

terials with which it works. Eliot does not oppose the concept of expression of personality, but rather the concept of direct personal expression.

The fact that Eliot is consistent in his belief that poetry is indirect personal expression—an objective structure or “general symbol” that implies the poet’s emotion—strengthens Schneider’s argument that his poetry reveals his own struggles with the problems of personal change—that it is, in fact, disguised autobiography. He did not earlier hold a doctrine of “extinction of personality” and later change to the opposite view. The poet’s personality, according to Eliot, is extinguished in the creative process, but it remains hidden behind the characters’ “actions and behaviour” (*SE*, p. 173). The world of the poet, like that of the dramatist, “is a world in which the creator is everywhere present, and everywhere hidden” (*On Poetry and Poets*, p. 112).

ALLEN AUSTIN

*Indiana University Northwest*

To the Editor:

In “Prufrock and After: The Theme of Change” Elisabeth Schneider argues that Eliot’s treatment of his religious conversion reveals a preoccupation with “not only what one may change *from* or *to* but with change itself.” While I agree basically with her statement that “the subject has not often been touched on by other poets,” I am troubled by her singling out of Donne’s Holy Sonnet “Batter My Heart” to illustrate her point.

Unless I misunderstand her, she suggests that for Donne (as well as for Gerard Manley Hopkins) God seizes “possession of man’s self and will,” whereas for Eliot the coming to God “is willed within the human self” (p. 1103). But Donne’s sonnet hardly illustrates this distinction. Certainly his images are more violent than any of Eliot’s quoted in the paper, but the essence of Donne’s poem is that God has *not* seized possession of his self and will (see l. 2), that Donne (as the imperative mood throughout the poem indicates) merely wills that God do so. The real distinction between Eliot and Donne is not that Eliot is active where Donne is passive, but that Eliot wills to believe in God where Donne wills to serve Him. In other words, Eliot, unable to presuppose a basic belief in God either for himself or for his twentieth-century reader, must begin at an earlier stage of the conversion process, that is, at the initial stage of willing to believe.

Aside from this one important difference between the two poets, I feel their respective renderings of the Christian’s experience of change may be more similar than Schneider would have us believe. To cite just two examples from her article, she finds remarkable in

Eliot an “acute self-consciousness [which] paralyzes the will and the power to act and feel” (p. 1104); yet one finds a similar self-consciousness in many of Donne’s poems as well (see, for instance, the Holy Sonnet, “Oh, to Vex Me”). Schneider also points out that in *Ash Wednesday* Eliot is “deliberately confessing that his own public avowals are not, or not yet, entirely matched by private belief” (p. 1112); yet Donne’s confession (in “A Hymn to God the Father”), “I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne / My last thred, I shall perish on the shore,” could be interpreted in much the same way.

It strikes me as impossible to conceive of “the process itself of subjective change” apart from “what one may change *from* or *to*” (p. 1103). Perhaps if Schneider had demonstrated more fully just how Eliot or any of his readers could handle such an abstraction, the uniqueness of Eliot’s attitude toward change would have been clearer.

JOHN J. POLLOCK

*California State University, San Jose*

To the Editor:

Elisabeth Schneider’s admirable essay seems to me an important step in the direction of understanding T. S. Eliot’s development as a poet. The following responses are intended as complementary to Schneider’s work; however, my responses come from a different critical angle and lead to slightly different conclusions.

In *Young Man Luther* Erik Erikson describes characteristics of young people whose sense of identity is not yet secure: they wait to be swept away by “a vast utopian view” which somehow never satisfies for long; the prospect of sexual intimacy “arouses at the same time both an impulse to merge with the other person and a fear of losing autonomy and individuation. In fact there is a sense of bisexual diffusion.” “These patients can feel like a crab or a shellfish or a mollusk”—“a pair of ragged claws.”

It seems clear that “Prufrock” speaks from something like the experience Erikson describes, and that *The Waste Land* continues to explore a vision of the world in which sexual intimacy is both obsessively preoccupying and abhorrently threatening. It is probably mistaken to suggest that Eliot was homosexual (as a *TLS* reviewer recently did), but there is certainly a sense of “bisexual diffusion” in Prufrock and in the Tiresian narrator of *The Waste Land*—and it appears reasonable to take this sense as evidence of an ongoing identity crisis that Eliot was trying to resolve through his poetic processes. *The Waste Land* searches for a “vast utopian” alternative to an unacceptable vision of the world, and for a definition of Eliot him-

self within that new order. "Prufrock" begins (as Schneider says) with ambivalent attitudes toward individual change—that is, to the development of identity: on the one hand, no change is seen as possible; on the other, change is desperately desired.

The possibilities of change through personal intimacy are perceived as having horrifying implications: "The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced." Yet in the rape of Philomel is the possibility of becoming the nightingale, and by this transformation acquiring some of the godlike power by which the change was accomplished. The nightingale is a version of the poet whose personality is extinguished "through identification with the will of God." If change is to be acceptable then it will have to come not through human love but through the psychological sublimation of the desire for human love; for Eliot, this sublimation eventually came when he substituted for love a less intense social experience—joining with other Christians in ritual orthodoxy.

As Schneider says (p. 1106) the ending of *The Waste Land* is inconclusive. I suggest that this inconclusiveness comes from the partial failure of Eliot's attempt to incorporate various alien myths into the symbolic structure of his own personality. Eliot may be rhetorically swept away by the symbolic portent of the coming of rain near the beginning of Part v; but by the end of that section the new "hope" is more hoped for than achieved. A residue of uncertainty remains which predicts "Ash Wednesday" and the subsequent Christian conversion—a change from alien myths to a familiar myth.

Eliot's early poetic ideal, his doctrine of the "extinction of personality," is fulfilled in his later work; that is, "Ash Wednesday" announces the end of the personal voice in Eliot's poetry, and the end of the struggle for change—the search for personal identity—that partly motivated the early poems. When he later disclaimed his early doctrine, he may well have meant to imply a negative judgment of his post-*Waste Land* poetry—not to mention a larger sense of personal failure to find in human love the fulfillment of that early desire for change and identity.

STEPHEN A. BLACK  
Simon Fraser University

*Ms. Schneider replies:*

I do not find myself in sharp disagreement with any of the three writers who have commented on my study of Eliot. Some of my discussions were necessarily condensed, however, and may have given a wrong impression.

To Black's remarks I have no objection at all though I myself prefer to avoid terms having to do with an

"identity crisis." I still feel vague about the precise meaning of this expression and sometimes wonder who among us ever does "know who he [she] is." The term therefore does not seem to me to throw light upon Prufrock but perhaps to others it may.

I quite agree with Pollock's account of Donne's poem and did not suppose I had implied anything else. The contrast I meant to suggest between Hopkins and Donne on the one hand and Eliot on the other was simply that the two earlier poets either had or longed to have and asked for an intense and intimate *personal* relationship with God or Christ, whereas Eliot, or at any rate the Eliot of the poems, does not appear to think or feel in these terms. Though it would be an overstatement to say that his loyalty was to the institution of the Church rather than to God, one does feel that the object of his devotion was abstract in a way and to a degree very different from that of Donne, Herbert, or Hopkins, and that the abstractness of Eliot's conception of God affected his feeling as well as his thought.

Pollock's closing comment cannot be dealt with adequately in a short space, but perhaps my meaning can be illustrated briefly. There is a common core of experience and feeling among the following: the Magi back "in the old dispensation"; a more or less cured narcotics addict or reformed criminal back in his old streets; even Pericles (not allegorized), with some ambivalence, finding his daughter; and an experience of religious conversion such as Eliot's. This common core is an example of what I mean by the *process* of subjective change.

The question raised by Austin regarding Eliot's critical theory of "impersonality" is even harder to cope with briefly; the account of it in my article was of necessity (as well as by accident) incomplete. If someone had driven Eliot to the wall when he had finished writing "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he might perhaps even then have acknowledged that his preoccupation with tradition and the impersonal aspects of tradition, and his dislike of Romanticism, had led him too far. He did not, however, in this essay or at any time deny "emotions and feelings": these he recognized as the poet's materials. His discussion of the "objective correlative" in "Hamlet and His Problems," which appeared in the same month as the first installment of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (Sept. 1919), deals with emotion and is not inconsistent with the best and most accurate statement in the latter essay: "For it is not the 'greatness,' the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts" (*Selected Essays*, 3rd enlarged ed., 1951; rpt. London, 1953, p. 19). Still, as it stands, I do not think we have seri-