

# 艾略特与英国浪漫主义传统



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张 剑 著

外语教学与研究出版社



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# Preface

My interest in T. S. Eliot backdated to my undergraduate years at University of Nanjing. It was in 1984 that I first encountered a volume entitled *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*. I was immediately attracted by "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*: the latter was already translated into Chinese. When I received the FCO award from the British Council in 1984, I decided to go to Britain to do a project on T. S. Eliot. However, it was when I arrived in Glasgow in October, 1985 that I realised, to my surprise, that an enormous amount of work was already done. The published items alone would fill a library.

Later, an eminent scholar asked me, after he got to know I was working on T. S. Eliot, "Is there still anything new to be done?" The question has been with me ever since that time. It is true that the archaeological work has almost been completed and the sources have almost been exhausted, but still I feel that previous criticism created new problems as it solved old ones. For example, Harold Bloom wrote in 1971, of a passage of "Ash-Wednesday," that it is "a simple, quite mechanical catalogue of clean Catholic contradictions, very good for playing a bead-game but not much as



imaginative meaning" (*The Ringers in the Tower* p200). And two years later, the editors of the *Oxford Anthology of English Literature* referred to Eliot and others as "the various fashionable modernists whose reputations are now rightly in rapid decline" (volume II p1279).

Such remarks are common among a certain group of critics, but their misjudgment is due not so much to personal antagonism as to a special critical procedure. These critics have invariably attempted to describe Eliot as a Romantic or post-Romantic. They have applied to him a set of standards derived from the study of Romantic poetry. And to yoke Eliot to the Romantic tradition seems a way to diminish his achievement too because, when regarded as a Romantic, Eliot is always found to be deficient or unable to match up to the High Romantics. He is always found to be a minor Romantic or a Romantic manqué. Thus a fair valuation of Eliot's achievement depends on a good understanding of his tradition.

The aim of this study is to re-trace Eliot's tradition and then to reevaluate his poetry. It attempts to do this through a special perspective. In "The Jolly Corner," a story which Eliot appreciated, Henry James described a man who went back to America, after years of life abroad, to visit his childhood home but who found himself unable to drive away the thought of what he might become if he had always stayed home. In *The Family Reunion*, Eliot also imagined Harry's return to Wishwood as an inevitable meeting with the other Harry who had stayed back and was never changed, as himself, by travel and experience. But the childhood home "will not be a very jolly corner". In "Burnt Norton," Eliot continues this meditation on the what-might-have-been, the "passage which [he] did not take" and the "door which [he] never opened". The idea of



returning to the cross-road and making a different choice always fascinated him.

In 1908, or thereabout, the direction of Eliot's intellectual development was determined when he chose to study Dante, Laforgue, Elizabethan dramatists, and the metaphysical poets. These, as we now know, constitute his tradition. In view of his fascination with the what-might-have-been, the alter ego, it will be interesting and, as I shall show, illuminating to examine the course which he did not take, to study his relation to the tradition he rejected, and to imagine the poet he might have been if he had made a different choice. Although only a "perpetual possibility . . . in the world of speculation", this alter ego is an interesting comparison to the poet Eliot finally became.

A study like this opens up new channels and takes one to untilled areas, which I shall leave to the text itself to demonstrate. However, like all students of Eliot, I am indebted to many critics who wrote on this subject in the last sixty years. The especially useful books have been listed in the bibliography. During the years of research which led to this book, I have received help and guidance from Professor Philip Hobsbaum. His great patience and stimulating supervision played a vital part in the completion of this study. I owe to Mr. Richard Cronin for help and advice at the early stage of my research. Thanks should also be extended to Robert Crawford for the opportunity to rehearse some of my views at the "T. S. Eliot Centenary Conference" (Glasgow 1988), to Professor Henry Wong for interest and practical help, to Bob Neil for lucid exposition of the basic concepts of Christianity, to Richard Mertens and Chankil Park for friendly and fruitful discussions, and to Tom Mitford for careful proof-reading. I would like to express the warmest thanks to Chen



Shizhen, to whom I dedicate this work, for her invaluable support during my years of research. Without her encouragement and practical help, it would be impossible to carry the work through to its end.



## Abbreviations

ASG	<i>After Strange Gods</i> (London 1934)
CPP	<i>Complete Poems and Plays</i> (London & Boston 1969)
EAM	<i>Essays Ancient and Modern</i> (London 1936)
FLA	<i>For Lancelot Andrewes</i> (London 1928)
ICS	<i>The Idea of a Christian Society</i> (London 1939)
OPP	<i>On Poetry and Poets</i> (London 1957)
SE	<i>Selected Essays</i> (London 1932)
SW	<i>The Sacred Wood</i> (London 1920)
TCC	<i>To Criticize the Critic</i> (London 1965)
UPUC	<i>The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism</i> (London 1933)



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# I . Eliot's Analysis of Romanticism

## I

A study of Eliot's relation with Romanticism may conveniently start with a discussion of his own view of Romanticism. The topic is so well-known now that there seems little left to say.<sup>1</sup> Yet the process by which Eliot arrived at this intellectual stance requires examination because it is vital for a good understanding of his tradition. It seems that Eliot's anti-Romanticism rose out of a strong dissatisfaction with the current state of literature and art. In 1914, just after he arrived in England, he wrote to Conrad Aiken that something had gone wrong with English letters and concluded that "it is a low time for poetry".<sup>2</sup> In 1918, he wrote to his cousin Eleanor Hinkley making more or less the same point: "Standards of good writing in English are deplorably low".<sup>3</sup>

Not just did Eliot declare his discontent, but he also sympathized with those who shared his discontent. Reviewing Stephen Leacock's *Essays and Literary Studies* for the *New Statesman* in 1916, he found behind the author's trans-Atlantic humour a positive and formidable point of view. "Mr. Leacock has exposed some of the essential faults of American education, some of the reasons for the insolvency of American literature".<sup>4</sup> To Eliot, what America suffered was the advanced stage of a disease which was beginning to threaten Europe. In a 1919 review of Frederick E. Pierce's *Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation*, he gave his



warm consent to the author's view that the Romantic age was "a period of intellectual chaos". "It leads us to speculate", he continued, "whether the age, as an age, can ever exert much influence upon any age to come; and it provokes the suspicion that our own age may be similarly chaotic and ineffectual".<sup>5</sup>

The problem which Eliot found with Georgian poetry and criticism seems to be emotionality and the lack of discipline. Of these problems he traced the cause to the previous century. "Romanticism stands for *excess* in any direction", he said in his 1916 Oxford University Extension Lectures on "Modern French Literature". "It splits up into two directions: escape from the world of fact, and devotion to brute fact. The two great currents of the nineteenth century—vague emotionality and the apotheosis of science (realism) alike spring from Rousseau".<sup>6</sup>

Then he outlined Rousseau's career as a "struggle against (1) *authority* in matters of religion, (2) *aristocracy* and *privilege* in government. His main tendencies were (1) exaltation of the *personal* and the *individual* above the *typical*, (2) emphasis upon *feeling* rather than *thought*, (3) humanitarianism: belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature, (4) depreciation of *form* in art, and glorification of *spontaneity*. His faults were (1) intense egotism, (2) insincerity".<sup>7</sup>

This criticism, as we now know, has a strong resemblance to the thought of Irving Babbitt, whose lectures on "Literary Criticism in France with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century" Eliot attended at Harvard in the year of 1909-1910. It was perhaps after attending this course, whose main argument was to be published in *Rousseau and Romanticism*, that Eliot understood Romanticism as individualism, personality, "inner voice", anarchy, and Protes-



tantism. It was also perhaps at this time that he formed the view of Rousseau as the "eternal source of mischief and inspiration".<sup>8</sup> Since Rousseau, Eliot wrote in 1918, "the flood of barbarism has left very few peaks [of literary achievement]. It is difficult to be civilized alone".<sup>9</sup>

Babbitt was also sensitive to the malaise of his time. In *Literature and the American College*, he exposed a bankruptcy of principle in American education and in general criticism. To him, the individualism and the moral-intellectual impressionism, which pervaded writings at the turn of the century, was a direct result of this bankruptcy of principle. "With the spread of impressionism," Babbitt wrote elsewhere, "literature has lost standards and discipline, and at the same time virility and seriousness; it has fallen into the hands of aesthetes and dilettantes, the last *effete* representatives of romanticism. . . ." <sup>10</sup>

Anti-Romanticism, in a sense, was a part of Eliot's upbringing. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, but of New England stock, he always considered himself a New-Englander in St. Louis.<sup>11</sup> The special Puritanical temperament of New-England writers is obvious in him. Calvinism and his family rules of self-denial and hard work were like commandments handed down by the Moses-like grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot.<sup>12</sup> With ideals like these, it would be hard for Eliot to swallow the emotional individualism and self-aggrandisement of the Romantic period. Summarizing Paul Elmer More's views published in *The Drift of Romanticism*, Eliot wrote in 1916:

The present age is a period of drift, license, and irresponsible emotionality. Since the time of Rousseau, men's attitude toward life has vacillated between two points of view which are



really complementary and which flourish in the same soil; on the one hand materialism and utilitarianism, tending toward brutality; on the other hand sentimentalism, humanitarianism. In art, these two tendencies find their expression in realism and romanticism; in refusing to refine upon Nature, or in refusing to handle it at all. In politics, the complementary tendencies are despotism and democracy. Both sides of the contrast — in art, in philosophy, in politics, in morals — are the expression of impatience against all restraint, against the unavoidable limitations of life and the necessary limitations of civilization, are expressions of belief in the undisciplined imagination and emotions.<sup>13</sup>

Circumstances also predisposed Eliot to Classicism rather than Romanticism. In 1914, Eliot arrived in England and met Pound, a fellow American poet who did not have a high opinion of the Romantic period. Through Pound, T. E. Hulme's *Speculations* exerted some influence on Eliot's intellectual development. Hulme, to an extent, confirmed Eliot's view of Romanticism and helped him to see more clearly than ever before that the classical point of view is "essentially a belief in Original Sin" and that "after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival".<sup>14</sup>

Classicism was a French ideal of this time. Through Babbitt, and perhaps also through Hulme, Charles Maurras's *Action Française* communicated its enthusiasm to Eliot. Maurras's classicism in every sense resembled that of Babbitt and More: it consists of an "intellectual conservatism" and a "distrust in the undisciplined human nature." Maurras exerted his influence chiefly in French politics, in his heroic attempt to restore the French monarch, but he did not lack literary interest. Years later Eliot



said, "The influence of Babbitt (with an infusion later of T. E. Hulme and of the more literary essays of Maurras) is apparent in my recurrent theme of Classicism versus Romanticism".<sup>15</sup>

Eliot's anti-Romanticism flourished in *The Sacred Wood*, his first book of literary criticism, in which he asserted in a stark statement: "There may be a good deal to be said for Romanticism in life, there is no place for it in letters".<sup>16</sup> Given these views it is not hard to understand the excitement with which he welcomed the following statement from Arnold:

The English poetry of the first quarter of this century [meaning the nineteenth], with plenty of energy, plenty of creative force, did not know enough. This makes Byron so empty of matter, Shelley so incoherent, Wordsworth even, profound as he is, yet so wanting in completeness and variety.<sup>17</sup>

## II

"The only cure for Romanticism", Eliot said, "is to analyse it".<sup>18</sup> And, different from that of others, his analysis concentrates on literature and is conducted within a historical compass. The Romantic period is judged typically in comparison and contrast with other periods, ie, his ideal periods. His criticism of Romanticism is accompanied with a passionate admiration for the Elizabethan-Jacobean age.

The comparative study of English versification at various periods is a large tract of unwritten history. To make a study of blank verse alone would be to elicit some curious conclusions. It would show, I believe, that blank verse within Shakespeare's lifetime, was more highly developed, that it became



a vehicle of more varied and more intense feeling than it has ever conveyed since; and that after the erection of the Chinese Wall of Milton, blank verse has suffered not only arrest but retrogression. That the blank verse of Tennyson, for example, a consummate master of this form in certain applications, is cruder ( *not* "rougher" or less perfect in technique) than that of half a dozen contemporaries of Shakespeare; cruder, because less capable of expressing complicated, subtle, and surprising emotions.<sup>19</sup>

Eliot's account of the literary history starts with the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. This is a period which he, after Grierson, was determined to champion, presenting his effort as the discovery of a lost tradition. According to him, the lesser Elizabethan dramatists and the metaphysical poets of the following age, though not usually regarded as major poets, show the kind of sureness and maturity which characterize great poets. Donne's "A Valediction", which has since become a classic, offers an example:

On a round ball  
A workeman that hath copies by, can lay  
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,  
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,  
So doth each teare,  
Which thee doth weare,  
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,  
Till thy tears mixt with mine doe overflow  
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

The bold metaphor, the balance, the irony and the sureness are the qualities Eliot admired — qualities which earned for such poems the name of metaphysical poetry. All these are again found in Lord



Herbert's "Ode":

So when from hence we shall be gone,  
And be no more, nor you, nor I,  
As one another's mystery,  
Each shall be both, yet both but one.

This said, in her up-lifted face,  
Her eyes, which did that beauty crown,  
Were like two starrs, that having faln down,  
Look up again to find their place:

While such a moveless silent peace  
Did seize on their becalmed sense,  
One would have thought some influence  
Their ravished spirits did possess.

The same excellence is again found in Marvell who, according to Eliot, often mixes seriousness with levity:<sup>20</sup>

Let us roll all our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball,  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife,  
Thorough the iron gates of life.

It is with great admiration and delight that Eliot presented these passages before his readers, with all the freshness of a new discovery. What earned his deepest respect is the special sensibility: the ability to make "direct sensuous apprehension of thought". The examples show that their authors' thought was felt "as immediately as the odour of a rose". In Donne, especially, a thought was an experience and it modified his sensibility; and in Herbert and Marvell, there was a "recreation of thought into feeling", an incorporation of



erudition into sensibility.<sup>21</sup>

Eliot considered this period to be the highest development of English poetry, “which we have perhaps never equalled”. Then, a little later, poetry began to slip down a slope. And Massinger was the harbinger of the deterioration:

Massinger’s feeling for language had outstripped his feeling for things; that his eye and his vocabulary were not in co-operation... And, indeed, with the end of Chapman, Middleton, Webster, Tourneur, Donne, we end a period when the intellect was immediately at the tips of the senses. Sensation became word and word was sensation. The next period is the period of Milton (though still with a Marvell in it); and this period is initiated by Massinger.<sup>22</sup>

The subsequent ages saw a different but inferior kind of poetry. And Eliot expressed the difference by the following theory:

The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; ... In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden.<sup>23</sup>

What happened was, Eliot argued, that the language became more refined but the feeling more crude. The Romantic poets were under the influence of Milton and they all exhibited the same defects as Milton: bombastic diction, abstract thought, and crude feeling. “They thought and felt by fits, unbalanced”. The attempts which