CHAPTER-VII

CONCLUSION

ELIOT'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CRITICISM:
A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Eliot is a critic of stature with whom to agree or to disagree is a pleasure and a privilege. In this context mention may be made of what Eliot told Ranjee Shahani in an interview: "What I seem to have accomplished in criticism is to have altered emphasis in criticism and revived interest in certain writers."¹ According to David Spurr, Eliot, as a critic, constantly evaluated the creative work of other writers. They had confronted or solved the particular problem he himself faced as a poet. It constituted a struggle to salvage an artistic whole from the battleground of his own consciousness. Eliot conceives of a ruling critical faculty in an endless dispute with an involuntary creative impulse in the labor of the artist. This critical faculty aims at putting intellectual order on an essentially formless and potentially rich poetic material. He finds that while Dante, who is always Eliot's artistic and spiritual model, achieves an "ordered scale of human emotions,"² Blake's poetry suffers from not being "controlled by a respect for impersonal reason ... the objectivity of science".

It is to be noted here that quite apart from this overt critical approach and more important for our study of Eliot's artistic consciousness, the style and imagery of his earlier critical essays reveal the same inner conflict that surfaced in the poems: a rivalry between intellectual order
and a purely visionary imagination. This conflict of values emerges in Eliot's writings not only as an object of critical enquiry and evaluation in the work of other writers, but also as a characteristic of his own criticism. Throughout his career one finds a continual deviation in the style of his essays toward covert identification with the very artistic values that a more conscious critical position opposes.

It is well known now that Eliot has pioneered a new poetic style and a new critical approach. Many schools of poetry and criticism which have come into existence are either in agreement or disagreement with his views. As a critic of stature he has remained the centre of attraction for many for being able to keep up literary criticism alive for more than half a century.

Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism marks an important phase in his life and works. By the time The Waste Land was published, nobody knew that he was seriously concerned with Christianity. But after his conversion the critics came to discover that Christian themes pervaded his works. Although he is a pioneer of the school of New Criticism he mocked at it as the "lemon-squeezer" school. He has made revaluations to create a proper critical atmosphere free of exaggerated idolatry, but later on he revises and modifies them. It produced great consternation in his followers who took everything he said as gospel truth. Because of the influence he exercised on this school the historians of modern criticism persisted in associating his name with New Criticism. As a critic of eminence, he is interested in the problems in which the New
Critics were interested. But he cannot be regarded as a purely New Critic. His 1927 statement of being a classicist in literature and a royalist in politics marks an important stage in his critical outlook and approach to criticism. Eliot's approach to a work of art is that of analysis and comparison - which is, fundamentally, an analytical approach. He views a work of art from the standpoint of analysis and synthesis. Although the concept of analytical criticism came into prominence in the mid-twenties in America and Britain, in Eliot's case it can be traced back in the 1920.

Having pursued this critical approach, Eliot is at his best in his essays "Tradition and the Individual Talent", "The Metaphysical Poets", "Dante", "Poetry and Drama" and those on F.H. Bradley and the Elizabethan dramatists. Eliot has his own style in his critical essays. The mode of his criticism at its best is not the mode of interpretation. Nor is Eliot a creative critic in the sense in which Lord David Cecil is held to be one, and at the same time he is not a romantic critic either, like Walter Pater or Arthur Symons. Hence we can admit that the critical method and style in Eliot's criticism are generally analytical, incisive, anatomical, scientific and expository. It can be said that Eliot's style is an ideal one for criticism proper. Although neutral and almost scientific, Eliot's style is not lifeless, or tasteless. It can be described as living and illuminating, equipped with the resources of tone, turns of phrase and implications, reservations and parentheses. Eliot's style and critical method in his critical essays are characterised by analysis,
exposition and elucidation, for the aim of his criticism is not to interpret or re-interpret or recreate a work of art, but to aid the reader to develop his own response to it with full possession of facts. According to Eliot, criticism must not be a substitution but an elucidation of a work of art, and this elucidation must be based upon facts. Here it may be mentioned that the quotations in Eliot's essays are very much apt, important and relevant, that they perform the function of analysis and further the critical anatomy. They are not based on any particular choice, whimsicality, narrow taste or prejudice.

Eliot states explicitly that his criticism is based on his poetic practice. The result is that whenever his poetic sensibility changes, he has also to change his critical standards. The comparisons he made between Dryden and Shelley, Milton and Joyce, and his reversal of attitude to Donne when he speaks of Dante, bear testimony to this. According to Eliot, a critic often interprets his own views in interpreting a work of art.

Eliot is also afraid that the poem may be lost in a mass of historical and biographical material and therefore draws attention of the critic to the poem instead of the poet. It is his view that a poem should be judged not in isolation but in relation to the whole work of the poet. He says that while judging a poem even the historical conditions of the poet should be taken into account. Although Eliot grants an
autonomous status to a poem yet he is fully conscious that the poem stands in some relationship to the poet's personality.

While discussing a poem Eliot looks for the organic unity of the poem in order to find its harmony in an organic continuity like European culture, civilization and tradition. Thus he is of the view that a critic should possess a knowledge of European literature which will enable him to transcend the limitations of period and geography imposed on the poet's mind. It could also lead him to ignore such distinctions as between classicism and romanticism, between neo-classicism and neo-romanticism. Above all these, he is of the view that there is a place in literature for subjects like philosophy, aesthetics and religion. He rightly points out that the greatness of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards. Such standards can determine merely whether or not certain literary works constitute literature.

Eliot's revaluations of literary works evidence a sincerity of purpose - that is, to correct the taste of the public. At one time he regarded the correction of taste as one of the functions of criticism. For example, as early as in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" he comes out vehemently against the Romantics, the Victorians, and their imitators for the very same reason.

Eliot's career as a literary and social critic may be roughly divided into three stages: the early years leading up to and immediately following publication of The Waste Land, the
middle years that is, just around the time of Eliot's religious conversion, when he was editor of *The Criterion*, and the final years (beginning with the late 1930s) as elder statesman to the world of letters. We should distinguish the methodology inherent in Eliot's criticism concerned primarily with an exposition of the standards in which he proposes the principles he keeps in mind while making his assessments.  

David Spurr says that Eliot's early criticism has embedded in it notions of empirical objectivity and intellectual force in comparison with primitive emotion or feeling. His youthful attraction to philosophical realism and the Imagists' emphasis on the use of concrete and visual images led Eliot to value, at least outwardly, an art based on "facts" and "experience".

In practically everything Eliot wrote one finds the evidence of an inner dissension regarding the nature of creative imagination. The essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) reveals his unease owing to the irresolvable nature of the conflict between the two concepts and the role of the unconscious in the poetic act. The essay starts by establishing primacy of the ordering intellect in the artistic process, but it later undermines this position by locating the source of artistic creation in darker regions of the mind. David Spurr is of the view that Eliot's scientific dissection of the artistic process ends by relying paradoxically on an almost mystical notion of imaginative vision. He seeks to
define the underlying assumptions of statements like "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion". (Selected Essays, p. 21) The expression "turning loose" denotes a potential for violence, while the statement as a whole suggests a characteristic play of irrational forces in the artistic process.

The first half of Eliot's essay reads as an elaborate defense against these forces that surface here as either "emotion" or "personality". Eliot describes tradition as an active force for order, operating not only historically, but also in the mind and work of the artist. He says that the dead poets "assert their immortality most vigorously", while the traditional sense "compels" a man to write in a certain way, the poet must be "judged, not amputated" by standards of the past. According to David Spurr this language carries an undercurrent of violence which induces an active struggle within the mind of the artist. The artist, conscious of the standards by which he will be judged, must toil for his knowledge and must check the intrusion of his personality into his work. As Eliot puts it, "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality".

Eliot associates tradition with objective mental awareness rather than with instinct or the material of dreams. According to him, a writer must be "acutely conscious" of his place in time and at the same time "very conscious of the main
current" of the past. He embodies tradition in intellectual terms as "the mind of Europe" and insists on the writer's need for continual awareness of this external source of order which is "much more important than his own private mind" as a model for individual artistic development.

He shows a divisive tension of his critical sensibility. In the second part of the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" he reverses the direction of his initial argument. He relegates the mind to a passive role in the creative act and describes this process as a surrender to the workings of the unconscious. But at the same time the potential danger of the unconscious is neutralised by being separated into independent components and then discussed in scientific terms.

Making a laboratory analysis of the poetic act Eliot compares the mind of the poet to a shred of platinum that remains "inert, neutral, and unchanged" during the combination of oxygen and sulphur dioxide into sulphurous acid. He is of the view that during the artistic process the poet’s mind acts either as catalyst or as "receptacle", but the real action takes place between gaseous "feelings and emotions". What Eliot means by emotion is difficult to pin down but feelings clearly act independently of conscious motivation. Eliot sees these mysterious feelings as "floating", "in suspension", in the poet’s mind. They come into play only at fortuitous moments, depending not on the poet’s choice but on "the right
combination" of artistic elements. This unconscious substance holds the essence of poetic material, such that "great poetry may be ... composed out of feelings solely". Eliot further says of poetry that "it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not "recollected", and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is 'tranquil' only in that it is a passive attending upon the event."7

It may be pointed out that Eliot's essays viz. "The Frontiers of Criticism", "Poetry and Drama", and "The Music of Poetry" contain his most mature criticism. Moreover, his essays on "Hamlet" (1919) and "Tradition and the Individual Talent" are also important for he discusses the concepts of objective correlative and the Impersonal theory of poetry respectively in these essays. But his early essays such as "The Function of Criticism" contain ideas from which he deviates widely in his later essays. A comparison of his early essays with the later ones reveals a number of contradictions. For instance, in his early essays one finds a greater degree of orthodoxy, conviction, cocksureness, vigour and incisive analysis and a more determined attempt to see the object as it is than in the later ones. Hence we can admit that the early essays have a greater degree of surety than the later ones though they are more absorbing, more exciting and more persuasive in tone. Eliot confesses the shortcomings in his approach in his essay, 'To Criticise the Critic' (1961):
There are errors of judgment, and, what I regret more, there are errors of tone: the occasional note of arrogance, of vehemence, of cocksureness or rudeness, the braggadocio of the mild - mannered man safely entrenched behind his typewriter.

And yet he knows also that his earlier critical essays are greatly effective and meaningful. As he confesses further:

So far as I can judge, ... it is my earlier essays which have made the deeper impression. I attribute this to two causes. The first is the dogmatism of youth. When we are young we see issues sharply defined: as we age we tend to make more reservations ... The second reason for the enduring popularity of some of my early criticism is less easily apprehended ... It is that in my earlier criticism, both in my general affirmations about poetry and in writing about authors who had influenced me, I was implicitly defending the sort of poetry I and my friends wrote. This gave my essays a kind of urgency, the warmth of appeal of the advocate, which my later, more detached and I hope more judicial essays cannot claim.
In an essay on "The Function of Criticism" Eliot holds the function of criticism to be the "elucidation of a work of art and correction of taste". He frequently changes his views and standpoint on various issues. For instance, in a later essay, "The Frontiers of Criticism", he describes the function of criticism to be the "promotion of understanding and enjoyment of literature". Again, in his introduction to Paul Valery's Art of Poetry Eliot says that there is no difference between the language of poetry and that of prose. But we find this view reversed in another essay "Johnson as Critic and Poet" where he admits that there should be for every period some standard of poetic diction, neither identical with nor remote from current speech. Here is evident his idea of the connection of the past with the present. In his discussion of poetry in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism he is of the view that intensity in poetry is gained through the elimination of meaning, but later on he recognises the importance of meaning when he points out that even music cannot exist without meaning in poetry. When Valery, Sartre and Mallarme plead for opacity, Eliot aims at transparency. He disagrees with the rigidity of Valery's style. His own language is transparent or translucent. It is never flamboyant. The indication of his taste for classical poetry is that he wants poetry to be so transparent that in reading it we must see not poetry but what the poem aims at. There is evidence of his ignoring the personality of the poet in the classic essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent". But later on he changes his attitude by laying emphasis on the personality of the poet in his essay on W.B. Yeats and in his remarks on Shakespeare.
In his essay on *Hamlet* he describes the play as a failure. But later rejects the essay for its immaturity and lack of mature wisdom. This essay shows more clearly the difference between ways of talking about art where the foundations of a purely reasonable criticism gradually die out into deeply carved out parts of the mind. Eliot's claim that the motivating force of the play exceeds the play's action and words reveal a critical position that includes its own contradiction. In the language of semiotics, Eliot complains of the inadequacy of the signifier to the signified. Yet his vivid awareness of the nature of the signified demonstrates that it has received adequate signification. In his essay on the Metaphysical poets he arouses fresh interest in metaphysical poetry among the literary public but soon curbs the critic's undue enthusiasm by demonstrating that there is greater poetry in Dante. A passage in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* likens the age of Dryden and the age of Wordsworth to the alternating sides of a schizophrenic mind: "What I see, in the history of English poetry, is not so much daemonic possession as the splitting up of personality." This may be thought of as a commonplace observation, but the choice of words indicates Eliot's historical awareness of a condition that effectively defines his own thought and work.

David Spurr is of the view that the nature of this division in Eliot's consciousness of course changes through time. The early essays both described and enacted the battle between a conscious intellect and the horrifying but visionary forces of the unconscious. There the force for intellectual
order consisted primarily of the mind itself and its "objective" relationship to external reality. In the years surrounding his religious conversion in 1927, Eliot's critical tactic depends less on the defensive capabilities of the intellect alone than on the kind of order residing in philosophical, cultural, and religious institutions; the mind's defense against its own primitive impulses now entails their subordination to a "coherent system" of thought and belief.

It may be roughly said that Eliot's critical work is dominated by two attitudes. The first is a purely literary attitude which he adopts when he depreciates creative criticism. Eliot shows his preference for criticism by the poet critics and demands of a critic the sense of fact. The other attitude, which is the religious attitude, interferes or co-operates, and sometimes agrees or disagrees, with his literary attitude. These two attitudes co-exist, and sometimes are so inextricably fused together that they become quite indistinguishable. The literary attitude which he adopts may be said to be based on a literary tradition that belongs to the metaphysical poets. Wit, Irony, Unified Sensibility, Objective Correlative, Impersonality - all are a consequence of this attitude. His religious attitude is born of a religious tradition which he finds in Villon, Baudelaire, and Joyce. His criticism of Hardy, Lawrence and George Eliot has also been born out of this attitude. These two attitudes are individualistic. He is in praise of Dante for his conception of both these traditions but it may not be wrong to say that his love for Dante is born to a greater extent out of his religious attitude. Eliot's preference for Dante is conditioned by more important artistic considerations.
According to Eliot, creative activity requires a strong mind that is "perfectly equipped for its work". At one and the same time he declares that "there is a great deal in writing of poetry which must be conscious and deliberate", and that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality". In creative activity, Eliot seems to see something of an antimony in the view that having a strong personality alone creates the need for escaping from its burden. On the other hand, both Ransom and Tate emphasize Tradition as contributing to the achievement of impersonality. It contributes to the formation of unified sensibility through the gift of experience.

R.P. Blackmur writing of Eliot's poems from Ash Wednesday to the Four Quartets throws new light on what led Eliot to the concept of the "objective correlative". According to him, it was Eliot's experience of the aesthetic of Christianity and his faith in Christian belief which compelled him to adopt the notion of "objective correlative". That is to say, it is Eliot's religious convictions which made it necessary for him to discover the objective correlative for them in the poetic situation. What he experienced in his work as a poet, he later on applied in his criticism of older poets and their works, as in the case of his analysis of Hamlet.

Eliot does not share the view of life of the Romantics for he thinks that they lacked humility and were highly egotistical. He shows his preference for the classical poetry, chiefly for its impersonality, self-restraint, and
poise of mind. Eliot's idea of impersonality has also a religious and theological basis. For writing poetry some kind of poetic inspiration is necessary and it may be regarded as being born out of a "parasitic growth on a poet's mind", or "an obscure creative impulse." Sometimes the poet's personal emotions are fused into something which is impersonal and universal. Every product of the creative imagination is subjective in so far as it is the projection of a personal vision and at the same time objective in so far as it transcends the merely individual.

Eliot as well as the New Critics has opposed the romantic view of literature as self-expression and preferred the impersonal art built on consideration of form. He comes out against this great tradition of poetry by bringing religion into it. More catholicism, more universality and intensity permeate the work of the Romantics rather than of the Metaphysicals or the neo-classicists. We also find the expression of ethical temper in their poetry which is essentially Christian. Eliot cannot overlook the absence of any religious element in the poetry of Pope and Dryden and also in that of the Romantics. The central tradition of English literature belongs to the work of Shakespeare. According to Northrop Frye, Eliot's version of tradition implies whatever is protestant and radical as related to his being an Anglo-Catholic, a royalist and a classicist. As such, he revolted against the neo-classical aesthetic. Another critic Lovejoy feels that the modern critical fashion has done a good deal to obscure an important historical fact. In his opinion Romanticism "was conceived by those writers as a rediscovery and revival, for better or worse, of characteristically
Christian modes of thought and feeling, and a sense of the inner moral struggle as the distinctive fact in human experience - such as had been for a century alien to the dominant tendencies in "polite" literature. The new movement was, almost from the first, a revolt against what was conceived to be paganism in religion and ethics as definitely as against classicism in art.  

Here we can underline Eliot's preference for poetry with some values. He appeals for a renewed Christian society because he does not believe that any religion can survive which is not a religion of the supernatural and of life after death in some form.

In The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism Eliot says that there is a significant relation between the best poetry and the best criticism of the same period and it is the recognition or emphasis on this relationship which gives a keener edge to Eliot's critical essays. His limitations as a critic were so much pushed into the background by his reputation: as a poet that even his dogmatic assertions were taken as prophetic utterances. Eliot's theory of impersonality of the poet provoked Herbert Read to a vehement defence of the poet as an individualist. Read asserted in his essay "Form in Modern Poetry" that all poetry is the product of personality and therefore inhibited into character. Read takes the help of the theories of personality advanced by Freud and Jung and thus clarifies in what way the mind of the poet works and how imagination may be related to the preconscious. It is significant that Read takes up the defense of poets like
Shelley and Byron who had come in for heavy fire in Eliot's criticism and thus provides an effective correlative to Eliot's dogmatic approach.

However, Eliot seems to overemphasize the importance of tradition and orthodoxy in literature. He has described tradition as an active force operating in the mind and work of an artist. According to him, Shakespeare created great literature without giving emphasis to any absolute values of life. Although Keats considered Christian Dogma as a "pious fraud", he could write great poetry. It is possible to think that Wordsworth's poetic powers suffered after his conversion to Christianity, or it might have been because of his old age. From this angle tradition and orthodoxy seem to be of minor importance. In Eliot's opinion, a great artist breaks conventions and foils expectations. He himself, modifies his views and statements from time to time. A great artist rejects blind orthodoxy and thus brings meaning, light and order to society. Jung agrees with Eliot's view by saying that such persons are not harmful to society:

Creative life always stands outside convention. That is why when the mere routine of life predominates in the form of convention and tradition there is bound to be a destructive outbreak of creative energy. This outbreak is ... and serves them with all his strength.
There is a very wide chasm between tradition and the creative mind, which is deeply traditional. It may be pointed out here that as a creative artist Eliot himself could not remain in a strictly Christian tradition. He drew inspiration from the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Buddhist scriptures.

According to Eliot, the idea of impersonality finds its adequate expression in drama as the best artistic medium. As for instance, Macbeth's private agonies have an impersonal meaning for us. His words "to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow" have one meaning for us and another for Eliot. Eliot claims this to be the Third Voice of poetry which is found mostly in verse drama. He is in favour of poetic drama because he is of the view that it can express the feelings beyond the nameable and the classifiable emotions of conscious life. We can thus assert here that Eliot's Impersonal theory forms the basis of his theory of drama also. For example, we may say that when the impersonal dramatist creates a personage with a definite character and a moral calibre he will not interfere with the consequences of character whatever the outcome may be. Above all, he will not try to rescue his hero from his predicament and the result is that he has to reconcile himself to his fate. According to Eliot, only an impersonal artist can achieve this inevitability of character. Eliot's essay "The Three Voices of Poetry" devotes itself to the critical craftsman's point of view, in its discussion of the second and third voices: the voice of the poet addressing an audience, and the poet's voice when he attempts to create a dramatic
character speaking in verse. A poet faces, for example, the problem of finding words for a variety of dramatic characters who differ in intelligence and temperament.

In his 1919 essay Eliot simply urges the individual artist’s conscious awareness of tradition, but by 1933 he has strengthened the protective power of this awareness by raising it to the level of orthodoxy - Eliot’s word for the conscious cultivation of tradition within a Christian moral framework. He also declares that he likes to have a dogmatic philosophy like that of Catholicism. He also speaks of the "intrusion of the diabolic" in Hardy and Lawrence. Even the seemingly harmless Thomas Hardy, with his "period peasants pleasing to the metropolitan imagination", does not escape Eliot’s anger. The "extreme emotionalism" of Hardy's characters seems to Eliot "a symptom of decadence". He observes: "The work of the late Thomas Hardy represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs". 13

Eliot regards Lawrence as "a very much greater genius" than Hardy; he notes his "keen sensibility and capacity for profound intuition", although he hastens to add that Lawrence drew the wrong conclusions from this intuition.

Eliot’s use of such phrases as "words perpetually juxtaposed", "wit fused into imagination", and his definition of wit as "the tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric
grace" and his exposition of critical ideas such as "dissociation of sensibility" and "impersonality in poetry" give an insight into his literary critical attitude. The language of Eliot's criticism consists of other phraseology which manifests his religious attitude. In his critical essays we find also references to Catholicism, Christian Dogma, Orthodoxy, and Humanism. He expresses his preference of Virgil to Homer because of the former's orthodoxy and dignity. Moreover, he prefers Dante to Shakespeare because of the former's ideas on theology. Eliot's 1931 essay on "The 'Pensees' of Pascal" offers a precise formulation of the way Eliot's critical sensibility developed from a reliance on conscious objectivity to an acceptance of Christian dogma. Eliot's Christianity becomes primarily a structure for intellectual order: "The Christian thinker ... proceeds by rejection and elimination. He finds the word to be so and so; he finds its character to be inexplicable by any non-religious theory: among religions he finds Christianity, and Catholic Christianity, to account most satisfactorily for the world and especially for the moral world within."14

Eliot's essay on "Lancelot Andrewes" fixes Andrewes as the model of Christian orthodoxy at the expense of his seventeenth century contemporary, John Donne. Eliot's comparison of these two spiritual personages reveals further the divided nature of his critical consciousness. He admires Andrewes for the brilliance of his intellect. Eliot observes: "the voice of Andrewes is the voice of a man who has a formed
visible Church behind him, who speaks with the old authority and the new culture. 15 As for Donne, in 1921 Eliot praised his power of direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or the recreation of thought into feeling. He remarked: "He is a little of the religious spellbinder, the Reverend Billy Sunday of his time, the flesh-creeper, the sorcerer of emotional orgy." 16 Eliot mistrusts Donne for relinquishing the authorial consciousness in his evocation of religious feeling; but, while he condemns Donne on these grounds, his threadbare, analytic discussion of Donne's poetry makes Donne more interesting than Andrewes.

Moreover, no one can deny the fact that there is sound reasoning in his statements. But the problem is that he takes sides between classicism and romanticism, between humanism and Christianity. It may be questionable whether his orthodoxy existed at all. However, it may be said that his plea for orthodoxy is based on a fear of moral and spiritual crisis resulting out of the subordination of religion and morality to science and socialism. He felt within himself a metaphysical isolation and profound loneliness of heart and sought to find solace in religion. What mattered most to him was "the salvation of individual soul." 17 In his heart he always felt that he had a sacred mission and his art demanded of him the devotion of a lifetime. As he said: "The arts insist that man shall dispose of all that he has, even the family tie and follow art alone. For they require that a man be not a member of a family or of a caste or of a coterie but simply and solely himself." 18 One can trace this devotion to art in his own
creative work. It is intermingled with spiritual problems, his
esoteric faith, and his sense of terrible agony and suffering.
His statement on Pascal in the essay "The 'Pensees' of Pascal"
can best be applied to himself:

Pascal is a man of the world among
ascetics, and an ascetic among men of the
world; he had the knowledge of
worldliness and the passion of asceti-
cism, and in him the two are fused into
an individual whole ... because our heart
tells us that it corresponds exactly to
the facts and cannot be dismissed as
mental disease; but it was also a despair
which was a necessary prelude to, and
element in the joy of faith. 19

For an artist trying to achieve artistic dimensions scepticism
and despair are as essential as joy and faith. A great artist
is one who brings hope and meaning into life as he passes from
appearances to reality and from abnegation to identification.
He thus tries to bring an order in a seemingly disordered
world. As a classicist in literature, Eliot has tried to focus
the attention of the reading public on Romantic lyrics as well
as classical epics. He dislikes the self-glorification of the
Romantics.

Eliot does not want art to be subordinated to
philosophy. According to him, nothing can be a substitute for
art and in the same way art cannot be a substitute for
anything. He thinks that although actual life is always the necessary material for art, abstraction from actual life is a necessary condition for its creation. Here we may recall one of the two epigraphs to "Sweeney Agonistes" : "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union until it has divested itself of the love of created things". The artist has thus a sacred duty which is to put order on a seemingly anarchic reality.

It may be said that the unity of Eliot's critical thought is not the unity attained by a man who never changes his mind, but the unity that obtains in the total work of a man who has never ceased to grow and to mature. Commenting on Eliot's criticism Professor Grand T. Webster says that his criticism is valuable like Dr. Johnson's, not because of the subject and not because what he says is right or wrong but because we can experience in his writings "a first class mind in action", and can learn one possible response to literature and life. F.R. Leavis praises the fine intelligence of Eliot's earlier and larger collection. He observes:

Eliot was the man of genius who after the long post-Swinburnian arrest altered expression.

Eliot spear-headed the movement in Modern Criticism for the rejection of Humanism and Impressionism and the substitution of the concept of Impersonality of Art. Moreover, the technique proposed by him centred round the concept of "objective correlative" which is also the seminal principle behind the work of the New Critics.
An editorial comment of the *Times Literary Supplement* in a Special Number on "Critics Abroad" (29th September, 1963) conveys the fact of the inter-relationship of the contribution of Eliot and the New Critics:

One of the striking facts about English criticism today is the way in which the influence of Mr. Eliot, Prof. Richards and Dr. Leavis seem to have coalesced so completely.

It may be right to argue that Eliot has made a positive contribution both to practical and theoretical criticism, although as a practitioner of the craft the emphasis in his case has been more on the former than on the latter. In his essays like "Poetry and Drama" and "The Music of Poetry" he is concerned with the future of these genres, but in the light of his own practice and that of his predecessors and contemporaries. Eliot's earlier critical essays were not concerned with an evaluation of the writers he was dealing with. On the contrary, they were the outcome of his own special interest in those writers and the affinity with his own technique which those writers showed. While the earlier essays suffer from this restricted approach, the later essays, those on Arnold and Milton, contain too many sweeping generalisations to be called dispassionate evaluation. Although, as Leavis says, Eliot's best critical writings might have facilitated the growth of criticism as "a special discipline of the intelligence", his criticism as a whole has had an inhibiting effect, making the writers of the age too self-conscious and
awkwardly tied up with the apron-strings of the literature of the past. If the criticism of the present has become over-intellectualised, resulting in such works as Richards' *Science and Poetry* and William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, its origin may be traced back to Eliot's critical writings.

It may thus well be concluded that Eliot's criticism is analytical - that is, he approaches a work of art from the viewpoint of analysis and synthesis. In his criticism we find subtle elaboration of the analytical approach to the elucidation of art - that is, by a theory which includes the factors of evaluation, the setting up of critical standards, aesthetics and the philosophy of art dealing with speculation or ultimate objectives and meanings; the practice of art, which has to do with the choice of media, the techniques employed by the artist in the performance of his craft; and, moreover, history which involves placing art in its temporal context, investigating streams of influence and relating particular works to the spirit of the time in which they were produced as well as to the history of ideas in general. His analytic approach is not merely analogical but it also approaches the condition of science both in its precision of definition and its application.