CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ELIOT’S CRITICISM

The word 'criticism' was used in the modern sense by Dryden in his preface to the *State of Innocence* (1677). He wrote, "Criticism as it was first instituted by Aristotle was meant to be a standard of judging well". With Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (1711) the term 'criticism' was firmly established in English. Now the term literary criticism is applied to the study of works of literature.

T.S. Eliot defines the nature and function of criticism in different contexts and on different occasions. In *Selected Essays*, he defines criticism as the elucidation of works of art and correction of taste.\(^1\) He thus gives the first theoretical statement on the relationship between literary criticism and its function to inculcate in the reader the correct way of appreciating literature. As it appears, he does not regard more enjoyment of literature as an end in itself. Enjoyment must also be accompanied by understanding of literary works.

Later, he remarks that the function of criticism is to promote the understanding and enjoyment of literature.\(^2\) Looking more deeply into the function of criticism, Eliot considers that a criticism should enable one to make a distinction between a good poem and a bad poem. One might of course ask here as to why Eliot relates the function of criticism only to poems, and not to other forms of literature. Is it because he was himself a poet and therefore his chief concern was poetry? Or, is it because the critics of his time were all mainly concerned with poetry? Does he not share this view of the function of criticism elucidated here with the other critics who are, like him, to be described as New Critics?
Again, Eliot is of the view that the rudiment of criticism is to enable the critic to select a good poem and reject a bad one.  

At a yet later stage, Eliot states that one function of criticism is to act as a kind of cog regulating the rate of change in literary taste.  

Eliot also observes that a critic must consider that "it is part of the business of a critic to preserve tradition where a good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it not as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time; to see the last work of our time and the best work of twentyfive hundred years ago with the same eyes."

Eliot relates criticism to philosophical activity in respect of its serious function. He observes: "It would appear that criticism like any philosophical activity is so inevitable and requires no justification ... you cannot deplore criticism unless you deprecate philosophy."

According to Eliot, a critic should have a highly developed sense of fact and the critic's task is to make the reader possessed of facts. In matters of literary importance, Eliot points out, the critic should not make judgments in terms of good or bad, better or worse; he must simply elucidate.

In "The Function of Criticism" Eliot stresses the fact-finding responsibility of a critic which may require him to examine even the minutest details connected with the work of literature. Eliot is in favour of storing a piece of fact, even
of the lowest importance. But in "The Function of Criticism", he disapproves of a critic's concern with source-hunting and genesis of a work. Thus in this essay Eliot takes a specific stand on the type of criticism pursued by phenomenological critics who emphasise a writer's personal biography and hunt for sources of his work. He therefore advises the critic to go directly to a work of art, and analyse it and appreciate it instead of examining any extraneous details. Discussing Wordsworth, Eliot states that Wordsworth secretly loved his sister Dorothy may be true, but that fact does not add to our enjoyment and understanding of the Lucy poems. Eliot turns down any critical effort at "the explanation of poetry by examination of its source". In On Poetry and Poets he observes:

For myself, I can only say that a knowledge of the springs which released a poem is not necessarily a help towards understanding the poem: too much information about the origins of the poem may even break my contact with it . . .

While Eliot discourages this method of criticism which seeks "a knowledge of the springs", he draws attention to the more serious issues that criticism is concerned with.

In considering the function of criticism, Eliot does not overlook the importance of the relationship between life and literature. In addition to the literary problems, he is seriously concerned with the major issues which vex the minds of modern thinkers. He is concerned with the survival of culture and civilization, with the problem of values, and with religion and its impact on the creative mind. Thus as a critic of life and letters, Eliot surveys the whole panorama of human
experience. But as a literary critic, he is of the opinion that the literariness of a work of art can be ascertained by only literary standards. He combines the two views and postulates that the greatness of literature cannot be ascertained by purely literary considerations. Such apparently contradictory statements not only confirm the variety and complexity of his critical ideas and formulations but also suggest that he views both life and art from a certain theoretical standpoint. Eliot thus maintains that criticism has serious functions to discharge. It is concerned not merely with establishing literary and critical standards but also with showing how a literary work can attain the height or level at which it can be called great. Criticism therefore, in the long run, puts serious responsibilities on the critic.

F.R. Leavis in a review captioned "Eliot's Stature as Critic", brings serious charges against Eliot as a critic. He writes:

What was not at once apparent to all of those impressed was that some of the ideas, attitudes and valuations put into currency by Eliot were arbitrary . . . 6

Leavis uses even harsh words like "the absurdity of the dictum" to criticise Eliot's important formulation about the perfect artist. But Leavis's remarks about Eliot are not to the point. They are emotional or smack of rancour when, for instance, he finds a significant defect of intelligence in Eliot. In the early part of the twentieth century Eliot had to play the role of an iconoclast. He was obliged to exaggerate and overemphasise certain ideas in order to blast the lingering romantic facades and habits behind the endeavours of critics.
On the contrary, Delmore Schwartz makes Eliot a dictator in his article, "The Literary Dictatorship of T.S. Eliot". There is no doubt some amount of exaggeration in his view, but to talk of the dictatorship of Eliot both as critic and poet is not altogether unjustified. It is difficult to deny that the best criticism of our time is usually not only Eliot-oriented but also looks authentic because of this orientation.

It may be said that Eliot's whole criticism is a denial of the poetic usefulness of romantic mysticism. And what he actually says is: "I do not deny that art may be affirmed to serve ends beyond itself; but art is not required to be aware of these ends, and indeed performs its function, whatever that may be, ... much better by indifference to them". But he expects the artist to be critically aware of his function which, seemingly, is to bring his resources of feeling, thought and language to bear on his subject in such a way as to produce a self-contained reality. He is concerned with the reality of his poem, and his function is to ensure it. But it is not his job to know what may be the end of his activity, the function of his own concern with function, or what use is to be made of it by others, or at what point it is to enter and affect the body of society. Poetry is important enough to be treated on in its own terms, as a separate thing. Therefore, Eliot avoids detailing or expatiating on the possible impact which poetry may have on society or on human affairs.

Eliot defines the purpose of criticism as "the elucidation of works of art and correction of taste". The "purpose" referred to here is obviously the social purpose, and the social impact it has. The actual process of criticism may aim at and consist of providing a more or less formal guidance
to the reader, even a hypothetical reader, to enable him to acquire an awareness of life of a higher quality envisioned in a poem or novel. It is therefore a communal matter and, as Leavis never weary of stressing, it is almost inevitably phrased so as to elicit argument, modification or enlightened dissent.9

Elliot's position as a critic has provoked a great deal of controversy, reaction and reassessments. Consequently, different meanings have been read into the intentions behind this reaction. R.H. Robbins, a hostile critic, in a book The T.S. Elliot Myth, now regarded as a very monument of incomprehension, sees Elliot's criticism as part of the counter-pressure of this century against the liberal achievement of the past three or four centuries. It is true that Elliot has been markedly influenced by the great thinker-critics who hated that "liberal achievement". Chief among them is T.E. Hulme. Of course there were other distinguished figures such as Remy de Gourmont, Irving Babbitt, Pound, Laforgue and F.H. Bradley - names which appear prominently in scholarly estimates. They too seem to have influenced Elliot.10 But Hulme had a greater impact on him.

Elliot's proper criticism can be found in his essays on Marvell, Blake, Swinburne and Ezra Pound. In these essays Elliot repeatedly stresses the procedure of comparison and analysis, direct inquiry, examination of a text and a disinterested assessment. In the essay "From Poe to Valery" we find that no apparent musical rhyme is able to soothe Elliot's critical eye to slumber. Regarding Poe's "The Raven" Elliot makes a significant remark:
The bird is addressed as 'no craven' quite needlessly except for the pressing need of a rhyme to 'raven' — a surrender to the exigencies of rhyme with which I am sure Malherbe would have had no patience. 11

Likewise his criticism of Swinburne is equally trenchant and in the same vein:

You see that Provence is the merest point of diffusion here. Swinburne defines the place by the most general word, which has for him its own value. 'Gold', 'ruin', 'dolorous'; it is not merely the sound that he wants, but the vague associations of idea that the words give him. He has not his eye on a particular place ... It is, in fact, the word that gives him the thrill, not the object. 12

T.S. Eliot, sometimes thought of as a founder of New Criticism, urged as far back as 1935 in his essay, "Religion and Literature", that the critical act is incomplete until the concern of ethic and religion have also been brought to bear upon the literary work. 13 Another modern critic and a close associate of Eliot, Allen Tate also insists that the literary standard, to be effectively literary, must be more than literary. 14

And if in their different ways Ransom and Blackmur, two other New Critics, have sometimes sounded too much like aesthetes, they have written most eloquently, and even perhaps somewhat penitentially, on the theme of the vital relation of
literature to deepest moral and intellectual concerns of man. A major theme of Ransom has been that art completes man by restoring to him something of what has been taken away from his human nature by his brute needs and appetites - the possibility of innocence, of love, even of religious awareness. And Blackmur urges in "A Critic's Job of Work" that criticism, by virtue of the very nature of literature, is inherently involved with the establishment and appreciation of human or moral values.\textsuperscript{15} He has insisted that the critic is simply a maker of connecting bridges so that perception and understanding can come about more easily between writer and reader.\textsuperscript{16} He is at most a "go-between", a discreet, disappearing Pandarus of the arts.\textsuperscript{17} Only Ransom, among the critics, comes forth bravely in defence of the critic as something of a poet, congratulating Tate on teaching "creative writing so that it may include criticism alluding to Arnold's authoritative belief that criticism exercises the creative intelligence",\textsuperscript{18} savouring Eliot's critical prose because it "has some of the value of literature".\textsuperscript{19} Ransom disparages the "schoolmaster" critic, like Aristotle, because art invites an art response, a secondary poetic frenzy, which the schoolmaster suppresses. He prefers the critic who, as he says in his essay on Aristotle, starts ideally with a spontaneous surge of piety, and is inducted by the contagion of art into a composition of his own, which sustains the warmth unashamed, and probably manages a rounded literary effect, having a beginning, a middle, and an end.\textsuperscript{20}

Eliot's critical essays, namely "The Function of Criticism", "The Frontiers of Criticism" and "The Experiment in Criticism", deserve particular attention because they represent the theoretical grounds of his criticism. These essays
underline Eliot's unhappiness with impressionistic or aesthetic criticism. He has a wrangle with Middleton Murry's "Inner Voice" in "The Function of Criticism". Eliot maintains that true criticism always aims at objectivity and springs directly from the text, and every generalization is said to be based upon it or is immediately relevant to it. Rebutting Murry's argument Eliot holds that in the pursuit of objectivity in criticism some rules, some guideline or authority should be acknowledged, for constant listening to one's inner voice will lead one to fancy or fiction or sheer subjectivity and make criticism meaningless. Eliot is critical of Middleton Murry's lines:

The English writer, the English divine, the English statesman, inherit no rules from their forbears; they inherit only this: a sense that in the last resort they must depend upon the inner voice — and says that in criticism "inner voice" will not work, it will rather lead the critic away as it is equal to "doing as one likes". Eliot terms this "inner voice" as "whiggery" or "Muddle Through".

Eliot mentions many other useful tenets of permanent value concerning criticism and critics in his essay "The Function of Criticism". In this essay he defines criticism as "the commentation and exposition of works of art by means of written words". He says that criticism is not an autotelic activity or critic a "palpitating Narcissi". For a critic the traditional or the historical sense is more important than for a poet. As Remy de Gourmont puts it, the chief tools of a critic are "comparison and analysis". And indeed they are tools to be handled with care. Analysis, then, demands that a critic
should have a highly developed sense of fact. Scholarship, even in its humblest forms implies stress on facts. As Eliot remarks:

And any book, any essay, any note in Notes and Queries, which produces a fact even of the lowest order about a work of art ...... but fact cannot corrupt taste, ...... The real corrupters are those who supply opinion or fancy ...... an attempt to present Coleridge in an attractive costume .

About a critic’s task he further says that a critic should try to overcome his prejudices and whims in order to love balance, truth and objectivity in his criticism. He makes a commendable remark in this context:

The critic, one should suppose, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks – tares to which we are all subject – and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgment .

Making an assessment of T.S. Eliot, W.E. Collins in his essay on Eliot which appeared in The Sewanee Review (1931) regards him as a type of the pure and ascetic critic. He further says that such a critic's most valuable instrument is "his faculty to perceive; his apparatus, a test-tube, a pair of callipers and a box of weights". What he says about impure critics is that they are not analysts, and that they have no dissociative faculty. They might rather be termed as impressionists.
It is true that Eliot's criticism is analytical. His earlier tendency towards aesthetic and impressionistic criticism has been controlled. It is analytical criticism not psycho-analytical, nor psychological criticism in the manner of Paul Bourget. Bourget's criticism is governed by catholicity of vision which can comprehend different kinds of literary experience. But to say that Eliot is merely a pure and analytic critic as Collins maintains would be to falsify the facts and overlook aspects of overriding the fundamental importance in Eliot's total critical output. As the later part of that critical work shows Eliot the critic has been clearly concerned with seeing literature in relationship with the social and religious concerns of man, not merely with literature as an autonomous construct. But before he arrives at that important stage of his perception, he relates criticism to the creative act.

Eliot places great stress on the terms "critical" and "creative" and says that the distinction between these two activities should not be made bluntly. No good art is possible without creation and the critical work done consciously or unconsciously is implied in it. We should not conclude that a creative work is not good if we find no critical labour in it for we may not know what were the obstacles in the way of criticism or in the mind of the writer. In this context we are reminded that there is a place for criticism in creation but not vice versa. He does not find creative criticism in general of any positive use and justification in the practice of criticism. Eliot says:

I have assumed as axiomatic that a creation, a work of art, is autotelic; and that criticism, by definition is about something other than
itself. Hence you cannot fuse creation with criticism as you can fuse criticism with creation.\textsuperscript{25}

Eliot's "The Frontiers of Criticism" may be termed as a classic essay on criticism. In "The Function of Criticism" we find that Eliot favours scholarship and the finding of facts of even the lowest order which may help in the interpretation of a work. Eliot suggests in it that the discovery of Shakespeare's laundry bills may be of no concern to us but may be put to some use by some geniuses in future. Hence it may be concluded that no hasty judgment should be passed on any scholarship of even the humblest order. But he confesses that this kind of fact finding research had been carried out with negative or unhealthy results. It had led to too much of source-hunting thus defeating the purpose of criticism which is to help the understanding and enjoyment of poetry.

One cannot have the right understanding of a work of art merely by seeking the sources and identifying the origin of it. Eliot reiterates that a critic's task is "to promote the understanding and enjoyment" of art. In his opinion, overemphasis on details about biographical, political or sociological aspects of a poem may become an obstacle to our immediate understanding and apprehension of the vital experience and the glory of poetry. Eliot himself felt partly responsible for the development of an unwelcome trend in criticism. He admits that his Notes to his poem, \textit{The Waste Land}, had led critics and readers to form a wrong notion of criticism which tempted them to hunt for sources, and the understanding of poems by going into their genesis. This trend was contrary to his intention of adding the notes to the poem merely to increase the number of printed pages.
Eliot does not regard highly Herbert Read's approach to Wordsworth. In his book on Wordsworth, Herbert Read explains the rise and fall of Wordsworth's genius in terms of his love affair with Annette Vallon. Another critic F.E. Bateson had come to another similar observation regarding Wordsworth's source of poetic inspiration. He held that Annette Vallon does not count so much as Wordsworth's love for his own sister, Dorothy. Eliot acknowledges that reading the Lucy poems may explain why after Wordsworth's marriage his inspiration dried up. But he does not find the argument very plausible because it left the real question unanswered - the question whether this account "helps the reader to understand the Lucy poems any better than he did before? Eliot takes a definitely theoretical stand on the question when he states that the biographical discovery does not help the reader. Discussing the theoretical implications of this approach Eliot states:

For myself, I can only say that a knowledge of the springs which released a poem is not necessarily a help towards understanding the poem: too much information about the origins of the poem may even break my contact with it. I feel no need for any light upon the Lucy poems beyond the radiance shed by the poems themselves.

I am not maintaining that there is no context in which such information or conjecture as that of Sir Herbert Read and Mr. Bateson may be relevant. It is relevant if we want to understand Wordsworth; but it is not directly relevant to our understanding of his poetry. Or rather, it is not relevant to our
understanding of the poetry as poetry. I am even prepared to suggest that there is, in all great poetry, something which must remain unaccountable however complete might be our knowledge of the poet, and that is what matters most. When the poem has been made, something new has happened, something that cannot be wholly explained by anything that went before. That, I believe, is what we mean by "creation".26

Eliot further states that he understands some poetry without explanation, as for instance, Shakespeare's "Full fathom five thy father lies" or Shelley's "Art thou pale for weariness of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth".

Eliot again sticks to the new puristic analytical view of criticism. He derides the critics who, under the guise of scholarship and fact-finding, have stepped out of the limits of literary criticism and are doing the work of biography, sociology or philosophy. In his opinion they might better be called historians, sociologists or philosophers. There are limits to literary criticism. When it exceeded in one direction it ceases to be literary and, in another, it ceases to be criticism. The task of writing a critical biography is the most delicate one. While taking up this task, one is likely to be misled or tempted to put more emphasis on biography than criticism. A biographer should possess some critical ability. Similarly, a critic in order to understand a work of another should have some knowledge of his biography.
Such a critic may be termed an empirical critic, i.e., one who learns and acts by experience. Not only does he aspire to the needs of a particular time but he also responds to the formulation of timeless principles. Eliot says:

Thirty-three years ago, it seems to have been the latter type of criticism, the impressionistic, that had caused the annoyance I felt when I wrote on "the function of criticism". To-day it seems to me that we need to be more on guard against the purely explanatory.

The distinction between the literary critic and the critic who has crossed the frontier of literary criticism is not that the literary critic has very limited interest beyond literature, as in that case such a critic will have very little to say to us. A critic cannot be presumed to be a technical expert just because he observes some rules. The critic should be a person "with conviction and principles, and possess knowledge and experience of life", and be able to recognise the variety, richness and depth of the experience and the artist's moral vision. Eliot emphasises the task of a critic as "the promotion of enjoyment and understanding" of a work of art. A critic should not be merely a verbal or technical expert. The understanding and enjoyment of a poem may not come merely by studying a poem on the printed page. Eliot's observations regarding the nature and role of a critic recall Henry James's remark: "Woe to the mere official critic, the critic who has never felt the man."
The frontiers of literary criticism have greater likelihood of being blurred as there has been constant development and overlapping of numerous disciplines: for instance, semantics, aesthetics, anthropology, etc.

In the opinion of Eliot literary criticism cannot be isolated from the developments and numerous happenings of the present. It is obvious that numerous sciences must have their impact on literature and criticism. Hence "the transformation of criticism" cannot be deplored. But Eliot also insists that in the right perspective literary criticism should not cease to be "literary". He explains that to be literary does not mean to be limited in one's interest for it does not forbid our having any "interest beyond literature". But he cautions us that literary criticism should not be a substitute for history, sociology, or neurology. On the task of criticism in the modern age Eliot in his essay, "Experiment in Criticism" remarks that it ought to expand its borders and also clarify its centre because these tasks were its important concerns.

Eliot maintains that there is a great deal of difference between modern literary criticism and the literary criticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. He finds that the latter recognised literature as literature and not as another thing. The purpose of literature is something distinct from the purpose of such studies as psychology and philosophy. The purpose of literature was to give a refined pleasure to persons of sufficient leisure and good breeding. The old critics took for granted that literature was something primarily to be enjoyed, If not, then, they could not have occupied themselves so sedulously with laying down rules for what was right to enjoy. In this context Eliot further says:
For the earlier period, art and literature were not the substitute of religion or philosophy or morals or politics, any more than for duelling or love-making. They were special and limited adornments of life. On each side there is profit and loss. We have gained perhaps a deeper insight, now and then, whether to enjoy literature any more keenly than our ancestors, I do not know, but I think we should return again and again to the critical writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to remind ourselves of that simple truth that literature is primarily literature, a means of refined and intellectual pleasure.

Eliot attaches importance to the need for self-criticism by artists or writers at some stages of their careers. Later on he modifies his opinion on it. But he speaks highly of "the notes on the art of writing by practitioners" in these words:

But from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century, literary criticism had been confined to two narrow, and closely related, types. One was a type which can always have great value, it may be called practical notes on the art of writing by practitioners... such notes are of the greatest value to other artists, particularly when studied in conjunction with the author's own work. Two classical examples in English are the Elizabethan treatises on rhymed and unrhymed verse written by Thomas Caupion and Samuel Daniel. The prefaces and essays of Dryden, the prefaces of Corneille, are of the same type but on a large scale and engage other wider issues.
In the light of the above remark we may regard some part of Eliot's criticism as "practical notes on the art of writing" or what he says "workshop-criticism". We are well aware that this kind of criticism has some obvious limitations as it is more revealing but limited in its range. The "practical note" which has no generality or universality cannot illuminate the aspects of art in which a particular poet does not take interest. A particular critical practitioner is the master of his own field; the other fields of study are beyond his competence. Thus we may conclude that although the workshop criticism has definiteness, it has also its limitations. Eliot states rightly that the ideal criticism can result from the interaction of critics of various special trainings. He observes:

The present age has been rather uncritical and partly for economic causes. The critic has been chiefly the reviewer, that is to say, the hurried amateur wage-slave. I am aware of the danger that the types of criticism in which I am interested may become too professional and technical. What I hope for is the collaboration of critics of various special training, and perhaps the pooling and sorting of their contributions by men who will be neither specialists of amateurs.

In two essays—"The Perfect Critic" and "Imperfect Critics"—Eliot elaborately analyses the qualities that would distinguish a good critic from a bad one. He says that the task of a critic is not only to point out the virtues of a writer but also to expose the fake and the fraudulent, and to condemn them. Its aim is to train us not to enjoy a bad poem but a good one. He regards Aristotle, REAY de GOURMON, Rochefoucauld and Coleridge as ideal and perfect critics. As he points out, the
ideal critical faculty consists in looking steadfastly and
solely at the object which provides us with an eternal example
of intelligence. The perfect criticism is termed in different
phrases as "intelligence ... swiftly operating" or "the
analysis of sensation to the point of principle and
definition". The function of perfect criticism is elucidation
and the reader is to form correct judgment. The ideal critical
mind is the intelligent or scientific mind or the mind of
universal intelligence which views the object as it really is.
The best criticism is obviously that which results from "the
disinterested exercise of intelligence". Again, Eliot says :
"... thus we aim to see the object as it really is and find a
meaning for the words of Arnold".

The perfect critical sensibility inheres in free
intelligence which is wholly devoted to inquiry. Remy de
Gourmont is said to have combined erudition, sensitiveness, the
sense of history, the sense of fact and generalizing power. In
one sense imperfect criticism is usually impressionistic or
aesthetic and emotional and is not devoted to sustained
inquiry, dissection and analysis. It "alters" the object but
never "transforms" it. The study of a work of art often directs
a bad critic's emotion to produce something new which is not
criticism at all. Like romanticism bad criticism often "leads
its disciples only back upon themselves". It lacks balance in
critical analysis. According to Eliot, a bad critic "takes the
reputations of the world too solemnly". He does not make a
disinterested endeavour to know the best that is known and
thought in the world. It is fallacious to say that criticism is for
the sake of "creation" or creation for the sake of "criticism".
Nor does Eliot want to mix up creative and critical acts. As he puts it, imperfect criticism is a "mixed critical and creative reaction". As mentioned above, the bad critic is like the sentimental person in whom a work of art aroused all sorts of emotions. His criticism is the satisfaction of a suppressed creative wish. Eliot points out the function of a perfect critic:

... a literary critic should have no emotions except those immediately provoked by a work of art – and these (as I have already hinted) are, when valid, perhaps not to be called emotions at all. 36

Eliot does not fully acknowledge the greatness of Coleridge as he extends half-hearted and ambivalent praise to him. In his essay "Experiment in Criticism", Eliot calls Coleridge's Biographia Literaria as "one of the wisest and williest, the most exciting and exasperating book of criticism ever written". He points out the weakness of Coleridge as a critic. He criticises Coleridge's distinction between fancy and imagination in the following manner:

Fancy may be 'no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of space and time'; but it seems unwise to talk of memory in connexion with fancy and omit it altogether from the account of imagination. As we have learnt from Dr. Lowes's Road to Xanadu (if we did not know it already) memory plays a very great part in imagination, and of course a much larger part than can be proved by that book... 37
And again:

There is so much memory in imagination that if you are to distinguish between imagination and fancy in Coleridge's way you must define the difference between memory in imagination and memory in fancy; and it is not enough to say that the one 'dissolves, diffuses and dissipates' the memories in order to re-create, whilst the other deals with 'fixities and definites'.

But one need not forget the fact that Eliot made drastic revisions of his critical opinions. This is particularly true of his opinion on Coleridge. At one stage, Eliot says that Coleridge's criticism cannot be regarded as intelligence "completely free". But at a later stage he extends his whole-hearted praise to Coleridge. Eliot's earlier statement in the essay "The Function of Criticism" that Coleridge belonged to the group of corrupters of taste is completely reversed when in 1956 he declares that modern criticism has its direct descent from Coleridge. He praises Coleridge for having established the critical relevance of disciplines such as aesthetics, philosophy and psychology, which future critics cannot afford to ignore. Praising him Eliot writes: "Coleridge was perhaps the greatest of English critics, and in a sense the last". He admires Coleridge for the scope and variety of the interests which Coleridge brought to bear on his discussion of poetry. The example of Coleridge leads Eliot to believe that to be able to present an objective assessment of a work a literary critic should make wide study and have broad terms of reference, because literary criticism cannot remain dissociated from other disciplines.
Eliot's critical theory is thus present in his direct statements on the nature, scope and function of criticism. But it is also a theory which is based as much on his views as on the practice of outstanding critics. In his examination of their critical practices Eliot presents in a closely argued manner his important insights into what criticism, or a perfect critic, should be like or should aim at. I, therefore, move on next to his discussion of his idea of a perfect critic and the theoretical considerations enunciated or implied in his observations on perfect critics.

In "The Perfect Critic" Eliot regards A. Symons as a typical example of an "imperfect" and "impressionistic" critic, whose insights on Antony and Cleopatra are transcribed as follows:

Antony and Cleopatra is the most wonderful, I think, of all Shakespeare's plays... The queen who ends the dynasty of the Ptolemies has been the star of poets, a malign star shedding baleful light, from Horace and Propertius down to Victor Hugo; and it is not to poets only...

In her last days Cleopatra touches a certain elevation ... she would die a thousand times, rather than live to be a mockery and a scorn in men's mouths ... she is a woman to the last ... so she dies, ... The play ends with a touch of grave pity ...

Eliot does not regard Symons's illustration as fitting for in his view it does not seem to be a part of an essay on a work of art or a work of intellect. Symons is regarded as
satisfying his suppressed wish and egotism while living through the play. The difference between A. Symons and a perfect critic is that the latter while trying to put the impressions into words, begins to analyse and construct, to "eriger en lois", the former "begins to create something else". His style is much more like Swinburne's poetry and it is not a prose style.

Clearly, comparing the two critics Eliot regards Swinburne as a better and more dependable critic than Symons on the ground that Swinburne's language of criticism is not sentimental. It does not also have the purple patches of poetry, and he does not also attempt to fuse criticism with creation. Swinburne's criticism does not alter the object with his sensibility. His essay is neither otiose nor does it mislead the reader by any stimulation. His critical judgment is sound and just. But his taste is sensitive and discriminating. Yet he is not a critic but an appreciator. Eliot says that Swinburne's criticism has a significant quality which merits the attention of any good critic.

Eliot considers Johnson as one of the three great critics of English poetry, the other two being Dryden and Coleridge. He regards Johnson as having a particular type of "critical integrity". He was not usually distracted from the frontier of literary criticism for he treated poetry as poetry and not as another thing. Eliot writes:

Nineteenth-century criticism, when it has not belonged primarily to the category of scholarly research, the presentation of the ascertainable facts about one author or another, has tended to
be something less purely literary. With Coleridge, criticism merges into philosophy and a theory of aesthetics; with Arnold, it merges into ethics and propaedeutics, and literature becomes a means towards the formation of character; in some critics, of whom Pater is a specimen, the subject-matter of criticism becomes a pretext of another kind. In our own day, the influence of psychology and of sociology upon literary criticism has been very noticeable. On the one hand, these influences of social disciplines have enlarged the field of the critic, and have affirmed, in a world which otherwise is inclined to depreciate the importance of literature, the relations of literature to life. But from another point of view this enrichment has also been an impoverishment, for the purely literary values, the appreciation of good writing for its own sake, have been submerged when literature is judged in the light of other considerations. 42

Eliot is not in favour of too much involvement of the critic with religious, philosophical or moral questions. He therefore states that when a literary critic is busily engaged with the religious, moral and other implications of a poem, poetry tends to become a pretext for some kind of discourse. Even the adoption of a negative attitude towards what the poet has to say by sticking too closely to the poetry is not desirable. By doing so one would deprive it of all significance. If one has the willingness to preserve one's standing as a critic, then there is a philosophic borderline which one must not transgress too far or too often. And Johnson is one of the great critics within some limitations. Moreover, one cannot simply reject his criticism.
In his essay, "Johnson as Critic and Poet", Eliot draws a very apt distinction between limited sensibility and a defective sensibility. Commenting on Johnson he says that he is a sensitive as well as a judicial critic within his proper limits. Although he did not suffer from defective sensibility he was not bound by the limitations of his own age.

Edification was of great importance to Johnson, and, as our time has changed, this term has become the subject of derision as our society and beliefs are not as compact and settled as they were in Johnson's time. In his time edification meant that poetry should have some seriousness for the readers. But we ignore to see that it is not merely the concept of edification that has changed. Eliot says that like a good critic Johnson is not technical or dogmatic. The limitations of a technical or dogmatic critic are underlined in these words:

The dogmatic critic, who lays down a rule, who affirms a value, has left his labour incomplete. Such statements may often be justifiable as a saving of time; but in matters of great importance the critic must not coerce, and he must not make judgments of worse and better. He must simply elucidate; the reader will form the correct judgment for himself.

And again, the purely "technical critic—the critic, that is, who writes to expound some novelty or impart some lesson to practitioners of an art—can be called a critic only in a narrow sense".
Eliot regards Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and Keats's Letters and his comments on poetry as significant contributions to criticism. He finds the marks of real genius in Keats's utterances on poetry and art. Keats's letters are said to be "the most notable and the most important ever written by any English poet". Eliot quotes a thought-provoking passage of Keats:

> In passing, however, I must say one thing that has pressed upon me lately, and increased my Humility and capability of submission — and that is this truth — Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect — but they have not any individuality, any determined character — I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power.

Eliot says that such a remark made by a young man like Keats could only be the result of genius.

It may seem that Eliot is unjustly critical of Arnold whom he regards as a half-hearted critic. But this is not always so. On the contrary, Eliot also says that we cannot afford to neglect him as he should be held the most satisfactory man of letters in some respects. He is the poet and critic representing a period of false stability. Dryden, Johnson and Arnold have performed their critical tasks as far as human frailty allowed them to do so. Eliot says that each new master of criticism renders a useful service merely by the fact that his errors are different from the last, and, if the sequence of critics is longer then there is the possibility of a greater amount of correction.
But you cannot read his essay on *The Study of Poetry* without being convinced by the felicity of his quotations: to be able to quote as Arnold could is the best evidence of taste. The essay is a classic in English criticism: so much is said in so little space, with such economy and with such authority.

We also get further insights into Eliot's critical theory when he examines and distinguishes between different types of critics in the essay "To Criticise the Critic". First, he tells about the nature of a professional critic. According to Eliot, a professional critic is one who thinks that his literary criticism is the chief and only title to fame. He regards the professional critic as the Super Reviewer, as he has been the official critic for some magazine or newspaper. In this category he includes critics like Paul Elmer More, Saint-Beuve, Desmond MacCarthy and also Edmund Gosse. According to Eliot, a professional critic may not be always a failed creative writer like Saint-Beuve.

Eliot points out that the second type of critic is the critic with a gusto. This critic draws our attention to the merits of the writers to whom we have a negative and indifferent attitude — and helps us to see their beauty and charm. Critics who belong to this type include George Saintsbury, Charles Whibley and Arthur Quiller Couch.

The third type of critic is the theoretical or academic. The critics who belong to this category include I.A. Richards, W.P. Ker, William Empson, and some others.
Commenting on F.R. Leavis, Eliot says that Leavis is an important critic and also calls him a moralistic critic.

Finally Eliot comes to the type of critic whose criticism may be termed as a by-product of his creative activity. And in this context mention may be made of critics like Samuel Johnson and Coleridge; and Dryden and Racine in their prefaces. He also includes Matthew Arnold in this group with some reservation. Where does Eliot himself belong? I think he belongs to the group comprising I.A. Richards, Empson, Tate, and others—all of them New Critics and yet retains his individuality among the New Critics as a critic with a complete theoretical framework though he would resist being called a theoretical critic.

Eliot has declared that the aim of a critic should be to avoid becoming formulaic. We may say that Eliot's best criticism is not limited to one single prescribed rule. As a good critic Eliot defies his own prescribed rules by displaying more than one critical mode or method. He tries to combine several approaches to literary criticism like the biographical, textual, humanistic, or sociological. On different occasions he employs different methods at his disposal for the proper analysis of a poem and the full grasp of facts. He evaluates a case according to its nature and merit. He has no belief in any absolute and fixed critical method. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot says that it is a laudable aim for a good critic to divert interest from the poet to the poem, but he concedes that no set formulae or methods will suffice for assessing every author and writer. While adhering to the New Critical principles, he does not totally sideline the personal, private, biographical, or other factors of some poets in his
practical criticism. In this context he says that in considering Byron's poetry one cannot avoid a discussion of Byron the man. But this does not mean that he changes his opinions. After all a critic must have a guideline or a system which he will follow for elucidating a literary work. This kind of realisation rather serves as a pointer to the fact that Eliot as a critic has range and flexibility. He is a classicist who praises a work of art primarily for its depth of feeling. He appreciates Byron's *Don Juan* for the "genuine emotion" and "genuine self-revelation". He observes:

What puts the last cantos of *Don Juan* at the head of Byron's works is, I think, that the subject matter gave him at last an adequate object for a genuine emotion. The emotion is hatred of hypocrisy; and if it was reinforced by more personal and petty feelings, the feelings of the man who as a boy had known the humiliation of shabby lodgings with an eccentric mother, who at fifteen had been clumsy and unattractive and unable to dance with Mary Chaworth, who remained oddly alien among the society that he knew so well - this mixture of the origin of his attitude towards English society only gives it greater intensity. And the hypocrisy of the world that he satirised was at the opposite extreme from his own. Hypocrite, indeed, except in the original sense of the word, is hardly the term for Byron. He was an actor who devoted immense trouble to becoming a role that he adopted; his superficiality was something that he created for himself. It is difficult, in considering Byron's poetry, not to be drawn into an analysis of the man ...
Thus, Eliot clearly goes beyond the New Critical emphasis on the avoidance of biographical details in the critical analysis of a literary work.

This break with the New Critical stance may be witnessed again. When he discusses Herbert's poetry he takes into account Herbert's family, hereditary influences, education and training. This is evident from his essay on Herbert:

The family background of a man of genius is always of interest. It is of interest to us because it was important to him. That two poet-brothers (George Herbert and Edward Herbert) should appear in a family so conspicuous for war-like deeds, administrative gifts and attendance at Court can only be accounted for by the fact that their mother was a woman of literary taste and of strong character and of exceptional gifts of mind as well as beauty and charm. If we remember Herbert's knowledge of music and his skill at instrument, we appreciate all the better his mastery of lyrical verse. 50

And yet Eliot would like to draw a line of separation between "the man who suffers" and "the mind which creates" in order to maintain objectivity in creation as well as in criticism. But he realises that in actual practice a work of art has also to be appreciated for its "emotional intensity" and for being "the record of spiritual struggles". commenting on The Temple, Eliot says that the spiritual struggles of a man of intellectual power and emotional intensity furnished intensity to the perfection of his verse. In the essay "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca", 51 Eliot writes that
the deep surge of Shakespeare's general cynicism and general disillusionment are attempts aimed to metamorphose private failures and disappointments.

Eliot does not completely rule out the possibility of sociological approach in criticism. Commenting on Wordsworth's criticism in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot points out that any radical change in poetic form is likely to be the symptom of some deeper changes in individual and society. He holds that all human endeavours are interrelated. He makes a reasonable and convincing statement in the following way:

> Nor am I indulging in sociological criticism, which has to suppress so much of the data, and which is ignorant of so much of the rest. I only affirm that all human affairs are involved with each other, that consequently all history involves abstraction, and that in attempting to win a full understanding of the poetry of a period you are led to the consideration of subjects which at first sight appear to have little bearing upon poetry. These subjects have accordingly a good deal to do with the criticism of poetry...

Eliot views criticism not merely from a literary point of view but also in a wider context. This is clear from his remark that it is impossible to keep off literary criticism from criticism. As he observes:

> I have suggested also that it is impossible to fence off literary criticism from criticism on other ground, and that moral, religious and
social judgments cannot be wholly excluded. That they can, and that literary merit can be estimated in complete isolation, is the illusion of those who believe that literary merit alone can justify the publication of a book which could otherwise be condemned on moral grounds. 53

Eliot's essays on Dante, Marvell, Massinger, Swinburne, Ezra Pound, Tennyson and Johnson may be regarded among the most valuable attempts at criticism. It is evident that in these essays one finds Eliot's emphasis on analysis and comparison, insight, intensity, impersonality, objectivity and generalizations based upon the text as the essential principles of criticism in his theoretical framework.

In Eliot's essay on Dante one finds the comparison of a line of Dante with that of Shakespeare which shows how Eliot views the difference in the two types of imagery.

Dante's line:

"And sharpened their vision (knitted their brows) at us, like an old tailor peering at the eye of his needle."

And Shakespeare's line:

"She looks like sleep/As she would catch another Antony/In her strong toil of grace." 54

Eliot says that the purpose of the type of Dante's simile is to make us see more definitely the scene which Dante has put before us in the preceding lines, whereas the image of
Shakespeare is much more complicated than Dante's; for "catch in her toil" is a metaphor, and its purpose is to add to what we see, a reminder of the fascination of Cleopatra which shaped her history and that of the world, and of that fascination being so strong that it prevails even in death. Clearly Eliot's practical criticism is analytic, comparative, generic and formalistic, and stresses the textual theoretical standpoint. But the text is also more than the work itself. To be universal, literary criticism has to cross the frontiers and limits and get transformed into a criticism that is related to other types of experiences.

And as to Eliot when criticism transcends the frontiers of literary criticism insisting on the importance of the supernatural over the natural life, it is not at all unpalatable reading. In his opinion pure literature does not exist, it is only a chimera of sensation:

Even the pure literature is alienated from non-literary sources, and has non-literary consequences. Pure literature is a chimera of sensation and admits the vestige of an idea and is already transformed. We must include besides creative work and literary criticism any material which should be operative on general ideas.

The objects of the world cannot be fully understood only in the temporal and secular light. As such it is quite natural on the part of human beings to speculate on the ultimate meaning of human life and the universe, thereby tending toward the supernatural and the ethical. In the essay, "Religion and Literature", Eliot says that secularism corrupts
the whole of modern literature which is unaware of the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life. His essay, "Goethe as the Sage", is a real discourse in praise of wisdom. In this essay he underlines that he can no longer confound worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom. But he points out that poetry and wisdom are inseparable in the poets of the highest rank. In this essay we find a thoughtful point which reminds one of Eliot's stand that a critic must have a definite system or guideline in his approach.

Literary criticism is an activity which must constantly define its own boundaries; also, it must constantly be going beyond them: the one invariable rule is, that when the literary critic exceeds his frontiers, he should do so in full consciousness of what he is doing. We cannot get very far with Dante, or Shakespeare, or Goethe, without touching upon theology, and philosophy, and ethics, and politics; and in the case of Goethe penetrating, in a clandestine way and without 'legitimation papers', into the forbidden territory of science. 56

The province of ethics is one which has very definable limits. With the passage of time we see Eliot withdrawing from hand-to-hand fight and struggling to make peace with morality. Eliot writes in the preface to After Strange Gods: "I ascended the platform of these lectures in the role of a moralist". It is difficult to say of Eliot what he said of Blake:"Because he was not distracted or frightened or occupied in anything but exact statements, he understood". Eliot's
object is no longer to understand but to convert. His language is now less analytical than before and its purpose is to persuade, bludgeon and cajole.

Eliot realises the complexities of a critic’s task. In his foreword to Henri Fluchère’s Shakespeare he cites several requirements for a complete Shakespearean critic which indicate once again that Eliot aims at a critical theory which is comprehensive, which is synthetic, and which is not devoted merely to the analysis of literary aspect.

The ideal Shakespeare-critic should be a scholar, with knowledge not of Shakespeare in isolation but of Shakespeare in relation to the Elizabethan theatre, in relation to the social, political, economic and religious conditions of its time. He should also be a poet; and he should be a man of the theatre. And he should have a philosophic mind. Shakespeare’s criticism cannot be written by a committee consisting of a number of specialised scholars, a dramatist, a producer, an actor, a poet and a philosopher; each of them would be incompetent without sharing some of the knowledge and capacities of the other. 57

Eliot’s foreword thus throws light on the range of knowledge that a critic must possess—a fact that New Critics would not so emphatically pronounce.

In his preface to Leon Vivante’s English Poetry and Its Contributions to the Knowledge of a Creative Principle, Eliot admits that he always remembered a distinction drawn by R.G. Collingwood at the beginning of The Principles of Art. In this book Collingwood contrasts two types of theorists in the field
of aesthetics — the "philosopher-aestheteician" and the "artist-aestheteician" and draws attention to different types of errors that each type of theoretician is liable to commit though Vivante seems to escape the mistakes of both.

In Eliot's opinion the philosopher-aestheteician is a philosopher who considers it necessary to produce a volume on aesthetics to complete his philosophical system. His theory appears to have no relation to our appreciation of the arts and as such fails to impress us. Moreover, he fails to deepen our understanding of the works of art for he is not able to correct our taste and open our minds to the enjoyment of other works of art.

On the other hand the artist-aestheteician in order to compensate for his ignorance of philosophy may rely too much upon his sensibility. He may also bring up a flimsy theory upon a solid foundation of experience.

Thus Eliot does not hesitate to make observations which may militate against his own theoretical standpoint behind the actual practice of criticism. In Eliot we find the signs of a developing and flexible mind. We may conclude that sometimes like a good critic Eliot turns down his own accepted formulae if the arrival of a new work calls for appreciation in a different manner. As a critic then, Eliot has a definite theoretical approach based on merit, intelligence, and other human considerations, but all these must help towards providing a useful elucidation of a literary text, and not isolating it
from social, human or moral realities. He is a New Critic but not in the usual sense of the New Critics who wanted literary criticism to remain confined to the printed page. Like most of the New Critics Eliot's critical theory also has implications for his criticism of poetry to which I shall turn in the next chapter.