

The Criticism of Evasion:

The Non-literary Margins in T. S. Eliot's Early Criticism

LA CRITIQUE DE L'EVASION:

LES MARGES NON-LITTERAIRES DES PREMIERES CRITIQUES DE T.S. ELIOT

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Abstract: This paper traces the non-literary margins in the youthful criticism of T. S. Eliot, focusing exclusively on the early essays in which he assumes an aesthetic stand in his early years as a critic. In "Tradition and Individual Talent," "Function of Criticism," "The Metaphysical Poets," besides other essays, Eliot pretends that literary appreciation/criticism can be practiced in isolation from any external influence, and that principles of criticism are purely literary in their origin as well as in their practice, that of establishing the value of the literary works. Relatedly, Eliot proposes that 'emotions', 'feelings' and 'experiences' in the literary work can be evaluated without connection to their non-literary margins. This paper explodes such claims by suggesting that non-literary margins dominated and shaped the early critical formulations and judgments of Eliot.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot; Criticism; Literary Tradition; Margins

Résumé: Ce document retrace les marges non-littéraires dans les premières critiques de T.S. Eliot, en se concentrant exclusivement sur les premiers essais dans lesquels il montre une position esthétique en tant que critique. Dans "Tradition et talent individuel", "Fonction de la critique", "Les poètes métaphysiques" et d'autres essais, Eliot prétend que l'appréciation/la critique littéraire peut être pratiquée de façon isolée de toute influence extérieure, et que les principes de la critique sont purement littéraires non seulement dans leur origine mais aussi dans leur pratique, afin d'établir les valeurs des œuvres littéraires. En plus, Eliot propose que «émotions», «sentiments» et «expériences» dans les œuvres littéraires peuvent être évalués sans connexion à leurs marges non-littéraires. Cet article étudie ces revendications en suggérant que les marges non-littéraires ont dominé et façonné les premières formulations de critiques et des jugements d'Eliot.

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We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness. I have said before
That the past experience revived in meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations.
(The Dry Salvages, lines 93- 99; Eliot 1969: 186-87).

The literary criticism of Eliot in his early years was related to shaping the standards for the kind of literature required as a meaningful and contemporary framework of the human experience in the modern age. Eliot's criticism was a reaction against the literary modes of writing current in the ideal Georgian and Victorian eras, unable to respond to the transience taking place within the new century (Kirsch). Eliot's critical mission attempted to formulate an order of modern aesthetics based upon his defense of "art as an autonomous activity" (Rosenthal 2006: 119). As a designated literary editor, critic, and an extension lecturer, Eliot evaluated various artists or literary movements and recruited those evaluations to illustrate his ideas and poetry, within his larger desire to formulate a conception of a European literary tradition (Sullivan 82; Margolis: 56). Similarly, the major critical pronouncements of Eliot belong to his endeavor to offer a personal vision of "modern life and its meaning" against the influence of "the corruption and decay of popular culture" (Scruton: 47, 44). Eliot describes these early pronouncements as "generalization[s]," "general affirmations" about his own poetry, and somewhat reactionary pronouncements against the literature of his early years (1978: 18; 16).

The scholarship of Eliot is an industry. Studies on Eliot are variant, ranging from the moral and classical to the post modern, historical, cultural and the postcolonial (Canary; Clarke; Brooker 2004; Cianci and Jason). Scholars and critics alike examined the homogenous aspect of Eliot's criticism, as they reviewed Eliot's body of essays according to what they thought he intended to utter. Eliot's ghost kept haunting his own critics, directing their perspectives; apparently, critics ignored the entangling issues in Eliot's tradition, because they rarely attempted to go against the grains or the mainstreams of criticism, averting the implicit and the marginal aspect in his essays. Hence, while studies on Eliot's tradition are many, they tilt to connect his criticism to the larger spectrum of interests in the early and later part of his career as a poet-critic and playwright. Consequently, critics scantily read Eliot's early criticism with reference to its extra-literary margins/implications, be they society, culture, and/or morality. The criticism of Eliot progressively, yet shyly, clarifies that he is torn between the literary and social aspects of his early criticism.

In his early criticism, Eliot remains evasive and ambiguous, leaning mostly towards non-literary realms, such as belief, morality, and society. Eliot's indeterminacy reflects his inability to locate these non-literary realms within his criticism as well as his own poetry (Canary: 71). Moreover, his hypocritical stance is exposed in his early criticism when he calls for dealing with literature as an autonomous activity without reference to any social, moral or religious implications. In "The Function of a Literary Review" Eliot confesses that non-literary factors affect literature, but it is the duty of literary criticism "to maintain the autonomy and disinterestedness of literature, and at the same time to exhibit the relations of literature -- not to 'life,' as something contrasted to literature, but to all other activities, which, together with literature, are the components of life" (1923: 421; qtd. in Margolis: 71-72). Surveying the early and the later parts of Eliot's criticism, Ashley Marshall noticed that Eliot "struggle[d] to decide what part the extra-literary should play in poetry and in literary criticism" (610). Marshall finds "Eliot [the critic and the poet] is consistently self-contradictory in simultaneously desiring to preserve the integrity of poetry and recognizing, however reluctantly, that an absolute separation [between the literary and the extra-literary] is impractical and impossible," especially in the early period before his conversion to the Anglican Church (610; see also Asher). Certainly Marshall is right when she thinks that the later criticism of Eliot is but a natural continuation of his early criticism, because what was implicit in the early stage became explicit afterwards. But she falls short of dwelling upon Eliot's evasions of these margins.

Wrestling with the bulky criticism on Eliot, this paper returns to the basics, to Eliot's essays themselves. The paper endeavors to explain the non-literary margins in Eliot's ideas, as they underline a fragmentary social theory. Few critics touched upon this sensitive matter, only suggesting such a connection, as in the Marshall's study (2005), but they never dwelt upon it because they were guided by Eliot's critical vernacular. The contemporary poet Louise Glück says that Eliot's method "inclines to the suggested over the amplified" (1994: 85), leaving critics and readers alike to speculate. Hence, it is inviting to read the undermined non-literary margins in the early critical pronouncements of Eliot against his dire attempts to evade from relating them to the non-literary bases of his literary criticism. The paper focuses on the essays Eliot wrote before his landmark conversion to the Anglican Church because they aid in tracing the genesis of the social dimension of tradition which Eliot elaborated and expanded in later writings such as *After Strange Gods* (1934), *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), and *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1987), as well as his social criticism: *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* (1962).

In *The Selected Essays* Eliot discusses the nature of criticism and its relationship to a work of art in an attempt to formulate criterion by which to judge and evaluate literature away from non-literary factors. Eliot struggles to fabricate a principle of judgment within the literary work. He dialectically tries to clarify the relationship between the critical sense and creative writing, without direct reference to society or culture. In "The Function of Criticism" Eliot notes that "the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer in his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism [...] because their critical faculty is superior," since, after all, "the critical activity finds its highest, its true fulfillment in a kind of union with creation in the labour of the artist" in manipulating the material of the literary work (1980: 30-31). It is the creative tension between the tendencies to create and to criticize that makes the literary work similar to the actual world. The combining of the creative and the critical senses is illustrated in Eliot's opinions on the fictional art of Henry James. The American novelist's genius is praised for creating a panorama of characters who behave in a consistent controlled manner in a fictional environment, similar/parallel to the social context from which the novel is taken (Kermode: 151-152). This idea is vital because Eliot, in his criticism and creation, underlines the importance of creating an ordered reflection of reality in a literary work. Certainly, Eliot envisions that "criticism, by definition, is about something other than itself" (1980: 30). One of these objectives of criticism is to establish an "order" for European literature where the artist is a component of the literary and/or cultural sensibility of Europe. Artists are connected by a "common [literary and cultural] inheritance and common cause," unifying an European literary tradition, by which writing becomes an act of "collaborate[ion]" and "contribute[ion]" among artists and within society, emphasizing the common rather than individual (1980: 24; see also 1929: 198).

Evidently Eliot's constant dilemma in "The Function of Criticism" is his inability to define the principles by which the critical sense has to be used in appreciating, within literature and art, a shared social dimension of an assumed European order. Eliot evasively says "I don't deny that art may be affirmed to serve ends beyond itself: but art is not required to be aware of these ends, and indeed performs its function, whatever that may be, according to various theories, much better by indifference to them" (1980: 24). Eliot's indifference is generated by personal fear from leading his critical discourse into no-literary realms, which is clear in his final statement in "The Function of Criticism," where he concludes: "if any one complains that I have not defined truth, or fact, or reality, I can only say apologetically that it was not part of my purpose to do so, but only to find a scheme into which, whatever they are, they will fit, if they exist" (1980: 34). Obviously, Eliot's statement remains unsatisfactory for "its dark and pregnant hints about the mystery of inspirations" inclines greatly towards "literary sociology" (Parrinder: 215, 223). As he advocates the painstaking creation of a literary text by the artist, Eliot does not clarify on which base the critic should review the literary material. In a similar status, in the Introduction to *The Sacred Wood* (1928), as well as in the two initial essays, "The Perfect Critic" and "Imperfect Critic", Eliot rejects both the romantic impressionistic and the Victorian cultural ideas of criticism represented by Swinburne and Arnold respectively since they are either too much inspirational or connected to society. Likewise, he does not justify the presence of such combined creative-critical faculty whether in terms of the impression of the poet's emotions or imitation or according to what larger idea should the work be planned by the poet. In the same introduction Eliot hints at the answer when he says that it is the function of the critic to "preserve [poetic] tradition", that is by making it 'timeless' or "beyond time" (1928: xv, xvi). Roger Scruton fills the gaps in Eliot's role for the traditional critic as well as the poet, as he explicates that "The critic[for Eliot], like the poet, is concerned to develop the 'sensibility' of his reader(s)-by which term Eliot meant a kind of

intelligent observation of the human world. Critics do not abstract or generalize: they *look*, and record what they see. But in doing so, they also convey a sense of what *matters* in human experience, distinguishing the false from the genuine emotions" (45). Eliot does not confess that the critical handling of the literary material must be in correspondence with the sources from which the literary text is manipulated. Part of preserving literary tradition, the other role of the literary critic, according to Eliot, is "the correction of taste" of the reader by the "elucidation of works of art" as expressions of the spirit of the age (1980: 24).³ In fact, Eliot's proclamation about the literary function of the critic, "the elucidation of works of arts and the correction of tastes" (1980: 24) entails a social duty (Lucy: 45).

To emphasize the continuity of the European literary order [traditions] and its readjustment due to alteration in literary and social values, Eliot believes that the critic himself must have a "sense of fact" which is "something very slow to develop," yet "its complete development means perhaps the very pinnacle of civilization" (1980: 31). The 'sense of fact' means the ability of the critic to handle the literary work similar to that manner of the artist who used both the critical as well as the creative faculties in fabricating his own work. For the critic, the development the sense of fact will aid him in evaluating the literary work in the same way as it helped the writer in creating the work with an acute feeling of the larger social or cultural idea out of which the work of art is derived. Yet, the critic's sense of fact is related to civilization. Contrary to his claims, "The Function of Criticism" exposes Eliot's marginal method of fabricating a base for evaluating literary texts. Eliot wants the critic to evaluate or judge a literary work according to its internal facts: "its condition, its setting, [and] its genesis" (1980: 32), yet such base of criticism is flawed because these facts are criticized without any reference outside the work.⁴ Then, Eliot talks about "Comparison and analysis" (1980: 32) as the main equipments the critic may use while focusing on the elements of the form (Canary: 69). He is against using these tools to highlight any historical, social or any non-literary margins outside the text. After that Eliot clarifies that the task of the critic is to circumvent "interpretation by external evidence" (Eliot 1980: 32) because interpretation is governed by the critic's caprice leading the critic to the non-literary context. Eliot does not solve the problems of the acclaimed purely aesthetic criterion of judging literary works as he oscillates between that criterion and non-literary domains. Thus, Eliot proclaims, "there is the possibility of cooperative activity, with the further possibility of arriving at something outside of ourselves, which may provisionally be called truth..., or fact or reality" (1980: 34). Vincent Buckley comments that Eliot's function of criticism is still obscure and problematic since facts and reality are limited to the literary work, and criticized without any reference to "society in general or in human affairs at all" (Buckley: 106). As such, Eliot's desire for defining a purely aesthetic frame for criticism seems to have contributed to his unconvincing exclusion of the non-literary realms.

The essays in *Selected Essays* and subsequent critical collections- *After Strange Gods* (1934), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1987), *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), and *To Criticize the Critic* (1978), are all an expansion of the different dimensions in tradition, whether it is thematic or stylistic in an attempt to reflect the spirit of the age and/or maintain the delicate equilibrium between literature and non-literary margins such as society, culture, belief. Eliot develops his concept of tradition in the pivotal essay "Tradition and Individual Talent". Eliot explores the significance of tradition for the artist, proposing that the "historical sense" includes capturing the "permanent" besides "the transient" aspects of society and its community of readers (1980: 14). The historical sense stands for the artist's awareness "of the temporal and of the timeless" which makes him aware of his place in time, of his "contemporaneity" (1980: 14). As such, the historical sense means that the modern artist is alerted to the way in which the pre-modern or traditional artists tried to reflect their own respective societies; that is, how they modeled their critical faculties in agreement with their distinctive communities. In other words, the artist's attempt to view his society with its *temporal* and *permanent* features, along with its "complication in economics and machinery" (1980: 16).⁵

³.Chris Baldick thinks that Eliot's mentioning of the problem of 'order' for the critic, in "The Function of Criticism," "provides the crucial link between its [order] literary and social references," as Eliot was interested in distancing the creation and criticism of a literary work from the modern "cultural disintegration" (118).

⁴. The reduction of fact from the social dimension into the literary sphere is discussed by Shusterman who thinks the philosophical concerns affected the early literary criticism of Eliot who tried to separate the poet's feeling away from any external fact (41-76).

⁵. Eliot was among other modern artists, like James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, and Joseph Conrad, who tried to fabricate their own individual literary tradition or to define "the mind of Europe," in order to counter the European "crisis" or

Thus, Eliot asserts: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his meaning alone" in isolation from the literary and the social tradition in which he writes or creates, since, "[h]is significance, his appreciation" as a poet/artist and a representative of traditional society springs from "the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" who were an integral part of the literary and social sensibilities of their eras (1980: 15). Therefore, "You cannot value him [living poet/artist] alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" artists (1980: 15) who symbolized the order of the European culture and literature, and whose works form "the mind of Europe" whether it is social or literary (1980: 16). *The Mind of Europe*, even when perceived in pure aesthetic terms, turns out to be rooted into the non-aesthetic interactions of the European community across history.

The other part of Eliot discussion in "Tradition and Individual talent" about the impersonality of the artist fits well within his definition of the artist as a passive creator who has no role in the making of the literary work other than storing feelings and producing them in the form of an artifact. The artist has no "personality" to express; he is just a "medium", or to presume, a mirror that reflects or creates poetry in an intelligent manner (1980: 20). What Eliot means is that the poet combines the creative and the critical faculties in his poetry, because he selects what ever he wants from his "[i]mpressions and experiences" to shape them in a "peculiar and unexpected manner" (1980: 20). Certainly the knowledgeable reader knows that Eliot in different essays stresses upon the idea that the emotions in the poem are impersonal, originating from life and transformed into a "very complex thing," since the poet who transforms into universality "his impressions and experiences... provoked by particular events in his life" (1980: 21; 20). Within this perspective, 'Tradition' represents the "identity" of the literary work (Kramer: 21), since the artist gives up individual caprice to join the "order" (Eliot 1980: 15) of the artists who embody the European mind or tradition.⁶

Eliot explains the effects of tradition in a number of essays on Shakespeare and other Elizabethan artists such as Ben Jonson, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, and Philip Massinger. Some of these playwrights failed and others succeeded in reflecting the society and its culture upon the stage: their failure was due to their inability/refusal to incorporate social ideas within their plays. For Eliot, the performance of these plays upon the stage and the ability of the audience to understand and enjoy these plays are the standard upon which the Elizabethan drama is evaluated. Also Eliot contrasts Elizabethan Drama with the Greek and Roman plays as he finds that certain plays of certain dramatists are better than others in terms of their social relevance and use of social and literary conventions (1980: 128). Cleo Kerns remarks that Eliot contrasted different poets and writers in terms of "their relations of value to one another" under the influence of "doctrinal and ethical traditions" that affected them "imaginatively" (79). Such cause-effect relationship between society and drama is also handled in the essay on "Ben Jonson," where Eliot manipulates this relationship to justify Jonson's failure in tragedy and success in comedy. While his [Jonson's] comedies with their humour and satire are "a criticism of the actual world" essentially referring to the real, Jonson failed in tragedy because he did not use the conventions of antiquity and of his contemporary artists in his tragedy, and because of his ignorance of or refusal to reflect "the traditions of conduct" within society (1980: 151; 212) has affected negatively the tragedy of Jonson. The case is similar in the plays of Philip Massinger who was not aware of the morality of his age, that which represented the "framework of emotions and morals of the time" that should be ingrained within his plays (1980: 213). For the age of Eliot, the poet attempts to "produce novel effect" upon the audience through "attentiveness to new subjects, new feelings, new complexions of consciousness;" and as a result, "each poet offer us a sense of reality-or, to use Matthew Arnold's phrase, a criticism of life" (Kirsch: 14). Hence, life, the realm of the literary and the non-literary, is the larger framework for both the artist and the critic.

In his celebrated essay "The Metaphysical Poets" Eliot is at his evasive best when he elaborates the poetical genius of John Donne and his contemporaries. The metaphysical poets, according to Eliot, had the peculiar quality of incorporating "their erudition into their sensibility" (1980: 286). Therefore, "their mode of feeling" which affected their poetic faculty "was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought," a differentia between them and the Elizabethan or the Restoration poets (1980: 286). Eliot

"collapse" of civilization consequent of the influence of different studies in Psychology, History, Anthropology and others fields of knowledge (Brooker 1994: 12; Bradbury: 85-105).

⁶. Brian Glaser strongly believes that Eliot's impersonality was due to his own negativity generated by the study of dialectic philosophy of figures such as Hegel and F. H. Bradley. See also (Rosen: 473-494).

mentions that "erudition" and the unified sensibility of the poet are altered by amalgamation of "disparate experience[s]" (1980: 287) but he does not define the source of those 'disparate' experiences from which the poets imbibe their poetic sensibilities, neither does he explain how the erudition of the poet is formed. Eliot focuses on language while discussing the Metaphysical poets, because he regards language as one of the tools for the conformity and adjustments in the genealogy of the literary tradition. John Donne and his contemporaries used a language "simple and pure" (1980: 285), and their figures of speech were "contrasted and condens[ed]" and "elaborate[ed]" in order to reflect the "rapid association of thought" (1980: 282). The aim of such language is "fidelity to thought and feeling" (1980: 285), since great poets should "find the verbal equivalent for the states of mind and feeling" (1980: 289). Initially, Eliot refers such peculiarity in the metaphysical poets to the development in "the mind of England" that made them distinctive from other poets like Gray and Collins who suffered from a "disassociation of sensibility" (1980: 288), because they lived in a different age and were influenced by different ideas and poets such as Milton and Dryden (Materer: 53). Clearly, Eliot undermines the non-literary distinctions that generated the aesthetic difference. Hence, in the essay on "Andrew Marvell," Eliot relates the poetical difficulty of the metaphysical poets to "quality of civilization, of a traditional habit of life" (1980: 292), in which the poets lived. Hence, the meaning of/within poetry changes as well as the critic's function in locating the poet within the traditional framework of his age. Within this context, Eliot illustrates that Marvell's poetic "wit", which is the product of the age in which the poet lived, was a result of the political strife and rivalry of the age. It is obvious that Eliot is unwilling to relate the "development of sensibility" to society, maintaining that the metaphysical school of poetry was a digression of the main current of English poetry (Eliot 1980: 286). He connects the development of the poetic language to the poet's persistent search for reality while indirectly acknowledging that the poet's experience or sensibility is inseparable from society and its culture; the poet's experience is "at once local and placeless, present and timeless" (Scruton: 53).

Discussing the issue of belief, Eliot has no clear opinion, particularly that belief extends into non-literary domains (religious, social, psychological).⁷ Eliot thinks that the poet's mission is to express an emotional equivalent for the ideas, beliefs or philosophies which are ingredients in the making of poetry, because "[a]ll great poetry gives the illusion of a view of life," and because "what every poet starts from is his own emotions" (1980: 135, 137). Nevertheless, the poet must "express the emotional equivalent of thought" (1980: 135). Hence Eliot's estimation of certain poets is based upon the use of belief as an ingredient of poetry. For instance, Shakespeare tried to transform thoughts into poetry, whether his own thoughts or those of his age, because, according to Eliot, a "great poet [like Shakespeare or Dante], in writing himself, writes his time" (1980: 137). Henceforth, Dante was influenced by philosophical, theological or cultural beliefs, which were European at large and particular of his age. Eliot describes the *Divine Comedy* as "the most comprehensive, and the most ordered presentation of emotions that was ever been made" (1928: 168) about Italy in particular and Europe in general. As a poet of European tradition, Dante's aim from the use of belief is to make the readers "see what he saw" in his society through "employ[ing] very simple language, and very few metaphors" (1980: 243). Hence, Dante, for Eliot, is "the most universal poet" within a unified European tradition (1980: 238) because he reflects a comprehensive image of life and of the thirteenth century European/Italian culture.

Eliot indeterminateness about the location of belief within the framework of poetry remains, as Louis Menand describes it, "the great riddle of his [Eliot's] criticism" because he is unable to find "the proper place of ideology, or belief, in literary appreciation and critical judgment" (Menand et al.: 37). It is exhibited further in the later essays in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957) in which Eliot frankly declares that there is no fixed 'meaning' or stand regarding belief and its treatment in the work and its effect on the readers who will vary in their interpretations of the same poem. The ideological ideas represented a dilemma for Eliot, the poet-critic, who could not integrate them within his schema of literary/critical ideas (Surette). Nevertheless, it is society and its culture that influence the readers and their sensibilities in the acceptance or refusal of non-literary margins such as belief in the appreciation/interpretation of poetry. As such, Eliot's early stand of denying the validity of any interpretation done only by the critic because he thinks that the work of art cannot be interpreted with reference to "external evidence" is ambivalently contradictory (1980: 32). Eventually, Eliot manipulated the difference between literary enjoyment and non-literary attitudes i.e.

⁷ In his study of the critical inconsistencies and the shifting grounds in T. S. Eliot's criticism, Bezel Nail remarks that Eliot freely uses the words 'philosophy', 'ideas', 'the doctrine', 'theory', 'belief', 'view of life', 'intellectual content meaning' in order to denote belief (68).

belief for his own advantage for he knows that such matter cannot be pinned down. Belief is not only a matter of variation/conflict between different critics, or different readers (Hyman), but also a question of difference between literature/ criticism and aesthetics (Lillehammer; Rosenthal 2006, 2008). Obviously Eliot's dialectic is general and vague. He neither dwells enough to clarify the aesthetic principles that maintain literary criticism within the text, nor does he define the non-literary margins that might affect the artist and his craft within the genealogy of tradition. Even in his later essays, Eliot is forced to justify that those non-literary margins are part of his tradition: Eliot had to revise "literary history to fit his own position" in order to establish the connection between himself as literary figure and to "his prominent literary forbearers" who are part of a "constructed past" (Marshall: 618).

The reasons for Eliot's understatement or overlooking of the non-literary margins of his criticism are different. There are the literary and non-literary influences on Eliot that shaped his sensibility as an artist, but could not sustain nor justify his critical scheme for a long period (1926: 3-4; qtd. in Margolis: 73). Also, Eliot's early criticism was controlled by the debates which were non-literary, among the modern artists; hence, many loose ends were left unclarified in some of his essays, because Eliot preferred in his early years to be a "self-exiled writer" and critic (Hart: 183; see also Kirk). Eliot's dialectical criticism is a manifestation of his ambitious mission to find new ways for the modern artist to handle literary material in relation to society without being affected by society and readers. Eliot's chief goal was to maintain "the integrity of poetry" which remains unsolved (1928: viii). Eliot's early, as well as later, criticism deals with basic issues such as criticism and creation, "the elevated conception and [function] of the critic," "the relationship between poetry and belief," and "tradition," because these are the basic issues the modern artist must resolve before creating a "vision of the modern world from a point of view outside it" (Scruton: 45) and certainly these issues could not be solved because they are part of the modern context and its contradictions (Levenson). Perhaps Eliot lacked an exist strategy that could explain the radical change in his ideas after conversion to Anglican Church. Yet Eliot confesses that "non-literary sources, and non-literary consequences" are part of the appreciation of literature and "the life of literature", but that is impossible due to the impossibility of defining the frontiers, or the limiting context of "literature" (Margolis: 73).

Therefore, the accusations that Eliot's literary ideas are fragmentary and inconsistent are raised every now and then, and the accusations are inadmissible. For instance, Rene Welleke thinks that the inconsistency in Eliot's ideas and the difficulty in pinpointing his ideas rise from the intermingling among "Eliot's theory of literature, which as a matter of course widened to a concept of politics and religion; Eliot's practical criticism, his opinions of writers, his taste; and Eliot's practice as a poet" (219), which makes the demarcation among these three approaches an arduous task for a critic. This opinion is, partially, supported by Daniel O'Hara who thinks that Eliot's literary criticism is dialectical, an embodiment of two different aspects of Eliot, "the classic practitioner of modern criticism" (98), and the "the closet Romantic theorist" (99). Perhaps the comments of these two critics are suggestive that Eliot had to shift between different stances and flirt with different critical stances, because he could not (did not wish to) justify some of his own ideas. According to Patrick Gray, Eliot the poet and the critic, and above all, the man, was in a state of "constant tension" between "fixity and flux, transcendence and immanence, the eternal and the temporal" which affected his poetry and criticism (315).

The non-literary margins in Eliot's claim for a pure aesthetic criticism appear throughout his early critical essays unexplained and undefined. Therefore, from Eliot's so-called aesthetic ideas emerges another critical subtext made of different ingredients: social, moral, philosophical, etc. These ingredients remain marginal because they are ambiguous not only for the reader/critic but for Eliot himself who struggled in his early literary criticism to sever the relationship between literature/criticism and society. Such overlooked margins undermine the validity of Eliot's aesthetical ground itself. Emotions and feeling are stripped of their social origins to maintain the integrity of literature. Even meaning is defined in cognitive and affective dimensions, without any reference to their marginalized or invisible non-literary origins. It is true that Eliot's early criticism is an attempt to force a divorce between literary tradition, its language and meaning. He sustained this divorce for a period which was the most intensely creative in his career as modernist artist; still, it was short and temporary, because he lacked the artistic justifications and resources to convince himself and the reader that tradition has non-literary margins. Eliotic scholarship is guided, as summarized by Gray, by Eliot "himself [who] focus[es] our attention on what to look for in his own thought and poetry" (311). The apologists of Eliot regard his conception of tradition as flawless because he explicates his ideas

in a purely psychological terminology. The very few critics who went against the grain underlined flaws in Eliot's critical vision. In the light of the epigraph, Eliot's confessed flaw in his early aesthetical criticism is evident even when it comes to tradition. He devotes most of his critical effort to circumvent any meaningful margin in his criticism in order to keep tradition within the artistic sphere; a fruitless effort indeed. Critics lead by Eliot's charismatic discourse had the experience but missed the non-literary margins. But approaching the *meaning* by restoring to the pastness of Eliot's non-literary experience restores the extra-aesthetic margins of Eliot's groundless claim for a purely aesthetic criticism.

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