The Review of English Studies, 2025, Vol. **00**, No. 0, 1–17
https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgaf071
Advance access publication 15 October 2025
Article

Editorializing Englishness: T. S. Eliot, John Middleton Murry, and Interwar National Identity

Zoe Rucker

T. S. Eliot's interwar literary review, *The Criterion*, served as his platform for engaging in various streams of English and European cultural-political discourse for 17 years, bringing him unprecedented critical prestige and influence. However, Eliot was not the only opportunistic individual in post-war literary London to vie for such power. The Classicism-Romanticism debate which unfolded between Eliot, as editor of *The Criterion*, and the editor of *The Adelphi*, John Middleton Murry, is recognized as one of the most important intellectual exchanges in the development of modernist literary criticism, but that no discursive conclusion was reached between them puzzles scholars to this day. Revisiting the debate with a particular focus upon the previously overlooked national identity politics and questions of editorial 'personality' which underpinned its trajectory, this article examines the often intensely nationalistic animosities and culturally exclusionary rhetoric both Eliot and Murry deployed against each other as they battled over not only which of their competing ideals of Englishness would become the modern 'tendency', but who would win the authority to 'editorialize' on behalf of the 'mind of England'. By bringing this facet of the debate to the forefront, I offer a new angle for understanding Eliot's rise to the position of 'arbiter of British opinion', concluding with a glance at how the conversation regarding English identity politics continued between Eliot and the English-born poets of the Auden generation.

At the start of 1921, T. S. Eliot responded to a frustrated letter from the fellow American poet Maxwell Bodenheim, who had spent the previous year struggling to find his footing in the London literary scene, by briskly explaining:

> I will agree with you in anything you care to say about the placid smile of imbecility which splits the face of contemporary London, or, more abstractly, the putrescence of English literature and journalism. I am inclined to think I am slightly more comfortable here than in America […]. I have, moreover, a persistent curiosity about the English and a desire to see whether they can ever be roused to anything like intellectual activity. And I suppose there are more people in America to tell the natives what's what from a European point of view than there are in England. Once there was a civilisation here, I believe, that's a curious and exciting point.[1]

The supercilious tone of Eliot's reply was perhaps warranted: while Bodenheim had spent a few months in London in pursuit of ultimately unfruitful writing stints, 1920 had been the

[1] *The Letters of T. S. Eliot, Volume 1: 1898–1922*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London, 2009), 532. Hereafter references to *The Letters* will be cited as '*Letters*' followed by volume and page number.

most successful year in Eliot's London literary career thus far. Having published another collection of poems and a volume of critical essays, whilst continuing to grow his literary network, he was on his way to becoming, by his own description, 'the most influential American critic in England since Henry James'—but, as his letter to Bodenheim suggests, his eyes remained set upon even loftier aspirations.[2] In parodying Conrad's infamous Kurtz by animating an American incarnation of the antagonist, Eliot sardonically insinuates that his next move would be to find some means through which he might 'civilize' the 'natives'.

After the unprecedented destruction of the First World War, many began to feel that Europe was once again becoming what Marlowe describes in the opening of Conrad's novel as 'one of the dark places of the earth'.[3] Europe looked on as America and Russia began to eclipse its long-held position as the global centre of power and debated the inevitability of Americanization and the threat of Bolshevism. Ever the opportunist, Eliot seized the possibilities that such an uncertain moment offered, founding and editing what Malcolm Bradbury hails as the '"most substantial and influential" of the interwar literary reviews', *The Criterion*.[4]

Founded as an organ to promote Eliot's 'European Idea'—his idealist vision for fostering a 'common culture of Western Europe', derived from the classical Greco-Roman tradition and aiming to heal the ethnic-nationalist tensions that had exploded in the First World War—*The Criterion* served as an internationalist, highbrow cultural forum, uniting what Eliot hoped was 'the best critical opinion in England together with the work of the best critics whom I can find in other countries'.[5] The review's 18 volumes, spanning a period of 17 years (1922–1939), offer a detailed record of significant literary and cultural political developments during this period, the eclectic range of contemporary responses to them, and the appearance of landmark literary works, including Eliot's seminal modernist long poem *The Waste Land*.

While *The Criterion* was designed to publish contents of 'international scope', scholars have often underplayed the fact that Eliot envisioned it as an 'English periodical' principally aimed at English readers.[6] Eliot's *Criterion* endeavour to teach the English 'what's what from a European point of view' by convincing them that they had a major stake in the cultural health of Europe, however, was about as ambitious a task as it was haughtily paternalistic. 'No contemporary English poet', Robert Crawford asserts, 'would have equated Europe with "his own country", particularly at a time when Europe had been so bloodily divided by World War One'.[7] The great challenge that Eliot undertook in founding *The Criterion* was thus not only that of turning the British gaze outward but also that of amassing the authority necessary to convincingly direct its attentions. Although, in the earlier stages of his career, Eliot was able to draw some respect within the English literary field by deftly manipulating 'the authority of the outsider', during his time as editor of *The Criterion* 'the alien culture became one that [he] himself was partly implicated in'.[8] In 1927 Eliot became a British subject, but his new legal status was not enough. Because the intended application of his 'European idea' in England was to re-shape notions of English cultural identity, Eliot had to exemplify the Anglo-European culture he wished his journal to promote—the version of Englishness

[2] T. S. Eliot letter to his Mother, *Letters*, I, 331.
[3] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Owen Knowles (London, 2007), 5.
[4] Malcolm Bradbury as cited in Jason Harding, 'The Idea of a Literary Review: T. S. Eliot and *The Criterion*', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2013), 346–63, 346.
[5] Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 4 (1926), 221–3; *Letters*, I, 655.
[6] Appendix: 'The Unity of European Culture', in Ronald Schuchard and Iman Javadi (eds), *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, vol. 7: [*A European Society, 1947-1953*] (Baltimore, MD, and London, 2018), 194–287.
[7] Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford, 1992), 229.
[8] Simon Grimble, 'Englishness', in Jason Harding (ed.), *T. S. Eliot in Context* (Cambridge, 2011), 43–51.

summarized in the self-ascribed 'general point of view', which he articulated as 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'.[9]

However, Eliot was not the only individual in London's post-war literary scene to opportunistically intervene at the moment of cultural crisis. The first real challenge advanced against his bid for authority over the 'mind of England' came early in *The Criterion*'s life.[10] To English-born, rival London literary critic and ex-editor of the re-founded *Athenaeum*, John Middleton Murry, authentic Englishness had been prematurely presumed dead. As David Goldie explains, 'the arid intellectualism of *The Waste Land*' and Eliot's seemingly Eurocentric review signalled a further threat to English culture. Partly in response to the appearance of Eliot's new *Criterion*, in 1923 Murry founded and edited his own literary review, *The Adelphi*, from which he launched his initial attack.

The intermittent debate that raged between the two editors from 1923 until roughly 1927—known to literary history as the Murry-Eliot, Classicism-Romanticism debate—is a well-trodden subject for scholars interested in the formation of Anglo-American modernism's intellectual substance. One reason for the exchange's notoriety is its lack of a substantive conclusion. As the cultural historian Christopher Dawson remarked in a 1932 *Criterion* contribution, 'The quarrel between Romanticism and Classicism has caused more ink to be spilt than any other literary controversy, [...] and after more than a century of warfare, matters stand very much where they were at the beginning.'[11] By the time the Murry-Eliot debate began, 'Classical' and 'Romantic' meant so much more than 'Greek and Roman literature on the one hand, Medieval on the other'; in Rebecca Beasley's words, 'the terms allud[ed] to a set of politicised characteristics', reflecting 'essentially opposed beliefs about human nature'.[12] In the context of the Murry-Eliot debate in particular, these terms juxtaposed the two editors' opposing cultural politics, ideas about the proper 'human nature' of the English, and the direction which the modern mind of England ought to follow for revivification. In this vein, although the debate ended in a *discursive* stalemate, Murry and Eliot's exchanges did, however, settle the final balance of symbolic power between the two critics within the field.

David Goldie's examination of the Eliot-Murry debate in *A Critical Difference* (1998), while admirably thorough, does not pay the warranted attention to the significant sub-dialogue concerning national-cultural identity that heavily influenced its content. 'Goldie', Peter McDonald observes, 'is always responsive to the numerous "cultural and ideological", energies at work in any purportedly "disinterested" piece of literary criticism, but it is, in the end, unclear how far he is willing to consider the impact of such issues as, for example, national or social identity.'[13] While it would be a mistake to reduce the value of the debate's intellectual content to little more than a personal squabble, the extent to which that content was instigated by and inflected with the two interlocutors' endeavours to institutionalize their particular ideas of Englishness for the modern era remains unexplored. However, that the Murry-Eliot debate simply fizzled out before any substantive conclusion was reached perhaps indicates that it really was, as Jason Harding tentatively suggests, 'stage-managed'.[14] That is, 'stage-managed' not necessarily for the expressed purpose of establishing the primacy of Classicism or Romanticism in England, but to determine

[9] Eliot, 'Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*', in Ronald Schuchard, Frances Dickey, and Jennifer Formicelli (eds), *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition,* vol. 3: [*Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927-1929*] (Baltimore, MD, and London, 2015), 513–14, 513.

[10] Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in Ronald Schuchard and Anthony Cuda (eds), *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, vol. 2: [*The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926*] (Baltimore, MD and London, 2014), 375–85.

[11] Christopher Dawson, 'The Origins of the Romantic Tradition', *The Criterion*, 11 (1932), 222–48.

[12] H. J. C. Grierson, *Classical and Romantic* (Cambridge, 1923), 5; Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound* (London, 2007), 48.

[13] Peter D. McDonald, review of David Goldie, *A Critical Difference: T. S. Eliot and John Middleton Murry in English Literary Criticism, 1919–1928* (Oxford, 1998) in *RES*, 51 (2000), 327–8.

[14] Jason Harding, *'The Criterion': Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2002), 39.

who would win the authority to declare or—in light of the journalistic context—to 'editorialize' the modern consciousness of England.

This article, therefore, will examine the Eliot-Murry Classicism-Romanticism debate as a thinly veiled endeavour for each editor to stage their respective versions of English national identity in and through their exchanges. The immediate differences between *The Criterion* and *The Adelphi* provided a creative tension through which they were able to forge their definitions in relation to each other. Although their two editors were rivals of sorts, *The Criterion* and *The Adelphi* were very different journals from the offset. As Harding offers, *The Adelphi* 'defined a sociology of taste distinct from the advanced modernism of Bloomsbury and other "highbrow" sections of the London intelligentsia'.[15] Each journal attracted markedly different sets of readers. In comparison to *The Criterion*'s small (never more than 1000) socially elite subscription base, which was largely drawn from the London metropole, Oxford, and Cambridge, *The Adelphi* carried a circulation of around 5000, with its strongest support coming from northern nonconformist communities.[16] In any case, after the initial exchanges, Eliot offered to host the debate within *The Criterion*. Yet, as editors, Eliot and Murry each wielded a certain level of representative authority over their journals' communities and, in turn, *The Criterion*'s and *The Adelphi*'s ethos, contents, and cultural capital became reflections of their editor's identities. Because he was still tied to his job at Lloyd's Bank and could not be perceived to be earning income from an external venture, during the first few years of his review's life until 1926, Eliot did not advertise his name as editor on the front cover of *The Criterion*, though his editorship was something of an 'open secret' among London literary circles.[17] Through his debate with Murry, Eliot was able to shape inter-war English identity and fashion his own cultural identity as simultaneous, complementary endeavours.

'A NATIONAL, A RACIAL ISSUE'

Murry and Eliot had known each other in both personal and professional capacities before their debate began in 1923. Eliot later described his frequently strained friendship with Murry as 'of a singular quality', explaining that 'We disagreed throughout many years on one point after another. But on the other hand, a very warm affection existed between us in spite of differences of view'.[18] Prior to the debate, the two had collaborated on *The Athenaeum* before it was absorbed by *The Nation* in 1921, 'working at and with literary criticism with an unprecedented seriousness' in pursuit of a mutual desire to enforce intelligible standards.[19] Although during this period they shared some similar views, their opinions on the centrality of the personal vs. the impersonal in criticism irrevocably diverged by the end of 1920 and, by the summer of 1921, Eliot was preoccupied with plans for his own review. Despite remaining in personal contact (with Murry even generously lending the Eliots his Suffolk cottage for Vivienne's convalescence), their divergent critical attitudes led to nearly insurmountable professional irritations—particularly when it came to the topic of cultural reform in post-war England.

The cosmopolitan bent of Eliot's aspirations is well known, but the fervour of Murry's English patriotism has been markedly understated in previous accounts of the debate.

[15] Harding, *'The Criterion'*, 26.
[16] F. A. Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry* (London, 1959), 111.
[17] Harding, *'The Criterion'*, 12.
[18] Eliot, letter to Murry's widow, Ada Elizabeth Cockbayne, 29 May 1957 as qtd. in *John Middleton Murry* <https://tseliot.com/people-in-his-life/john-middleton-murry> accessed 19 August 2025.
[19] Malcolm Woodfield, 'Introduction', in Malcolm Woodfield (ed.), *Defending Romanticism: Selected Criticism of John Middleton Murry* (Bristol, 1989), 1–52, 14.

Murry had previously expressed relatively internationalist views but, as the war came to a close, and particularly after the January 1923 death of his wife Katherine Mansfield, his concerns became increasingly 'centred in English life and English culture'.[20] While Eliot continued to promote his internationalized canon of modern writers after *The Egoist* folded in 1919, Murry's nationalized tastes manifested, in contrast, in a series of hero-worshipping editorials on Thomas Hardy, whom he hailed as the only man who could 'speak for all that is noble in England as no poet since Wordsworth has been able'.[21] Murry's engagement with the Romanticism-Classicism debate was closely entangled with this growing commitment to a self-assigned crusade on behalf of literary nationalism. As F. A. Lea explains, for Murry, Mansfield's illness and the war 'constituted a single event'.[22] While separated during Mansfield's treatment abroad, Murry began to see himself and Mansfield as 'the sole surviving representatives' of 'the authentic England'.[23] In one letter to her, he writes:

> No, my darling, you and I are English, and because we are truly English, we are set apart from our generation. That was gone a whoring after strange gods, and you and I and Wordsworth and Coleridge, Lamb Keats and Shelley abide. I am in that state of mind, not seldom with me now, when I can see symbols in everything. […] You are the perfect flower of England — the thing that Shakespeare dreamed, and almost embodied in Cleopatra (in the moment you and I know by heart)[24]

For Lea, after 'avoiding the War and turning to love as a refuge', and then losing Mansfield, Murry was compelled 'to expiate his guilt and his generation's by becoming their spokesman and arraigning the actual England in the name of the ideal'.[25]

Though the sentiments of a man born and bred in England, Murry's ideal of authentic Englishness, like Eliot's conceptualization of a classically inflected English culture, was the product of an imagination that had cobbled it together from a range of sources amidst the uncertainty of the post-war. Firstly, Murry's perfect English rose Mansfield, like Eliot, was a 'metic': she had immigrated to Britain from New Zealand. Secondly, while Murry's allusion to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* reflects his regard of the bard as the progenitor of the great English Romantic tradition, his comparison of the Egyptian queen to 'the perfect flower of England' disrupts the intended perception of a truly singularized cultural identity.[26] Eliot's 'classicized' England was certainly part of a vision of Europe which Moody describes as 'a Europe discovered mainly in books and ideas, a Europe of the mind which would become, by [Eliot's] powerful turn of phrase, "the mind of Europe"'.[27] Murry's England, although built from a different set of monuments—Shakespeare, Keats, Lamb, Coleridge, Shelley, Wordsworth, Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, etc.—was still a cultural ideal defined using the slippery terms of literary history.

It is also important to acknowledge the extent to which the Eliot-Murry debate was spurred by both individuals' perception of the impediment that their personal identities posed to their professional stations. Eliot was still attempting to make sense of his increasingly complicated identity, meditating on how he could overcome the perception of his externality to English

[20] Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Circulating Genius: John Middleton Murry, Katherine Mansfield, and D. H. Lawrence* (Edinburgh, 2010), 210–11.
[21] Murry, 'Notes and Comments', *The Athenaeum* (19 November 1920), 687–8.
[22] Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry*, 61.
[23] Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry*, 62.
[24] Murry as qtd. in Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry*, 62.
[25] Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry*, 63.
[26] I would like to acknowledge my *RES* reader for suggesting this close reading in these terms. In 'Romanticism and the Tradition', Murry declares that 'The great figures of the period (after the Renaissance to now) are shaped after the pattern of Shakespeare—they are nearly all what is generally called "Romantics"'. *The Criterion*, 2 (1924), 272–95.
[27] A. D. Moody, *Tracing T. S. Eliot's Spirit* (Cambridge, 1996), 62.

culture as a resident alien. But though English-born, Murry was also an outsider among the Bloomsbury elite. The son of a London clerk, Murry had won scholarships to attend the prestigious Christ's Hospital School, followed by Oxford; in comparison to the Bloomsburies, he was definitively lower-middle class. In a letter quoted by his son, Murry describes 'the feeling that I have been completely outside the mainstream of literature: that I don't "belong" and indeed never have belonged'.[28] Yet, like Eliot, he was nevertheless intent on making his mark.

Still wrought by grief over the loss of Mansfield, Murry founded his own new literary review, *The Adelphi*, in June 1923, introducing the periodical in virtually antithetical terms to Eliot's *Criterion*. His first statement of his editorial programme was articulated with potent Romantic sentiment: 'We believe in life. Just that. And to reach that belief, to hold it firm and unshakably, has been no easy matter for some of us.'[29] This, along with Murry's declaration of *The Adelphi*'s ardent intention to answer post-war deprivations with its 'assertion of [...] faith' in the liberal individualist directive that 'man must be true to his own experience', was enough to jolt Eliot into addressing his *Criterion* readership through implicitly editorial prose for the first time in 'The Function of a Literary Review', offering his response to Murry's *Adelphi* announcement.[30]

Whether Murry intended to cast his journal's principles in the borrowed robes of the earlier Classicism-Romanticism debate among intellectuals in France, which notably included the militant far-right, classicist-revival movement known as the *Action Française*, to provoke Eliot remains unanswered. Eliot's reply, though, does closely echo elements of the French movement's leading literary critic, Pierre Lasserre's, classicist refutation of 'life's precedence over art'.[31] Along with the necessity of maintaining the 'autonomy and disinterestedness of literature', Eliot declares that it is the function of a literary review 'to exhibit the relations of literature—not to "life", as something contrasted to literature, but to all the other activities, which, together with literature, are the components of life'.[32] Murry undoubtedly discerned the trail of Francophile classicism behind Eliot's reply to *The Adelphi*'s Romantic, self-styled, 'English' liberalism. Murry knew Eliot and his work well enough to discern his multifaceted nature, previously comparing him to a chameleon, observing that while the 'range of variation is not truly infinite; there are colours which the chameleon cannot compass. But the chameleon, if he were an artist, would make it an essential of his art not to be lured against a backdrop which he could not imitate.'[33] As a born Englishman, Murry likely believed that he had finally identified 'a backdrop' to lure Eliot against, which the American-born writer would be unable to assimilate to.

And so, it was Murry who threw the first punch. Responding to a recent *New Statesman* reviewer's claim that 'the Romantics were marking "a last despairing stand" in *The Adelphi*', he published 'On Fear: And On Romanticism' in the September 1923 number of his review.[34] In the piece, Murry makes a sweeping argument for the Romantic impulse's claim as *the* true English tradition:

> In England there has never been any classicism worth talking about: we have had classics, but no classicism. And all our classics are romantic. That is to say, the *decorum* the great English

[28] John Middleton Murry as qtd. by Colin Middleton Murry, 'Introduction', *Journals of J. Middleton Murry: The Early Years (1912–1923)*, Wellington, The Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Papers-11327-001.
[29] Murry, 'The Cause of It All', *Adelphi*, 1 (1923), 1–11.
[30] Murry, 'The Cause of it All', 8.
[31] Pierre Lasserre writes, 'A ce que nous jugeons et prononçons au nom de la raison interprète de l'expérience, les bergsoniens opposent ce qu'ils appellent 'la vie'—la vie qui se moque des arrêts et limitations de la raison et dont le propre est d'inventer toujours des expériences nouvelles.' 'La philosophie de M. Bergson', *L'Action Française*, 27 (1911), 165–83, 174.
[32] Eliot, 'The Function of a Literary Review', *The Criterion*, 1 (1923), 421.
[33] Murry, 'The Eternal Footman', in *Defending Romanticism*, 68–70.
[34] Murry, 'On Fear: And on Romanticism', *Adelphi*, 1 (1923), 269–77.

> writers naturally observe is one that they fetch out of the depths in themselves. It is not imposed by tradition or authority.[35]

His act of throwing down the gauntlet with his baiting conclusion that 'When a classicist comes along who knows as much about his own creed as I know about mine—then we may prepare for battle', has been interpreted as a telling indication that he had pre-selected Eliot as his contender.[36] Goldie highlights Murry's 'appropriation of the patriotic rhetoric of wartime [...] the rhetoric of an English voluntarism pluckily resisting the blind force of the continental enemy's monstrous and dehumanising organisation', but he does not explicitly make the connection between Murry's nationalistic framing and his foreign opponent.[37] Murry's use of the verb 'imposed' denotes the specific angle from which he was launching his attack on his particular target. He poses the stakes of the debate in loaded personal terms when he asserts that 'the interloper and the alien [...] in England is the classicist', going further by declaring that '[he] *cannot* establish himself here; he may be a pastime for the *dilettanti*; his elegance may be attractive, but it is always the slightly excessive elegance of the outsider'.[38] As Murry insinuates, Eliot could try to naturalize his image, but despite all his efforts, he would never fully be able to blend in.

Attempting to portray Classicism as an external intrusion, Murry casts it as a Franco-European trend whose subscribers 'for the sake of a little prestige in a little coterie try to wear their rue with a difference imported from Paris', painting Eliot —a leading proponent of this fashion—as the alien invader at the lead.[39] It is revealing that this was not the first instance in which Murry employed eccentric nationalistic language in the defence of English Romanticism. In a 1920 review of Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*, he cross-examines the classicist critic, asking 'What hypocrisy or self-deception enable you to clothe your statements of fact in a moral aura and to blind yourselves and the world to the truth that you were killing a domesticated dragon who guarded the cave of a devouring hydra, whom you benevolently loosed?'.[40] Using beasts of myth and legend as symbols for the national traditions of Britain and ancient Greece, Murry presents the question of Classicism or Romanticism as an issue concerning the nation's imaginative sovereignty. Three years later, in 'On Fear: And On Romanticism', the question is re-presented in more pressing terms as a decisive duel for this sovereignty between kings leading two respective armies: Murry at the head of the English forces and Eliot leading the French.

Murry's positioning of himself in relation to his *Adelphi* audience animates the nationalist sentiment underpinning his aims and further supports a view of the essay as the first manoeuvre in a larger self-promotional endeavour. He reinforces his argument for the English tradition's innate Romanticism, using inclusive plural pronouns to encourage a sense of national community: 'Romanticism—is in our bones. The trouble with us, at the present time, is [...] we are not Romantic enough, nor Romantic in the right way.'[41] His arguments become rallying calls, instructions for forwarding the 'English' cause, and claims to reassure people that the emergence of a suitable classicist opponent is 'not the sort of opposition we have to fear in this country'.[42] *The Criterion* and *The Adelphi* attracted very different audiences, but as editor Murry represented a voice of authority for the particular constituency his review brought together. He poses as the emerging leader of English critical opinion, addressing his readers in

[35] Murry, 'On Fear: And on Romanticism', 274–5.
[36] Harding, *'The Criterion'*, 30.
[37] Goldie, *A Critical Difference*, 102.
[38] Murry, 'On Fear: And on Romanticism', 275.
[39] Murry, 'On Fear: And on Romanticism', 277.
[40] Murry, 'The Cry in the Wilderness', in *Aspects of Literature* (New York, NY, 1920), 167–75.
[41] Murry, 'On Fear: And on Romanticism', 276.
[42] Murry, 'On Fear: And on Romanticism', 276.

ways that reinforce a sense of their mutual belonging to a representative *national* (literary) collective. 'The first stirrings of a popular national consciousness', Robert Colls reminds us, 'occurred in the fifteenth century, in the writings and fighting experiences of the Hundred Years War'.[43] By invoking the same Anglo-Franco opposition, Murry is preparing his audience, in the event that he does defeat Eliot, for his assumption of the throne. As his frequent pseudonym 'Henry King'—which begs to be inverted as 'King Henry'—suggests, Murry began the debate with lofty ambitions for his future within the English literary field.

Although Murry posed his challenge as 'a national, a racial issue', Eliot adapted to his opponent's advancing attack by embracing Murry's nationalized focus and bringing his testy claim that Classicism 'has no standing in England whatever' to the fore of his reply.[44] Murry's attempt to exclude Eliot from the imagined national literary collective falls flat when Eliot begins to demarcate that English collective into constituent groups. As we have seen him perform with other critical theories and literary concepts in his earlier prose, Eliot mediates the concept of Englishness by breaking it down into smaller representative segments to create more controlled comparisons. He sharpens Murry's dichotomy between the Classical and Romantic attitudes by introducing further dichotomies that colour the distinction between them in Classicism's favour: 'the difference between the complete and fragmentary, the adult and the mature, the orderly and the chaotic'.[45]

Crucially, he deflates Murry's contention that the natural English tendency is toward Romanticism by further demarcating which types of Englishmen—or, more accurately, which nation of Britons—this claim actually applies to. Quoting Murry's assertion that 'The English writer, the English divine, the English statesman, inherit no rules from their forebears; they inherit only this: a sense that in the last resort they must depend upon the inner voice', Eliot turns to pull the rug out from under him.[46] In a snide, self-elevating tone, he dissects Murry's appeal for the sanctity of the 'inner voice', writing:

> This statement, does, I admit, appear to cover certain cases; it throws a flood of light upon Mr. Lloyd George. But why '*in the last resort*'? Do they, then, avoid the dictates of the inner voice up to the last extremity? My belief is that those who possess this inner voice are ready enough to hearken to it, and will hear no other. The inner voice, in fact, sounds remarkably like an old principle which has been formulated by an elder critic in the now familiar phrase of 'doing as one likes.' The possessors of the inner voice ride ten in a compartment to a football match at Swansea, listening to the inner voice, which breathes the eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust.[47]

Although we cannot presume that readers would have been aware of Murry's heritage, Eliot's counter-charge demonstrates how shallowly these acidic identity politics lay beneath the intellectual matter of the debate. Murry was born in Suffolk, but his father's family had been Welsh shipwrights from the County of Pembrokeshire.[48] Eliot's jab at Lloyd George is an obvious derision of radical liberal politics, but the Welsh background Lloyd George and Murry hold in common forges the implication that the inborn deference to the 'inner voice' which Murry identifies as the English inheritance is instead actually a Welsh trait. The farcical image of a carriage packed with football hooligans en route to Swansea, guided by the inner voice's

[43] Robert Colls, 'Englishness and Political Culture', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness, Politics, and Culture 1880–1920* (London, 2014), 53–84.
[44] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', *The Criterion*, 2 (1923), 31–42.
[45] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 34.
[46] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 35.
[47] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 35.
[48] Cf. 'First Years' in Lea, *The Life of John Middleton Murry*.

'eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust', solidifies the troubling connection Eliot draws between Wales, Dissenters, and the unbridled impulse to chaos and disorder.[49] If Murry suggests that Eliot represents an alien threat to Englishness, then Eliot challenges that Murry's Englishness is just as non-conforming.

Personal barbs of this genre were thrown back and forth across the course of the debate, through to its final tired stages in 1926 and 1927. That the primary concern of the debate was less to settle the primacy of Classicism or Romanticism in England once and for all than to hold an exchange concerning identity is further supported by the fact that, amidst his increasing frustrations with Eliot's less than chivalrous replies, Murry resorted to expressing echoes of the anti-American sentiment that reignited in the later twenties. While Murry's attempt to park the debate at a middle ground with his June 1927 essay 'Towards a Synthesis' was generous, the digs he makes at Eliot's Americanness betray the reality that he was no longer vying for authority but launching a last-ditch effort to undermine the authority Eliot had already amassed for himself. The specific attack Murry makes on Eliot's American background in the essay has passed unrecognized. In delineating his opponent's conceptualization of the sharp dichotomy between the classicist's 'intelligence' and Romantic 'intuition', Murry writes:

> In this case, Mr. Eliot's position would be that the best name for the whole activity of knowledge is 'intelligence': 'intelligence' is the genus, intuition and discourse, the species. To such a position there can be no particular object: except that it implies a theory of knowledge which seems rough and ready to say the least.[50]

The 'rough and ready' characterization may have come from one of two contexts. Murry may be referring to the nineteenth-century novel by the American writer, Horatio Alger, who wrote a series of popular moralistic stories about young American boys rising into the middle class through the strength of their work ethic, or he may be alluding to an American silent film by that name, released earlier that year. In either case, the implication remains the same. Murry calls attention to Eliot's American roots to engage contemporary snobbish perceptions of America's crude, adolescent vigour. The further subtext is to insinuate that Eliot's privileging of 'intelligence', along with his broader promotion of classicism, are vectors of the Americanization of Britain—the uncultivated impositions of the St Louis-born 'interloper'.

As Eliot had read Murry's manuscript and suggested revisions before he published it in *The Criterion*, he was likely confident that he could meet Murry's accusation with gusto. In his reply, Eliot confronts the slur with an armour of irony:

> I am willing to admit, in a rough and ready way, that 'intelligence is the genus, intuition and discourse the species'. Only just at this point, Mr. Murry takes advantage of my simplicity, by introducing a kind of intuition which is *his* kind and hustling out several specimens of my kind.[51]

He throws the phrase back at Murry twice more, even using it to elaborate his point 'that I am "on the side of the intelligence" because I am convinced that Mr. Murry, just as roughly and readily as myself, is against it'.[52] If, as Murry alleges, Eliot is but a rough wit from the American mid-west, then, as Eliot suggests, Murry is an upstart crow, unsuccessfully struggling to claw his way up the ranks of the literary intellectual elite. One gets the sense that the content of their dialogue had strayed too far from both men's remit. And yet, by this point in the debate,

[49] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 35.
[50] Murry, 'Towards a Synthesis', *The Criterion*, 5 (1927), 294–313.
[51] Eliot, 'Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis', *The Criterion*, 6 (1927), 340–47.
[52] Eliot, 'Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis', 342–3.

the evidence of (as Harding terms it) 'stage management' between 'Towards a Synthesis' and Eliot's response indicates a vindictiveness in the latter, fuelled not by his interest in the theological semantics of Thomistic synthesis but the shot fired at his cultural identity.

THE IDEA OF THE EDITOR

One of the bitter ironies of the Classicism-Romanticism debate is that if Murry began the exchange believing that he would emerge victorious over his opponent by virtue of his 'organic' cultural identity, Eliot demonstrated the power of cultural inheritance acquired through 'great labour'.[53] Despite the discursive impasse in which it was left, Eliot emerged from the debate having self-fashioned the iconic Anglo-European persona represented under the 'ideological coat of arms' that he resolutely inaugurates in his 1928 'Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*': 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic'.[54] Each dimension of this identity was sculpted in the course of his dialogue with Murry and is a testament to how influential Murry's opposing ideas of Englishness were to Eliot's processes of defining and proclaiming the conservative genre of Europeanized English culture with which he ultimately occupied the centre of the English literary establishment. While it would be reductive to suggest that Eliot's eventual allegiances to the English Conservative Party, the Monarchy, and the Anglo-Catholic Church were little more than convenient accessories to the articulation of classicist values across multiple domains, it should be acknowledged that before he debated with Murry Eliot had, as Levenson describes, 'kept a self-conscious distance from [politics'] immediate demands [… and] preferred to keep free from the familiar identities of party and sect'.[55] It was Murry, though, who first seems to have associated Eliot with the British Conservative Party when he answered Eliot's accusation of 'Whiggery' by branding him 'an English Tory', and it was Murry who cheekily suggested that Eliot make the leap of faith and get baptized into the Catholic Church where he would 'find an authority and a tradition'.[56]

As Eliot's appropriation of the leader of the *Action Française*, Charles Maurras's, 'trinity of enthusiasms' indicates, it was authority indeed which attracted him to these ideological allegiances.[57] In his effort to naturalize these ideological stances within an English context, Eliot's early modernist forerunner and English expounder of the *Action Française*, T. E. Hulme, seems to have proved a vital point of inspiration. As Ronald Schuchard observes, Hulme had evidently understood that his Frenchified Classicism required careful transplantation to be accepted by the English mind.[58] Hulme's own classicist ideals had developed in dialogue with the application they found in the Conservative Party's post-1910 electoral defeat propaganda efforts. According to Christos Hadjiyiannis, 'Hulme and his long-time associate Edward Storer used the terms "romanticism" and "classicism" as part of a concerted and orchestrated attempt to provide the Party, […] with an effective propaganda strategy'.[59] Part of Hulme's strategy involved defining and naturalizing his particular brand of Englishness against a scaffolding of familiar rival terms, often manifesting in his writings as 'pairs of contrasted epithets', including 'Constancy and Progress', 'Order, Authority, and Liberty', 'Equality and Hierarchy' and 'National and Universalism'.[60] That 'Englishness is not so much a category as a relationship',

[53] Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Prose*, II, 105–14, 106.
[54] Kenneth Asher, 'T. S. Eliot and Ideology', *ELH*, 54 (1988), 895–915; 'Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*', *Prose*, III, 513.
[55] Michael Levenson, 'Eliot's Politics', in David E. Chinitz (ed.), *A Companion to T. S. Eliot* (Oxford, 2009), 376–87.
[56] Eliot published a dialogue, entitled 'On the Eve', which had actually been written by his wife, under his own name in the January 1925 *Criterion*. In the story, Murry is caricatured as a 'whig' with 'no principles'. See pp. 278–81; Murry 'More About Romanticism', 557; Murry, 'The Classical Revival [II]', *Adelphi* (March 1926), 648–50.
[57] Levenson, 'Eliot's Politics', 903.
[58] Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel* (Oxford, 1999), 55.
[59] Christos Hadjiyiannis, 'Romanticism versus Classicism in 1910: T. E. Hulme, Edward Storer and *The Commentator*', *Literature and History*, 22 (2013), 25–41.
[60] 'A Tory Philosophy', in *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford, 1994), 232–45.

in that it is a culture that has evolved through the 'inclusion, simple exclusion, and transformation' of constituent cultures and connected lineages, came to Eliot's benefit.[61] Because Eliot's Englishness was neither originally his inheritance, nor entirely England's, he could convincingly wield the authority to adjudicate on its behalf—even more convincingly if he did so under the auspices of a public controversy with an authority representing a rival form.

Eliot derived a particular tactical advantage from moving the debate to his home turf, where he could manipulate the juxtaposition between his and Murry's forms of Englishness to his own benefit. Part of his approach involved presenting his classicist Englishness as the moral option; as he counters in 'The Function of Criticism' in response to Murry's attempt to steer the debate into the realm of essentialism, the fundamental issue at stake is '*not* what comes natural or what comes *easy* to us, but what is right'.[62] While after 'The Function of Criticism', Murry attempted to stage his cause as a kind of resistance to the 'cultural colonialism', which he portrayed Eliot as a vector of, Eliot simply took the high ground.[63] The contrast is especially evident in the *Criterion*'s April 1924 number. In 'Romanticism and the Tradition', Murry moves to characterize Romanticism as an ostensibly rebellious impulse. 'Romanticism', he explains, was 'something that happened to the European soul after the Renaissance; and the essential fact of the Renaissance was that man asserted his independence of an external authority'; the modern age, he insists, necessitated a Romantic moment equating to a 'fundamental change or rebirth of the human consciousness'.[64] However, in his 'Commentary' for the April 1924 *Criterion*, Eliot defines the imperative 'new classical age' as that 'state of equilibrium' that will be reached 'when the dogma, or *ideology*, of the critics is so modified by contact with creative writing, and when the creative writers are so permeated by the new dogma'.[65] The subtle echoes of his theory of the 'dissociation of sensibility' here are far from coincidental. In 'The Metaphysical Poets', Eliot describes the qualities typical of his 'classical' grouping of poets as 'transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind'.[66] They effect the reunification of feeling and thinking that existed more widely prior to the seventeenth century—the kind of 'equilibrium' that a new classical age could reinstate across England and Europe. Elaborating on what a 'classical moment in literature' would entail, in his 'Commentary', Eliot envisions such a moment as 'a moment of *stasis*, when the creative impulse finds a form which satisfies the best intellect of the time, a moment when a type is produced'.[67]

Eliot presented his Classicism as a kind of remedy, which he was offering the modern mind of England to alleviate its contemporary socio-cultural ills and was *already* enacting positive results. Throughout the following *Criterion* numbers, Eliot gathered and deployed the strength of the *Criterion* group and its connections against Murry to demonstrate to his audience that a classicist 'type' already existed in force. Admittedly, not all the writers that Eliot enlisted contributed pieces that wholly aligned with the nuances of his position, but many articulate views that helped to pad Eliot's arguments with a loose consensus of English-born voices. Harold Monro, for example, offered a criticism of Wordsworth's 'immaturity' from an English perspective: 'It is in childhood that most of us are introduced to Wordsworth', he observes, but 'the Wordsworth of later life becomes a distrustful and distrustable figure to whom we should not assign more significance than we do to any older gentleman who has lived long

[61] Philip Dodd, 'Englishness and the National Culture', in *Englishness, Politics, and Culture, 1880–1920*, 25–52.
[62] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 36.
[63] Asher, 'Eliot and Ideology', 901.
[64] Murry, 'Romanticism and the Tradition', 281, 295.
[65] Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, 2 (1924), 231–5.
[66] 'The Metaphysical Poets', *Prose*, II, 382.
[67] Eliot, 'A Commentary' (1924), 232.

enough to say (like Southey to Shelley), "When I was your age, of course."'[68] Among others, H. P. Collins similarly lent his perspective to the effort to assess English culture through the lens of the Classicism versus Romanticism question. Closely aligning with Eliot's favourable assessments of Andrew Marvell, in 'A Note on the Classical Principle in Poetry', Collins proclaims that 'Marvell's work is essentially the product of a Latin culture', and yet his classicism 'is more partial than that of Milton and of a kind more native to the English spirit'.[69] A similar ushering of antagonism towards Murry and his claims for Romanticism was also evident in *The Criterion*'s discussion of recent developments in criticism, as evidenced by Herbert Read's 'Books of the Quarter' mostly enthusiastic review of I. A. Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* and Stephen Ward's *Ethics: An Historical Introduction*, which he applauded for their advances in the creation of 'a tolerable science of literary criticism'. Concluding that 'Art demands a sanction, as every other activity. Some direct is implied—an orientation to prevent chaos', Read, too, echoes Eliot's call for critics to defer to 'a very highly developed sense of fact' rather than their 'opinion or fancy'.[70] Within his review, Eliot was shoring together the evidence to suggest to readers that the modern mind of England had made its choice and was on its way to becoming classical.

By January 1926, when he introduced the second incarnation of his review as the *New Criterion*, Eliot had essentially claimed what spoils he sought in his exchange with Murry. Having secured funding from his new employer Faber & Gwyer, *The Criterion* closed the first chapter of its life, celebrating the start of a new. Now free of Lloyd's, Eliot could finally print his name as the editor on his review, but, more importantly, this freedom also presented the opportunity to assertively connect the fruits of his editorial labours of the last few years to the editorial imprimatur he had been cultivating during his ghost editorship. As part of its new promotional campaign, the *New Criterion* reprinted testimonial praises from other English periodicals, from which a general tune can be discerned among the choir: hailed as 'One of the best produced of our reviews', *The Criterion* is painted as a *tour de force* of editorial sensibility. The attention to the review's materiality—a kind of *object d'art* 'produced' with a craftsman-like stamp of quality—suggests *The Criterion*'s up-market ethos but directs praise towards the hand which completes the labour. As *The Oxford Magazine* testified, 'Mr T. S. Eliot almost always seems to succeed in giving a unity to each issue of his quarterly, and to keep pace with what is of vital interest and real importance in this country and abroad'.[71] Many readers would have gathered some awareness that Eliot was *The Criterion*'s editor, but for those being introduced to the review as *The New Criterion*, his name was now a marketing point. The impression of order he mediates in each *Criterion* issue—between different voices, perspectives, national canons, and critical ideas—is the outstanding feature of the review's identity and evidence of what Eliot 'the editor' confers upon the modern English consciousness.

The *New Criterion* notices combine with Eliot's updated manifesto, 'The Idea of a Literary Review', to reassert the principles for which the review stood and upon which Eliot's public image as an editor-critic could now rest. As the title suggests, Eliot set out to dissect the literary periodical as a publishing form down to the elemental basics of editorial policy, the contents and their arrangement; that is, how the 'literary' quality of a literary periodical ought to be realized. But, in actuality, his deeper intention was far more personal and targeted: despite the pretence of theorizing the 'idea of a literary review', Eliot's discussion more obviously deals

[68] Harold Monro, 'Wordsworth Revisited', *The Criterion*, 2 (1924), 468–76.
[69] In 'Andrew Marvell', Eliot writes that 'this wit that pervades the poetry of Marvell is more Latin, more refined, than anything that succeeded it'. *Prose*, II, 309–23; H. P. Collins, 'A Note on the Classical Principle in Poetry', *The Criterion*, 3 (1925), 389–400.
[70] Herbert Read, 'Books of the Quarter', *The Criterion*, 3 (1925), 444–9; Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 39, 42.
[71] See advertising notices printed throughout *The Criterion*, volume 3.

with the 'idea of the editor'. Among the errant qualities he delineates as those of a poor periodical, Eliot includes a direct strike at Murry's editorial philosophy and practice:

> The review which makes up its contents merely of what the editor considers 'good stuff' will obviously have the character of a miscellany, and no other character whatever, except the feeble reflection of the character of a feeble editor. [...] A review which depends merely on its editor's vague perceptions of 'good' and 'bad' has manifestly no critical value. A review should be an organ of documentation. That is to say, the bound volumes of a decade should represent the development of the keenest sensibility and the clearest thought of ten years.[72]

Booker and Thacker agree that Murry 'dominated the contents and tone of *The Adelphi*', both with his own voice and in the way the review's contents typically represented a rather indiscriminate collection of contributions loosely connected by the stamp of his personal approval.[73] In describing a bad review's character as a 'feeble reflection of the character of a feeble editor', Eliot at first appears to float the notion that a review *is* a kind of expression of its editor's personality. Yet, as he draws his contrast between a bad and an ideal review, it becomes evident that this manifestation of the connection between an editor and the product of their labour is a sign of error. His definition of an ideal review as 'an organ of documentation', an illustration of its 'time and the tendencies of the time', and a representation of 'the keenest sensibility and clearest thought' (2) therein reverses the direction in which that connection should flow. A good review must be a reflection of its cultural and historical context. If the editor performs their work appropriately by selecting pieces 'of the same order of merit', ensuring that the structured content of each number of their review is 'ordered and rational, not heterogene and miscellaneous' (4), then what the results express is not their personal tastes and 'character' but an ordering principle which Eliot calls a 'tendency' (5).

Immediately following this denunciation of Murry's realization of periodical editorship, Eliot moved to confirm his gains: 'I believe that the modern tendency is toward something which, for want of a better name, we may call classicism' (5). The feigned tone of hesitation in Eliot's statement is undercut by the length to which his implication reaches; he does not simply declare *The Criterion*'s editorial tendency, but *the* tendency of the broader cultural-historical moment. Eliot is calculated in the way he proceeds to define 'classicism' for the new incarnation of his review. Yet, even with his somewhat vague description of it as a tendency 'toward a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason' that may suggest 'the Greek ideal' (6), his use of the words 'control', 'Reason' and his juxtaposition of 'Reason' with 'emotions', he remains in direct dialogue with Murry and the Romantic qualities he professes. While Eliot signposts his readers to a Francophile gathering of texts, which 'exemplify this tendency', the contrasting set of texts representing the Romantic tendency are drawn from a cohort of writers closely associated with Murry and *The Adelphi*, including H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, and Bernard Shaw (the latter being afforded the especially acerbic title of 'the artist whose development was checked at puberty', 6). As if completely razing Murry's Romantic camp was not enough, he salts the fields by echoing Murry's editorial principle in his concluding remarks on the Romantic artists' 'faiths' in 'amateur religions'. Murry's editorial 'homily' announcing *The Adelphi* as 'an assertion of faith' in 'life' is treated with mock-bafflement at its alleged incoherence and is marginalized to a stinging footnote, dismissing the 'religion of Mr. Middleton Murry, which I am totally unable to understand'.[74] Although the exchange tiredly continued for another year,

[72] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Literary Review', *The Criterion*, 4 (1926), 1–6. Cited in the paragraphs that follow parenthetically.
[73] Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 'IV. Editors and Programmes: Introduction', in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds), *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Little Magazines*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2009), 339–45.
[74] Murry, 'The Cause of it All', 8; Eliot, 'The Idea of a Literary Review', 6.

Eliot had signalled that his interest in pursuing a respectful dialogue on equal footing had ended—Murry's Romantic Englishness was now 'that part of the present which is already dead' (6).

But how, we might ask, *should* an editorial tendency and an editorial imprimatur ideally be connected, or better, how did Eliot strategically wield it for himself as a mode of self-fashioning? Although by Eliot's account, poetry may not be 'an expression of personality', editing and publishing a periodical presents a different case. In defining a tendency, he transparently admits to the inescapable dilemma that he 'cannot help substituting personal tendencies for those which are impersonal and existing in the outside world' and invites his readers to make 'his own reserves and deductions accordingly' (5). 'Personality', therefore, inevitably does have some place within Eliot's ideal periodical, and not just the personality of the editor, for a literary review, he explains, 'will depend upon nice adjustment between editor, collaborators, and occasional contributors' so that there is always at least 'a residue of common tendency' (3) among them. Throughout *The Criterion*'s preceding volumes, Eliot had been assembling works which he believed documented the 'keenest sensibility and the clearest thought' emanating from contemporary England, Europe, and beyond, 'order[ing] and articulat[ing] them [through] numerous editorial decisions' to promote his classicist form of English culture to his audience.[75] While Murry's editorial practice was an expression of his personality, Eliot had made his editorial personality an expression of the modern cultural-intellectual sensibility he wished to instil in Britain. His editorial imprimatur expressed, as he writes in his April 1924 'Commentary', 'a type'—a type of Englishness carefully shaped through his review. As for Murry's rival form, Eliot again treads under the impression of the moral and intellectual high ground in 'The Idea of a Literary Review', reflecting that Murry and his Romantics:

> all exhibit intelligence at the mercy of emotion. They all, it is true, have their faith. It is not for us to sneer at the faith of those who were born and reared under conditions different from ours – perhaps more difficult – perhaps easier. But we must find our own faith, and having found it, fight for it against all others (6)

The irony, of course, though, is that Eliot's order to his audience not to 'sneer' at Murry's crew because they 'were born and reared under conditions different from ours', re-appropriates Murry's initial cultural essentialist angle to imply that it is *he* and his band of Romanticists that are aliens in England. He flips the scales against Murry and his inherited Englishness, staking his claim over the field—a claim that would continue to assert itself over the coming generation of English writers.

INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATIONS: AUDEN AGAINST AUTHORITY

Eliot's ascent to the power over Englishness that he wielded as the 'Pope of Russell Square' remains one of the most prominent narratives of authorial identity transformation in modern literature, but it also remains a tacitly thorny matter. When the poet-critic Michael Roberts, acting as 'arbiter' of his generation's poetic voice, edited and introduced the famous Hogarth Press *New Signatures* volume which announced the Auden generation's arrival by printing Auden, Spender, and Day Lewis's poetry together for the first time, he drew a clear but courteous line between Eliot's modernism and the rising young English-born poets.[76] In his 'Preface', he articulates the 30s generation's sense of their art and its purpose in the present

[75] Harding, *'The Criterion'*, 7.

[76] Faber & Faber label Roberts 'an arbiter of the modern in poetry' on their official author profile for him. 'Michael Roberts' <https://www.faber.co.uk/author/michael-roberts/> accessed 13 May 2024.

moment, writing that 'poetry is here turned to propaganda, but it is propaganda for a theory of life which may release the poet's energies for the writing of pure poetry'.[77] These poets' 'technical achievement', he explains, lies in their discovery of 'rhythms not alien to the normal movement of English speech' and is more similar to 'those which formed the pattern of eighteenth century verse and of Shakespeare and Miltonic blank verse'.[78] While we cannot be certain whether Roberts is consciously echoing Murry's declaration of faith in 'life' in *The Adelphi*, the 30s poets certainly announced themselves as a response to the 'alien' impositions its immediate predecessors had made upon the 'authentic' English tradition.

As Eliot lost interest in his debate with Murry, the Auden generation of writers emerged with their own views of the contemporary crisis and ideas of what it meant to be English at such a turbulent historical moment. Ushering Murry off stage, Eliot welcomed a new generation of interlocutors within the pages of his review. Although Ian Hamilton puts it somewhat patronizingly, his observation that 'there is something touching in [Eliot's] effort to ally himself with the [young writers of the 30s], while deploring every aspect of their creed', evokes the salient question of why Eliot was so intent upon maintaining a public connection between himself and them.[79] Many of the 30s poets who eventually signed on as Faber writers were first published in *The Criterion*, and, indeed, it was central to the review's policy to remain contemporary and up-to-date—to 'represent the development of the keenest sensibility and the clearest thought of ten years'.[80] Eliot's relatively brief curiosity (which manifested in a series of *Criterion* essays) towards the contemporarily fashionable political ideologies that some of the younger generation tied themselves to, such as communism and fascism, testifies to his commitment to keep up-to-date. Yet, the other major 'developments' that arose amidst the final decade of the inter-war period included the reaction against the previous generation's redemptive efforts and, particularly, the idea of Englishness which Eliot represented and had enshrined at the centre of the literary-cultural establishment.

The Classicism-Romanticism conversation took on an inter-generational dimension with the appearance of Auden's first professional literary publication in the October 1930 *Criterion*: his verse drama *Paid on Both Sides*. Auden came to poetic maturity with a perception of Englishness that was very different from the Eliotic concept of England's tradition. His more direct artistic influences were native English poets such as Edward Thomas, and, notably, Murry's poetic hero Thomas Hardy. Auden was raised with a strong sense of his Scandinavian heritage, which he had further explored in his study of Old English while at Oxford. The idea of English cultural heritage he developed placed much more of an emphasis upon the 'Teutonic' strain, which Eliot had dismissed as little more than 'roots and husks' in comparison to the Classical Greco-Roman influence.[81] Although Auden later claimed that the eminent Professor J. R. R. Tolkien's lectures baffled him, he was clearly captivated by the 'Northern tradition' he espoused. For Tolkien, works like *Beowulf* were of true 'permanent value' to the 'English temper', which he characterized by 'its strong sense of tradition, dependent doubtless on dynasties, noblehouses, and their code of honour', with a distinct flavour of 'the northern past to blend with southern learning and new faith'.[82] This alternative idea of the English tradition held the so-called 'Teutonic' element to be the more direct source of inheritance, and so it seems did Auden.

[77] Michael Roberts, 'Preface', in Michael Roberts (ed.), *New Signatures* (London, 1934), 8–9.
[78] Roberts, 'Preface', 8–9.
[79] Ian Hamilton, *The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors* (London, 1976), 11.
[80] Eliot, 'The Idea of a Literary Review', 2.
[81] Eliot, 'The Classics in France — and in England', *The Criterion*, 2 (1923), 104–5, 104.
[82] J. R. R. Tolkien, '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics', in Lewis E. Nicholson (ed.), *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* (Indiana, IN, 1963), 51–103.

The extent to which Auden's play opposes Eliot's idea of tradition merits further scrutiny. It has been acknowledged that the play's title alludes to lines from *Beowulf*; Chris Jones offers that 'bringing the full context of the source to bear on the title, *Paid on Both Sides* also provides a moral criticism of the feud-driven, heroic ethic that dominates the play (as the *Beowulf*'s poet's aside also seems to undermine the heroic value-system)'.[83] Yet, Auden challenges the sanctity of the very notion of a unifying cultural tradition no matter which tradition that may be, to assert his feeling that the new life source of Englishness cannot be derived from the demands of history. His response to modern cultural deterioration in the play is much more akin to Murry's.

While rain does eventually come in *The Waste Land*, Auden's village of Rookhope remains derelict by the play's end. There is no promise of re-fertilization if one retains ownership of this wasteland:

> Chorus: [...]; let the son
> Sell the farm lest the mountain fall;
> His mother and her mother won.
> His fields are used up where the moles visit,
> The contours worn flat; if there show
> Passage for water he will miss it:[84]

The only resolution is to break the cycle of inheritance, which the farm symbolizes. Auden locates English inheritance in a different tradition than that which Eliot prescribes, but his iteration of the English tradition holds even less redemptive potential. Tradition and cultural memory have replaced personal agency and ethics. The play's characters have followed Eliot's directive in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' and have surrendered themselves to their families' tradition. That tradition, though, is one of intergenerational violence, and, as a result of their self-surrender, the characters have forgotten what they 'want to go on killing each other for' (273). Cultural and personal memory are reduced to a system of signs and signifiers of violence. When John and Dick part ways, they exchange knives as mementoes of each other, implying that in this society, the expression of the self is irrevocably bound up in a language of destruction. Even talk of the year's rugby season quickly morphs into a conversation about which player recently died in a fight and when:

> W: Did you ever see Warner? No, he'd be before
> your time. You remember him don't you, Trudy?
> T: He was killed in a fight at Colefangs, wasn't he?
> W: You are muddling him up with Hunter. He was
> the best three-quarter I have ever seen. (272)

There is a strangely casual string of cognitive association between a sports game, real violence, and the 'muddle' under which the victims' identities are absent-mindedly confused. Speech, action, and memory are dictated by inherited structures of aggression and barbarity that permeate through every area of the characters' lives, rendering them unable to forge bonds while duty-bound to their ancestors to draw blood.

Paid, at last, expresses an attitude which stands closer to Murry's Romantic 'intuition' than with Eliot 'on the side of [classicist] intelligence'. The perennial issue within the society Auden

[83] Chris Jones, 'W. H. Auden and The "Barbaric" Poetry of the North: Unchaining One's Daimon', *RES*, 53 (2002), 167–85.
[84] Auden, *Paid on Both Sides*, *The Criterion*, 9 (1930), 268–90. Henceforth cited in-text by page number.

portrays is the inability to 'betray the dead'; as John meditates at the start of the trial scene, 'As we pass their graves can we be deaf to the simple eloquence of their inscriptions […] ?' (277). Auden's answer to this question is yes; instead, one must not be deaf to the 'inner voice'. One of the play's more powerful soliloquies comes as John begins to realize this truth:

> John: Always following the wind of history
> Of others' wisdom makes a buoyant air
> Till we come suddenly on pockets where
> Is nothing loud but us; where voices seem
> Abrupt, untrained competing with no lie
> Our fathers shouted once. They taught us war,
> To scamper after darlings, to climb hills,
> To emigrate from weakness, find ourselves
> The easy conquerors of empty bays:
> But never told us this, left each to learn,
> Hear something of that soon-arriving day
> When to gaze longer and delighted on
> A face or idea be impossible. (276)

Fundamentally, John's speech is a reflection upon whether the individual ought to bestow their allegiance to 'something outside themselves' or to that which lies within.[85] Eliot's tradition blows as 'the wind of history', but its currents cannot carry one forever. For, as Murry, writes, 'in the last resort they must depend upon the inner voice'—the voice which emerges loudly, and although perhaps unrefined or 'untrained', withstands the competing lies 'our fathers shouted once'.[86]

Auden's later decision to carve out his own path as a transatlantic immigrant, inverting the Eliotic precedent by leaving Britain to reside in America, in several ways, represents a continuity of the theme of inherited versus acquired cultural identity, which animated much of the Murry-Eliot debate. Although Auden was much less concerned with outwardly assimilating to his host country's culture than Eliot was in England, he too acquired a kind of outsider's authority within the post-war American poetry scene, exerting a gentle influence from his New York flat over emerging young writers and becoming an emblem of the vibrant fruits of transatlantic cultural exchange himself. Despite the push-back against the authority of Eliot's tradition expressed in *Paid*, Auden ultimately recognized and appreciated his mentor, publisher, and personal friend's efforts to reinvigorate English culture and literature at such a critical time. On the occasion of Eliot's sixtieth birthday, Auden poetically acknowledges that it was Eliot who, 'not speechless from shock but finding the right / language for third and fear, did much to / prevent a panic' during that crucial post-war moment.[87]

Balliol College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

[85] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', 35.
[86] Murry, 'On Fear: And on Romanticism', 275.
[87] Auden, 'To T. S. Eliot on his Sixtieth Birthday', in Edward Mendelson (ed.), *Collected Poems* (London, 1994), 578.