CHAPTER THREE

THE SENSE OF TRADITION:

I

We may all wonder how Eliot, who had arrived in London sometime in 1914, and whose poetic output can hardly be called voluminous, came to achieve such eminence or influence. It is possible that part of his success is due to the prophetic gifts with which he gave us, in his early poems, what Day Lewis has called the image of a society in decay. Eliot's vision is, indeed, penetrating, and he has forged an instrument fit to convey his message. In him there is complete concord and continuity between style and substance. He has brought a profound intelligence and an intense sensibility into harmony, and has emphasized the mutual dependency of the critical and creative faculties. In addition to this, Eliot has become an example of a superlative poet who, over the course of a whole life, attempted to grapple with the basic and crucial questions of his age and, alerted us to the dangers and difficulties that may overwhelm the age. Writing in the Criterion of April, 1924, he has declared
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that the late T.E. Hulme

... appears as the forerunner of a new attitude of mind, which should be the twentieth-century mind, if the twentieth century is to have a mind of its own. Hulme is classical, reactionary, and revolutionary; he is the antipodes of the eclectic, tolerant, and democratic mind of the end of the last century.

Many critics have discussed the influence of Hulme on the thinking of Eliot. (1) Hulme believed that without the stabilizing doctrine of Original sin all chaos would break loose. As Frank Kermode has explained it, Hulme's ideas had implications that pointed almost everywhere:

Romanticism was a calamity however you looked at it: politically, philosophically, aesthetically. It was the anthropocentric assumption of the Renaissance at the stage of mania, all Rousseauistic rubbish about personality, progress and freedom, all a denial of human limit and imperfections.

(Frank Kermode: Romantic Image, 1964, pp. 125-26)

Eliot’s commentary in The Criterion of April 1924, suggesting 'a new attitude of mind' for the twentieth century must have been a response to the posthumous publication of T.E. Hulme's Speculations. But,

(1) Critics such as Vincent Buckley, Raymond Williams and Frank Kermode have all explained how Eliot tried to carry forward the tenets of Hulme's thinking on life and art.
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even before this, he was, for quite some time, involved in the formulation of a new mental make-up, which will control his life and art. The influence of Wendell, Babbitt, Royce, Charles Maurras and other intellectuals of the French right thrust him toward a cultural and political stage akin to theirs. This and his Puritan upbringing in New England led him to look forward to the past, to tradition and classicism. In The Criterion of October 1923 he argued, in Maurrasian terms, for the supreme importance of Mediterranean civilization, and claimed that 'England is a "Latin" country'. In fact, as a young poet and innovative critic, with all the solicitude for literary enterprise, Eliot's writing would manifest a certain tendency, and what this tendency was might be discovered in such books as Georges Sorel's Reflexions sur la violence, Maurras's L'Avenir de l'intelligence, Julien Benda's Belphegor, Hulme's Speculations, Jacques Maritain's Reflexions sur l'intelligence and Babbitt's Democracy and Leadership.

In many ways Eliot was a strategist, and what his phrase, 'new attitude of mind' meant was mainly a conscious direction towards a strategy of life and art.
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As a matter of fact his career can be read as a progress towards definition and towards eminence during which new ground is gained and new positions taken with the conscious deployment of talent. Eliot was a very intelligent writer who was always aware of the situation, literary and historical, surrounding him. Rarely surprised by events, and ready both to anticipate and encourage changes in the world of art and culture, he progressed according to plan, with an eye clearly fixed on the systematic development of his taste and talent. Pound noticed this kind of sophistication when he first met Eliot about whom he wrote to Harriet Monroe in 1914, saying that Eliot was

... the only American I know of who has made what I call adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained himself and modernized himself on his own. ... It is such a comfort to meet a man and not have to tell him to wash his face, wipe his feet, and remember the date (1914) on the calendar.


During the next ten or twelve years of his life Eliot laid the foundation for his development expertly and with great determination. He was consciously working toward a philosophical, aesthetic and cultural orientation and configuration which would sustain him throughout his life. In this process of orientation and configuration Eliot's sense of tradition will always be found as the nucleus,
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from which, again, emanates Christianity or the Christian tradition as the central element in his mind and art.

In 1919, the world saw Eliot's famous essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in the pages of The Egoist. In later years Eliot was inclined to regret its celebrity; it was 'perhaps the most juvenile and certainly the first to appear in print.' (2) F.R. Leavis has condemned it for 'its ambiguities, its logical incon-sequences, its pseudo-precisions, its fallaciousness and the aplomb of its specious cogency,' (3) but F.W. Bateson, who saw the essay in its earliest version, regards it as 'a classic of our criticism, one comparable to Chapter XIV of the Biographia Literaria or to Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the present time."' (4) The essay has continued to maintain its contentious vitality, and up to the end Eliot refused to repudiate it. It set forth Eliot's central position and marked a welcome response to the pervasive literary climate of his time, which was overcharged with subjectivism, inspiration and self-expression.


(4) Ibid, p.61.
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In 1928, in his preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*, Eliot announced his general position: 'Classical in literature, Royalist in politics, Anglo-Catholic in religion.' But already in 1920, with the publication of a collection of early essays called *The Sacred Wood*, which included 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' Eliot showed the limitations of Romanticism, Whiggery, and secularism. The idea of tradition was to remain central in Eliot's thought throughout his life. In 1919, tradition was wholly a matter of literature, but in the later development of his thought it was to acquire a wider reference and to include social, political and religious implications. It led to a whole complex of ideas connected with romanticism, classicism, Europeanism and Christianity.

II

This concern for the past and the tradition is a distinctive feature of the American personality. Columbus discovered America as a fact of geography, and enlightened Americans had to discover it intellectually as a fact of life and thought, and crystallize a truly American mind in the process. The Pilgrim Fathers and their descendants
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framed their ideas of life and patterns of thought in terms of their religious adventure which had grown out of an explosive historical situation. For them America was 'New England' to which they fled in reluctant exile from England. It was also the new Canaan, the land of promise, where the last great battle for truth and for man's soul was to be fought. Gradually the heat of the religious struggle subsided and a new awareness dawned— an awareness of man's response to a new environment and a new situation. 'The land was ours before we were the land's,' begins one of Robert Frost's poems, meaning that the concept of America, of Americanness, was not something that had been exported from Europe to the New World, but something which had evolved from the experience of living in it. Walter Allen writes:

Yet all, whatever their origins, colour, religion, occupation, social position, have one thing in common, and it is fundamental. All are descendents of men and women who were in the strict sense of the phrase, displaced persons.

( Walter Allen : The Urgent West, 1969, pp.7-8)

For the first settlers as for the millions who poured into America during the nineteenth century, there was still the necessary act of decision, the necessary
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resolution, however arrived at and for whatever reason,
to uproot themselves from home, to go elsewhere, to begin
again. But,

In my beginning is my end ...
*** .... .... .... .... ....
... In my end is my beginning.

In the mysterious matrix of life the past became an
unexorcized spectre haunting the Americans. Even when Carl
Sandburg writes that 'The past is a bucket of ashes,' (5) or
when Henry Ford makes the purely American remark that 'History
is the bunk,' (6) an oppressive mixture of 'memory and desire'
drives the Americans into an intense awareness of the parti-
cular continuum of time and place in which they were born.
Further, the discovery of America was not something made by
the Americans alone; it was one of the great adventures of
eighteenth-century European civilization. When the Americans
were building up their own experiences, Europe was projecting
its own hopes and aspirations on the New World. It is because
of such a complex of reasons and imperatives that for the
Americans, history, the past, the roots, the sense of belonging,
and of identity, are things which have special implica-
tions in their existential drama.

Then, emigration from America, the journey back to
the Old World has been a constant factor in American

(5) & (6) Both the remarks have been quoted by Dalamore,
Schwartz in his article, 'T.S. Eliot as the
International Hero' from T.S. Eliot: a Selected
Critique, ed. Leonard Unger (Russell & Russell,
1966, P. 50)
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history. The limitations of the Puritan world with its rarefied emotional climate troubled the young adventurous minds. When Wendell brought out his highly critical book, A Literary History of America, President Eliot of Harvard wrote to Dean Briggs on March 13, 1901:

Wendell's new book is highly interesting and meritorious. ... But he implies that moral purity — national or individual — is the accompaniment, or the result of an experience undesirably limited. ... If he be right will not the courageous youth or nation say — give me the large, rich, various life; I prefer Voltaire to Dr Holmes.

(Quoted by Herbert Howarth in Notes on Some Figures Behind T.S. Eliot, p. 94.)

Wendell did not precisely drive Eliot to Voltaire and to godlessness, but he certainly drove Eliot to Voltaire's Europe, to Pascal, Dante and the old Church. There could be other forces intensifying this desire or haunting nostalgia. Perhaps the failure of the all-American experiment in St. Louis and the popular money - muddled morality and culture giving rise to the industrial boom and the gigantism of the cities induced sensitive and conscientious Americans to go into exile to look for the urbanity, elegance and grace of Europe.

Young Eliot, who was working assiduously and growing silently, reacted sharply to the unhappy situation.
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He was intensely aware of the peculiar destiny of an American. Northrop Frye writes:

Eliot belonged to one of the great dynastic New England families who have supplied so much of cultural and political leadership in American life, and, like other American writers with such names as Adams and Lowell, reflects the preoccupation with tradition, with breeding, with loss of common social assumptions.

(Northrop Frye: T.S. Eliot, Oliver and Boyd, 1968, p. 9)

Eliot left America, came to the Old World, and became a poet. This passage to Europe involved a radical disjunction from the Unitarian family tradition. Now, the career of poetry seems to have necessitated the voyage to England and the abandonment of America. William Carlos Williams complains:

Eliot had turned his back on the possibility of reviving my world. And being an accomplished craftsman, better skilled in some ways than I could ever hope to be, I had to watch him carry my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy.

(William Carlos Williams: Autobiography, p. 174)

Eliot carried off Williams's world, not to the enemy, but to the ancestors. The expatriate carried with him the early experience of living in the New World to the Old World for re-definition and ultimate redemption. It was a courageous attempt towards reintegration. The
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apparent abandonment or rejection of America was, in reality, a definition and identification of his world. Leaving the traditional family professions he plunged into the universe of Symbolist aesthetic and tried to digest the chaotic experience of his world for some kind of redemption. Eliot was not an exile, or even an expatriate in the ordinary sense. Departing from America, he moved back to the Old World, to the point at which American experience departed from English Puritanism, and beyond that, to the unfissured Catholicism of pre-Reformation Europe embodied in the work of Dante. It was with remarkable existential courage that Eliot assumed and maintained his outwardly absurd choices.

III

However, the idea of tradition was not merely something worked out of the individual choices of Eliot. There was already a tradition of tradition at Harvard. Whether the nation's art should be utterly independent or whether it would be better if it grew out of the traditions of Europe, was an old American debate. Whitman had been a magnificent exponent of independence. But in Cambridge, Longfellow had debated the issue and had given his sympathy to the other side. James Russell Lowell,
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who inherited the Smith Professorship from Longfellow, intensified the devotion to tradition. Then came Babbitt who brought to the debate, not a donnish quietude, but paradoxically, the ruggedness of independent America. Eliot received the lesson from Babbitt, who directed his pupil to the French neo-classicists like Maurras and Benda. Then contact with Pound, and the philosophical training and the work on Bradley impelled Eliot to a decisive definition of the theory of tradition, which gave rise to a kind of English literary revolution at an agonizing moment of the 20th century. A proper understanding of Eliot's theory of tradition and of his growth as a writer and thinker calls for a serious study of the influence of Babbitt, Bradley, Hulme and Maurras on him.

Babbitt's attacks on Romanticism and the debilitating cult of personality, his concern and advocacy for the 'inner check' and the 'higher self' are well known. Against the Romanticist, 'in perpetual adoration before the holy sacrament of himself,' he urged that man's deepest need is for genuine communion which means a genuine escape from his ordinary self. According to him 'Man is not only a stupid animal inspite of his conceit of his cleverness, but we are here at the source of his stupidity... moral indolence.' (7) The ideas of the primacy of personality,

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emotion and instinct lead to a perversion of human standards and a dissipation of human energies. Ethical effort, the submission of one's impulses to the 'inner check' of the ethical imagination is the only way out of confusion, barbarism and meaninglessness. Barbarism could only be avoided by a return to moral responsibility, and the pervasive results of the unsound rapture with traditional wisdom could only be met by a classical resurgence 'consecrated to the service of a high, impersonal reason.' (8) These are some of the pointers leading to the basis of Babbitt's teachings on impersonality, tradition and classicism, which were imbibed by his attentive pupil, T.S. Eliot. Further the philosophic clashes between the metaphysicians of the One and the metaphysicians of the Many attracted the attention of both the teacher and his pupil. Babbitt writes:

Life does not give here an element of oneness and there an element of change. It gives a oneness that is always changing. (9)

This inseparability of oneness and change means that such reality as can positively be known is inextricably mixed up with illusion:


(9) Rousseau and Romanticism, p.7, quoted by Adrian Cunningham in Eliot in Perspective, p.213.
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Man is cut off from immediate contact with anything abiding and therefore worthy to be called real, and condemned to live in an element of fiction or illusion. (10)

The basic error of naturalism lay in its intoxication with the everlasting flux in which the human law of righteousness, control and morality was dissolved; it denied the duality of human nature. But civilization must rest on the recognition of something abiding. This leads to some kind of a partial solution of the metaphysically insoluble problem by recourse to imaginative symbols which convey those truths upon which the survival of civilization rests. It is at this level that the influence of Babbitt was very crucial for Eliot. It is around the compulsive preoccupation with the duality of oneness and change, the duality of human nature, and the problematic continuity of the human tradition through wide cultural changes that both Babbit and Eliot developed their ideas of impersonality, tradition and classicism.

The problems of oneness and change, which can be productively studied along with the Dwaita and Advaita

philosophies of the Hindu tradition(11) were central in Eliot's engagement with Bradley. Eliot, whose whole development was governed by an overriding preoccupation with the conditions for the unification of experience, was profoundly influenced by Bradley's ideas on partial truth and fluidity of subject and object in their definition by context and relationship. As against a pervasive project of unification the antitheses indicated in tradition and the individual talent, society and the individual, the national and the universal church, are rather symbiotic relationships. The antithetical concepts are dialectical polarizations of the same phenomenon. Tradition and the individual talent are different but inseparable concepts in constant interaction. Oppressed

(11) Dvaita and Advaita are important concepts of Hindu philosophy regarding the nature of reality. Dvaita refers to dualism whereas Advaita refers to non-dualism. Vedanta asserts that the dualism set up between self and the world, between spirit and matter is the product of illusion (Maya) or of ignorance (Avidya). The manifold world with its changing phenomena is unreal and the only reality is brahman, which is identified with atman. The view which accepts as real both the components of dualism in their distinction and opposition is Dvaita; that which denies this is Advaita. However, the Advaita does not positively assert the oneness of all reality; it simply denies the dualism which presents itself in our ordinary thinking.
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by this sense of the permanency of dichotomy and of the impossibility of an absolute view of oneness some persons strike out along the path of religion which hints at such an absolute point of view. Outside the world of religion the tussle between the tendency to connect and the resistance to connection remains constant. The final possibility of unification is not attainable outside faith. It was because of this imperative that Eliot turned towards the Christian tradition and met a kindred spirit in Hulme.

Hulme emphasized the basic elements in the mental make-up of Eliot. The one vital area where tension in the thought of Eliot was confronted and reinforced by Hulme is that of religion. Hulme's anti-romanticism goes far beyond that of Babbitt because it is also an uncompromising anti-humanism. His insistence on the discontinuity of levels in man evidenced in the well-known statement on Original Sin\(^{(12)}\) goes beyond the duality of human nature in Babbitt and the irreducible nature of gaps in experience in Bradley. Hulme's classicism demands at its centre the assent to some form of transcendental certainty of ethical validation. This assent makes Eliot realize the inadequacy

\(^{(12)}\) Hulme: 'In the light of these absolute values, man himself is judged to be essentially limited and imperfect. He is endowed with Original Sin. While he can occasionally, accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself be perfect.' (*Speculations*, p.45.)
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of the previous pattern of resolution and impels him to raise the question of religious belief. The introduction of the religious dimension does not, however, cancel or radically alter the previous pattern, but validates it at the points where it would otherwise break down.

For Maurras also the totality of tradition is the central truth to which the individuals must submit. He was a fierce critic of the nineteenth century and hated the industrial plutocracy which released forces of anarchy. He looked back with wistful regret to the order and harmony of France of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. He was possessed by a grand image of Europe's civilizing tradition, which had originated in Greece, emigrated to Rome, marched with the Roman legions into France, and spread over to Spain and up the Rhine. He thought that it was best preserved in France and that the health of Europe depended on its development around the French monarchy. The monarch of Maurras was some kind of an incarnation of the collective idealism which lay behind an intellectual fraternity and a cultural tradition. It was a stable and embodied focus, a concrete centre of authority beyond the realm of universal subjectivity. Maurras was not a Christian. For him the church was a cultural institution, and the Catholic Church was the supreme
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embodiment of the classical hieratic tradition. Thus in Maurras the idea of tradition was available as fact and institution, and Eliot was deeply influenced by Maurras. When Leo Ward commented that Maurras's intention was to pervert his disciples away from Christianity, Eliot replied:

I have been a reader of the work of Maurras for eighteen years; upon me he has exactly the opposite effect. ... I only say that if anyone is attracted by Maurras's political theory, and if that person has as well any tendency towards interior Christianity that tendency will be quickened by finding that a political and religious view can be harmonious.

('The Action Francaise, Maurras and Mr Ward,' The Criterion, March, 1928)

But Maurras could not remove the ontological anxiety of Eliot. The search for that external authority, that something beyond the individual which would finally validate the calculus of unification led Eliot beyond Maurras. It was because at the limit of the concreteness of the Maurrasian answer the old Bradleyan problem always raised its head. Ultimately Eliot had to follow the hint given by Bradley. Thus, with the help of thinkers and writers like Hulme, Baudelaire, Pascal and Dante, Eliot struck out along the path of religion. For him religion was Christianity, and the Christian tradition ultimately became the tradition he was looking for. He himself stated
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quite categorically:

Among other things, the Christian scheme seemed the only possible scheme which found a place for values which I maintain or perish ... ... it is in favour of the Christian scheme from the Christian point of view that it never has and never will work perfectly. No perfect scheme can work perfectly for imperfect man.

('Christianity and Communism,' The Listener, 16 March, 1932)

IV

In his own works Eliot shows a constant preoccupation with the problem of tradition. At a very initial stage of his career Eliot rejected the romantic fallacy. This rejection which was fundamental, did not imply a denial of the worth of man's inner longings, but it emphasized the need for objective standards. Contemporary society could offer no ground for the discovery of such standards. The political hysteria of the inter-war years was paralleled by a wild outburst of artistic experimentation justified by its 'modernity' and the extent to which it broke away from tradition. Surrounded by the ruins of traditional ethics and artistic standards, Eliot felt that the modern world's spiritual store had to be rebuilt by synthesizing the peculiarities of the modern world
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with the universality that could be found in tradition.

His concept of tradition is very closely linked with his ideas about culture, which is the way of life of a society. According to Eliot,

Tradition is not solely, or even primarily the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs ... tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rites to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represents the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place.

(After Strange Gods, p. 18.)

Tradition is, for Eliot, that part of living culture inherited from the past and functioning as a powerful force in the formation of the present. A sense of the past and history is essential to tradition, particularly to literary tradition: ' ... the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.'

Heresy is the result of the loss of a sense of tradition. In After Strange Gods Eliot points out that after the deterioration of the Christian and Classical cultural frameworks writers looked for many far-fetched and dangerous
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systems of thought and belief. This produced the contemporary artistic Babel. Again, tradition, particularly literary tradition is largely unconscious, and Eliot wants the writers to maintain 'orthodoxy' by exercising all of their conscious intelligence. The critic is a guardian of literary tradition:

It is part of the business of the critic to preserve tradition - where a good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and to see it as a whole; but this is eminently to see it not as consecrated by time but to see it beyond time.

(Introduction to The Sacred Wood pp.XV-XVI).

The tasks of the critic are to use the past to measure and judge the present, to use the past to help the true development of the present and to reorganise a new view of the whole tradition.

It is essential for the reader of Eliot to realise that his concept of tradition is integrally linked with the classical tradition, which is again linked with Catholicism. His ultimate allegiance is to what he regards as the European tradition, which is a shared tradition. This shared tradition is the heritage of Europe from Greece Rome, and from Christianity. It is a shared past which
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still lives by its effects, both direct and indirect, on the present. The themes of the 'mind of Europe' and the cultural unity of Europe run through all the writings of Eliot:

There will be those who appreciate the need, if the present chaos is ever to be reduced to order, of something more than an administrative or an economic unification — the need for a cultural unification in the diversity of Europe. ... a new unity can only grow on the old roots; the Christian faith and the Classical languages which Europeans inherit in common. These roots are I think inextricably intertwined.

(To Criticize the Critic, p. 160.)

Eliot refers to these 'inextricably intertwined' roots,— the Christian faith and the Classical languages, again and again in his writings. European culture is essentially a Christian culture built by Christianity out of the fabrics of European character in all its rich variety. The foundation is made up of Christian faith and the Classical culture.

Eliot's Europeanism is the culmination of a process which had started with his American origin. When Eliot, who regarded the American experience as an extension of the European experience, moved back to Europe, he was sharply aware of the old roots. It was easy for him to see
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Europe as a unity and a community, and he became a powerful exponent of the values of Europe. Eliot's brand of Americanism always leads to Europeanism. He has himself stated:

It is the final perfection, the consummation of an American to become, not an Englishman, but a European — something which no born European, no person of any European nationality, can become.

(In Memory of Henry James, The Egoist, 1918)

In October 1922 Eliot launched The Criterion which he intended to be a living embodiment of the 'mind of Europe', and a fitting rival to The Dial and the Nouvel Revue Francaise. As the editor of the journal he explained the purpose:

The CRITERION aims at the examination of first principles in criticism, at the valuation of new and the re-valuation of the old works of literature according to principles, and the illustration of these principles in creative writing. It aims at the affirmation and development of tradition. ... It aims at the assertion of order and discipline in literary taste.

(The Criterion, July 1923)

Through its pages Eliot tried to communicate the new thought and work of Europe to his countryman, and to communicate his own thoughts and that of his countryman to Europe. Through a reciprocal process, he
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aimed at advancing Europe's sense of a common tradition
and of its unexhausted potentialities as a cultural unity.
The contributors formed a remarkable international
procession and the journal became a remarkable European
Review. Eliot's view of the unity and diversity of Europe
is somewhat similar to that of Ortega y Gasset who thought
of Europe as a swarm in which there were many bees but
only one flight:

The multitude of European forms constantly emerging
from their radical unity and falling back into it
in order to impart to it a new force, that is the
greatest treasure of the West.

(The Criterion, July 1938)

In the thirties The Criterion had increasing
difficulty in remaining true to its own ideals. The
European community of letters, which had seemed a reality
in the twenties, was disintegrating in the face of totali-
tarian forces and the growing threat of war. For the last
years of its life politics and theology became the dominant
concerns of the journal. Eliot wrote his 'Last Words'
for the issue of January, 1939:

For myself, a right political philosophy came more
and more to imply a right theology — and economics
to depend upon right ethics — leading to emphases
which somewhat stretched the original framework of
a literary review.

(The Criterion, 'Last Words', January, 1939)
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Eliot tried to advocate what he regarded as the right theology and to probe, cautiously but unremittently, the political commitments of his contemporaries, and testing these by his theology. Referring to Eliot in England and Allen Tate in America one of the contributors to the Criterion wrote in 1938 that the 'theological revolution has certainly begun, not only at Rome, Geneva and Canterbury, but in Kentucky and Russell Square.' (13) Eliot of the thirties emphasized the system and discipline of religion. For him faith was best observed as a discipline and a debt to society; it had to be applied daily to the exigencies of the world. But, for a man to declare himself Christian, or anything equally serious, is to attract a lot of problems with no easy solution. It is extremely difficult to maintain clear-sightedness, and Eliot himself stated:

That balance of mind which a few highly-civilized individuals such as Arjuna, the hero of the Bhagavad-Gītā, can maintain in action is difficult for most of us even as observers.

(Criterion, January, 1937)

This poet of 'If and Perhaps and But', as Eliot calls himself in his poem 'Five Finger Exercises', burdened

(13) George Every in Criterion, April, 1938.
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with an awareness of his convictions, tried hard to arrive at some positive decision through a cautious and persistent probing. All through this process Eliot was painfully aware of the difficulties involved in finding the right answer. His comment on Wyndham Lewis in 1938, that 'the detached observer, ... ... is likely to be anything but a dispassionate observer; he probably suffers more acutely than the various apostles of immediate action,'(14) is revealingly autobiographical.

The last issue of The Criterion appeared in January, 1939. In the midst of the gathering clouds of disintegration, the 'European mind, which one had mistakenly thought might be renewed' and fortified, disappeared from view, and The Criterion had to close. But Eliot's search for meaning, means of unification, and the right answers to the vital issues of his time, however, continued. When he was trying to renew and fortify the 'European mind' during the life of The Criterion, Eliot highlighted the place and role of peripheral England in the comity of European nations. For Eliot the virtue of the Anglican Church was its spirit of moderation and mediation. In addition to this he felt that Britain, by virtue of its geographical position, history and temperament, was the ideal mediator—a mediator among

(14) Criterion, April, 1938.
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He has stated:

I am talking about the common tradition of Christianity which has made Europe what it is, and about the cultural elements which this common Christianity has brought with it. ...

It is in Christianity that our arts have developed; it is in Christianity that the laws of Europe have — until recently — been rooted. It is against a background of Christianity that all our thought has significance ...... Only a Christian culture could have produced a Voltaire or a Nietzsche.

I do not believe that the culture of Europe could survive the complete disappearance of the Christian Faith. And I am convinced of that, not merely because I am a Christian myself, but as a student of social biology. If Christianity goes, the whole of our culture goes.

(Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, p. 122)

It should be quite clear, by this time, that what Eliot meant by culture and by tradition was the Christian culture and the Christian tradition. He has stated this very clearly:

To our Christian heritage we owe many things besides religious faith. Through it we trace the evolution of our arts, through it we have our conception of Roman Law which has done so much to shape the Western World, through it we have our conceptions of private and public morality. And through it we have our common standards of literature, in the literatures of Greece and Rome. The Western World has its unity in this heritage, in Christianity and in the ancient civilizations of Greece, Rome and Israel, from which, owing to two thousand years of Christianity, we trace our descent.

(Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, pp. 122-123)
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For Eliot it was not merely a question of sentiment; it was essentially a question of existence and meaning in life:

What matters is that we should recognise our relationship and mutual dependence upon each other. What matters is our inability, without each other, to produce those excellent works which mark a superior civilization.

(Ibid, pp. 123-24)

And these were the reasons which impelled Eliot to call on all men of letters of Europe to

... try to save something of those goods of which we are the common trustees; the legacy of Greece, Rome and Israel, and the legacy of Europe throughout the last 2000 years.

(Ibid, p. 124)

V

Here, then, is the tangle of ideas, the trials and tendencies which went into the evolution of Eliot's concept of tradition. Starting with his essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' which was a kind of interim report on some process of thought and feeling, he went on defining and living the complicated implications of the concept throughout his life. Tradition was something indispensable for the whole being of Eliot—the man who
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suffers and the mind which creates, and that tradition was the Christian tradition.

In the late nineteenth century the key to progress was the growing respect for individualism, making for democracy in politics, and liberalism, with a strong affinity to Protestantism in thought. Eliot was uniformly opposed to theories of progress and contemptuous of writers like H.G. Wells who tried to popularise a progressive view. He felt that the disintegration of Europe began soon after Dante's time, that a diminution of all aspects of culture had afflicted England since Queen Anne and that the nineteenth century was an age of progressive degradation. Eliot said: 'There are two and only two finally tenable hypotheses about life: the Catholic and the materialistic'. (15) Everything which is neither, including Protestantism, Whiggery, liberalism and humanism, is untenable: they are a series of queasy transitional hesitations, each worse than the one before it. The height of civilization was reached in the Middle Ages, when society, religion and arts expressed a set of common standards and values. The cultural synthesis of the Middle Ages symbolises an ideal of European Community. All history since represents

(15) Selected Essays, p. 514.
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a degeneration of this ideal — 'the disintegration of Christendom, the decay of a common belief and a common culture'. Against such an awareness of cultural breakdown, Eliot became preoccupied with a historical dialectic which concentrated on the disintegrating and deliquescent tendencies of the egocentric self of man. Professor Northrop Frye has written that

All views of life that Eliot would call serious or mature distinguish between two selves in man: the selfish and the self-respecting. These are not only distinguishable but opposed, and in Christianity the opposition is total, as for it the selfish self is to be annihilated, and the other is the immortal soul one is trying to save.(16)

The first type leads to a breakdown of community, for the ordinary or selfish self is locked in its private jail-cell - 'each in his prison'. But society is prior to the individual. Laws for the will, beliefs for the reason, and great Classics of culture for the imagination, are there from the beginning. A man cannot claim that he is a timeless and spaceless "I" : his context cannot be separated from his real personality. The particular context or continuum into which he is born, Eliot calls his culture or tradition. In Matthew Arnold, religion is a part of

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which culture is the whole. For Eliot, culture is the 'incarnation' of religion. Religion guarantees the distinction between a higher order of human nature and a lower order of physical nature. Eliot writes:

If this 'supernatural' is suppressed ... the dualism of man and nature collapses at once. Man is man because he can recognize supernatural realities, not because he can invent them.

(Selected Essays, p. 485)

Human culture is alligned with a spiritual reality which is superior to it and yet within it. This kind of relationship is represented in Christianity by the Incarnation. Thus the genuine self is man in the context of certain institutions and traditions. The ego is a parasitic by-product of the genuine self; it is anti-cultural and anti-traditional. Emerson said: 'An institution is the lengthened shadow of a man'. But Eliot, reacting sharply to such a view, writes:

The lengthened shadow of a man
Is history, said Emerson,
Who had not seen the silhouette
Of Sweeney stradled in the sun.

The ordinary, natural man is the shadow of an institution, or man in genuine society or tradition. In this context Eliot's concern for the virtue of humility,
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which arose out of his ceaseless quest for the spiritual values of life, becomes revealingly relevant. In 'Fast Coker' he writes that humility provided 'The only wisdom we can hope to acquire'. And humility, which is the opposite of pride which is centred in ego and traditionally the essence of sin, helps, as Eliot thinks, in the realization of tradition.

However, acceptance of tradition does not mean uncritical relativism, doing in Rome as the Romans do merely because they do it. One must strive for it with one's critical awareness alive. There must be analysis, comparison, adjustment, rejection and synthesis. Tradition is the very stuff of the history of man's existential, artistic and spiritual explorations. One has to begin with a sense of reality based on the absorption of the ego, which lives in a world of illusion where the primary categories are those of time and space, producing loneliness and alienation, in a social, cultural and spiritual continuum. Because tradition gives meaning to man's life in time and space, resolves chaos into order, and transforms spiritual apathy into spiritual effort and validation.