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The purpose of my thesis was to examine the critical relationship between T. S. and J. M. Robertson. Both writers were important figures in driving the evolution of Twentieth century literary theory toward scientific empiricism. But there has been no concerted effort to fully explore the connection between the two.

Given the lack of secondary scholarship in the field, my research was entirely primary documents, and it yielded surprising results. Both authors discerned a methodological failing in late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth century criticism. They argued that Romanticism had corrupted critical theory. Criticism needed to be redefined as a more scientific field grounded in empirical observations.

Both critics also discussed the interconnected relationship between art and criticism and how each is part-science and part-creative act. They argued that it was the critic's responsibility to identify the relationship and correctly apply it to critical theory.

But Robertson and Eliot disagreed about the critic's role in re-establishing artistic theory away from Romanticism. Looking closely at *Elizabethan Literature*, *The Problem of Hamlet*, "Hamlet and his Problems," "Tradition and the Individual Talent," I show that Eliot wrote criticism to adjust artistic theory toward scientific empiricism and Robertson settled for changing critical theory. Their different objectives affected the way they wrote criticism and the way subsequent scholars have read their criticism.

T. S. ELIOT'S DEBT TO J. M. ROBERTSON: A CONSIDERATION
OF THEIR CRITICAL THEORIES AS REPRESENTED
IN ELIOT'S 1919 *ATHENAEUM* REVIEWS

by

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T. S. ELIOT'S DEBT TO J. M. ROBERTSON: A CONSIDERATION OF
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ATHENAEUM REVIEWS

Reflecting on his life's work in "To Criticize the Critic" (1961), T. S. Eliot fears that his age of influence is "coming to an end" (22). At the end of his critical career, he seems to want to offer a final summation. His tone is valedictory. He is less guarded and much more revealing than in his earlier prose addresses. Eliot appears unafraid to admit publicly the mistakes that accompanied his successes. He lists his major inspirations such as Ezra Pound, Irving Babbitt, and F. H. Bradley. He discusses artistic influences like Marlowe, Webster, Dante, and Donne. He also notes Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière among his inspirations. But what about his other critical influences? Elsewhere in the address, he documents his admiration for French critics, Coleridge, Johnson, Dryden, Arnold, and others, but he neglects to explicitly say whose ideas he borrowed and retooled.

In discussing his most lasting critical assessments, Eliot focuses on his famous phrases such as "objective correlative": "if I am unable to defend them now with any forensic plausibility, I think they have been useful in their time. . . . they may soon go out of fashion completely: but they have served their turn as stimuli to the critical thinking of things" (19). While regressing slightly, he indicates that his primary motivation was to change critical attitudes. In his earlier criticism, he wanted to engage in the critical

community of taste and force revaluation of critical methods. Here, he reveals that J. M. Robertson was an inspiration and an important source for his own critical methodology: “I was at that time hand-in-glove with that gallant controversialist, J. M. Robertson, in his critical studies of Tudor and Stuart Drama” (19).

In this thesis, I will demonstrate that Eliot’s early critical ideas were formed partly under the guidance of the unsuspecting Robertson. Robertson wrote with a crusading purpose: to perfect criticism with scientific precision and to promote his ideas through the aggressive attack of established critical processes. He was inflammatory and brusque often to his own detriment, for his reputation suffered and he was deemed a critical pariah. But where others noted cavalier austerity, Eliot discerned honorable intentions. Even if Eliot did not agree with all of Robertson’s conclusions or accusations, he valued the man, his opinion, and his critical instinct.

On its surface, Eliot’s statement is a fond reminiscence – chivalrous, even a little histrionic. But looking back over his career, he was bound to be sentimental. He appreciated Robertson’s work even if he only mentions its effect in two letters in 1922. He saw in Robertson what he desired: not a father, not a mentor, not a teacher, not a guide but a critical peer. When he surveyed Robertson’s criticism, he perceived an elder whom he could respect and emulate. In Robertson, he found superior method, sound judgments, and controversial scholarship. He labels Robertson’s work controversial because it was unique for the time. Robertson provided an initial spark for “scientific criticism” that would ignite into structuralist formalism and eventually into New

Criticism. While others used their critical writing as an impetus for creative impulses, Robertson was a true critic that appreciates the critic's position and promoted proper methodology. Eliot extended his gratitude for Robertson's zeal in his final, public review of his own criticism.

Eliot's Direct Correspondence with Robertson

J. M. Robertson is perhaps unknown except to the most dedicated Elizabethan literature scholars. If he is remembered at all, it is for his attempted "disintegration" of the Shakespearean canon. He claimed that *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Two Gentleman of Verona*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Comedy of Errors* and *Measure for Measure* were all written primarily by other playwrights (Chambers 218). Robertson had a wide variety of interests. He was concerned with issues from all walks of life and believed that each intellectual discipline fed into the same scientific process of judgment. A self-educated polymath, Robertson read, wrote, and spoke voraciously on issues ranging from economics, journalism, humanism, rationalism, progressivism, liberalism, sociology, religion, and literature. He spoke six languages, served in the British Parliament for 12 years (1906-18), wrote over 100 books and circulars, and his articles number in the thousands (Freedon). Robertson's output was so prolific that no definitive bibliography of his work exists (Tame 16).

But the lack of a bibliography is evidence of both high productivity and critical obscurity. Despite his output and wide-ranging career, today Robertson is largely forgotten. But he was known in his day. In 1919, three decades after his first critical study of Walt Whitman, he published *The Problem of Hamlet*. He tried to reorient the discussion away from Hamlet the character toward *Hamlet* the play. In the September 1919 issue of the *Athenaeum*, Eliot reviewed Robertson's book adding his own interpretive commentary and building on Robertson's scholarship and conclusions. Eliot's study produced unusual results. Critics flocked to debate and, more importantly, denigrate Robertson's claims, and as a result he found himself at the center of a controversy on the merits of *Hamlet*. But critics had misread Robertson and ascribed Eliot's views of his work to him.

The misdirected notoriety must have plagued Robertson for a number of years, because in August 1922, Eliot wrote him an apologetic letter: "I fear that my name may be known to you only in a connexion which will hardly dispose you in my favour," Eliot remarks plaintively ("To J. M. Robertson: 31 August 1922"). "Certain critics" had mistaken Robertson's arguments in *The Problem of Hamlet* for Eliot's similar claims in "Hamlet and His Problems." Eliot concludes, "I am sorry that this has involved you in attack, and even abuse, which was primarily aimed at myself."

In the same letter, Eliot thanks Robertson for providing astute criticism: "I take this opportunity of acknowledging an indebtedness, extending over many years, to your work, in connexion with the Elizabethan studies which have always formed one of my

strongest interests.” Three years after reviewing Robertson’s work, Eliot extends his gratitude for “many years” of influence. To what indebtedness was Eliot referring? Why wait three years after a public discussion involving the two to acknowledge the debate and its aftermath in a private letter? We need to look at the letter’s original purpose to answer these questions. The letter’s primary occasion was neither to thank Robertson nor apologize to him. Eliot wanted to recruit Robertson on behalf of his own critical labors. In the letter, he requests that Robertson contribute an essay to *The Criterion*. He wanted a critic who had “both literary distinction and more exact scholarship than the majority of those whose names you see.” Eliot appreciated his professionalism and his “exact” criticism. Eliot’s compliment points us toward Robertson’s critical method.

The main tenet of Robertson’s criticism was scientific investigation. No matter which field, Robertson used the methods of scientific empiricism, advocating strenuously for this method in his criticism. He wanted all critics to move away from bias, taste, and predilection in favor of objectivity. Robertson’s pleas were more for credibility than precision. Literary criticism is by definition subjective and is hardly scientific. Robertson was another in a long line of critics that attempted to ascribe objectivity to criticism by borrowing terminology from science. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sigmund Freud, Paul Elmer More, Max Weber, Ferdinand Saussure, and others were able to lend scientific credibility to seemingly unscientific fields. Public and scholarly interest in psychology, sociology, new humanism, semiotics, phenomenology, and other disciplines grew significantly with these “scientific” advances. As the booms have

rescinded and interest has waned, the discoveries and theories are no longer authoritative. But contemporary criticism's realignment should not diminish Robertson's contributions. I believe that Robertson only wanted more respect for literary criticism, and, for that purpose, he argued that criticism needed more grounding in science.

However, Robertson also recognized that criticism cannot purely be science. He understood that criticism is part art and part scientific empiricism, and equally, that art is part criticism/science and part art. In this way, Robertson's criticism presents a unique example of the relationship between criticism and art, the critic and the artist: he viewed the relationship as a binary. Art and criticism are capable of drifting toward either extreme. But the most effective art is largely art with some criticism, and the most authentic criticism is mostly criticism with a component of art. In most of his criticism, the terms "thought" and "feeling" serve as shorthand for this binary: thought representing the critical component and feeling representing the artistic component. If art becomes too critical or if criticism became too creative, the critic/artist would corrupt the process, producing illegitimate art and/or criticism.

Eliot appreciated and agreed with Robertson's conception of the art-criticism binary. In fact in the letter after Robertson's affirmative reply, Eliot allows him latitude in choosing the essay's subject but offers two recommendations: a study of Elizabethan blank verse or an essay promoting a "decent method in criticism." If Robertson chose the former, Eliot, even though he was working on an essay on the same topic, would defer to Robertson's expertise: "It is precisely a subject on which I have been supposed to be

writing a set of articles for the *Times*, for the past year; but life and vicissitudes have intervened; and now that I hear you have dealt with the subject, I am humbly thankful that I did not venture in before you” (“To J. M. Robertson: 4 September 1922”). In regard to an essay on critical methodology, Eliot comments: “your reference to having once hoped to establish a decent method in criticism suggests a very valuable essay. I must say that I have shared your hope, and share your despondency.”

Thanking, apologizing, soliciting, deferring, sharing hope and despondency. These are not the words of a literary icon to an unknown critic. Eliot presents himself as a kindred spirit to the insufficiently recognized Robertson. Eliot’s words communicate indebtedness, misplaced blame, admiration, common values, and common purpose three years after his and Robertson’s only known public intersection. In these letters, Eliot implicitly acknowledges his kinship with Robertson and his critical method. He suggests that he and Robertson perceive the same failing in modern criticism and agreed on the solution: an art-criticism binary coupled with scientific empiricism.

Therefore, for both critics, the stakes were very high. Both argue that modern critics were misguided about the proper balance between art and science in criticism. Eliot and Robertson suggest that their contemporaries had been influenced by Romanticism into neglecting objective reflection in lieu of overreliance on spontaneity and sentimentality. Criticism needed to move away from this tendency and move toward the proper balance between thought and feeling. If critics did not adopt Robertson’s

method, both he and Eliot contested that criticism would continue to deteriorate, perhaps irreversibly.

In these letters, Eliot explicitly admits his critical agreement with Robertson for the first and perhaps only time. He wanted to convey that his views about criticism and art were in harmony with those of the elder critic. Throughout his critical career and particularly during his early years, Eliot wrote extensively on the proper purpose and true nature of criticism but rarely indicated previous models or progenitors for his views. These letters offer an important window into discerning Eliot's critical origins. Who inspired Eliot? Whom did he read? What did he value in criticism? Why did he value it? Many questions remain about his critical path. I want to show that Robertson plays an important role in answering these questions and defining Eliot's critical evolution.

But he and Robertson differed on the critic's role in relation to changing artistic attitudes. Robertson relegated himself solely to the critical arena. Despite arguing for an interrelated understanding of art and criticism and noting detrimental Romantic influence in art and criticism, he did not advocate for modern artists to change their method. Robertson's criticism observes the critical and artistic past but only demands change in the critical present. He argues that artistry is ultimately too dependent on historical factors such as economic freedom, social tensions, language, and foreign influences. In his view, while criticism could be corrected through proper alignment along the art-criticism spectrum, art is too reliant on tradition. An artist could and should try to achieve

the proper balance between art and criticism, but social conditions determine art's direction more than individual critics or ideologies.

Where Robertson did not venture critically, Eliot did. He tried to enact artistic change. He adopted and promoted Robertson's theory of a balanced union of thought and feeling. However, he also suggested that an individual artistic talent could override historical conditions. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he again acknowledges a debt to Robertson's critical theory but takes the argument further. He contends that tradition is important, but that without the individual artist, tradition has no vessel for its unfolding. Tradition needs an individual talent with historical sense, originality, and balanced thought and feeling. Without the individual talent, great art could not continue.

Robertson's influence on Eliot was significant. Their critical paths intersected at other moments besides the 1919 *The Problem of Hamlet* review and the 1922 letters. In "Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe" (Autumn 1919) and again in "Poets' Borrowings" (April 1928), Eliot reinforces his argument by pointing out that in *Elizabethan Literature* (1914) Robertson had observed that many sixteenth century playwrights freely appropriated plots, devices, and habits – good and bad – from each other. In "Mr. Robertson and Mr. Shaw" (April 1926) and "The Problems of the Shakespeare Sonnets" (February 1927), Eliot reviews two of Robertson's other works. In "London Letter" (July 1922), "Shakespeare and Montaigne" (December 1925), "A Popular Shakespeare" (February 1926), and "Bradley's 'Ethical Studies'" (December 1927), Eliot refers to Robertson's work in essays that are not primarily about Robertson.

Given the letters and numerous other references, we must conclude that Robertson's influence on Eliot was not restricted to *The Problem of Hamlet*. It started earlier, extended further in his career, and encompassed a wide range of ideas. Nevertheless, the *Athenaeum* essays of 1919, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), and his review of *The Problem of Hamlet* demonstrate that this was the period when Robertson most intensely influenced him. I argue that he adopted Robertson's views on criticism (as indicated in *Essays Towards A Critical Approach* [1889] and *New Essays Towards A Critical Approach* [1897]), including advocating for scientific empiricism to affect a critical change. Further, I explain that he used Robertson's schema of the art-criticism binary and understood the importance of a balance between thought and feeling in art and criticism. I contend that he agreed with Robertson in judging that the Romantics were the cause of modernity's critical and artistic downfall and that he used much of Robertson's language to articulate his own similar ideas. I also argue that, in many of his 1919 essays, he advocates for contemporary artistic change in a way Robertson never did. Finally, I want to show that "Hamlet and His Problems" and "Tradition and the Individual Talent" were the essays in which he developed his own theory in opposition to Robertson's thesis in *Elizabethan Literature* and much of his debunking of Shakespeare. Robertson argues that individuals were prisoners of historical conditions, but Eliot contends that individual talents could override tradition. In the process of aligning these influences and drawing conclusions, I want to show that

Robertson played a role in determining Eliot critical maturation and that, without understanding Robertson, we cannot hope to fully understand Eliot.

Robertson and the Critical Process

Robertson's first critical study, published in 1884, is entitled *Walt Whitman, Poet and Democrat*. He had written a few political essays, but nothing substantial. This book was his introduction to the world of letters. Like any emerging writer, he needed to express his mission statement – a critical framework in which to place his argument – at the outset.

Walt Whitman aims to show the deterioration of late nineteenth century art and culture. Robertson's introduction states that "we are a perverse generation." He faults his contemporaries for believing that "the essence of poetry [is] spontaneity" (3). Nineteenth century poets Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold rely too much on spontaneity and emotion in their poetry. He connects them with Milton and Wordsworth; he implicitly blames Romanticism. After surveying literary history, he concludes that the current downward trajectory through Romanticism to the late eighteenth century started with Milton. Milton's poetry displays great virtuosity but at the expense of reflection. As Robertson indicates in *Elizabethan Literature*, "Dramatic blank verse soon fell from greatness after Shakespeare; even the great epic verse of Milton is perhaps more often skilful than inspired" (10). For Robertson, Romanticism is clearly the cause of the

poetry's ills. As he observes in *Whitman*, "The essence of modern poetry may be said to be indicated in Wordsworth's idea of emotion recollected in tranquility and artistically expressed" (35). The "perversity" of "spontaneity" combines with this judgment and produces Wordsworth's well-known phrase that becomes the fortune cookie shorthand for Romanticism: the spontaneous overflow of feelings recollected in tranquility.

Robertson claims that spontaneity and emotion by themselves are insufficient for poetry. In order to "strike with giant's hands the inner chords," another agent is required. He indicates that he values poetry that probes deeper than surface spontaneity – that is less reactionary and more contemplative. He wants scientific, intellectual consideration of detached emotion – thought and feeling. But Robertson does not stop at blaming Romanticism's influence on poetry; he notes its detrimental influence on criticism as well. Later in the introduction, he partially blames Romanticism's continuing impact as "only one outcome of a spirit of criticism peculiar to this century" (3). He does not enumerate the other fallacies, but he locates them within misguided criticism. He neglects to go further. Perhaps, this is a function of self-restraint; the volume's advertisement announces that "the main object will be to secure a treatment thoroughly sympathetic; to exemplify criticism of a positive, rather than a negative, nature" (53). But given the proper forum, he wastes no time stating the problems of traditional and modern criticism and attempting to correct them.

In 1889, Robertson wrote an extended discourse on criticism entitled *Essays Towards a Critical Method*, and two years later, he published another volume on

criticism called *New Essays Towards a Critical Method*. In these books, he proposes that his contemporaries had degenerated into “recent nihilism” (*Essays Towards A Critical Method* 46). In his 1889 collection of critical essays, Robertson, borrowing an argument from nineteenth century scholar Richard Green Moulton, argues that “literary judgments tend in general to be arbitrary and in particular to be conservative” (65). He views this situation as a major problem. Robertson believes that if criticism could be reduced to arbitrary conservatism, the arguments hold no value. The critics’ method, if they even possess one, invalidates their conclusions. His statement implies that most critics rely either on insubstantial opinions or previously held inclinations. Either way, meandering criticism is unacceptable. His solution is for critics to govern their taste and abandon personal affiliations – to “avoid taking our simple likes and dislikes, our assents and dissents, for a true measure of things” (69).

Instead, Robertson argues that critics need to embrace scientific empiricism. Over half of Robertson’s *Essays* is taken up by a 150-page treatise entitled “Science in Criticism.” In this essay, he states that “criticism . . . shall be scientific, or reducible to connected steps of reasoning from verifiable data, as against that which is but the random expression of an aberrant opinion, both of ignorance, haste, or perversity” (105). It is important to note that five years after his Whitman study, he still blames haste or “spontaneity” for the generation’s “perversity” in art. But in this statement, he extends his previous judgment to include criticism as well. He argues that poorly conceived

Romantic tendencies had reached beyond art to infect its evaluation as well. He suggests that scientific empiricism offers a superior alternative.

For Robertson, arbitrary opinion is insufficient; criticism should utilize the investigative process and should always start with the same question to any opinion: “Why do you think so?” Then the question is resolved through a “statement of data and a process of proof” (105). The adoption of scientific empiricism would reestablish criticism with the proper “measure of demonstrability and of agreement arrived at in, say, moral, political, economic, and therapeutic science” (iii). The critic should be part moralist, part politician, part economist, and part therapeutic scientist.

Although advocating strenuously for scientific empiricism in multiple texts and hundreds of pages, Robertson never equates criticism solely with science. While he argues that arbitrariness and spontaneity corrupted criticism, he nevertheless also claims that these qualities serve a critical function. The problem arises from criticism based *entirely* on taste and knee-jerk reactions. Robertson indicates that criticism is too intertwined with art ever to escape its grasp. In *New Essays* (1897), he adds an introduction to the updated edition called “The Theory and Practice of Criticism.” Here, he indicates that criticism is also an art-form: “the extensive study of art as art is clearly an acquiring of knowledge. But that is not all. There is (2) a process of science, of analysis, of study and measurement, behind the artist's art; and there is (3) a process of constructive art, as apart from mere detailed literary expression, in every completed scientific demonstration” (“Practice of Criticism” 6). The critic uses scientific empiricism

but molds his thoughts through “constructive art.” Because Robertson sees art and science operating in a binary, he discerns both science and art in the critical process.

Even though he champions a bold and important theory, Robertson was not the first literary critic to draw this conclusion. As René Wellek indicates in *Concepts of Criticism* (1963), other critics such as Hippolyte Taine, R. G. Moulton, and Emile Hennequin made the same critical connection as Robertson (52). Later, I. A. Richards made similar important contributions to the study of critical theory. But Robertson was an important figure in the scientific movement in criticism. Charles Maxwell Drennan, Robertson’s contemporary, credits him as an important practitioner who “laid the groundwork for a method of free scientific criticism” (*The Spirit of Modern Criticism* 58). More importantly, Robertson clearly influenced Eliot’s understanding of the relationship between critic and art.

Robertson’s distinction redefines simultaneously the critical process and the critical relationship between criticism and art. He argues that there is little difference between scientific acts of assembly and artistic construction. In *Essays* (1889), he compares artistic creativity with critical creativity: “if labour of expression is ‘creative,’ then even the prose historian, and every prose writer, including the ‘critic,’ is ‘creative’ up to a certain point” (145). Criticism is at least partially a creative act. Again, he does *not* want the creative criticism of Romanticism. He argues that that had led to criticism’s “recent nihilism.” While creative “up to a point,” criticism needs to be empirically based.

In this way, Robertson creates a sliding spectrum between art and criticism: art as represented by pure emotion and criticism as represented by empirical, rational contemplation. With art and criticism existing at opposite ends of a spectrum, they are inevitably complementary. Criticism could be artistic or scientific. Similarly, art could be critical or emotional. But he argues that criticism and art, while overlapping, have different ideal locations on the spectrum. In his estimation, criticism needs to settle closer toward science. On the other hand, art requires more creativity than criticism. But Robertson also posits his statement as a conditional: “if labour of expression is ‘creative’” (145). He suggests that expressive gestures, whether in criticism or art, could be either creative or not creative. Given his binary, Robertson’s conditional statement implies also that creative works (criticism and art) possess varying degrees of creativity. As he writes in *Essays*, “The only generic difference between the ‘critic’ and the ‘original’ writer is that the former, as such and as a rule, writes apropos of books, while the latter, as a rule, writes apropos of things, events, and ideas” (145). He stipulates that genre affects a creative work’s position on the binary. Following his previous articulations, it also is natural that “poems on facts are more ‘creative’ than histories only in the sense that they involve more labour of expression” (145).

Robertson extends the same ideas into his consideration of critics and artists as practitioners of criticism and art. He imagines an intertwined, symbiotic relationship between critic and artist. Both play important roles in aiding the other. In gathering his emotions and considering them rationally before putting them into poetry, the ideal poet

is part critic and part emotional artist. In the introduction to *Walt Whitman*, Robertson writes, “In short, we are brought up against the discovery that all poetry is criticism of life, and must be content with demanding that the criticism shall take a less formidably crude shape than an *Essay on Man*” (5). This statement is an earlier version of Robertson’s identical judgment in *Essays*. In assessing essays as a cruder genre than poetry, he articulates the “labour of expression” dichotomy and reinforces his conclusion that art and criticism are interrelated. The critic and artist are partners with corresponding tools but different goals: the artist’s purpose is to unite thought and feeling into a cohesive whole, and the critic’s purpose is to produce constructive art using scientific empiricism and a “process of imagination.”

However, despite writing criticism that advocates for different critical methods, champion scientific empiricism, faults the “perverse generation” for Romantic tendencies, and establishes an interdependent relationship between critics and artists, Robertson never makes the meta-critical leap to directly advocate artistic change. His criticism never aims to produce changes in public taste or artistic method. He leaves that critical move to T. S. Eliot.

Eliot, the Critical Process, and Artistic Change

In Eliot’s first literary reviews in the *Athenaeum* in 1919, he writes with unwavering bravado. In every line he seemingly attempts to eviscerate the books he’s

reviewing and to challenge everyone to do better. As Mark Jeffries contends, Eliot “styled his prose so as to give every impression that he was no youthful pretender but actually already a confident, established literary authority in his own right” (93). Jeffries terms this strategy the “rhetoric of assumed authority,” and argues that Eliot “redefined the book reviewer’s task, changing the review from simple judgment of a book to a process of drawing progressively finer distinctions between the author of the book in question and other authors, great and small, throughout history” (93). But Jeffries only provides half of the context. Eliot writes with assumed authority to establish himself as a critical voice, but he also does it to affect critical *and* artistic change. Unlike Robertson, he argues that a critic’s position is more than reviewer; he is also a social agent. In “The Function of Criticism” (1923), he declares, “Criticism . . . must always profess an end in view, which, roughly speaking, appears to be the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste” (*Selected Prose* 69). This point of view is markedly different from Robertson’s. Robertson agrees that critics should appreciate works of art and use the correct method but never proposes they institute a “correction of taste.” Eliot suggests that, after surveying dominant cultural opinion, the critic should push artistic opinion into a new direction.

However when confining himself to a discussion of critical standards outside of artistic advocacy, he echoes Robertson in affirming that the critic needs to disregard personal preference in evaluation: “The critic . . . should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks . . . and compose his differences with as many of his

fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgment” (69). This speaks directly to Robertson’s claims in *Essays* and *New Essays*. In declaring that critics should set aside personal favor *and* not hastily produce reactionary criticism, he adopts Robertson’s suggestion. In Robertson’s estimation, criticism comes to be less personal and more formal. Eliot moves away from Romantic conceptions of creation toward Robertson’s method of scientifically empirical criticism. Criticism should be based on scientific investigation instead of predilection.

Eliot also agrees with Robertson that contemporary critics were misguided. In “The Perfect Critic” (July 1920), he restates Robertson’s denunciation in *Walt Whitman*, declaring that “modern criticism is degenerate” (*Selected Prose* 50). In the manner of Robertson, he might have continued to label it a “perverse generation.” Eliot further echoes Robertson in his belief that it was his critical responsibility to cause other critics to adopt a better critical method. Indeed, if he wanted to produce a public “correction of taste,” he first needed to create the same movement among critics. Therefore, he argues that changing critical methods was of the utmost importance. If artists and other critics needed to be pushed away from Romantic appeals to spontaneous emotion toward a new direction, it was his job to produce the necessary change.

The new direction that Eliot advocates was Robertson’s scientific empiricism. In “A Note on the American Critic,” despite the title, he addresses both British and American criticism. The essay appears in the first run of *The Sacred Wood* (1920). We cannot accurately date its writing, but the volume’s earliest essay, “Swinburne and the

Elizabethans,” ran in the September 19, 1919, issue of *Athenaeum*. Conceivably, the essay could have been written at any time between then and *The Sacred Wood*'s publication in 1920. In the essay, Eliot compares various British critical methods:

if literature is to Swinburne merely a passion, we are tempted to say that to George Wyndham it was a hobby, and to Mr. Whibley almost a charming showman's show. . . . In all of these attitudes the English critic is the victim of his temperament. . . . [Criticism] is useless unless it enables us to see literature all round, to detach it from ourselves, to reach a state of pure contemplation. (23)

In this passage, Eliot observes that temperament is a critical liability. It blinds the critic by focusing too much on emotion. Borrowing Robertson's model of scientific empiricism, he suggests that great criticism is a union of detached emotion and pure contemplation – thought and feeling.

Similarly, in “Swinburne and the Elizabethans,” Eliot asserts that Swinburne in his essays on Elizabethan and Jacobean drama was “an appreciator and not a critic.” Eliot argues that, instead of offering critical appreciation, Swinburne “might have studied through the literature to the mind of [seventeenth] century; he might, by dissection and analysis, have helped us to some insight into the feeling and thought which we seem to have left so far away” (909-10). The methodology of “dissection and analysis” points directly to Robertson, as does Eliot's statement that the modern generation had severed thought from feeling. Like Robertson, he faults contemporary critics for failing to adopt a scientific method.

Eliot's statements on thought and feeling in criticism raise the question: Did he, like Robertson, see an interconnected relationship between art and criticism? In "Modern Tendencies in Poetry" (April 1920), he further reveals his debt to Robertson. As Peter White indicates in "'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Revisited," which argues for a stronger reading of "Modern Tendencies," Eliot's essay must be viewed in its proper context. At the time, he was engaged in a back-and-forth among contributors to John Middleton Murry's *Athenaeum* concerning the complex relationship between art and science (White 365). He appears to have understood the debate as an extension of the same binary that he discerned in Robertson's *Essays, New Essays*, and other works. In "Modern Tendencies," Eliot writes that, "it is useful, not to compare poetry to science, but to start out with the view that poetry *is* a science" (9). Before, going further, he tries to determine the historical moment when modern criticism and poetry moved away from this idea. Like Robertson, Eliot points to "the influence of two poets—Shelley and Keats—who died young and rather romantically" (10). Victorian fascination with Romanticism caused poetry to be associated with "youth and youthful inspiration . . . [and] with the charm of youthful personality . . . rather than with steady toil." He echoes Robertson's claim that the Romantics produced unbalanced poetry. According to Eliot, the Romantic influence also infiltrated and corrupted science. The Romantic conception relied too heavily on personality, spontaneous inspiration, and emotion and not enough on diligent, steady investigation.

Again following Robertson's lead, Eliot writes that emotions are a vital component in the process, but they need to be kept in check. The poet, like the scientist, "possesses a variety of feelings to make use of . . . he is able to regard these feelings as existing apart from him . . . [so] that he can work them into art" (11). He echoes Robertson as he elaborates on the relationship of the poet to the scientist: "[The poet's] attitude will be at least analogous to that of the scientist: and he will include the analytical interest . . . and constructive interest" (14). Although Robertson uses the term critic instead of scientist, the meaning is the same. Both argue that art and criticism contain parts of the other: analysis and constructive art – thought and feeling. However, while Robertson contends that the critic is the more important of the two as part moralist, part economist, part politician, and part therapeutic scientist, Eliot holds the artist in higher esteem: "[The artist] may be perceptive of any or all of the ingredients in the modern world, scientific, historical, political, philosophical, provided that what he manipulates is the emotional or the emotional co-efficients of these subjects in the human mind" (15). He adopts Robertson's binary but redefines the relationship. In Eliot's conception, the artist reigns supreme and, despite assimilating creativity and science, gravitates more strongly toward emotions.

Eliot's division of artist and critic followed naturally because he was himself both artist and critic; but he was first and foremost an artist. In fact, he suggests that artists make the best critics because they are able to properly navigate the binary between art and science. In "The Perfect Critic" (July 1920), Eliot addresses the question of whether

artists or critics make superior critics. He argues that critics could misjudge art because they are incomplete artists. If they do not embody the proper art-science dynamic, they repress creative desires and would consequently produce fallacious criticism. Artists are better suited to criticism because they have a creative outlet: their art.

Eliot combines his ideas on the critical process, the creative process, and the art-science binary in an extended excerpt from “The Perfect Critic” that discusses Aristotle as a critic and philosopher:

The ordinary intelligence is good only for certain classes of objects; a brilliant man of science, if he is interested in poetry at all, may conceive grotesque judgments: like one poet because he reminds him of himself, or another because he expresses emotions which he admires; he may use art, in fact, as the outlet for the egotism which is suppressed in his own speciality. But Aristotle had none of these impure desires to satisfy. . . .
(55)

Careless critics simultaneously contaminate art and criticism. He also contends that critics with great scientific knowledge are at greatest risk of becoming careless critics. The repetition of “may” shows that his statements are hypotheticals. But Eliot associates overly scientific critics with the hypothetical critical errors. Whether through repressing their emotions or excessively identifying with the art, scientific critics possess the greatest capacity and means to produce poor artistic judgments. Therefore, they need to maintain a proper balance between art and science even in their critical judgments about artistic expression.

Since Eliot considers the artist superior to the critic, he progresses beyond Robertson. Robertson is only interested in making scientific empiricism the basis of criticism. But Eliot, along with changing critical standards, wants to shift artistic modes. Reflecting on his criticism from this period in "To Criticize the Critic," he explains that, "in my earlier criticism . . . I was implicitly defending the sort of poetry I and my friends wrote. This gave my essays a kind of urgency, the warmth of appeal of the advocate. . . . I was in reaction, not only against Georgian poetry, but against Georgian criticism; I was writing in a context which the reader of today has either forgotten, or has never experienced" (16). This statement reinforces Eliot's belief that art is more important than criticism because his own criticism functions partially as a clandestine advertisement for his poetry. Also, it reveals his reaction against criticism he did not value. Furthermore, it shows his rejection of poetry that he did not value. His criticism enacts a "correction of taste" toward his own poetry. Not only is his criticism reactionary and designed to change critical and artistic methods, but it also defends his own poetry.

Eliot admitted late in his career that his earlier criticism defended his own poetry. This admission violates his endorsement of scientific criticism in his *Athenaeum* essays. In his later years Eliot's ideas about the role of criticism shifted, but "To Criticize the Critic" also can help us evaluate his previous criticism in relation to his poetry and his statements concerning scientific criticism. In writing criticism that implicitly values his own poetry, is he speaking as an artist or as a critic? Is he trying to produce critical change or artistic change? In his case, by writing criticism to defend his own poetry, he

sacrifices the critical process to enact artistic change; he corrupts scientific empiricism to correct culture's taste and elevate his own poetry. He disregards the art's merits for ulterior motives. In this instance, the critic as artist is not an "incomplete artist" but an incomplete critic. But dismissing all of Eliot's early criticism as self-serving would be severely limiting and shortsighted. Instead, we should look at how his criticism attempts to drive changes in public taste, how he makes certain critical accusations, and why he omits others. His critical attacks contain a common thread: modern art and culture's overwhelming inferiority in relation to the past, particularly the Elizabethans.

Like Robertson, Eliot blames the Romantics and their influence for modernity's degradation. In his first *Athenaeum* essay (January 1919), he reviews a study of American literature. He credits the author with identifying the correlation between Americans and British Romantics: "He perceives the relationship of Poe to Bryon, Moore and the Romantic movement in general. . . ." ("American Literature" 236). But Eliot considers the American literary giants to be undeserving of serious consideration: "Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman are all pathetic creatures; they are none of them as great as they might have been. . . ." (237). He perceives the Americans as poor imitations of British Romantics: "Their world was thin; it was not corrupt enough. Worst of all it was secondhand; it was not original and self-dependent—it was a shadow" (237). The only writer to escape with a modicum of praise is Hawthorne. Hawthorne was "a realist" who wrote with "the firmness, the true coldness, the hard coldness of the genuine artist . . . [and] the permanence of art" (237). Eliot's assessment of Hawthorne points to what he

considers the primary problem of Romanticism: the lack of emotional detachment. This attitude is identical to Robertson's. Put another way, both argue that Romanticism failed because it relied too heavily on sentiment without an intellectual framework. Given the standard definition of Romanticism, Eliot and Robertson implicitly assert that, as a critical philosophy, Romanticism is inherently flawed and inferior to scientific empiricism.

In his next essay, Eliot considers George Wyndham's *Essays in Romantic Literature*. Wyndham was the critic whom Eliot characterized as writing criticism as a "hobby" on a whim. Eliot's review is laden with sharp, dismissive comments. The essay's title, "A Romantic Patrician," is Eliot's label for the author. He writes about Wyndham first and establishes him as a self-involved caricature: "his literature and his politics and his country life are one and the same thing. . . . Together they made up his world: literature, politics, riding to hounds. In the real world these things have nothing to do with each other. But we cannot believe that George Wyndham lived in the real world" (265). He asserts that Wyndham constructs a fictive world of countryside romance that is unrealistic. Inevitably, Wyndham's assessments are too emotional and are lacking in sociological awareness.

Eliot also says that Wyndham lacks "balance . . . [and] critical profundity" (266). Again, he mirrors Robertson in redefining the critical situation. "Critical profundity" is a symbolic stand-in for scientific empiricism. He next attacks Wyndham as "himself a period and a tradition." What sounds like a compliment is actually a condemnation. He

views Wyndham and his like (Romantics) as the malignant cause of society's cultural and critical fall. By continually debasing Wyndham and Romanticism, Eliot subtly points toward the need for contemporary critical alternatives. Simultaneously, in the act of constructing superior criticism, Eliot presents himself, and by implication Robertson, as suitable replacements to the Romantics.

But Romanticism was not just a problem of American's literary past or England's critical present: Eliot argues that it had also overrun modern British literature. He finds Kipling lacking the only redeeming quality that Hawthorne embodies. Using the same language, he writes, "The emotion is not 'there' simply, coldly independent of the author, of the audience, there and for ever like Shakespeare's and Aeschylus' emotions; it is present so long as the author is on the platform and compels you to feel it" ("Kipling Redivivus" 297). Like Wyndham's criticism, Kipling's poetry lacks "cohesion" and Eliot finds it "to be frankly, immature" (298). He later uses the same word ("immature") in "The Function of Criticism" when considering John Middle Murray's survey of literature: "With Mr. Murry's formation of Classicism and Romanticism I cannot agree; the difference seems to me rather the difference between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic" (70). Eliot offers this comparison not to discuss the merits of Classicism against Romanticism but to further degrade Romanticism. Here, he broadens his critical scope beyond Robertson's. Robertson stays within the critical arena, but Eliot extends to advocate artistic change. Whereas he dismisses Wyndham in order to call for better critical standards, he faults

Kipling to gesture toward higher standards of poetry. Again, he implicitly endorses himself as an alternative. Whereas Romanticism lacks balance and cohesion, Eliot, again using Robertson's binary, contends that criticism and art needed unity of thought and feeling. Eliot alludes to the same idea in the essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (Oct. 20, 1921). He argues that the Metaphysical Poets felt and thought at the same time: "Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility" (669-70).

Eliot finds a redeeming quality in Kipling's verse that points toward the needed unity exemplified in Donne's verse. His evaluation is revealing insofar as it provides historical insight into his thought process, provides an alternative to Romanticism, and supplies specifics on Eliot's theory of artistic creation. The passage deserves to be quoted in full:

The eighteenth century was in part cynical and in part sentimental, but it never arrived at complete amalgamation of the two feelings. Whoever makes a study of the sentimentalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will not neglect the peculiar cynical sentiment of Mr. Kipling. . . . The sentiment of Tennyson and Mrs. Browning is obsolete; it is no longer a living force; it is superseded by Mr. Kipling's. . . . Mr. Kipling may have winked at Tennyson down the road. But Tennyson does not wink back. (297)

Eliot draws a line from the Eighteenth century's separation of cynicism and sentiment to the Nineteenth and early Twentieth century's excessive sentimentality. In invoking Tennyson, he again blames Romantic influence and its stain of spontaneous

sentimentality for the present predicament. In discussing Kipling's "Plain Tales from the Hills," he reiterates his disdain for the stereotype of the English gentleman in his essay on Wyndham: "[Kipling] has given the one perfect picture of a society of English, narrow, snobbish, spiteful, ignorant and vulgar" (297). In appreciating Kipling's cynicism, he points toward a possible escape from Romanticism: a union of thought and feeling. Cynicism provides an intellectual, meditative counterweight to sentiment.

In "The Post-Georgians" (April 1919), Eliot expresses many of the same ideas. As Eliot indicates in "To Criticize the Critic" (1961), he considered the Georgians to be his critical and artistic rivals during the late 1910s and early 1920s. Therefore, his evaluation of their work necessarily points toward the superiority of his own work. Before assessing the Georgians, he comments, "Great simplicity is only won by an intense moment or by years of intelligent effort, or by both. It represents one of the most arduous conquests of the human spirit: the triumph of feeling and thought over the natural sin of language" (171). His "simplicity" is strikingly similar to his own conceptions of "balance," "cohesion," and independent emotion in essays from the same period and identical to Robertson's "thought and feeling." All involve the wedding of intellect and emotion – thought and feeling. When he considers the group of poets in question, they of course fail his test: "Simplicity was not hard won by the Georgians, it was given them by the fairy. . . ." (171). By juxtaposing "fairy" with "fairyland" in "A Romantic Patrician," we can perceive that he is implicitly invoking his characterization of the pastoral gentry as hopelessly corrupted by Romanticism and implanting it on the Georgians.

Throughout many of his *Athenaeum* essays from 1919-20, Eliot continually finds fault with Romanticism and its influence on modern culture, argues for scientific criticism, and makes the case for combining thought and feeling in poetry. He remains contemptuous of Romanticism and argues that criticism needs to use scientific empiricism and to restrain personal taste. He contends that the best art is a union of thought and feeling. Eliot, also, perceives a correlation between the artistic process and the critical process. We can identify many of the same ideas in Robertson's criticism. Because he is an artist, Eliot is the only one of the two that advocates for artistic change. However, the additional reasons for this disparity are found in Robertson's *Elizabethan Literature* and Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

Robertson, Tradition, and Social Factors

In a "Poets' Borrowings" (April 1928), Eliot refers to Robertson's book *Elizabethan Literature* (1914) and quotes a couplet from *Pericles* that Robertson characterized as one of Shakespeare's best. On the surface, this passage seems unimportant. But Robertson was a noted Shakespearean "disintegrationist." He argued on numerous occasions that Shakespeare did not write several of the plays attributed to him. He also calls *Pericles* "impossibly bad" (199). Eliot chose to invoke a Shakespearean skeptic's decade-old sentence to endorse one of Shakespeare's most poorly critically received plays for the purpose of praising two lines. If nothing else, this passage from

“Poets’ Borrowings” shows that, even if he disagreed with Robertson’s assessment, Eliot was intimately familiar with his Elizabethan studies.

The main thesis of *Elizabethan Literature* is that, during the Elizabethan age, literature developed at a faster rate and reached greater heights than it has since. Robertson viewed the rapid development of blank verse, the shift to English as the language of choice for writing, and the creation of new forms such as the sermon and the personal love-poem as monumental achievements. When Robertson surveyed the Elizabethans, he perceived originality, sentimentality, intellectualism, and many other qualities: “poetry . . . [was] becoming newly sincere and newly arresting, in its resort to the most universal of all emotional and artistic motives . . . love” (13). In another passage, he considers the advances in prose: “[I]f the Elizabethan drama is a new birth alike as to form and content, no less does Elizabethan prose tell of a rapid development of mental life” (16). But how did the Elizabethan artists reach such heights? If as he says, “Every vigorous age must write in its own way; and all sincere and competent utterance makes for good writing of some kind,” what makes Elizabethan writing superior to past utterances (10)?

Perhaps he thought that the Elizabethan period had more men of genius. After all, he argues that despite the numerous positive developments during this time, not every writer was great: “Lasting charm was to be reached only when men with a genius for style took up enduring themes on which they had thought and felt deeply. . . . Only thus can craftsmanship become fine art” (22-3). Here again, he reiterates that art requires both

thought and feeling. However, he also adds another necessary factor: genius. He contends that, without these three requirements, Elizabethan art would not have grown as rapidly.

In a later passage in *Elizabethan Literature*, Robertson articulates the same principle more directly and clearly:

All forms of art and science can ultimately be seen to be perfected by way of an intensifying of thought and feeling, in which the data are refelt and re-considered. The deepening may come through simple iteration of the processes by a faculty that ripens with time the evolution of the individual. . . . But genius is always conditioned, and Shakespeare in Sidney's place would not have been the Shakespeare we possess. Marlowe could not as an experienced actor have produced the drama with which he began; he would have seen such matter to be poetic recitation rather than the expression of character in action. Shakespeare, with his unique powers in course of growth, had to undergo the provocation of having to declaim and hearing declaimed the verse of poets who were outside rather than inside their subject. (176)

In this complex argument, Robertson first reiterates his ideas in *Essays* and *New Essays* that art and science exist on an interrelated binary. Both involve scientific empiricism including consideration of “data,” and both depend upon a unity of thought and feeling. More importantly, he advances upon his earlier statements to locate these processes in the “evolution of the individual” toward genius. Then, he progresses one more step to say that each individual’s “genius” is different from that of other individuals. In this selection, he adds a new factor into the artistic process. He claims that, without the “evolution of the individual,” unified thought and feeling are insufficient. Artists could still create wondrous poetry, but to achieve poetry to match the Elizabethans’ greatest verse, genius is necessary.

Finally, he claims that the individuality of genius comes from conditioning. What does conditioning entail? It is more than just individual genius, thought, and feeling. In Robertson's investigation of Elizabethan literature, he perceives overriding social conditions that produced an environment where genius could thrive – where the mind evolved more quickly toward a higher sensibility. He points toward economic/social freedoms and foreign predecessors as determining factors in Elizabethan genius. Elizabethans had the best of both worlds: unlike other European nations, they had a free marketplace of ideas. They also had access to numerous foreign influences and the freedom to incorporate a variety of artistic advances.

Robertson argues social freedoms produced an environment where great art is more likely to be created. The inherent conflicts and cultural clashes produced meant exposure to different demographics and ways of life. Additionally, it meant an artist had to prove himself to these different subcultures and meet their criteria for art. Through these social trials, the artist and his art would progress. Without exposure to these social conditions, genius, even with thought and feeling in balance, could not evolve.

Competition and the market economy were also important to the maturation of Elizabethan genius. In these social settings, success depended upon public taste: “the living drama rose out of the ‘effective demand’ of the populace for a kind of play suited to its taste and capacity; and in the liberty to meet that demand lay the secret of the English revolution” (96). Robertson credits an English free market with creating an environment where living drama could flourish. Without these same freedoms, the

French stage had declined: “The fact is that the French populace never had the chance that was offered to the English of determining the line of evolution of the literary drama” (91). Instead French drama and artistic modes were regulated by the monarchy’s moral restrictions. Put another way, they were controlled by an outside force whose interests conflicted with the development of genius, unified thought and feeling, and true art.

After considering Robertson’s principle of “conditioning,” it becomes clear why he never advocates directly for artistic change. He suggests that outside, social forces are overpowering in determining artistic trends. Moreover, they are *necessary*. Without Elizabethan leaders granting social freedoms, great art would not have been produced at such an impressive rate. According to Robertson’s analysis, if Elizabethan critics had intervened and forcibly altered the cultural, artistic path, it would not have made a difference. It might even have derailed natural changes that were already underway. Robertson never entertains the possibility that artistic genius or critical advocacy could control its own destiny in the face of tradition.

For an illustration, one need only look at his evaluation of the period’s greatest writer: Shakespeare. Not surprisingly, he considers Shakespeare the best Elizabethan poet with the greatest genius. But he claims that Shakespeare was a product of his environment. When he surveys Shakespeare’s background in *Elizabethan Literature*, he is simultaneously unimpressed and amazed. Looking at Shakespeare’s early career, Robertson writes that, “a simple actor the youth must have been for several years, and there is no evidence that he was ever reckoned a great one” (175). Moving on to his

upbringing, he again notes Shakespeare's ordinariness: "he had no august conventions to outgrow. He appears to have had an ordinary English grammar-school education, and thereafter to have helped in the . . . business of his father . . . as tanner, glover, and butcher for the village" (176). But he also argues that Shakespeare's conventional background enhanced his playwriting ability. Shakespeare's unexceptional, social "conditioning" provided a better artistic education than Shakespeare could have received through any other pedagogical method: "his preparation was all the better for being non-academic" (176). Rather than trying to explain away Shakespeare's history, Robertson incorporates it as a strength.

In another section, Robertson addresses Shakespeare's acting: "For [Shakespeare] realization was at once objective and subjective: the more real character-types had to pass the crucible of the actor—himself in this case the greatest poet of all" (177). His characterization is interesting for two reasons. First, he again points to thought (objectivity) and feeling (subjectivity) as the primary components in genius. Second, and more importantly, he stresses that Shakespeare's dramatic characterizations could not have existed had he not been an actor. Without having first been an actor, Shakespeare would never have created Hamlet, Lear, Falstaff, Othello, Richard III, Henry V or any of his other famous characters. Robertson proposes that Shakespeare's genius required failure in acting to condition him for playwriting. He finds it remarkable because "there is . . . no case on record of a great actor who was also a great writer; and men have

accordingly been apt to undervalue Shakespeare's training. . . . It was probably, however, of capital importance in his artistic evolution" (176).

Another important social factor in Shakespeare's development was the influence of domestic and foreign writers. Robertson describes Shakespeare's early work as "adapting and recasting other men's work" (178). Other critics had refused to address this consideration. In 1897, Robertson wrote *Montaigne and Shakespeare* in answer to "the unwillingness in England to conceive of Shakespeare as owing much to foreign influences" (6). But again, he claims that his purpose is more scientific than provocative. In Robertson's critical theory, it is the critic's job to use scientific empiricism and investigate all factors that affect art. He maintains that he is trying to enhance our understanding of Shakespeare's genius. In *Montaigne and Shakespeare*, he writes

We are embarked, not on a quest for plagiarisms, but on a study of the growth of a wonderful mind. And in the idea that much of the growth is traceable to the fertilising contact of a foreign intelligence there can be nothing but interest and attraction for those who have mastered the primary sociological truth that such contacts of cultures are the very life of civilisation. (10)

Robertson's "growth of a wonderful mind" echoes his own "evolution of the individual" in *Elizabethan Literature*. Both passages concern Shakespeare, and both relate to external determining factors – "conditioning" – that greatly affected Shakespeare's development. He wants to use scientific criticism to prove that foreign influences were one of the major factors in Shakespeare's genius and in "the very life of civilization."

But Robertson argues one step further. He claims that contemporary collaborators were another factor in Shakespeare's development. Robertson was a noted "disintegrationist." He went to great lengths to prove that Shakespeare was not the primary author of many texts in the Shakespearean canon. He wrote books with titles like *Did Shakespeare Write 'Titus Andronicus'?: A Study in Elizabethan Literature* (1905), and *Shakespeare and Chapman: A Thesis of Chapman's Authorship of 'A Lover's Complaint' and his Origination of 'Timon of Athens', With Indications of Further Problems* (1917). Robertson concentrates extensively on Shakespeare because he was the most celebrated and critically accepted genius of the Elizabethans, which Robertson considered the greatest literary age. His purpose is to take the most acclaimed artist and show that his success was ultimately dependent on external, traditional influences more than his own genius.

In response to Robertson's Elizabethan criticism, Shakespearean scholar E. K. Chambers investigates Elizabethan canons for himself and reaches a surprising conclusion: "There is a mass of anonymous work. . . . Probably we should be able to differentiate some of the personalities a little better, if we had reliable canons. . . . But there are no such canons. Only from two to seven plays are ascribed to any one man, and of these many have been transmitted in such corrupt texts that they are valueless" (233). In trying to disprove Robertson, Chambers indirectly strengthens his points: scientific empiricism is a superior method and genius does not exist in a vacuum. Even with a

tremendous talent like Shakespeare's, genius still only thrives in combination with other social factors.

Robertson's conclusion explains why he never directly advocates for artistic change. While Eliot and Robertson both agreed on the method to criticism (scientific empiricism), they disagreed on its practice. Because he is an artist first, Eliot argues the critic has a responsibility to correct the public's taste. That is why he tries to shift the public's definition of great art toward his and his friends' (Pound and others) school of poetry. Robertson, on the other hand, maintains that the market – the public, society, culture – needs to control its own taste. That is why in his criticism he does not gesture toward cultural changes. Individuals, even critics like Robertson, are not enough. Genius is insufficient. Unified thought and feeling are inadequate. Proper critical method is secondary. Freedom of choice and taste come first. Without allowing the public freedom to choose the best art, he argues that art would never reach its greatest heights.

Eliot and “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

“Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “Hamlet and His Problems” are Eliot's most renowned essays. In 1961, he remarked that “Tradition and the Individual Talent” still enjoyed “immense popularity among those editors who prepare anthological textbooks for American college students,” and “Hamlet and His Problems” still drove “earnest scholars . . . [and] schoolchildren” to write Eliot for an explanation (“To Criticize

the Critic” 17-9). The essays’ well-known passages seem inflammatory as if he wants to cause a stir. But indeed they are inflammatory and they did cause a stir. As Jeffries points out, Eliot, in many of his *Athenaeum* essays, criticizes with the clout of a seasoned professional to elevate himself and his poetry above others. However, if placed into the context of the rest of his essays from the time, another one of his primary motives emerges. Eliot wanted to explore his affinity with Robertson’s criticism and properly define his own theory of tradition.

In “Some Notes on the Blank Verse of Christopher Marlowe” (Autumn 1919), Eliot refers to Robertson for the first time in any of his essays. He borrows an observation from Robertson’s *Elizabethan Literature* that indicates Spenser’s influence on Marlowe. In September 1919, he published the first part of “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” On September 26, 1919, his review of Robertson’s *The Problem of Hamlet* was published. In the winter of 1919, he published the second part of “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” These essays and the conclusions are not isolated from one another. In these essays, Eliot explicitly expresses his debt to Robertson. His critical agreement with Robertson is not a coincidence; it is a progression of various ideas that he considered for most of 1919 and that he found in Robertson’s arguments in *Elizabethan Literature, Essays Towards a Critical Approach* and *New Essays Towards a Critical Approach*.

As I previously indicated, in *Elizabethan Literature* Robertson argues that the Elizabethans presented the best unity of thought, feeling, and genius, but that

environmental factors were the crux to this foundation. Even with geniuses approaching art through thought and feeling, he argues that without the proper social context art could not prosper. “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and “Hamlet and His Problems” (which will be addressed in a later section) are Eliot’s complex responses to Robertson’s arguments.

While often viewed as Eliot’s major statement on poetic impersonality and the influence of tradition, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is motivated by other concerns as well. Most critics are agreed on the essay’s main claim; namely, tradition as reflected in art represents a “simultaneous order” in which past and present are fused. In arguing this point, Eliot disputes the common critical assertion that a poet’s greatness resides in his most individual, original moments, that is, when he deviates from tradition. Instead, critics need to look toward an artist’s influences and predecessors and the poet’s ways of incorporating their ideas into new material. In his consideration, nonconformity is a hindrance, not an asset.

In “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot laments that critics had shied away from direct confrontation with tradition and its repercussions in literary criticism: “In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name deploring its absence” (54-5). He claims that this omission is a critical failing. In comparing French and English critics, he offers the possibility that the English mind is less critical than the French mind. However, Eliot remarks that English critics “might remind [themselves] that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that [they] should be

none the worse . . . for criticising [their] own minds in their work of criticism” (54-5).

This is an Eliotic reworking of Robertson’s opening passage from “The Theory and Practice of Criticism.” At the outset, Robertson says that criticizing criticism is futile because “the censure itself is criticism, the protest must rank as one of the paralogisms set up by the random use of words. . . .there is no respite from [criticism] while we live and think” (1). Eliot’s similar language is evidence that Robertson’s ideas were on his mind at the time.

Eliot continues to insist that, if critics would use their scientific faculties, they would recognize that too much importance is placed on artistic nonconformity at the expense of tradition. For Eliot, tradition involves multiple components. In answer to Robertson, he acknowledges that economic and social factors are important in accurately judging art. In the essay’s first paragraph, he restates an idea carried over from his own essay one month earlier, “Was There a Scottish Literature?” The common idea is that tradition is an intricate concept. It involves a dual understanding of individual perceptions of history and a collective cultural past.

In “Scottish Literature,” Eliot harangues the author of *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919), G. Gregory Smith, for using the terminology of tradition without accounting for social tradition. He complains that beginning with Gregory’s tortured use of the word “literature,” the author oversimplifies, corrupts critical, scientific empiricism and reaches the wrong conclusion. In this case, the wrong conclusion is his finding that “the unity of the subject is not literary but only geographical” (680-1). By

claiming that literature is only dependent on geography, Smith fails to account for many other factors. Eliot, recalling Robertson, argues that Smith needs to take into account other social factors such as linguistic development and foreign intrusions. In comparing English literature with the Scottish literature, he remarks that, “in the long run we can see that the continuity of the language has been the strongest thing” (680-1). Eliot argues that the historical stability of the English language was an asset in its literature’s historical development.

Eliot does not deny that the English language had an unsteady maturation period or argue that it was immune to the same problems faced by the Scottish literature and language. Eliot suggests that both English literature and Scottish literature were affected by foreign influences. The difference was that English maintained its identity despite political power transfers and upheavals. He writes, “English literature has not only, at times, been much affected by the Continent, but has sometimes, for the moment, even appeared to be thrown off its balance by foreign influence. But in the long run . . . English, the more it borrowed and imitated, the more significantly it became English (680-1). As a language, English was and still is defined by its versatility and incorporation of other traditions. Eliot echoes Robertson’s nearly identical claim in *Elizabethan Literature*: “Influenced of course by classic models and by Italian and Spanish romance themes, [English literature] is a markedly English product” (15). He argues that Smith did not account for English’s traditional influences or its effect on Scottish literature. To accurately assess Scottish literature, Smith needed to adjust his

understanding of tradition to account for Robertson's thesis and account for cultural shifts in influence.

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot remarks that writing a poem with an awareness of tradition produces a "refinement." The poetry approaches a more varied, historically cognizant expression of emotions and feelings. He does not offer a definite cause for this refinement. The refinement, although clearly linked to tradition, is too amorphous: "this development . . . is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of the psychologist or not to the extent which we imagine; perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery" (54-5). This statement seems a further indication of Robertson's influence on Eliot. Like Robertson, he perceives poetic refinement as a product of economics and social "machinery." This perception mirrors Robertson's conception of "conditioning" and its affect on the "evolution of the individual." In both instances, Eliot uses different terminology than Robertson but reiterates the same argument: art depends heavily upon tradition for its development.

If anything, Eliot's conclusions reinforce Robertson's overarching claims in *Elizabethan Literature*. Both argue that tradition is an important influence on literary development. The particulars are economic freedoms, language, foreign influences, and social tension. But Eliot does not say that tradition is the most important factor of artistic development. As an artist himself, Eliot understood that art is a product of traditional forces and artistic sensibility. Without unified sensibility, Donne never writes "The Sun

Rising.” Without the proper balance of thought and feeling, Eliot never writes “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

Unlike Robertson, who sides with tradition, Eliot claims that the artist is the deciding factor in the artistic process. As he writes in “Tradition,” “if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, ‘tradition’ should positively be discouraged” (54-5). The artist’s ability is dominant in the process. Here, Eliot reinforces his different rendering of Robertson’s art-science binary. Even though, tradition is an important component, Eliot maintains the artist is more important in determining culture’s direction.

Eliot argues that the individual artist plays the key role in the relationship. Despite advocating impersonality, Eliot says that the creator remains an important vessel for cultural influences. He demands that the artist exhibit “the historical sense” to study and observe tradition. The historical sense “involved a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence. . . . [It] is what makes a writer traditional . . . [and] what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity” (54-5). Without the historical sense, the artist could not incorporate cultural knowledge and understanding into his art. Unlike the Romantics, who lack “the completely awakened intelligence, the consciousness of their own time,” the individual talent needs to be aware of the present and the past simultaneously and creatively demonstrate his awareness. Eliot asserts that it is a difficult process, even for the individual talent. With the aid of

historical sense, the artist could still only integrate tradition into his work through “great labour.”

As Eliot indicates in “Modern Tendencies in Poetry,” great poetry is not the simple outpouring of emotion; it is “a serious study, a life time’s work . . . [of] steady toil” (10). According to Eliot, prior to any new creation, all past works of art exist together in a living order. When an artist creates a new work of art, it combines with every previous work of art to form an “ideal order” (54-5). The ideal order reconfigures itself to reflect a changed understanding of tradition that includes the new artwork’s social conditions.

Despite including the historical sense and a nuanced understanding of tradition, great art is not imitative; it is contemplative. In “Tradition,” Eliot distinguishes nonconformity from originality. Nonconformity is the ill-advised deviation from tradition without awareness or understanding of the past. Originality or individuality is genius reflected through consciousness of the past and present. The artist should avoid nonconformity and instead produce an original work. To reinforce this distinction, Eliot discourages the artist from imitation: “To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art” (54-5). When the new artwork combines with the previous living order, Eliot labels the process “the supervention of novelty.” Only through the injection of artistic novelty (originality) into tradition can the artist create great art.

In addition to an historical sense and originality, the individual artist requires a unified process of thought and feeling. It goes without saying that Eliot prizes emotion in poetry, but the artist also must exhibit scientific understanding. He has to practice qualities of science and art – criticism and creativity – thought and feeling. This is an extension of the binary that Eliot reads in Robertson’s “Theory and The Practice of Criticism,” *Essays, New Essays, Elizabethan Literature*, and other works. It is also the dichotomy that Freud, Weber, More and others used to reposition their vocations as scientific disciplines worthy of funds, research, and public attention. Eliot probably also recognized it from his debates with other contributors to the *Athenaeum* on the role of science in art. At the close of “Tradition” [I], Eliot observes that, in the process of depersonalization, “art may be said to truly reach the condition of science” (54-5). Considered with Eliot’s brief reference to “the reassuring science of archaeology” in the essay’s first paragraph, the two allusions to science bookend Eliot’s discussion about interrelated tradition and art and reveal his debt to Robertson’s art-science spectrum.

But Eliot clarifies that he does not mean superior art requires tremendous historical knowledge or recitation of facts *ad nauseam*. Instead, he desires an awareness of the past that goes beyond reading history books. In “Tradition,” he says that, “it is not desirable to confine knowledge to whatever can be put into a useful shape for examinations, drawing-rooms. . . . Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum” (54-5). His understanding of essential history is cultural, not cognitive. It dismisses a pluralistic,

historical survey in favor of consciousness preserved in great literature. When Eliot refers to the history that Shakespeare acquired from Plutarch, it seems a direct borrowing of Robertson's use of the same pairing to illustrate the same concept. In *Montaigne and Shakespeare*, Robertson writes, "In the English version of Plutarch's Lives, pressed upon him doubtless by the play-making plans of other men, Shakspeare found the most effectively concentrated history of ancient humanity that could possibly have reached him" (108). Robertson's assessment is the same as Eliot's later judgment. The similarity shows that, even though they disagreed about the artist's role in the process, he and Robertson both valued artistic intelligence and historical sense. Robertson indicates that, "where the trained scholars around Shakspeare reproduced antiquity with greater accuracy in minor things . . . anise and cumin of erudition, they gave us of the central human forces, which it was their special business to realise, mere hollow and tedious parodies" (109). Here, he perfectly articulates the difference between education and consciousness of the past that Eliot uses for his conception of tradition. While the former involves historical accuracy in detail, the latter supplies honest artistic representations that unite thought and feeling.

For Eliot, there were other ways for individual artists to incorporate scientific principle into their art other than research. In considering Donne and the Metaphysical poets, Eliot suggests that the most desirable way was uniting thought and feeling into single expression. Again drawing on Robertson, he considers thought as objective and feeling as subjective. In "The Metaphysical Poets" (October 1921) he argues that "the

language of these poets is as a rule simple and pure; in the verse of George Herbert this simplicity is carried as far as it can go. . . . The *structure* of the sentences, on the other hand, is sometimes far from simple, but this is not a vice; it is a fidelity to thought and feeling” (62). This recalls Eliot’s earlier statement in “Post-Georgians” about the virtue of simplicity in thought and feeling. Additionally, his statement refers implicitly to Robertson and the art-science spectrum. By asserting that metaphysical verse was a combination of thought and feeling, Eliot argues that it was part science and part art, part criticism and part art.

In considering Donne and Chapman, he writes, “In Chapman especially there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling, which is exactly what we find in Donne” (63). This statement provides a clearer context for his opaque defense of his reading of Donne at the essay’s close:

Those who object to the 'artificiality' of Milton or Dryden sometimes tell us to 'look into our hearts and write'. But that is not looking deep enough; Racine or Donne looked into a good deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts.
(66)

This statement implicitly connects Milton, artificiality, and feeling with Eliot’s other denunciations of Romanticism. In direct opposition, he places Donne, whose poetic faculty probes beyond the heart’s emotion to the brain’s thought, rationality, and psychology. He uses the same analogy in “The Preacher as Artist” (November 1919). In that essay, he considers Donne as “an Egoist . . . an Eye curiously, patiently watching

himself as a man” (1252). Much as in his essays on Hawthorne and Kipling, Eliot equates Donne’s thought with unemotional detachment, self-reflection, and meditation. For Eliot and Robertson, whether through a process of learning or a process of meditating on emotions, art requires a critical component, even if it is unequal to the artistic component.

Up to this point, Eliot articulated many ideas that share an affinity with Robertson’s arguments. Whether in considering scientific empiricism, the art-science spectrum, or critical advocacy, his and Robertson’s interests coincided. He only deviated from Robertson in privileging the individual talent over tradition. However, thus far, Eliot had not directly addressed Robertson’s work in his criticism. This would change when he reviewed Robertson’s *The Problem of Hamlet*.

Eliot, Robertson, and *Hamlet*

All of these ideas about the intersections of criticism and art, thought and feeling, and tradition and the individual talent come to a head in Eliot’s review of Robertson’s *The Problem of Hamlet*. Before even considering the play, Eliot agrees with Robertson on the grounds for critical debate: the play *Hamlet*, not the character Hamlet, is the topic of consideration. Eliot further stipulates that critics had abused the critical process by analyzing Hamlet instead of *Hamlet*. In similarly addressing this issue, Robertson quotes Edgar Allan Poe:

In all commentating upon Shakespeare there has been a radical error never yet mentioned. It is the error of attempting to expound his characters, to

account for their actions, to reconcile their inconsistencies, not as if they were the coinage of a human brain, but as if they had been actual existences upon earth. We talk of Hamlet the man, instead of Hamlet the dramatis persona of Hamlet that God, in place of Hamlet that Shakespeare created. . . . It is not . . . the inconsistencies of the acting man which we have as a subject of discussion . . . but the whims and vacillations, the conflicting energies and indolences of the poet. (*The Problem of Hamlet* 24-5)

Robertson quotes the passage to find fault with critics who did not consider *Hamlet* on its merits. Instead, the critics used the play as an impetus to rewrite Hamlet as a different character or as a real person. He levels the same accusation that Eliot later uses as validation for recommending artists as the best critics.

In his review, Eliot echoes Robertson in his appraisal of creative/impressionist critics. As I have shown, Eliot was weary of the creative critic because he argues that such a critic would mistakenly try to apply the creative process to the critical process. The failed artist-turned-critic would attempt to change the play and corrupt the critical process of scientific empiricism. Eliot applies this characterization to critics that he claims had misconstrued *Hamlet*: “Hamlet the character has had an especial temptation for that most dangerous type of critic. . . . These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization” (940-1). He argues that Goethe, Coleridge, and other critics projected their repressed creative energy onto Shakespeare’s creation. Here, Eliot once again draws on Robertson’s art-science binary. He also criticizes artists-turned-critics for assuming artistic authority and not considering Hamlet the character

without superimposed creativity. His conclusion clearly illustrates his debt to Robertson in this review and also sheds light on his previous borrowing from Robertson.

He and Robertson remain critically aligned even as Eliot famously unveils the “objective correlative.” The objective correlative is his concept, but it brings Robertson’s ideas to mind. Eliot argues that the objective correlative is “the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art; in other words, a set of objects . . . which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (941). He contends that *Hamlet* fails partly because Hamlet is defined by an emotion that is unequal to the facts. In this instance, form and formula are not empty words but overt references to scientific empiricism. As I have shown, for Eliot and Robertson, scientific empiricism extended beyond criticism to include artistry as well. Eliot invokes the term in the same way that he used thought and feeling to refer to Donne’s two-headed creative process. Eliot equates emotion with feeling and thought with form to lend scientific weight to creative endeavors. Eliot argues that, “both workmanship and thought are in an unstable condition” (941). His word choice is striking. After many lines arguing that Hamlet’s emotion does not equate with the play’s objective reality, he gestures toward the play’s insufficient form and logic. This juxtaposition again demonstrates that Eliot, in echoing Robertson, values thought and feeling together. However, in *Hamlet*, he finds thought and feeling severed.

Eliot and Robertson share the same verdict on the play as a whole: “the play is most certainly an artistic failure” (941); “Shakespeare *could not* make a psychologically or otherwise consistent play out of a plot which retained a strictly barbaric action while the hero was transformed into a supersubtle Elizabethan” (74). Similarly, Eliot endorses Robertson’s identification of the play’s main defect. Rather than Hamlet’s revenge or philosophical anxiety, both pronounce that the play is about the “effect of a mother’s guilt upon her son” (941). Additionally, Eliot follows the elder critic’s lead in determining what caused the play’s failure. Robertson argues that “the play cannot be explained *from within*” (29). By consequence, the play must be explained from without. This locates the artistic tension outside of the play. Consequently, both critics venture beyond the play’s final text to other factors to explain why it fails.

Opening the essay, Eliot repeats a staple of Robertson’s argument: namely, that Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is the final iteration of many previous versions of the same plot. This conclusion places a great deal of culpability on historical factors for the play’s “intractable material” (941). It re-emphasizes the relationship between tradition and the individual talent without privileging one over the other.

After his borrowing from Robertson’s argument, Eliot offers his own unique assessment of Shakespeare’s work: “*Coriolanus* may be not as ‘interesting’ as *Hamlet*, but it is, with *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare’s most assured artistic success” (941). His characterization is oddly compelling for two reasons. First, rarely does anyone declare *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* as Shakespeare’s best plays

or most confident successes, especially while devaluing *Hamlet*. Second, he has a predecessor for this distinction: Robertson. In *Elizabethan Literature*, Robertson heaps considerable praise on both plays. He writes that, “in *Coriolanus* we see [Shakespeare] again bent on taking elbow-room for his own genius, with the result that . . . he builds another great artistic whole, wherein nearly every character is limned with a masterly power” (188). In his evaluation of *Coriolanus*, he concludes that, “Framed as it was without any intermediary model, this play serves . . . to reveal the dramatic supremacy of Shakespeare” (188). Similarly, in considering *Antony and Cleopatra*, he argues, “Antony is probably a little later than *Coriolanus*; and it completes the testimony to its author's creative mastery at the mature height of his power” (190). Robertson provides the critical inspiration for Eliot's statements on both plays. If nothing else, Eliot's statements indicate that Eliot was reading more of Robertson's criticism than *The Problem of Hamlet* at the time of his review.

In contrast to Eliot, Robertson in *The Problem of Hamlet* gives the strongest evidence to show that genius was subservient to tradition. As I have indicated, he argues that economic and social conditions are the dominant influences on an artist's development and output. It should be noted that Robertson's “tradition” is different than Eliot's conception of tradition that is defined by artistic knowledge. Robertson never argues directly for artistic change because any attempt would be overridden by economic and social forces. Particularly, in his evaluation of Shakespeare, he explains much of the poet's output in terms of his environment and historical situation. Similar to his assertion

in *Elizabethan Literature*, in *The Problem of Hamlet*, he argues that Shakespeare was “as usual, adapting an old play for his company, in the way of business” (75). Much of *Hamlet* was carried over from previous iterations and “every stroke to that end was an element of success” (75). For Robertson, Shakespeare’s reliance on previous plots is successful because it gave due weight to tradition. In fairness, the overreliance on old plots imprisoned Shakespeare in a plot that he could not escape. But if anyone should have been able to overcome a bad plot, it would have been Shakespeare. In Robertson’s estimation, Shakespeare had the finest intellect in the most developed artistic period; his poetry represented the best of art and science – “objective and subjective” realization (*Elizabethan Literature* 177). Yet, according to Robertson, Shakespeare was unable to elevate the composition beyond turgidity. In this instance, historical factors doomed an artistic creation rather than elevated it. His final assessment strengthens his argument that tradition overpowered talent. If Shakespeare could not overcome tradition, no individual talent could prevail. As Robertson says, “What Shakespeare could not do, no man could have done” (*The Problem of Hamlet* 75).

In discussing tradition’s influence on individual artists, specifically tradition’s influence on Shakespeare, Eliot further widens his critical split from Robertson. While sharing Robertson’s conclusion that *Hamlet* is a failure, he takes a different approach and asks different questions. His criticism exhibits the very method that Robertson dismisses. In response to a theory that Hamlet represents Shakespeare himself, he argues that it has plausibility because, considered this way, the character becomes a “prolongation of the

bafflement of the creator in the face of his artistic problem” (941). Whereas Robertson focuses on traditional factors, Eliot investigates the individual artist’s circumstances. Robertson never considers the possibility that Shakespeare is confused or mistaken or mishandles his plot. For Robertson, all of the play’s defects are attributed to traditional, historical, and economic considerations. But Eliot looks at the author himself and notes his “artistic problem.”

In closing, Eliot contemplates Hamlet’s intense emotion and wonders why it lacks an objective correlative in the play’s reality. In an unusual moment, he peers beyond individual, biological factors to Shakespeare’s psychology. In other considerations of the individual artist, he privileges originality, consciousness of the past, and consciousness of the present. But in this instance, he writes, “Why [Shakespeare] attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know. We need a great many facts in his biography. . . .” (941). He focuses his assessment on Shakespeare’s personal life. His approach mirrors Robertson’s method somewhat in that Robertson valued Shakespeare’s personal history as a failed actor. However, Eliot goes one step further. He writes that, “the ordinary person puts these feelings to sleep, or trims down his feeling to fit the business world; the artist keeps it alive by his ability to intensify the world to his emotions” (941). He investigates Shakespeare’s psychology as a possible source of the play’s malady. He disagrees with Robertson’s reading that economic factors can explain the play’s failure. Only an ordinary, reserved person would restrain himself emotionally

for “business.” A true artist – an individual talent – would keep his emotions ripe by overcoming social factors and would change the world to fit his emotions. But Eliot argues that Shakespeare was unable to express unified thought and feeling in *Hamlet*. In this instance, Eliot says that the individual genius, not tradition, is to blame. Even in disputing Robertson’s reading of the relationship between tradition and the individual talent, Eliot agrees with his conclusion on *Hamlet*.

However, by indicating the possibility that an individual talent could surmount social conditions, Eliot provides the final key to his relationship with Robertson. Robertson stops short of advocating artistic change because he claims that it was futile. He asserts that critics are inconsequential in the face of other environmental and historical realities. He would have laughed at the idea of writing criticism to explain and promote one’s own poetry. But Eliot insists otherwise. In ascribing more responsibility to the artist, he shows a reason why he advocates for certain poetic schools and denigrates others. He declares that critics are integral participants in tradition that could drive art in different directions. They owe it to the past to ward off poor imitations and promulgate poetry that combines thought and feeling – science and art – tradition and the individual talent.

Eliot and Robertson as Critical Influences

In the decades since his death in 1933, Robertson has drifted into obscurity. His main literary theories are no longer debated or studied. On the other hand, despite fearing in 1961 that his age of influence was coming to an end, Eliot remains a critical and artistic fixture. Graduate students, scholars, and professors still discuss and interpret the “objective correlative” and “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” *The Wasteland*, “Sweeney Among the Nightingales,” “Ash-Wednesday,” *Four Quartets*, and other poems still regularly appear in anthologies and are required reading in college English classes.

Different possible explanations may account for this discrepancy. The most likely involves their difference in disciplines: Robertson was a critic, Eliot was a critic and an artist. Robertson wrote no creative works. There is no intertwined relationship between poetry and criticism to unfold and investigate in Robertson’s writings. On the other hand, the main reason we still read Eliot is because of the strength, vibrancy, originality and genius of his poetry. His poetry continues to fascinate and dazzle readers of all ages and backgrounds. His criticism persists primarily because of its relationship to his poetry. We use his criticism to gain greater insight into his thoughts on writing, critiquing, and reading poetry and to enhance our understanding of his own poems. One might even raise the question: if Eliot’s poetry were to fall out of favor, would we still read and study his criticism?

However, another intriguing possibility to ponder is the ways that their own criticism affected subsequent readings of their work. Robertson strongly advocates for critical change but stops short of demanding artistic change, while Eliot argues for an interrelated understanding of art and criticism. Robertson identifies the historical relationship between criticism and art, but he isolates his criticism from modern art. Eliot's criticism is a veiled endorsement for his school of poetry.

It seems that, in relegating his criticism to studying historical art and not present art, Robertson sealed his own fate. In his criticism, Robertson argues that art and criticism were complementary, but his own critical choices indicate that they are instead supplementary. Rather than being integral parts of a whole, for Robertson, criticism and art are not united in a reasoned study of the present and the future.

While Robertson only notes artistic missteps in the past, Eliot attacks the artistic present and his creative rivals. In his criticism, Eliot combats Georgian, Vers Libre, Black Mountain, and other schools of poetry. Also, he does not insulate his poetry or his criticism from contemporary assaults. Eliot seems to seek out the competition, knowing or hoping that it would prove the superiority of his own work.

Later critics have followed suit. Despite dying over forty years ago, Eliot is still debated, attacked, and he is the focus of full-length studies and graduate theses. He lives on through both his poetry and his criticism and its controversy. But it is Eliot that labeled Robertson the "gallant controversialist" over 25 years after his death. Even if

modern criticism has largely forgotten about Robertson, Eliot never did and we shouldn't either.

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