

# *The Voice of This Calling: The Enduring Legacy of T.S. Eliot*

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IN 1953, THE FIRST EDITION of *The Conservative Mind* was subtitled *From Burke to Santayana*; the second and every edition thereafter bore the subtitle *From Burke to Eliot*. Not only did this adjustment afford Kirk a bookend better consisting with Burke, but the change was also fortuitous as one element of a broader clarification of Kirk's premise and purpose. For the second edition, Kirk enlarged his discussion of Eliot, and he also recast the final chapter, changing its final section from one called "The plan of action for American conservatives" to one entitled "The conservative as poet." Thus, Kirk emphasized formally an argument that runs throughout his book—that the most vital expressions of conservative thought are not to be measured so much by effective political activity as by their reflection in the tradition of humane letters, particularly in those writers who (to borrow Kirk's habitual wording) furnished anew the wardrobe of the moral imagination.

In T. S. Eliot, Kirk found just such an exemplar of thoughtful conservatism in-

formed by an acute literary sensibility. Perhaps more importantly, in selecting Eliot as something of a latter-day counterpart to Burke—certainly as a figure more substantial than Santayana and one still living at the time of his writing—Kirk was looking ahead, beyond the tradition of thought he had surveyed, to identify possible models and resources for cultivating the "Conservatives' Promise," as he titled his concluding chapter. The golden anniversary of the original publication of *The Conservative Mind* offers an occasion to reassess that promise and to suggest what the legacy of T. S. Eliot has to offer another generation as we work the fields of a different cultural landscape, venturing to renew what Eliot called "The life of significant soil."<sup>1</sup>

## I

Kirk's substitution of Eliot for Santayana was not merely an afterthought but rather indicative of his sustained engagement with Eliot as he sought to honor an intellectual debt. Shortly after arriving at Saint Andrew's University in 1948 to commence his doctoral studies and to compose the manuscript that would become *The Conservative Mind*, Kirk discovered Eliot's *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*; immediately, he felt a sense of intellectual kinship. The two men met for the first time in Edinburgh in 1953, and that meet-

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ing began a friendship that lasted until Eliot's death in 1965, and which issued in the publication six years later of Kirk's long-germinating study, *Eliot and His Age: T. S. Eliot's Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century*.<sup>2</sup>

Kirk's book on Eliot makes explicit and endeavors to substantiate a strong claim more modestly adumbrated in his survey of conservative thought: "ours has been the Age of Eliot." In the years from the end of the First World War through the first score after the Second, Kirk argued, "Thomas Stearns Eliot, a shy colossus, bestrode the period as Virgil or Dante or Dryden or Johnson had dominated very different times."<sup>3</sup> In thus characterizing Eliot's dominion, Kirk was not simply designating an era of literary history or weighing the poet's considerable influence; nor was he just paying tribute to the one who gave us in *The Waste Land* the preeminent metaphor for our times; rather, for Kirk, "Eliot was the principal champion of the moral imagination in the twentieth century." Eliot summed up the spiritual loss and longing of an epoch so "that, beyond the boredom and the horror, men might perceive the glory."<sup>4</sup>

Kirk saw in Eliot a vital link to the past and a promising link to the future. But he was also aware at the time he finished *Eliot and His Age* in 1971 that the "Age of Eliot" was waning and that forces were mustering to launch a post-mortem assault on Eliot's authority, reputation, and credibility: "Catholic, royalist, classicist—a writer so bold as to describe himself thus sets himself up as a mark to be shot at by folks who worship strange gods."<sup>5</sup> Kirk also predicted that the figure who had been so widely lionized in his lifetime, often for all the wrong reasons, would with the inevitable sharpening of ideological knives become prey to "the rising fad of psychobiography" and grist for the mill of the hermeneutics of suspicion.<sup>6</sup> Even a cursory survey of writings on Eliot over the last two decades amply

confirms the worst of Kirk's fears. Yet Kirk's sympathetic study of Eliot was not, it needs emphasizing, an exercise in hagiography. Actually, the book is remarkably judicious and at points sharply critical of its subject. Kirk sought to rescue Eliot as much from misguided deification as from malicious demonization.

Accordingly, Kirk's task was (and it remains ours today) to discern the enduring value of Eliot's life and work behind the associations, misconceptions, and half-truths conjured by the poet's name: the upstart American who took the European literary establishment by storm; the iconoclastic pioneer of poetic modernism; the romantic nihilist and connoisseur of the aesthetics of despair; the arch architect of obscurity; the neurasthenic neo-medievalist and fusty Anglican; the literary dictator and mandarin arbiter of elite taste (though even Kirk indulges this last one a bit, repeating a touch too solemnly the facetious sobriquet of the aging director of Faber & Faber, "the Pope of Russell Square").

Clearing the ground for a measured appreciation of Eliot requires, too, a difficult sense of perspective—he is, at once, too close to us, and too remote—and an acknowledgment of those things which were peculiar to his historical moment. *The Waste Land*, as Kirk concedes, is already "something of a period piece,"<sup>7</sup> and many of the quarrels of pith and moment that Eliot marshaled between the wars in the pages of *The Criterion* today scarcely command more than antiquarian interest. Even so, Kirk insists, and quite aside from the insights of Eliot's definition of culture, his idea of a Christian society, and his assorted critical and literary judgments, the poet continues to offer latter-day "pilgrims in the waste land" a collection of perduring symbols that can help us explicate our condition and direct our way.<sup>8</sup>

But those symbols, even when rightly construed, risk losing their vitality and

becoming shopworn through long familiarity and our very proximity to Eliot. Much like the hallowed Kirkian invocations of the “permanent things” and the “moral imagination,” holding onto their meanings requires a constant struggle of translation and assimilation. This was something Eliot keenly understood and practiced, and in such understanding, such practice, resides Eliot’s continuing importance. To recover and keep vital the symbols we must also reclaim a measure of the disposition that engendered those symbols.

It is a commonplace that the sequence of Eliot’s major poems and the pattern of his life enact a kind of Dantean pilgrimage from the inferno of the modern soul through the purgatorial fires of self-abnegation to a foretaste of paradisaal communion. Eliot’s own pilgrimage, an instance of our common journey of sanctification, was hardly a holiday excursion. Rather, it entailed an unremitting movement *forward*, together with a concerted motion out and back—to fathom the resources of tradition that afforded the possibility of meaningful pilgrimage in the first place, and to find a way clear of the apparent impasse of modernity. Eliot provides us an example and a challenge—that of combining an appetite for significance with a search for order realized through unsentimental engagement with present-day reality and a sustained and discriminating conversation with tradition, all to approach the possibility of a hope beyond tradition. As Eliot put it, tradition “cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour.”<sup>9</sup> From him we can learn anew the habit of reclaiming tradition, not simply as an intellectual activity or program but as a kind of ongoing spiritual discipline, even a penitential regimen—yet one, for all that, not without its own sense of play. And part of the tradition we have so to reclaim from manifest distortion and misunderstanding is Eliot himself.

## II

“We had the experience but missed the meaning,” wrote Eliot with suggestive generality in the third of his *Four Quartets*.<sup>10</sup> His words may have some application to understanding the extraordinary phenomenon of his own career and reputation, the “mystique” of T. S. Eliot, its making and its undoing. In a belated “obituary” for the “Age of Eliot,” penned by Cynthia Ozick for *The New Yorker* in 1989 (a typical screed, distinguished only in the venomous puerility of its *ad hominem* attacks), Ozick declares that nowadays “the bookish young” can find nothing of interest, much less value, in Eliot.<sup>11</sup> To demonstrate the point, she enacts her own personal exorcism of the spirit of Eliot, confessing and then repenting her youthful idolatry of the poet: “He was lyric shudder and roseburst. He was, in brief, poetry incarnate; and poetry was what one lived for.... He was, to say it quickly, absolute art: high art, when art was at its most serious and elitist.”<sup>12</sup> Eliot, she says, was for her generation the quasi-divine oracle of rapturous despair. But now, alas!, Ozick wails and exults to the accompaniment of Nero’s fiddle,

High art is dead. The passion for inheritance is dead. Tradition is equated with obscurantism. The wall that divided serious high culture from the popular arts is breached; anything can count as “text.” Knowledge—saturated in historical memory—is displaced by information, or memory without history: data.... For the modernists, the center notoriously did not hold; for us (whatever *we* are), there is no recollection of a center and nothing to miss, let alone mourn.<sup>13</sup>

But to pursue the implications of her words—that knowledge saturated in historical memory may point the way back to a real center beyond whirling blips of data, as Eliot understood—that would interrupt the cathartic euphoria of Ozick’s revisionist iconoclasm. She gives

us, instead, facile psychologizing and the summary judgment that Eliot was just another crypto-fascist. The meaning and shape of Eliot's life and writing, she informs us, are really much simpler than we had reckoned: brilliant young Tom ran off to Europe to escape his parents; he married Vivien Haigh-Wood, the poor woman went mad, and the experience produced *The Waste Land*; thereafter Eliot's soul shriveled, and he became a bitter, atavistic churchwarden, hiding in the sacristy, consumed by sin and guilt. Such is the fruit of Ozick's smug disillusionment; but some of us seek more substantial food.

That Eliot perceived through his sense of sin a larger vision of the universal human predicament, that he transmuted his personal suffering into something greater, that he approached through art the reality of a grace beyond the reach of art, that he did so through the enlarging perspective of tradition: all this Ozick refuses to consider. Instead, she chooses to dance on the grave of the slain god, wistful yet gloating: "the truth is we had the experience and were irradiated by the meaning...it is now our unsparing obligation to disclaim the reactionary Eliot."<sup>14</sup> Were she not so blinded by the glow of her own self-righteousness, she could have read on in Eliot's poem just past the line her allusion willfully misconstrues and pondered, "the past experience revived in the meaning/ Is not the experience of one life only/ But of many generations."<sup>15</sup>

Though he retains more sympathetic and tougher-minded expositors—chief among them Denis Donoghue<sup>16</sup>—Ozick's depreciation of Eliot is typical of our current critical climate, and part of Eliot's value today is precisely that he models an alternative to such self-aggrandizing, pop post-modernism, with its ritualistic "slaying of the father"—not only a different idiom but a different disposition of mind and heart. (A further index of these parlous times is the fact that Cynthia Ozick is often accounted something of a "conser-

vative," and not without reason.)<sup>17</sup> To find our way back from Ozick and her ilk to Eliot himself requires opening ourselves to tradition, to a particular attitude toward tradition, and to its disciplined practice.

It is not simply that Eliot understood the practical imperative of what Simone Weil called *l'enracinement*, the need for roots—he wrote an appreciative preface to the English translation of her book of that title—but he also had a vital sense of what we might call the metaphysics of tradition. The variety of his writings, in poetry, drama, literary criticism, and cultural theory, all attests that tradition, rightly conceived, offers neither a refuge of security nor mastery of time but rather constitutes, with and through language, the very medium of our participation in the shared human enterprise, the ground of genuine self-knowledge, the pre-condition for the perception of order and for the possibility of authentic development.

Yet he knew as much without hypostasizing or deifying tradition or history as a monolithic entity; he had a keen sense of time as a dynamic field of tensions and of the fragmentary quality of our fitful resistance to both willed and unconscious uprootedness. He understood, as well, that tradition is no substitute for deeper forms of transcendence, that tradition can only point toward the discovery and the gift of the dispensation of faith handed down for our health. Though he never developed this understanding explicitly in one place, such is the persistent, unifying concern of all his work, from its first articulation as a dimension of literary experience in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) through his musings on time, memory, history, and transcendence in *Four Quartets* (1943). The same concern is not only explored but embodied and enacted in the sequence of his major poems, in his plays, essays, and lectures, branching out from specifically literary questions to encom-

pass and characterize Eliot's approach to society, culture, politics, and religion. Eliot sought to see the whole, yet he also accepted and embraced the particular limitations of his own (partially willed) rootedness in time and place and in the various traditions (some chosen) that composed his self-understanding: "Home is where one starts from," but "History is now and England."<sup>18</sup>

Far from parochial or sectarian, though nonetheless firmly situated, Eliot's work can be understood as a kind of demonstration of Alisdair MacIntyre's insight into "the rationality of traditions" and accordingly connects with an important and ongoing philosophic discussion of the meanings and implications of *traditio*.<sup>19</sup> From Edmund Burke to John Henry Newman and on through Eric Voegelin and Hans-Georg Gadamer, a large and various body of argument concurs in suggesting that the real enemy of human understanding and development is not the dead weight of tradition—which is never quite as dead as some suppose—but rather the conditions of deracinated individualism and rootless cosmopolitanism, coupled with all the attendant species of modern ideological presumption. The result is the deprivation of relational connectedness and the impoverishment of meaningful language, inducing the modern sense of *anomie* that Eliot diagnosed with ruthless precision and that even Ozick ruefully concedes to be the ongoing character of our times: "Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind."<sup>20</sup>

However, Eliot did not use tradition only or even primarily as an instrument of critique for contrasting a shabby present with a vibrant past—though crude readings of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* hardly get beyond such an inference. To be precise, Eliot did not "use" tradition at all, as if it were an implement or a power to be wielded; rather Eliot's acute and cultivated consciousness of tradition constituted, as

much or more than personal experience, the very nerve of his creative and critical faculties. We will come to no just estimate of Eliot and his relevance unless we also appreciate the positive function of tradition in composing his particular moral imagination. "Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us/ To purify the dialect of the tribe/ And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight"<sup>21</sup>—since language was the stuff of Eliot's calling—it may be helpful to think about his discipline of tradition in the light of Gadamer's historical hermeneutics, with its remarkably positive vindication and development of classical aesthetics and the humanist ethics of interpretation.

### III

Against the dominance of subjectivism and the rule of "method" in aesthetic and interpretive theory since the Enlightenment, Gadamer argues for the solidly historical character of human knowledge, and he rehabilitates the concept of "prejudice" to help reclaim the resources of authority and tradition as means of creative insight and rational participation: "Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused."<sup>22</sup> Gadamer's central concept of the "fusion of horizons," the intersection of past and present, has the character of a conversation with broad ethical implications. As it was for Eliot, tradition for Gadamer is the ground of morality, the basis of education, and the arena of human freedom; and in language it becomes also a mode of our participation in the ground of being.

Though language itself in Gadamer's thought sometimes threatens to usurp the place of divinity, the validity and relevance of linguistically mediated tradition in his account rests on an Augustinian notion of the function of the *Logos* in human understanding and on the con-



cept of personal application (*subtilitas applicandi*) inherited from German Pietism.<sup>23</sup> That Eliot applied the lessons of tradition to his own conversion to Christian orthodoxy does not mean that he settled into an easy chair, communing privately with the Word in religious bliss; far from it, he recognized in conversion the beginning of “a long journey afoot,” one beset with the constant struggle of wresting meaning from language and tradition.<sup>24</sup> With Gadamer, and with the best of our post-modern avatars of suspicion, Eliot knew that “Words strain,/ Crack and sometimes break” and that “History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors.”<sup>25</sup>

Tradition comes to us with a variety of multifarious voices: their meaningful orchestration and application to the concerns of the current moment demands openness, tact, judgment, and discrimination. Tradition is not an object that can be mastered by method or controlled by technique, Gadamer insists, but rather presents itself to us as a gift in the form of an interpersonal relationship: “For tradition is a genuine partner in communication, with which we have fellowship as does the ‘I’ with a ‘Thou.’”<sup>26</sup> It is perhaps sadly revelatory that Eliot’s poetry rarely dramatizes—and even his plays only intermittently—genuine moments of human intimacy and person-to-person communion; yet his poems are rich in Gadamerian dialogues with tradition, both explicitly and more subtly personified, from the voices of Virgil and Augustine in *The Waste Land* through the “familiar compound ghost” of *Little Gidding*, and indeed, his essays consist largely of such conversations. As Gadamer argues and Eliot demonstrates, the ordered apprehension, assimilation, and development of tradition is the work of an ethically informed historical consciousness, situated in time and place, and requires the diligent application of prudence (*phronesis*), an awareness of human finitude together with an appreciation of the

educative value of suffering, and the self-surrender of creative interaction with art as a form of “play.”

To descend for a moment from the heights of hermeneutic theory, we may glean a sense of the relevance of Gadamer’s approach to understanding Eliot’s own *habitus* of tradition by pausing to hear W. H. Auden’s wonderful characterization of Eliot’s intermingled *personae* as a household with “at least three permanent residents”:

First, there is the archdeacon, who believes in and practices order, discipline, and good manners, social and intellectual, with a thoroughly Anglican distaste for evangelical excess.... And, no wonder, for the poor gentleman is condemned to be domiciled with a figure of a very different stamp, a violent and passionate old peasant grandmother, who has witnessed murder, rape, pogroms, famine, flood, fire, everything; who has looked into the abyss and, unless restrained, would scream the house down.... Last, as if this state of affairs were not difficult enough, there is a young boy who likes to play slightly malicious jokes. The too earnest guest, who has come to interview the Reverend, is startled and bewildered in being handed an explosive cigar.<sup>27</sup>

In Auden’s vignette of Eliot’s multiple selves we can discern analogies for the principal dimensions of his particular stewardship of tradition.

In the figure of the archdeacon we see Eliot as an exemplar of Aristotelian *phronesis* as applied by Gadamer to the moral component of creative insight and critical understanding. Insofar as our conversation with tradition is ultimately ordered toward self-understanding and the application of the universal to the particular situation, argues Gadamer, the moral knowledge sought in creative and critical activity subsists in the habit of practical wisdom.<sup>28</sup> Even Eliot’s decision to align himself with the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England rather than Roman Catholicism was not only a func-

tion of theological conviction and cultural preference but also had about it the character of a prudential judgment. More to the point, as a poet and a critic Eliot never allowed the mists of abstraction to obscure the jagged edges of concrete and particular instance. Though he is known for the arcane formulations of the “objective correlative” and the “dissociation of sensibility,” he was pre-eminently a practical critic concerned above all else to explicate and make richly meaningful demonstrable nuances of tone, voice, and sensibility. He had an astonishing gift in his essays for apt and revealing quotations, and in his poetry for arresting and evocative allusions. Where his poems configure the voices of tradition in vivid juxtaposition with the controlled pressure of challenging contexts, his literary criticism explicates the tensions within and across traditions through a deft counterpoint, as when he sets in contrastive play Pascal and Montaigne, Bramhall and Hobbes, Andrewes and Donne, and Dante and the French Symbolists.

This counterpoint of tensions also inflects Eliot’s cultural criticism with intricate webs of qualification, carefully delimiting the scope of his arguments and the particular force of his claims, “Restricted to What Precisely/ And If and Perhaps and But./ How unpleasant to meet Mr. Eliot!”<sup>29</sup> Thus he painstakingly delineates the tensions between liberalism and Christianity (in *The Idea of a Christian Society*) and the complex symbiosis of culture and religion, class and elite, unity and diversity, and education and politics (in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*). However much Eliot’s networks of caveat and proviso may exasperate the reader, they are central to his habit of mind and characteristic of an ethical disposition committed to honoring all of the complexity and diversity of our multi-form reality.

Eliot the prudent archdeacon keeps company with “a young boy who likes to

play slightly malicious jokes,” and we recall that “Old Possum” really was a Marxist of the Groucho variety and an inveterate practical joker. But quite aside from his sense of whimsy, there is in Eliot’s engagement with tradition through aesthetic experience and in the very seriousness of his art a quality of “play” that is not altogether unlike handing the importunate guest an explosive cigar. For Gadamer, the concept of “play” is both important and elusive, drawing together in a rich knot of meanings multiple senses of the word, to designate not the subjective attitude of “playfulness” but rather the nature of art itself. It is, he says—not very helpfully!—“the mode of being of the work of art itself.”<sup>30</sup> In Gadamer’s usage, the word characterizes the gratuitous integrity and internal dynamism of the accomplished artwork, which is like a “game,” set off from ordinary reality, vitalized by its own “rules,” and to which the “player” submits in “playing” to become part of the “game.” In both the making and contemplation of art, we are drawn outside and beyond ourselves into a mode of disinterested yet pleasurable participation, one in which reality is arrested and transformed in artistic representation. But the reality that “goes into” art in representation, arrested and transformed, also “comes out,” as it were, in contemplation and can issue in a new perception of reality, transformed with insight. Thus, for Gadamer, art—most especially literary art—serves uniquely as a vital carrier of tradition even as it effects the ongoing modification or enrichment of tradition: “What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition has effectively something about it of the truth of play.”<sup>31</sup>

Gadamer’s account of “play” helps gloss the brilliant insights of “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” especially Eliot’s theory of the “impersonality of art,” while assisting our larger appreciation of Eliot’s dual vocation as poet and critic. Accord-

ing to Gadamer, the critic, too, plays a central role in preserving and transmitting tradition: “The literary critic goes on, as it were, weaving the great tapestry of tradition which supports us.”<sup>32</sup> And perhaps Eliot was not altogether disingenuous when he described poetry as “a mug’s game” and “a superior form of amusement.”<sup>33</sup> Be that as it may, in the spirit of Gadamerian “play” we can still receive the gift of Eliot’s poems as so many explosive cigars, with their capacity to arrest and transform our understanding; and when they explode in our midst we may feel with the blast and the ensuing epiphany something of what Gadamer calls “the joy of knowledge.”<sup>34</sup>

We must not forget the place in the Eliot household of the “old peasant grandmother” with her comprehensive awareness of the reality of human suffering. Ready to “scream the house down” and speaking for herself in Eliot’s verse, she requires rather less commentary than her flat-mates, restrained as she is by the prudent reverend and momentarily distracted from the abyss by an exploding cigar. Suffice it to say that Eliot perceived and recorded in his time, as Aeschylus and Dostoevsky did in theirs, both the universal *pathos* of human grief and the particular forms of modern pathology; and it was his special *métier* to reveal not the shapes of physical violence—murders, rapes, pogroms—but their subtler, less obvious psychic equivalents in the waste land of broken, desiccated, loveless souls. He saw this spectacle of suffering, and he saw it steadily and whole through the blind eyes of Tiresias—through the perspective of tradition. He did so not as an act of evasion or repression, to hide from himself and the world “the inferno that was Vivien,” as Ozick would have it,<sup>35</sup> but in the only way any of us can learn from suffering—through its enlargement in sympathy and solidarity, even and especially across the distance of time.

According to Gadamer, the Aeschylean dictum of “learning through suffering” (*patheimathos*), perhaps the central awareness of historical consciousness, means not only passing through the vale of disillusionment, but more particularly the humbling acknowledgement of human finitude, which is the very reality of experience, not just of tradition. If the clergyman and the prankster keep the old woman in check, it is also true that the hectoring grandmother puts the other two in mind of their mortality; prudence and play are both circumscribed in and necessitated by *finitude*. Gadamer sums up:

What a man has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but the knowledge of the limitations of humanity, of the absoluteness of the barrier that separates him from the divine. It is ultimately a religious insight—that kind of insight which gave birth to Greek tragedy.<sup>36</sup>

From this truth, says Gadamer, comes not only humility but “a new openness to new experiences” and the moral knowledge for a deeper communication with tradition. And he might have added: compassion. Recalling his first meeting with Eliot in 1953, Kirk wrote,

Nowadays I hesitate to attribute “compassion”—what with the mawkish corruption of that word—to a sensible man. Yet compassion, in its root sense, could be read in Eliot’s face: not the condescending sentimentality of the humanitarian, but a consciousness of the community of souls.<sup>37</sup>

Kirk goes on to quote the lines from Eliot’s “Preludes” that came into his mind on the occasion of that meeting:

I am moved by fancies that are curled  
Around these images, and cling:  
The notion of some infinitely gentle  
Infinitely suffering thing.

Unsentimental yet tender, Eliot came to see as the full measure of compassion, as



the object of faith and hope beyond the insights of his beloved Greek tragedians, embracing and even constituting the community of souls throughout time, the ministrations of “The wounded surgeon,” Christ our Health, in Whom we are assured that “All shall be well, and/ All manner of thing shall be well.”<sup>38</sup>

#### IV

For latter-day “pilgrims in the wasteland,” T. S. Eliot offers neither a program for success nor a recipe of happiness, no remedy, nostrum or elixir, but simply the counsel of hope, the example of his prudence, play, and compassion, all as part of the imperative of the unremitting spiri-

tual discipline of tradition. Tradition is a hard and rugged way—not without its consolations, but daunting nonetheless. Yet nothing else will do, arrayed as we are against the powers of darkness and the forces of forgetfulness, “But fare forward, voyagers.”<sup>39</sup> By his labor and in his words, Eliot modified the contours and contents of tradition with his particular fusion of horizons. He is now part of the tradition in which we find ourselves, and his are the *tradita* handed down to us by which we must take our own bearings and respond anew to “the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling.” The rest, Eliot enjoins us, “Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.”<sup>40</sup>

1. *The Dry Salvages*, l. 233. Quotations of Eliot’s verse are from *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (New York, 1970). 2. On Kirk’s first meeting with Eliot and their ensuing friendship, see *Eliot and His Age* (Peru, Ill., 1971), 4-5 and *passim*, and *The Sword of Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict* (Grand Rapids, 1995), 212-216. Though sadly out of print, *Eliot and His Age* remains perhaps the best and most engaging introduction to Eliot’s life and times, as well as the range of his writings, including poetry, drama, essays, lectures, reviews, and letters. Though Kirk does not offer particularly original readings of the poems, his literary criticism is unfailingly judicious, and he provides lucid guidance through some of the most challenging verse of the century. 3. *Eliot and His Age*, 9-10. 4. *Ibid.*, 7. 5. *Ibid.*, 429. 6. *Ibid.*, 428. 7. *Ibid.*, 432. 8. *Ibid.*, 433-434. 9. “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York, 1975), 38. 10. *The Dry Salvages*, l. 93. 11. Cynthia Ozick, “T. S. Eliot at 101,” *The New Yorker* (November 20, 1989): 119. 12. *Ibid.*, 122. 13. *Ibid.*, 152-53. 14. *Ibid.*, 154. 15. *The Dry Salvages*, ll. 97-99. 16. See Denis Donoghue’s *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (New Haven, 2000). 17. Especially interesting in light of Ozick’s piece in *The New Yorker* is Mark Krupnick’s essay, “Cynthia Ozick as the Jewish T. S. Eliot,” *Soundings* 74 (1991): 351-368. 18. *East Coker*, l. 190 and *Little Gidding*, l. 237. 19. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, 1988), esp. Ch. 18, “The Rationality of Traditions.” 20. *Burnt Norton*, l. 104. 21. *Little Gidding*, ll. 126-

128. 22. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York, 1982), 258. 23. See Jens Zimmerman, “Confusion of Horizons: Gadamer and the Christian Logos,” *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 22 (2001): 87-98. 24. In a letter to Paul Elmer More, dated 3 August 1929, Eliot wrote, “Most critics appear to think that my catholicism is merely an escape or an evasion, certainly a defeat. I acknowledge the difficulty of a positive Christianity nowadays; and I can only say that the dangers pointed out, and my own weaknesses, have been apparent to me long before my critics noticed them. But it [is] rather trying to be supposed to have settled oneself in an easy chair, when one has just begun a long journey afoot.” Quoted in John D. Margolis, *T. S. Eliot’s Intellectual Development 1922-1939* (Chicago, 1972), 143. 25. *Burnt Norton*, ll. 149-50 and *Gerontion*, l. 35. 26. *Truth and Method*, 321. 27. Quoted in R. P. Blackmur, “In the Hope of Straightening Things Out,” in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Hugh Kenner (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), 140. 28. See *Truth and Method*, 278-289. 29. *Five-Finger Exercises*, V. “Lines for Cuscuscaraway and Mirza Murad Ali Beg,” ll. 6-8. 30. *Truth and Method*, 91. 31. *Ibid.*, 446. 32. *Ibid.*, 302. 33. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, 95. 34. *Truth and Method*, 101. 35. Ozick, “T. S. Eliot at 101,” 143. 36. *Truth and Method*, 320. 37. *Eliot and His Age*, 5. 38. *East Coker*, l. 147 and *Little Gidding*, ll. 167-168. 39. *The Dry Salvages*, l. 170. 40. *Little Gidding*, l. 238 and *The Dry Salvages*, l. 214.