Selected Essays of T. S. Eliot, 1917-1932 Study Guide

Selected Essays of T. S. Eliot, 1917-1932 by T. S. Eliot

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

In 1932, in London, T. S. Eliot published a selection of essays from among the prose he had written since 1917. By 1932, he was almost universally recognized as one of the most important living poets and critics of English literature, and *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* provided an in-depth overview of a theory that had fundamentally changed literary thinking.

Bound with a complex argument for a new theory and laced with allusions to almost every period of literary history, *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* may seem inaccessible or perhaps intended only for stuffy academics. But, it is important to remember two things while reading the book. First, Eliot was an American who had recently been baptized into the Church of England and who found it extremely important to sound civilized, learned, and authoritative in the grand role he had assigned himself. Second, since the success of Eliot's literary theory requires a vast knowledge and sweeping understanding of the whole of literature, the book needs to supply its reader with a broad variety of examples and parallels. After this is accomplished, the reader can go back and immerse him/herself in Eliot's idea of the classics of English literature.

Eliot revised and supplemented *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* in 1951, but this entry deals with the original version of the book. The earlier version presented then-vibrant and new material, which represented the beginnings of a shift in Eliot's thinking and which at times may seem contradic tory. It is important to treat the work as a whole, with examples supporting a grand and unified yet complex and subtle theory, to understand the book's profound influence and value.

Author Biography

Thomas Stearns (T. S.) Eliot was born into a large and prosperous family September 26, 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri. Eliot grew up with frequent visits to Massachusetts, where his father built a house overlooking Gloucester harbor, and entered Harvard as a philosophy student in 1906. His greatest influence there was "new humanist" philosopher Irving Babbitt, who helped Eliot form the basis for his philosophical theories.

In 1910, Eliot moved to Paris and then to Munich to study French and German literature, but he soon reenrolled at Harvard to study Eastern philosophy. With the outbreak of World War I, he began pursuing a doctoral thesis on F. H. Bradley while on a traveling fellowship to Merton College, Oxford. He stayed in Oxford until his marriage in 1915 to Vivien Haigh-Wood.

By this time, Eliot had written some of his most famous poetry, including "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Ezra Pound, whom Eliot met in 1914 in Paris, was immediately struck by Eliot's talent and helped him publish his first collection of poetry by 1917. Pound and Eliot's lifelong friendship and collaboration on various journals eventually helped to establish them as the two main literary authorities of their generation. Upon completing his doctoral work, Eliot worked as a bank clerk and as the assistant editor of Pound's *Egoist*, a literary journal considered the major outlet for modernist thought.

Although his essays had already met with some critical success, Eliot's fame truly began in 1922 with the publication of his most influential poem, "The Waste Land." Appearing in a new quarterly called *Criterion*, of which Eliot was the founding editor, "The Waste Land" is a complex and multifaceted poem about, among other themes, the spiritual decay of Eliot's generation.

Eliot's religious thinking became increasingly important as his influence spread, and in 1927 he was officially baptized into the Church of England. The next year, in the title essay of *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order*, he famously declared himself "classical in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion."

By the 1930s, as noted by critics and writers such as E. M. Forster, Eliot was probably the most important literary figure in English. In 1932, he published *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*, which served to confirm his position in critical circles. He also began attempting to revive poetic drama in plays such as *The Family Reunion*, and in 1939 he wrote a classic book for children, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.

Eliot separated from his first wife in 1932, due to her physical and mental ill health; their marriage had made a painful and stressful impact on his life. In 1933, Eliot won the Nobel Prize for literature and was awarded the English Order of Merit. He remarried in 1957, ten years after his first wife died, and continued to write poetry, plays, and criticism until his own death in 1965 in London.

Plot Summary

Section 1

Selected Essays, 1917-1932 begins with an essay on the role of the "poet," or the author of a work of art written in English. A poet must understand his/her literary predecessors, Eliot argues, and carefully consider how his/her work of art will fit into the world of artistic tradition. Through "a continual extinction of personality" (or individual talent), a talented writer should become a translator of the emotions of his generation in a new way that adds to the poetic achievements of the past.

"The Function of Criticism" extends the theories of the previous essay to critical literature. Here too, writes Eliot, "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." Critics should make a work of art clear to the reader and guide his taste.

Eliot states that John Middleton Murry provides an example of the difference between the "outside authority" of classicism and "inner voice" of romanticism. A critic must provide a useful explanation of the work of art with the important tools of "comparison and analysis" to help the reader understand it without prejudice. By following this method, Eliot writes, there is "the further possibility of arriving at something outside of ourselves, which may provisionally be called truth."

Section 2

In "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama," Eliot argues against the use of the term "rhetoric" (artificially argumentative or unnatural speech) to mean bad writing. Examples from Shakespeare and Renaissance dramatists demonstrate that rhetoric is sometimes a useful and appropriate authorial technique.

The next essay explores a number of tangents and often appears to stray from logical argument, although the subject is supposed to be "the possibility of poetic drama." The essay presents a discussion among seven voices, each named a letter from A to G. B begins with a speech ending in the statement that theater is essentially meant for amusement. A, C, D, and E question the place of morality in drama, and E points out that "form" (or aesthetic beauty, such as a Russian ballet) is the future of drama. Eventually the discussion comes closer to the original topic: whether poetic drama, or drama written in verse that is both poetically beautiful and dramatically compelling, is possible at the present time. G suggests that the seven of them form their own theater of poetic drama, "by ourselves and only for ourselves," but F and B maintain that this is not possible. E then states that plays simply need to be shorter, a solution A ridicules.

In "Euripides and Professor Murray," Eliot criticizes Professor Gilbert Murray, a popular Greek translator, and calls for translations that take into consideration the recent advances in aesthetic and scientific thought. "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" begins

with a discussion of the very influential Latin author and his plays, considering why he was so popular during both his time and the Renaissance, but became so unpopular afterwards. Seneca's characters are often unrealistic, Eliot argues, with long, contrived speeches, but the writer has great and consistent dramatic power. Seneca's ideas are a complex basis for Renaissance thought. Seneca is not responsible for the often bloody and violent nature of the period's plays, but his verse technique did serve as the foundation for the revolutionary literary forms of the Renaissance.

Section 3

Next comes a "preface to an unwritten book," titled "Four Elizabethan Dramatists." In this essay, Eliot emphasizes the need for a new "point of view toward the Elizabethan drama," because the two main critical approaches to it are both incorrect and indistinct. One approach assumes that plays should be read as literature, and the other "maintains the view that a play need not be literature at all"; but they are both wrong to separate drama and verse. Modern critics should understand that Elizabethan failures in dramatic unity and believability, and modern playwrights' failures in rhythmic verse, are both due to the lack of a firm dramatic convention (a consistent literary style among a community of writers).

An essay on Christopher Marlowe emphasizes that Marlowe's verse is an earlier version of the blank verse in Shakespeare but that it is (like that of all successful poets) a very unique application of the newly developing style. "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" continues the discussion of Elizabethans and their influences. Critics are for ever misinterpreting Shakespeare, says Eliot, and mistakenly assume he has a conscious and consistent ideology, although Senecan "stoicism" does underlie his work. Stoicism, a philosophical attitude popular in Roman times, stresses a passive response (a "join[ing one]self with the Universe") to a world seen as hostile to weak and insignificant humans. Shakespeare's tragic heroes consistently try to cheer themselves up with this fatalistic philosophy that ignores one's own mistakes and blames them on an evil world.

An essay on *Hamlet* argues that the play must not be, as is mostly the case, a study of the main character; it must examine the dramatics of the play itself. The play is an "artistic failure" because the primary emotion of the play is "inexpressible." Eliot notes that, since the events of the plot are not sufficient to drive the action, Shakespeare "tackled a problem that proved too much for him."

The next series of essays are evaluations of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. To Eliot, Ben Jonson is a superb poet "of the surface." His characters do not have the "inner life" of Shakespeare's, but they sophisticatedly fit in with each other and with Jonson's unique dramatic world. Jonson's "fine sense of form" and his "deliberate" philosophy make him very worth the trouble that it takes to understand his work as a whole.

Thomas Middleton, on the other hand, "has no point of view" or "personality," according to Eliot, but he does have an excellent talent for depicting the "permanent human impulse" Eliot finds so important. Thomas Heywood has "no imaginative humor," writes Eliot. His success is in the "drama of common life" (Eliot thinks of his plays like soap operas); Heywood's work does not compare with the beauty of verse and drama that Eliot finds in Shakespeare.

Cyril Tourneur, who is typically thought to have written only two plays, is described as an excellent dramatist, like Middleton. A lengthy comparison of Tourneur's two plays reveal that *The Revenger's Tragedy*, although it is an "isolated masterpiece" of seemingly greater skill than *The Atheist's Tragedy*, actually was written first, a fact supported by what Eliot calls the "immaturity" of its horrific moral vision.

John Ford, meanwhile, despite having moments of great and unique style in blank verse, has no "purpose" to his plays as a whole. Eliot believes he lacks the "soul of the poet" that Eliot considers vital to the great masters.

Finally, after emphasizing the importance of putting Elizabethan writers into a broad scholarly context, Eliot describes Philip Massinger as a poet of "exceptionally superior . . . literary talent," with an inclination towards the later style of the Restoration. However, Eliot notes that Massinger has a "paltry imagination" and no ability to capture human emotion like his predecessors.

Section 4

The *Divine Comedy* of medieval Italian poet Dante Alighieri is the subject of the next essay. The great poem has three sections, *Inferno* ("Hell"), *Purgatorio* ("Purgatory"), and *Paradiso* ("Heaven"), that describe Dante's descent through hell, his journey through purgatory, and his ascent through heaven until he reaches God. Eliot writes that Dante is the most "universal" of poets since the ancient Greeks and Romans, because of his visual imagination and his having lived in a time that was united under St. Thomas Aquinas's Christian philosophy.

Eliot discusses Dante's complex use of allegory, in which nearly everything is a symbol for something in the Christian philosophical universe. A reader can enjoy the poem without understanding these symbols but afterwards will probably want to explore their meaning and allegorical context. Eliot claims that Dante reaches the "complete scale of the depths and heights of human emotion" through allegory. He closes the essay by discussing Dante's early work, the *Vita Nuova* ("New Life"), which clarifies a major symbol in the *Divine Comedy*, that of Beatrice, the Florentine woman whom Dante loves first as a human and then as a divine virtue.

Section 5

In "The Metaphysical Poets," Eliot asserts that the poets in this group are too diverse and "permanently valuable" to be placed under the category of their title. Although these

poets sometimes engage in "metaphysical conceits," or complex and long metaphors that are carried "to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry" them, so-called metaphysical poets wrote with more feeling than modern poets. They try "to find the ver bal equivalent for states of mind and feeling," writes Eliot.

An essay on Andrew Marvell elaborates on Eliot's praise for the poetry of the seventeenth century (before the Restoration of Charles II). Marvell is not one of the greatest poets, but his generation's "wit" and balance between jest and seriousness come through in his best poems. The "precious and needed and apparently extinct" qualities that come through "minor" poets like Marvell reveal to Eliot the poetic superiority of an age.

In "John Dryden," Eliot argues that appreciation for this eighteenth-century poet has dwindled because of the poor taste of the nineteenth century, which disfavored the material of Dryden's poetry. Although Eliot believes that Dryden lacks "insight," he notes that Dryden's broad range, great wit, and lyrical genius make Dryden an extremely enjoyable, influential, and important poet.

William Blake, however, despite his own original genius and "considerable understanding of human nature," lacked the "framework of traditional ideas" vital to Eliot's idea of a first-order poet. Eliot's essay on Blake describes Blake's "visionary" philosophy as too incomplete and "remote from the world" since it lacks an understanding of tradition.

"Swinburne As Poet" briefly compares this writer with examples of poetry infused with more sense and meaning than Swinburne's works. Although Eliot finds him a superb linguist, Swinburne's meaning is "merely the hallucination of meaning" because it dwells entirely in language, as opposed to human feeling.

Section 6

"Lancelot Andrewes" and "John Bramhall" discuss two influential seventeenth-century bishops of the Church of England. Eliot observes that Bishop Andrewes, although his writings are dense and not "entertaining," wrote some of the "finest prose" in English. Andrewes is able to write with such excellent structure because he is unwaveringly committed to his theological subject.

Bishop Bramhall is, according to Eliot, not appreciated nearly enough for his "mastery" of logical argument. The essay on Bramhall contrasts his writings with those of Thomas Hobbes to reveal that Bishop possesses the "historical sense," "philosophical basis," and vital "middle way" of argument that Hobbes lacks.

"Thoughts after Lambeth" elaborates Eliot's views on the recent conflicts in the Church of England by examining the Lambeth Conference Report of 1930. The Lambeth Conference, which occurs once every ten years, is the major forum for the leaders of the Anglican Church. Despite some understandably poor "verbiage" of the report, writes Eliot, the conference marked "an important stage" towards the reunification of Christian

religious sects. Overall, it was a successful effort to clarify the theological position of the Church of England at a time of particularly pronounced division and controversy.

Section 7

The final section of *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* concentrates on nineteenth-century artists, beginning with an essay on Baudelaire. In order to better understand one of the most important French poets of the nineteenth century, Eliot proposes to "affirm the importance of Baudelaire's prose works." From these, it is clear that he has both a "sense of his age" and the "inner disorder" that is characteristic of his contemporaries. This comes out in his poetry, which has excellent "superficial form" but lacks inner unity.

The next two essays evaluate Walter Pater and Francis Herbert Bradley, two Victorian prose writers, in comparison with Matthew Arnold, the nineteenth- century critic famous for his views on literary and social culture. "Arnold and Pater" proposes that the "art for art's sake" aesthetic theory that Pater developed, a theory emphasizing that there are no grand outside principles for judging the merit of a work of art, is actually in direct line with Arnold's philosophy. Both theories represent to Eliot "the degradation of philosophy and religion" because they substitute cultural values for theological values.

Eliot writes in his next essay that Bradley's prose, like Pater's, has fundamental similarities in theme to Matthew Arnold's. But unlike Pater, Bradley is a careful and thorough philosophical thinker who is able to provide a unified basis for Arnold's unsuccessful attempts at philosophy.

A brief essay then praises popular actress Marie Lloyd because of her "understanding of the people and sympathy with them." Next, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens" recognizes the importance of interesting and convincing drama (by which Eliot means sophisticated characterization) and good melodrama. Collins, although he could not create interesting and convincing characters like Dickens could, was a master of melodramatic novels.

The next two essays express Eliot's view on "humanism," a traditionalist philosophy stressing the importance of classic literature. As becomes clearer in "Second Thoughts About Humanism," Eliot affirms what he considers "pure humanism," which "makes for breadth, tolerance, equilibrium and sanity." But, he argues against the type of humanism that his former professor Irving Babbitt implies because to Eliot it unsuccessfully disregards religion.

In "Charles Whibley," Eliot praises his contemporary as a brilliant journalist with the ability to write with "life," as people normally speak. Whibley was also an important critic because of his vast literary knowledge and "personal gusto and curiosity."

Characters

Dante Alighieri

Alighieri (1265-1321) is one of the most revered poets of the Middle Ages. His *Divine Comedy*, written in the common language of Florence, Italy, is a masterpiece of Catholic philosophy and poetry. His earlier work, *Vita Nuova*, describes Dante's idealized youthful love for a Florentine woman named Beatrice. Eliot calls Dante the most "universal" of poets because his poetry has "peculiar lucidity" (a clear and transparent beauty) and his philosophy has the benefit of a united cultural belief (influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas). Born in 1265 and raised in Florence, Dante was exiled in 1301 because of fighting between political factions in the Guelph family.

Bishop Lancelot Andrewes

Andrewes (1555-1626) held a number of important positions in the Anglican Church between 1589 and 1626. Eliot revived an interest in this distinguished scholar and linguist—whose sermons are inaccessible to most people because of their dense classical allusions—by calling him "second to none in the history of the formation of the English Church."

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) was the most important religious philosopher of medieval Europe. By reconciling Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology in *Summa theological*, he created the extremely influential system of thought apparent in the work of Dante Alighieri.

William Archer

Archer (1856-1924) was an important critic who argued that modern plays were much more appropriate for the stage than earlier works and should be performed more often. Eliot argues with this view throughout section VII.

Matthew Arnold

Arnold (1822-1888) was one of the most important critics and advocates for "culture" (arts and humanities, particularly literature) in Victorian England. Champion of "disinterested criticism," he argued for a standard of critical taste that is not influenced by one's subjective perception of a work. He was not widely thought to be sacrilegious—in fact, he emphasized the importance of studying the Bible—but Eliot argues (particularly in section VII) that Arnold takes morality from culture when instead he

should take it from religion. Arnold, like Eliot, wrote poetry in addition to criticism and was central in establishing the literary taste of his generation.

Irving Babbitt

Babbitt (1865-1933), who was Eliot's professor at Harvard, greatly influenced Eliot's philosophy. Babbitt is best known as the father of American "new humanism," which resisted the self-expressionist and romantic philosophies of the time. Instead, Babbitt advocated a return to classical modes of thought by studying traditional works of literature.

Charles-Pierre Baudelaire

A French poet, critic, and translator, Baudelaire (1821-1867) is mainly famous for his lyrical and truly felt (sometimes sordid) poetry. As a young man in Paris, he had affairs with prostitutes, went to prison, and contracted large debts. Eliot discusses Baudelaire's philosophy and tendency towards form in the first essay of section VII, implying that Baudelaire was a latent Christian despite the blasphemy in some of his poetry.

William Blake

Blake (1757-1827) was a poet and an artist of the romantic period. He never went to school but read widely and was taught by his mother until he became an engraver by trade. He crafted all of his poetic works into ornate plates of his own unique design. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is one of his earliest and perhaps best-known works, but he went on to create poems about mythological worlds and philosophical systems he invented.

Francis Herbert Bradley

An English philosopher about whom Eliot wrote his doctoral thesis, Bradley (1846-1924) was interested in ethics, logic, and metaphysics (a branch of philosophy that deals with the origins of the universe). In section VII, Eliot discusses Bradley's moral philosophy, its connection with religion, and its superiority to the philosophy of Matthew Arnold.

Bishop John Bramhall

Bramhall (1594-1663) was a British-Irish theologian who increased the revenue of the Irish church and wrote various Royalist and Anglican treatises.

Wilkie Collins

Collins (1824-1889) was an extremely popular Victorian novelist who, as Eliot points out in section VII, mastered the art of suspenseful storytelling. He co-wrote various plays and stories with Dickens but lost some of his influence when he began commenting on social issues. In the 1860s, Collins was thought to be the most skillful writer of "sensation fiction" (melodramatic and engaging novels that were often mysteries).

Charles Dickens

Dickens (1812-1870) was a vastly influential Victorian novelist, editor, and social critic. Like Wilkie Collins, though more permanently regarded as a profoundly talented novelist, he was a master of suspense and drama in his serialized novels. Almost all of his books take place in Victorian social contexts, often featuring desperately poor circumstances.

John Dryden

Poet, playwright, and critic of the English Restoration, Dryden (1631-1700) frequently changed his mode of expression and his opinion about historical or literary events, but nearly everything he wrote is considered important English literature. He formed a tradition of satirical verse and had an unsurpassed capacity for controlling language. Eliot discusses his recent unpopularity and explains that this is mainly due to the subject, as opposed to the quality, of his work.

Euripides

Ancient Greek dramatist Euripides (c. 480-406 B.C.) was one of the first pioneers in dramatic form. A master of surprise, he was famous for representing gods and heroes as real people in his tragedies. Eliot discusses the merits of various translations of Euripides, calling for new and better ones.

John Ford

Ford (c. 1586-1640) wrote plays and some poetry, mainly involving moral paradoxes. Eliot does not hold him in high esteem and writes that he has "an absence of purpose" despite his unique style.

Ben Jonson

Jonson (1572-1637) was a poet, critic, and playwright. Although some of his individual poems and plays are considered of the highest quality, Jonson is more famous for his influence on his contemporaries than for his own work. He led a group of writers called

the "Sons of Ben," whose aims included getting closer to meaning through language. Eliot attempts to revive an interest in Jonson's plays, which, Eliot writes, are of the intellectual "surface" but nevertheless have a unique and engaging "form."

Marie Lloyd

Lloyd (1870-1922) was a popular actress and singer in London, known as "Our Marie" or "The Queen of the Music Hall" to her many fans.

Christopher Marlowe

Marlowe (1564-1593) was a playwright and poet. Possibly involved in the secret service of Elizabeth I, he is better known for the striking plays he wrote before his murder in a London pub. His uniquely defiant heroes and use of blank verse changed English drama and had a character all its own. Eliot provides a textual analysis of Marlowe in order to show the complex influence of his writing over later playwrights.

Andrew Marvell

Marvell (1621-1678) was a "metaphysical poet," a term Ben Jonson used to describe seventeenth- century poets who used long, complex comparisons (a characterization Eliot discusses at length and argues is useless). As well as writing ambiguous and subtle poetry, Marvell was involved in various government positions before and after the Restoration of Charles II. Eliot praises his "wit" in section V, although he argues that Marvell lacks the individuality of a poet like Dryden.

Philip Massinger

There is much scholarly debate on which plays writer Massinger (1583-1640) actually wrote, as there is with many of his contemporaries. However, his talent with language and gift for satire are clear in the plays that are attributed to him.

Thomas Middleton

Middleton (1580-1627) was an unsentimental playwright who, Eliot notes, flatly depicted human relations without making judgements on them. Middleton collaborated on many of his plays and probably wrote passages in some of Shakespeare's plays, including *Macbeth*.

John Middleton Murry

John Middleton Murry (1889-1957) was a modernist critic. Eliot discusses him because of his dependence on the "inner voice" of criticism, which Eliot finds non-authoritative, insubstantial, and unreliable as a basis for critical thought.

Walter Pater

A Victorian critic, Pater (1839-1894) was the spokesperson for the aesthetic movement, best known for its creed "art for art's sake." A master prose stylist, Pater argued that art can only be experienced by an individual on a subjective basis. Eliot writes that Pater's literary theory, which is the opposite of Eliot's own authoritative and classical theory, lacks a permanent moral and philosophical basis.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Seneca (c. 4-65 A.D.) was a Roman philosopher and dramatist born in Corduba, Spain (present-day Cordoba). Seneca's father was a teacher of rhetoric (the ancient Greek word for "formal argument"). Seneca became a politician and, after an eight-year banishment, the tutor to Emperor Nero. He wrote nine tragedies that are generally considered to be intended for recitation, not performance; they contain no naturalistic or realistic speech but engage in rhetoric, about which Eliot has qualified reservations.

Eliot discusses Seneca's stoic philosophy at length, which he describes as a "join[ing one]self with the Universe"). Stoicism was a philosophical attitude popular in Roman times, stressing a passive response to a world seen as hostile to weak and insignificant humans. Section III stresses that stoicism underlies Shakespeare as well as Renaissance writers; and since for Eliot it is an inferior philosophy to Christianity, it poses a problem for the moral and aesthetic quality of Renaissance plays. Seneca did not create stoicism, but he wrote about it and supposedly practiced it (although his pupil Nero was famous for excesses directly violating stoic belief).

William Shakespeare

Strikingly little is known about Shakespeare's life (1564-1616), given that he is probably the most famous English writer ever. Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a town in the English midlands, and by 1592 had moved to London to act and write plays. He wrote poetry, including his famous sonnets, in addition to dramatic comedies, histories, and tragedies. His writing is revered for a variety of contradictory reasons. Many critics, like Eliot, praise him for his lyrical and poetical genius in addition to, in Eliot's words, the "permanent human emotion" displayed by his characters. No collected editions of Shakespeare's plays were published until 1623, when two members of his company collected the versions they considered authentic into the "first folio."

Algernon Charles Swinburne

Swinburne (1837-1909) was a prolific poet, playwright, novelist, and critic. He was known as a fierce opponent of mainstream Victorian morals, and his poems of 1866 made him both famous and hated because of their rebellious and even perverted themes. Swinburne had a superb capacity for imagination; he both experimented with old forms and created new ones, but Eliot points out that it is difficult to find "meaning" or consistency of thought in his works.

Cyril Tourneur

An Elizabethan playwright, Tourneur (c. 1575-1626) was probably involved in military and diplomatic work aside from writing at least two plays, but historians know very little about his life. Eliot praises his play *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a "masterpiece" but argues that it has a more "immature moral vision" than the other play attributed to Tourneur.

Themes

Tradition

Selected Essays, 1917-1932 begins with what is probably the most important theme of the collection: tradition. Eliot has a complex and personal idea of tradition, but mainly he refers to the vast canon of literature written by great authors of the past. He does not specifically mean literature written in English, but he does mean "Western classical" literature, from the ancient Greeks to Seneca, Dante, Chaucer, the Renaissance writers, Dryden, and Pope, through the romantics and the Victorians. In other words, tradition in *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* is literature that Eliot considers of the highest order, literature he deems important for modern English writers and critics to have read.

Eliot is one among many famous critics to have established such an idea of tradition; even in selecting and revising the list of important works, he heavily relies on such writers as Matthew Arnold, who is famous for identifying the classical literary canon in Victorian times. This seems somewhat ironic, since modernism, the literary movement of which Eliot is considered a great leader, is generally thought to break from the past. Eliot makes clear in his description of the importance of tradition, however, that writers of his time should only break with the very recent past, the age immediately before theirs, which Eliot considers to have gone astray in artistic principles. Indeed, Eliot finds art meaningless unless it is placed within the broad context of literary history. Literature finds its value in the way it communicates with the past. Eliot writes:

Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.

Although this sounds like a simple idea, it has very subtle and complicated results; it is the reason for Eliot's constant and difficult allusions and comparisons to so many different works, authors, and literary movements. Because of his concept of tradition, Eliot analyzes each single work only as a single part of the grand, shifting meaning of literature. In fact, it is difficult to appreciate Eliot's criticism of a single work without understanding his greater concept of the purpose of Western literature. Although it begins with the concept of "a continual extinction of personality" on the part of the poet in order to fit in with tradition, this concept changes and gradually develops *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*.

Dramatic Poetry

Eliot is interested throughout his essays in the merging of poetry and dramatics. He continually stresses the aesthetic ideal of beautiful verse and sophisticated use of language merged with realistic characters in compelling situations. The essays in section 2, especially, point out that a literary form, or convention, established by like-

minded artists of a generation is necessary for great dramatic poetry to succeed. Often, Eliot judges writers almost entirely by how well they accomplish this feat; for Eliot, the two must coexist in all great pieces of literature. Essays on novelists like Dickens or poets like Marvell are few and tend not to place their subjects on the same level as a dramatic poet like Shakespeare.

Eliot's reasoning for the superiority of dramatic poetry had profound influence on the public taste of the day, including public opinion on his own creative writing. His plays, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral*, are meant to form the convention of dramatic poetry for which he argued in his essays.

Christianity

Christianity plays an increasingly important role in Eliot's critical thinking. Although section 1 provides an approach to literature that is not dependent on any religious belief, the philosophy underlying various authors and movements begins to be a criterion for judgment, especially in sections 4, 6, and 7. To Eliot, religion is absolutely vital to any discussion of philosophy or ethics: "If you remove the word 'human' and all that the belief in the supernatural has given to man, you can view him finally as no more than an extremely clever, adaptable, and mischievous little animal."

This quote emphasizes that Christianity is vital to Eliot's literary theory; his view of great writers is that they are "more" than animals and therefore require supernatural belief to create great literature. Eliot changes his idea, however, of whether a writer "thinks" and believes in a particular theology; he begins by denying this but later recognizes (as in the essay on William Blake) that theology is often a conscious effort that strongly influences the greatness of a work. Eventually, Christian thought is strongly present in Eliot's aesthetics as well as in his philosophy.

Style

Circuitous Argument

Selected Essays, 1917-1932 engages in a subtle and complex form of argument that can be called "circuitous," or roundabout and even indirect. Students of Eliot without a profound literary back ground in English literature are likely to find his essays very difficult reading material, not only because of the vast number of literary allusions but because of the complexity of the author's points that are subtly woven into the essays. Only after having read most or all of the *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* is Eliot's entire theory clear; the essays are a roundabout way of making a generalized, large-scale argument.

This does not mean that the argument is unspecific; as critic John Chalker writes in his essay "Authority and Personality in Eliot's Criticism": "Most of the *Selected Essays* were book reviews, yet, because of the precision with which he has established his theory, Eliot is able to present a continuing argument." Eliot's theory of literature often seems to contradict itself, and there are many places where it does so overtly (see "Christianity" above). Yet the entire collection, despite its indirect approach, is best seen as a thorough and subtle argument, using generalizations from nearly the entire history of literature as examples to support a theory.

The basis for Eliot's circuitous argument about the function and value of literature is in section I, but the brief and clear definition of art in the first two essays does not effectively sum up the gradually developing theory. "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" is a more appropriate representation of the entire work's argumentative technique, since its tangents and varying unresolved opinions better represent the complex and shifting theory Eliot creates. Indeed, his circuitous argumentative technique is suited to the subtle, roundabout literary theory.

Rhetoric

When Eliot begins section 2 by arguing that "rhetoric" is not necessarily bad writing, he is subtly defending a characteristic of his own style. "Rhetoric" refers to a method of manipulating language, often with bombastic and artificial overtones, for the purposes of argument. Eliot's vast generalizations and obscure allusions are among his most effective stylistic methods; as Chalker writes, "What strikes one particularly about [the early essays] is their strongly rhetorical manner. The tone is immediately authoritative and magisterial."

In his role as a trendsetter, and, as critic Delmore Schwartz calls him in *T. S. Eliot, Critical Assessments*, a "literary dictator," Eliot develops an enormously influential theory of literature. And, although he tries to separate himself from Matthew Arnold, whose wide-ranging opinions determined the mainstream aesthetic views of his time,

Eliot consciously places himself in a very similar role. His rhetorical style is very important to this process; by it, he ceases to sound like one critic with an opinion and moves into the role of an authority. The necessity of a conventional authority is vital to Eliot's theory (this is the "outer voice" of "the function of criticism"), and Eliot underscores his ability to provide exactly this with the rhetorical voice in his essays.

Historical Context

The Renaissance and English Writers

The Renaissance refers to the extremely broad European cultural movement characterized by a flowering of art and literature. Although it began in fourteenth-century Italy, the movement did not have much influence in English literature until the reign of Elizabeth I (1558 to 1603), which marked a new sophistication and sensibility in poetry and drama. Writers such as Edmund Spencer and Philip Sidney began this revolution in poetry, while Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd were among the first pioneers in the new dramatic verse form that came to a height with the plays of William Shakespeare.

With the introduction of printing technology, lyric poetry became widely available to all classes for the first time, and this is one of the reasons that Elizabethan writing was not confined to the court. In the plays, which people of all types could see in the theaters in London's South Bank, graceful and innovative writing in iambic pentameter (a verse form in which each line has five iambs, or feet, of two syllables each) was combined with drama containing a broad range of realistic human emotions.

Poetry and drama—including Shakespeare's later tragedies—continued to develop rapidly after Elizabeth's death in 1603 and the ascension of James I of Scotland. Poets began to divide into two main new camps: the "Sons of Ben," who imitated Ben Jonson's direct language intended to get closer to meaning, and the "metaphysical poets" (chiefly John Donne), who were characterized (unfairly, in Eliot's and others' views) by long and complex comparisons taken to the extreme. By the 1650s, Milton's technical genius to manipulate language marked the beginning of the Restoration period in 1660.

Victorian England

The other historical period of vital importance to *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* is the one immediately before Eliot's own. Chiefly important to Victorian literature are three main elements: the Industrial Revolution, the growth of the British Empire, and the fierce intellectual movement stressing moral self-consciousness. These combined to form a number of like-minded writers, particularly novelists, who wrote "realist" fiction attempting to display the actual social conditions of the time, often with moral judgments about social and political issues.

Victorian literature is also characterized, however, by the growing counterculture that exploded in the 1890s. Critics such as Walter Pater argued vehemently with eminent Victorian social and critical writers such as Matthew Arnold (although Eliot argues that Pater and Arnold are of the same philosophical disposition without knowing it). But

Victorian values did not completely break down until the modernist movement of the early twentieth century.

Modernism

Modernism is generally considered to have coincided with World War I, which caused drastic changes to a variety of assumptions and ways of thinking. Many modernist writers, feeling that they could no longer express themselves in old forms, responded with experimental techniques that borrowed from a variety of other movements, most notably postimpressionism (which dealt with a simplification of form in the visual arts) and naturalism (which dealt with a deterministic universe involving a brutal struggle for individual survival). Most important to modernism in fiction was James Joyce's effort to deal with a multiplicity of viewpoints that lead to an "epiphany," or sudden moment of truth and understanding. In poetry, modernism was influenced by Eliot's own poetry, with modernist poems often reflecting the spiritual decadence of Eliot's "The Waste Land."

Eliot, with support from his friend Ezra Pound, was clearly the authoritative father figure of this movement. His theory, which guided the main current of modernist thought, desires both to experimentally break from the immediate past and to communicate closely with a dense tradition (creating a new but classical form). *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* is an effort to form a group of artists united around a common aesthetic goal. It was not entirely successful; despite Eliot's tone of voice throughout the essays that pretends he is speaking to a like-minded audience of critics and writers, modernism was not a single, united movement. Many authors were going in entirely different directions, trying different experimental forms that did not take the form of Eliot's somewhat classical and traditionalist approach. Nevertheless, everyone was in- fluenced, one way or another, by Eliot's new aesthetic thinking.

Critical Overview

Although Ezra Pound and a few other radicals were supportive from the start, critics tended to resent or ignore the early essays anthologized in *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. Arthur Waugh's "The New Poetry" called his poems "un-metrical, incoherent banalities" with "no steady current of ideas behind them." Waugh represents a group of critics who did not take Eliot's literary theory seriously.

But, by the time Eliot published *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* in 1932, he was already an extremely well-established critic. Some resented Eliot, as an American, telling the English what to think, and Delmore Schwartz points out in his essay "The Literary Dictatorship of T. S. Eliot" that many found Eliot far too overbearing and authoritative. All, however, found his thinking innovative and important. Richard Shusterman points out in his introduction to *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism:* "Whatever one thinks of the merit of Eliot's critical thought, its enormous influence on twentieth-century critical theory and practice cannot be denied."

Modern critical opinions on Eliot follow a similar formula. Recent critics, like Jean-Michel Rabaté in his essay "Tradition and T. S. Eliot," discuss some of the more innovative ways to approach Eliot's idea of a constantly changing literary past. Anthony Julius famously attacks Eliot's attitude towards Jews in his book, *T. S. Eliot, Anti- Semitism, and Literary Form:* "Of the many different kinds of anti-Semite, Eliot was the rarest kind: one who was able to place his anti-Semitism at the service of his art." But, as Shusterman goes on to argue, even such sharp attacks on Eliot's critical judgments are "powerful testimony to his lasting significance."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
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- Critical Essay #6
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Critical Essay #1

Trudell is a freelance writer with a bachelor's degree in English literature. In the following essay, Trudell discusses the impact of religious belief on Eliot's theory of literature.

Eliot is a Christian critic, and his *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* develops a Christian view on literature. In an indirect, subtle way, his essays assume not only that the reader is extremely well-read in the classics of Western literature, but that he/she thinks as a Christian: "It is our business, as Christians, *as well as* readers of literature, to know what we ought to like." But Eliot's theory of literature is valuable for all critical thinking, and its influence is much broader than one religious lens. In order to gauge the impact of *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*, it is important to understand where Eliot's literary philosophy requires a Christian viewpoint and where it is not confined to one.

First, it is necessary to briefly discuss what a Christian viewpoint on literature entails. On the simplest and most literal level, such a viewpoint would judge a work of art by two factors: how greatly its philosophy represents underlying Christian values and how greatly the author is talented to do this. Since a genuine knowledge and complete understanding of Christianity is required to criticize art on these terms, the viewpoint would maintain that a reader cannot fully appreciate or understand "Christian art" without believing in Christianity. And it would also maintain, therefore, that a reader cannot truly appreciate any work of art unless he/ she believes in its religious or philosophical basis. This concept is not as simple as it sounds because it is unclear which art falls under which umbrella, and it is doubtful (even to Eliot) whether most art has this clear of a theological basis in the first place. But, it is the necessary foundation of thought for any "Christian critic."

Samuel Hynes's essay "The Trials of a Christian Critic" discusses Eliot's contradictory affirmations that a critic can have an objective appreciation of a work regardless of his religion and that a critic's religious belief is necessary to his "full understanding." Although Eliot entertains the idea that "it must be possible to have full literary or poetic appreciation without sharing the beliefs of the poet," he later revises this to: "It is possible, and sometimes necessary, to argue that full understanding must identify itself with full belief." Hynes writes that Eliot "failed as a Christian critic" because, ultimately, Eliot let religion take over his literary philosophy to the point where it was merely an extension of theology and as such had little value as a coherent theory of literature.

It is perhaps true, as Hynes proposes, that the subtle and carefully chosen literary theory Eliot developed, which makes every effort to find a complex universal criterion for judging the value of art irrespective of religion, ultimately fails in consistency and relies on a religious standpoint. Nevertheless, the bulk of Eliot's criticism is not strictly Christian, and his erection of a continuous English literary tradition that constantly changes with each new work of art is not fundamentally a Christian idea. For Eliot, the only complete and unified Christian art is the work of Dante; and however much he

praises Dante in section IV as the most universal of poets, Eliot by no means judges all art simply by how close it comes to the achievements of *The Divine Comedy*.

Shakespeare, for example, whose underlying philosophy Eliot considers more "Senecan" than Christian, is clearly Eliot's choice for the greatest poet of all time: "I believe that I have as high an estimate of the greatness of Shakespeare as a poet and dramatist as anyone living; I certainly believe that there is nothing greater." And, although Eliot qualifies this praise with the assertion that the philosophy behind Shakespeare is inferior to the theology behind Dante, it seems inappropriate to apply the Christian viewpoint to Eliot's judgment of the plays; it is hard to imagine Eliot arguing that he cannot "fully appreciate" Shakespeare's work because its Senecan moral foundation is not Christian enough for him. Even the attempt at subverting Shakespeare to Dante is suspicious given the amount of attention and importance given to the English Renaissance. If Eliot finds Renaissance philosophy "inferior" to that of Dante, why do the Elizabethans excite him so much more?

One reason is that Eliot, while he does firmly believe in the superiority of Christian thinking, is very interested in the way a great poet operates in a literary world that is not unified in Christianity. Of course, Eliot (one of the most important poets of his century) sees himself in exactly this position. As Timothy Materer suggests in his essay "T. S. Eliot's Critical Program": "Eliot saw his literary criticism as a way of improving the appreciation of his own art."

This critical agenda underscores the importance of Eliot's commentary on his time and guides the reader to an appreciation of it. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot argues that a poet should not (and cannot successfully) consciously formulate the philosophical or moral essence of his work; he must act as an unbiased "catalyst":

The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

In this view, the poet's talent lies in what he makes of the conflicted ethos of his generation. Without this talent, few readers could successfully understand Eliot's poetry or plays, and Eliot considers himself quite an important receptacle to be understood.

But Eliot's criticism is more than a tool for understanding his creative writing. His revision of the English canon developed by Matthew Arnold is still very influential over what is thought to be classic literature today. And his "correction of taste" is not simply a move towards works that better represent Christian values. Indeed, Eliot's most important and lasting influence over critical thought is his subtle analysis of what he considers the highest form of literature: beautiful poetic language combined with compelling drama centered on "permanent human emotion."

His preference is the basis for a coherent and completely secular philosophy of art; it does not depend on a Christian philosophy at all, and it provides an objective criterion for judging literature. In fact, it is probably the most important non- Christian

generalization to extract from Eliot's criticism. Such an extraction, which is consistent with the idea that a poet exists as a catalyst and not a conscious thinker about philosophical problems, has had visible effects on critical thought of all religious bases. Its emphasis on a balance between verse and drama—aimed at a high goal of beauty and truth, achieved through a specific convention of common thinking among a group of artists deeply engaged with the past at the same time as they are breaking radically from it—is not a bad description of modernism, the complex literary movement for which Eliot was considered a great leader.

And this process by which Eliot analyzes the texts, regardless of his philosophical and moral judgments, is where a modern critical view finds value in his essays. Although it is difficult to define the specifics of this analysis, Eliot expresses its basis in his essay "The Function of Criticism" by describing the use of "a very highly developed sense of fact" and the employment of "comparison and analysis." It is more helpful to look at Eliot's essays themselves, however, to understand the sophisticated technique that allows Eliot to make his decisive judgments on the quality of so many authors; it is only clear when reading through Eliot's specific and intuitive reasoning about the language and meaning of his subject. This method of analyzing a piece of literature in its proper context creates a new standard for what should be considered beautiful art, an important suggested guideline for the thinking of a generation of artists (to which many adhered and against which many revolted).

Admittedly, this method of analysis does not fully represent Eliot's comprehensive aesthetic theory. For one thing, focusing only on the secular aspects of Eliot's theory vastly oversimplifies his literary taste; despite his assertion that great authors do not "think," he admits that much of artistic creation is a conscious process and makes no effort to separate fundamental philosophical belief and meaning from a judgment about what is a great piece of literature. Many authors succeed, for Eliot, by the conscious or unconscious philosophy in their work. Also, this extracting what is of secular value assumes that Eliot took a clear stance on the issue throughout his life; and as the long span of *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* shows, he changes his mind on even the most basic of his principles during the fifteen-year period (during which time, notably, Eliot becomes increasingly religious).

Nevertheless, Eliot's method of textual analysis is his most lasting critical legacy in a multicultural, secular society. And it is the most important part of his careful, thorough overview of Western literature since the ancient Greeks. It is where his theory is the most "impersonal," and therefore applicable to other theorists, and it is the place where Eliot's poetic genius and intuitive understanding of language is most apparent. Indeed, it is an objective and almost scientific side of his analysis. Despite his assertion against the profusion of "individual talent" and personality, the more religious and moral judgments of his essays contain Eliot's most subjective (and therefore, by his own criteria, his most unhelpful) views on religion and literature. His comparison and analysis, meanwhile, masterfully place English writing into its appropriate tradition, just as they place Eliot's essays into the tradition of English critical theory.

Source: Scott Trudell, Critical Essay on *Selected Essays, 1917-1932,* in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay excerpt, Weinblatt explores Eliot's efforts to "explore, to make sense out of and to illustrate the implications and consequences of his myth of failed adequation" in Selected Essays.

High theory and the evocation of intensely immediate experience as embodied, respectively, in Eliot's "essays of generalization (such as *Tradition and the Individual Talent*) and [his] appreciations of individual authors": the drama of Eliot's prose writings, especially of his *Selected Essays* is, at its most vital, to draw these poles together, to discover their mutuality, to declare them fully complementary facets of the same, common quest for adequation. At first this dramatic movement is not clearly evident. Dipping into *Selected Essays* at random, finding here the reassuringly familiar essay on "The Metaphysical Poets," there a relatively unknown, seemingly unrelated piece on the Church of England's Lambeth Conference of 1930 ("Thoughts after Lambeth"), the essays seem more independent, more self-contained—as befits their diverse publishing history as occasional essays, journalistic reviews or belletristic polemic. They do not at first reading appear implicated in the general meaning of each other. This deceptive impression of disconnection and autonomy is enhanced by Eliot's oft rehearsed protest that he was no "systematic thinker," and that any search for system or architectonic in his work, erected on a structure of "sustained, exact, and closely knit argument and reasoning," must inevitably issue in failure or error.

What are we to think when at a certain moment, after sustained rereading, the argument of each essay, the conclusion, the summing up, the drawing forth of meaning from the subject at hand, begins to reveal a tell-tale similarity to each of the others? For, in almost every case, Eliot's method of procedure, his strategy of advance from premise to conclusion, is to invoke, to draw upon a highly limited repository of recurring words. These words echo and reecho themselves, catch up and pattern a multitude of disparate writers and situations into a common design, often amplifying each word's latent suggestivity in a variety of subject-matters (the comparative merit of specimens of poetry drawn from successive ages, or the contemporary dispute over humanism and religion, or disquisitions on education, sociology and the passing of the music hall era) until, almost without warning, each essay becomes but a particular, almost subordinate illustration of the more general, more critically important set of meanings, which it is Eliot's underlying aim to communicate.

The truth is, this technique of verbal refrain and reprise, this repertory of recurring words and phrases stems neither from genuine architectonic nor preconceived system but from an urgent, ongoing, underlying concern on Eliot's part to explore, to make sense out of and to illustrate the implications and consequences of his myth of failed adequation: the catastrophe of dissociated sensibility. Here "adequate objects" are repeatedly distinguished from "inadequate" ones, and "adequacy" unfailingly counterpoints "inadequacy." Here "intellect" struggles heroically to become adequate to "sensibility" and here "experience," "feeling," "emotion," "sensation," "enthusiasm," "passions," "emotional states," "emotional orgy," "emotional intensity and violence," and

inexpressible "baffled emotion" surge over the bastion of "words," "language," "meaning," "receptacle," "gesture," "form," "expression," "clear purgation" and, of course, "objective correlative." Here the chiseled world of the "strong and simple outline," the "perfectly controlled" expression of emotion is set over against the unfocused world of that which is "inexpressible," the "incommunicable . . . vague and unformed," the world of "mistiness," "fluid haze," and shimmering "dream." Here swelling passion, unrelieved because undefined, is stymied from attaining to meaning in the form of "dogma," "revelation," "belief," and "religion."

Viewed from this perspective, the design of *Selected Essays* may be understood as a series of assays into the literary consequences of metaphysical pessimism, assays which depart from and return to this central myth. Taken in totality these assays chronicle the long, slow decline—in Eliot's eyes— of European literature from the time of Dante. Bearing directly on this point is a passage from Walter Jackson Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet:*

A great deal of modern literature—and criticism—is haunted, as Stephen Spender says, by the thought of a "Second Fall of Man," and almost everything has been blamed: the Renaissance loss of the medieval unity of faith, Baconian science, British empiricism, Rousseau, the French Revolution, industrialism, nineteenth- century science, universities and academicism, the growing complexity of ordinary life, the spread of mass media.

At one time or another, Eliot touches upon almost all of these issues, but quickly propels each one into orbit around his own metaphysical sun. As catalogued by Eliot in the great majority of his "appreciations of individual authors," the effects of this haunting Second Fall, this cosmic universal dissociation of form and feeling, group themselves into two categories.

Into the first category fall those essays which treat of the overall inadequacy of *doctrinal thought*— be it as dogma, theology, ideology, theory or a developed, articulated point of view—to the underlying affections in which a particular doctrine is rooted and from which it draws emotional sustenance. Under the second category are grouped those essays which illustrate the inadequacy of particular *works of art*—work of art being used in the broadest sense to include any poem, play, narrative, essay, image, word or even gesture—as vehicles to convey the emotions from which they spring. Both categories bear striking witness to the inexorable crumbling of form into the ruin of meaninglessness which is Eliot's starkest poetic fear.

Critical Essay #3

Of the four "appreciations of individual authors" in which the central argument is the failure of equilibration between some structure of doctrinal thought and the feelings and emotions it once successfully conveyed, perhaps the most graphic—and famous—illustration is "Arnold and Pater." Matthew Arnold, in his extensive writings on the unraveling of ties between Christianity and Culture, was engaged in waging, according to Eliot, a "religious campaign," and the upshot of this succession of field operations was to "affirm that the *emotions* of Christianity can and must be preserved without the *belief*," an affirmation whose inevitable consequence was the "divorce" of that special sensibility possessed by "religion," with its heights and depths of feeling and emotion, from its superstructure of doctrinal "thought." One outcome of this resulting imbalance—indeed severence—between emotions and belief where dogma no longer can function adequately to channel, shape and confer meaning on feeling, is "to leave Religion to be laid waste by the anarchy of feeling." With religion thus split, fragmented, open to the eddying currents of individual feeling, it becomes possible to install, in the place of dogma, either "Morals" or "Art." This substitution is accompanied by the need to translate everything either into morality—witness the "religious vapourings of Carlyle" or the "social fury of Ruskin"—or into the dangerous cult of "emotion and . . . sensation" which marks Pater's own "peculiar appropriation of religion." But for Eliot there exists also a third substitute for dogmatic religion, an outgrowth and later development of the foregoing, a substitute for which Arnold's campaign to elevate culture over dogma was incontrovertibly a "forerunner," and a substitute with which Eliot found himself, often to the exclusion of almost everything else, increasingly preoccupied and distressed: the substitute of Humanism. Dealt with at length over several years in a series of articles and heated rejoinders in the *Criterion* by such noteworthy controversialists as Herbert Read, G. K. Chesterton, and Allen Tate, the topic surfaces, in *Selected Essays*, in "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt." The focal difficulty with Humanism, unlike dogma, is that, although it offered itself as an "*alternative* to religion," it could provide no clear definition of itself, no unchallengeable intellectual edifice, no anatomy of belief open to inspection and deliberative consideration. A loose amalgam of overlapping and often contradictory tenets, some drawn from religion, others from the classical tradition, and still others from the confluence of both, the generally accepted premises of Humanism—order, discipline, tradition, continuity, proportion, restraint, reason, authority, privilege, and aristocracy—might provide temporary solace for those "unable to take the religious view—that is to say . . . dogma or revelation" but would fail to provide "a view of life . . . durable beyond one or two generations." The reasons for this failure are not far to seek. In terms of actual operation, the Humanism of Eliot's day split irreparably into morality in the form of what Babbitt, no doubt thinking of Matthew Arnold's "best self," called the "inner check," a doctrine of selfcontrol by moral restraint, and simultaneously into an attempt, equally vital if futile, to provide, in Babbitt's words, "an enthusiasm"—an infusing or eliciting of feeling and emotion which "man" naturally "craves"— "that will lift him out of his merely rational self." But between an influx of amorphous "enthusiasm" and an ideally defined "inner check" there is neither connection nor commerce: enthusiasm and inner check appear as mindless adversaries engaged in an endless tug

of war, the former to inflate the ego with sporadic doses of a heady intoxicant, the latter to prick it back into place. Enthusiasm and inner check are shards of a broken whole, the fragmentary remains of Christian "theology in its last agonies." Isolated "morality" must come to appear "hideous" because it loses all touch with the "personal and real emotions . . . this morality [once] supported and into which it introduced a kind of order." Religion is always "in danger of petrifaction into mere ritual and habit," but lacking a central, articulated, and living framework of belief, it can never be "renewed and refreshed by" a mere "awakening of feeling" or by the unbiased scrutiny of "critical reason." Humanism is a sham because it denies the supernatural, because its elevation of reason denies the dispossession of the intellect, because it denies the primacy of the emotive, and because it denies the quest for adequation.

This same decay of dogma is apparent, not surprisingly, in "Baudelaire," but the reaction of Baudelaire's self is strikingly different: it engages in a drama of positive, if agonizing, search to overcome this dogmatic vacuum. Although Baudelaire experiences a growing recognition of the "fact that no human relations are adequate to human desires," there is an accompanying battle to transcend this obstacle, to overcome, as Eliot sees it, the typical nineteenth-century "disbelief in any further [supernatural] object for human desires than that which, being human, fails to satisfy them." With the swelling "content of [religious] feeling . . . constantly bursting the receptacle" of available dogma, Baudelaire's answer was neither to suppress such feelings, deal with them in isolation, or limit their importance through a rejection of belief, but rather to accept them, to welcome them, to crave them in the form of "Satanism": for such rejoicing in the emotion of evil, stripped of its inevitable trappings of flamboyance and theatricalism, "amounts to a dim intuition of a part . . . of Christianity," an abandonment of "theological innocence" and religious ignorance by "discovering Christianity for himself." And the part of Christianity which he investigated was the reality and meaning of "suffering," the reality of Original Sin that implies, even if always beyond the farthest hope of being reached, "the possibility of a positive state of beatitude." Recognizing, however imperfectly, the vast latitude of the religious sensibility, Baudelaire explored one small segment of that scale, but explored it with unmatched ferocity. Impressive for his thoroughgoing rejection of both the "naturalist" and "humanist" positions, Baudelaire is even more so for his positive recognition that his "business was not to practise Christianity"—that he could never bring himself to do— "but . . . what was much more important for his time . . . to assert its *necessity*." Beginning with a self-intuited emotional reality, Baudelaire finds his way, if just barely, to the threshold of an intellectual reality, to the assertion of a supernatural, adequate reality.

Critical Essay #4

This same logic, writ large, informs the spiritual allegory that Eliot traces in "The *Pensées* of Pascal." Pascal begins in "despair," a pocket of despair so deep and dark, a clear-cut emotion that "corresponds [so] exactly to the facts" of an unillumined, spiritually sere world, that it "cannot be dismissed as mental disease." Because Pascal was "a man of strong passions," his passions threatened, terrified, tyrannized so long as no "spiritual explanation"—no intellectual explanation adequate to his felt demon—"could be found." But then, by a process of logic that fills Eliot with awe, Pascal comes to recognize that "if certain emotional states . . . are inherently and by inspection known to be good, then the satisfactory explanation of the world"—the adequate explanation—"must be an explanation which will admit the 'reality' of these values." It follows, therefore, that if the "emotional" state of "what in the highest sense can be called 'saintliness' . . . [is] inherently and by inspection known to be good, then the satisfactory"— the adequate— "explanation of the world" must accommodate and give lucid expression to the existence of this value. The result of this spiritual conversion was the plan of the *Pensées*, a book which "was to have been a carefully constructed defence of Christianity, a true Apology and a kind of Grammar of Assent, setting forth the *reasons*. which will *convince the intellect*." To the right mind, Christianity is attractive precisely because of the difficulty it poses "to the disorderly mind and to the unruly passions"—the mind turning over in an agony of doubt, the passions bottled up in unending turbulence. In healthy religion we find, as Eliot would argue over and again, not merely emotion and belief twined in ideal concord. We find, in the first place, a means of attaining that "*intellectual* satisfaction" we crave and without which we "do not want [religion] at all." We find, in the second, a means of "disciplin[ing] and training . . . emotion" by making it significant, a means "only attainable through dogmatic religion." We find, finally, an object worthy of pursuit, even if unattainable, because of a permanence—a permanence of adequation—that answers to the heart's need:

I should say that it was at any rate essential for Religion that we should have the conception of an immutable object or Reality the knowledge of which shall be the final object of that will; and there can be no permanent reality if there is no permanent truth. I am of course quite ready to admit that human apprehension of truth varies, changes and perhaps develops, but that is a property of human imperfection rather than of truth. You cannot conceive of truth at all, the word has no meaning, except by conceiving of it as something permanent. And that is really assumed even by those who deny it. For you cannot even say it changes except in reference to something which does not change; the idea of change is impossible without the idea of permanence.

Composed roughly of thirteen essays, the second of the two broad categories into which Eliot's "appreciations of individual authors" comes to enclose themselves, focuses on individual works of art whose expressive powers, either through authorial perplexity or linguistic debility, are flawed by a practical, operative inability to transmute feeling into form. This category is itself, of necessity, divisible into two groups, depending on whether our momentary perspective or vantage point directs attention to objects large or small: those essays which explore at length the failure of language, of individual words

—the smallest building block of literature—either singly or collectively, to attach themselves to reality; and those essays, dealing with complete works of art, which center on what Eliot came to call the dilemma of "baffled emotion," works whose overall shortcoming Eliot described using the notion of the "objective correlative." On the topic of verbal insufficiency Eliot's most important commentary is to be located in "Swinburne as Poet." Eliot begins by cataloguing Swinburne's highly idiosyncratic style and peculiar verbal habits— the "adjectives [which] are practically blanks," the "slightly veiled and resonant abstractions" which are embedded in the large poem to no visible purpose, and become therefore "destitute of meaning," the words chosen "merely for the tinkle," the general absence of lines so singular and unique that they "can never be recaptured in other words," the penchant for "diffuseness" in place of "concentration," the sense of being seduced by "the most general word . . . because his [underlying] emotion . . . [is] never particular." Finding here a distinct pathology of language, Eliot is driven to set forth the theoretical premise that "language in a healthy state," an ideal condition unlike that to be found in Swinburne, "presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified." Ideally, words and their objects are inseparable; to exchange one word for another is, unwittingly, to transform reality, to alter it, to dismantle it. Swinburne scants objects, relishing the word in decadent isolation.

For Eliot, words never constitute a mere aperture onto an independent reality set over against them. Eliot assumes that "the name" of an object— be it physical, emotional, or a tangled complex of both—is never "merely a convenient means for denoting something which exists in complete independence of the name." For Eliot words cannot be merely *signs* for an independent, preexisting reality. On the contrary, words are *symbols* which cannot "be . . . arbitrarily amputated from the object . . . [they] symbolize," for "[n]o symbol . . . is ever a mere symbol, but is continuous with that which it symbolizes." Eliot goes further by stating that an "explicit recognition of an object as such" cannot actually occur "without the beginnings of speech," and as speech develops and evolves, growing in achieved nuance and complexity, an equal and corresponding evolution of reality takes place. In more drastic terms: "without words, no objects." One might successfully argue, as both Eliot and Merleau-Ponty appear to, that language is a higher form of experience, continuous with it while nurturing it into adequate form.

Critical Essay #5

"Language," adds Eliot, is always "a development of reality as well," and whenever "language shows a richness of content and intricacy of connections," these "are as well an enrichment of the reality grasped. For if a symbol were to be plucked from the soil of experience, it would become "a symbol that symbolize[s] nothing"— ceasing to "be a symbol at all" and becoming instead "another reality . . . [consisting of] certain [idle] marks on paper."

Granting that "Swinburne was . . . a master of words," for Eliot this particular mastery consists not in a finely honed skill which renders the object more precise, more concrete, more palpable, but rather in a massive talent for obscurantism—for shrouding the object in an impenetrable verbal haze. The distinctive quality possessed by Swinburne's words is the ability to radiate "suggestions" which scatter endlessly in all directions while pinpointing nothing with "denotation." "If," as a result, "they suggest nothing, it is because they suggest too much;" Swinburne fell prey to the illegitimate—because autonomous—blandishments of suggestive language, its associative richness leading to irresponsibility, its profusion of possible meanings which collectively mean nothing; it was "the word that [gave] him the thrill," laments Eliot, "not the object. When you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne, you find always that the object was not there—only the word."

Eliot's judgment of Swinburne comes from his conviction that Swinburne has abandoned pursuit of experience for escape to an aerie from which the real world has been banished: "human feelings . . . in Swinburne's case do not exist." His "morbidity" is not of feeling—these are nowhere to be found—but of "language." For Swinburne the "object"— the felt object toward which adequation proceeds— "has ceased to exist," with the consequence that "meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning," and "language, uprooted, had adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment." Only a "man of genius"—though the context transforms the term into a blatant misnomer— "could dwell so exclusively and consistently among words as Swinburne." This genius manifests itself in that extraordinary ability of "so little material" to "release such an amazing number of words," all of which attempt to amplify and increase "the vague associations" they are capable of eliciting, without ever becoming anchored in a real "emotion" that is "particular," without ever being "focused." Like the dream that fails to sustain its reality upon awakening, Swinburne's work possesses an air of dreamlike deception; like a dream, his work seems to hover tantalizingly on the brink of important meaning without ever attaining it, without ever trembling into adequate form. This is Eliot's meaning when he says that Swinburne's statements seem to counterfeit "tremendous statement[s], like statements made in our dreams." In Swinburne's work the quest for adequation becomes irrelevant, since his world "does not depend upon some other world which it simulates; it has the necessary completeness and self-sufficiency for justi- fication and permanence." Perfection for Swinburne is the perfection of irrelevance, for ultimately the kind of "language which is . . . important" is language which has embarked on the task of adequation, language

that finds itself "struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects" of the real.

With some slight variation the same charge is made in such essays as "Philip Massinger," "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," "Euripedes and Professor Murray," and, in more extreme form, in "Four Elizabethan Dramatists." Massinger, for example, is viewed as a poet whose "feeling for language," whose sheer lust for things verbal, has "outstripped his feeling for things; . . . his eye and his vocabulary were not in co-operation." In Senecan drama, "the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it," unlike the Greek drama or the drama of Shakespeare, where "[b]ehind the drama of words is the drama of action . . . and the particular emotion." In them, "[t]he phrase, beautiful as it may be, stands for a greater beauty still." In his acid, frontal attack on John Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripides' *Medea* from the Greek, Eliot accuses Murray of a fundamental disregard for language which betrays him into the sloppiness of employing "two words where the Greek language requires one, and where the English language will provide him with one," and of "stretch[ing] . . . Greek brevity to fit the loose frame of William Morris, and . . . the fluid haze of Swinburne." The problem also imbues "Four Elizabethan Dramatists," where the devaluation of words is compounded and exacerbated by a parallel loss of artistic conventions—convention defined as any "selection or structure or distortion in subject matter or technique" which results in "form or rhythm [being] imposed upon the world of action." The outcome is a loss of conventional "form[s]" capable of "arrest[ing] . . . the flow of spirit at any particular point before it expands and ends its course in the desert of exact likeness to . . . reality. . ." Here the desert of reality refers to the impoverished, circumscribed territory of the individual ego, cut off from the depths and heights of the emotional reality which lies outside its own narrow pale; since a lack of conventions or forms exists to describe this alien richness, this other existence becomes a reproach to the artist, taunting him with his own impotence. When conventions do exist, an impoverishment of language may render literature improbable; but when the conventions themselves are lost, literature becomes impossible, since conventions are the norms of reality which mediate our existence and make possible art in the first place.

In only two essays, "Marie Lloyd" and "Wilkie Collins and Dickens," does Eliot discern some slight grounds for optimism. Of Marie Lloyd, the renowned music hall artist, Eliot writes that there resided in "her smallest gesture"—her singular, theatrical vocabulary—a "perfect expressiveness" for what she felt; in consequence, "no other comedian succeeded so well in giving expression to the [emotive] life of . . . [her] audience . . . the soul of the people." In the other case, that of Wilkie Collins and Dickens, Eliot seeks to draw a distinction between "pure melodrama," that form of art where we "accept an improbability"—a situation incapable of affording intellectual satisfaction— "for the sake of seeing the thrilling situation"—a climactic surge of raw emotion untethered to intellectual meaning—as opposed to a higher art where, instead of accepting melodramatic "coincidence, set without shame or pretence," we find "fate . . . which merges into character," and "the melodramatic— the accidental—becomes . . . the dramatic—the fatal." After the momentary thrill of the melodramatic we demand a return to a higher art based on a harmonious intellectual scheme adequate not simply to the eliciting of emotions but to rendering them significant in an integrated, organic whole.

Critical Essay #6

But Eliot's most compelling attention, as manifested in the turns, twists, and responses of his argument, is paid to that group of essays dealing with whole works of art in which the quest for adequation is mysteriously blocked, in which the endeavor to express "emotion" is "baffled." No "correlative" in the "objective" world of language and form can be found for the unarticulated feelings which underlie such works. In several of these essays, Eliot turns to a mode of argument that hinges on comparison and contrast, on mulling over the latent assets and hidden defects of two works set in juxtaposition or in weighing the comparative merits of two figures placed side by side, and watching as the scale balances, first this way, then that, on the point of an imaginary fulcrum.

Of those essays where a single figure alone is scrutinized, the case of Tennyson is both instructive and typical. Despite Tennyson's undisputed diversity of lyric form, Eliot delivers himself of a virtually formulaic summary of Tennyson's plight. His tragedy resides in the fact that his "real feelings . . . profound and tumultuous as they are, never arrive at expression," because of a paradoxical failure, despite their powerful intensity and Tennyson's own insistent poetic experimentation, to find a form adequate to their pent-up force, a form that would transform melancholia into meaning. Tennyson's long-harbored and long-submerged "emotional intensity and violence . . . emotion so deeply suppressed, even from himself, as to tend rather towards the blackest melancholia than towards dramatic action" could ultimately achieve "no . . . clear purgation." Tennyson committed errors which were grave to the degree that they thwarted adequation—"fundamental error[s in the choice] of form." A closely parallel case is Cyril Tourneur. The emotions which rise to the surface in *The Revenger's Tragedy* — "cynicism," "loathing and disgust of humanity" are held by Eliot to be "immature in the respect that they exceed the [dramatic] object," they overwhelm the confines of the play because in the end the play proves a fundamentally inadequate vehicle for their full expression. Indeed, Eliot concludes that any "objective equivalents" for such emotions could be found only in "characters practising the grossest vices; characters which seem merely to be specters projected from the poet's inner world of nightmare, some horror beyond words."

The four essays which pivot on comparison and contrast— "Francis Herbert Bradley" (to whom John Ruskin is unfavorably compared); "Lancelot Andrewes" (who is applauded at the expense of John Donne); and "Hamlet and His Problems" which must be read in immediate conjunction with the essay on "Ben Jonson"—widen this circle of argument but scarcely alter the relentless flow of Eliot's thought. They comprise a brilliant triad whose purpose is to advance, augment, and amplify Eliot's argument. Bradley and Ruskin furnish a useful point of departure. The prose flights of Bradley, in which intellectual toil "is perfectly welded with the matter" to produce his "great gift of style," are the issue of a man whose "pleasure was the singular one of thinking." It is a poignant irony that Bradley's own underlying philosophic pessimism toward adequation is couched in a style which proves supremely adequate to its embodied matter. In the case of Ruskin, on the other hand, "[o]ne feels that the emotional . . . intensity . . . is partly a deflection of something that was *baffled* in life, whereas Bradley, like Newman,

is directly and wholly that which he is." And this terse analysis points back to the comparison of Donne with Andrewes in the previous year to which, though less volubly expansive, it is the logical successor. The "emotion" found in Andrewes's sermons "is purely contemplative" because it issues solely from a selfabsorbing contemplation of an adequate object— the careful elucidation of the essential dogma of the Incarnation.

Having found an adequate object allows both for the harmonious absorption of feeling into object, and for the triumphant denotation of feeling by object, a reciprocal, self-enhancing process in which form renders feeling adequate and feeling renders form meaningful. The entirety of Andrewes's prose sermons is made "adequate"—and here Eliot is at pains to underscore his point—only by means of "his emotions [being] wholly contained in and explained by the object. But with Donne, there is always the something else, the 'baffling'" swarm of feelings which remains isolate, objectless. Donne is perpetually engaged in searching for "an object which shall be adequate to his feelings," whereas "Andrewes is wholly absorbed in the object and therefore responds with the adequate emotion." In Donne there is discoverable a little of the nervous ascent and descent of "the religious spellbinder, the flesh-creeper, the sorcerer of emotional orgy," ready to play to a rapt audience, to whip up and indulge quivering and taut emotions. But this theatrical bent, this rhetorical ability is purchased at the price of "spiritual discipline," in that it prevents and is itself the offspring of some obstacle that hinders his "experience [from being] . . . perfectly controlled," perfectly ordered, made perfectly meaningful by the attainment of a satisfactory object. In consequence, there hovers about the edges of Donne's poetry and sermons some taint of the "incommunicable," feeling which is at once "the vague and unformed," and "experience" which, because imperfectly realized and therefore imperfectly understood, "is not perfectly controlled." No such taint darkens the pages of Andrewes, whose overspreading mastery is everywhere grounded in an achieved harmony of "[i]ntellect and sensibility," a harmonious perfection, unshadowed by tenuity or hesitation, of adequation. Indeed, the reader becomes the witness to this unfolding drama. He follows "the movement of . . . [Andrewes's] thought" as he "takes a word and derives the world from it: squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning," until this "examination of words" and meanings which can be wrung from them terminates "in the ecstasy of [intellectual and emotional] assent."

By the time we reach Eliot's famous dyad of essays about "baffled emotion"— "Hamlet and His Problems" and "Ben Jonson"—we are fully habituated to his speculative and generalizing terms, to the origins and central concerns of his argument. Perhaps this allows us better to perceive the imperfections beneath this dyad's notoriety, its failure to formulate an all-embracing statement whose hardsurfaced, intellectual, abstract tone would suffice to stand alone, a formula whose a priori, scientific elegance and inescapable determinism would, once and for all, interpose itself between Eliot and the dilemma of adequation.

Eliot begins his discussion of *Hamlet* by noting that in a wholly successful work of art,

The artistic "inevitability" lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an

emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear. . . *Hamlet* . . . is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art.

To the extent that *Hamlet* remains a play about an unrecoverable, unfathomable emotion, unlike the lucidly defined emotional motivations animating Shakespeare's other tragedies— "the *suspicion* of Othello, the *infatuation* of Antony, or the *pride* of Coriolanus"—our inspection of its shortcomings must commence with the "disgust . . . occasioned [in Hamlet] by his mother," while recognizing at the same time "that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelopes and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action." There is recognizable here an insidious overlapping of art and artist in which the dilemma of Hamlet and that of his creator are seen to join and become one: "Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem." Shakespeare himself had sounded the theme of the scourge of baffled emotion as early as *Titus Andronicus*, his first tragedy: "Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopp'd,/ Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is." Thus far Eliot's analysis is beyond reproach; but then, in the face of this dilemma of baffled emotion, Eliot, with a striking lack of elaboration in an essay of barely six pages, proceeds to erect a massive theory.

"The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art," says Eliot, "is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." The first clause of this ill-begotten formulation merely repeats that emotion must attain to the nobility of form to find expression and achieve meaning. Eliot then engrafts a second formula, bedecked with scientific ostentation, that is both contradictory to the sense of his initial premise and erroneous in its own right. He posits nothing less than the existence of a fixed hierarchy of emotions whose existence would be reflected and confirmed by a corresponding hierarchy of "formula[s] . . . for [each] . . . *particular* emotion," such that when a particular formula—a word, a phrase, a situation, a chain of events, an adequate vehicle of whatever description—is supplied, the emotion is automatically elicited. This latter formulation rings with automatism, and is steeped in the logic of stimulus and response. It comes across as wholly invalid in a universe of process, and untrue to the underlying drift of Eliot's thought as we have followed it thus far.

Critical Essay #7

For if such a project of fitting together hierarchies of emotion and adequate vehicles of form could be undertaken and achieved once and for all, adequation would cease to be a dilemma and the very task and endeavor of art— "the fight to recover what has been lost/And found and lost again and again" would at a stroke be subverted, indeed disappear forever. In the midst of a cosmos in process, as Eliot sadly concludes elsewhere, the attainment of such final certitude, either in life or art, is impossible. . .

Source: Alan Weinblatt, "Adequation as Myth in the Design of *Selected Essays*," in *T. S. Eliot and the Myth of Adequation*, UMI Research Press, 1984, pp. 15-36.

Critical Essay #8

In the following review, Quennel comments on Eliot's lack of ornamentation in Selected Essays and asserts that "the austerity of his professional attitude commands respect."

Mr. Eliot's volume of *Selected Essays*, just now published as he leaves us for America, represents in four hundred and fifty pages fifteen successive years of work. Here are essays from the early *Sacred Wood*, which first made its appearance in 1920; here, too, is a large part of *For Lancelot Andrewes*. The brilliant trilogy, entitled *Homage to John Dryden,* re-emerges next to the little book on Dante. *Thoughts after Lambeth* also recur. Two essays reproving Professor Babbitt, and generally setting about the neo-Humanists, are neighboured by a brief encomium on Marie Lloyd. A sympathetic portrait of Charles Whibley brings this various procession to a close.

The last choice was particularly apt. Mr. Eliot ends the survey of his own criticism by a study of a very different type of critic, precisely—even dramatically— opposed to himself. All that Whibley was not, Eliot is. All the qualities that the older critic possessed —and the modern writer is not behindhand in appreciation; he pays a generous tribute to Whibley's talents—are qualities he himself has never displayed. How far this abstention has been deliberate is a problem both fascinating and hard to solve. Whibley was a 'man of the world' in literature. I do not suggest that Mr. Eliot's critical work shows any lack of worldly knowledge, but his knowledge is of a specialised and rarified kind, accumulated by a special sort of experience. He is analytical rather than discursive. It is the peculiar strength of such critics as Charles Whibley that the enthusiasm they have derived from their private reading should be reflected on the surface of their critical style, and that they should charm us by a warmth of reflected enjoyment. Pleasure is made the basis of understanding, while analysis provides a subsidiary means of approach.

Enjoy, begs the critic, as I enjoy! True, every critic worth the title must have appreciated before he can expound; but then appreciation may assume conflicting guises. Whibley's appreciation of English literature was that of a cultivated and scholarly man of the world, an epicurean in the purest and oldest sense, *honnête homme*, like Saint Evremond or Sir William Temple. His prose has a Cyrenaic smoothness; and Mr. Eliot practises literature as a form of asceticism. Though we read his critical work for our own pleasure, we can't help feeling that it was often written from a sense of duty.

Not that he seems to toil against the grain. No reader of *Homage to John Dryden* and the Elizabethan essays in *The Sacred Wood* can doubt that he is capable of deep enjoyment and thinks pedagogy a poor substitute for true delight. He has said as much himself in the former study. My point is that, since puritan and epicure are both preoccupied in the last resort by the pursuit of happiness, Mr. Eliot has chosen the puritanical method. He analyses in order that we may enjoy; he sacrifices immediate charm to ultimate clarity.

And so one feature distinguishes all his criticism—an avoidance, carried to strict lengths, of what he considers vain and superfluous ornament. Let the critic, he implies, remain a critic. He has expressed his distrust of the common type of writer whose critical efforts are a secondary form of creation, a consolation-prize in the race he has failed to win. Hence a marked absence of phrases and redundant imagery. He never starts a campaign with a display of fireworks, never marches around a citadel to the blast of trumpets. It has become, one feels, a rigid code of honour to observe the courtesy of a scientific siege.

These preferences must be accepted by his readers: few phrases, no brilliant and lively discursions, a prose style intentionally cold and colourless which throws his subject into clear if chilly relief—a style, in short, consistently selfeffacing. It is an impersonal style, and when prejudice emerges—as it is apt to do, even here, from time to time—and he speaks of the Arch-Fiend in *Paradise Lost* as 'Milton's curly-headed Byronic hero.' the effect is not infrequently a trifle awkward. Whether his rare phrases are awkward through want of interest, or whether he eschews them from lack of facility, we can only conjecture.

I mean facility of the pyrotechnic kind. At all events, they are unimportant in his critical essays where words for the sake of words seldom figure. Some writers begin by blindfolding us with verbal eloquence, lead us up a steep and difficult path, snatch off the bandage and show us the view. Eliot starts by removing the scales from our eyes. An operation for cataract is always painful; and many fellow critics confronted by an opening paragraph which states—oh, so simply and oh, so coldly! albeit with a certain underlying benevolence—that if they admire *this* they are not likely to admire *that* and had much better return to their false gods, have been known to snort indignantly in the surgeon's face and argue that they prefer their original dimness.

Mr. F.L. Lucas is one of these. Unfortunately, whereas critics of the type of Whibley are as uncommon as critics of the type of Eliot, Mr. Lucas belongs to a large school. He is the literary, or pseudo, 'man of the world,' who enjoys tremendously writing about literature—we men of the world know what is good! —but, although his cheerful enthusiasm is sometimes infectious, it never crystallises in a distinct point of view.

And a distinct point of view Eliot has. Mr. Lucas once arrayed against the critic some of his more startling literary judgments—that *Hamlet* is unsuccessful as a work of art, that Crashaw is a finer poet than Shelley—and asked us to draw our own conclusions. Well, we don't go to a critic for absolute truth; that is to say, we can't measure a critic's usefulness by totting up a balance-sheet of right and wrong. Literary excellence is comparative at the best of times; and, whatever may be our opinion of Crashaw's merits —and he had some merits which to Shelley were quite unknown—there is little doubt that, as expressed by Mr. Eliot, the contrast was provocative and stimulating.

The opinion was at least consistent with his attitude. To appreciate Mr. Eliot at his critical worth, it is not necessary to accept his every paragraph or regard him as the Rhadamanthus of Russell Square. One may regret, for example, his sponsorship of Lancelot Andrewes and consider that the Bishop's quaintly allusive pietism is inferior to

the baroque eloquence of John Donne. One may even hold aloof from Mother Church. . . . The fact remains that, granted his point of view, Mr. Eliot cannot be charged with inconsistency. A cenobite in the waterless landscape of *The Waste Land*, he has now adapted himself to a more regular monastic life.

Objections, of course, can be raised. We are accustomed to envisage the perfect critic as being suspended in the void—preferably in the void of mild agnosticism—who surveys the world with disabused detachment. We are offended by any touch of *parti pris*. True, all criticism enshrines some prejudice; but we hate to think that such prejudice as we may encounter is imposed on us by an orthodox religious system. Mr. Eliot is now essentially orthodox. As long as the point of view, to which I have referred, continues to assimilate these beliefs—they are foreshadowed even in *The Waste Land* it seems impertinent to quarrel with private convictions. Puritanism is a dominant mode in English literature, and Mr. Eliot is a puritan of American ancestry.

It is a Puritan intelligence he brings to bear. Critics naturally less ascetic have proved less sensitive to the beauties of language and added less to our understanding of its spell. Mr. Eliot writes as a poet but not poetically. Looking through this volume of *Selected Essays*, it is very hard to find a chapter or a single line in which the desire to make an effect or round a paragraph predominates over a Spartan sense of fitness. No metaphor, flown with syllabic intoxication, breaks into the strenuous hush of the critic's dissecting-room.

There he labours, and on subjects very diverse. Mr. Eliot is not temperamentally expansive, but his interests are sympathetic and range wide. He treats of Swinburne as sensibly as of Andrew Marvell, of Blake, Jonson, Baudelaire and many others, always with an experienced and odd touch like an artist investigating a foreign studio. It is perhaps one of his greatest critical virtues that he should have done his best to redeem modern criticism from its tendency to slovenly picturesqueness. We may agree with him, or violently disagree. The austerity of his professional attitude commands respect.

Source: Peter Quennel, "T. S. Eliot the Critic," in *New Statesman*, No. 4, October 1, 1932, pp. 377-78.

Critical Essay #9

In the following review, Frank recommends reading Selected Essays as a means of seeing Eliot "as a whole."

The collected essays of Mr. Eliot provide a portrait of a mind that for the past twelve years has prominently played on the American literary scene. The volume contains theoretical chapters from *The Sacred Wood* eleven papers on the Elizabethan dramatists, the entire brochure on Dante, essays on the Metaphysical Poets and on Dryden, Blake, Baudelaire, Swinburne. It represents Mr. Eliot's social and theological position in the studies of Lancelot Andrewes, in *Thoughts After Lambeth*, and in the two essays on Babbitt et al., which did so much more to discomfit the new humanists than the lunges of their foes. And finally, it reveals the more casual man—delightfully—on topics like poetry in drama, Wilkie Collins, Dickens and Marie Lloyd. The book portrays a sensitive, finely endowed person. Itself an accumulation of comments on many matters, it suggests a review of like nature: one is tempted to pass from page to page detailing, comparing, dissenting. But the place of Mr. Eliot as a literary influence in our time, and the cultural crisis of our time, make this method inadvisable. It is important to employ the book as a means for seeing the man whole; and, having done so, to deduce a measure of his values as a leader and thereby a measure of the time which took him as a leader.

The first revelation is of a man with an exquisite, almost infallible, taste for the stuffs of literary art. Whether he touches a line of Dante or of Swinburne, a melodrama of Cyril Tourneur or of Wilkie Collins, the prosody of Baudelaire or of Blake, Mr. Eliot evinces an esthetic delight which implies true contact with his subject. This first trait is particularly distinguished in an age in which the field of literary discussion has been almost monopolized by writers who may know something of baseball or economics but who ignore the nature of literary art. The second trait of Mr. Eliot, not less pervasive but more subtly entextured in his book, his moral sense; and this, coupled with his first, is even more rare. We have had plenty of moralists— More, Mencken, Lewisohn, are examples —writing on literature and totally insensitive to literary esthetics; we have had a few 'estheticians' disclaiming the moral sense (as if esthetic form were some kind of insubstantial absolute and not an organic configuration of ordinary human experience and motive), and therefore writing with even worse futility on books. When Mr. Eliot compares lines in Massinger and Shakespeare, contrasts tropes in Dryden and Milton, draws a prosodic sequence from Donne to Shelley, he reveals, in his taste and judgement, the moral integer: he knows the *human nature* of esthetics. This moral sense is organic in the man; it is no mere acceptance of rules, it is not moralistic. Being the permeation, within his specific literary experience, of his general view of life, the moral quality in Mr. Eliot is religious. Everywhere, although he may be discussing merely a choice of verbs in Middleton. he reveals a general and definite attitude toward existence taken as a whole: and this attitude, when logically formed, becomes religion.

T.S. Eliot, then, is portrayed by this book as a man with a sense of the whole, with a conviction of his place in the whole, as a man engaged in an activity (literature) for

which he is fitted and to which he gives his entire equipment. Such a crystallization comes close to what Nietzsche meant by a cultural act; and in an epoch whose literary critics have been insensitive and incompetent men, it makes Mr. Eliot an exceedingly welcome figure. If, however, we turn from those contemporaries in contrast with whose nullity he looms, and measure him rather by his own subjects and by the literary exigencies of our epoch, Mr. Eliot dwindles. No single major essay in this book, for instance, can be said to be organic either as a presentation of its subject or as a literary essay. Consider the 'Dante' in whose study he is at his best: every observation is exact, many a phrase stands forth a luminous gem; but the observations merely mount arithmetically into so many pages of running comment. Dante and his work are never objectified, never dimensionally re-created either in the world of Dante or in the world of T.S. Eliot. Or consider the justly admired pages on the Elizabethans: they contain glimpses both precise and profound into the art of the theatre, into the poets and their world. But none of the plays, none of the dramatists, is made to stand whole, either in the epoch, in the drama, or in some total conception of the critic.

If, then, as I have stated, there is wholeness in Mr. Eliot, we are led to question what kind of wholeness it must be that can focus so superbly on details in a dozen poets and a dozen epochs, and yet fail to envelop any one of them. It is true that this failure is not always complete. In the 'Baudelaire,' for instance, or the 'Swinburne,' we obtain a kind of two-dimensional cross section, built from the prosodic study, which we can place for ourselves in the organic milieu of the nineteenth century. But in the essays on the more cosmic men there are no dimensions beyond mere points of light. And in the studies of dynamic but little-discussed figures, the failure is disastrous. The pages on Bradley, for example, proceed without the faintest evocation of the two ideological worlds— Hegelianism and English individualism— which Bradley sought to synthesize. The chapter on Lancelot Andrewes is a mere ringing of personal responses to the old priest's music, which become sentimental and pretentious, since there is no effort to place this music in the symphony of Roman Catholic, Jewish and Arabic exegesis, from which it was never truly independent.

T.S. Eliot, it becomes plain, is a man of integrity in the real sense of the word; but his vision is such that it can never hold more than details; and his energy is too weak to give organic form either to his subjects or to his essays. Unlike most of his fellows, who suffer in chaos, he lives in a 'universe.' But this 'universe' of Mr. Eliot's is evidently small and minor. It is achieved by huge and deliberate exclusions. It scarcely contacts with the modern world— the world whose radical transformations in physics, psychology and economics have dissolved all the old formal values. Nor does it really embrace the past worlds with which Mr. Eliot is so sympathetic: Dantean Europe or Jacobean England. This failure of mastery even on Mr. Eliot's chosen ground is revealing. No one can understand a living past who is not actively engaged in the living present. For any past age is an integer in the creating of today, and only by conscious sharing of this creation can the past, as part of it, be understood. Fundamentally, Mr. Eliot's subjective love of the Anglo-Catholic tradition leaves him as remote from what England really was as his distaste for modern problems leaves him remote from us—and for the same reason.

That reason brings us to the heart of our portrait. Any living world, whether it be Seneca's or Shakespeare's or our own, in so far as it lives, is dynamic; and Mr. Eliot's world is static. Wherefore, in confrontation with a chaos of dynamic forces like our modern era, a chaos which our dynamic will must meet, grapple with, and mold, Mr. Eliot can only ignore; and in confrontation with dynamic worlds of the past, he can only rather sentimentally adore. His own static vision picks out details, re- flects them and variates them into a kind of series, like the stills of a cinema, whose total effect may be sensitive and delightful, but cannot be organic.

This same static quality explains Mr. Eliot's loyalty to a class and a class creed. A static universe does not evolve, cannot believe in evolving. It does, however, accumulate, and its 'additions' make a quantitative change—the one kind of change and of cultural contribution which Mr. Eliot admits (see his essays on 'Tradition, "Individual Talent' and 'The Function of Criticism'). In a static universe, trans- figuration and revelation, and the capacity for these, are all stratified in the past. And this is another way of saying that Mr. Eliot's spiritual experiences, from which issue his moral and esthetic taste, although they are real, have the form not of life, but of an inherited convention. Thus Mr. Eliot, with a religious sense, conceives of no religion except the orthodox Christian; with a tragic sense, conceives of man's struggle exclusively in the cant meanings of Original Sin; with a sense of the spirit's need of discipline and order—both in society and in the person—dreams of no method but that of a moneyed class ruling through church and state.

Are such views valid, in the sense of having a relationship with reality? Is there a position from which the universe is static; in which transfiguration and revelation are past; in which Good, Evil, and the given political and economic forms are absolute? The answer is Yes, in the sense that death, being real, is valid. The living world of the mind is as dynamic as the material world (they are one); there, too, the individual life must partake of the dynamism of the whole, and when it is severed from that dynamism we call it dead. The only difference is that in the world of the mind we do not commonly employ the term 'death'; we prefer to say conventional, dogmatic, static. Mr. Eliot's position is that of a man who has withdrawn from growth-in our meaning, withdrawn from life. *He* is static, his soul's transfiguration is past, whatever progress he conceives must be a mere consolidation of himself into forms already uttered. His intellectual, spiritual and poetic 'life' is a rationalization of this death deep within him.

We hold now, I believe, the key to T.S. Eliot. He is a man who has abdicated; but since he has been deeply sensitized to life, the articulation of his experience remains an exquisite, lingering echo. Such abdicated men have always existed, and have never been vital: even in periods of cultural stability (like that of Dante, for example), the cultural whole had constantly to be recreated by dynamic men. But in our age, where stability has foundered into chaos, and where the need for spiritual growth has become absolutely identified with the bare struggle for survival, the discrepancy between a man like Mr. Eliot and adequate leadership becomes enormous.

What we have really defined in our portrait of T.S. Eliot is a type of minor poet. He is in the tradition, neither of our major poets—Poe, Whitman, Melville—nor of the great

Victorians. He is close to a cultivated and popular figure like Thomas Gray; and his 'Waste Land' is a poem as good, and of the same nature, as the 'Elegy.' Gray also was a technical innovator with an immense appeal because he foreshadowed, unconsciously, what was to become the dominant appetite of Europe: closeness to nature. From the energy of this appetite, Titans were to evolve the method for absorbing and controlling nature. But in Gray, the motion took a reactionary form: a sentimental harking back to the values of Puritanism (and to the language of Milton). The analogy with *The Waste Land* is complete. Here, too, is technical innovation together with a vague foreshadowing of what is *now* the dominant need of the world: the need of an organic, a livable Whole in which all men and all man may function. This foreshadowed need gives to the poem its pathos, its unity and its importance. But, as in Gray, it is negatively stated by an evocation of a sentimental memory and by the use of old materials—in Mr. Eliot's case, more diffused and catholic, since no strong Milton stands immediately behind him.

The questions remain: why has Mr. Eliot been a leader and what does his leadership reveal about our literary generation? The questions are swiftly answered. Even in an age of confused standards, there is recognition of literary merit. Mr. Eliot's clarity, it is true, is achieved not by integrating the chaos that has bewildered us, but by withdrawal. Yet to the men whom the cultural dissolution has frightened and weakened (the majority of men), these limitations make him only more acceptable. A long time ago, I wrote of what I called 'the comfort of limit,' and explained its appeal to many types of mind lost in our modern chaos. Only athletic souls can face a world that has become, perhaps more than any other era, an overwhelmingly open and darkened future. The temptation to limit this world, either by rationalistically charting its future (a disguised reactionism) or by merely advocating its reform in an image of the past, is great and manifold.

All the dogmatisms of our day are really such 'limits'—such simplifications of the real. There is the dogmatism of science (the comfort of limiting reality and its mastery to problems of mechanics and addition); there is the dogmatism of cynical despair (the comfort of giving up hope and therefore struggle); there is the dogmatism of a pseudo-Marxian dialectic (the comfort of explaining the human tragedy in terms solely of a simple, solvable class struggle). And, for the weakly poetic, there is the haven of an elegiac past, like Mr. Eliot's, in which great poets still sing and sure priests thunder.

The one way of life that has no limit and affords no comfort is the way ahead—into the bitter and dark and bloody dawn of a new world, wherein mankind shall integrate without loss the stormy elements that make the chaos of our day, and its promise.

Source: Waldo Frank, "The 'Universe' of T. S. Eliot," in *New Republic*, No. 72, October 1932, pp. 294-95.

Topics for Further Study

Listen to some classical music by Igor Stravinsky and others, written between 1917 and 1932. Describe its form using the criteria of *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. How does Eliot's artistic theory apply to it? What do you think he would say about it? Then, listen to some music from the same time period by Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. Write a comparative review in Eliot's style, describing the artistic merits of the two types of music and how each fits into the tradition of Western music.

Some critics (most notably Anthony Julius in his book *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*) have accused Eliot of being anti-Semitic, and others have accused him of being a fascist. Research the history of this response to Eliot's work and his personal life and write an essay in which you discuss these theories and whether or not they are well founded. If these findings are true, do you think students should therefore not be reading Eliot's works?

Read Eliot's *Collected Poems*. How does his critical theory relate to his poetry, and how would he fare under his own standards?

Read one of the works that Eliot discusses at length in *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* and research other criticism on the work you choose. Does Eliot have a unique viewpoint? Do other critics follow a similar method of analysis? Do you agree with what Eliot says about the work?

Eliot discusses philosophy and theology at length, and both are extremely important to his critical theory. Do some reading of early twentiethcentury philosophers or theologians who discuss art at some point in their theories (F. H. Bradley, for example). What is the main philosophical trend of the time? How does Eliot fit into it?

Compare and Contrast

1590s: The British Empire is just beginning. With the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the seas are open to British trade and exploration, and British culture is showing the beginnings of racism towards future colonies.

1920s: The British Empire is still strong, and Britain is still pervaded by imperialist thinking that emphasizes the superiority of British culture.

Today: The British Empire has crumbled, and the British public is far more skeptical of notions of cultural superiority.

1590s: Although Elizabeth I shows a greater degree of religious tolerance than the previous ruler, all British subjects are required to be members of the Church of England. In practice, a significant number of Puritans and Catholics retain their own beliefs. Atheism is taboo and very uncommon.

1920s: The Church of England is building up to a crisis, with its authorities of very different minds about how to approach a developing lack of religious conviction in the British public.

Today: Some bishops in the Church of England are acknowledged atheists. Although much of the British public remains devout, the general population has become significantly less religious in the past eighty years.

1590s: English writing is flowering, but the respected literary canon is composed almost entirely of male, ancient Greek and Roman writers.

1920s: Classical English literature has a fairly clear, firm, and ancient tradition. Feminist thought is beginning to be influential, but the general public does not often question the white-maledominated literary canon.

Today: English literature is pervaded by a multiplicity of viewpoints. Critics frequently condemn the white-male-oriented tradition and attempt to draw attention to undervalued minority writers.

1590s: The most popular forms of art are plays, which anyone can attend, and lyric poetry, which is beginning to spread around England because of the invention of the printing press.

1920s: Although poetry is becoming more important because of the revolution in style, popular forms of art are not so radically different from Victorian times, and it is the era of the novel.

Today: Together with popular music, motion pictures (especially those from America) have exploded as one of the most popular art forms in England.

What Do I Read Next?

The Divine Comedy (1321), by Dante Alighieri, describes the poet's descent into hell and eventual rise through purgatory to heaven. Although it is full of complex symbols and allusions, it is an extremely readable and exciting poem, not to mention its unequalled formal beauty.

Eliot's *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (1963) contains the definitive collection of the author's best poetry. It provides a superb overview of his long and varied poetic efforts, with some of the most important poems of the century.

W. H. Auden's *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (1962) contains a helpful alternative view to Eliot's literary philosophy. A collection of critical essays by a poet with a sophisticated critical eye, Auden's work combines a personal touch with a great breadth of observation.

The Riverside Shakespeare (1974) is one of the best editions of Shakespeare's collected works. Alternatively, when beginning to explore Shakespeare's plays, it may be more economical to use the respected individual editions from Oxford University Press.

Further Study

Bradbury, Malcolm, and James McFarlane, Modernism: 1890-1930, Viking Press, 1991.

Bradbury and McFarlane provide an insightful overview of the modernist period, and their book is a clear and readable way to begin understanding Eliot's era.

Gordon, Lyndall, *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*, Vintage, 1998.

Gordon provides an interesting and comprehensive biography of Eliot that includes a way to think about his poetry and prose.

Martin, Graham, *Eliot in Perspective*, Macmillan and Co., 1970.

This collection of essays represents an important anthology of views about Eliot from a symposium shortly after his death. It provides a useful overview of the author's impact as perceived after his illustrious career came to an end.

Moody, David A., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

The variety of essays in this book provide a good overview of modern critical stances on Eliot's works. It is a good place to begin an in-depth analysis of various themes in *Selected Essays*.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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