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THE POET'S INTUITION OF PROSE FICTION: Pound and Eliot on the Novel

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FOR the same reason we originally acquired the most perspicacious theorizing about poetry from poets, we acquired perhaps the most acute speculation about the novel from its own practitioners. Objective critical opinion about the novel—and by that I infer ‘from without’, from the critical rather than the creative ranks—had only just got underway in the beginning of this century. The reasons are obvious: the novel was a relatively new form, had made radical changes in a short space of time, and was still the chameleon of literature; besides, the critical approach was taking considerable time to sense its own capabilities and the directions open to it. As eminent a critic as F. R. Leavis illustrates this point when he writes in the thirties that “criticism of the novel has hardly yet begun.”¹ He elucidates his remark, and the significant point of his observations is the confusion he sees in the critical intelligence between the nature and purpose of poetry and of the novel.

Increasing critical attention has been paid to prose fiction² in our own time—and the early manifestos of the novelists themselves (James, Proust, Conrad, Forster, Mann, and so forth) have become almost curiosity items in the technical workshops of the new schools of criticism. This is common knowledge and well understood; what is also known but less understood is a phenomenon that transpired in the early decades of this century: the concentration of the poetic instinct on critical analysis. The early critiques written by both Pound and Eliot on poetry, on individual poets, on critical approach, have still-echoing reverberations; only the perspective of history can measure to what extent their insight pervades and informs our contemporary understanding and practice of all these things. But their interest and need took them into other literary areas, and while it would be misleading to pretend they encompassed all literature evenly in their early critical writing, they each achieved an enviable scope. Much consideration (though different) on each of their parts has gone into prose-fiction. The purpose of this paper is to examine their

ideas on this issue and to see how these evolved through their critical analyses of certain trends in fiction and of specific novelists themselves. The fructifications of such a task will not be immediately evident; the purpose is clear, I hope. Essentially it is: to understand the individual approach a highly poetic creativity takes to such matters—to distill their observations if possible into the central intuition which inspired them—and as a kind of *ancilla*—to see how their approaches and their conclusions differ.

A word should be said about method. Their styles, no less than their interests, differ completely. Pound—grand master of apocalyptic statement, the blinding flash of intuition, the obstreperous remark, the fleeting rebuke—his style stems from an almost febrile mind, fraught with more ideas and insights than perhaps he could control at any given instant. To read him in search of an organon or a system requires, together with patience, the talents of a crossword specialist. It is all there certainly, but finding it frequently requires immense digging and sometimes even cross-planting and synthetic nurturing. Eliot on the other hand is a surveyor's delight. Not only is everything there, but it is usually all in one place. He literally supplies us with indices to help us locate it. Of all possible critical-creative writers, then, these are perhaps the most difficult to work with conjunctively. For this reason I treat each separately and in a way that I think most appropriate to his own particular kind of genius.

Pound's attitude toward prose-fiction—both his understanding of that literary form and his criticism of novelists themselves—can easily be misunderstood. To a good many critics of literature, it is in this field (as well as in the field of dramatic literature) that Pound's interest and even his genius fail him. As Eliot wrote of him retrospectively in 1946, he was

a masterly judge of poetry; a more fallible judge, I think of men; and he was not at all interested in those who did not strike him as eligible for the ideal intellectual and artistic milieu which he was always trying to find or to found.³

But this is a small matter, and Eliot knows it; I merely mention it to serve as a *vade mecum* in distilling from Pound's critical works all that he says and implies about this issue of prose-fiction. The point is: Pound's interest seems at times limited or biased only to those who expect him to be all things to all people. If he wrote less interestingly and less acutely on certain topics than Eliot, we can look at it posi-

tively and say it was because his interest was directed elsewhere. Posterity may well interpret Pound the finer poet and Eliot the more astute critic—but that is not within the concern of this paper. The initial observation to be made pertinent to this study is this: if we look to Pound for a completely satisfying theory of prose-fiction and for a penetrating criticism of the novel through history or as it existed in the twenties or thirties, we shall be left unsatisfied. At an extremely high pitch and momentum the poetic faculty can fail as easily as the critical; and this because interest is at that moment dispersed or focused upon other things.

Pound believes in keeping the terms poetry and prose dissociated; each means something distinct in his conceptual framework, and he assumes this connatural understanding with his reader. He is not the man to quibble over terms, and categorical minds have interpreted this disinterest as an intellectual failing. Such is certainly not the case. As far as Pound is concerned, there is in the end but one type of writing, "good writing", and that always involves "precision" and "perfect control".⁴ But insofar as a distinction between prose and poetry should be made, he is willing to make it. The basic contradistinctions are these: Poetry is "highly charged" language; prose is less so and thus permits "factual presentation". Poetry therefore implies emotion which is refined, condensed, always clearly expressed, and with the characteristics of *melopoeia*. "Prose does not need emotion."⁵ Obviously, it may portray it, but it is not indigenous to its nature. There is something essential to the nature of prose, however, and it has to do with intellection rather than passion. Realizing the precariousness of such a reticulate division, Pound nevertheless delineates it:

The prose author has shown the triumph of his intellect and one knows that such triumph is not without its suffering by the way, but by the verses one is brought upon the passionate moment. . . . The intellect has not found it but the intellect has been moved. . . . In the verse something has come upon the intelligence. In the prose the intelligence has found a subject for its observation. The poetic fact pre-exists.⁶

The degree to which prose is a "conscious formulation" and poetry a deliberate yet paradoxically spontaneous process or "the thing that will out"—is clear.

A few years later Pound formulates this distinction somewhat differently, though certainly one definition does not exclude the other but approaches it from another direction. His remarks are less literary,

more philosophical and pertain to what he feels is the essential nature of these "two arts of literature":

Most good prose arises, perhaps, from an instinct of negation. . . . Poetry is the assertion of a positive, i.e., of desire, and endures for a longer period.⁷

What he is alluding to in these remarks is the frequency of prose to achieve critical even didactic statement, or at any rate to approximate the effect of a critique-commentary—while on the other hand, the inclination of poetry is emotional statement ("emotional synthesis"). Prose discusses or describes (circumscribes) the subject; poetry is itself the statement of intuition and does not necessarily direct the reader beyond itself.

With this much of Pound's formulated theory in the back of our minds, a consideration of the prose-fiction he studied and criticized will be more meaningful.

Novelists interested Pound primarily for what he could learn from them about his own art and for the ideas they expounded. The French novelists, as his statements on poetry reiterate over and over again, gave him the greatest impetus and inspiration of all the prose writers he read (Henry James, perhaps, excepted). Their significance in the history of European literature was to dislocate the "poetic pre-eminence"—and to make prose language the clearer, more precise form of creative expression. In the *A B C of Reading*—compiling as it does the distillation of many of his thoughts—one finds what well might be considered the final hierarchical arrangement and significance he gives these writers. The primary intuition according to Pound was Stendhal's; though Flaubert comes to the same point of awareness. In their writings one finds inchoate signs of the movement that will lead among other things to the emancipation of language and to the possibility of modern poetry. The epiphany was in essence:

An attempt to set down things as they are, to find the word that corresponds to the thing, the statement that portrays and presents, instead of making a comment, however brilliant, or an epigram.⁸

According to Pound, poetry had always been until that moment the higher art; but in France, at least, it was then suffocating from the sonorous inarticulateness of the age. It seemed that the language of poetry was incommensurable with any genuine attempt to express emotion clearly and forcefully. Stendhal saw the possibilities of a gem-

like prose cutting through this "fustian à la Louis XIV" (. . . "tout l'attirail de ses ornements appelés poétiques . . .") and defining with precision and clarity the stages of emotion and the various states of consciousness ("des mouvements du cœur. . .").⁹ Flaubert realizes the same thing and his greater verbal talent fulfills the promise of the new prose, and poetry is relegated to a subservient role. The cornerstone, of course, in the structural precision of his art is the famous "mot juste"¹⁰—an integral part of Pound's own aesthetic credo and practice.

After the lesson of the master and the example of *Madame Bovary* the Brothers Goncourt take up the aegis of fine prose and give it theoretic shape. De Maupassant "slicked up the Flaubertian mode",¹¹ diluted it somewhat with an overweened narrative sense, with concentration on "neat little diagrams"¹² as a way of recreating life. This then is Pound's essential schema. Little is observed about these authors that cannot be deduced from what we have noted; though elsewhere in his writings he will allude to Flaubert's creation of *Everyman*, or to Stendhal's "roughness and directness"¹³ or to his experiments in "Impressionism."¹⁴ Or, he will call Flaubert's prose "solid",¹⁵ or say that he is "softer" than Voltaire or Stendhal.¹⁶ These desultory remarks strike the unknower with confusion perhaps, to say nothing of impatience. But one need only read his treatise on "The Hard and Soft in French Poetry" to realize the viable signification these terms possess.¹⁷ Sometimes, a mere collation of epithets will tell us all we need to know about Pound's interest in a particular writer.¹⁸

Sadly enough, he hardly mentions other French novelists external to this main stream which he sees running straight to his own day. He alludes to Balzac's heightened economic awareness ("the factor of earning one's exiguous living"), and sees a certain contemporaneity or even modernity in his vision, though he finds his actual writing "crude".¹⁹

On the English novel, Pound has little to say beyond praising a few novelists. He admires Sterne's valid sense of realism, and the innovation, at least, which *Tristram Shandy* implies. Jane Austen—he feels, will subsist for her "refinement" and for the intimate knowledge she revealed about the human heart. Hardy—he looks back on recently with the recollection that he had learned much from "the degree to which he would concentrate on the subject matter, not on the manner."²⁰ In 1918, Pound thought him antiquated—though he admired the "epic tonality" that his novels achieved. He completely discards

the Wells-Bennett group, primarily because of its fustiness, its "oleosities", its "illusionism"—and because of its lack of "sensitization".²¹ Their work lacks those "short deep probings into the very axis of reality" that Melville spoke of.

It should be noted that Pound's interest in prose came to him late and as an offshoot of his interest in language and poetic expression. It was Ford Madox Hueffer who really shaped and annealed this interest and taught him that prose was "as precious and as much to be sought after as verse, even to shreds and patches."²² Pound liked Hueffer's own creative work primarily for its qualities of impressionism and for its prose precision, and would still in 1934 place his novel, *A Call*, amongst the work of such esteemed craftsmen as Flaubert, Sterne, and Henry James. But it now strikes us that there was less reasoning in Pound's enthusiasm for Hueffer's creative abilities than in his recognition of his critical acumen. Hueffer made little advance in the novel genre and even held some nineteenth century views as to its construct and scope. His gift was primarily one of expression, or more accurately, of verbal impressionism and precision. Perhaps Pound was aware of this in his careful description of Hueffer as "the best critic in England."²³

After Flaubert, Henry James accomplished the next significant step in prose-fiction so far as the young Pound was concerned. His interest in his fellow American was always alive and became obfuscated only when the colossal figure of Joyce made all novels read like short stories. In 1918 he conceived the idea of a James' number for the *Little Review*—and contributed an essay which is still fresh with the genius and insight that originally infused it. It is Pound's most objective and perceptive interpretation of a novelist's talent; none of his smaller reviews on Joyce or on Lewis approximate its concentration or its brilliance.²⁴ This essay alone avows to the prodigious scope of the apperception that he was occasionally inclined to focus into his discussions on prose-fiction.

It is not difficult to strike at the core of Pound's remarks and abstract what he intuits about James. He attempts to summarize his own observations and notes what he feels are the three lasting characteristics of James: James' hatred of tyranny (linked up with his continual recognition and acceptance of the differences inherent in people everywhere)—the forces he plays off against each other ("the masses he sets in opposition")—and finally, his sense of American

history ("history of a personal sort, social history, well documented and incomplete"). Pound's estimation is brilliant in that it reduces itself to what contemporary opinion has tended to extract from James' works: the rareness of sensibility that was able to capture the emergence of two worlds—the old with the new—and the diverse states of consciousness their interaction makes possible. Pound is approaching this interpretation when he observes:

He was aware of the spherical form of the planet, and susceptible to a given situation, and to the tone and tonality of persons as perhaps no other author in all literature.²⁵

Pound is equally perceptive in sensing many of the limitations of James: the lack of a real narrative sense as de Maupassant possessed it—the early self-conscious obfuscation and cluttering of the mind with old furniture ("unfortunate cobwebs")—the failure in the scope of his characters (he lacked even Flaubert's sense of *Everyman*, to say nothing, we might add, of Dostoevsky's).²⁶ Pound in his estimations comes close to our own understanding and assessment of the man.

In the field of contemporary prose-fiction, Pound retains his acclamation for the chief luminaries of his day: Joyce and Lewis. Anything outside their scope or outside his own coterie, draws little attention. In his letters of this period he strikes us as not particularly knowledgeable about literary happenings in America—but then with one or two exceptions (Fitzgerald and Barnes, primarily) no strides were being made in prose-fiction across the Atlantic. He hears about novelists like Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Djuna Barnes, Henry Miller,²⁷ but has not read them carefully or else finds them inconsequential. At home and abroad he appears to have dismissed writers like Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Céline, Forster, Mann and Kafka (or at least chosen not to discuss them). This was due in part to the dominance within his own circle of Joyce and Lewis, and in part to his gradual withdrawal from active criticism and the constant re-preparations it entails. His last critique on Joyce shows the critical interest flagging; but his judgment on the man proved no less incisive.

Joyce and Lewis are different cases altogether. In 1914, the same year that the *Dubliners* was published, he finds Joyce's stories perfect gems of "clear, hard prose" in a generally sloppy literary period. He labels Joyce "impressionistic" in the most complimentary sense of the term and gives him credit for mastering anew (since de Maupassant, of course) the narrative art. He especially admires Joyce's preciseness,

his universality, and his lack of sentiment. Four years later, he looks back on the *Dubliners* and assesses them as "several sketches rather lacking in form".²⁸ *The Portrait of the Artist*²⁹ now receives his full attention and admiration. What impresses him about the book is Joyce's "scope"—the range of both his mind and his style. *Ulysses* has just begun to appear; he finds it "obscene, as life itself is obscene in places, but an impassioned meditation on life." Again, four years later, he writes on Joyce (1922); *Ulysses* is now totally unveiled, a veritable masterpiece, and Joyce's *Weltanschauung* suggests a breadth equalled only by that of Flaubert. Joyce takes up where Flaubert left off; and *Ulysses* represents the next advance after *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Aside from re-enacting Flaubert's breakthrough in style (Pound is never very concerned with formal construct in the novel), achieving Flaubert's amplitude of vision, Joyce also creates the sense of Everyman (cf. Bloom) that was a talisman of Flaubert.³⁰

At the same time that he spends superlatives on Joyce, Pound looks closely at the talent of Wyndham Lewis. He senses a titanic intellect in the man and since he has always agreed with Henry James that "the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer"—he finds Lewis' *Tarr* to be the "most vigorous" and "volcanic English novel of our time."³¹ Even Joyce does not possess Lewis' "energy" and his characters in comparison are "cold and meticulous". Lewis strikes him as comparable to Dostoevsky, even supersedes the latter in the "celerity" of his thoughts, yet loses none of Dostoevsky's effects of "mass and of weight".³² Of all Pound's comments on Lewis, this perhaps died with its utterance; at any rate, we would hardly pair off these two authors, given the perspective that we now possess.

This then is the picture we get of Pound on the novel and on novelists. Generally speaking, those same qualities³³ which appeal to Pound in poetry appeal to him in prose—clear expression, brittleness of language, intensity, originality, sensitization. The exception is perhaps strong "intelligence": something which he sees lurking behind the novels of Joyce and Lewis and something that excites him. He is not interested in character delineation as such, though he senses James' failure to provide us with an Everyman, and he has very little to say about the new form made possible by a book like *Ulysses*.³⁴ While he may be accused of failing to seek out the profundity of Dostoevsky or to sense the experimentation, the beauty, and the inno-

vation in form of Virginia Woolf or Djuna Barnes—in the case of the dominant novelists of his own day, his critical astuteness did not fail him. Indeed, our own understanding of their achievement owes much to his initial perception.

Critics rely on Eliot for proper clarification and definition of the terms and categories that he uses in his criticism. In most cases the distinctions that he draws are complete and even paradigm; however, his remarks on prose-poetry-verse and the contradistinctions that he deduces have displeased not a few critics. His formulations nevertheless are quite satisfactory for his own purposes, and we would do well for the present study to possess these as inalienably as he himself does.

His understanding of this prose/poetry issue can be seen germinating in his earliest writings; certainly by 1921 he had drawn almost permanent conclusions. The important essay that year was "Prose and Verse", with its very title suggesting the dipolarity in Eliot's theory on this matter. He states quite bluntly that no valid difference can exist for him between two things that are at heart as inseparable as prose/poetry. (We should realize that he contains within the comprehension of the term 'prose' such things as "the novel, the essay, or whatever else there may be in English.")³⁵ For the converse reason that he will not sharply sever prose from poetry, he refuses to identify poetry with verse.

. . . good poetry is obviously something else besides good verse; and good verse may be very indifferent poetry.³⁶

His dissociations clearly lie on either side of the meaning of poetry: "that intercommunication between the inner being of things and the inner being of the human self which is a kind of divination."³⁷ No value judgment lurks in his distinction of prose from verse: both are in potential equally important. If a difference exists in the nature of the two, it is frequently but a difference in shade or degree. Great prose can acquire as much natural rhythm as great poetry and: "This prose rhythm may be more or less complex or elaborate, according to the purposes of the writer."³⁸

Prose and verse are the pivotal terms then; forty years after this essay he restates it again with heavier emphasis. Paul Valéry had coined the neat analogue—

Poetry : Prose : : Dancing : Walking (or running)

In his careful introduction to the French poet's *The Art of Poetry* (1958), Eliot examines the limitations and dangers of removing poetry so harshly from prose (and in this shows an unconscious debt to Hueffer/Pound and their whole elevation of the "prose tradition")—he refutes Valéry's analogy. Once again he states his own case, insisting upon the need of the "intermediate term verse" in connection with the other two terms.

This then is the basis of Eliot's entire approach to prose. His views on the novel are in a way ramifications of this understanding in that he is willing to consider prose-fiction as something which can now achieve poetic results beyond those normally associated with such a form. Eliot has sensed in the hybrid 'novel' of the twentieth century, and especially in the new form it presages, something very different from what its archetype had traditionally stood for; in fact, he sees it approaching a type of new mythic-epic poetry. These are some of the possible things he implies in his remark: "The novel ended with Flaubert and James."³⁹

These ideas come out most clearly in his essay (1923) on *Ulysses*—perhaps his major statement on the novel as such. He finds the book "the most important expression which the present age has found"—and this because its scope encompasses that "panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."⁴⁰ This is why he finds the work as much epic as novel:

"... if not a novel, that is simply because the novel is a form which will no longer serve; it is because the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression of an age which had not sufficiently lost all form to feel the need of something stricter."⁴¹

The statement at least implies the proposition that the novel became an integral part of literature only when poetry itself (or more properly, verse) failed—and as a corollary to this, that Stendhal and Co. could as easily be judged spoiled poets as great innovators of the novel as such. Eliot might not go that far, but his observations do at least point to the novel form as being arbitrary; and in this essay on Joyce he asserts the utter necessity of recognizing the new formlessness (New Critics would term it 'open-form') as a way of retrieving the novel from obsolescence. In respect to this, he notes the exploitation of "mythical" rather than "narrative" method in *Ulysses*.⁴² In a way, Eliot in his seeming circumambulation is really intuiting what is to

be the *modus operandi* of modern fiction: the transposition of technique and form from secondary to primary importance and the literal discovery by this technique and form of the complex implications that reality itself is heir to.⁴³ Eliot was always totally acute to experimentation in fiction, partly because of the serious attitude he took toward criticism as a science, and partly no doubt because of his extra-curricular association with the publisher Faber and Gwyer from⁴⁴ 1925 onward.

Eliot's essays on Henry James⁴⁵ provide other significant tangents to his thinking on the novel and to his understanding of a novelist's specific genius. Much less vociferous in his approbation of James than Pound is, he nevertheless thinks just as highly of the man and his work. He finds James a critical genius ("a critic who preyed not upon ideas, but upon living beings") with "a mind so fine that no idea could violate it." This is a high compliment in Eliot's terms—emphasizing as it does that James' mind was sacrosanct to the "parasite" idea and that James always nurtured his ability to think from his experiences (and feelings) rather than allowed rude ideology to corrupt his feeling. This of course is as much a conscious dictum for Eliot himself as it was an unconscious one for James.

Always tending to locate the precise forces of influence at work on a particular period or individual, it is not unusual that Eliot should devote much space in both these essays to the tradition that James worked in and to the writers from whom he earned his inheritance. The tradition, naturally enough, was that of New England; its primary exponent prior to James was Hawthorne. James "took talents similar to Hawthorne's and made them yield far greater return than poor Hawthorne could harvest from his granite soil." Quintessential aspects of this tradition were: a concern for "deeper psychology" (in particular, sensitivity to those subtle nuances, those "curious precipitates and explosive gases which are suddenly formed by contact of mind with mind")⁴⁶—and an awareness of cosmology no matter how microcosmically (an omnipresent awareness, in the case of New England for Hawthorne and of a large part of America for James). This is the tradition then and for Eliot it flourishes as a truncation of the old world, and in counter-disposition to it.

Eliot always retained a deep interest in American literature—in particular in its prose-fiction. As late in his critical career as 1950 he

introduced an edition of *Huckleberry Finn*, and his observation therein that the "river gave the book its form" has since provided one of the best critical keys to the structure of that novel.

In 1925 he wrote F. Scott Fitzgerald a letter on the latter's newly published *The Great Gatsby* (a letter which manages to get reprinted in nearly every Fitzgerald criticism)—praising the novel highly and remarking that it struck him as "the first step American fiction has taken since Henry James. . . ."

Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1937) merited a lengthy introduction by Eliot, which is worth examining to see how this type of prose-fiction moves him. He finds the prose so fraught with poetic inspiration that only those sensitivities "trained on poetry can wholly appreciate it." Its language has that "prose rhythm that is prose style, and the musical pattern which is not that of verse . . . (that) raises the matter to be communicated to the first intensity."⁴⁷ This is one of the primary qualities that excites Eliot about a novel: the tonal quality and timbre of its prose.⁴⁸ But great fiction embodies infinitely more than that; there must be defined through this language (and imagery) the minuscule vibrations and pulsations of life itself. *Nightwood* for Eliot represents the purest coincidence of medium with vision, of subjective perception with the perplexity and ambivalence of reality:

The miseries that people suffer through their particular abnormalities of temperament are visible on the surface: the deeper design is that of the human misery and bondage which is universal.⁴⁹

It might be noted in passing that although Pound has spoken repeatedly of the significance of "scope", "intelligence", "profundity" in a work of literature, he has never taken cognizance of this same "horror and doom", this suffering that is integral to man's very existential nature, and which literature frequently concerns itself with imparting.⁵⁰

The English novel (or its history) has never drawn such panegyrics from Eliot; his comments seldom go beyond his use of it to elucidate certain theories he has about the gradual "secularization" of modern literature. He wrote a somewhat feeble essay—in fact indulged in his least favourite "parlour game" ("the polite essay")—about Wilkie Collins and Dickens.⁵¹ The essay goes a long way toward drawing a vivid appreciation of Collins, but when Eliot has said all he has to say, we are a little amazed that he should get so placidly elated over Collins' melodrama. It is obviously a personal, even idiosyncratic

expression of exuberance and the apologetic tone of the essay confirms this.

Eliot has some unique notions of the responsibility of the writer in society (particularly the novelist since he reaches the greatest numbers). In *After Strange Gods* (1934) he applies to contemporary literature the test of tradition and orthodoxy and finds the age almost heretical. He examines certain novelists like (Katherine) Mansfield, Joyce, Lawrence, and the recently deceased Hardy, for the "moral implications" of their respective visions. It had slowly become a part of Eliot's belief that "Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint."⁵² Of the authors he has chosen to look at, only Joyce possesses any 'moral consciousness' and only he functions within an ethically "orthodox" tradition. We should be careful in not thinking that Eliot is evaluating the religious proclivities of these writers—though in fact what he is scrutinizing is a conscious (or unconscious) reflection of that belief. What he is primarily concerned with is their adherence to some "orthodoxy of sensibility" and "to a sense of tradition". In Joyce's works this can be seen in the willingness of the novelist to let his characters operate within an essentially orthodox (in this case, Christian) framework, without making them alarming iconoclasts who wilfully destroy all sense of tradition. The argument is perhaps inevitably indefensible; but it is not our purpose here to give credence to those critics who feel Eliot is "merely using the works of certain eminent authors to illustrate a moralistic point of view."⁵³ Of interest to us is what Eliot says of each writer *qua* writer.

He ponders deeply over D. H. Lawrence, finds his characters utterly without conscience, devoid of "any moral or social sense." Lawrence himself is an "almost perfect example of the heretic," which Eliot defines elsewhere as "a person who seizes upon a truth and pushes it to the point at which it becomes a falsehood".⁵⁴ Though he admires Lawrence's incisive but crude intuition, he feels it cannot justify the "lack of critical faculties which education should give" and which Lawrence seems to be without. Something fundamentally spiritual lingers in his work, but it is warped spirituality, imbued with a vision that is "spiritually sick."⁵⁵

An interesting footnote to this early essay is the introduction by Eliot eighteen years later to a critical study of Lawrence.⁵⁶ His tone has changed—is now less admonishing, less ecclesiastical; surprisingly

enough, his judgment has as well. No longer does Lawrence convey demonic powers working through a man of genius, no longer does he evoke the opprobrium: heretic. Distance has lent perspective and allowed the critical organ greater vision. By 1951, the name of D. H. Lawrence was almost a household word and the weight of critical opinion had come to recognize him as one of the most individualistic, truth-seeking spirits of the early twentieth century. The same critical forces were unsure of the achievements of Remy de Gourmont, Madox Hueffer, and Wyndham Lewis. In that year, Eliot ameliorates his stricture of Lawrence, interprets him less as a positive expression of unorthodox radicalism. He reconsiders the man as being ignorant of his own untraditional accomplishments (wrong "from ignorance, prejudice, or drawing the wrong conclusions in his conscious mind from the insights which came to him from below consciousness").⁵⁷

To return to some other considerations in *After Strange Gods*: in particular to the resume Eliot therein gives of the English novel viewed from an ethical stance. He admits an insecure comprehension of the history of the English novel—but to his mind, he detects a growth in self-awareness on the part of its novelists. This growth has got out of hand in his own day, signifying as it does "the aggrandizement and exploitation of personality." Now Mr. Eliot knows full well the hallmark of twentieth century Western art is the re-discovery of the self, what Maritain calls the "individual, incommunicable universe of creative subjectivity."⁵⁸ It is not this focal point that Eliot condemns—but the intensity, the blindness that frequently accompany it and the consequent alienation from that all important sense of man's spiritual heritage (from the sense of tradition itself). "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone."⁵⁹

He cites the works of Austen, Dickens, Thackeray as possessing a right balance between the creative self and the object attended to in the work of art. Eliot is here approving of the novelist as objective observer—or more specifically, the orthodox observer ("personality in its proper place"). The change appears to begin with G. Eliot and her deplorable "individualistic morals" and to culminate in Hardy with the cult of self-expression. "Emotionalism" is at the core of Hardy's vision because he misconstrued the relation of man to Universe, man to God. Even his excessive use of landscape is symptomatic of his morbid self-absorption. In condemning Hardy's concentration on the passion of his characters (might we add, even of his landscape?), Eliot would

appear to be implying that evocations of pure emotion work in literature only when there is an equal and opposite exertion of reason. "Unless there is moral resistance and conflict there is no meaning."⁶⁰

This then is the multifarious approach of two poet/critics to the novel as literary genre—and to individual practitioners of that form. Their different approaches, no less than their dissimilar styles, go a long way toward suggesting the kind of conclusion each one arrives at. Pound's approach is fragmentary, centrifugal: touching upon several topics simultaneously and dispersing a hundred insights to the winds. As this type of genius will, it frequently errs—not so much in calculated judgment as in hastiness to say everything; nevertheless, Pound is perhaps quantitatively more perspicacious than Eliot. On the other hand, Eliot's approach is thoroughly consistent and even scientific; it is centripetal in its attentions because Eliot usually knows all he is going to say before he says it. Usually he is moved by a single intuition toward some work of prose-fiction, and it is generally easier in his case to distill exactly what he has intuited.

On the assumption that a new work of art requires individual consideration—Pound varies his approaches, his language, and even the mode of criticism. With Eliot, history and tradition provide the touchstones of criticism and restrain him from the outbursts and experimentations that Pound's intuition often gives rise to.

Each poet seeks different things from prose-fiction. Pound likes vital intelligence and erudition to show through a work of literature; that is why he can get more excited over Wyndham Lewis than Eliot can. He also admires precision and limpidity in language—and "scope" (and what we might call "internationalism") as it is exemplified in the works of James and Joyce. Eliot is more discerning in what he expects from prose-fiction; and nothing of what he expects can be reduced to epithets like "precise", "magnetic", or "universal"! Meaning is paradigm for Eliot and all the *melopoeia/phanopoeia* devices are worthless unless they are ordained toward a profound and lasting statement. He has a much keener appreciation of what we might call the spiritual elements in life than Pound has (yes—even of the elements of darkness and suffering). His observation about James' pristine mind never being sullied by a "parasite" idea could never be applied to Pound; in fact, one wonders if Eliot was not unconsciously

thinking of Pound's kind of intelligence when he remarked this. It would not be an unfair description of the critical abilities and interests of both poets to say: Pound lived with ideas and cultivated his thoughts with them, Eliot suspected them and tried to reduce his thinking to initial experience. Thus it is that Pound will speak of Joyce's "solidness" and Eliot of Barnes' "suffering". Two disparate visions—suggesting separate approaches—demanding different appreciations.

In their most speculative moments, both poets saw that poetry was (and always would be) but a part of some larger development called "literature"—and each in his own way realized that prose-fiction had a purpose and a result quite removed from poetry. Their own age proved a literary renaissance could include both poetry and the novel—and each subsisted with the other not only because it could utilize language with comparable precision, imagination and beauty—but because each could say something quite distinct about human nature and about the human conundrum that involves us all.

NOTES

1. F. R. Leavis, *How to Teach Reading: A Primer for Ezra Pound* (Cambridge Univ., 1932), p. 33. A particularly pertinent point to this discussion since Leavis is here exemplifying and emending Pound's *How to Read*—in particular, doing what Pound had not done, viz., supply notes on the novel form. Leavis makes what he feels are the necessary observations: "With the novel it is so much harder to apply in a critical method the realization that everything that the novelist does is done with words, here, here and here, and that he is to be judged an artist (if he is one) for the same kind of reason as a poet is. Poetry works by concentration; for the most part, success or failure is obvious locally. . . . But prose depends ordinarily on cumulative effect. . . ." For Pound's reply, see *A B C of Reading* (New Directions, 1951), p. 89.
2. I use the term synonymously with "novel"—but I do not thereby trenchantly remove prose-fiction from the precincts of poetic inspiration or for that matter from poetry itself.
3. T. S. Eliot, "Ezra Pound" in *Poetry* (September 1946), reprinted in *Ezra Pound* (1950), ed. P. Russell. We might recall what Pound himself wrote in Canto LXXXVI:

J'ai eu pitié des autres

probablement pas assez, and at moments that suited my own convenience . . .

4. Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist" (1913), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London, 1954), pp. 48–49. See also a letter on this: "Poetical prose??? . . . The great writing in either p or p consists in getting the subject matter onto paper with fewest possible folderols and antimaccassars. When the matter isn't real, no amount of ornament can save it. The inner structure is the poetry. And the prose—poetry stunt is merely soup/lacking the rhythmic validity of verse." (Quoted in *Letters of E.P.* (N.Y., 1950), p. xviii.)
5. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
6. He does not seem to be separating verse from poetry; and frequently the terms are used interchangeably. *Literary Essays*, pp. 53–54.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 324 ("Henry James" footnote; 1918).
8. *A B C of Reading* (1936), p. 74.
9. "Serious Artist" (1913), *Literary Essays*, p. 54. Always: "His true Penelope was Flaubert." *Mauberley* ("Ode pour L'Election").
10. Pound's simple retrospective comment on this in *Culture* suffices (New Directions, 1938, p. 49). "We have heard a good deal about using 'mot juste'. For the purpose of novel writing and telling stories, the composition of poems, the evocative word, the word that throws a vivid image on the mind of the reader suffices."
11. *How to Read* ("Prose", 1927-28), *Literary Essays*, p. 32.
12. "Dubliners & Mr. James Joyce" (1914), *Literary Essays*, p. 400.
13. "The Hard and Soft in French Poetry" (*Poetry*: February 1918), *Literary Essays*, p. 287.
14. "Dubliners and Mr. James Joyce" (1914), *Literary Essays*, p. 399.
15. "Henry James" (1918), *Literary Essays*, p. 305.
16. "The Hard and Soft in French Poetry", *Literary Essays*, p. 287.
17. Terms suggested by Théophile Gautier.
18. In particular, his quick spasmodic allusions to prose writers, a few examples of which I list below: Chesterton: "a vile scum on the pond" (*Letters*, p. 116); "the vacuity of a Gide" (*Culture*, 1938, p. 88); "Shavian-Bennett inanities" (*Literary Essays*, p. 425); "praise worthy sobriety"—Goncourts (*Literary Essays*, p. 32); Proust—"very accomplished" (*Literary Essays*, p. 405); Rabelais—"a rock against the follies of his age" (*Literary Essays*, p. 405); Wells' "stew" (Letter, July 1937); also "nickle cash-register"—Bennett.
19. "Henry James" (1918), *Literary Essays*, p. 301.
20. Interview with Pound in *Paris Review Interviews* (Viking Press, 1963), p. 43. He had written early in his career that Hardy: "awoke one to the extent of his own absorption in subject as contrasted with aesthetes' preoccupation with treatment." (July 8, 1922: *Letters*, p. 178.)
Pound is referring primarily to Hardy's poetry, but indirectly to what the man had learned himself from his absorption in fiction. In April, 1937, Pound admired Hardy's 'clarity'—a quality attained, he felt: (and this is significant of Pound's entire approach to the novel—i.e., novel qua ground-work/for/poetry) through "the harvest of having written twenty novels first."
21. "... interest in a writer being primarily in his degree of sensitization." "Henry James" (1918), *Literary Essays*, p. 331.
22. "The Prose Tradition in Verse" (1914), *Literary Essays*, p. 372.
23. It should be noted that in July 1937 Pound wrote to M. Roberts: "the man who did the *work* for English writing was Ford Madox Hueffer." Pound, happily, never forgot the debt he owed this mentor.
24. The article, together with the work on the issue itself, took considerable time from Pound's other interests. In February 1918 he wrote Mary Anderson that he anticipated six months' work on this James' Issue and appended the remark: "I do not want to sink wholly into criticism to the utter stoppage of creation."
25. "Henry James" (1918), *Literary Essays*, p. 298.
26. In his essay on Remy de Gourmont (1920), Pound notes that the French writer was infinitely more competent in the "modality and resonance" of his characters' emotions—and in what could be termed his sense of negative capability (for Pound, James' characters never rose above their adumbrated state of existence in his own creative imagination).
27. Dreiser quite succinctly is "uninteresting" (*Letters*, p. 125); Sinclair Lewis less talented than Shaw (whom he disliked) and not at all in the field of *Weltliteratur* to merit the Nobel Prize (1930); Djuna Barnes strikes him as

little more than competent; Henry Miller has "considerable talent. Ultimately bores me as did D. H. Lawrence." (*Letters*, Dec. 11, 1937). Elsewhere, he states a preference for Miller over Virginia Woolf. It is significant that in this letter (Dec. 11, 1937) he states that "no one" in contemporary literature provides him with much interest.

28. "Joyce" (1918), *Literary Essays*, p. 412.
29. Published in serial form from February 2, 1914–September 1, 1915; then completely in 1916.
30. It has always been important to Pound that he posit Joyce as next in significance in Flaubert's lineage. In 1930 he wrote to L. Untermeyer (in that famous autobiographical letter to "put the facts straight"):
 "Note: the evaluation of *Ulysses* in the *Mercure de France* (June 1922) the first French critique of Joyce; establishing the proportion between Joyce and Flaubert." *EP to LU* (Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 18.
31. "Wyndham Lewis" (1920), *Literary Essays*, p. 424.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Marshall McLuhan extends this point to all his critical appreciation: "... if there is one theme which emerges everywhere in Mr. Pound's critical prose it is the seeking out of those qualities and techniques in a writer which lead to the economical rendering of complex actualities." ("Pound's Critical Prose", 1949, in *An Examination of Ezra Pound*, p. 170.)
34. In "James Joyce et Pécuchet" (*Mercure de France*, 156, June 1922, 307–320) Pound had contrived an analogy between *Ulysses* and the sonata form (the parts following the pattern of a sonata movement: 'exposition', 'development', 'recapitulation'. Aside from this interesting parallel, Pound seldom shows any theoretic interest in the novel form as such. (He did attempt to write a novel once but gave up; *Mauberry* was in itself an attempt to "synthesize the Jamesian novel.")
35. "Prose and Verse" in *The Chapbook*, No. 22 (April 1921), p. 10.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
37. Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Pantheon Books, 1953), p. 3. Eliot is very close to the philosophic understanding of 'poetry' and implies distinctions which Pound would have little need of. Maritain briefly suggests the evolution in meaning of the term 'poetry' from Plato's *Mousike*, through the Latin *vates* (poet qua diviner/prophet), through Coleridge's 'poesy' (that "generic term inclusive of all the fine arts") to his own broad definition of the term.
38. Introduction to *Nightwood* (1937), (*New Directions*, 1946), p. xii. This prose rhythm is "what raises the matter to be communicated to the first intensity."
39. "Ulysses, Order and Myth", *The Dial* (November 1923), reprinted in *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism* (New York, 1939), p. 201. See also his remarks in "Wilkie Collins and Dickens", *TLS* (August 4, 1927), reprinted *Selected Essays*: "The greatest novels have something in them which will ensure their being read . . . even if the novel, as a literary form, ceases to be written." p. 417.
40. "Ulysses . . ." *op. cit.*, pp. 198 and 201. A conclusion equivalent to Pound's a year previous in his French critique of Joyce. *Vide supra*, note 34.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
42. For Leon Edel, Eliot (in calling *Ulysses* "mythical") means "... that the novel is read not as a time-sequence but as a heterogeneous series of perceptions each catching its moment of intensity without reference to what lies on the succeeding pages, but the entire reading of which conveys a poetic synthesis." *The Psychological Novel: 1900–1950* (New York, 1955), pp. 207–208.
43. What Mark Schorer calls "Technique as Discovery"—"The virtue of the modern novelist . . . is not that he pays so much attention to his medium,

- but that, when he pays most, he discovers through it a new subject matter, and a greater one." *The Hudson Review* (Spring, 1948).
44. Eliot joined Faber and Gwyer in 1925 (Later Faber & Faber). See F. V. Morley's "T.S.E. as a Publisher" in *T.S.E.: A Symposium* (London, 1948).
 45. "In Memory of Henry James", *Egoist*, V. I (January, 1918). "The Hawthorne Aspect", and the above were published in *The Little Review*, V. 4 (August, 1918) together with Pound's Baedeker on James.
 46. "Henry James", reprinted in *Literature in America* (Meridian, 1957), p. 223. It is interesting to note that Pound came to similar conclusions about James' awareness of the inter-action of minds in a given situation; and that Eliot's essay was written some time before Pound's.
 47. *Nightwood*, p. xii.
 48. In 1938 he was attracted to the poetry of Lawrence Durrell's *The Black Book* and said it was "the first piece of work by a new English writer to give me any hope for the future of prose fiction."
 49. *Nightwood*, p. xv.
 50. As an interesting footnote on this, Pound wrote Eliot in 1937 on his *Nightwood* eulogy (*Letters*, p. 286):
 "There onct wuzza lady named Djuna
 Who wrote rather like a baboona.
 Her blubbery prose had no fingers or toes;
 And we wish Whale had found this out sooner.
 This exaggerates as far to the one side as you blokes to the other. I except *Ladies Almanack*, which wuz lively."
 51. *TLS* (August 4, 1927)—in part a reworking of his "Homage to Wilkie Collins" in *Criterion* (January 1927).
 52. "Religion and Literature" (1935) in which he traces the growth of "secularization" from Fielding through Eliot (George) down to Hardy.
 53. D. S. Savage, "The Orthodoxy of T. S. Eliot" (1944).
 54. (1928), *Selected Essays*, p. 436.
 55. *After Strange Gods* (Faber, 1934), p. 60.
 56. *D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence* by W. Tiverton (London, 1951). Introduction by T. S. Eliot.
 57. *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. viii.
 58. Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
 59. "Tradition and the Individual Talent", *Selected Essays*, p. 4.
 60. *After Strange Gods*, p. 55.

