" whose contents "depend upon its editor's vague perceptions of good' and 'bad'," an ideal review "will depend upon a nice adjustment between editor, collaborators achievements: "there was possibly something . . . magical in having a banker in the crew."

and occasional contributors. . . . That must issue in a 'tendency' rather than a 'programme'." He argued that because a programme is essentially a static doctrine, it is easily shattered by the entry of a new opinion or argument, a fate that Eliot witnessed several reviews suffer during the years he spent observing literary London. "A tendency will endure," however,

unless editor and collaborators not only change their minds but their personalities. Editor and collaborators may freely express their individual opinions and ideas, so long as there is a residue of common tendency, in the light of which many occasional contributors, otherwise irrelevant or even antagonistic, may take their place and counteract any narrow sectarianism. 11

The core of Eliot's earliest support came from the friends who had helped him in pre-Criterion days and who remained interested in his literary career. In 1922 many of the Criterion collaborators and staunchest supporters were also Eliot's personal friends. Particularly in London there was a sense of camaraderie, as many felt tacitly united by a common aim. A warm personal respect pervades, for instance, an exchange of letters between Eliot and Wyndham Lewis regarding the excerpt of Lewis's "The Apes of God" that appeared in the April 1924 issue of the Criterion. As Lewis had earlier assured Eliot:

As I understand with your paper that you are almost in the position I was in with the Tyro and Blast I will give you anything I have for nothing, as you did me, and am anxious to be of use to you: for I know that every failure of an exceptional attempt like yours with the Criterion means the chance of establishing some sort of critical standard here is diminished. 12

About the manuscript Eliot replied: "You have surpassed yourself and everything. It is worth running the Criterion just to publish these." 13


13 Eliot to Lewis, n.d., ibid., 140.
In time the two quarrelled and the benevolence faded, but the early sentiments of friendship remained mostly unaltered. Similarly, during the close and frequent correspondence between Eliot and Virginia Woolf, she assured him: "I am greatly flattered that you should wish to have anything of mine for the Criterion, where, apart from your noble terms, I would rather appear than anywhere else." 14

Although one can hardly quantify esteem, the portion of Criterion pages occupied by "favors" to or from Eliot is very small. Critics generally agree that his wife Vivien Eliot's short prose and essays (printed under several pseudonyms) were perhaps the only work unequal to the usual critical caliber. With this exception, then, Eliot's friends apparently were not exempt from the usual editorial prerogative. He managed to maintain sincere, respectful friendships as well as critical discretion and integrity. Even those acquaintances prompted by Eliot's growing reputation and those he sought for professional reasons often blossomed into personal regard, and bore fruit of mutual reward.

In a sense, the Criterion also reaped the harvest of Eliot's enormously influential poetry. Beginning in small circles when his Prufrock poems appeared, and flourishing on a legendary scale after "The Waste Land" (1922), his poetry generated a near cult-like following. Cyril Connolly called the effect of Eliot's work on the "drugged and haunted" youth in the twenties a "veritable brain-washing, a total preoccupation." 15 A whole generation of young or beginning writers

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acknowledged, both with resentment and with admiration, Eliot's influence on their work. Eliot's "growing influence over rebellious youth"\textsuperscript{16} laid the groundwork for what would become one of Eliot's most successful professional aims—to encourage and assist untested writers. Thus initially and inadvertently through his poetry and later through deliberate effort, Eliot attracted dozens of the decades' most promising writers to the \textit{Criterion} offices. This contingent of young writers became, especially in the thirties, a critical portion of \textit{Criterion} readers and contributors, and a large measure of its importance.

Eliot attributed not only the endurance but also the integrity of any literary review to the quality of the relationships between its editor and contributors. He described this relationship most simply in a letter to Herbert Read, where he explained that he hoped to get as homogeneous a group as possible: but \ldots I do not expect everyone to subscribe to all the articles of my own faith, \ldots but it seems to me that at the present time we need more dogma, and that one ought to have as precise and clear a creed as possible. \ldots What is essential is to find those persons who have an impersonal loyalty to some faith not antagonistic to my own.\textsuperscript{17}

While some of that group were Eliot's personal allies, and others were drawn to him through a respect for his poetry, the definitive segment of \textit{Criterion} collaborators were those whose work and interests Eliot deliberately solicited. As he later told Malcolm Bradbury, the \textit{Criterion} "depended on his going out and getting what contributors he wanted and suggesting the subjects of the discussion; unsolicited contributions formed only a small part of the matter of the paper."\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{17}Eliot to Herbert Read, Oct. 1923, in Read, \textit{Cult of Sincerity}, 105.

Eliot selected his contributors to illustrate and perform three essential functions, which he outlined as three aspects of the purpose of a critical review like the Criterion. He intended the Criterion to publish the fiction and poetry that best indicated the forefront of modern literature, no matter how controversial or unrecognized. Second, the Criterion aimed to publish both creative and critical work of significant non-English writers. By doing this, and by featuring regular essays and reports discussing non-English society, politics, and art, the Criterion hoped to cultivate an international sense of intellectual camaraderie and exchange. Its third aim was to advocate a particular "point of view," an ideological stance that would help to clarify not only the Criterion position on an issue, but opposing opinions as well. Eliot believed that a literary review is best based not merely on literature, but on what we may suppose to be the interests of any intelligent person with literary tastes. . . . We must include besides 'creative' work and literary criticism, any material which should be operative on general ideas—the results of contemporary work in history, archaeology, anthropology, even of the more technical sciences when those results are . . . valuable to the man of culture and when they can be made intelligible to him.19

This was the chief "criterion" for inclusion in the quarterly, and governed its main activities during its initial years.

Of the three aspirations meant to define the Criterion, the first and easiest goal was to publish new or unfamiliar creative writers if their work merited attention. With the Criterion as with Faber and Faber, a colleague noted, Eliot "wasn't apt to fight for anybody that any other publisher would publish; but he could fight for people at whom no other publisher would look."20 He became, in fact, a champion

of untried but talented writers, as the *Criterion* of the thirties more vividly proved. In 1924 Eliot welcomed Ford Madox Ford's new transatlantic review, and in its first issue reminded its readers that

"A review is not measured by the number of stars and scoops that it gets. . . . The use of a review is not to force talent, but to create a favorable atmosphere. . . . In the *Criterion* we have endeavored not to discriminate in favour of either youth or age, but to find good work which either could not appear elsewhere at all, or would not appear elsewhere to such advantage."

The advantage was clearly a mutual one; writers received recognition and the highest critical appraisal, while readers benefited from the exposure to new ideas and styles. As a reader in the most primary sense, Eliot had "only one request to make: give us either what we can support or what is worth our trouble to attack. There is little of either in existence."22

The early volumes of the *Criterion* contained creative work by some of the most "difficult" and "modern" writers of its time. Included were work by such diverse writers as Luigi Pirandello, Virginia Woolf, W. B. Yeats, E. M. Forster, Marcel Proust, Wyndham Lewis, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Conrad Aiken, Ezra Pound, and of course Eliot. The *Criterion* aimed to both sanction and provoke new art and ideas. It took a strong stand against censorship by defending Joyce's controversial *Ulysses*, by publishing fragments of his "work in progress" that later became *Finnegans Wake*, and by printing Yeats's 1926 protest against religious censorship in Ireland.23

22Ibid.


provided fair exposure for writers offering new and stimulating ideas or perspectives. Eliot welcomed disagreement and debate in the Criterion on the same terms with which he greeted the transatlantic review in 1924: "If it is similar to the Criterion I shall take it as the best possible blessings of the gods on our enterprises; in so far as it be different I hope that the differences will be complementary or at least antagonistic."24

Another facet of the Criterion's interest in original, modern writing was its ongoing attention, in the "Foreign Periodicals" section, to American literary activity—a focus unique among British magazines. American little magazines seemed indigenously rooted in the kind of critical energy that the Criterion encouraged, and so received earnest attention even though Criterion reviewers often pronounced American periodicals "immature" and "flawed." In 1924 Herbert Read described with relish the American Mercury, which "to its great virtue" embodied that "raciness or zest which seems to be the distinctive contribution of the American genius to the gaiety of nations."25 The Criterion also welcomed the experimental, rebellious American reviews Secession and Contact, because even though the "result is generally one of intellectual artifice, or merely of bad crudity... what matters is the seriousness of the pursuit, and the possibility of an original thing." In a 1924 essay on contemporary fiction, Virginia Woolf shared the Criterion's policies toward modern fiction and poetry when she confessed a willingness to "tolerate the spasmodic, obscure, fragmentary, failure" because "we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages in


English literature."²⁶

The Criterion's wish to publish new, provocative writing, and its growing priority of printing careful, extensive book reviews,²⁷ also prompted the weekly informal luncheons and monthly dinner meetings of Criterion collaborators and friends. Among those who regularly attended were Herbert Read, Harold Monro, J. G. Fletcher, F. S. Flint, Frank Morley, Montgomery Belgin, J. B. Trend, and usually a dozen or so less regular contributors. Eliot believed that "the more contact, the more free exchange, there can be between the small number of intelligent people of every race or nation, the more likelihood of general contribution to what we call Literature." These meals celebrated and cemented a sense of camaraderie and support that occurred when contributors gathered to "discuss, and if possible, supply ideas."²⁸ The gatherings were an informal version of the critical beliefs that governed Eliot's editorial policies, stressing the cooperative unity of literature and thought. Literature, Eliot wrote in 1923, is an "organic whole" only in relation to which are individual artists and works significant. Because they are united by a common tradition and a common cause, "only the many who has so much to give that he can forget himself in his work can afford to collaborate, to exchange, to contribute."²⁹ This theme was echoed repeatedly throughout the Criterion.


²⁷Beginning with the July 1924 issue, which contained 9 pages of 5 reviews, the "Books of the Quarter" department gradually expanded to include, by Oct. 1926, 41 pages of 33 reviews.


and is also intrinsic to its second major purpose.

As a corollary to its intent to foster modern creative writing, the Criterion also aimed to introduce to American and British readers some of the best non-English writing of the time. Determined that language should not be a barrier to the diffusion of ideas, Eliot and his colleagues translated many important works into English. They wished to reestablish the unity and continuity of all European culture, which they believed the recent war had seriously jeopardized. Through organized cooperation and shared values, Eliot and similarly concerned editors such as Jacques Riviere of La Nouvelle Revue Francaise "helped heal the wounds of the war by their cosmopolitan views and their hospitality to good work, no matter what its origin."30

The early Criterion exhibited many facets of the synthesis of European culture that Eliot advocated. It fostered cooperation and discussion on an international scale, and, at least for a time, gave its readers the rare chance, as Bonamy Dobree remembered, "to see all European literature as one."31 The Criterion accomplished this in four general ways: it published translations of important non-English writers, it printed "letters" and "reports" of cultural events in other nations, it solicited essays discussing the international nature of art from leading critics, and it regularly reviewed recent issues of foreign periodicals.

During its first five years the Criterion printed over twenty works translated for the first time into English, contributed by German, French, Russian, Spanish, Greek, and Italian authors. Eliot was


later proud to note that "the Criterion was the first literary review in England to print work by such writers as Marcel Proust, Paul Valery, Jacques Riviere, Ramon Fernandez, Jacques Maritain, Charles Maurras, Henri Massis; . . and others."32 Elsewhere in the first five volumes, beginning with the October 1924 issue, the Criterion included regular reports of contemporary arts, including Wyndham Lewis's "Art Chronicle," J. B. Trend's "Music," and various critiques of theater and dance seasons in major Western cities. Gilbert Seldes's "New York Chronicle," J. Kessell's "A Note from Paris," and occasional similar reports examined "local" cultural scenes within the context of larger Western life.

Another form of the Criterion's international emphasis was its regular and often lengthy feature, "Foreign Periodicals." Through this column various Criterion writers reviewed and summarized recent issues of other nations' periodicals, including those from France, Germany, the United States, Italy, Spain, Russia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, and Brazil. By providing synopses and often excerpts from these foreign issues, this feature highlighted the Criterion's interest in the cross-fertilization of ideas and perspectives. More indicative of the Criterion's intent, however, are the reviewers' judgments of the nature and direction of its foreign counterparts. A number of them clearly shared the Criterion's concerns, reinforcing its hope of international cooperation. The Criterion also welcomed those periodicals that did not share its orientation, if they at least encouraged dynamic, coherent thought. The "Foreign Reviews"

32Eliot, "A Commentary," Criterion, VIII (1929), 577. Apart from "The Waste Land," one of the feature attractions of the first issue of the Criterion in 1922 was its translation of Valery Larbaud's discussion of Joyce's Ulysses, which was one of the first and best critical essays written about the book.
section in each Criterion was essential to its effort to revive the
momentum of what was finally marshalled under the term "Intelligence"—
critical, mature, deliberate thought.

When Jose Ortega y Gasset's Spanish review, Revista de Occidente,
appeared in 1923, F. S. Flint wrote:

Its aims, ... significant of the present direction or tendency
of intelligence in the older European nations, appear to be
much the same as those of the Criterion. ... It appeals to
the 'happy few' who seek to keep their minds free of the froth
of newspapers, and their gaze directed toward significant
events, whether in art, science, or life. It will be cosmo-
opolitan in the sense that it does not consider wisdom to have
national boundaries, and ... its pages will be open to
foreign writers on an equal footing with those of Spain. Fi-
nally, it hopes in time to become the meeting ground of all
those who are resolved to see clearly.33

When Flint concluded that Ortega's review was "the most alertly
intelligent" of all the foreign reviews he received, he emphasized
the fundamental premise upon which such reviews rested. The strength
of this complementary effort among Western intellectual reviews depended
upon a participation by an elite minority of "intellectually responsible"
citizens, the "happy few." As Ortega had discussed in his 1930 book,
The Revolt of the Masses, the twentieth century had witnessed the rise
to power of "mass" men in many Western nations. Many European intell-
lectual reviews, consequently, were disturbed by this "revolution"
against their traditional function in society. Both in reaction to
this democratic development and to reassert their perceived task to
provide "intelligent judgment" and "historical vision" in Western
culture, several periodicals invoked an "elite" responsibility to
Europe that would transcend exclusively national or class interests.

While the Criterion documented other periodicals' responses, it

developed its own, using a broad base of writers and issues. Buoyed by the international alliance with similarly dedicated quarterlies, the Criterion asserted that the final "equilibrium" in thought and art requires a steadying dogma—a set pattern of acknowledged authority, values, and allegiances—as well as a bright creative spark. Both of the Criterion's efforts to establish an international intellectual identity and to publish distinctly "modern" creative work were dimensions of, and "impudent" without, this third, most significant, function.

In "The Idea of a Literary Review" Eliot stated his belief that the "modern tendency is toward something which, for want of a better name, we may call classicism." While aware that "we must scrupulously guard ourselves against measuring living art and mind by dead laws of order," he perceived in his time a classicist "tendency—discernible even in art—toward a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason."34 With this 1926 declaration Eliot summarized as well as projected the Criterion's course, and indicated the ways in which the Criterion hoped to define the cultural age it documented.

This essay is pivotal in understanding the Criterion and its fate. The pronouncement of a dogma soon dictated its efforts and success in its other two aims. The Criterion advocated classicist principles because it believed they were necessary for the achievement of a "new age" in art and thought. For this reason, Eliot had earlier praised the work of T. E. Hulme and James Joyce because they

belong to a new age chiefly by representing, and perhaps precipitating, consummately in their different ways the close of the previous epoch. Classicism in a sense is reactionary, but

it must be in a profounder sense revolutionary. A new classical age will be reached when the dogma, or ideology, of the critics is so modified by contact with creative writing, and when the creative writers are so permeated by a new dogma, that a state of equilibrium is reached.\textsuperscript{35}

The \textit{Criterion} aimed to provide that contact between creative writers and classicist dogma. This hope of achieving a new "state of equilibrium" underlay its emphases on contemporary literature and international philosophies. This 1926 essay indicated its confidence in the value of declaring beliefs and in the constructive potential of such acts. The essay also heralded, however, what would become the \textit{Criterion}'s chief vulnerability in the 1920s, its dogma.

Yet during most of the twenties the \textit{Criterion} did achieve a modest success as a forum for intellectual exchange and creative writing of the highest caliber. It also successfully sponsored long discussions on topics it considered vital to contemporary culture, and enjoyed cooperative participation from many who disputed the \textit{Criterion}'s "tendency." Thus in the twenties the \textit{Criterion} encouraged others to clarify philosophies while it defined its own.

There were several facets of the \textit{Criterion}'s classicist tendency, highlighted by the general discussion topics it sponsored. Appropriately among the earliest was an examination of the American "New Humanism" movement centered on Irving Babbitt, Eliot's mentor at Harvard.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35}Eliot, "Hulme and Classicism," \textit{Criterion}, II (1924), 232. The classicist positions for which the \textit{Criterion} is now remembered should be understood as the expressions of many leading writers of the 1920s. Eliot's beliefs, evident in his commentaries and essays, were of course an important index to the stance of the review, but the real measure of the \textit{Criterion}'s classicism rests in the application of those shared principles by contributors to a variety of subjects and interests.

To a significant degree, the *Criterion* reflects Babbitt's influence on Eliot; many of its classicist values echoed New Humanist tenets, even though Eliot split sharply with Babbitt in his ultimate orientation. Nevertheless, the *Criterion*, like Babbitt, worked to cultivate the "saving remnant" of society, and to preserve through them "an attitude toward letters and the life of which letters are symptomatic that shall be comprehensive, cohesive and based upon perceptions of wholes." The *Criterion* was instrumental in gaining an international audience for the New Humanists, who contended that tradition, reason, discipline, and authority are necessary to restore unity to Western culture. Primarily between 1927 and 1930 it published articles, book reviews, and letters discussing the New Humanist movement by many leading figures, including Paul Elmer More, Allen Tate, Norman Foerster, Ramon Fernandez, M. C. D'arcy, J. M. Murry, Herbert Read, and Eliot.

Apart from the long discussion specifically concerning New Humanism, the *Criterion* shared many of the New Humanists' principle concerns, as evident in the articles it printed and the ongoing topics it promoted. These interests included the maintenance of the West's classical and Catholic traditions, a resistance to scientific predominance, a condemnation of "romantic ethical anarchy," a distrust of democratic principles, and a general emphasis on critical inquiry.

As with its own function, the *Criterion* asserted that schools

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ought to strive "not for the advancement of learning but for the assimilation of learning and the perpetuation of culture." Appreciation of learning and culture meant of course an attentive respect for Greek and Roman foundations of modern Western knowledge. As Eliot reminded Criterion readers, "all European civilizations are equally dependent upon Greece and Rome--so far as they are civilizations at all." As A.W. G. Randall praised the German review Neue deutsche Beiträge: "It appears to be founded on the belief that the classics...are still worth the attention of intelligent people, for the human and spiritual value to be found in them."

Further, as Babbitt argued, classical thought merits special scrutiny because it is untainted by the subsequent centuries of Western chauvinism that have polarized Western and Eastern values. Believing that growth occurs through perceptions of "wholeness," Babbitt sought to "complement Occidental political, ethical and philosophical experience with the profound and vast experience of the Orient." Hugo von Hofmannsthal, editor of Neue deutsche Beiträge, echoed Babbitt's belief when he wrote in the Criterion that our Greek heritage is especially important because Greece lies at the point where East and West intersect: "This completeness is the last word of the culture in which we root: here is neither occident alone nor orient alone; and we belong to both these worlds."

Richard Aldington acknowledged the other bulwark in the Western

41 Munson, "Babbitt," Criterion, IV (1926), 498.
the Roman Catholic Church, as a cultural and intellectual institution independent of its spiritual value;

No man who values the arts, the intellectual life, the genius of order, can neglect the Church without injury to himself. . . . To any man who respects the tradition of thought and culture, that alone /centuries of dominance/ is sufficient to compel his deferential respect, even though he may value principally those things the Church tolerated because it could not overthrow, preserved because it could not wholly destroy.43

If one danger of modern education was neglect of traditional classical values, another was the tendency to separate and subordinate humanistic from utilitarian, scientific concerns. New Humanists argued that schools should demonstrate "that art and literature stand in vital relation to human nature as a whole, and are not to be considered forms of 'play' after occupation with scientific analysis."44 Eliot felt that men of letters were intimidated by science: "the aristocrat of culture has abdicated before the demagogy of science." Responding to Bertrand Russell's manifesto of the triumph of scientific efficiency over "culture's chaos," Eliot wrote: "Democracy appears whenever the governors of the people lose the conviction of their right to govern; the claims of the scientists are fortified by the cowardice of men of letters."45 Eliot and the New Humanists resented scientific arrogance because they sensed the mutual enrichment that cooperation could bring. Early in the Criterion, in an essay on "The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry," Herbert Read urged poets to recognize that "intellectual minority of considerable vigour and positive achievement—


44Munson, "Babbitt," Criterion, IV (1926), 496.

modern physicists, whose work would seem to provide a whole system of thought and imagery ready for fertilization in the mind of the poet."\(^{46}\)

Science and poetry, he declared, strive toward the same ideal—the satisfaction of reason. Cooperative respect could yield an intellectual unity richer than either could achieve independently.

In a sustained debate with John Middleton Murry (1923-1930), Eliot clarified the Criterion's application of another major tenet of New Humanism, that modern society is the product of a romantic fallacy. The complex relationship between Eliot and Murry, bridging both their personal and professional lives, sheds a great deal of light on Eliot's editorial manner and stature. Their ongoing dialogue concerning the merit of romantic thought for contemporary art and culture is equally significant, however, for the ways that it demonstrates Criterion "tendencies."\(^{47}\)

Critics have sometimes accused Eliot of exploiting Murry's effusive essays on romanticism to pose more graphically his own classicism.\(^{48}\)


\(^{47}\)See Delmore Schwartz's discussion in "The Criterion: 1922-1939," Kenyon Review, I (1939), 437-49. The major articles in this exchange debate romanticism (Murry) vs. classicism (Eliot), and move later into the closely related argument of intuition vs. intelligence. Eliot invited 5 articles from Murry between 1924 and 1930, the first of which, "Romanticism and the Tradition," II, 272-95, responded to Eliot's 1923 argument in "The Function of Criticism," II, 31-42. Other articles were Murry's "The Romantic Fallacy," IV, 521-37; and "Towards a Synthesis," V, 294-313; Eliot's "Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis," VI, 340-47; Murry's "Concerning Intelligence," VI, 524-33; and Murry's "The Detachment of Naturalism," IX, 642-60. The debate also included essays by several other authors. Murry continued to represent an opposing viewpoint throughout the Criterion through many book reviews.

Although Eliot admitted that he was "totally unable" to understand Murry's mystical quests, he did not "attack" Murry to discredit or humiliate him. He recognized that Murry was "aware that there are definite positions to be taken, and that now and then one must actually reject something and select something else." Thus Eliot helped promote the fruitful controversy that his friend sought. Eliot was as eager as Murry to define a viable "tendency" for the time, and their debate in the Criterion, "as amiable as it was lively," successfully sharpened the distinctions between modern romanticism and classicism.

In his first contribution to the Criterion, an essay that Eliot had "generously invited," Murry defined romanticism as the movement of the soul which begins with the assertion of the I AM against all external spiritual authority, ... and goes on toward the ultimate recognition of a new principle of authority in and through deeper knowledge of the self. Briefly, it may be called the rediscovery of the greater I AM through the lesser I AM.

He believed that "the burden of modern consciousness" is rooted in an apprehension that each individual must "take his stand, apart and alone," and demand that life should satisfy his own private sense of justice and harmony. This romantic faith in men's inherently "good"
initiative and behavior premised Murry's belief that the resolutions to the acute "paradox" of the modern world lie in the eventual acquisition of that "new principle of authority" discernible only in and through "the truest and deepest knowledge" of oneself. In an earlier essay in the Adelphi Murry had called this universal, eternal resource the "inner voice," a concept to which Eliot responded sharply when proclaiming his classicist alternatives.

"The possessors of the inner voice," Eliot wrote in a now-famous and perhaps histrionic passage, "ride ten in a compartment to a football match at Swansea, listening to the inner voice, which breathes the eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust." He felt that Murry's romanticism was a program of ethical anarchy, a license to undermine the fundamental principles of traditional society and culture. After all, he reasoned, "Why have principles, when one has the inner voice?" He imagined that the inner voice was precisely what stirred "mass" men throughout the West to retort that they will "not only like whatever we like to like but we can like it for any reason we choose." The authority of the inner voice rendered critical leadership superfluous.

Eliot defined the difference between classicism and romanticism as one between "the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic." Against the dissonance of modern "vanity, fear, and lust," the Criterion sponsored the discipline of a cosmopolitan perspective guided by what Babbitt called a "selective sympathy." Like Murry and the Adelphi he edited, Eliot and the

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52 Ibid., 283, 287.
54 Ibid., 34.
Criterion sought comprehensive answers to the cultural insecurities of the day; Murry peered inward to find reassurance, while the Criterion, like many New Humanists, endeavored to construct "a model, a standard of excellence based upon the past experience of the race and [one's] own confirmation of that experience."55

Based not on romantic "fancy" but the "fact" of experience, this model claimed to perceive more accurately the heights and depths to which the human spirit can stretch. Like the artist or writer who produces only indiscriminate, garbled "creativity," the romantic, Eliot argued, can hardly "distinguish between fact and fancy, whereas the classicist, or adult mind, is thoroughly realist--without illusions, without day-dreams, without hope, without bitterness, and with an abundant resignation."56 While as opposed as romanticists to a collective uniformity imposed on men, Eliot and the New Humanists hoped to advance the individual not through a pilgrimage into the ego but through a mediation between emotions and reason, and a strenuous ethical self-discipline.

Babbitt's doctrine of ethical strenuousness helped to spur Eliot toward a religious commitment that he confessed was the ironic culmination of his initial Humanist sympathies. Eliot believed that, ultimately, New Humanism could never be more than a substitute for religion, and so was incomplete: it was "auxiliary to and dependent upon the religious point of view." He concluded that only orthodox religion could provide the unity and discipline as a spiritual force that New Humanism, dependent on individual restraint, could not.57 On June 29, 1927

57Eliot, "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt" (1927), in Selected
Eliot was baptised into the Anglican Church; six months later, prompted by an "honest obligation" to Babbitt's challenge to "come out into the open," he announced in the preface to For Lancelot Andrewes (1928) his Anglo-Catholic, royalist, and classicist beliefs.

1927 was a pivotal year for the Criterion as well. Eliot's declaration, which he "regretted later for its pontificality," signalled an important but not isolated development in the Criterion's course. Its first four volumes had registered momentum, conviction, vivid criticism, and youthful energy despite many handicaps. Through 1926 it had struggled to define and assert its authority and interests, and well earned the respect it received. But when the May 1927 issue appeared, glowing with fresh financial support, a new name (the New Criterion), a new cover, and reinvigorated enthusiasm for its task, the Criterion made the significant transition from "becoming" an intellectual review to "being" one. Its major tendencies at last defined after years of dialogue, inquiry, and careful commitment, it turned to face the responsibilities of maintaining, applying, and reviewing the faiths it pronounced. Like its editor, the Criterion would soon face serious criticism and accusations of evading the scrutiny of its own judgment. Eliot knew that the greatest test lay in following, not choosing, one's course. The Criterion from 1927 to 1939 would attempt to sustain the vitality of its early years. As Eliot answered the challenge: "It is rather trying to be supposed to have settled oneself in an easy chair, when one has just begun a long journey afoot."59

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III.
MISPLACED AMBITIONS: 1928-1939

There is no help in parties, none in interests,
There is no help in those whose souls are choked and swaddled
In the old winding-sheets of place and power
Or the new winding-sheets of mass-made thought.
O world! forget your glories and your quarrels,
Forget your groups and your misplaced ambitions,
We speak to you as individual men,
As individuals alone with GOD.

—T. S. Eliot, "The Rock" (1934)

In January 1939 Eliot surveyed the closing decade from the final pages of the Criterion. He remarked:

I have wondered whether it would not have been more profitable, instead of trying to maintain literary standards increasingly repudiated in the modern world, to have endeavored to rally intellectual effort to affirm those principles of life . . . from the lack of which we are suffering disastrous /sic/ consequences. But such a task would be outside the scope of the Criterion, . . . perhaps another indication that the Criterion has served its purpose.¹

In that valedictory essay, entitled "Last Words," Eliot relinquished the vision of a "disinterested" critical quarterly with which he had started the Criterion seventeen years earlier. He noted that one of the major continuing aims of the Criterion had always been to "provide in London a local forum of international thought." But, he wrote, circumstances of the time thwarted this aim. He designated 1926 as the year when "the features of the post-war world began clearly to emerge," and when intellectual and artistic efforts began to focus on the coming era instead of the past one. In the final decade of the Criterion, he observed:

gradually communications became more difficult, contributions more uncertain, and new and important foreign contributors more difficult to discover. The 'European mind,' which one had mistakenly thought might be fortified, disappeared from view: there were fewer writers in any country who seemed to have anything to say to the intellectual public of another.2

Eliot was only partly right in blaming the Criterion's collapse on the breakdown of international cultural and intellectual cooperation. Although the thirties were dominated by intense political preoccupations and conflicts that polarized the intellectual communities of the twenties, two "internal" developments also gradually undermined the Criterion's stature. Demands of the time for political commitment certainly exacerbated and hastened the Criterion's demise, but it was as deeply weakened by the two ultimately irreconcilable tendencies within its own operation. On one hand, the Criterion reasserted its emphases on examination rather than endorsement of ideas, and on providing forums rather than platforms for those ideas. At the same time, however, its editor became increasingly convinced that the only salvation for the disintegrating world was an imposed Christian "orthodoxy," which primarily required acknowledging the doctrine of Original Sin.3 This tension between Eliot's editorial principle of "disinterestedness," exerting intellect over emotion, and his personal belief in necessary submission to authoritative Christian dogma, would finally lead him to abandon the Criterion effort.

Although Eliot as editor always intended only to contribute to, not arbitrarily dictate, Criterion opinions, his religious and political ideas so alienated many readers and contributors that the Criterion was less and less able to solicit, print, and discuss opposing

2Ibid., 271-72.

ideas. And without a modicum of participants beyond its own circle, the *Criterion* ultimately could not continue in its original function as a forum for the exchange and clarification of ideas.

In a less commitment-oriented era, Eliot's Christianity would probably not have been pressed into such a central role in the *Criterion*. Even though they eventually accentuated the grave differences among *Criterion* collaborators, religious issues at first provided ample territory for the *Criterion* to exhibit its prowess as an international forum. And Eliot certainly did not intend for his 1928 statement to do anything more than clarify his personal principles. In fact, with his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, Eliot's principles in art and thought did not so much change as deepen. Eliot transformed what was essentially a personal integrity into an acknowledgment of a spiritual, moral "orthodoxy" without which he believed personal integrity had no meaning. But in those years, when the approach of another world war already seemed evident to many, such uncompromising religious priorities earned little credibility and less respect. It seemed to many a frightened retreat from personal responsibility for contemporary social, political, and intellectual affairs.

Eliot's turn to Anglican Toryism in the face of the vividly sensitive European political climate precipitated the dissatisfaction and criticism that plagued the *Criterion* throughout the thirties. Most people responded to Eliot's announced loyalties with cynicism, disappointment, and a sense of intellectual betrayal that foreshadowed attitudes toward the *Criterion* in that decade. "I believe wuxxianity might be a great help in time of trouble," wrote Conrad Aiken to his friend in 1928. "Perhaps you will not like me to take so utilitarian
a view of the credo?" Others echoed the sarcasm. Upon hearing of
Eliot's allegiances, the Criterion's unofficial assistant editor Her-
bert Read was so surprised that he retorted that he was an "anarchist,
romantic, and agnostic," and Dylan Thomas reportedly pronounced him-
self a "Welshman, drunkard, and heterosexual."5

Apart from the private teasing, Eliot's Christianity gradually
led to a serious and more prevalent complaint against the Criterion.
As Read explained, religious affiliation alone did not hamper Eliot's
relations with others, but it did give him a private source of final
authority that he allowed no one to challenge:

> Once the finality of [Eliot's moral] criterion was accepted
> it could be ignored—it never stood in the way of the most
> affectionate relationships with heretics or pagans like Pound
> and myself. And yet one always had a slight uneasiness in
> his presence, fearing that he might at any moment assume the
> judicial robes.6

Frank Swinnerton more bitterly decided that Eliot wanted "some positive
assurance with which to justify instinctive revulsions from materialism
and . . . 'enthusiasm.' . . . Now he had a big brother—quite the big-
gest brother of all—to fight his battles for him."7 While such reac-
tion is familiar to every advocate of a religious faith, Eliot was
annoyed that others should think he sought an "escape" when he was
instead pursuing his beliefs into the difficult territory of open ac-
knowledgment. His beliefs led him to the Anglican Church; he did

4Conrad Aiken to Eliot, Mar. 31, 1928, in Joseph Killolin, ed.,
Selected Letters of Conrad Aiken (New Haven, Conn., 1978), 142.

5Herbert Read, The Cult of Sincerity (London, 1968), 112; William
York Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature, 1885-1946 (New
York, 1947), 90n.

6Read, Cult of Sincerity, 114.

7Frank Swinnerton, Figures in the Foreground: Literary Remin-
iscences, 1917-1940 (Freeport, N.Y., 1963), 224.
not seek the Church to find beliefs.

Those beliefs, nevertheless, alienated many Criterion readers who could not share or respect them. As Eliot argued in After Strange Gods (1934), he was mainly concerned with the "disappearance of the idea of Original Sin, with the disappearance of the idea of intense moral struggle," because that loss diminished the human dimensions of characters in literature. Further, he believed, living humans as well are deprived of profound capacities when the notion of Original Sin is neglected.

If you do away with this [moral] struggle, and maintain that by tolerance, benevolence, inoffensiveness and a redistribution or increase of purchasing power, combined with a devotion, on the part of an elite, to Art, the world will be as good as anyone could require, then you must expect human beings to become more and more vaporous.8

Particularly after 1928 or so, but foreshadowed earlier, Eliot's insistence on an "orthodox" acknowledgment of inherent human sin—which alone could premise the necessary growth from despair to resignation to faith—as the governing "criterion" when judging art and ideas, obviously radically affected the Criterion. Even though Eliot took care not to impose deliberately his own ideas on the magazine, his religious beliefs affected the Criterion in two major ways: they alienated many readers and contributors, and they underlay the Criterion's political opinions, when pressures insisted they be stated.

Many Criterion followers, understandably, accused Eliot's conversion of leading the magazine to exhibit an offensive moral snobbery, to assert a criterion of dogma rather than of "intelligence" in its opinions. Edmund Wilson, discussing the relation of science to art,

chided Allen Tate for being "too much impressed with the dicta on this subject of the Aquinas of the Criterion, who has an obvious interest nowadays in disparaging scientific revelation in order to fortify religious revelation." Although few argued seriously that Eliot's religious "interests" resisted scientific knowledge, Wilson's attitude was typical of many who could not accept Christian doctrines as relevant issues in contemporary affairs. Eliot, however, insisted that religion was a vital force in Western thought. He sponsored discussions of theological issues in the Criterion not to convert others to a particular belief but to introduce religion as a valid area for inquiry and opinion. As he explained the appearance in the Criterion of an essay by the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, "the point of view may be new and even uncongenial to many readers, but it is one that will command, at least, serious attention."

In this way Eliot hoped to demonstrate that the Criterion's "critical attitude is extended to all the problems of contemporary civilization" and "is concerned with everything that can be examined in a critical spirit." Eliot's Anglican membership did not cause the Criterion's interests to narrow or become intolerant. To the contrary, its chief complaint with most of its fellow publications remained that "they are so little interested in ideas that it is never worth while to agree or disagree with them." As Eliot emphasized, the Criterion hoped to promote religious controversies; it would not exclude certain ideas to protect others. "It can only examine the ideas involved, and


their implications, their consequences, and their relation to the general problems of civilization." The Criterion's jurisdiction ends "where intellectual analysis stops and emotional conviction begins."¹²

Throughout the duration of the Criterion, many leading scholars and theologians voiced in its pages their opinions of the role and future of religion in Western society. A diverse group of writers, including Paul Elmer More, Christopher Dawson, J. M. Murry, Ramon Fernandez, Martin D'Arcy, Jacques Maritain, G. K. Chesterton, Allen Tate, Eliot, and others, challenges each other's beliefs. This extended exchange remains central to the nature of the Criterion as an international forum pursuing issues that defied resolution. In this context it successfully marshalled the leading ideas of the time under its colophon. This was the process by which the Criterion believed "the few" could enlighten and inspire each other and, ultimately, "the many."

In the 1930s, however, few readers still shared the Criterion's value of such formal, detached but serious, "discussion," particularly of a topic that seemed to most far less crucial than European politics. Few agreed with Eliot's conviction that right politics depended upon a right theology.¹³ Rather, the Criterion's extended and thorough forums on New Humanism, classicism, Christianity, and related topics, seemed mostly a manifestation of Eliot's personal obsession with a "right theology." It is remarkable that the Criterion was able to conduct successfully (in its variety) a forum precisely on the topic in which Eliot was most personally committed. But it is also ironic:


this "success" was often viewed in the thirties rather as hypocrisy, equivocation, and even cowardice. Thus, the Criterion's discussions of religious issues annoyed many readers because of what it had declined to discuss at such length—the more imminent politics of the day. Simultaneously, however, readers resented not only the Criterion's preferences but also its presumption to dictate priorities of concern. This presumption had been from the start a cornerstone of the Criterion, but by the 1930s it only helped to alienate further many of its early readers. By bolstering its original "elite" values in the thirties, the Criterion seemed to slip backward with a reactionary pace.

This impression reflects the time's shifting values as much as a defiant arrogance in the Criterion. Throughout its seventeen years Criterion writers consistently defended the function of an aristocracy of intelligence and expressed a distaste for democratic values. The Criterion contempt for postwar democratic developments was initially concerned only with their effects on art and culture. Several articles in the early volumes argued that "intelligence" cannot be democratised. Wyndham Lewis proclaimed in a 1924 essay that mass participation in art was not only hypocritical but a hindrance to genuine creativity; it yielded only "psuedo" art. A year earlier, the Criterion had printed a similar essay by Ford Madox Ford that decried the "contamination" posed to art and thought by the "vulgar distractions" that obsessed Europe and America after the war. "A civilization is measured," he wrote, "by the proportion of its people who are able to sit still . . . and think."

\[\text{Wyndham Lewis, "Art Chronicle," Criterion, II (1924), 480.}\]

\[\text{Ford Madox Ford, "From the Grey Stone," Criterion, II (1923), 72.}\]
Eliot too had sensed the threat to art and thought that a cultural democracy posed. He noted that the prevalent aversion for the work of art, [and] preference for the derivative, the marginal, is an aspect of the modern democracy of culture. We say democracy advisedly: that meanness of spirits, that egotism of motive, that incapacity for surrender or allegiance to something outside of oneself, which is a frequent symptom of the soul of man under democracy.16

Eliot struck earlier at both the nineteenth-century origins of the "mass" consciousness and the response that he felt would best direct and discipline it when he praised T. E. Hulme as the forerunner of a new attitude of mind, which should be the twentieth century mind, if the twentieth century is to have a mind of its own. Hulme is classical, reactionary, and revolutionary; he is the antipodes of the eclectic, tolerant, and democratic mind of the last century.17

Hulme, like the Criterion, rejected the tolerant "common denominator" as a standard for anything, and so mistrusted democratic values. The Criterion feared that democracy would dilute rather than distribute a cultural heritage, and loathed its leveling instincts.

Yet, although the Criterion frequently lamented this perceived democratic threat to modern culture, and vehemently pronounced the necessity of its own elite purpose, the posture was only a preface to a more fundamental intention. The "intelligent" members of society, it insisted, should not be divorced from it. If the intellectual reviews of the 1920s too loudly announced their own importance, it was because they hoped to revive and advance the "whole" through their insights and keener judgment. But unless those advantages were recognized and heeded, they feared, the "mass" men might assume control of a function that they were not equipped or even truly inclined to


17 Ibid., 231.
exercise. As Eliot criticized government plans to establish a National Theater to educate the masses more effectively:

Civilization, culture, and enjoyment of anything intellectual being suspect, they cannot pass authority unless disguised beneath the dim word 'education'—a word which has lost almost all meaning, but which still fortifies in utilitarian and democratic odour. A National Theatre is not something to educate anybody; it is something to which the public, in a very long time, must first be educated. \(^\text{18}\)

The greatest threat of "mass" culture, however, was more serious than this disestablishment of the intellectual and artistic classes. More feared was the perception that when average men appraised cultural and intellectual expressions—literature, music, art, drama, dance, philosophy—they would recognize little worth valuing or preserving. Thus they would not only forfeit the cultural dimension in their own lives but would jeopardize, through apathy, the future of an evolving culture. The masses, Eliot wrote, maintain only a vicarious, passive interest in civilization, and so invite "moral atrophy" through their "listless apathy." \(^\text{19}\) In an essay titled simply "Dullness" George Saintsbury argued that dullness, a common indictment of many traditional elements of 1920s culture, is not an intrinsic quality but the product of a widespread inability or reluctance to "participate" or to extend actively one's interests and knowledge. \(^\text{20}\) This essay is significantly placed at the beginning of the Criterion's effort to clarify and employ those "dull" values, and to combat the exaltation of the Ordinary.

Developed further during the romanticism/classicism and Humanism/

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\(^{18}\text{Eliot, "A Commentary," IV (1926), 418.}\)

\(^{19}\text{Eliot, "In Memorium: Marie Lloyd," Criterion, I (1923), 192-95.}\)

\(^{20}\text{George Saintsbury, "Dullness," Criterion, I (1922), 1-15.}\)
Christianity forums in the late twenties, the Criterion's classicism had always been openly expounded and generally respected. And it approached the thirties as well with a renewed defense of an aristocratic style of life and thought. Eliot admitted in 1927 that he wished the Criterion to resemble the nineteenth-century reviews whose contents were "work of men who were not hurried, and who could have the incentive of knowing that a part at least of their readers would read their work with corresponding care and leisure." He believed that quality of thought rested on the advantages of "leisure, ripeness, thoroughness." In 1928 Eliot abandoned a brief effort to "modernize" the Criterion—issuing it monthly—to accommodate the pace of modern life. He felt that such a concession sacrificed the advantages of quality and care that only a quarterly publication, no matter how "old fashioned" the format, could achieve. He defended his decision to resist "some of the tendencies of contemporary life":

if the quarterly review seems obsolete to the popular mind, that is perhaps a sign that the quarterly review is more needed than ever, and that it is ahead of the times rather than behind them. Something should surely be provided for those minds which are still capable of attention, thought, and feeling . . .

Ten years later, in the final Criterion, Eliot reiterated even more strongly this recurring argument that cultural and intellectual progress rests on the shoulders of a very small minority:

For the immediate future . . . the continuity of culture may have to be maintained by a very small number of people indeed—and these not necessarily the best equipped with worldly advantage. . . . it must be the small and obscure papers and reviews, those which are hardly read by anyone but their own contributors, that will keep critical thought alive, and encourage authors of original talent.

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As Allen Tate wrote in 1936, supporting the *Criterion*’s stance:

> The ideal task of a critical quarterly is not to give the public what it wants, or what it thinks it wants, but what, through the medium of its most intelligent members, it ought to have. . . . The way to give the public what it resentfully needs is to discredit the inferior ideas of the age by exposing them to the criticism of the superior ideas.  

The *Criterion* was virtually alone in the 1930s in its adherence to the presumed privileges and self-restrictions of this belief, and so was denounced bitterly for its "snobbery." Recognizing this difficulty, Eliot commented in 1932 that "an elite which is only recognized by itself is in a bad way." He blamed not so much a popular ambivalence but a growing apathy among writers to each other. As that intellectual community dissolved, he feared, "the labour of the few at the top, their labour in developing human sensibility, their labour in inventing new forms of expression and new critical views of life and society, is largely in vain."  

This "disintegration" arose primarily from the democratic, or Marxist, instincts of Americans and others. Malcolm Cowley and other young Americans lost interest in the *Criterion* writers and others of a once-accepted "aristocracy" whose special education, their social environment and . . . their feeling of mingled privilege and insecurity had prepared them to follow Eliot in his desert pilgrimage toward the shrines of tradition and authority.  

Cowley and others dismissed Eliot's efforts through the *Criterion* as frightened attempts to entrench threatened interests and assumptions. Even Conrad Aiken discerned in his friend a retreat from modern trends.

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24 Allen Tate, "The Function of the Critical Quarterly" (1936), in *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago, 1968), 55.


which he could not approve of or participate in. After attending the Criterion Christmas party of 1928, Aiken wrote,

> Tom is a lost man. He's unsure of himself, more dependent than he used to be, wary, and now faced with a growing opposition and a shrinking following. . . . They are all of them on the defensive, I think, a little bit weary and frightened, a little shrunk in size, feeling the frost.27

Dissatisfaction with the Criterion grew for many reasons during the thirties. The chief complaint was the Criterion policy toward politics, a policy that also governed its treatment of religious, literary, social, and cultural issues. It encouraged careful, responsible thought, guided by intelligent analysis more than emotion. This policy of "restraint" stemmed from its classicist values, which were soon, ironically, rife with serious political overtones. Criterion claims to "disinterest" then, became themselves evidence of a certain political tendency; Criterion respect for "order, discipline, authority," which were recognized as philosophy in the twenties, were quickly translated in the thirties into ominous political tendencies. The Criterion attitude toward democracy and the "masses," formulated in a cultural, artistic context, gradually acquired political implications. What was "classicist" in the 1920s often read as "fascist" in the 1930s.

Nevertheless, the Criterion refrained from endorsing any political ideology for two, ultimately incompatible reasons. Officially, of course, Eliot believed it was important for such a journal not to surrender intellectual integrity to a political creed. In 1927 he said:

> It is a trait of the present time that every 'literary' review worth its salt has a political interest; indeed that only in the literary reviews, which are not the conscientious organs of superannuated political creeds, are their [sic] any living political ideas.28


He often reiterated that the immediate task of the Criterion and similar reviews was only to stimulate and challenge ideas:

the more individuals there are in a nation who can think intelligently and independently, the less inclined for war that nation will be. . . . The desire for peace is /not/ enough to ensure it; though intellectual vigilance and independent criticism will help to preserve it.\(^2^9\)

As A. L. Morton, a young Marxist who contributed regularly to the Criterion from 1927 to its end, testified, "during all the years of my association with the Criterion I had complete freedom to express in it a viewpoint which Eliot must have thought entirely mistaken."

What the Criterion sought, Morton explained as he borrowed Eliot's words, was "free play of the intellect. . . . It was our business not so much to make any particular ideas prevail, as to maintain intellectual activity on the highest level."\(^3^0\)

The other reason why the Criterion never endorsed any political ideology was not based so clearly on principles. Eliot's "politics" were simply more theoretical than actual. He was as interested as any of his contemporaries in politics, but only in the ideas involved rather than the organizations. Again, politics ultimately meant theology for him, so his "politics" ran against the grain of others' just by definition. In fact, he viewed political attachments as surrogate religious ones, and judged political movements accordingly. Most specifically, he feared the growing appeal of "community" in political (and religious) affiliation; he feared commitment for its own sake.

The mystical belief on herd-feeling . . . /is/ a deliberate repudiation of civilization and its responsibilities; to the Christian it must appear a travesty of all that in which he


believes... The craving for some passionate conviction... assumes odd and often extremely dangerous forms.31 Eliot explained his position further in a 1933 Commentary:

The ideas of communism... have come as a godsend... to those young people who would like to grow up and believe in something. Once they have committed themselves, they must find... that they have let themselves in for all the troubles that afflict the person who believes in something. ... They have joined that bitter fraternity which lives on a higher level of doubt... which is a daily battle.32

The battle that mattered to Eliot was not against opposing beliefs but against complacency, habit, and expediency in one's beliefs. He insisted that valid beliefs of any kind must never become static "facts": as early as December 1928 he wrote, "Russian communism and Italian fascism have died as political ideas in becoming political facts."33

But in the 1930s it was neither fashionable nor wise to dismiss so coolly fascism and communism. If they had ceased to be ideas, they were no less vivid as facts. The Criterion certainly recognized the political concerns of the decade, but it persistently avoided party entanglements. It sponsored an exchange between A. L. Rowse and J. S. Barnes (1928-1933), championing ideological communism and fascism respectively, but the Criterion endorsed neither. While it argued that a quarterly of its nature was obliged to remain neutral, it was also silenced by Eliot's insistence that one's politics grows out of a stronger "supernatural" allegiance. As he wrote in 1931: "The Bolsheviks... believe in something which has what is equivalent for them to a supernatural sanction; and it is only with a genuine supernatural sanction that we can oppose it."34 And yet communism's super-

natural sanction at least provided a coherent political ideology for its believers; Eliot could not formulate an equally potent or viable ideology based on Christian orthodoxy. He admitted that

the only hope is a Toryism [in] which a doctrine of the relation of the temporal and spiritual in matters of Church and State is essential, but even a religious foundation for the whole of its political philosophy. Nothing less can engage enough respect to be a worthy adversary for Communism.35

This position satisfied virtually no one. To most observers, Eliot seemed to be only dodging the critical issues. The shelter of his religious perspective, moreover, allowed Eliot to indulge occasionally in political commentary that only further alienated many of his readers. In a reflection on "Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse," Eliot confessed a "preference for fascism in practice," but continued whimsically that this preference was simply because he believed that "the fascist form of unreason is less remote from my own than is that of the communists, but that my form is a more reasonable form of unreason."36

Politics, again, to Eliot were serious as ideas but ambiguous and disappointing as facts. His political positions may often have been "reactionary," but he was also quick to admit the irrelevance of reaction.37 Later, in 1936, he denounced right-wing politics too because they distracted men as much as communism from Christian orthodoxy.

The movement toward the Right so-called . . . is a symptom of the desolation of secularism, of that loss of vitality, through


36Eliot, "Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse," Criterion, VIII (1929), 690-91.

37Chace, Political Identities of Pound and Eliot, 165.
the lack of replenishment from spiritual sources, ... which becomes ready for the application of the artificial stimulants of nationalism and class.  

Such political commentary hastened the criticism of the Criterion that spread throughout nearly all the literary and intellectual circles that had once supported it. Many American and British writers, including such men as Pound, Hemingway, Cummings, Aiken, Lewis, Joyce, Lawrence, and others, complained about what Pound called "that keerful Criterese which so successfully protekks [Eliot] in the stinking and foggy climik agin the bare-borians." Yet most of the criticism expressed more disappointment than contempt. Those who recognized the potential influence and respect that a review of the Criterion's stature could command were usually dismayed at its reluctance to enter the political battlefield. Wyndham Lewis called Criterion policies "a disguise . . . mere gestures of a stylistic effrontery . . . a slow, a very slow-movement stately pirouette" that obscured a fundamental ambivalence to commitment of any sort.

Without a cooperating intellectual community in which ideas could circulate freely, unrestricted by national and ideological rigidity, a review like the Criterion seemed ridiculous in its efforts to promote what many considered a charade of "discussion." Its scope of endeavor narrowed accordingly, but Eliot continued to pursue what he could of the original aims of the Criterion. In retrospect he wrote that as "alien minds took alien ways, ... our efforts turned to what

40 Wyndham Lewis, Men Without Art (New York, 1934), 77.
was possible in a situation of enforced insularity—"primarily the introduction and development of new writers.

This facet of the Criterion's function grew as opportunity to develop international exchange dwindled. Most of the new generation's leading poets and writers appeared in the Criterion. Besides contributing poems and essays, young writers such as Jacob Bronowski, William Empson, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden, and Louis MacNiece wrote many book reviews for the Criterion, often of each other's work.

A scholar studying "the Auden generation" has recently observed,

> It is a nice bit of accidental symbolism that [Auden's Paid on Both Sides], the first parable of the thirties, appeared in January 1930; more important, and not at all accidental, is that it did so under the sponsorship of the generation's principal influence and ancestor. For all through the thirties Eliot—classicist, royalist, and Anglo-Catholic though he professed to be—managed to be both a model and a patron to the radical young.

One young writer included this relationship in a description of "the Thirties Poet":

> He reads the Criterion once a quarter; and no man who makes it a duty to read that journal but bears its mark inscribed across his brow. I do not imply that he is necessarily an Anglo-Catholic...but I feel certain that the prodigious melodrama of modern Europe casts its shadow in some form on to his mind.

Eliot's respect from the "thirties generation" originated in the newness and impact of his own youthful poetry, particularly "The Waste Land" (1922), and was sustained by his helpful patronage as an editor at Faber and Faber. Stephen Spender recalled anticipating as a young poet "the possibility of being published by Eliot, of meeting him,"

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43 Peter Quennell, Letters to Virginia Woolf (London, 1932), 16.
and Desmond Hawkins wrote, "I suppose every budding poet and critic
made his pilgrimage to that small, high room and perhaps came away
with something to do for the Criterion."^44

Eliot's appeal to these writers sometimes exceeded his own wishes.
I. A. Richards noted that

in the course of acquiring the tremendous authority that the
editor of the Criterion came to enjoy, T. S. Eliot ... had
become alarmed and indeed irked by the weight his judgments
were being accorded. He was no longer amused by the reverence
with which they were received.\(^45\)

But the excesses were largely inconsequential; more mutual benefits
than handicaps resulted from the close editorial relationships. In
a testament to that often ironic relationship, the Marxist A. L. Morton
wrote of Eliot that "he stands high among those men of our time who
once helped me to a better understanding of the contemporary world.
There is much I must reject ... / but/ there remains a considerable
remnant without which my mind would have been both narrower and poorer."^46

Both Eliot and his young contributors benefited from this exposure to
differing ideas of art and politics. "In the 1930s," one Criterion
writer recalled,

many younger contributors were attracted to Communism, but
continued to observe, in work for the Criterion, a decent re-
spect for labours expended in the creation of a European trad-
ition, and to many the place of Christianity in that tradition
grew more personally significant as the years drew by. On
the other hand, the editor learned from them a more radical
attitude to social evils."\(^47\)

\(^44\)Stephen Spender, "Remembering Eliot," Sewanee Review, LXXIV (1966),
67; Desmond Hawkins, "The Pope of Russell Square," in Richard March and


\(^46\)Morton, The Matter with Britain, 166.

\(^47\)Brother George Every in March and Tambimuttu, Eliot, 186.
irony of the relationship. F. R. Leavis, as editor of *Scrutiny*, a review established in 1932 as an alternative to the *Criterion*, enjoyed the "comedy" of watching "the Rightist man of principle . . . hand over the Leftist poets to use for their own ends the review pages of his quarterly." Another contemporary lamented the "taming" of the new generation, and complained that Eliot had

marshalled the young revolutionaries beneath his banner, and led them back through the waste land to an altogether unexpected Canaan of royalism, classicism, and anglo-catholicism. . . . born in the glittering rowdyism of the post-war Saturday night /they/ now found themselves sober in garb and mien at Mr. Eliot's Sunday morning service.49

While some regretted Eliot's influence over the young writers, others resented the handicaps to the *Criterion* that the alliance produced. Edmund Wilson advised Allen Tate to avoid a similar mistake with the *Sewanee Review*:

> I think you have been influenced by Eliot in your policy of printing your poetry elsewhere. . . . People bought the *Criterion* because it was Eliot's magazine and then found little in it except tiresome articles by young men who were hanging around Eliot, and whom he didn't have the energy to brush off.50

And Rightists denounced the intolerable fact that "Left Wing literary slime is encouraged by . . . one of our official Royalists. . . . How much further can decadence go?" Nevertheless, despite the odd juxtaposition of political tendencies among its contributors, the *Criterion* had achieved its aim of encouraging new literary talent.

The *Criterion*’s moderate success in publishing and even sponsoring some of the best of the thirties' writers was a major reason why it

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48 F. R. Leavis, "Retrospect of a Decade," *Scrutiny*, IX (1940), 72.

49 John Collier and Iain Lang, *Just the Other Day: An Informal History of Great Britain Since the War* (London, 1932), 228.


51 *Right Review*, I (1938), 2–3.
retained its small readership and reluctant respect during the decade. But, ironically, it was its success in this creative writing market that prompted the creation of rival literary journals throughout the 1930s. Those who spurned the *Criterion's* aristocratic values and format resented its "capturing" the new writers, and so produced several new magazines to launch more enthusiastically and compatibly the new generation's art and ideas. Eliot himself conceded later that the *Criterion's* energy and enthusiasm waned in the thirties as he was stymied in the aims that came more and more to matter most to him. In 1939 he explained:

> I have felt obscurely during the last eight years or so ... the grave dangers to this country which might result from the lack of any vital political philosophy ... For myself, a right political philosophy came more and more to imply a right theology--and right economics to depend upon right ethics: leading to emphases which somewhat stretched the original framework of a literary review.

Unable to explore such directions adequately within the pages of a literary review, and feeling little inclination to muster interest in more popular preoccupations, Eliot confessed a feeling of staleness. The spark of life burned low in the *Criterion*, and he preferred to extinguish it rather than continue perfunctorily. "If a similar review is needed," he conceded, "then it will be far better for someone else to start a new review. ... New conditions will very likely require new methods, and somewhat different aims."

Hints of similar sentiments among *Criterion* watchers began to surface as early as the late twenties. At first its advantages in sheer intellectual stature kept murmurs of dissatisfaction to mere qualifiers to expressions of praise and approval. Lincoln Kirstein,

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53 Ibid.
the editor of the American Hound and Horn, a review modeled after the Criterion, wrote in 1927 that the Criterion seems to have lost some of its freshness, and to have taken on an atmosphere of officialdom and heaviness. . . [Yet we] hope it will soon assume its former position as the most refreshing and at the same time the soundest review in English. 54

And in 1930 Ezra Pound, testing the literary pulse, announced:

I cannot say that the ideas Mr. Eliot has selected to have discussed in his Criterion have been unfailingly lively. . . Nevertheless, he has induced a care in the use of critical terms that was absent during the antecedent period of critical and reviewatorial slop. 55

Yet dissidents in England's literary communities grew increasingly restless as the Criterion's classicist principles and political abstinences made it unsatisfying to many readers and writers of the 1930s. The inevitable crop of new periodicals began to appear.

Geoffrey Grigson, editor of New Verse, explained the "eruption" of that magazine in 1933—and of the others that would follow:

To his juniors the approachable, yet ambiguous Mr. Eliot, down in Russell Square, was already becoming an elder of modernism. . . . (I remember Stephen Spender saying he was the best we had, but what a pity he was the best). . . . Under the great London shadows of Eliot and sardonic Lewis. . . . a second or third newness was arriving. The planet Auden was up . . . [and we knew] that the second newness needed a new magazine. 56

As the decade progressed, writers turned away from the Criterion both in dissatisfaction with its political aloofness and to demonstrate their sense of a new European literary generation. John Lehmann created New Writing in 1935 because he wanted a magazine that could serve "as a rallying point for the so rapidly growing anti-fascist and anti-war

sympathies in my intellectual generation." By 1936 one critic flatly denied the Criterion's political stance: "There is no longer a fence for intellectuals to sit on: they must choose between fascism and anti-fascism; and magazines of modern poetry can no longer pretend they are Something Apart." Two years later Julian Symons announced simply that "the moral scale of values by which [the Criterion] judges literature and life is one that no longer has much meaning."57

The most serious and successful critical journal to challenge the Criterion was Scrutiny. As the first issue's "Manifesto" explained:

It is difficult to speak [of the Criterion] without respect. It is still the most serious as it is the most intelligent of our journals. But its high price, a certain tendency to substitute solemnity for seriousness, and, during the last two years, a narrowing of its interest, prevents it from influencing more than a small proportion of the reading public. It is necessary, but not the unum necessarium.58

F. R. Leavis established further the ways in which Scrutiny hoped to be a clear alternative to the Criterion. He noted that a reviewer in the New English Weekly had accused Scrutiny of neglecting to give undivided "allegiance to its true 'god', T. S. Eliot, from whom it 'obviously derives'." Leavis replied that "scrutiny" rather than allegiance is the preferable route to judgment.

It is part of our great debt to Mr. Eliot that there can be no easy way [to judgment] ... but it is just our criticism of the Criterion that so many of its writers are condemned by the spirit of this dictum. Judgment cannot be a matter of applying the accepted (or 'inherited') standards.

Later he added that Scrutiny refused merely to "show colours": "We


58 L. C. Knights and Donald Culver, "A Manifesto," Scrutiny, I (1932), 3n. The Criterion never sold more than 1000 copies and lost about £500 a year. At most it had only about 800 subscribers, and toward the end
did indeed reject Marxism and we had no use for any proposed antithesis, Fascistic, Poundian, Wyndham-Lewisite or Criterionic.  

The Criterion thus disappointed most of its followers on two paradoxical grounds. First, the often-cited principles of its "elite" genre scorned political (or any kind of) partisanship. Second, when the Criterion did indicate a political philosophy, its answer to communism vs. fascism vs. democracy was an "unrealistic" submission to Christian orthodoxy in social and political as well as spiritual and moral matters. The Criterion "stand," therefore, was rejected either because it was too dogmatic, or because it sidestepped "real" political issues. Eliot may have had this dilemma in mind when he admitted that he considered it a "fatal mistake" for such a critical journal to try to combine a popular appeal with a highbrow appeal. Yet the Criterion could not survive avoiding such concessions. Neither could it survive by offering its ideology based on a "right theology" to a highbrow clamor for articulate political action. In 1939, unable to continue the strain of rebuked yet demanded leadership, Eliot relinquished his own "misplaced ambition" to expose the "misplaced" secular, political ambitions of others, and retired to resist the approaching apocalypse with less presumptuous effort, "redeeming the time" as best he could with his own poetry and drama.

Immediate reaction to Eliot's "Last Words" in January 1939 was generally regretful. Friends and foes of the Criterion alike expressed sorrow that it had ceased publication. Despite disagreements and dropped to less than 600, most of them outside of England.


60 Lehmann, In My Own Time, 463.
disappointments, most felt a loss to the Western intellectual community with its end. Notices in both American and European magazines told that the Criterion's death marked "the end of a post-war literary epoch." A writer in the Kenyon Review cited Eliot's valedictory suggestion "that there was no longer sufficient intellectual and literary vigor left in Europe to justify such a periodical as the Criterion. Whether its slow decline was due primarily to this cause or to Mr. Eliot's increasing distaste for the contemporary world, no British periodical has yet arisen to take its place."61 Desmond Hawkins told his readers in the Partisan Review that the Criterion had been "the only substantial and authoritative review in England, and ... there is a certain sadness in the disappearance of an intellectual landmark which had acquired a very great prestige."62

The Criterion may have ended for some on a note of defeat, but many of Eliot's friends hoped to equate the end of the Criterion with a healthy release for him from the strenuous labor of combating its centrifugal tendencies. Conrad Aiken wrote in February:

I'm grieved, sort of, to hear of the death of the Criterion. I never wholly subscribed, as you know (double entendre), but it was good, and that good things come to an end is sad. What a relief to you, thought--I should think you'd feel like a cork. I take it you won't be in a hurry to start another.63

Others treated its demise with a deliberate irreverence commemorating the natural mortality of even the most ambitious review. Hearing of Eliot's "Last Words," Ezra Pound promptly wrote to Ronald Duncan:


Did you kill the Criterion?
Wot will pore Robbink doo gnaw?

Who killed Cock Possom?
Who bitched his blossom?

"I," said young Duncan,
Sodden and drunken, "I bit the Criterion."

"I," said ole Wyndham,
"I bloody well skinned 'um."

"I," said Jeff Faber,
"I the worse neighbor
I tightened the puss-strings."

Pound's sarcasm introduces a necessary levity to the persistent question, just what did kill the Criterion? But more important to others was the greater significance of its death. More and more people gradually realized, as Desmond Hawkins did in 1939, that

The full-scale quarterly, surveying the whole range of cultural activity, drawing its contributors and its readers from a public world of educated persons, and edited by a man of national repute, is a thing of the past; in its place we have groupist pamphleteering, more ephemeral, more informal, smaller in scale, more dependent upon coterie support, and edited by men who have scarcely reached the age of thirty.

In time, Eliot and others would consider both the intellectual values that foundered with the Criterion, and those that displaced them. Only in retrospect can one reasonably judge the full scope and importance of the Criterion's many successes, and of its many failures.


IV.
CONCLUSION

Despite its failure to maintain a participating readership during the 1930s, the Criterion remains valuable today as much for those many complex reasons why it "failed" as for the "record of thought between two wars" that Eliot later claimed it achieved.\(^1\) While it is easy to blame the war for its demise in 1939 (many periodicals, after all, succumbed to the psychological and economic pressures of a wartime society\(^2\)), harsh conditions did not defeat the Criterion, although they may eventually have done so. The war ended the Criterion effort because it demonstrated, most finally, the ineluctability of the conditions, choices, and events in which the Criterion could or would not participate.

As its course through the thirties indicated, the Criterion was stifled by two developing features: first, by its own increasingly repudiated and anachronistic genre, whose principles and privileges Eliot refused to compromise; and second, by a growing, irresolvable conflict between the "disinterestedness" to which the Criterion as an intellectual quarterly was dedicated, and Eliot's private dogma to which he was utterly committed.

The first difficulty affected the Criterion as a periodical with ambitions and responsibilities independent from those of its editor. The Criterion was a periodical whose cultural presumptions, ambitions, and


\(^2\)In England three other major magazines ended in, or shortly be-
and attitudes merit an autonomous significance, independent from any place it may occupy in the Eliot canon. Of course Eliot's ideas and character loom large throughout its pages, but as this became increasingly true toward the end of the 1930s, he saw no point in continuing to work through such a medium. He obviously viewed the Criterion as something more than a mouthpiece for himself, and abandoned the enterprise when the gradual restriction of its larger aims limited it to little more than that.

By 1939 the Criterion, conceived as an international forum for the highest levels of art and thought, no longer held a place in its time. During its early years in the 1920s, it had displayed an earnest confidence that was buoyed by a general acknowledgement of its position and function. Throughout those years it had successfully sponsored most of the best new writers of Europe and America. More important, many of those writers—both creative and critical—had shared a deep sense of their own cultural importance and role. This assumption lay at the heart of the Criterion's existence; without it the Criterion's aims would seem intolerably arrogant and even eccentric. Yet that fundamental assumption was gradually rebuked through both ambivalence and contempt. As the Criterion's ideology, formulated in the 1926 essay, "The Idea of a Literary Review," became more and more evident, and reinforced in later volumes, fewer writers consented to provide work if they did not share the Criterion's "elitist" principles. This

3Eliot's own contribution to the Criterion throughout its 18 volumes included 9 essays, all published before 1931, 6 poems (or sets of poems) and one "dialogue," 7 translations, 63 "Commentaries" beginning with volume II, and 61 book reviews, which represented most of his contribution in the later volumes.
became a chief dilemma for Eliot; while he wished the *Criterion* to represent a clear "tendency" based on the cooperative effort of collaborators—"those persons who have an impersonal loyalty to some faith not antagonistic to my own"—he also needed and wanted a cooperative community of contributors and readers, those whose "impersonal loyalties"—however different from his—could be challenged and clarified through the rigor of *Criterion* intellectual standards. The *Criterion* had hoped to provoke the dialogue that would sharpen all ideas and expose the flaws of the inferior ones.

But in the 1930s such premises crumbled. Few loyalties to any "faith" remained impersonal, or much content with discursive printed exchanges. The *Criterion* thus increasingly became a vehicle for printing essays that complemented rather than challenged each other, and for creative works for writers who who simply disregarded the *Criterion* tendency. This was a poor and impotent version of Eliot's original vision, and finally little worth the effort. By 1939 it was clear that his original aspirations—the achievement of a "new age" through the fusion of classicist principles and modern creative writing—were not possible.

Because Eliot's founding vision of the *Criterion*’s role was scoffed at and finally denied in the thirties, should that vision, or its tenacity, be blamed for the journal's fate? Was George Orwell right when he remarked in 1948 that the "present day 'left' orthodoxy is better than the rather snobbish, pietistic Conservative orthodoxy which prevailed twenty years ago . . . for at least its implied objective is a viable form of society which large numbers of people actually

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The *Criterion* would have certainly resisted such deference to consensus opinion. It emphasized repeatedly the greater value of ideas formed and advanced not by those reflecting popular preference, but by that minority possessing the advantages of intellect, education, leisure, and cultural responsibility. Ten years after the *Criterion's* end, in an essay titled "The Unity of European Culture," Eliot reflected on the circumstances that denied those advantages. He recalled that the *Criterion* was founded upon an unconscious assumption that there existed an international fraternity of men of letters, within Europe: a bond which did not replace, but was perfectly compatible with, national loyalties, religious loyalties, and differences of political philosophy. And that it was our business not so much to make any particular ideas prevail, as to maintain intellectual activity on the highest level.6

Throughout the next sixteen years, he recalled, the "pressure of circumstances" caused the *Criterion* to reflect a particular point of view, and, more important, led to "the gradual closing of the mental frontiers of Europe." Consequently, as creative and intellectual activity was "harassed and limited by political anxieties and forebodings, and by the internal divisions which political prepossessions set up," the *Criterion's* original, essential premises disintegrated. Its fate, Eliot concluded, was an early indication that "a universal concern with politics does not unite, it divides. . . . It tends to destroy the cultural unity of Europe."7

Several critics also have recognized, as Eliot did, that the *Cri-

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7Ibid., 120-21.
tion was perhaps the last intellectual quarterly of its stature to exercise seriously a belief in a functioning international tradition and culture, and to invoke from it an authoritative criterion for judgment. Stephen Spender conceded that the Criterion and Eliot taught a generation unable to put the instruments of power to constructive uses . . . that, however much the individual might be committed to social tasks, he belonged to an eternal order of events where he was not the product and victim of his time.8

And Malcolm Bradbury noted: "To be published in the Criterion was not merely to have been awarded recognition as a serious writer, but to suffer exacting demands and the sense of being tested against a living tradition of literature."9

Yet even if the disbanded "international fraternity of men of letters" represented worthy values, the Criterion's policy not to follow the many new directions in which that fraternity dispersed is less easily condoned. As Spender noted, what resulted from its strict intellectual discipline was a Criterion that resembles thick slices of bread with a little nutricious butter very thinly spread over it. There is much editorial conscience but remarkably little passion. In its articles and reviews it gives the impression of being run not so much by a clique as by a bunch of cronies who have formed their own dining club and whose opinions have little reverberation outside its pages. Current politics are discussed on the level of theory by theorists without influence or realism and there is practically no sense of the tyrannies, revolutions, murders, tortures, and concentration camps going on in the world outside.10

The Criterion's persistent defense of its self-imposed "disinterestedness," which prevented partisan opinion in fascism/communism struggles, preserved its principles at the cost of frustrating readers, contribu-

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tors, and finally even its editor. And by calcifying those principles into a passionless "perspective beyond the fray," the Criterion distanced itself from the very ideas and culture it meant fervently to address. Thus, while Eliot blamed a popular "repudiation" of those once-honored principles for the Criterion's downfall, the staleness of those principles is equally evident in the Criterion's inability to adhere to them and still to be, as it promised in 1927, "perpetually in change and development, to alter with the alterations of the living minds associated with it and with the phases of the contemporary world for which and in which it lives."¹¹

Those principles, however, as understood at the Criterion's inception in 1922, are not as such the cause for the magazine's fate. One must consider, rather, the subtle ways in which those general, cultural principles were slowly altered to bolster instead a particular attitude. In its first and successful decade, those principles served as a bridge connecting the Criterion with a variety of writers and ideas. During the 1930s, however, in the face of violent political developments that were mobilizing many into polarized allegiances, those principles were slowly twisted to accommodate, and authorize, less the Criterion's intellectual integrity than Eliot's conviction that such warring political beliefs were only a symptom, not the remedy, of the world's crises. Thus, the Criterion's policy of endorsing no party platform or philosophy stemmed less and less from its generic "principles" than from Eliot's belief that only a penitent return to Christian orthodoxy could redeem modern culture: "there seems no hope in contemporary politics at all," he wrote in 1938.¹²


slowly bent the Criterion's "superior perspective" of "disinterestedness" to invoke also his own "higher creed" of Christianity.

But in the course of exercising a moral "grand perspective" to resist secular politics, the Criterion was reduced by the late 1930s to "the ablative state of being neither fish not flesh." As one harsh critic has written, when the Criterion's "dubious ideology" drifted from politics into theology, its tendency " petered out into ludicrous irrelevance" when confronted with social circumstances it could no longer evade:

the magazine's whole programme was being overtaken by events—events which had not been envisaged and which the Criterion could take no useful part in. By 1939 the game was evidently up. The Criterion could not continue to pretend that Nazism did not exist, but neither—apparently—could it bring itself to oppose it.13

The vivid confrontation between communism and fascism recognized no middle, or higher, ground. The Criterion's persistence in a position "apart" was simply not credible to its peers as a second world war approached. By 1939 its claim that detachment yields superior judgment was no longer tolerated, even if only for its use of that "principle" to imply that the spiritual discipline of Christian orthodoxy is superior to worldly party politics.

The Criterion, therefore, represents today more than a "record of thought between two wars." It is a testament to the privileges and penalties of the intellectual principles that it set out to exercise. In the ideological heat of the 1930s, even the Criterion could not maintain its "disinterestedness." Its course marked the failure of that generic principle to oppose, or even to rein, the both sinister and liberating march of many modern faiths.

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Periodicals


VITA

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