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# The Reconstruction of the European Mind: T. S. Eliot's *Criterion* and the Idea of Europe

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## ABSTRACT

T. S. Eliot was the founder and editor of the *Criterion*, a literary and cultural review with a European focus that was published during the interwar period. The *Criterion* functioned as a platform for intellectuals with a shared perception of European culture and European identity. It was part of a network of European periodicals that facilitated an intellectual exchange between writers and thinkers with a common orientation. Examples of other reviews in the *Criterion* network were the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from France, *La Fiera Letteraria* and *Il Convegno* from Italy, the *Revista de Occidente* from Spain (edited by José Ortega y Gasset), and *Die Neue Rundschau*, the *Europäische Revue*, and the *Neue deutsche Beiträge* (edited by Hugo von Hofmannsthal) from Germany.

In this article, I investigate the specific role the *Criterion* network of reviews and intellectuals played as an infrastructure for the dissemination of ideas about European culture during the interwar period. I also discuss the content of these ideas about the 'European mind'. As to the latter, I suggest that Eliot positioned himself as well as his magazine in the European tradition of humanist thinking. Unfortunately, the *Criterion's* ambition for a reconstruction of the European mind would dissipate as the European orientation of the 1920s was displaced by the political events of the 1930s.

Eliot and his *Criterion* network expressed a Europeanism that has often been overlooked in recent research. The ideas discussed in this network remain interesting in our time, in which discussions about European values and European identity are topical. What is also highly interesting is the role cultural reviews played during the interwar period as a medium for exchanging such ideas.

## KEYWORDS

The *Criterion*, idea of Europe, European identity, T. S. Eliot

Joseph Roth's novel *Flight Without End* (1927) describes the adventures of Franz Tunda, a lieutenant in the Austrian Army, who returns to Europe from Siberia after the First World War. Wandering about Europe in the aftermath of the war, Tunda spends time in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris, but finds he is unable to recapture the old European atmosphere: it seems to have disappeared with the war. Politicians and intellectuals solemnly talk about a 'community of European culture', but when Tunda asks what precisely constitutes this culture whilst attending a high society soirée, none of the answers seem very convincing:

'Religion!', said the President, who never went to church.  
 'Morality', said the lady, whose illicit associations were common knowledge.  
 'Art', said the diplomat, who had never looked at a single picture since his schooldays.  
 'The European idea', said a gentleman by the name of Rappaport cleverly, because vaguely.  
 The aristocrat, however, contented himself with the remark: 'Just read my magazine!'<sup>1</sup>

Despite the irony of this passage (which, it may be noted in passing, in many ways resembles the current debates about European cultural values and identity), the aristocrat's remark is quite telling. During the interwar years, there were indeed several European cultural and literary magazines that aimed to reanimate the Occident by taking a European point of view and expressing a shared 'idea of Europe'. In this article, I discuss how the *Criterion*, the review that T. S. Eliot founded in 1922 and edited until its demise in 1939, functioned as a platform for European writers and thinkers with a shared perception of European identity.<sup>2</sup> As such, the *Criterion* turned against both nationalist and communist thinking and aimed for a revaluation of the common European culture and shared European cultural heritage. True to the spirit of this ambition, it was part of a network of cultural reviews that shared a European attitude and a similar interpretation of European culture.

The European standpoint of Eliot and his *Criterion* has been recognized in earlier scholarship. Peter Dale Scott mentions Eliot's 'efforts for a culturally integrated Europe';<sup>3</sup> Herbert Howarth writes that 'Eliot became, more distinctly and powerfully than any other writer in England, an exponent of the values of Europe as a whole';<sup>4</sup> John Peter says that Eliot 'professes precisely the sort of internationalism [Matthew] Arnold had professed before him, invoking the "European Idea"';<sup>5</sup> and Ronald Schuchard refers to Eliot's 'post-war commitment to the reconstruction of the European mind'. The latter interestingly notes that Eliot rejected the ideas behind the Treaty of Versailles: 'To Eliot, Wilson's idea of peace was an idea which disregarded the unity of European culture', he writes, adding that in his letters Eliot referred to the 'fiasco [of] the reorganisation of nationalities [...] the "Balkanisation" of Europe'.<sup>6</sup> But in spite of observations like these, recent criticism has often been severe in its assessment of Eliot and other writers in his *Criterion* network, such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Thomas Mann, and José

- 1 Joseph Roth, *Flight Without End*, trans. by David Le Vay (London: Peter Owen, 2000), p. 116.
- 2 Detailed information on the history of the *Criterion* and Eliot's role in it can be found in Jeroen Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). This article is partly based on this previous research.
- 3 Peter Dale Scott, 'The Social Critic and His Discontents', in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. by David Moody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 60–76 (p. 64).
- 4 Herbert Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), p. 259.
- 5 John Peter, 'Eliot and the *Criterion*', in *Eliot in Perspective*, ed. by Graham Martin (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 252–66 (p. 255).
- 6 Ronald Schuchard, 'Burbank with a Baedeker, Eliot with a Cigar: American Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and the Idea of Culture', *Modernism/Modernity*, 10.1 (2003), 1–26 (p. 11).

Ortega y Gasset, whose ideas are frequently associated with cultural elitism and political conservatism.<sup>7</sup> As Jason Harding rightly remarks, in recent research ‘few critics have explored his [Eliot’s] avowed intention to use the *Criterion* to nourish intellectual exchange between “an international fraternity of men of letters, within Europe”’.<sup>8</sup> This is in fact exactly what I aim to do. In the period after the catastrophe of the First World War, Eliot and his *Criterion* network can be seen to contribute to European reconciliation by emphasizing a common European heritage. This article is intended to add to existing studies in two ways. First, it aims to provide a better understanding of the specific role the network of reviews played in the distribution of shared ideas about European culture during the interwar period. Secondly, it aims to provide more insight into the content of these ideas. Regarding the latter, it will be suggested that Eliot positioned himself and his magazine within the European tradition of humanist thinking.

In what follows, I will first briefly introduce the *Criterion*, then explain the ‘mechanics’ of the European network of reviews in which it took part, before subsequently discussing the ‘idea of Europe’ that was expressed in the *Criterion* and in the other reviews in its network. Eliot’s ideas about a shared European culture will be shown to have gradually evolved over the interwar period, and I will investigate what consequences this shift had for the *Criterion* and its network.

### The *Criterion*

The *Criterion* was published from October 1922 to January 1939. Eliot, who lived in London, remained the editor throughout its existence. In its early years the review was dependent on the patronage of a wealthy aristocrat (like in Roth’s novel), but from 1928 onward it was taken over by the publishing house Faber and Faber, where Eliot had been working as an editor since 1925. The first half of its existence was clearly the most interesting and successful period for the *Criterion*. Some historical context helps to shed light on this early success.

The mood of the 1920s tended to vacillate between hope and fear. On the one hand, the enormous deception of the war had shattered the nineteenth century belief in Enlightenment values and continuous progress, and resulted in expressions of pessimism such as Oswald Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1919), Ezra Pound’s poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920; in which he wrote how the beautiful princess Europa had changed into ‘an old bitch gone in the teeth’), and Erich Maria Remarque’s novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1928). On the other hand, however, Europe in the second half of the 1920s seemed to have some reason for optimism. In her book on the interwar period, Zara Steiner mentions a number of factors that contributed to this optimism.<sup>9</sup> European agricultural and industrial production had returned to pre-war levels. France and Germany were on increasingly friendly terms, which was symbolized by the friendship between their respective foreign ministers Briand and

7 Of the many examples, worth mentioning are Kenneth Asher, *T. S. Eliot and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *T. S. Eliot and our Turning World*, ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker (New York: St Martin, 2001); John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992); Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Christopher Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).

8 Jason Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 203. Harding is quoting the passage ‘an international fraternity of men of letters, within Europe’ from a lecture by Eliot entitled ‘The Unity of European Culture’, which will be referred to below.

9 Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–33* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

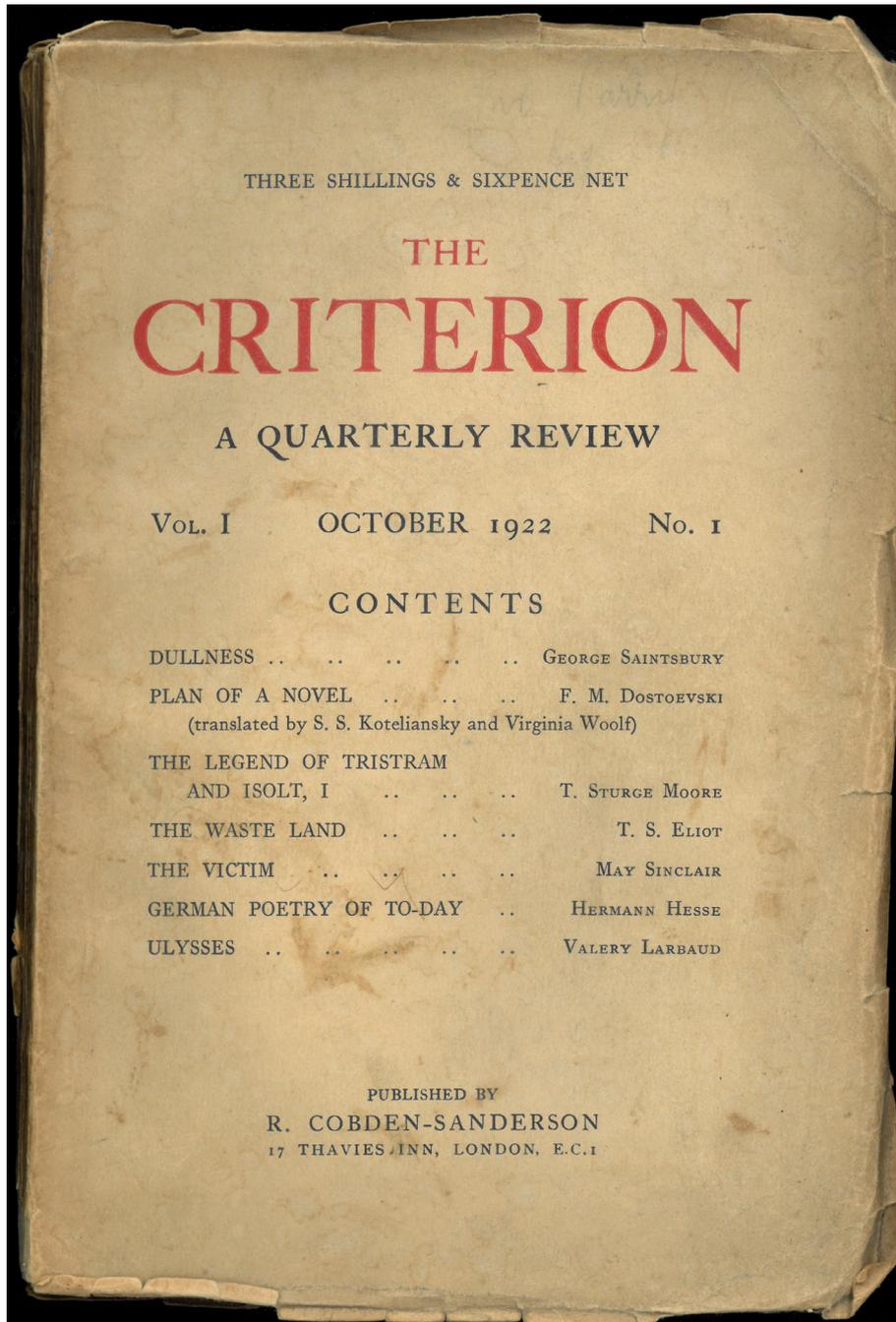


Fig. 1 Cover of the first *Criterion* issue

Stresemann, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926. Through the Treaty of Locarno (1925) and Germany's joining of The League of Nations (1926), international relations were gradually normalized. In a 1929 speech held in Ottawa, Winston Churchill said that the outlook for peace was better than it had been for fifty years. 'For a world-moment', as Stefan Zweig put it in *The World of Yesterday*, 'it seemed as if a normal life was again in store for our much-tried generation'.<sup>10</sup> This relaxation of political tensions enabled the European intellectual cooperation that reviews like the *Criterion* needed in order to succeed. In the 1930s, however, the increasing political tension resulted in

10 Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (London: Cassell, 1943), p. 241.

the dissolution of the European intellectual infrastructure and therewith the decline of the *Criterion's* success.

In its early years, the *Criterion* mainly contained literary work: poems, short stories, and essays on literary topics. But the range of subjects would widen over the years. An increasing number of essays and book reviews dealt with philosophical, historical, scientific, anthropological, and other cultural themes. In the 1930s, the scope widened even further: in those years the *Criterion* published a substantial number of essays and book reviews on religious and theological subjects as well as on politics, economics, and education. Throughout its lifetime, the *Criterion* also served as an outlet for cultural criticism, condemning what were considered to be alarming developments, such as the waning of historical consciousness, the worship of science and technology, the sensationalism of the mass press, and the declining standards of education. In short, having started as a literary review, the *Criterion* over the years became a general *revue d'idées*. Obviously, this development was not unrelated to the political and cultural developments of the time and the ubiquitous discussions about national versus European values and identity.

The contents of the *Criterion* were not only varied, but generally also of a high intellectual level. Many well-known writers contributed to it, especially in the 1920s. Among them were, for example, Julien Benda, Marcel Proust, Paul Valéry, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Thomas Mann, Ezra Pound, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, and James Joyce. Of course, Eliot himself also contributed to it as a writer, publishing numerous editorial commentaries and now and then some poetry. The very first issue of the *Criterion* contained his famous poem *The Waste Land*.

### **The International Network of the *Criterion***

As becomes clear from the names listed above, writers from several European countries contributed to the *Criterion*. Its scope was international, though with a largely European focus and occasional attention paid to the United States. The *Criterion's* cosmopolitanism is apparent from the network Eliot built as an editor, as well as from its foreign chronicles and its reviews of foreign magazines.<sup>11</sup>

Eliot developed relations with literary figures in many European countries: writers, academics and philosophers such as the Italian journalist and writer Giovanni Angioletti, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, the French philosopher and essayist Julien Benda, the German novelist Thomas Mann, and the Austrian poet, essayist and playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Looking back on his years as editor in a 1946 radio lecture entitled 'The Unity of European Culture', Eliot can be seen to emphasize the European dimension of the *Criterion*: 'In starting this review, I had the aim of bringing together the best in new thinking and writing in its time, from all the countries of Europe that had anything to contribute to the common good'.<sup>12</sup> Although the ideas of the various contributors often diverged, they shared a common belief in the unity of European culture and the significance of the European cultural heritage. As one reviewer for the *Criterion*, discussing an essay by Thomas Mann, put it: 'Intellectual differences may be the cement of international friendship, provided there is mutual respect and a common consciousness of a fundamental common tradition'.<sup>13</sup>

11 When using the term 'cosmopolitanism', the Western world is implied: the cosmopolitanism of Eliot and his *Criterion* network was in practice, though not in principle, limited to the Western world. The *Criterion's* foreign chronicles and its reviews of foreign magazines will be discussed below.

12 The text of the radio lecture is included in T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber, 1962), pp. 110–24 (p. 116).

13 'German Periodicals', *Criterion* (October 1926), p. 804.

One of the key figures in the *Criterion* network was Ernst Robert Curtius, a German literature professor who considered himself a 'civis Romanus' and 'German Roman', and had contacts with writers all over Europe.<sup>14</sup> In a *Criterion* editorial, Eliot wrote that Curtius was 'one of those men such as Gide and Larbaud in France, Hofmannsthal in Austria and Ortega y Gasset in Spain, who have steadily laboured in the interest of the European spirit'.<sup>15</sup> Eliot later wrote that in the interwar years, no intellectual was more representative of the European orientation than Curtius, the German expert on modern French literature who published essays on Proust and Balzac in the British *Criterion* and who translated *The Waste Land* into German.<sup>16</sup> In the *Criterion* essay 'Restoration of the Reason', Curtius pleaded for a European intellectual cooperation: 'we must have a united European front [...] embracing all the constructive energies of Europe'.<sup>17</sup> Looking back on the 1920s, Curtius would later write about the 'Europe of the mind' that characterized those years and the role that periodicals like the *Criterion* played in this respect:



Fig. 2 Caricature of E.R. Curtius. Reproduced from *Liber: A European Review of Books*, October 1989, p. 5 (artist unknown)

14 Peter Godman, 'T. S. Eliot and E. R. Curtius: A European Dialogue', *Liber: A European Review of Books*, 1.1 (1989), pp. 5–7 (p. 7).

15 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (October 1932), p. 73.

16 T. S. Eliot, 'Brief über Ernst Robert Curtius', in *Freundesgabe für Ernst Robert Curtius*, ed. by Max Rychner, W. Boehlich, and Ernst Robert Curtius (Bern: Franke, 1956), pp. 25–27 (p. 26).

17 Ernst Robert Curtius, 'Restoration of the Reason', *Criterion* (November 1927), pp. 389–97 (p. 390).

But how many paths and encounters there were in the spiritually relaxed Europe of the time! Rilke translated poems by Valéry, who showed them to me in manuscript. At [Max] Scheler's I saw the first issue of Ortega's *Revista de Occidente*. Valery Larbaud introduced Joyce in France. Sylvia Beach's bookstore, 'Shakespeare and Company', was an international meeting-place [...] A Europe of the mind — above politics, in spite of all politics — was very much alive. This Europe lived not only in books and periodicals but also in personal relations.<sup>18</sup>

According to Eliot, the past had shown similar examples of European intellectual cooperation. In one of his essays he expressed his admiration for the early seventeenth-century Anglican theologians Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes, referring to their 'breadth of culture, an ease with humanism [...] which helped to put them on terms of equality with their continental antagonists [...] they were Europeans'.<sup>19</sup>

Crucial to the European orientation of the *Criterion* were its relations with foreign periodicals. Eliot intended to establish a network for intellectual exchange between European reviews with a shared cultural orientation. 'The *Criterion* was only one of a number of reviews similar in character and purpose, in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and elsewhere', he explained, 'and my own interest [...] responded to the interests of the editors and contributors of these other reviews'.<sup>20</sup> These other periodicals were discussed in a special 'Foreign Reviews' section in which notable contributions were mentioned and sometimes translated. Examples of foreign reviews that were discussed in the *Criterion* are the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from France, *La Fiera Letteraria* and *Il Convegno* from Italy, the *Dial* from the United States, the *Revista de Occidente* from Spain (edited by Ortega y Gasset), and the *Neue deutsche Beiträge* (edited by Hofmannsthal), *Die Neue Rundschau* and the *Europäische Revue* from Germany. In the aforementioned radio lecture, 'The Unity of European Culture', Eliot speaks of the existence of a network of European intellectuals and independent reviews as a crucial means for the transmission and circulation of ideas during the 1920s.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from its reviews of foreign periodicals, the international outlook of the *Criterion* also manifested itself in chronicles which discussed contemporary literary and cultural activities in other countries. These included, among others, an 'Italian Chronicle' by Giovanni Battista Angioletti, a 'French Chronicle' by Montgomery Belgion, a 'German Chronicle' by Max Rychner, a 'Russian Chronicle' by John Cournos, a 'Madrid Chronicle' by Antonio Marichalar, an 'American Chronicle' by George Seldes, and a 'Dutch Chronicle' by A. den Doollaard.<sup>22</sup> Other contemporary periodicals had similar chronicles. For example, Eliot wrote a 'London Letter' for the *Dial* in 1921–22, and a 'Lettre d'Angleterre' for the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1923. Also published in *The Dial* were Hofmannsthal's 'Vienna Letter' (1922–28), Ortega y Gasset's 'Spanish Letter' (1924), Ezra Pound's 'Paris Letter' (1920–23), and Thomas Mann's 'German Letter' (1922–27).

The *Criterion's* European point of view is thus evident from its network, the contributions by foreign authors, the regular foreign chronicles, and the reviews of foreign periodicals. But the European orientation of the *Criterion* is also to be seen in the manifest content of several of its editorial commentaries and essays. This is evident, for

18 Ernst Robert Curtius, *Essays on European Literature*, trans. Michael Kowal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 170.

19 T. S. Eliot, 'Lancelot Andrewes', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 341–53 (p. 343).

20 Eliot, 'Brief über Ernst Robert Curtius', p. 26.

21 Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 115.

22 These chronicles appeared with varying frequencies. The 'Dutch Chronicle' was published only twice.

example, in its approving coverage of the 1925 Treaty of Locarno.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, it was more focused on intellectual than on political cooperation. In an editorial commentary in July 1927, Eliot wrote that intellectual forms of cooperation, although less visible than political ones, might be more important in the long run: 'We must not forget, however, amongst these glorious [political] public meetings, proposals and resolutions, that real intellectual co-operation is something far less conspicuous in its time'.<sup>24</sup> In another editorial commentary, Eliot referred to an essay by Curtius in which the latter 'offers a desirable caution against the danger of conceiving the future of Europe in terms of one country only', and then proceeds to quote Curtius accordingly: 'If peace for Europe and enduring co-operation between Germany and France are desired, then neither treaties of Locarno nor European congresses are enough [...] we must advance beyond the position of enthusiasm and beyond the negation of disillusion to a third stage, that of analysis'. Acknowledging this need, Eliot says that this in fact is precisely what the *Criterion* aimed to contribute to: 'Such an analysis as that of which Mr. Curtius speaks is neither politics nor work for politicians. It is work for all those who are concerned with the general ideas of art, literature and philosophy, as well as the social sciences'.<sup>25</sup> In November 1927, in an editorial in which he discussed the impact of the Russian Revolution and Italian nationalism, Eliot again pleaded for European intellectual cooperation: 'And none of these [economic and political] problems is local. It is the same set of problems, perhaps in the end the same problem, which is occupying the mind of all Europe'.<sup>26</sup>

As has been seen, the *Criterion* was one of a network of several cultural periodicals which shared an interest in a common European culture. These reviews, and the authors who wrote for and edited them, can be seen to constitute a European 'Republic of Letters'. In his lecture 'The Unity of European Culture', Eliot claimed that the network of writers and thinkers involved in the *Criterion* formed 'an international fraternity of men of letters' who cooperated in a shared European spirit.<sup>27</sup> They exchanged letters, contributed essays to one another's reviews and occasionally translated one another's work. This intellectual network flourished during the cosmopolitan 1920s, but gradually broke down as a consequence of the political developments of the 1930s, as will be discussed below.

### The *Criterion's* Idea of Europe<sup>28</sup>

Eliot was convinced that European political unity could not do without an intellectual form of cooperation. Furthermore, he believed that the latter starts from the conviction that there is a shared European identity, a unity of European culture. This has been referred to a number of times now, but of what did this unity consist, according to Eliot and his companions? What was the 'idea of Europe' expressed in the *Criterion* and its network?

23 'Foreign Reviews', *Criterion* (June 1926), p. 616.

24 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (July 1927), p. 3.

25 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (August 1927), p. 99.

26 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (November 1927), p. 387.

27 Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, pp. 118, pp. 115–16.

28 The information in this section is partly based on Jeroen Vanheste, 'The Idea of Europe', in *T. S. Eliot in Context*, ed. by Jason Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 52–59.

### *The Classicist Idea of Europe*

In his book *Europa: De geschiedenis van een Idee* [*Europe: The History of an Idea*], Pim den Boer discusses the development of ideas about European identity.<sup>29</sup> Den Boer distinguishes various conceptions of Europe: a Christian one (in which Christianity is considered to be what unites Europe); a political one (Europe as the coexistence of several nations with independent rulers and religions, depending on a 'balance of power' for keeping peace); an Enlightenment one (Europe as a common 'civilization', one of the main pillars of which is Roman public law); a liberal one (in which the separation between church and state is considered a decisive European characteristic); and a democratic one (in which the Greek city state is seen as the cradle of European civilization).

As Den Boer discusses in his book, mixtures of the various (Christian, liberal, democratic, etc.) conceptions of Europe also occur. The idea of Europe that was expressed by Eliot and other intellectuals in the *Criterion* network was just such a mixture: the *Criterion* did not express one fixed idea of Europe. In a 1927 editorial commentary, Eliot wrote about 'the variety of appearances' of the European idea.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to the *Nation and Athenaeum*, Eliot also stressed the 'unity in diversity' of the viewpoints expressed: 'The *Criterion* is not a "school", but a meeting place for writers, some of whom, certainly, have much in common, but what they have in common is not theory or dogma'.<sup>31</sup> But in spite of the 'heterogeneity' of the ideas that were exhibited in the *Criterion*, there remained a 'common tendency'.<sup>32</sup>

The designation Eliot chose for this 'common tendency' and 'unity in diversity' was 'classicism', which he admits to have chosen 'for want of a better name'.<sup>33</sup> The classicist idea of Europe proposed by the various authors in the *Criterion* network consisted of a combination of religious and other notions, its main components being the Greek and Roman roots and Christianity. Within this framework, different authors focused on different aspects. Some of them, such as Benda in his 1933 essay 'Discours à la nation européenne' (which was published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*), stressed the Greco-Roman roots of Europe and its rationalistic legacy. Others (like Eliot himself, in various *Criterion* editorials) placed more emphasis upon Europe's Christian roots, while others (like Thomas Mann) focused on the humanist heritage. What they all shared, however, was the conviction that there was indeed a common heritage, which was considered to be some combination of the diverse elements mentioned. In the following quote from 'The Unity of European Culture', Eliot makes this clear:

The Western World has its unity in this heritage, in Christianity and in the ancient civilisations of Greece, Rome and Israel, from which, owing to two thousand years of Christianity, we trace our descent. I shall not elaborate this point. What I wish to say is, that this unity in the common elements of culture, throughout many centuries, is the true bond between us. No political and economic organisation, however much goodwill it commands, can supply what this cultural unity gives.<sup>34</sup>

29 Pim den Boer, *Europa: De geschiedenis van een Idee* [*Europe: The History of an Idea*] (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2007).

30 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (August 1927), pp. 97–98.

31 T. S. Eliot, 'Letter to the Editor', *Nation and Athenaeum* (21 April 1928).

32 T. S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Literary Review', *Criterion* (January 1926), p. 2; 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (May 1927), p. 18.

33 T. S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Literary Review', p. 5.

34 Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 123.

In relation to this belief in a shared European identity, it should also be noted that Eliot rejected all nationalist thinking. This is typified by the following remark in one of his *Criterion* editorials: ‘The old Roman Empire is a European idea; the new Roman Empire [Mussolini’s ‘Romanita’] is an Italian idea, and the two must be kept distinct’.<sup>35</sup>

### *Classicism as a Form of Humanism*

The ‘classicism’ of Eliot and his *Criterion* can be interpreted as a form of European humanism, as the expression of an archetype that has been a constant factor in the history of European thought.<sup>36</sup> This archetype has found diverse expression throughout history, such as the humanism of the Greek city states, the religious humanism of Christian thinkers like Erasmus, the civic humanism of the French Enlightenment *philosophes*, and the Central-European Jewish humanism that flourished in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For all their differences, these various (Greek, Christian, Enlightenment, twentieth-century) manifestations of the ‘European idea’ of humanism share some basic anthropological and cultural convictions. Humanism considers the human individual to be a relatively autonomous being who is partly, but not fully determined by its natural and cultural dispositions. It stresses the role of human reason, which consists not only of intellectual capacities but also of *phronesis*: the notion of ‘practical wisdom’ that originates in Aristotle’s virtue ethics. Furthermore, humanistic thinking stresses the significance of cultural continuity and cultural heritage.

Eliot himself seldom wrote about humanism in the *Criterion*. He did however refer to it in the work of others, especially that of Curtius. In a 1932 *Criterion* editorial, Eliot refers to the latter’s essay ‘Humanismus als Initiative’ as ‘one of the best and most reasonable expositions of a “humanist” attitude that I have ever read’.<sup>37</sup> In the essay in question, Curtius claims that although historical manifestations of humanism are mutable and conditioned by their time, together they form ‘a distinguishing characteristic of Europeanness’.<sup>38</sup> In the earlier *Criterion* essay ‘Restoration of the Reason’, Curtius had written about ‘the reconstruction of European man’, a reconstruction that had to come about by revaluing humanism and rejecting ‘various types of radicalism’ such as nationalism and communism.<sup>39</sup>

The humanism of Eliot and the *Criterion* gradually changed over the years. As a result, the *Criterion*’s perception of Europe changed somewhat as well, increasingly emphasizing the Christian elements in the European heritage. I first discuss the *Criterion* perception of Europe in the 1920s and then see how it changed in the 1930s.

### *The Criterion’s Perception of Europe in the 1920s*

In a 1927 *Criterion* review of foreign periodicals, the ideas of Valéry were approvingly mentioned as a source of elucidation on the subject of the European identity.<sup>40</sup> In his 1922 public lecture ‘Europe’, Valéry had characterized Europeans as those who have undergone the formative influences of Rome, Christianity, and Greece. The contribution of Rome was that it remains ‘the eternal model of organized and stable power’ and shows

35 ‘A Commentary’, *Criterion* (April 1926), p. 222.

36 This view is proposed and argued for in Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*.

37 ‘A Commentary’, *Criterion* (October 1932), p. 74.

38 ‘ein Wesensmerkmal des Europäismus’. Ernst Robert Curtius, ‘Humanismus als Initiative’ [‘Humanism as Initiative’], in *Humanismus*, ed. by Hans Oppermann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), pp. 166–90 (p. 167).

39 Curtius, ‘Restoration of the Reason’, p. 396.

40 ‘Foreign Reviews’, *Criterion* (January 1927), p. 180.

‘the benefits of tolerance and good administration’.<sup>41</sup> Christianity added a common God and eternal justice to the common law and temporal justice of Rome: ‘while the Roman conquest had affected only political man and had ruled the mind only in its external habits, the Christian conquest aimed at and gradually reached the depths of consciousness’. Finally, the Greek contribution to Europe is ‘that subtle yet powerful influence to which we owe the best of our intelligence, the acuteness and solidity of our knowledge, as also the clarity, purity, and elegance of our arts and literature’. In his conclusion, Valéry summarizes his perception of the European:

These, it seems to me, are the three essential conditions that define a true European, a man in whom the European mind can come to its full realization. Wherever the names of Caesar, Caius, Trajan, and Virgil, of Moses and St. Paul, and of Aristotle, Plato and Euclid have had simultaneous meaning and authority, there is Europe. Every race and land that has been successively Romanized, Christianized, and, as regards the mind, disciplined by the Greeks, is absolutely European.<sup>42</sup>

Valéry’s ideas about European identity were highly influential for the *Criterion* network and for interwar Europe more generally. In 1922, the Council of the League of Nations had established a ‘Committee on Intellectual Co-operation’. Three years later, a ‘Sub-Committee on Arts and Letters’ was set up, with Valéry as one of its members. For his continuing contribution to European intellectual cooperation, Valéry has been called ‘one of the founding fathers of a United Europe’.<sup>43</sup>

The aforementioned lecture by Valéry was discussed in the *Criterion* and translated for the *Europäische Revue*, one of the reviews in the *Criterion* network. In a 1923 *Criterion* editorial, Eliot states that ‘all European civilizations are equally dependent upon Greece and Rome — so far as they are civilizations at all’, and adds that ‘if everything derived from Rome were withdrawn [from English culture] — everything we have from Norman-French society, from the Church, from Humanism [...] what would be left? A few Teutonic roots and husks. England is a “Latin” country’.<sup>44</sup> On another occasion, Eliot referred to ‘the continuity of the impulse of Rome to the present day’, which ‘is in fact the European idea — the idea of a common culture of Western Europe’.<sup>45</sup> Similar examples of expressions of the European idea can be found among other *Criterion* contributors. In a 1928 ‘Foreign Reviews’ section, an article in *La Fiera Letteraria* by the Italian *Criterion* contributor Giovanni Angioletti was mentioned. In the article, Angioletti writes lyrically about ‘the truth of Homer, Horace and Dante, which is the truth of every day, of the King and of the humblest citizen [...] the real European truth’.<sup>46</sup> Once again Greece, Rome, and Christianity are mentioned, this time with reference to some of their eminent literary representatives.

### *The Criterion’s Perception of Europe in the 1930s*

As acknowledged by most scholars, Eliot’s views on the interrelations between humanism, religion, and the European cultural tradition developed in the course of

41 Paul Valéry, ‘The European’, in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry: Volume 10: History and Politics*, ed. and trans. by Jackson Mathews (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), pp. 307–23 (p. 316).

42 Valéry, pp. 318, 319, 322.

43 Valéry, p. xxxiv.

44 ‘A Commentary’, *Criterion* (October 1923), p. 104.

45 ‘A Commentary’, *Criterion* (April 1926), p. 222.

46 ‘Foreign Reviews’, *Criterion* (February 1928), p. 189.

the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>47</sup> Christianity became more important both to his life and to his ideas, as evidenced by his conversion to Anglicanism in 1927, and the publication of the volume *For Lancelot Andrewes* in 1928. There is a difference between the poet of *The Waste Land* (1922) and that of the *Four Quartets* (1936–42), a difference which can also be felt in his essays and social criticism. Eliot came to believe that we cannot do without religion and that ‘there is an *absolute* to which Man can never attain’. We cannot do without the supernatural, because otherwise there would be no answer to fundamental questions like, ‘Where do all these morals come from?’<sup>48</sup> Notwithstanding his increasing religiosity, however, the European tradition of humanism remained an important part of Eliot’s thinking. In his essay ‘Religion without Humanism’ (1930) he states that culture, religion, and humanism form an indivisible whole. On the one hand, ‘humanism is in the end futile without religion’, and on the other hand religion cannot do without humanism: ‘Without it [humanism], religion tends to become either a sentimental tune, or an emotional debauch; or in theology, a skeleton dance of fleshless dogmas, or in ecclesiasticism, a soulless political club’.<sup>49</sup> So in spite of the increasingly Christian signature of his thought, Eliot kept stressing the classical and humanist dimensions of the European cultural heritage.

As Eliot changed, so too did the *Criterion*. There was a marked increase in the number of book reviews and essays dealing with religious and theological topics. In these, a sympathy could often be felt for a Christian humanism inspired by authors such as the neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain and the Catholic historian Christopher Dawson. The latter was especially important to the *Criterion* in the 1930s. In a *Criterion* review of his book *The Making of Europe* (1932), the reviewer describes how Dawson mentions the elements that came together to create the European character:

the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, the classical tradition [...] The Roman Empire, the first of these, was responsible for a sense of territorial unity in Europe [...] The second element, the Christianity of the Catholic Church is closely bound up with the first and was an even more important centre of unitary feeling [...] Politically and spiritually the structure of Europe was laid on a foundation of unity, the full fruit of which was to be the culture of the medieval age [...] The classical tradition, the third [...] is nothing more than the Greek tradition, perpetuated from age to age in the figures of such men as Cicero, Alcuin, Petrarch or Erasmus, a type of individual almost confined to the European world.<sup>50</sup>

Similar to Valéry’s analysis and the *Criterion*’s ideas of the 1920s, Dawson saw the European tradition as the fusion of the Greek, Roman, and Christian heritage. But in spite of this continuity, a difference can also be felt in the greater emphasis placed on the significance of Europe’s Christian roots. This is the case for Dawson as well as for the *Criterion* in general. A typical example is a *Criterion* editorial in which Eliot criticized Joseph Wood Krutch’s book *Was Europe a Success?* (1935) for associating Europe with the Enlightenment rather than with Christianity. ‘He [Krutch] does not appear to think that Christianity had very much to do with the development of European civilization, except to obstruct it’, Eliot complained, and went on to ask: ‘Is Mr. Krutch able to rewrite the history of Europe in such a way as to show that his “European man” whom he admires was evolved and maintained in spite of Christian culture, and not by means

47 See, for example, Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*, pp. 151–55, 191–93.

48 Eliot, *Selected Essays*, pp. 490, 484.

49 T. S. Eliot, ‘Religion Without Humanism’, in *Humanism and America: Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilisation*, ed. by Norman Foerster (New York: Port Washington, 1967), pp. 105–12 (p. 111).

50 ‘Books of the Quarter’, *Criterion* (January 1933), p. 290.

of it?<sup>51</sup> Eliot was particularly irritated by some patronizing remarks made by Krutch about Dante, for he admired Dante as an outstanding exponent of European culture. 'Dante is first a European', Eliot wrote in his essay 'Dante' (1929), arguing that 'the culture of Dante was not of one European country but of Europe' and that 'in Dante's time Europe [...] was mentally more united than we can now conceive'.<sup>52</sup> To speak more generally, contributors to the *Criterion* such as Maritain and Dawson sought to demonstrate the inseparability of the 'idea of Europe' from Christian civilization.

In summary, although the *Criterion* over its entire lifetime approached European culture as a heritage that combined classical and Christian notions, it came to place increasing emphasis on the Christian elements in the 1930s. This change can also be seen as a shift from a mainly literary and intellectual conception of culture towards a more social and organic conception, one that Eliot was to express in his two major later works of social criticism, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). The shift in Eliot's ideas and in the contents of the *Criterion* was of course related to events in European politics and economics, which necessitated what Eliot called a 'mutation of the artist': intellectuals and writers could no longer stand aloof from contemporary political developments, for 'politics has become too serious a matter to be left to politicians'.<sup>53</sup>

Although there was no radical break in Eliot's ideas about the European cultural identity, his increasing focus on its roots in Christianity caused some disagreement with more secularly oriented humanists such as Ortega y Gasset and Curtius. In 1932, Ortega y Gasset's book *The Revolt of the Masses* was admired by a *Criterion* reviewer for its analysis of contemporary culture, but criticized for its neglect of the Christian dimension of European culture.<sup>54</sup> In the same year another essay by Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme*, was criticized as well. 'It comes as a shock', the reviewer wrote, that Ortega y Gasset seems to deny 'the existence of any absolute whatsoever'.<sup>55</sup> Curtius publicly criticized Eliot in a 1929 article published in *Die Literatur* and later wrote that Eliot's 'open-minded Europeanism of 1920 remained an unfulfilled promise'.<sup>56</sup> Still, in spite of this, the difference between them was more one of emphasis than one of principle, as Eliot's admiration of Curtius's 1932 essay 'Humanismus als Initiative' ['Humanism as Initiative'] indicates.<sup>57</sup>

### *The End of the Criterion's European Dream*

The relative optimism of the 1920s and the *Criterion*'s belief in a revival of the European spirit came to a halt when, in the 1930s, the political developments in Spain, Italy and Germany greatly complicated international intellectual exchange. Several of the European reviews with which the *Criterion* had aligned itself faced difficulties in this new political climate. The German *Die Neue Rundschau*, the Spanish *Revista de Occidente*, and the Italian *Il Convegno* had to close down or drastically change their editorial policy. The dream of a reanimation of the Occident through a reappraisal of the shared European cultural heritage now lay shattered. In his final editorial comment 'Last

51 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (April 1936), pp. 459, 460.

52 T. S. Eliot, 'Dante', in *Selected Essays*, pp. 237–77 (pp. 239, 240).

53 'A Commentary', *Criterion* (November 1927), p. 386. The issue of the 'mutation of the artist' is discussed further in Vanheste, *Guardians of the Humanist Legacy*, in particular in Chapter 4 and Appendix A.

54 'Recent Books', *Criterion* (October 1932), pp. 144–46.

55 'Books of the Quarter', *Criterion* (April 1932), p. 534.

56 Ernst Robert Curtius, 'T. S. Eliot als Kritiker' ['T. S. Eliot as Critic'], *Die Literatur* (October 1929), 11–15; Curtius, *Essays on European Literature*, p. 397.

57 Curtius, 'Humanismus als Initiative'.

Words' (1939), Eliot described what happened to the 'European mind' of the *Criterion* network in these final years:

Gradually communications became more difficult, contributions more uncertain, and new and important foreign contributors more difficult to discover. The 'European mind', which one had mistakenly thought might be renewed and fortified, disappeared from view: there were fewer writers in any country who seemed to have anything to say to the intellectual public of another.<sup>58</sup>

In 1946, Eliot reflected on the eventual failure of the *Criterion's* ambitions in similar terms, attributing its demise to 'the gradual closing down of the mental frontiers of Europe'.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1927 Eliot wrote in one of his *Criterion* editorials:

We are beginning to hear mention of the reaffirmation of the European tradition. It will be helpful, certainly, if people will begin by believing that there is a European tradition; for they may then proceed to analyse its constituents in the various nations of Europe; and proceed finally to the further formation of such a tradition.<sup>60</sup>

As argued in this article, Eliot believed in the unity of European culture, a unity that in his view was based on its classical and Christian roots. His *Criterion* review, as well as the many other European periodicals and intellectuals in the *Criterion* network, played a key role in the distribution of these ideas. The periodicals were interconnected in an informal way, through the friendship of their editors, the discussions of one another's contents, the chronicles of cultural developments in other countries, and the occasional translations of each other's articles. In this manner, the various authors in the *Criterion* network aimed to contribute to a reconstruction of the European mind. Although there were significant differences between the ideas of authors such as Eliot, Curtius, Benda, Ortega y Gasset, Hofmannsthal, Maritain, and Dawson, they shared a common tendency, which was referred to as 'classicism'. As I have argued, classicism can be interpreted as a form of humanism. After he joined the Church of England, Eliot's conception of humanism was increasingly influenced by Christianity, but although this somewhat estranged him from other *Criterion* contributors such as Curtius and Benda, there remained a basic continuity in his convictions. His commitment to the 'idea of Europe' was a constant factor, from his early work up to the late essay 'The Man of Letters and the Future of Europe' (1944) and the radio lecture 'The Unity of European Culture' (1946).

Eliot and his *Criterion* network expressed a Europeanism that has often been overlooked in recent research. The intellectuals mentioned contributed to the hope and optimism of the 1920s. While the 1925 Treaty of Locarno and the sharing of the 1926 Nobel Peace Prize between Briand and Stresemann were evidence of a political rapprochement, the *Criterion's* Europeanism contributed to what Curtius referred to as a cultural 'springtime of the mind'.<sup>61</sup> Alas, the ambition to reconstruct the European mind

58 T. S. Eliot, 'Last Words', *Criterion* (January 1939), p. 27.

59 Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 116.

60 'A Commentary', *Criterion*, 6 (August 1927), pp. 97–98.

61 Godman, 'T. S. Eliot and E. R. Curtius: A European Dialogue', p. 5.

faded away when the European orientation of the 1920s was displaced by the political events of the 1930s. It might be argued, however, that the ideas I have discussed above remain quite relevant in our time, when nationalist outbursts and debates on European identity and European values are still very topical. Furthermore, it provides us with a most interesting example of the role that cultural reviews played in the interwar years. For those with a historical interest or a contemporary concern, Joseph Roth's aristocrat was surely right: quite a lot can be learned from reading the interwar magazines.

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