

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

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

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To the Editor:

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

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

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

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

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

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To the Editor:

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

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

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