

tude”: his view of man is pessimistic, he sees the necessity for austere discipline in the natural struggle of good and evil, and he does not let illusive ideas of progress, of humanitarian “social evolution,” blind his critical vision. As in More and Leacock, Eliot finds in Webb another classicist of the “humane” tradition in lonely battle with the romantic humanitarians, and Eliot emphasizes the importance of Webb’s defense of religion against the “novelties of science.” This “important struggle,” as Eliot describes it, is between a belief in the need for the present regeneration and salvation of the individual soul through religious discipline and a belief in the future betterment of humanity through scientific progress. The opposition of Eliot’s religious and Catholic sensibility to nineteenth-century humanitarianism and the belief in progress is clearly revealed in these and other reviews of the period.

In quantitative or statistical terms there is an esthetic emphasis in Eliot’s early criticism, but his recurring preoccupation with the moral sensibility and orientation of the artist is a central concern within the esthetic criticism. I wholly disagree with Austin’s shopworn assertion that after 1927 there is a shift from esthetic to moral criticism and that Eliot earlier maintained that poetry should be judged solely by literary qualities. Elsewhere I have written at length about the development of Eliot’s moral criticism (*ELH*, forthcoming), but one need only look through some of Eliot’s lesser-known writings to see his pervasive moral interest during the early period, as in “The Lesson of Baudelaire” (*Tyro*, 1, 1921, p. 4), where Eliot rediscovered in Baudelaire a lesson he had already learned: “All first-rate poetry is occupied with morality. This is the lesson of Baudelaire. More than any poet of his time Baudelaire was aware of what most mattered: the problem of good and evil.” Further significant progress in understanding Eliot’s complex critical and spiritual development is partially dependent upon the future availability of presently restricted letters, notebooks, and other unpublished materials written between 1909 and 1926. But the failure to see the consistent relationship and development of Eliot’s esthetic and moral criticism from 1916 is but one of the critical consequences of habitually basing too many conclusive judgments on the collected surface of Eliot’s writings in neglect of the unplumbed mass below.

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King Lear

To the Editor:

Although I agree with Johannes Allgaier’s overall view that *King Lear* is an antiauthoritarian play

(*PMLA*, 88, 1973, 1033–39), an important point in his argument seems to me to need modification.

Allgaier maintains that Cordelia’s defiance of her father in the opening scene is an instance of the Christian *ethos* of “disobedience and rebellion” (p. 1034) outweighing the Christian *doctrine* of obedience to parents, as expressed in the Fifth Commandment. However, this interpretation overlooks another potent Christian doctrine of Shakespeare’s day, namely (in the words of the old marriage ceremony), that a woman’s duty to her husband is to “obey him and serve him, love, honour, and keep him, in sickness and in health.”¹ It is true, of course, that Cordelia is not yet married, but France and Burgundy have been wooing her, and Lear has announced, in effect, that one of them is to be chosen as her husband on this occasion (l.i.44–47). Her relationship to a husband is therefore very much on her mind.

What Shakespeare has done here is to confront his pre-Christian heroine with the problem of reconciling two forms of obedience prescribed by the Christian tenets of his audience. She meets the test by first declaring her love for her father, “according to my bond,” and by then reserving “half my love . . . half my care and duty” for her husband-to-be. Significantly, she tries to conciliate Lear by speaking to him in the language of the marriage pledge (with an echo of the Fifth Commandment in the final verb): “I . . . obey you, love you, and most honour you.” But her fidelity to moral law forbids her to go further and “love my father all.”

There is no conflict in this scene between *ethos* and *doctrine*. On the contrary, Cordelia’s conduct rests solidly on the doctrinal obligations of daughter and wife, reinforced—not contradicted—by the concept, from the *ethos*, that it is right to resist unjust authority.

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¹ *The Prayer-Book of Queen Elizabeth, 1559* (London: Griffith Farran, n.d., preface dated Jan. 1890), p. 123. I have modernized the spelling.

Tirez à blanc, monsieur Braun!

To the Editor:

Thanking Theodore E. D. Braun for his courtesy in considering some aspects of my essay “a significant contribution indeed,” I regret, however, to have to disagree with most of his comments (*PMLA*, 89, 1974, 353–54) on my article “La Voix de Rimbaud: Nouveau point de vue sur les ‘naissances latentes’ des ‘Voyelles’” (*PMLA*, 88, 1973, 472–83).

Like Braun, I myself had a strange sensation, not of déjà vu, but of irrelevance, upon reading his letter.