The Complete Prose of
T. S. Eliot
The Critical Edition
Volume 3: Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927–1929
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JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS
BALTIMORE
faber and faber
LONDON
**LITERATURE, POLITICS, BELIEF, 1927-1929**

**Introduction**

In June 1927, at the age of thirty-nine, T. S. Eliot was baptized and confirmed in the Church of England; in November he became a naturalized British citizen. These momentous acts resonate through his prose of 1927 to 1929, the years covered by this volume. Even as he continued to write on many of the same subjects as in earlier years — Dante, Elizabethan drama and poetry, the seventeenth century, Baudelaire — he now saw these familiar figures and periods from a new vantage point. As he wrote in the 1928 Preface to the second edition of *The Sacred Wood* (1920), looking back on his first book of essays, he had “passed on to another problem . . . that of the relation of poetry to the spiritual and social life of its time and other times” (3.413). His long spiritual journey was accompanied by a deepening interest in the history, complexity, and difficulty of belief in the modern world. In the prose of these years, Eliot explored the relation of belief to poetry and humanism in debates with I. A. Richards, John Middleton Murry, and Irving Babbitt; considered the sources and collaborations of Elizabethan poetry and drama; and probed the moral character of contemporary literature. His British citizenship brought a lasting concern for the political forces threatening the relation of church and state in England and Europe. Eliot spoke out on behalf of the *Action française* while distinguishing it from Italian fascism, writing in the *Criterion* in 1929: “If, as we believe, the indifference to politics as actually conducted is growing, then we must prepare a state of mind towards something other than the facile alternative of communist or fascist dictatorship” (3,598). As a reviewer, editor, and publisher, he also responded to a wide array of writers and topics that reflected the trends and problems of the day, including copyright reform, censorship, literary piracy, historic preservation, church controversies, and London slums. All of his writing during this intensive three-year period was composed in the midst of demanding editorial and publishing responsibilities, family and employee deaths, a failing marriage, and a transformed spiritual and civic life.

While Volume 1 covers fourteen years, and Volume 2, eight years, this volume includes only three; in sheer numbers it represents Eliot’s most
productive period as a literary journalist. Eliot’s personal burdens continued as before, but the quantity of his prose writings increased dramatically. Compared with the twenty-two pieces of 1926 (a respectable number by any measure), in 1927 he published fifty-two essays, book reviews, commentaries, translations, and letters to the editor, as well as the lecture “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca” and his introduction to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies. Nearly the same number followed in 1928 (forty-seven new periodical contributions); 1929 saw the publication of his small book on Dante as well as twenty-four prose pieces. During this time Eliot also wrote three of his Ariel poems – Journey of the Magi, A Song for Simeon, and Animula; the six poems that comprise Ash-Wednesday; and a translation of St. John Perse’s poem Anabasis, each published individually between covers. The nine essays that he collected in his third critical volume, For Lancelot Andrewes (1928), represent only a fraction of his writing from this period.

ELIOT’S LIFE, 1927-1929
The question during these years is how Eliot was able to keep up such a pace of writing while editing the Criterion, working full-time at Faber & Gwyer, and surviving the strains of his personal life. One answer is that his religious conversion focused his interests and gave new purpose to his writing. His turn to the church was not sudden; hints of his private spiritual search can be found in his early poetry, his study of Bradley’s Absolute, his years of immersion in Dante, his acceptance of the doctrine of original sin, and his more recent interest in the sermons of English divines from Andrewes to Donne. It was a surprise to his brother and sister-in-law, however, when he fell to his knees before Michaelangelo’s Pietà during their journey to Rome in the summer of 1926 (2.xxxvi). That winter, in a review of I. A. Richards’s Science and Poetry, he stated to the public: “If I believe, as I do believe, that the chief distinction of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever, Mr. Richards’ theory of value is inadequate” (3.46).

In November 1926 Eliot had initiated contact with William Force Stead, Chaplain to Worcester College, Oxford, who invited him to visit and who afterwards wrote, “My impression was that you had changed your point of view; that you were dissatisfied with both the form and mood of the Waste Land and that you are now working . . . from an outlook on life based not upon doubt and negation but upon a theistic philosophy” (L3 359n). By
February 1927, Eliot began to correspond with Stead about his intended conversion:

What I want to see you about is this: I want your advice, information & your practical assistance in getting Confirmation with the Anglican Church. I am sure you will be glad to help me. But meanwhile I rely upon you not to mention this to anyone. I do not want any publicity or notoriety – for the moment, it concerns me alone, & not the public – not even those nearest me. I hate spectacular ‘conversions.’

By the way, I was born & bred in the very heart of Boston Unitarianism. (L3 404)

They discussed whether Eliot would require baptism — as a Unitarian, he had been baptized but not in the name of the Trinity — and what knowledge he would have to demonstrate for his confirmation. “I think in your case,” Stead wrote, “if you can write such an excellent review of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, you are already above the average in your knowledge of Anglican theology” (L3 428n). Eliot was eventually baptized on 29 June and confirmed the next day by the Bishop of Oxford, in private. Though some friends did not learn about this event until later, he made no secret of his religious commitment in reviews of and replies to Richards, Murry, and Babbitt. It was Babbitt, in fact, who advised him that he should publicly clarify his literary, political, and religious positions. Eliot responded by announcing them in the Preface to For Lancelot Andrewes the following year: “The general point of view may be described as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion” (3,513).

The demands placed on Eliot by his editorship of the Criterion increased dramatically when the quarterly became a monthly in May of 1927, another factor in the increased number of Eliot’s prose writings. He produced a substantial “Commentary” for each of the next eleven months, as well as six other reviews for the Criterion. The monthly format also required more time soliciting contributions and obtaining copy from reviewers for the always-imminent deadlines of the next issue. By November, when the monthly format proved commercially unsuccessful, the directors of Faber & Gwyer proposed reverting to quarterly publication. Eliot traveled to Switzerland to discuss this change with the journal’s founding patron, Lady Rothermere, estranged wife of newspaper magnate Harold Sidney Harmsworth. As Eliot wrote to his mother afterwards:
I found that she was very sick of The Criterion, and did not mind saying so, to such an extent that it would have been impossible to go on that way. . . . One gets very tired in time of doing a job in which oneself is so submerged; fighting other people's battles, and advertising other people's wares. (L3 862-63)

When Lady Rothermere withdrew her capital, Eliot at first believed that the journal had come to an end; ultimately, however, a number of private supporters were found to ensure its continuance. Faber & Gwyer took on the rest of the financial burden of a periodical that did not increase company revenue directly but enhanced the firm's prestige and became a conduit for acquiring new authors for their list.

Not only the Criterion but the firm itself changed hands during this period. Eliot was drawn into negotiating between chairman Geoffrey Faber and Alsina and Maurice Linford Gwyer, who were co-proprietors of the firm but not actively involved in its management. Disagreements arose and persisted; while Faber wanted to invest more in the company, Maurice Gwyer disapproved of many of his business decisions. Their conflicting positions were finally settled in 1929 with the sale of the Gwyer part of the business − the Nursing Mirror − and the formation of a new firm, Faber and Faber, with Eliot as one of the directors. On 13 July, Eliot wrote to his mother: “Now that Faber & Gwyer has become Faber and Faber instead, I find that I have a good deal more of general publishing business on my hands than before: advising on manuscripts, discussing with authors and possible authors, and general matters of policy and finance. The business is fairly promising; and the management very harmonious” (L4 548). Yet his feelings about publishing were mixed at best, as revealed in his career advice to Criterion contributor J. S. Barnes:

There is a perpetual struggle between one's ideals and the necessity of hitting the market; most of the books one publishes are intellectually and morally worthless; you are interested in poetry and you have to sit up planning the “lay-out” of a book on cricket, or the memoirs of some eminent nincompoop; and insensibly it becomes harder to read any book for profit or enjoyment, or to judge any book except commercially. You have to work just as hard and just as commercially, as in any other business; and this business somehow has an odious connexion with your intellectual interests which befouls them. (L4 640)
As with the *Monthly Criterion*, the creation of the new firm meant less time for writing and yet more pressure to do so. To support the fledgling firm, Eliot gave up part of his salary and complained that he had to make up the difference “by reviewing, articles, prefaces, lectures, broadcasting talks, and anything that turns up. I begin, I confess, to feel a little tired at my age, of such irregular sources of income” (*L*4 652-53).

Conditions at home were anything but auspicious for writing. Eliot began 1927 in the shadow of his sister Charlotte’s death and Vivien’s mental instability, which had brought her to the verge of suicide the previous summer. In March, Vivien’s father Charles Haigh-Wood died after a long illness, magnifying both the daughter’s psychological torment and the son-in-law’s domestic responsibilities: as one of the executors of the will, Eliot took on the job of settling the estate with lawyers and accountants. In the meantime, his own mother began to decline; every letter he wrote to Charlotte Eliot during these years—until her death in September 1929—expresses worry about her health. Yet he felt he could not return to the States to see her while Vivien remained suicidal. Eliot wrote to his brother Henry on 30 August 1927:

> no doctor will commit anyone to an asylum unless they have either manifestly tried to commit suicide or committed a criminal assault upon someone else. So there is no likelihood of getting Vivien into a Home at present. We must therefore wait until she either annoys people in the public street (which I am always expecting) or tries to take her own life, before I can do anything about it. Meanwhile I feel that I must not leave her, even for a night, as this sort of thing might happen at any time. (*L*3 674)

In September, Vivien returned to the Sanatorium de la Malmaison outside of Paris, where she had been treated the previous year, and remained there until late February 1928.

Even with frequent visits to Paris to check on Vivien, Eliot found that her absence gave him time to work and relief from the “daily anxiety and necessity” of staying by her side (*L*3 649). The second half of 1927 stands apart as a respite from the litany of miseries that Eliot experienced throughout the 1920s. He began composing and publishing individually the poems that he would assemble as *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), starting with “Salutation” in December 1927. By 31 January, this period of respite was coming to an end. “You must have gathered from Tom what a horrible mess all this is,” Vivien wrote to Ottoline Morrell. “But as you can see, he simply hates the
sight of me. And I don’t know what to do” (L.4 28). “V. has come back with me,” he himself wrote to Ottoline after returning from Paris three weeks later. “It may not be a bad thing” (L.4 50).

Eliot made his first confession in March 1928, writing afterwards to Stead, “I do not expect myself to make great progress at present, only to ‘keep my soul alive’ by prayer and regular devotions. . . . I feel that nothing could be too ascetic, too violent, for my own needs” (L.4 128). In his search for austere self-discipline, Eliot read St. John of the Cross closely, drawing on The Ascent of Mount Carmel for both his private and artistic life, as in one of the epigraphs to Sweeney Agonistes: “Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings.” In his gradual estrangement from Vivien and desire to return to a seemingly happier, less painful time, he had begun corresponding with his beloved from graduate-school days, Emily Hale. He sent her a copy of Ara Vos Prec (1920), inscribed with lines from Dante’s Inferno spoken by Brunetto Latini, author of Il Tesoro (The Treasure): “sieti raccomandato il mio ‘Tesoro,’ / nel quale vivo ancora; e più non cheggio;’ / Poi si revolse” (“let my ‘Treasure,’ in which I still live, be commended to thee; and more I ask not.’ Then he turned back”).

Misfortunes, major and minor, followed throughout the next eighteen months, beginning with the illness of Eliot’s secretary Pearl Fassett, whose capable organization and literary skills had kept the Criterion going since 1923. Diagnosed with tuberculosis, she resigned in April and died in July at the age of 27. “I really do not know how he gets on without her,” Vivien wrote to Mary Hutchinson. “Of course he is so reserved & peculiar that he never says anything about it, & one cannot get him to speak. . . . [Pearl] was the most perfect companion & friend that anyone ever had. I have never known anyone like her” (L.4 265). Vivien fell ill again in March 1928; during the next year she suffered from a succession of debilitating illnesses and psychosomatic ailments. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary:

I stand for half an hour listening while he says that Vivien cant walk. Her legs have gone. But what the matter? No one knows. . . . And they have difficulties, humiliations, with servants. . . . But what a vision of misery, imagined, but real too. Vivien with her foot on a stool, in bed all day; Tom hurrying back lest she abuse him: this is our man of genius. (L.4 490n)

To make matters worse – or rather in an attempt to make them better – the couple continued to seek a satisfactory place to live, redecorating their
flat throughout the summer of 1928; flat-hunting in the spring of 1929; selling their flat on Chester Terrace in June (when Vivien was immobile); moving to a “most terrible flat” at Clarence Gate Gardens. “We are in a bad state,” Vivien wrote to Mary Hutchinson:

We have never been away at all. The summer seemed like 2 long hot summers, never ending. You last saw us at 57 Chester Terrace. And I believe we were congratulating ourselves on moving to a flat. Did I tell you I had never seen the flat? I left it to Tom to choose it. Very stupid & unfair of me . . . It is quite awful . . . And hideous . . . So after nearly 3 months pining we are going to move again if we can only get it off our hands. (L.4 613)

Yet none of these domestic troubles can compare to the blow delivered on 10 September 1929, when Eliot learned by telegram that his mother had died. On that day, Vivien wrote to Mary: “I fear for Tom, at this time” (L.4 615). In his own letters, Eliot says little except to ask his brother Henry for certain keepsakes; about the loss itself he remains silent.

BELIEF

“A Note on Poetry and Belief” is one of the earliest essays in this volume, and it sounds the theme that Eliot explores with special intensity during and immediately following his conversion. It also marks the opening of Eliot’s decade-long conversation with I. A. Richards about poetry and belief, instigated by the Cambridge psychologist’s 1925 declaration that in The Waste Land Eliot had “effected a complete separation between his poetry and all beliefs” (3.18). Eliot rejected this interpretation of his work but also found it thought-provoking, replying to Richards no less than three times between 1927 and 1929. His responses in a sense book-end this volume, beginning with “A Note on Poetry and Belief” and “Literature, Science, and Dogma” (January and March 1927) and ending with a note devoted to Richards in Dante (September 1929).

In these pieces Eliot considers the questions raised by Richards’s theory that poetic statements, unlike scientific statements, are not verifiable and thus have no objective truth-value. While this theory was not compatible with Eliot’s strongly-stated preference for poetry based in (what he found to be) a coherent belief system, it did offer a way to appreciate poetry expressing beliefs he did not share. Thus Eliot asks whether a poetry that expresses no belief is possible, and he answers no, he cannot imagine what
it would look like. Is a future poetry removed from all belief “capable of saving us”? No, he concludes, that is “like saying that the wall-paper will save us when the walls have crumbled” (3.48). But he does agree with Richards that one may enter into an imaginative sympathy with a poet despite holding divergent beliefs. In the first two pieces, Eliot uses skepticism to undermine Richards’s own skeptical treatment of belief. Pointing out that the term “belief” doesn’t just apply to religion, he observes that Bertrand Russell “believes that when he is dead he will rot; I cannot subscribe with that conviction to any belief” (3.46). In “A Note on Poetry and Belief” he remarks that “doubt and uncertainty are merely a variety of belief” (3.19).

The conversation with Richards offered Eliot an occasion to explore questions of pressing personal import. In their occasionality these essays are typical of Eliot’s prose. When he directly engaged with questions of religious belief, he tended to do so in dialogue with secular intellectuals from his own circle of acquaintances. Richards, Murry, and Babbitt served him as interlocutors on the subject of literature and belief; Russell and H. G. Wells served him as foils. Murry, previously editor of the *Athenaeum* and then of the *Adelphi*, was from 1919 Eliot’s intimate friend “in spite of our absolute antagonism on almost every serious matter” (L3 735). The two soon opened a debate over romanticism and classicism that enlivened the pages of both of their journals, from Eliot’s “The Function of Criticism” (1923) (2.458) to his “Mr. Middleton Murry’s Synthesis” (1927). When the debate began, Murry championed romantic individualism against Eliot’s defense of classicism and “external authority,” a position that makes Eliot’s later commitments to church and crown look inevitable in retrospect. As the argument developed, with Herbert Read and Ramon Fernandez joining in, Eliot strategically placed himself on the side of thought and intelligence as against feeling and intuition. In “Popular Theologians: Mr. Wells, Mr. Belloc and Mr. Murry,” Eliot treats *Adelphi* contributor H. G. Wells as something of a surrogate for Murry, deprecating Wells’s intellectual abilities in comparison to Murry’s, but calling the beliefs behind Murry’s biography of Jesus “incomprehensible” (3.67). Murry attempted to find a middle ground between intuition and intelligence in “Towards a Synthesis” (*Criterion*, June 1927). In his reply, “Mr. Middleton Murry’s Synthesis,” Eliot refused the olive branch, objecting that “For Mr. Murry poetry . . . is a substitute for everything: not only for the ‘abstract conceptual thinking’ of science and philosophy, but for religion itself” (3.273).
Accusing Murry of historical relativism, Eliot asserted that he possessed a “false ecstasy of admiration for something you do not believe in,” and concluded, “For a world like Mr. Murry’s there is no danger, because nothing in it is worthy of preservation.” Though this exchange did not end their friendship, Murry wrote to Eliot: “It seems that there really is some sort of abyss between us – not humanly thank goodness – but in respect of our ideas & convictions. If I didn’t know you, I should suspect you of trying to score debating points – that gives you a notion of the separation I feel at the moment . . . ” (L3 676n).

Eliot might have classified Murry’s idea – that poetry and other arts can take the place of religion – as a form of humanism. Irving Babbitt’s defense of humanism went back to his 1895 lecture, “What Is Humanism?,” and Eliot was familiar with the term from his Harvard days; however, the word rarely appears in his writing before the publication of “The Humanism of Irving Babbitt” in July 1928. From 1928, however, “humanism” joins “romanticism” and “intuition” in his cabinet of opprobrium. Eliot shared much common ground with Babbitt, particularly the scorn he expressed for Rousseau’s “doctrine of natural goodness” in Rousseau and Romanticism (1919). But Eliot now separates himself from his mentor, arguing that humanism cannot stand very well or very long on its own without religion; he sees Babbitt’s humanism as “a product – a by-product – of Protestant theology in its last agonies”; “it has never found anything to replace what it destroyed” (3.457). He points out that what religion supplies is precisely the “inner check” that Babbitt claims for humanism. For those humanists who have separated themselves from the religious attitude, Eliot holds little respect: “the humanist has suppressed the divine, and is left with a human element which may quickly descend again to the animal from which he has sought to raise it” (3.455).

In 1929 Eliot followed up with “Second Thoughts about Humanism,” which examines the work of Babbitt’s follower Norman Foerster, whom he calls a “zealot” and a “heretic” for trying to make humanism and literature “do the work of philosophy, ethics and theology” (3.618). His embattled attitude towards Foerster’s “snack-at-the-bar” variety of humanism goes hand in hand with an element of self-defense against those who have questioned the sincerity of his belief:

Most people suppose that some people, because they enjoy the luxury of Christian sentiments and the excitement of Christian ritual, swallow or pretend to swallow incredible dogma. For some the process is exactly
opposite. Rational assent may arrive late, intellectual conviction may come slowly, but they come inevitably without violence to honesty and nature. To put the sentiments in order is a later, and an immensely difficult task: intellectual freedom is earlier and easier than complete spiritual freedom. (3.455)

Not long after “Second Thoughts,” Eliot wrote in a similar vein to his friend Paul Elmer More:

Most critics appear to think that my catholicism is merely an escape or an evasion, certainly a defeat. I acknowledge the difficulty of a positive Christianity nowadays; and I can only say that the dangers pointed out, and my own weaknesses, have been apparent to me long before my critics noticed them. But it [is] rather trying to be supposed to have settled oneself in an easy chair, when one has just begun a long journey afoot. (L 567)

In his confrontations with Murry, Babbitt, and Foerster, Eliot argues strongly in defense of the necessary relation of humanism and religion, even as his lifelong skepticism keeps him company on his continuous spiritual journey.

Eliot included “The Humanism of Irving Babbitt” in For Lancelot Andrewes, together with recent essays on Baudelaire and Machiavelli, authors in whom Eliot finds value for their recognition of the reality of original sin as the basis of moral value. In “Poet and Saint...” his 1927 review of Arthur Symons’s new translation of Baudelaire, Eliot praises Symons for perceiving Baudelaire’s preoccupation with religious values, but he criticizes the translator’s “childish” fascination with vice (3.73). Eliot’s debt to Symons went back to 1908, when The Symbolist Movement in Literature opened a world of poetry to him. Again in 1919, Symons’s addition of a chapter on Baudelaire to the revised edition of his book prompted Eliot’s study of the French poet. Baudelaire’s presence in The Waste Land was one of the consequences of this study. Reviewing Symons’s translation, Eliot makes a case for an appreciation of Baudelaire beyond his role in Symbolism: “being the kind of Christian that he was, born when he was, he had to discover Christianity for himself. . . . To him the notion of Original Sin came spontaneously, and the need for prayer” (3.76). Retitled “Baudelaire in Our Time” when collected in For Lancelot Andrewes, the review takes its place between Eliot’s “Lesson of Baudelaire” (1921) and
“Baudelaire” (1930) in his developing interpretation of Baudelaire as a moralist. While Eliot’s unorthodox reading of Baudelaire illuminates his own spiritual struggle, his bold praise of Machiavelli, another figure with a reputation for cynicism, focuses on Machiavelli’s honesty about the baseness of human nature. To Eliot, he is “no fanatic”:

he merely told the truth about humanity. The world of human motives which he depicts is true – that is to say, it is humanity without the addition of superhuman Grace. It is therefore tolerable only to persons who also have a definite religious belief; to the effort of the last three centuries to supply religious belief by belief in Humanity the creed of Machiavelli is insupportable (3.117).

His ill repute, Eliot writes in Machiavelli’s defense, is humanity’s attempt “to protect itself, by secreting a coating of falsehood, against any statement of the truth” (3.118). In a searching review of Eliot’s essay, Desmond MacCarthy recognizes the limited appeal of Machiavelli but sharply rejects Eliot’s view of him as a “sound moralist” by pointing out his treachery and cruelty:

From [Eliot’s] new point of view, what appears sympathetic and therefore important in Machiavelli is that his theory of government takes for granted the utter vileness of human nature when untouched by ‘Grace.’ Machiavelli seems a sound moralist to Mr. Eliot because he thinks of him as one who has grasped the dogma of original sin, a sound statesman because he valued order, whatever the means to establish it, above liberty. . . . What shocked mankind was that Machiavelli, having taken firm hold of the fact that the ethics of government are not those of private life, should show such complete indifference to the discord. (L4 417-18n)

“I admit that you show me that I have made some exaggerated statements about Machiavelli,” Eliot wrote to MacCarthy on 6 February 1929. “Your criticism of my Machiavelli essay seems to me very sound” (L4 418). Eliot consequently wished to “scrap” the essay and remove it from his collected canon: he did not carry it forward into Selected Essays (1932). When For Lancelot Andrewes went out of print and underwent substantive revision as Essays Ancient and Modern in 1936, he wrote in the preface to the English edition that he was “omitting two papers with which I was dissatisfied, on Machiavelli and on Crashaw.” Eliot had earlier explained his dissatisfaction to Bonamy Dobrée in a letter of 13 September 1930:
I doubt myself whether good philosophy any more than good criticism . . . can be written without strong feeling . . . my essay on Machiavelli, for instance, is not good, not because I did not know enough (which I didn’t) but because I had not soaked deep enough in Machiavelli to feel intensely – therefore, in so far as there is any good in it, that is because it is not about Machiavelli at all. (L5 317).

His view of Machiavelli at the time of writing may have been related, in fact, to his more intensely felt support of the political views of Charles Maurras, for Machiavelli, too, Eliot writes, also “maintained steadily that an established Church was of the greatest value to a State”(3.113).

In contrast to his appreciation for certain characteristics of Machiavelli, Eliot finds little to approve of in Hobbes, both in the Machiavelli essay and in “John Bramhall,” which was also included in For Lancelot Andrewes. Eliot sees Hobbes as a cynic more interested in his own theory than in the good of the state, as a precursor of modern psychologists (he may have had Richards in mind) who explain human nature in terms of “natural impulses” that leave no place for free will, consciousness, “or for human beings” (3.144). Eliot contrasts Hobbes with the Anglican Archbishop John Bramhall, whose work offers a “perfect example of the pursuit of the via media.” In “Lancelot Andrewes” (1926) (2.817), Eliot had followed John Henry Newman in characterizing Anglicanism as a middle way between radical Protestantism and Catholicism. From this point forward, Eliot seeks the via media as a guide for political, religious, and cultural issues. It guides him to reject both communism and fascism, but also to express admiration for Bramhall’s belief in the divine right of kings, a “noble faith” that was Bramhall’s way of laying on the king a religious as well as a civil obligation to his people. Many of Eliot’s contemporaries found this royalist preference hard to follow; Eliot himself called it a “noble though untenable faith” in the first printing of the essay (as “Archbishop Bramhall”). But Eliot was willing to take an unpopular and unlikely path when reason led him there: “the via media is of all ways the most difficult to follow,” he concludes (3.146).

Along with essays of clear religious import, For Lancelot Andrewes includes Eliot’s 1927 review of F. H. Bradley’s Ethical Studies, “Francis Herbert Bradley.” This essay is partly an act of homage for the philosopher from whom (Eliot said) he had learned all he knew about prose writing (L4 411). In assessing Bradley’s place in nineteenth-century history between Mill and
Arnold, Eliot seems to reflect on his own activities as an essayist and public intellectual. He describes Bradley as “fighting for a European and ripened and wise philosophy, against an insular and immature and cranky one,” an aim he clearly shares (3307). He places Bradley, Arnold, Babbitt, and himself on the same side of a perennial struggle against utilitarianism and philistinism, fighting “rather to keep something alive than in the expectation that anything will triumph” (3308). Despite the values shared by Arnold and Bradley, however, Eliot observes that Arnold’s veneration of culture was not immune from Bradley’s attack. And he signals his coming critique of Babbitt’s humanism by pointing out that Arnold’s “best self” is not unlike Babbitt’s “inner check.” Continuing to develop the parallel between himself and Bradley, Eliot identifies the philosopher’s “skepticism and uncynical disillusion” as tools for revealing his opponents’ errors. He adds that these “are a useful equipment for religious understanding,” a conclusion that aligns closely with his remark in “A Note on Poetry and Belief” that “doubt and uncertainty are merely a variety of belief” (319).

Eliot chose to include some of his sterner essays, all written before December 1927, in For Lancelot Andrewes, but he soon began to write more sympathetically about contemporary religious writers, such as Baron Friedrich von Hügel, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, and Paul Elmer More. A gradual softening of the controversial tone in Eliot’s writings on belief may be discerned after October 1928, when Geoffrey Faber invited him to write an essay on Dante for the firm’s new “Poets on the Poets” series. Given a free hand to reflect on this great poet, Eliot set out to give his reader “a faithful account” of his devoted reading and understanding of the Divine Comedy and the Vita Nuova over the past twenty years. “This, and no more, I can do,” he informed his readers in the preface to the Faber publication. He described the essay to Pound as “merely a small autobiographical fragment” (L4 698) and admitted to John Cournos that he “did not bother to do any reading or re-reading, but just wrote ahead” (L4 654). Composed as a close reading of cantos and episodes crucial to his own intellectual and spiritual understanding of Dante’s work, and of the nature of Dante’s New Life in the Vita Nuova, the essay became a cornerstone of his critical canon.

In this sixty-nine page book — at first Eliot called it a “popular pamphlet” before collecting it in Selected Essays (1932) as “Dante” — he examines the fusion of Dante’s literary technique with his religious beliefs. He begins by observing that Dante achieved universality by virtue of his linguistic and geographic proximity to the center of Europe, his use
of allegory, and his visual imagination. Further, he claims that we can appreciate Dante’s hell because he represents it as a state, rather than a place: a man may be “damned or blessed in the creatures of his imagination” (3,711). The literary qualities of the Inferno may still give pleasure to readers who do not share its value system. In his discussion of the Purgatorio and the Paradiso, Eliot thinks through the role of the reader’s beliefs in appreciating such a poem. Dante’s “private belief becomes a different thing in becoming poetry” (3,718). By the same token, “you cannot afford to ignore Dante’s philosophical and theological beliefs, or to skip the passages which express them most clearly; but that on the other hand you are not called upon to believe them yourself” (3,717). Teasing apart “philosophical belief and poetic assent,” Eliot could not resist working in a long “Note to Section II,” in which he takes up his differences with Richards once again.

Eliot wrote to Richards in advance of publication that he had “worked in a few notions discussed with you: the idea of . . . the difference between philosophy as philosophy and philosophy in poetry: the distinction between Belief and Poetic Assent or acceptance” (L.4 506). He may have known that Richards had already begun his extensive “Notes on Belief-Problems for T. S. E.” Eliot’s own “Note” is written in similar terms as before, but with a concluding admission that “I cannot, in practice, wholly separate my poetic appreciation from my personal beliefs,” and that “one probably has more pleasure in the poetry when one shares the beliefs of the poet” (3,729-30). “I am sending you my small Dante essay,” he wrote to Richards on publication, “in which you will find traces of conversations. Of course it is an elementary, almost one-syllable essay; but I want you to read the note to [section] II” (L.4 662). The note was, in effect, a mini-essay, justified on the one hand as a statement on belief or poetic assent for modern readers of Dante, but on the other as a summary of his present position directed primarily to Richards. Such was his confidence that, while reading final proofs, Eliot offered the editor of a new periodical a separate essay on “The Place of Belief in the Appreciation of Poetry, a subject hitherto hardly dealt with except by I. A. Richards in his recent book Practical Criticism which you ought to look at” (L.4 558). That essay, which likely would have incorporated Richards’s point of view, never materialized, but the two would continue their dialogue well into the next decade.4

In the third and final section of “Dante,” Eliot discusses Dante’s transmutation of biographical experiences in the Vita Nuova, approaching the work by affirming that it “could only have been written around a personal
experience” and by declaring that “I cannot find it incredible that what has happened to others should have happened to Dante with much greater intensity” (3.732). Prior to writing the essay, Eliot had reviewed Gratia Eaton Baldwin’s *The New Beatrice* (1928), criticizing the author for denying the presence of the personal in the allegory: “Though the form of the *Vita Nuova* be shaped by convention, though it is in no way autobiographical in the modern sense, the book is obviously based on human passion; and without this basis it would have been merely a curiosity of literature, not an immortal work” (3.502). Eliot subsequently wrote to Paul Elmer More that his “only contribution” in the essay “is possibly a few hints about the *Vita Nuova*, which seems to me a work of capital importance for the discipline of the emotions; and my last short poem *Ash Wednesday* is really a first attempt at a sketchy application of the philosophy of the *Vita Nuova* to modern life” (L5 209). To Eliot, the *Vita Nuova*, besides being a sequence of beautiful poems connected by a curious vision-literature prose is, I believe, a very sound psychological treatise on something related to what is now called “sublimation.” There is also a practical sense of realities behind it, which is antiromantic: not to expect more from life than it can give or more from human beings than they can give; to look to death for what life cannot give. The *Vita Nuova* belongs to “vision literature”; but its philosophy is the Catholic philosophy of disillusion. (3.733)

“Dante” begins as an introduction to some of the literary qualities that give the *Divine Comedy* universality, and ends with a personal reflection on the necessity of a framework of belief to give meaning to life. This section of the essay may speak to the process of sublimation to which Eliot was subjecting his own feelings for Emily Hale, who had come back into his life, and to his writing of the Dantesque sequence of poems that became *Ash Wednesday*. The final section of this essay seems to carry the question of poetry and belief beyond an intellectual debate between himself and Richards and directly into his own life as a man and poet.

**ELIZABETHAN AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE**

Perhaps Eliot’s most abiding intellectual passion as a critic was with the literature of the Elizabethan Age and the seventeenth century, extending back to his 1919 essays on Marlowe and *Hamlet*. During this time Eliot
contemplated writing books on Donne, Elizabethan drama, and “the Sons of Ben,” but all had to be deferred for more pressing and remunerative invitations. He took every opportunity, however, to write and lecture on Renaissance drama, poetry, and prose, at no time more intensely than during the years 1927 to 1929. In more than twenty-one articles, two pamphlets, and six BBC lectures, he celebrated and criticized new Renaissance scholarship, offered his own analysis of influences and textual problems, and probed the poetic, dramatic, and moral implications of many works. His prolific output was fed by a steady stream of books sent for review by Bruce Richmond, editor of the TLS, and by ideas that he had developed in 1926 while giving the Clark Lectures. In a letter to Geoffrey Faber, who had proposed him as a candidate for a research fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford, Eliot indicated the concept behind much of his thinking:

For a long time, at any rate since the age of Lamb and Coleridge, the criticism and consequently the production of English literature has been largely determined by the opinions held concerning Shakespeare and his age. Any revaluation of literature is therefore dependent upon a revaluation of the literature of this age. This is what I wish to attempt; but it is manifest that any attempt at such a large reorganisation must exceed the borders of “literature.” It is a study, focused upon a definite point, of the temper and mind of the period from Henry VIII to Cromwell, and must take account of influences and interests political, philosophical, theological and social. (L3 141)

Eliot’s intimacy with the quickly changing field of Renaissance studies, combined with his broad goal of “revaluation,” resulted in a peak of intense writing, from his introduction to Seneca his Tenne Tragedies in 1927, which he thought “the most scholarly piece of work that I have done” (L3 707), to his broadcasts on the varieties of Tudor prose for the BBC in 1929.

While Eliot was writing “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation” for Charles Whibley’s “Tudor Translations” series, already two years behind schedule, he was invited to address the Shakespeare Association; the topic he chose was “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca.” The two works were completed within weeks of each other in spring 1927 and effectively make a pair, with the second building on the foundations of the first. “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation” seeks, on the one hand, to exonerate the Roman philosopher and playwright from responsibility for “the horrors which
disfigure Elizabethan drama” – a gruesome taste for violence that, Eliot argues, belonged to the time and not to Seneca’s influence (3.205). On the other hand, he credits Seneca with shaping fundamental formal aspects of Renaissance drama; the five-act play and the blank verse line, which developed as the closest English equivalent to the Senecan iambic. Eliot also gestures to Seneca’s influence on the thought (“or what passes for thought”) of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. He picks up this thread in “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca,” arguing that Shakespeare, while not “Senecan,” reflects an element of Roman stoicism in the self-dramatization of his tragic heroes at the moment of their fall, such as Othello “cheering himself up” over Desdemona’s body (3.248). Eliot argues that Shakespeare’s “cynicism and disillusion” were most likely derived from personal causes unknown to us, but that his dramas “metamorphose private failures and disappointments” “into something rich and strange.” The essay becomes a reflection on how “a great poet, in writing himself, writes his time” (3.254). Eliot intends his remarks about the Elizabethan age to apply to his own time as well: “a period of dissolution and chaos; and in such a period any emotional attitude which seems to give a man something firm, even if it be only the attitude of ‘I am myself alone,’ is eagerly taken up” (3.249). The pair of essays on Seneca make an instructive contrast; in the first, Eliot strives for scholarly accuracy about literary influence and avoids broader questions of intellectual history; in the second, admitting both personal and speculative lines of thought, he explores what makes Seneca interesting for himself and modern readers.

In other essays on Renaissance drama, Eliot shifts among the perspectives of scholar, cultural and moral critic, and poet. Reviewing new editions of Jonson and studies of Chapman and Marlowe, Eliot enters into scholarly debates about authorship, texts, and influences. He praises F. L. Lucas, the Cambridge fellow and librarian with whom he had an increasingly strained relationship over the years, for his four-volume edition of Webster’s Complete Works, but criticizes Lucas for overvaluing “desperate courage” in Webster and thereby confusing ethics and aesthetics (3.336). In a letter to Mario Praz about this review, he offers a test for successful criticism: “what was the conception of Webster which made him so important to Lucas with reference to Lucas’s own temperament?” (L 68). This is a question that Eliot’s most thoughtful essays seek to answer about himself and other critics.

In “Thomas Middleton,” the one essay on drama included in For Lancelot Andrews, Eliot praises Middleton’s realism and objectivity. “Of all the Elizabethan dramatists,” Eliot writes, “Middleton seems the most
Impersonal” in his plays. He has “no point of view, is neither sentimental nor cynical; he is neither resigned, nor disillusioned, nor romantic; he has no message” (3.123). Middleton’s impersonality, his being “merely the name which associates six or seven great plays,” appeals to Eliot’s temperament, as does Middleton’s representation of human fallibility in The Changeling and The Roaring Girl. In the midst of “tedious discourse,” suddenly we encounter characters who “are real and impelled irresistibly by the fundamental motions of humanity to good or evil.” What is “real” and “permanent” to Eliot is Middleton’s depiction of moral conflict. He sees The Changeling as one of the greatest Elizabethan tragedies, declaring that “in the moral sense of tragedy it is safe to say that in this play Middleton is surpassed by one Elizabethan alone, and that is Shakespeare” (3.125). He describes Middleton in his comedies as “a great observer of human nature, without fear, without sentiment, without prejudice” (3.128). In particular, he praises The Roaring Girl as a work that “more than any Elizabethan comedy realizes a free and noble womanhood” (3.129).

Ever since he published “The Possibility of a Poetic Drama” (1920), in which he laments “the incompetence of our time in poetic drama,” Eliot had been searching Elizabethan drama and popular modern genres such as music hall and farce in an attempt to satisfy the “legitimate craving, not restricted to a few persons, which only the verse play can satisfy” (2.278). To Eliot, modern attempts to revive the poetic drama “have begun at the wrong end; they have aimed at the small public which wants ‘poetry,’” whereas the Elizabethan drama “aimed at a public which wanted entertainment of a crude sort, but would stand a good deal of poetry; our problem should be to take a form of entertainment, and subject it to the process which would leave it a form of art” (2.283). Eliot took his first steps toward creating a poetic drama that would transform popular forms of entertainment into art in “Fragment of a Prologue” (1926) and “Wanna Go Home, Baby?” (1927), brought together in Sweeney Agonistes. He observed in “Seneca in Elizabethan Translation” that “Seneca’s plays might, in fact, be practical models for the modern ‘broadcasted drama’” (3.198).

Invited to introduce Dryden’s dialogue Of Dramatick Poesie: An Essay 1668 (1928), Eliot developed his thoughts about drama in “A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,” a conversation among “a half-dozen men who may be imagined as sitting in a tavern after lunch,” a form that “enables me to discuss the subject without pretending to come to any conclusion” (3.396). The speakers, identified only by letters of the alphabet, consider the various
purposes of drama (to amuse, to flatter the prejudices of the mob, to provide form); analogues to poetic drama (the ballet, the Mass); cultural obstacles to a present-day poetic drama, and practical issues in dramatic production. One speaker rhetorically throws up his hands by saying, “You can never draw the line between aesthetic criticism and moral and social criticism; you cannot draw a line between criticism and metaphysics; you start with literary criticism, and however rigorous an aesthete you may be, you are over the frontier into something else sooner or later” (3.406).

In the ten essays on Renaissance and seventeenth-century verse collected in this volume, Eliot deliberates on poets ranging from Shakespeare and Richard Crashaw to George Turbervile, Richard Edwards, John Denham, and a range of other minor figures. At the same time, he brings forward critical principles of impersonality developed in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” – the necessity of being aware that “the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates” (2.109). “The Problems of the Shakespeare Sonnets” appears at the same time as “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca” and similarly reminds his audience not to read for autobiography, for a “fine poem which appears to be the record of a particular experience may be the work of a man who has never had that experience; a poem which is the record of a particular experience may bear no trace of that or of any experience” (3.38). Likewise, in “The Silurist,” he criticizes Edmund Blunden for reading too much of his own nostalgia into the poetry of Henry Vaughan and over-ascribing a mystical quality to the work. In a distinction that he develops further in “Dante,” Eliot states: “Poetry is mystical when it . . . succeeds in conveying . . . the statement of a perfectly definite experience which we call the mystical experience . . . . A genuine mystical statement is to be found in the last canto of the Paradiso; this is primarily great poetry” (3.191).

The only essay on seventeenth-century verse that Eliot chose for inclusion in For Lancelot Andrewes was “A Note on Richard Crashaw” (later excluded). Here again, as in “Thomas Middleton,” he ventures to reveal what his critical temperament finds of interest in Crashaw’s “peculiar form of greatness,” believing as he does that Crashaw is “a much greater poet than he is usually supposed to be” (3.380). He finds Crashaw, who died at thirty-seven in Loreto, a “far more mature” poet and a greater craftsman of sound and sense than Keats and Shelley, whose early deaths in Italy brought their similarly “unfulfilled renown.” On the other hand, he judges Crashaw
as a devotional poet to be somewhat “deficient in humanity,” in the sense that “his passion for heavenly objects is imperfect because it is partly a substitute for human passion. It is not impure, but it is incomplete.” He contrasts Crashaw to Dante, who “always seems perfectly aware of every shade of both human and divine love; Beatrice is his means of transition between the two; and there is never any danger of his confounding the two loves” (3.382).

Ultimately, however, Eliot is attracted to Crashaw’s rich European sensibility, to the redeeming fact that he is more steeped in Latin, Italian, and continental literature and culture than his peers: “He is alone among the metaphysical poets of England, who were mostly intensely English: Crashaw is primarily a European” (3.383). Eliot agrees with Mario Praz’s assessment that among seventeenth-century English and European writers Crashaw is to be seen as “the representative of the baroque spirit in literature.”

In 1929, Eliot planned a series of six weekly BBC lectures on Tudor Prose, bringing forward authors and subjects that he first discussed in his 1918 Extension lectures on Elizabethan literature. Rather than addressing a specialized audience (as with his Seneca essays) or the educated readership of the TLS and the Criterion, Eliot now reached out in a new medium to unknown listeners. “Once you get used to talking in that way, without seeing any audience, it becomes very easy,” he wrote to his mother, “and there is a pleasure in thinking that the people who listen really are listening, and not like so many people at a lecture who come merely to find out what you look like” (L4 554). In the future, Eliot was to broadcast numerous lectures for the BBC. Eliot divided the writers of Tudor prose into translators, “hack novelists and pamphleteers,” philosophers, preachers, travelers and biographers. Published in shortened form in The Listener the day after each broadcast (with their full texts restored for the first time in this volume), these engaging lectures examine ordinary kinds of writing from the period in order to “watch the English mind learning to think and to speak” (3.625). Accordingly, Eliot shows how more sophisticated forms of writing emerged from a large body of workmanlike prose: he discusses how Shakespeare turned passages of Thomas North’s translations into “great poetry” and how the underworld exposées of Robert Greene gave rise to modern crime fiction. In these talks Eliot returns to authors already familiar in his prose, such as Donne and Hooker, but he also revels in out-of-the-way works, including political pamphlets and the adventure stories and log-books of Elizabethan navigators. Delivering his thoughts orally seems to free Eliot – as it did in “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca” – to
deal directly and freshly with Elizabethan authors as a fellow practitioner. He speaks of himself as a prose writer when he concludes the lectures: “the Elizabethan age is not something dead and embalmed, or unreal and romantic, but a living age which still lives in ourselves, and an age which had to tackle problems of thought and expression with which we are ourselves vitally concerned” (3.688).

POLITICS

Eliot’s political prose in this volume ranges in topic from church and parliamentary politics to pan-European questions about forms of government. He offers the best introduction to his political interests in a Criterion “Commentary” of November 1927, the month of his naturalization:

The man of letters of to-day is interested in a great many subjects – not because he has many interests, but because he finds that the study of his own subject leads him irresistibly to the study of the others; and he must study the others if only to disentangle his own, to find out what he is really doing himself. Three events in the last ten years may be instanced: the Russian revolution (which has also directed our attention to the East), the transformation of Italy (which has directed our attention to our own forms of government), and the condemnation of the Action Française by the Vatican. All of these events compel us to consider the problem of Liberty and Authority, both in politics and in the organization of speculative thought. Politics has become too serious a matter to be left to politicians . . . none of these problems is local. It is the same set of problems, perhaps in the end the same problem, which is occupying the mind of all Europe. (3.287)

Eliot identifies here the main themes of his political writing of the period: weighing communism and fascism as alternatives to democracy, defending the Action française, and deliberating on the role of the intellectual in politics.

Eliot’s defense of the Action française preceded and largely led to the other confrontations. His favorable view of this reactionary movement and its leader, Charles Maurras, originated under Babbitt’s tutelage and was reinforced by Eliot’s own exposure to French politics in Paris. The March 1913 Nouvelle Revue française, to which he subscribed, described Maurras in terms very close to those that Eliot adopted for himself in 1928: “classique,
catholique, monarchique.” Three years later, in his 1916 Extension lectures on Modern French Literature, he included Maurras on the syllabus (see 1.475). Eliot gradually developed a personal relationship with Maurras, soliciting an article for the Criterion in 1923 that eventually appeared in January 1928, translated by Eliot as “Prologue to an Essay on Criticism.” At the height of the movement’s strength and popularity in the summer of 1926, Eliot enjoyed a dinner in Paris with the leaders of the Action française. But Maurras’s fortunes quickly changed for the worse; in December of the same year Pope Pius XI condemned him and his organization, placing his writings (including the newspaper he edited) on the Index. In supporting Maurras during this time, Eliot was thus remaining loyal to someone he admired and developing a political position that loosely resembled Maurras’s in theory.

The basis for Eliot’s sympathy is evident in his first defense of the Action française, which appeared late in 1927; in a letter to the Church Times he describes Maurras as one who, “without religious belief himself, and without the support of any constituted authority, took upon himself to aim at the recovery of that social order without which the Catholic Church cannot flourish” (3.290). Three additional letters followed, and in March 1928 Eliot voiced his support in the pages of the Criterion, where he criticized Leo Ward’s pamphlet, The Condemnation of the “Action Française,” for misrepresenting Maurras by quoting him out of context. Here Eliot also counters the claim that Maurras intends “to pervert his disciples and students away from Christianity,” testifying: “I have been a reader of the work of Maurras for eighteen years; upon me he has had exactly the opposite effect” (3.374). In a further “Reply to Mr. Ward” in June, Eliot confronts Ward’s assertion that Maurras as an agnostic political philosopher is “profoundly anti-Christian.” “How can he be anti-Christian,” Eliot asks, “when he admits that Catholic Christianity is essential to civilization? . . . I say only that if anyone is attracted by Maurras’s political theory, and if that person has as well any tendency towards interior Christianity, that tendency will be quickened by finding that a political and a religious view can be harmonious” (3.423).

This defense of Maurras underwrites Eliot’s two reviews of Julien Benda’s La Trabison des clercs (“Culture and Anarchy” and “The Idealism of Julien Benda”). While Eliot had greatly admired Benda’s critique of French culture in Belphégor (1918), hailing it along with Maurras’s L’Avenir de l’intelligence as a great influence on his thought (2.519), he was less enthusiastic about La Trabison. He agreed with Benda’s analysis of modern
intellectuals (“clercs”) as increasingly influenced by political passions, but he questioned Benda’s conclusion that politics should be left to politicians. As a public intellectual with an interest in politics, Eliot could not accept this part of Benda’s thesis, especially in view of Benda’s criticism of Maurras throughout the book. But he also disagrees with Benda for other reasons, remarking that “a complete severance of the speculative from the practical . . . is itself impossible, and leads, in M. Benda’s implications, to an isolation which may be itself a romantic excess” (3.438).

Eliot’s defense of the Action française and his case for political engagement coincided with a series of Criterion “Commentaries” and articles noting the rise of fascism. Before 1927, the term “fascism” appears only once in his prose, in a letter to the editor of the Daily Mail in 1923 (2.430). But what he described in “Political Theorists” (July 1927) as “the political and economic anarchy of the present time” made the movement impossible to ignore (3.136). In a “Commentary” of February 1928, he cautiously pointed out the inconsistencies between fascist government and the British Constitution (3.333), and in June prepared the way for a more thorough examination, writing that “the philosophies expressed or implicit in various tendencies, such as communism or fascism, are worthy of dispassionate examination” (3.417). Eliot then reviewed five books on fascism, both pro and con, in “The Literature of Fascism.” In this extensive and judicious essay he rejects fascism as a political idea and practice for England:

I cannot share enthusiastically in this vigorous repudiation of “democracy.” When the whole world repudiates one silly idea, there is every chance that it will take up with another idea just as silly or sillier. . . . The modern question as popularly put is: “democracy is dead; what is to replace it?” whereas it should be: “the frame of democracy has been destroyed: how can we, out of the materials at hand, build a new structure in which democracy can live?” (3.546)

Eliot expresses a negative opinion of full-suffrage democracy and repeats his support for the monarchy along the lines drawn up by Maurras. Indeed, Eliot’s rejection of fascism goes hand-in-hand with his support for the Action française, which he views as a more appropriate political model for England than that of Mussolini. Thus, Eliot warns: “if anything, in another generation or so, is to preserve us from a sentimental Anglo-Fascism, it will be some system of ideas which will have gained much from the study of Maurras. His influence in England has not yet begun” (3.370).
In a follow-up article of July 1929 (“Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse”), Eliot compares communism and fascism and finds them equivalent on several points: neither proposes a revolutionary idea of government; both appeal to the emotions by using charged words such as “loyalty” and “order”; both are “apparently anti-capitalistic” but would not necessarily be enough to undo the current concentration of power in the hands of company directors. Eliot points out what he sees as weaknesses in both ideologies. The materialist theory of history is “merely a theory that things happen,” by its own logic predicting that communism is bound to lead to something else. Fascism, on the other hand, represents “the Napoleonic idea,” and the attitude towards a fascist dictator is similar to “the feeling which the newspapers teach us to have towards Mr. Henry Ford” (3.663). Eliot takes a moment to distinguish the figure of the king, who incarnates the idea of the Nation, from the fascist dictator. His preference for kingship being clear, he adds that between the two systems under discussion in his review, he leans towards fascism because communism seeks to destroy the church. These two Criterion essays document Eliot’s steadfast royalist position in the late 1920s, a position shaped perhaps equally by his intensive study of Maurras and an acute analysis of the political alternatives facing Europe, which he felt the Criterion was obliged to examine.

During the years of this volume Eliot wrote a number of “Commentaries” and letters to editors of periodicals that weigh in on local and national matters. Some of these engagements reflect Eliot’s new position as a Church member, such as his “Commentaries” on the New Prayer Book controversy (3.61, 431) and his position on burials at Westminster Abbey (3.318). He also continued his defense of city churches and other historic buildings, asking in his “Commentary” of July 1928 why none of the political parties were including historic preservation in their “mostly vague and dubious policies” (3.652). He did not hesitate to criticize “brainless” politicians and policies, commenting that “within the memory of no living man under sixty, has [the Conservative Party] acknowledged any contact with intelligence” (3.655). His support for preservation also extended to a bill protecting wild birds (3.187).

NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE
As editor of the Criterion and publisher at Faber and Faber, Eliot was also “vitally concerned” on a daily basis with the quality of poetry, fiction, and drama by his contemporaries, as his many discriminating judgments and
Letters of advice attest. About fifteen percent of his prose from 1927 to 1929 addresses the work of modern writers and their nineteenth-century forebears, from Blake, Goethe, and Whitman as representative Romantics to Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, and Ezra Pound as contemporary peers. In June 1927, however, Eliot also admitted his expanding interest in another, perhaps unexpected form of modern writing, that of detective fiction. When Woolf lightheartedly accused him of never having read a word she had written, “so that it is all the more to your credit that you make it sound so interesting,” he replied: “I am much better acquainted with your work than with that of Mr. Bennett, or Mr. Galsworthy, or Mr. Wells, or Mr. Walpole, or even Miss May Sinclair. But for a person who specializes in detective fiction and ecclesiastical history I think I have done pretty well” (L 3 542).

In these years Eliot wrote three essays on Wilkie Collins and reviewed twenty-eight detective novels and an edition of The Complete Sherlock Holmes Short Stories. Eliot’s surprisingly detailed and comprehensive body of prose on detective fiction began with his “Homage to Wilkie Collins,” an omnibus review evaluating nine novels according to “rules of detective conduct” laid down by Collins’s The Moonstone, “the great book which contains the whole of English detective fiction in embryo” (3.14). The good detective story must avoid the “elaborate and incredible” in the way of disguises, motives, scientific discoveries, machinery, and the character of the detective, who “should be highly intelligent but not superhuman.” To Eliot, the stories of Poe and even Conan Doyle remain outside this tradition of English detective fiction. On the basis of his “Homage,” Oxford University Press manager H. S. Milford invited Eliot to contribute an introduction to the planned “World’s Classics” edition of The Moonstone. As he was also writing a piece on Collins and Dickens for the TLS, he was happy to oblige, and so it happened that within a one-year period he made himself a “specialist” in detective fiction.

In “Wilkie Collins and Dickens,” Eliot considers the detective novel in the larger context of melodrama, comparing the two authors by examining the difference between the dramatic quality of Dickens’s novels and the melodramatic nature of Collins’s. Whereas Collins was a “master of plot and situation” — the essential components of melodrama — Dickens was a master of character. His characters possess “a kind of reality which is almost supernatural” and which seems to descend upon them “by a kind of inspiration or grace” (3.165). In Collins, the characters are often “fabricated” to
forward the melodramatic motives. Eliot identifies *The Woman in White* as the novel in which Collins comes closest to Dickens, while he views *The Frozen Deep* and *Armadale* as “pure melodrama.” In his introduction to *The Moonstone*, Eliot developed his comparison of Collins and Dickens further, suggesting that Dickens’s novels became less narrative and more dramatic as a consequence of Collins’s influence. An atmosphere of fatality hangs over Dickens’s later novels: “in drama the coincidences, the fatalities, appear to be the visible manifestations of some obscure power beyond human knowledge. The dramatist seems to be sensitive, more than we, to these Dark Forces.” By contrast, in the melodramatic novels of Collins the interest is in “the effects as effects, without knowing or caring what lies behind” (3.360).

Eliot also brings the necessity of strong characterization into play in “Recent Detective Fiction,” his omnibus review of seventeen detective and mystery novels, and in “Sherlock Holmes and his Times,” where he praises Conan Doyle as a dramatist of the novel while observing that his characters lack the reality of the great characters of Dickens. In distinguishing between the two genres, he observes that in mystery stories the reader is led from one event or adventure to another, whereas in detective fiction any event after the committed crime is subordinate to “the collection, selection and combination of evidence” in solving it (3.107). But what a successful detective story must have, he insists, is a character who provides “the pleasure of following the working of one keen mind,” stating that “no one has ever surpassed Poe’s Monsieur Dupin” in the way in which this keenness and wit are exhibited. To Eliot, much modern detective fiction lacks both “the pure intellectual pleasure of Poe’s *Marie Roget*” and “the fullness and abundance of life of Wilkie Collins.” “We often wish,” he concludes, that the majority of our detective writers would . . . take more trouble and space over the characters as human beings and the atmosphere in which they live” (3.108).

In 1927 Eliot returned to his lifelong reading of Poe in “Israfel,” a review of a two-volume biography and two additional volumes of Poe’s works for the *Nation and Athenaeum*. Eliot locates Poe’s “romantic origins” in Byron and Heinrich Heine and sees him as a precursor to Baudelaire, who read and was influenced by the American author (Eliot even remarks on the strange physical resemblance between the two men). Eliot saw Poe less as a romantic than as a metaphysical poet, so strong was his grasp of the real world (2.846); Baudelaire he saw as a counter-romantic, even as “a deformed
Dante, so strong was his moral sense (2.306). Eliot's essay on Poe — unlike his critical assessments of other romantics — suggests that he saw him as a forebear, perhaps through Baudelaire, about whom he was writing at the same time. Though both writers incorporated fashionable romantic apparatus into their works, Eliot sees beneath it all the presence of a classical sensibility at work — observing in “Baudelaire” (1930) that “a poet in a romantic age cannot be a ‘classical’ poet except in tendency.” He credits Poe with being “a critic of the first rank” (3.97) and a poet and writer whose works effect an expansion of sensibility.

During these years Eliot wrote prefaces to two books on aspects of American culture: This American World, by Edgar Ansel Mowrer, and Fishermen of the Banks, by James B. Connolly. The two prefaces are especially valuable for Eliot’s unusual relaxation into autobiography as he discusses his childhood in St. Louis and Gloucester, particularly his remark, as a new British citizen and with an ingrained sense of exile, that “it was not until years of maturity that I perceived that I myself had always been a New Englander in the South West, and a South Westerner in New England” (3.492).

Eliot also turned his attention to his fellow American expatriate, Ezra Pound. His review of Personae: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound and his introduction to Pound’s Selected Poems reflect the long relationship of the two poets, encompassing mutual aid and constructive criticism. Marianne Moore commissioned Eliot to review Personae for the issue announcing Pound as winner of the 1928 Dial prize, but, as Eliot wrote to his mother, “I don’t know whether he will like my article, if they publish it; for I have been frank and said what I think both for and against him” (L3 801). In “Isolated Superiority,” Eliot distinguishes sharply between Pound’s form and his content. Eliot praises him as the most skilled versifier of their generation, his poetry as an “inexhaustible reference book of verse form.” As for vers libre, “we can now see that there was no movement, no revolution, and there is no formula. The only revolution was that Ezra Pound was born with a fine ear for verse” (3.322). Eliot professes little interest in what his friend is saying, however, only how. From medieval mysticism to current medical theories, and “a steam-roller of Confucian rationalism” that “has flattened over the whole,” Pound’s curiosity ranges over “everything that is said and written.” Unsatisfied with Pound’s choices and omissions for Personae, Eliot made his own selection for a Faber and Faber edition before the year was out: Ezra Pound: Selected Poems (1928). Striking only the positive note that he had sounded in “Isolated Superiority,” Eliot’s
introduction to the edition limits itself to admiration of the variety and inventiveness of Pound’s verse.

One of Eliot’s most important essays on modern literature from these years, “Le roman contemporaine,” was never published in English: after it appeared in La Nouvelle Revue française in May 1927, Eliot sent the English typescript to his mother, in whose possession it remained. Published here in English for the first time, the essay evaluates the state of the contemporary novel with reference to D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, and David Garnett. He begins with the observation that contemporary fiction lacks the “moral preoccupation” of Henry James’s novels, proposing that the “shallower psychology” of psychoanalysis has substituted itself for James’s “deeper psychology” of the soul, a criticism first expressed in his essay on James, “The Hawthorne Aspect” (1918). While Lawrence explores primitive sexuality (moving backwards in evolution towards some “hideous coition of protoplasm”), Woolf seeks the “highly civilized . . . with something left out” (3.391). He praises the “astonishing beauty” of her writing and astutely notes that life in her novels is a “construction.” His penetrating remarks about Woolf, which she read and approved, can be compared to his harsher criticism of Gertrude Stein in “Charleston, Hey! Hey!” — a review of Composition as Explanation, about which Eliot concludes: “If this is of the future, then the future is, as it very likely is, of the barbarians” (3.27).

Eliot’s writing about contemporary literature took a more politically active turn in his defense of free speech and copyright protection. He supported artistic experimentation even when he disapproved of the results, fighting back against efforts to censor literary works (and paintings) deemed immoral by the Home Secretary, Sir William Joynson-Hicks. This was a matter of principle and professional solidarity: “So far as my own work goes,” he wrote in “Contemporary Literature: Is Modern Realism Frankness or Filth?” (1929), “I happen not to have a taste for such methods as those of Mr. Joyce or Mr. Lawrence, but I consider that merely a question of method, so that it is hardly more than a trifling accident that Joyce and Lawrence are censored and I am not” (3.582). In his “Commentaries” and letters to editors, Eliot defended Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness and Norah James’s Sleeveless Errand, two novels dealing frankly with female sexuality. While making clear that he did not have a high opinion of the works, he pointed out the inconsistencies in Joynson-Hicks’s judgments, arguing that the Home Secretary should not serve as a literary arbiter. On
no less than six occasions Eliot wrote on behalf of freedom of speech, a small but important portion of his political writing in the period. He was also involved in the 1927 uproar over Samuel Roth’s piracy of Ulysses in his *Two Worlds Monthly*. Taking advantage of the fact that *Ulysses* could not be copyrighted in the United States because it had been banned, Roth serialized an expurgated version of Joyce’s novel, as well as Eliot’s “Eeldrop and Appleplex” and the two “fragments” of *Sweeney Agonistes*. Eliot objected to this unauthorized use of his work in what he described to his mother as “an amusing fight” conducted in two columns of the *New York Evening Post* (L3 683). More generally, Eliot used his “Commentaries” to support the cause of copyright legislation, objecting that “the present American Copyright Law is a flagrant injustice to British and still more to Irish writers” (3.134).

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By the end of 1929, Eliot at forty-one had greatly expanded his reputation as poet, critic, editor, publisher, lecturer, and broadcaster. Ten years after taking on the English literary and critical establishment in the *Athenaeum*, he had built a much larger platform for launching a broad engagement with the ills of British and European culture. He had defined and solidified the literary, political, and religious traditions that would serve as the pillars of his intellectual conservatism in a new decade. The classical critic of romanticism and humanism would increasingly explore the relation of literature and religion and ways of bringing a moral dimension to his evaluation of modern writers. The royalist would continue to face down the rising threat of fascism and communism to European unity. The convert would become a churchman with a new voice in Anglo-Catholic politics and Christian sociology; the Christian humanist would unflinchingly address himself to those forces that made up what he termed the “modern dilemma” – religious modernism, secularism, liberalism, humanitarianism, the illusion of progress, and the “phantom dilemma” of religion and science. At the end of July 1929 he was notified that he might soon be nominated for the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship at Harvard (L4 555), an appointment that would bring dramatic changes in his life, from his permanent separation from Vivien to his recognition in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* as the “English Lion,” “the idol of the younger literates of Europe and . . . considered by many the greatest living English poet.”
NOTES


2. In his 1916 review of Balfour’s *Theism and Humanism*, Eliot refrains from using the word and argues against Balfour’s contention that theism promotes appreciation of art (1.394).


4. Their mutual interest in the problem of belief declined, but not before TSE brought it up again in “Poetry and Propaganda” (1930), the Turnbull Lectures (1933), and in *UPUC* (1933). Richards responded generally in “Belief” (1930) and again in “What Is Belief?” (1934), in neither of which he refers to TSE or the debate out of which he writes. In the latter, he aimed to bring their civil and respectful dialogue to a personal close: “The ages of faith may have supplied invaluable ingredients to human nature. I think it very likely that we should be today infinitely the poorer without them. I wish only to discourage the assumption that the type of mind which needs Belief is necessarily the finer... For our tradition encourages such minds and serves them with all its treasures.” For an account of their continued correspondence and debate in the 1930s, see I. A. Richards, *Selected Works 1919-1938*, vol 10: *I. A. Richards and his Critics*, ed. John Constable (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001).