

Louis K. MacKendrick

T.S. ELIOT AND THE *EGOIST*: THE CRITICAL PREPARATION

I

T.S. Eliot is infrequently remembered as the last literary editor of the *Egoist*, a small *avant-garde* periodical with which he was associated from June 1917 until its expiry in December 1919. With the exception of the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" his other work for that little magazine has been largely overlooked. Yet a survey of Eliot's *Egoist* reviews, the form taken by his early criticism, indicates how his concern with tradition in literature reached the point of formulation in his only major article for the journal. Because his role with the *Egoist* was as a contributor rather than as an administrator, it is in this perspective that Eliot's writing as its Assistant Editor merits re-consideration.

Eliot secured his first editorial position through the agency of Ezra Pound. The *Egoist* was the retitled successor of the *New Freewoman* (1913), a feminist fortnightly commandeered by Pound as the principal English outlet for such Imagist poets as himself, "H.D.", Richard Aldington, and William Carlos Williams. With the change of name in January 1914 Aldington became its Assistant Editor until his military call-up in late 1916. The Editor was Harriet Shaw Weaver, James Joyce's benefactress, who trusted Pound's judgement completely. Pound hungered for periodicals, but dissociated himself from Imagism when the movement was taken over by Amy Lowell and pursued his interests in *Poetry* (Chicago) and the *Little Review*. His sponsorship of Eliot after they first met in September 1914 was whole-hearted. On 5 May 1917, when Eliot had just begun his work with Lloyd's Bank, Pound told his patron John Quinn that he "planned to install Eliot as

proprietor of their mutual concerns on the *Egoist*, and to go on contributing 'strengthening' articles himself."¹ Two days later he wrote Nora Joyce, "I am now 'London Editor' of the Little Review. I hope Eliot will be made a Contributing Editor on the *Egoist*, as it would greatly strengthen the paper, and also give us two 'organs' for the expression of such sense as we've got."²

Before Eliot joined the *Egoist* it had been primarily an Imagist vehicle. However, under Richard Aldington (and Pound as gray eminence) it had also printed French poetry, German and Russian prose in translation, a series on contemporary music, art and literary criticism, the early poetry of Marianne Moore, Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* (April 1916 – November 1917), and Pound's translation of the *Dialogues of Fontenelle*. Most importantly, at Pound's instigation Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* had been serialized from February 1914 to September 1915. In fact, the *Egoist* was probably the most advanced literary journal of its time in England. In 1915 it had commenced formal publishing by issuing six pamphlets in the "Poets' Translation Series", unacademic renditions of rare Greek and Roman writers, and Andre Spire's *Poemes: Et J'ai Voulu la Paix*. These were followed by the first English edition of the *Portrait* (February 1917), and the next release was Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Pound had been unable to place the poems with Elkin Mathews, and wrote Quinn on 11 April 1917:

'So I told him if he wouldn't publish Eliot's poems without fuss, someone else would. "The *Egoist*" is doing it. That is *officially* the *Egoist*. As a matter of fact I have borrowed the cost of the printing bill (very little) and am being the *Egoist*. But Eliot don't know it, nor does anyone else save my wife, and Miss Weaver of the *Egoist*."³

Prufrock was issued by the *Egoist* Ltd. In June, 1917, as the new Assistant Editor began his tenure.

Richard Aldington's duties had been undertaken by his wife after his enlistment, but she was not an able substitute, and Pound had been offered an editorship. He successfully proposed Eliot for the vacancy and honoured some of the exiguous salary. This upset Dora Marsden, the *Egoist*'s Contributing Editor, feminist, and author of a linguistic-philosophical article which led most issues: " . . . it should be an arrangement made between us & Eliot. We have no place for a nominee of Mr Pound's in the position of an independent editor & paid only or

mysteriously (very!) by the latter. . . ' " 4 (Miss Marsden had immediately accepted Pound's nomination of Aldington in late 1913.)

Eliot provided the stronger editorial direction which the *Egoist* had lacked under the Aldingtons in late 1916 and early 1917. With Pound's support ("Unofficially an advisor without stipend"⁵) he began to turn the journal into a critical review. He swiftly established the terms and tone of a distinctive personal approach, necessary for survival in the face of Pound's characteristic dominance. Nonetheless, though Pound and Aldington had fallen out somewhat over Amy Lowell, Eliot welcomed Pound's writing. His "strengthening" began with a review of *Prufrock* (June 1917), a welcome, as it were, of Eliot as a writer "without pretence" (IV, 5, p. 73).⁶ Pound also contributed a compilation of hostile press reactions to the *Portrait*, two reviews of Arnold Dolmetsch, series on "Elizabethan Classicists" and "Early Translators of Homer", an article on the Anglo-French Society, and an examination of Henry James's *The Middle Years* in the January 1918 James number.

Eliot's conception of what the *Egoist* might achieve may be suggested by his current reflection on the periodical medium, for while its Assistant Editor he made no such pronouncement. The introduction to *The Sacred Wood* (1920) gives some indication of his pre-*Criterion* experience:

When one creative mind is better than another, the reason often is that the better is the more critical. But the great bulk of the work of criticism could be done by minds of the second order, and it is just these minds of the second order that are difficult to find. They are necessary for the rapid circulation of ideas. The periodical press — the ideal literary periodical — is an instrument of transport; and the literary periodical press is dependent upon the existence of a sufficient number of second-order (I do not say 'second-rate,' the word is too derogatory) minds to supply its material. These minds are necessary for that 'current of ideas,' that 'society permeated by fresh thought,' of which Arnold speaks.⁷

This contrasts with part of an *Athenaeum* review of 13 June 1919 entitled "Criticism in England":

It ought to be possible, we feel with conviction, to write review articles which should be worth cobbling into a book. Even though periodicals may be a necessary evil; though their function may be something quite different from the quick production of superior thought; though they may merely provide a substantial fluid upon which the lighter oil of current conversation may float

from week to week or quarter to quarter; nevertheless it is difficult to give up the idea that a really good article is worth preserving.⁸

Eliot's audiences must be kept in mind here, as Hugh Kenner observes in *The Invisible Poet*. He was reviewing for the *Egoist*, the *Athenaeum*, the *New Statesman*, and the *International Journal of Ethics* simultaneously; each publication elicited a different tone and approach. The last required a simple presentation of contents, as did the *New Statesman* at greater length. Only the *Athenaeum* and the *Egoist* used critical review articles; the former was directed toward the cultural establishment, the *Egoist* toward new literary forces. Scorn in one became advocacy in the other. Many of Eliot's longer reviews were indeed "cobbled" into *The Sacred Wood*, and though his mind was not of the second order, it was the only critical intelligence operating consistently in the later *Egoist*. His work here began to cohere substantially, and though coherence is the premise of two subsequent pieces on the periodical ("The Function of a Literary Review," *Criterion*, June 1923, and "The Idea of a Literary Review," *New Criterion*, January 1926), "A Brief Treatise on the Criticism of Poetry" (*Chapbook*, March 1920) best summarizes his immediate experience. With the example of the *Egoist* behind him, Eliot proposed:

Let us come to look back upon reviewing as a barbarous practice of a half-civilized age. Let private presses multiply.... Let small books of new poets be circulated first among a private audience of the two hundred people who are most likely to be interested in them. The book, the price, and the address of the publisher, could be mentioned in the literary periodical. There is a great deal for these periodicals to do besides reviewing. If 'critical journalism' is an activity quite apart from creative activity, if critics are a race apart from artists who hold the artist's destiny in their hands, both criticism and art perish. Let the practitioners of any art or of several arts who have a sufficient community of interests and standards publish their conversation, their theories and their opinions in periodicals of their own. They should not be afraid of forming 'cliques,' if their cliques are professional and not personal. The friction will be stimulating.⁹

These prerequisites were not fulfilled in the *Egoist* as a whole, but only in the work of Eliot himself. His was essentially a secondary editorial rank; the paper continued to be a literary miscellany, and it failed before he could do more than indicate post-Imagist tendencies. However, the publications of the *Egoist* Ltd. and the presence of critics

and creators like Eliot, Lewis, Pound, and Joyce in the *Egoist* were significant indexes to the time.

Apart from the telling difference made in the critical quality of the *Egoist* through Eliot's reviews, and the themes evident in them, the new Assistant Editor was responsible for slight changes in content. Some writers who had been with Richard Aldington continued with Eliot, notably Huntly Carter (the Peace Theatre) and Muriel Ciolkowska (a Parisian literary journal and series on "The French Idea" and "The French Word in Modern Prose"). New contributors, many of whom Eliot had met socially and who often appeared only once in the *Egoist*, included Arthur Symons, Arthur Waley, John Rodker, Mary Hutchinson, Mary Butts, Ernest A. Boyd, Iris Barry, Jean de Bosschere, Douglas Goldring, Sacheverell and Edith Sitwell, May Sinclair, and Aldous Huxley. Huxley, represented by a short ironic "prosicle", sourly wrote his brother about "the horrid little paper which [Eliot] has recently joined as sub-editor, *The Egoist*, which is filled by Aldington and his fellow whatyoumaycallem-ists...I cannot think of their tribal name at the moment. I hope Eliot will contrive to improve it."¹⁰ Significantly, the space once accorded to poetry shrank considerably, perhaps a reflection of Eliot's feelings about its formlessness, though this was offset by a greater emphasis on creative prose. Imagism was in decline, but poets associated with the movement, however peripherally, continued to appear; these included Aldington, Herbert Read, "H.D.", Marianne Moore, Williams, John Gould Fletcher, and Edward Storer. Short stories of mixed quality, many of which were romances, were printed, and, in 1919, Chapters II, III, VI, and X of *Ulysses*, which Pound had hoped would appear together in the *Egoist* and the *Little Review*. Eliot had nothing to do with the *Egoist* Ltd.; its publications were the responsibility of Miss Weaver, and during his editorship they were Pound's *Quia Pauper Amavi* and *Dialogues of Fontenelle*, Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* and *The Caliph's Design*, Richard Aldington's *Images*, and both new and revised pamphlets in the Poets' Translation Series.

Eliot wrote only two formal articles for the *Egoist*: "In Memory of Henry James" (January, 1918), reprinted in the August 1918 *Little Review*, and "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (September, December 1919). A series on Elizabethan drama was announced in August 1917, but it did not appear in the journal and was ultimately

included in *The Sacred Wood*. In late 1919 the Egoist Ltd. promised Eliot's *The Art of Poetry* for the following spring, material originally submitted to Alfred A. Knopf with his new poetry; it, too, was not published in this form.

Some of Eliot's *Egoist* reviews contributed little to his critical premises, except by indirection; these involved short notices of such writers as Edward Thomas, Harold Monro, Alan Seeger, James Joyce (*Chamber Music*), Sturge Moore, Joseph Campbell, J.B. Yeats, Edith Wharton, Ford Madox Hueffer, Clive Bell, Alec Waugh, and W.B. Yeats (*Per Amica Silentia Lunae*). Here Eliot showed a neat capacity for phrase-turning, praising or damning with gentlemanly wit, and combining "intellectual acuteness with an ironical and light-hearted tone".¹¹ However, these notes did not violate the credo advanced in a review called "Professional, Or . . ." (April, 1918), where he concluded, ". . . we must learn to take literature *seriously*." (V, 4, p. 61) This underlines the attitudes otherwise explicit in his writing. Eliot had a facility for epigram, and the short notices were *jeux d'esprit* in contrast to longer reviews where his critical fundamentals were evolving. Their spirit was typified by fictitious correspondence in the *Egoist* of December, 1917, concocted by Eliot, each letter illustrating some banality of uninstructed literary "appreciation". Yet a serious purpose prompted such satiric thrusts as the following:

This book has not much to offer to the small public which wants nothing twice over, but it has a good deal to give to the public which will take what it likes in any amount. (IV, 11, p. 172)

Mr. Stephens's 'A Visit' has a kind of odd humour which must be pleasing to the adept, but is unintelligible to any one who has not substituted Georgian emotions for human ones. . . . ALDOUS HUXLEY: It is difficult to tell what he is really like. He has come down with a serious attack of Laforgue (which may be a very good thing), and we must wait until he has worked it off. (V, 3, pp. 43, 44)

. . . Miss Lowell's words are well trained; and fly obediently from trope to trope at her bidding. (V, 4, p. 55)

Dunch really deserves the quite favourable reviews which it has had from the majority of the side-whiskered weeklies. (V, 5, p. 75)

Mr. Waugh is said to be very young, and to have written a novel. This is a bad beginning, but something might be made of him. (V, 6, p. 87)

Young poets ought to be made to be cheaply printed; such sumptuous pages deceive many innocent critics. (V, 7, p. 99)

These judgements have led Hugh Kenner to remark Eliot's "tone of deft buffoonery" and his "parody of official British literary discussion: its asperities, its pontifications, its distinctions that do not distinguish, its vacuous ritual of familiar quotations and bathetic solemnities."¹² Bernard Bergonzi also notes Eliot's "feline tone", his "art of deliberately provocative iconoclasm", and a "characteristic note of urban lifemanship."¹³ Both critics, however, admit Eliot's essential gravity; as Bergonzi writes, "his provocative flights were never merely frivolous; they were part of his personal campaign to raise the level of critical intelligence and to rewrite the history of English poetry."¹⁴

The themes that became focussed in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and beyond were often anticipated in Eliot's other review articles for the *Egoist* and the *Athenaeum*. Most were carefully developed expositions (in contrast to Pound's "ideogrammic" method) which proceeded from a precise general introduction and applied these observations to the works under scrutiny. Here a distinction is necessary. Eliot was shortly to say:

... the point at which a piece of writing ceases to be a review and becomes a critical article is difficult to determine. But if we isolate reviewing from criticism its only proper motive is to call attention to something good and new. And this is exactly the motive which least often animates the reviewer.¹⁵

In the *Egoist* Eliot was a critical journalist, propounding what were to become the bases of his literary theory, seeking the "single critical motive" (V, 4, p. 61), and only rarely discovering the "good and new". His review subjects pale beside the creative criticism they excite, and yet were made to surpass what he felt to be the ignominy of "reviewing" for a livelihood.

II

Three motifs persist in Eliot's reviews for the *Egoist*: the nature and function of the critic, the role of tradition, and literature's need for cross-cultural fertilization. What he wrote on these subjects had much more than the propagandist motivation he suggested in "To Criticize the Critic" (1961):

... in my earlier criticism, both in my general affirmations about poetry and in writing about authors who had influenced me, I was implicitly defending the sort of poetry that I and my friends wrote. This gave my essays a kind of urgency, the warmth of the advocate, which my later, more detached and I hope more judicial essays cannot claim.¹⁶

This disclaimer notwithstanding, the reviews were sure and careful, establishing important critical understandings that now seem to look to the future with a cool clarity.

Although Eliot's primary concern in all his *Egoist* work may be called "criticism", it was not until the issue of January 1918 that he specifically addressed himself to the matter. The essay "In Memory of Henry James" broached the theme and foresaw "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in a concern for critical and creative impersonality and the role of "feelings" in art:

James's critical genius comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas; a mastery and an escape which are perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence. ... In England ideas run wild and pasture on the emotions; instead of thinking with our feelings (a very different thing) we corrupt our feelings with ideas; we produce the public, the political, the emotional idea, evading sensation and thought. (V, 1, p. 2)

James "preyed not upon ideas, but upon living beings"; he was a critic of life. This emphasis, however, was tangential to strictly literary considerations; the subject was raised more particularly in a review of two volumes of literary studies and Alfred Kreymbourg's anthology *Others* (May, 1918). Censuring the forces of vitiating ("a large crawling mass") as opposed to those of growth in a nation's intelligence, Eliot declared:

We must insist upon the importance of intelligent criticism. . . . I mean the ceaseless employment of criticism by men who are engaged in creative work. It is essential that each generation should reappraise everything for itself. . . . A writer of literary criticism may be doing one of several things, or he may be doing them all; but he certainly ought to know which he is doing, and not confuse them all under the name of criticism. Perhaps the essence of his work is bringing the art of the past to bear upon the present, making it relevant to the actual generation through his own temperament, which must itself interest us. (V, 5, pp. 69-70)

The practices of reassessment and comparison, implicit in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", are here linked to the "historical sense"; to these the concept of impersonality need only be adduced to give the focus of that essay.

The idea was reinforced in a later review of J.H.E. Crees's *George Meredith* (October, 1918). In "Studies in Contemporary Criticism" Eliot judged: "The work of the critic is almost wholly comprehended in the 'complementary activities' of comparison and analysis. The one activity implies the other; and together they provide the only way of asserting standards and of isolating a writer's peculiar merits." This constitutes Eliot's magisterial and fundamental criterion for criticism. As he elaborated somewhat in the nearly contemporary "Criticism in England",

Analysis and comparison, methodically, with sensitiveness, intelligence, curiosity, intensity of passion, and infinite knowledge: all these are necessary to the great critic. Comparison the periodical public does not want much of: it does not like to be made to feel that it ought to have read much more than it has read before it can follow the critic's thought; analysis it is afraid of.¹⁷

In the *Egoist* Eliot continued: "If the critic has performed his laboratory work well, his understanding will be evidence of appreciation; but his work is by the intelligence not the emotions" – another demand for personal objectivity. He argued for a place in literature for those best able to apply a method: "There might be a recognized set of tools which the critic could be taught to use, and a variety of standard patterns which he could be trained to turn out."

Only his concern for the proper practice and objectives of criticism may have led Eliot to suggest such a seemingly artificial measure. He abhorred the critical commonplaces and dead language which he cited from the book in question; perhaps discouragement was behind the proposal of critical stereotypes for men "who like to write about literature without themselves having a 'method' to deliver; without (in cruder terms) being 'creative' writers." (V, 9, p. 113) Yet in the second part of "Studies in Contemporary Criticism" (November-December 1918) Eliot classified some kinds of criticism to "enable the reader to determine immediately whether a critic fulfils any of the legitimate critical functions or fulfils more than one without confusion" – again, the single critical motive. His conclusion all but nullified the system: "Perhaps the greatest blunder is that nearly every one who criticises preserves some official ideal of 'criticism' instead of writing simply and conversationally what they think." The virtue of Ezra Pound's *Pavannes and Divisions* in this context was that "he is not to be diverted on any

pretext from the essential literary problem, that he is always concerned with the work of art, never with incidental fancies." (V, 10, pp. 131-133) Pound's method, so distinct in style from Eliot's, seems the norm here. It remained so in "Hamlet and His Problems" (*Athenaeum*, 26 September 1919), in Eliot's reproach of the critic who intrudes on his subject: "Qua work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticize it according to standards, in comparison to other works of art. . . ." ¹⁸ In short, impersonality, singleness of focus, and comparison stand as the prerequisites of criticism as Eliot considered it for the *Egoist*.

Eliot's case against provinciality, the prime instance of which he took to be Georgian poetry, was his major preoccupation. In his second review for the *Egoist*, a consideration of the Ezra Pound-Ernest Fenollosa *Noh, or Accomplishment* (August, 1917), he decided:

Translation is valuable by a double power of fertilizing a literature: by importing new elements which may be assimilated, and by restoring the essentials which have been forgotten in traditional literary method. There occurs, in the process, a happy fusion between the spirit of the original and the mind of the translator; the result is not exoticism but rejuvenation. (IV, 7, p. 102)

This is but one example of many described by Hugh Kenner:

Deliverances of principle occur only as some nexus in the anatomizing of the subject requires them, and, like the famous sentence about the objective correlative, they come with great pregnancy precisely because they are not major premises to an argument but generalizations forced upward into visibility by the pressure of some particular instance. ¹⁹

Eliot's term "fusion" suggests the agency of the catalyst in the "mystico-chemical transmutation theory"²⁰ of "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Pound's characteristic insistence on literary renovation was likewise explicit in Eliot's appreciation of the *Noh*, and the intimate ideological relatedness of the two men was evident in the article following the review, Pound's "Arnold Dolmetsch". Perhaps less than coincidentally, Pound wrote, "There are times when archaeology is almost equal to creation, or when a resurrection is equally creative or even more creative than invention." (IV, 7, p. 104)

The same subject, approached less obliquely, occupied Eliot's review of Harold Monro's poems, *Strange Meetings* (September, 1917). His censure of Georgian attention to the trivial reflected the concern that "contemporary English verse has borrowed little from foreign sources; it is almost politically English; the Georgian poets insist upon the English countryside, and are even positively patriotic." (IV, 8, p. 118) The idea was sustained in the March 1918 review of *Georgian Poetry 1916-1917*: "The serious writer of verse must be prepared to cross himself with the best verse of other languages and the best prose of all languages." Eliot considered the Georgians to be fatally inbred and pleasant, whereas the contributors to *Wheels, A Second Cycle* were at least aware that "literature exists in other languages than their own." (V, 3, pp. 43, 44)

"Disjecta Membra" (April, 1918) was Eliot's scathing dismissal of Amy Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*; his hostility, perhaps influenced by her treatment of Pound, showed in the conclusion about narrowness:

Literature must be judged by language, not by place. And standards may come from Paris, or even Rome or Munich, which London as well as Topeka must respect. Provinciality of material may be a virtue, as in the *Sportsman's Sketches*; provinciality of point of view is a vice. (V, 4, p. 55)

This was reiterated in "Professional, Or..." in the same issue of the *Egoist*. Commenting on the British dislike of the specialist, Eliot found it to be "behind the British worship of inspiration, which in literature is merely an avoidance of comparison with foreign literatures, a dodging of standards." (p. 61) But perhaps the most coherent statement of Eliot's intercultural theme came in a discussion of the *Little Review's* February 1918 anthology of French poets, and the disinterest in it shown by *Poetry* and the *New Age*. Eliot observed that the *Egoist*, "having always insisted upon the importance of cross-breeding in poetry, and having always welcomed any writer who showed signs of international consciousness, is interested in this issue, and in the state of mind of the critics." He continued to stress the significance of cultural blending:

...it is necessary that any one who is writing or seriously criticizing indigenous verse should know the French. We insist in the face of a hostile majority that reading, writing, and ciphering does not complete the education of a poet.

The analogy to science is close. A poet, like a scientist, is contributing toward the organic development of culture: it is just as absurd for him not to know the work of his predecessors or of men writing in other languages as it would be for a biologist to be ignorant of Mendel or DeVries. (V, 6, p. 84)

The analogy, of course, was to provide a major direction of "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

Eliot's thesis also persisted in his 1919 reviews for the *Athenaeum* where, as in the *Egoist*, he "brings off time and again the difficult task of making an intelligent appraisal of the book he is discussing, while at the same time advancing his own literary ideas."²¹ One example was a review of an anthology of North American Indian songs and chants, where he wrote:

Within the time of a brief generation it has become evident that some smattering of anthropology is as essential to culture as Rollin's Universal History. . . . And as it is certain that some study of primitive man furthers our understanding of civilized man, so it is certain that primitive art and poetry help our understanding of civilized art and poetry. Primitive art and poetry can even, through the studies and experiments of the artist or poet, revivify the contemporary activities.²²

This bears out Eliot's estimate of Wyndham Lewis: "The artist, I believe, is more *primitive*, as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries, his experience is deeper than civilization, and he only uses the phenomena of civilization in expressing it." (V, 8, p. 106) Like much of Eliot's concern for cultural interface, this shades into the question of tradition without any critical displacement, and may now be pursued as the third theme of his *Egoist* writings.

Though proportionately the idea of tradition is the least of Eliot's critical motifs in his early reviews, it implicitly underscores much of his distinction between simple novelty and true originality in literature. The problem had been raised in "Reflections on *Vers Libre*":

In an ideal society one might imagine the good New growing naturally out of the good Old, without the need for polemic and theory; this would be a society with a living tradition. In a sluggish society, as actual societies are, tradition is ever lapsing into superstition, and the violent stimulus of novelty is required.²³

Imagism was the unstated target here. In the *Egoist*, Eliot first mentioned the subject in a November 1917 review of Harriet Monroe's anthology, *The New Poetry*, where he distinguished kinds of innovation:

All the ideas, beliefs, modes of feeling and behaviour which we have not time or inclination to investigate for ourselves we take second-hand and sometimes call Tradition. . . . In literature especially, the innovations which we can consciously and collectively aim to introduce are few, and mostly technical. The main thing is to be quite certain what these are. (IV, 10, p. 151)

By the time of "Reflections on Contemporary Poetry" in the *Egoist* of July, 1919, the point had altered from sluggishness to a decided preview of "Tradition and the Individual Talent". In examining poetry by Herbert Read and Conrad Aiken, Eliot discussed individual literary development and postulated a stimulus more important than simple admiration of another writer: "This relation is a feeling of profound kinship, or rather of a peculiar personal intimacy, with another, probably a dead author." The effect of such involvement is that "we do not imitate, we are changed; and our work is the work of the changed man; we have not borrowed, we have been quickened, and we become bearers of a tradition." From his remarks on cultural admixture it was predictable that Eliot felt contemporary poetry to be deficient in tradition:

. . . one never has the tremendous satisfaction of meeting a writer who is more original, more independent, than he himself knows. No dead voices speak through the living voice; no reincarnation, no re-creation. Not even the *saturation* which sometimes combusts spontaneously into originality.

The review concluded by announcing the essay to follow: "One ought properly at this point to revert to the question of tradition, and to the consideration of what, in the developing and maturing of verse, changes and what remains the same." (VI, 3, pp. 39-40)

After "Tradition and the Individual Talent" had begun in the *Egoist* of September, 1919, two successive *Athenaeum* reviews continued the theme. In the above appreciation of Indian song, it was no coincidence that Eliot judged:

The maxim, Return to the sources, is a good one. More intelligibly put, it is that the poet should know everything that has been accomplished in poetry (accomplished, not merely produced) since its beginnings – in order to know what he is doing himself. He should be aware of all the metamorphoses of poetry that illustrate the stratifications of history that cover savagery.²⁴

A week later (24 October 1919) Eliot described "The Method of Mr. Pound", where again tradition and anti-provinciality appear.

Most poets grasp their own time, the life of the world as it stirs before their eyes, at one convulsion or not at all. Mr. Pound's method is indirect and one extremely difficult to pursue. As the present is no more than the present existence, Mr. Pound proceeds by acquiring the entire past; and when the entire past is acquired, the constituents fall into place and the present is revealed. Such a method involves immense capacities of learning and of dominating one's learning, and the peculiarity of expressing oneself through historical masks. Mr. Pound has a unique gift for expression through some phase of past life. This is not archaeology or pedantry, but one method, and a very high method, of poetry.²⁵

What these opinions illustrate, other than a comparatively leisured treatment of tradition, is how Eliot's critical motifs began to come together in late 1919. A final review from the *Athenaeum* ("The Local Flavour", 12 December 1919), published when "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was concluding in the *Egoist*, demonstrates more particularly the coherent amalgamation of principles toward which Eliot's critical reviews had been aiming:

There are two ways in which a writer may lead us to profit by the work of dead writers. One is by isolating the essential, by pointing out the most intense in various kinds and separating it from the accidents of environment. . . . The other method . . . is to communicate a taste for the period — and for the best of the period so far as it is of that period. . . . For the critic needs to be able not only to saturate himself in the spirit and fashion of a time — the local flavour — but also to separate himself suddenly from it in appreciation of the highest creative work.²⁶

That the merging of the motifs of criticism, tradition, and cultural crossing continued to concern Eliot is finally apparent in his introduction to *The Sacred Wood*:

It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition — where a good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it *not* as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time; to see the best work of our time and the best work of twenty-five hundred years ago with the same eyes.²⁷

The *Egoist* provided a limited scope as a critical platform for Eliot; its adherents were few and its circulation very small. Hugh Kenner has noted its "familial intimacy", and Bernard Bergonzi observes that even in the *Criterion* Eliot "seems never wholly to have freed himself of the coterie spirit that he had picked up as assistant editor of *The Egoist*."²⁸ What both critics imply, and what is germane here, is that in the *Egoist* Eliot had a testing-ground for his maturing literary theories, the adjunct

to his poetry, where the regularity of his writing and the cohesion of his ideas could impress on the *avant-garde* that "we must learn to take literature *seriously*." It is evident that there was no dramatic growth of Eliot's principles in his reviews, but rather an accumulation of critical insights, a process of incremental repetition that was reflected in his prose style as well. Yet by the time that the *Egoist* ceased publication his interests perceptibly come together, and one central result is "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

Footnotes

1. B.L. Reid, *The Man From New York: John Quinn and His Friends* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 286.
2. Forrest Read (ed.), *Pound/ Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 115.
3. Donald Gallup, *T.S. Eliot & Ezra Pound: Collaborators in Letters* (New Haven: Henry W. Wenning/ C.A. Stonehill, 1970), p. 8.
4. Jane Lidderdale & Mary Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), p. 138.
5. D.D. Paige (ed.), *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), p. 258.
6. All subsequent references to the *Egoist* will be incorporated in the text in this form: (Volume, issue number, page of citation).
7. T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1969), xiv.
8. T.S. Eliot, "Criticism in England", *Athenaeum*, June 13, 1919, 456.
9. T.S. Eliot, "A Brief Treatise on the Criticism of Poetry", *The Chapbook*, II, 9 (March, 1920), 9.
10. Grover Smith (ed.), *Letters of Aldous Huxley* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 132.
11. Bernard Bergonzi, *T.S. Eliot* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 38.
12. Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), pp. 97, 99.
13. Bergonzi, pp. 38, 39, 45.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
15. Eliot, "A Brief Treatise on the Criticism of Poetry", 6-7.
16. T.S. Eliot, "To Criticize the Critic" in *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1965), p. 16.
17. Eliot, "Criticism in England", 457.
18. T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems" in *The Sacred Wood*, p. 96.
19. Kenner, p. 101.
20. Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 92.
21. Bergonzi, p. 43.
22. T.S. Eliot, "War-Paint and Feathers", *Athenaeum*, October 17, 1919, 1036.
23. T.S. Eliot, "Reflections on *Vers Libre*" in *To Criticize the Critic*, p. 184.
24. Eliot, "War-Paint and Feathers", 1036.
25. T.S. Eliot, "The Method of Mr. Pound", *Athenaeum*, October 24, 1919, 1065.
26. T.S. Eliot, "The Local Flavour", *Athenaeum*, December 12, 1919, 1333.
27. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, xv-xvi.
28. Kenner, p. 99; Bergonzi, p. 81.