

The *Criterion*: an inter-war platform for agricultural discussion

by Jeremy Diaper

Abstract

This article examines the *Criterion* to reveal the importance of T. S. Eliot's preoccupation with agriculture. The *Criterion*, edited by Eliot from 1922 to 1939, has received a large amount of critical attention, but the agricultural side of the literary review has been almost entirely disregarded. This article begins by analysing the agricultural concerns present within Eliot's *Criterion* Commentaries. It then brings to attention the agricultural books that Eliot selected for review in the 'Books of the Quarter' section and the key figures of the organic husbandry movement who contributed to the *Criterion*. It reveals that a number of central organic concerns were discussed within the *Criterion*, including those of rural decline, the imbalance of town and country, mechanization, artificial fertilizers, humus and soil erosion. It concludes that the *Criterion* helped forward the organic philosophy throughout the 1930s and that, consequently, Eliot can be considered a supporter of the organic movement.

The *Criterion* has long been recognized as integral to a full understanding of T. S. Eliot's literary practice. The literary review, which ran from 1922 to 1939, provided Eliot with a means to discuss, debate, and dispute various issues that were of crucial importance to him during this period. Unsurprisingly, the *Criterion* has prompted a large amount of critical scholarship that has enhanced our understanding of the journal.¹ Yet, despite the large volume of critical attention the *Criterion* has received over a number of decades, all the accounts either completely ignore, or give very little consideration to, one crucial element: the journal's deep-seated interest in agricultural issues.

Valentine Cunningham was the first to point out Eliot's interest in agriculture and rural issues, highlighting that 'The *Criterion* became a kind of house journal for the spokesmen of post-war British ruralism'.² Similarly, Steve Ellis in *The English Eliot* (1991), and Jed Esty in *A shrinking island* (2004), both acknowledge the importance of Eliot's concern with agriculture by quoting briefly from his *Criterion* commentaries. Elsewhere, David Matless momentarily

¹ See for instance, Herbert Howarth, *Notes on some figures behind T. S. Eliot* (1965), pp. 250–99; Russell Kirk, *Eliot and his age: T. S. Eliot's moral imagination in the twentieth century* (1971), pp. 93–129; John D. Margolis, *T. S. Eliot's intellectual development, 1922–1939* (1972); Denis Donoghue, 'Eliot and the *Criterion*', in David Newton-De Molina (ed.), *The literary criticism*

of T. S. Eliot: new essays (1977), pp. 20–41; Agha Shahid Ali, *T. S. Eliot as editor* (1986); Jason Harding, *The Criterion: cultural politics and periodical networks in inter-war Britain* (2002).

² Valentine Cunningham, *British writers of the Thirties* (1988), p. 231.

refers to the agricultural figures who contributed to Eliot's journal: 'Massingham, Stapledon, Gardiner, Lymington and Mairet all contributed to Eliot's *Criterion* journal in the 1930s'.³ The aforementioned academics, however, neglect to expand in any detail upon such allusions to the *Criterion*, and consequently fail to emphasize sufficiently its significance as an agricultural platform.

Moreover, even when Eliot is recognized as a noteworthy figure in the organic husbandry movement and as having made some contribution to the agricultural debates of the period, the importance of the *Criterion* is completely neglected. Thus, for example, Philip Conford suggests that:

Eliot's importance to the organic movement was three-fold: as a director of Faber and Faber he took an active interest in Richard de la Mare's commissioning of books on organic husbandry; as a member of the Chandos Group he helped formulate the ideas of a Christian Sociology which were the context of the organic movement's development; and as a member of the editorial board of the *New English Weekly* he helped run the paper which was the major vehicle for organic ideas.⁴

Undoubtedly, Conford provides us with an invaluable account of the organic movement, and helps raise awareness of the fact that Eliot had an 'active interest' in the agricultural issues of the time. There is far more to be done, though, in exploring the full significance of Eliot's contribution to these roles. Admittedly, even Conford himself accepts that his section on Eliot in *The origins of the organic movement* (2001) is but a 'small contribution to that task'.⁵ Hence David Bradshaw's insistence that more critical scholarship needs to be carried out on Eliot's interest in agriculture and environmentalism still remains true over 15 years on from his observation.⁶ But, whilst nearly all aspects of Eliot's involvement with the organic movement demand closer attention, it is perhaps most pressing that the agricultural character of the *Criterion* receives elucidation, as it was only as recently as 2010 that this was adequately acknowledged.

The first notable step towards exploring the role the *Criterion* played in Eliot's preoccupation with agriculture was made by Alexandra Harris, in her critically acclaimed monograph *Romantic moderns* (2010). She asserts that '[i]n T. S. Eliot we find the poet as farmer, or at least as a champion of agriculture', and reinforces my contention that 'the extent of Eliot's interest in farming is not always acknowledged'.⁷ Crucially, she maintains that 'it was a significant part of his intellectual life' and clarifies the *Criterion*'s function within this:

³ Steve Ellis, *The English Eliot: design, language and landscape in 'Four Quartets'* (1991), p. 80; Jed Esty, *A shrinking island: modernism and national culture in England* (2004), p. 124; David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (1998), p. 134. See also Steve Ellis, 'Eliot and earth', in *The Journal of the T. S. Eliot Society* (2012), pp. 1–8.

⁴ Philip Conford, *The origins of the organic movement* (2001), p. 223. For a brief account of the Chandos Group, see Roger Kojecy, *T. S. Eliot's social criticism* (1971), pp. 79–85. For more information on the *New*

English Weekly (NEW), Philip Conford, 'A forum for organic husbandry: the *New English Weekly* and agricultural policy, 1939–1949', *AgHR* 46 (1998), pp. 197–210.

⁵ Conford, *Organic movement*, pp. 223, 266.

⁶ David Bradshaw, 'T. S. Eliot and the major: sources of literary anti-semitism in the 1930s', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 July 1996, pp. 14–6.

⁷ Alexandra Harris, *Romantic moderns: English writers, artists and the imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (2010), p. 183.

Eliot wanted a wider audience for these ideas, so he used the editorial pages in his journal, the *Criterion*, to comment provocatively on rural matters. Conceiving culture and agriculture as mutually dependent, he understood the degradation of one to be disastrous for the other. The urbanization of the ruling and literary classes was a kind of standardization that signalled the degeneracy of a whole society.⁸

As well as providing an overview of the main agricultural viewpoints that Eliot put forward in the *Criterion*, she also notes that he was in correspondence about agriculture with some of the key figures in the organic husbandry movement, including Viscount Lymington (Gerard Wallop, the ninth Earl of Portsmouth).⁹ Harris's contribution to our understanding of the *Criterion*, then, is a critical one, and has finally brought us round to considering seriously the agricultural issues which arose in the pages of the *Criterion*. Nonetheless, her discussion passes swiftly over the key topics that arise in Eliot's journal and leaves many blanks, which I intend to fill in.

My examination of the agricultural aspects of the *Criterion* will be multifaceted. First and foremost, I shall offer a detailed consideration of Eliot's *Criterion* Commentaries in order to illustrate how these reveal his increasing preoccupation with agricultural issues. In doing so, I hope to create a clearer picture of Eliot's agricultural concerns and the agrarian society he envisaged. Furthermore, I shall stress that Eliot's appeal for a return to the land was not a solitary plea, but reiterated by a number of other *Criterion* contributors. I shall then focus on the 'Books of the Quarter' section of the journal, where Eliot chose influential authorities on agriculture to review a number of crucial texts. The significance of Eliot's book reviews has been acknowledged, but the agricultural books he selected for review and the reviewers themselves have been almost entirely disregarded. Thus I shall bring to light these key texts, both by looking at the content of the reviews they received in the *Criterion*, and by discussing the books and reviewers themselves. Moreover, I shall use these books to contextualize our understanding of Eliot's views on agriculture, and to draw comparison with his own opinions. My main aim is to elucidate the agricultural and rural viewpoints Eliot put forward in the pages of the *Criterion*, but also to establish it as an important platform for discussion and debate amongst many prominent members of the organic husbandry movement.

I

In a *Criterion* Commentary of October 1934, Eliot considered the annual report of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty.¹⁰ Eliot begins this Commentary by asserting that it is promising to see the work of the National Trust being carried out as a result of the charitable donations of a substantial number of people. For Eliot, this is of significance as it seemed to be a clear indication that there was public support for such a

⁸ Ibid., pp. 183, 184.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 184–85. For a detailed account of Viscount Lymington and his position in the organic husbandry movement, Philip Conford, 'Organic society: agriculture and radical politics in the career of Gerard Wallop, ninth Earl of Portsmouth (1898–1984)', *AgHR* 53

(2005), pp. 78–96.

¹⁰ For more on the National Trust, Graham Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust* (1987); Jennifer Jenkins and Patrick James, *From acorn to oak tree: the growth of the National Trust, 1895–1994* (1994); Merlin Waterson, *The National Trust: the first hundred years* (1997).

body: 'what is most important is that it has obviously stirred the feelings of a very large number of people'. The fact that the £350,000 which had been donated up until 1933 did not simply come from 'a single American millionaire' was telling, as Eliot felt this meant the National Trust had more chance of survival: 'It would seem that the kind of work that the National Trust does in preservation has appealed to a general public spirit which is the best assurance of its continuation'.¹¹

Eliot made it clear from the outset of his Commentary that he did not wish to diminish the merit of the National Trust: 'I do not in any way depreciate the value of the National Trust, or belittle the generosity of those who have given labour, money and land'. Notwithstanding that, he states that the presence of such an enduring institution inevitably 'gives rise to curious reflections'.¹² Thus, whilst Eliot applauds the 'generous efforts' of the Trust, he finds it regrettable that there exists a need for such an institution: 'Surely we are living in a very odd and unsatisfactory state of society, when such a struggle has to be carried on to preserve England from destruction and disfigurement'.¹³ That the Trust had to strive to protect the beauty of England signalled to Eliot a visible deficiency in the present state of civilization:

The existence of such an institution as the National Trust, and the present necessity for its existence, seems to me to imply some pretty drastic criticism of contemporary society; and we should like all the people interested in the preservation of 'beauty spots' to investigate a state of society in which beauty spots have to be preserved.

Therefore, despite initially offering praise for the Trust and commending their 'excellent' work, Eliot was troubled by the requirement for its existence and wanted to probe behind the deeper implications this had for society. Accordingly, he was adamant that the efforts of the Trust, which included those who had generously donated to it, should not be deemed sufficient, boldly recommending that they 'should not content their hearts and consciences with the thought that this is all that needs doing'. Instead, he encouraged Trust supporters to comprehend the current state of 'natural development', and to move towards a more detailed understanding of why their work was necessary in the first place:

For when such work has to be done, we must acknowledge that we are interfering, in a way never before attempted in history, with natural development; and when natural development has to be interfered with, ought we not to look a little deeper and try to do something about the 'nature' which develops in such an unpleasant way?¹⁴

Eliot called for a move beyond the basic concerns with beauty and historical importance, to a firmer understanding of the powers behind the ruination of rural Britain: 'we want to form some notion of the nature of the forces which we may expect to be active in destruction of the beauty of England in the future'. Until this information was provided, Eliot made it clear that he could not offer his full backing to the National Trust: 'It is difficult to be quite whole-hearted in one's support of the National Trust, until one is able to answer such questions'.¹⁵

¹¹ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 14 (1934), p. 86.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 87–8.

Most importantly, then, although Eliot was encouraged by the amount of support the National Trust had accumulated, he felt that it did not go far enough to protect the countryside and he consciously wanted to avoid offering a passive resistance:

While supporting the work of the National Trust so far as it goes, I am apprehensive lest it help to engender a lack of confidence in the future, and consequently a neglect of action about the future ... Such work as that of the National Trust seems to belong to a transitional period of society. Either society will somehow rearrange itself in such a way that whatever ought to be preserved exactly as it is, will be in no danger; or the whole business of artificial conservation will be taken over by the State. The latter event is much the more probable, the former the more desirable.

As far as Eliot was concerned the National Trust was not proactive enough in its attempts to preserve the countryside. In order for the countryside to be salvaged, Eliot believed that modern civilization must be changed through 'humility' and 'conviction'. The crucial verb in the above passage, however, is 'rearrange'. Eliot goes on to outline that this rearrangement of society should entail 'a very different economic basis, and a healthy, settled agriculture, with a proper balance between town and country life'.¹⁶

The *Criterion* Commentary of October 1934 illustrates how deeply concerned Eliot was about the despoliation of the English countryside. In particular, Eliot underscores the need to preserve rural England from the development carried out by an increasingly urban-minded society:

Some parts of England are more beautiful than others; some, because of their natural configuration, are quite exceptional; but there is very little of rural England that is not beautiful and worthy of protection. Some of the wilder and more romantic spots may be quite unsuited for tilth, grazing, or other legitimately profitable uses; these are rightly to be protected against the hotel on the hilltop, the week-end bungalow on the slope, the 'roadhouse' in the valley, the golf course on the downs, the pavilion on the beach.¹⁷

Yet Eliot's vision of the English countryside was far from a romanticized conception of rural beauty. As Ellis succinctly puts it: 'not for Eliot any Wordsworthian swooning over mists and mountain-peaks'.¹⁸ In fact, as Eliot himself stated, 'the beauty of England' was not to be seen in 'the more remote hills and moors which men have not yet found it worth their while to disfigure'. On the contrary, it was visible in 'the ordinary countryside which is largely the work of generations of humanizing labour'. Crucially, though, if this was to be preserved at all, Eliot insisted that it must be 'preserved *alive*'.¹⁹

Eliot's notion of a countryside that was 'alive' was one that maintained an agricultural

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 88. Eliot's concern surrounding the encroachment of an urban landscape upon the countryside was commonly held in the 1920s to '30s. See Clough Williams-Ellis, *England and the octopus* (1928); Clough Williams-Ellis (ed.), *Britain and the beast* (1937); J. B. Priestley, *Our nation's heritage* (1939).

For a discussion of these attitudes, Trevor Rowley, *The English landscape in the twentieth century* (2006), pp. 196–98, 212–16.

¹⁸ Ellis, *The English Eliot*, p. 81.

¹⁹ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 14 (1934), p. 88.

basis. Agriculture, therefore, forms the backdrop to all of Eliot's thinking on the issue of the countryside. This is not to say, however, that the rural is separated from his discussion of agricultural issues. Rather, as is often the case throughout the *Criterion*, the two issues are inter-linked. In order for agriculture to be in true harmony with its natural surroundings, Eliot maintained that there must be a healthy balance between town and country. To uphold this balance, the country had to be preserved from the threat of the town populace:

It is from a population habituated to town life, a population to which the countryside represents holidays, whether on an elaborate or a simple scale, that the countryside has to be protected, rather than from those to whom the country means the scene of their daily work and life.²⁰

Certainly, Eliot was perturbed by the prospect of towns becoming larger, and he argued that should this happen it would not provide a health-giving environment for the population: 'much of the change of a destructive kind which we are concerned to combat, seems to result from the over-development of town life and the atrophy of the country'.²¹ Thus, Eliot recommended that alongside the preservation of the countryside, the development of towns needed to incorporate sufficient means of countrified relaxation and recreation:

It is as important – to take questions which are actual – to plan wisely for the future development of the Surrey Bank, and to see that the new suburbs in Middlesex are properly provided with parks and gardens and arranged so that they may grow to be communities, as it is to preserve any part of rural England.²²

Eliot later re-examined the relationship between the countryside and the town in a Commentary published in the *Criterion* in April 1938. In this Commentary he turned his attention towards the Music and Drama Bill and pondered whether this would successfully prevent the alarming, and ever increasing, drift to the towns. The inter-war years saw a mass departure from the countryside, and this rural exodus was especially pronounced in the 1930s.²³ In particular, the number of people living and working on the land significantly reduced as a result of low incomes and poor living conditions. For example, between 1931 and 1938, for example, the number of those working in rural employment fell by 17 per cent.²⁴ Indeed, in the years 1929–1939, the number of people employed full time in British agriculture dropped by 128,000.²⁵

The Music and Drama Bill was a measure prepared by the League of Audiences which aimed to boost the attractiveness of life in the countryside by providing more frequent tours

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 89–90.

²¹ Ibid., p. 89.

²² Ibid., p. 90.

²³ Rowley, *English landscape*, p. 218; Alan Armstrong, *Farmworkers: a social and economic history, 1770–1980* (1988), pp. 200–1; Richard Perren, *Agriculture in depression, 1870–1940* (1995), pp. 62–5.

²⁴ John Stevenson, 'The countryside, planning, and civil society in Britain, 1926–1947', in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil society in British history: ideas, identities,*

institutions (2003), p. 200.

²⁵ Perren, *Agriculture in depression*, p. 48. See also Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, *A century of agricultural statistics: Great Britain 1866–1966* (1968), p. 62.

²⁶ For more information on the League of Audiences, see *The League of Audiences* (an explanatory leaflet, 1936); J. H. Alden, 'The League of Audiences', *Music and Letters* 19 (1938), pp. 79–83.

from various musical performers, including orchestras and brass bands.²⁶ Eliot was extremely sceptical of the Bill and was outspoken in his belief that it was not the appropriate measure to stop the movement away from the countryside, bluntly stating: 'It is a pity that action should take precedence over thought'.²⁷ Despite Eliot's reservations regarding its effectiveness, the Music and Drama Bill provided him with another opportunity to consider further the issue of rural Britain. Once again, he not only reinforced the significance of this concern, but highlighted that it was directly related to the issue of agriculture:

The two most serious long-distance problems we have, apart from the ultimate religious problem, are the problem of Education and the problem of the Land – meaning by the latter the problem, not merely of how to grow enough food, but of how to obtain a proper balance between country and town life.

Eliot then analysed what he deemed to be the central flaw in the majority of proposals to protect the countryside. This main weakness was, fundamentally, that they seemed to be devised by those with an 'urban outlook'. As a result, many of the ideas were centred on moving the benefits of the towns directly to the countryside. One such example was the wireless, which Eliot felt was not only wholly unsuccessful in encouraging country folk to stay within their rural setting, but injurious to the meritorious aspects of their lifestyle: 'Some have thought that the wireless would do it: what the wireless can do is to tempt country folk to stay up late when they ought to go to bed in order to get up early'.²⁸

Accordingly, Eliot proposed that schemes to prevent the drift to the towns should be thought out by the true 'country gentry' and real 'villagers', whom he defined as follows: 'I mean, people who have been brought up in the country, whose substance comes from the cultivation of the land – people who are, economically, as much bound to the land as their tenants or their tenants' labourers'. Indeed, he insists that the legislation of such schemes should not be carried out by those urban-minded citizens who have falsely attached themselves to the country by their own accord: 'I do not mean retired bankers and industrialists who have become landowners or who own land maintained out of dividends from the City'.²⁹

Following on from his critique of the Music and Drama Bill, Eliot mused upon his own personal feelings towards country life: 'I should myself find it as difficult to live in the country as to give up smoking – more difficult, for my urban habits are of much longer standing than the habit of smoking: they are, indeed, pre-natal'.³⁰ Interestingly, in volume three of T. S. Eliot's *Letters* (1926–27) there are a number of illuminating insights which lend weight to the notion that Eliot was never truly comfortable in the countryside. In a letter of August 1926, Eliot makes it apparent that although he has no intrinsic dislike of the countryside, it would not be conducive to his productivity to be based there: 'I do not suppose for a moment that it would be possible for me to do much good work under such conditions – not that I have any objection to the country *per se*'.³¹ Perhaps the most important insight, however, comes from

²⁷ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 17 (1938), p. 483.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

³¹ Letter to John Middleton Murry, 31 Aug. 1926, in Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (eds), *The letters of T. S. Eliot, III, 1926–1927* (2012), p. 268.

Vivienne's thoughts on Eliot and the country: 'Tom, I don't know. He never seems to really *like* the country, or to know what to do with it'.³² Here Vivienne's thoughts are strikingly in accord with Eliot's own pronouncements, over a decade later, in his *Criterion* Commentary of 1938. Therefore, even when taking into account Vivienne's mental fragility at this time, such a remark seems to be a fair assessment of Eliot's personal feelings towards a residence in rural surroundings.³³

As the correspondence of 1926–27 makes manifest, Eliot was not predisposed to settle in the countryside or on a farm. It seems reasonable to deduce, however, that this was partly because he had always been a city dweller, and felt naturally at home in such urban surroundings.³⁴ Although Eliot himself could not envisage living in the country for any sustained period of time, he increasingly felt that the populace should be centred in the country: 'And I believe that the real and spontaneous country life – not *legislated* country life – is the right life for the great majority in any nation'. The fact that Eliot made it clear he would personally have found it difficult to live in the countryside does not diminish the significance of his enduring preoccupation with agriculture and ruralism. Rather, it enabled him to see that country and town life should be distinct, and that trying to merge them together by providing urban amenities, as proposed in the Music and Drama Bill, would ultimately create a false country life:

But I can at least see that *living* in the country must be something quite different from *living* in the town; that many benevolent people who want to make country life more endurable are merely aiming to make it suburban; and that a genuine country life must be one which is in a position to provide its own amenities, and to do without London newspapers, Langham Place, and Whitehall.³⁵

This was not the only point at which Eliot questioned the modern fascination with making 'life more endurable'. For instance, a year earlier in a Commentary of April 1937, Eliot was highly sceptical about mankind's increasing focus on contemporary conveniences: 'It is likely that too much importance is attached to the modern craving for luxury, comfort and recent inventions'. Whilst Eliot did not deny that many recent inventions (such as electric refrigerators) were of value, he warned of their dangers: 'The worst that can be said for these things is that they keep people's minds in a perpetual rapid distraction'. Furthermore, whilst he did not begrudge modern society's desire to 'keep up one's standard of living', he was wary that this propensity was accompanied by unnecessary 'self-indulgence'.³⁶

Most importantly, though, Eliot's deliberation over the issue of mankind's standard of life led him once again to meditate on the now frequent concerns of religion, ruralism and agriculture.

³² Ibid., p. 268. Letter to John Middleton Murry, 30 Aug. 1926.

³³ Eliot's first wife Vivienne grew increasingly unwell in the years 1926–27 and this led to her being admitted to the Sanatorium de la Malmaison in Paris.

³⁴ Eliot was born in the city of St. Louis, Missouri in 1888. He later spent brief periods in a number of cities including Paris and Oxford, although for the majority

of his adult life he resided in London.

³⁵ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 17 (1938), pp. 482–3. Langham Place is a reference to the BBC whose headquarters building, Broadcasting House, was (and still is) in Langham Place.

³⁶ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 16 (1937), p. 471.

Firstly, he bemoaned the poor standard of life of the clergy: 'clergy – of all denominations – are among the classes of decreasing prosperity'. Yet, he regarded the needs of agricultural workers as the number one priority, stating that their 'standard of life is already so low that it ought to be improved first'.³⁷ Eliot was certainly not alone in observing that the populace of rural areas had a poor standard of life in the 1930s. A. G. Street, for example, famously pronounced that this era marked 'the waning of the farmer's glory'.³⁸

For many skilled agricultural workers, wages were significantly lower than that of unqualified townsmen. Edith H. Whetham notes that 'Both farm wages and the earnings of farmers in the inter-war years remained at about 60–65 per cent of non-agricultural incomes'.³⁹ Furthermore, the impoverishment of those living in the countryside was not only evident in their low wages: the living conditions and amenities were equally wretched. As the Scott Report of 1942 detailed: 'Thousands of cottages have no piped water supply, no gas or electric light, no third bedroom ... For the great majority of rural workers a bathroom is a "rare luxury"'.⁴⁰ By contrast, many townspeople had access to these facilities, as well as other conveniences such as shops, buses and cinemas.

In Eliot's Commentary of 1937, the position of agriculture in society was again at the forefront of his thinking. In calling for an improvement of the rural population's living conditions, he warned that it was not just rural communities who were dependent on a healthy agriculture, but the towns as well: 'The agricultural districts perhaps deserve place of importance, for it is from the country that the towns are alimented and not vice versa'.⁴¹

The issue of financial difficulties was also addressed by Eliot in his Commentary of April 1936, where he examined the consequence of the Tithe Bill on the country clergy. Eliot suggested the clergy were 'impoverished' as a direct result of the Tithe Bill and that it served as 'recognition of the unimportance of the country clergy'. In a similar manner to his Commentary of April 1937, Eliot did not conceive of religion, agriculture, and ruralism as separate entities, but saw a distinct correlation between them. Eliot argued, therefore, that the decline of the Church would lead directly to the decline of rural life:

The Church has been an essential, a central point in English rural life. It needs reorganization: but if it simply decays and disappears, then the decay of the English rural community will proceed apace; and England will become divided into three parts: industrial areas (elevated or depressed), suburbs, and beauty-spots.⁴²

Eliot was also perturbed by the correlation he perceived between the decay of rural society and human well-being. In a Commentary of 1938, Eliot singled out the importance of Lymington's book *Famine in England*, and highlighted that Lymington was not merely troubled by the

³⁷ Ibid., p. 472

³⁸ A. G. Street, *Farmer's glory* (ninth edn, 1944), pp. 146–9.

³⁹ Edith H. Whetham, 'The waygoing', in Whetham (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, VIII, 1914–1939 (1978), p. 315. See, also Eric M. Ojala, *Agriculture and economic progress* (1952), p. 135 and J. R. Bellerby, *Agriculture and industry: relative income* (1956), p. 50.

⁴⁰ *Britain's trade and country pattern: a summary of the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt reports* (Rebuilding Britain Series, no. 2, prepared by the Nuffield College, Social Reconstruction Survey, 1943), pp. 86–7.

⁴¹ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 16 (1937), p. 472.

⁴² Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 15 (1936), p. 666.

state of the land, but with the 'inevitable deterioration ... of its people ... if the present tendencies are not checked'.⁴³ In *Famine in England* Lymington illustrates the 'deterioration' of man from several angles, in concurrence with Eliot's own views. One perspective that Lymington and Eliot shared was the anxiety over the increasing urbanization of man. For example, in a *Criterion* Commentary of 1934, Eliot debated: 'whether it is desirable that the large towns should become larger; whether it is healthy that the mind of the whole nation should become urban'. Eliot concluded that: 'in asking such questions we are questioning all the assumptions of our society for many generations past'.⁴⁴ Eliot continued to be troubled by the predominantly urban state of society, and declared in a *Criterion* Commentary of 1938 that:

What is fundamentally wrong is the *urbanization of mind* ... which is increasingly prevalent as those who rule, those who speak, those who write, are developed in increasing numbers from an urban background.⁴⁵

In a similar manner to Eliot, Lymington was distressed by the urban conditions in which the preponderance of mankind was living:

A crowded street of London traffic where there is no breeze will be to the countryman almost unbearable from the highly poisonous petrol fumes ... Add to this pollution the facts that the air itself is overcrowded with human beings, and that nearly everyone of them is living in a state of noise, hurry, stress, and crowded journeys to and from work, then one has the very worst conditions in which to create a healthy people.

Lymington deduced therefore 'that morbidity, restlessness, and malaise (physical and spiritual) are our daily lot', unless we were to change our approach to agriculture.⁴⁶ Lymington was confident that agriculture was the solution to the problems of urban society, and that 'the health of the nation will be affected spiritually as well as physically by tending our soil with love and diligence'.⁴⁷ Likewise, Eliot felt that the salvation of civilization lay in agriculture. As he states in the *Criterion* Commentary of 1938:

To have the right frame of mind it is not enough that we should read Wordsworth, tramp the countryside with a book of British Birds and a cake of chocolate in a rucksack, or even own a country estate: it is necessary that the greater part of the population, of all classes (so long as we have classes) should be settled in the country and dependent upon it.⁴⁸

During the 1930s there was a rapid rise in the amount of people who participated in outdoor activities such as rambling, hiking and cycling. By the end of the decade there were

⁴³ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 18 (1938), p. 59.

⁴⁴ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 14 (1934), p. 90. From 1870 there was a fixed movement away from the countryside to the towns among the populace, and this trend continued throughout much of the twentieth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the greater number of the population resided in towns. See,

Rowley, *The English landscape*, p. 218.

⁴⁵ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 18 (1938), p. 60.

⁴⁶ Viscount Lymington, *Famine in England* (1938), p. 83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴⁸ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 18 (1938), p. 60.

approximately half a million hikers in England alone.⁴⁹ Yet the attraction of these outdoor activities was not simply as another form of recreation. Indeed, in the *Clarion Club handbook*, the rambler was assured he was not merely a 'pleasure-seeker', but rather 'an actor and doer in some movement which makes for the improvement and uplifting of humanity'.⁵⁰

However, in order for humankind to be rescued from the malady associated with an urban lifestyle, Eliot was convinced agriculture had to be situated at the forefront of society. Brief rural expeditions would not suffice; for Eliot it was essential that 'the greater part of the population ... should be settled in the country and dependent upon it'.⁵¹ This was underscored by Eliot in a *Criterion* Commentary of October 1931: 'The essential point is that agriculture ought to be saved and revived because agriculture is the foundation for the Good Life in any society; it is in fact the normal life'. He maintained, therefore, that despite the hardships agricultural workers had to endure, it remained the most desirable way of life for most of society: 'No one would pretend that life on the land is a very good one for a man with a family, whose wage is only a few shillings more than the dole; but agricultural life is capable of being the best life for the majority of any people'. Eliot envisaged an agrarian society which would consist of 'a primarily agricultural society in which people have local attachments to their small domains and small communities, and remain, generation after generation, in the same place'.⁵²

This conception of a society based on rural settlement and agriculture received further clarification in *The idea of a Christian society* (1939). Eliot stated here that he wanted to bring into fruition 'the idea of a small and mostly self-contained group attached to the soil ... having its interests centred in a particular place'.⁵³ In leading a life 'attached to the soil' he believed mankind would develop the necessary 'behaviour and habit' to fulfil a religious existence.⁵⁴ As Harris asserts: 'He had done his research and was absolutely serious. England's most prominent poet was advocating a vast, co-ordinated return to the soil'.⁵⁵ What Harris fails to observe, though, is that Eliot's entreaty for a return to the land was not a lone cry, but functioned within a network of writers contributing to the *Criterion*. Eliot was not just using his Commentaries to call for a return to the land, but enabling many others to articulate similar sentiments within the *Criterion's* pages.

In 1930, Christopher Dawson proclaimed with a fearful sense of foreboding that mankind had reached 'The end of an age'. In this *Criterion* article he argued that the age of science was coming to a conclusion, and that society must restore to life its spiritual consciousness: 'The more one studies the origins of humanism, the more one is brought to recognize the importance of an element which is not only spiritual but definitely Christian'. Dawson expounded that 'The reign of the machine' could 'only be conquered by the spiritual power

⁴⁹ Ross McKibbin, *Classes and cultures: England, 1918–1951* (1998), p. 379. For a detailed account of outdoor recreational activity in the 1930s, see: Harvey Taylor, *A claim on the countryside: a history of the British outdoor movement* (1997).

⁵⁰ *Clarion Club handbook* (Sheffield, 1929), p. 5, cited in Frank Trentmann, 'Civilization and its discontents: English neo-romanticism and the transformation of anti-modernism in twentieth-century Western culture',

J. Contemporary Hist. 29 (1994), p. 587.

⁵¹ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 18 (1938), p. 60.

⁵² Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 11 (1931), p. 72.

⁵³ Eliot, *The idea of a Christian society* (1939), p. 31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 30.

⁵⁵ Harris, *Romantic moderns*, p. 184.

which is the creative element in every culture'.⁵⁶ Crucially, though, Dawson argued that it was only through going back to an agricultural basis that society could find the necessary balance of communal spirituality:

The return to an organic type of society and the recovery of a spiritual principle in social life need not imply the coming of an age of obscurantism or of material squalor and decay. On the contrary, it may well give a new lease of life to Western civilization and restore the creative power which the secularization of modern culture has destroyed.⁵⁷

Similarly, three years after Dawson's article 'The end of an age', Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu repeated his call for the restoration of an agricultural basis to society: 'Man needs once more to find his roots – the roots from which spring his specifically human strength and the spirit of locality and family. In these he will find the source of creative risk'.⁵⁸ Elsewhere, Marcel Auroousseau affirmed that both F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson had rightly emphasized the weight of the decline in agricultural communities. In his review of *Culture and environment: the training of critical awareness*, he suggests that they illustrate 'most clearly what this country lost by the change'.⁵⁹

They hold that the destruction of the 'organic community' is (in the West) the most important fact in recent history; and that its replacement by the 'organized modern state' has led to such a deterioration of values that the training of sensibility and taste are necessary if we are to avoid the danger of 'substitute living'.⁶⁰

Auroousseau himself concludes that in destroying our agricultural basis, we had blindly damaged society: 'Not aware of all they were doing, the English undoubtedly destroyed a good life – though less good than we suppose – and created a bad one'.⁶¹

II

At this point, we must observe the valuable function of the 'Books of the Quarter' section as a platform to express opinions on agrarian matters. Indeed, the agricultural topics raised in Eliot's Commentaries were regularly addressed at length in the 'Books of the Quarter' section of his literary journal. Eliot went into considerable detail about the process of choosing books for review: 'The selection of books for review – and even the shortest notices represent a very careful selection – is regularly one of the most difficult of editorial problems'. In addition, Eliot

⁵⁶ Christopher Dawson, 'The end of an age', *The Criterion* 9 (1930), p. 396. Christopher Dawson was an English historian and scholar who wrote a number of books on Christianity and religion. Eliot himself was among those influenced by Dawson and, in the preface to *Notes towards the definition of culture* (1948), he conveyed 'a particular debt' to him.

⁵⁷ Dawson, 'The end of an age', pp. 400–1.

⁵⁸ Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, 'Back to flesh and blood: a political programme', tr. Helen Grant, *The Criterion* 12 (1933), p. 199. Aron and Dandieu

were 'French social theorists' who edited the journal *L'Ordre nouveau*. In his Commentary of Jan. 1934, Eliot recorded the death of Dandieu as 'a loss to the *Criterion* as well as to the intellectual life of Paris', cited in Harding, *Criterion*, p. 185.

⁵⁹ Marcel Auroousseau, Review of *Culture and environment: the training of critical awareness* by F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, in *The Criterion* 13 (1933), p. 137.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

endeavoured to keep clear of 'the perfunctory review' and felt that 'a long notice should be either a review of an authority by an authority, or a review of an important book by someone whose opinions on that book are likely to be interesting or valuable'.⁶² This aspect of Eliot's editorial policy is of considerable consequence and when we survey the 'Books of the Quarter' section of the publication, it becomes evident that the *Criterion* reviewed some extremely influential books on agriculture, and that these were reviewed by several eminent figures.

This is made apparent by a consideration of Rolf Gardiner's review published in October 1932.⁶³ In this number of the *Criterion* Gardiner reviewed *Horn, hoof and corn: the future of British agriculture* by Lymington. Gardiner opened his review with complimentary acclaim: 'This book is something to be thankful for; despite a too easy optimism in certain directions, its emphasis is refreshingly clear and sound'. In fact, throughout his review, Gardiner was in accord with many of Lymington's ideas and reaffirmed that the 'matrix of civilization is the soil'.⁶⁴

At the centre of Lymington's proposals for agricultural policy in *Horn, hoof and corn* lay the recommendation that it was 'Not only for the state to save agriculture, but for agriculture to save the state'.⁶⁵ According to Gardiner, such an approach was both 'statesmanlike and far-sighted'.⁶⁶ Moreover, he was especially pleased to see that Lymington's focus was to enable mankind to move away from the effects of industrialism towards a creative and nurturing relationship with the soil. In this regard, Lymington suggested that it was for the 'mental and physical health of our people' that statesman must endeavour 'to offset the spiritual vanity of industrial progress by repopling the land'.⁶⁷ By returning to the work of husbandman, Lymington proposed that mankind would not only improve their personal well-being, but that the equilibrium of society would be restored: 'There can only be a balance in national life when enough of the population can satisfy their instincts for craft and the oldest craft instinct of all, the use of the land'.⁶⁸

Gardiner echoed Lymington's call to restore the balance of society to a healthy level by bringing British agriculture back to prominence. Indeed, he emphasized that mechanization had dangerously disrupted the balance of civilization: 'Lord Lymington ... show(s) us the perilous condition of a society of which, if it be likened to a pyramid, the base is ever contracting and the apex flattening out until all proportion and balance are lost'.⁶⁹

Similarly, when reviewing R. G. Stapledon's book, *The hill lands of Britain*, Philip Mairet drew attention to the imbalance caused to society by having industry at its core, as opposed to agriculture: 'It is true Mr. Stapledon prays for a better way of life; sees clearly the evils of

⁶² Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 5 (1927), p. 188.

⁶³ Rolf Gardiner was an important member of the organic husbandry movement who was affiliated with the far-right group the English Mystery, but also helped form the Kinship in Husbandry and the Soil Association. For more on Gardiner, see R. J. Moore-Colyer, 'Rolf Gardiner, English patriot and the Council for the Church and Countryside', *AgHR* 49 (2001), pp. 187–209; Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley (eds), *Rolf Gardiner: folk, nature and culture in interwar Britain*

(2011).

⁶⁴ Rolf Gardiner, Review of *Horn, hoof and corn: the future of British agriculture*, in *The Criterion* 12 (1932), p. 134.

⁶⁵ Lymington, *Horn, hoof and corn: the future of British agriculture* (1932), p. 161.

⁶⁶ Gardiner, Review of *Horn, hoof and corn*, p. 134.

⁶⁷ Lymington, *Horn, hoof and corn*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁹ Gardiner, Review of *Horn, hoof and corn*, p. 134.

an economy overbalanced by industry not only nor chiefly in the neglected landscape, but in the creeping psychosis of an over-urbanized humanity'. This phrase, 'creeping psychosis of an over-urbanized humanity', may seem at first to be veering towards hysteria if taken in isolation.⁷⁰ But Mairet's remark, when placed alongside the anxiety expressed by other *Criterion* contributors, can be interpreted as an accurate summation of the threat that many ruralists perceived to lie in urbanization. In concord with Eliot, both Mairet and Stapledon felt that encroaching urbanization was seriously damaging to society as a whole.⁷¹ In *The hill lands of Britain* Stapledon asserts that 'modern man is not in harmony with this man-made environment, and is not happy, and does not enjoy himself'.⁷² In order to gratify mankind Stapledon called for a return to the land:

we must get back to the land and to the simple enjoyment of the rhythm of nature, as opposed to the excruciating rhythm of modern transportation, urbanization and industrialization if we are to maintain and perpetuate our race and our species.⁷³

Patently, the central theme of Lymington's *Horn, hoof and corn*, that both the stability of society and human well-being will suffer when mankind is not kept in contact with the land, resonates not only with Eliot's own agricultural concerns expressed in his *Criterion* Commentaries, but those expressed by a number of other contributors.

Significantly, the vast majority of the agriculturalists who contributed to the *Criterion* were members of the organic husbandry movement, and consequently the journal espoused the organic ideology.⁷⁴ The organic movement grew rapidly in the 1930s and 1940s owing to anxiety over the increasing use of artificial fertilizers and industrial farming methods. Soil erosion and soil fertility were also major concerns for organic farmers and featured prominently in the agricultural texts in these two decades.⁷⁵ One of the key issues for the organicists was the importance of humus to maintaining a healthy and fertile soil. The debate surrounding humus caused such great controversy that it reached the House of Lords in 1943, with members of

⁷⁰ Philip Mairet, Review of *The hill lands of Britain*, in *The Criterion* 17 (1938), p. 341.

⁷¹ Mairet was a significant member of the organic husbandry movement and participated widely in a number of associated groups, including the Chandos Group, the Council for the Church and Countryside, the Sociological Society and the Kinship in Husbandry. Perhaps his most important role, however, was as editor of the *New English Weekly* from 1934 until 1949. For more on Mairet, see Conford, *Organic movement*, pp. 167–75 and 191–94. R. G. Stapledon influenced a number of the organic movement's prominent members such as Viscount Lymington and Rolf Gardiner. Stapledon also featured regularly in the *New English Weekly*.

⁷² R. G. Stapledon, *The hill lands of Britain: development or decay?* (1937), p. 107.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷⁴ Stapledon is the exception here as he also held a dominant position amongst those in favour of orthodox

agricultural methods. Thus, Stapledon found himself in a middle ground between the two main agricultural sides of debate. For accounts of the organic movement see, Conford, *Organic movement*, Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, pp. 103–35 and 137–60; Jeremy Burcharth, *Paradise lost: rural idyll and social change in England since 1800* (2002), pp. 131–40; William Lockeretz (ed.), *Organic farming: an international history* (2007); Matthew Reed, *Rebels for the soil: the rise of the global organic food and farming movement* (2010).

⁷⁵ See, for example, G. C. Watson, *The soil and social reclamation* (1938); A. G. Street, *Already walks to-morrow* (1938); Lord Northbourne, *Look to the land* (1940). Of most significance here, though, is the world survey of soil erosion by G. V. Jacks and R. O. Whyte entitled *The rape of the earth* (1939), published by Faber and Faber in the same year as Eliot's *The idea of a Christian society*.

the organic movement openly questioning the Ministry of Agriculture's stance on the use of artificials.⁷⁶

The disputation surrounding humus and artificial fertilizers also took place within the pages of the *Criterion*. In his review of *The land: now and tomorrow*, Lymington took issue with Stapledon's advocacy of artificials: 'As a practical farmer and improver of land I have been driven increasingly to doubt the wisdom of using artificials save the age old method of chalking land'. He goes on to stress the value of the humus content of the soil:

While I do not doubt the temporary effects of artificials, and the permanent need of some form of lime for the soil, the fact remains that humus is the natural food of the soil, and not artificial manures, which are pills that require a constantly increased use to maintain the same crop, certainly on arable land.

Lymington held extremely strong views against the use of artificials, as he believed that their unlimited application was responsible for 'many diseases of plant, beast and man'. Furthermore, Lymington steadfastly regarded his opinion to be true owing to the fact that it had been founded 'entirely from practical experience'. He even went as far as to make the bold claim that: 'In the long run, the farmer who is eighty years behind the times today may, when our false gods are exposed, be the herald of a saner age'.⁷⁷

Interestingly, many of the key issues in the organic philosophy discussed within the pages of the *Criterion* were later raised by Eliot in his social criticism. Thus, for example, in Mairret's review of *The hill lands of Britain* he delineates how the failure to cultivate British soil sufficiently has resulted in man's exploitation of the land abroad in South America, Africa and the Southern States:

we are not allowed to live as husbandmen, wedded to the land we hold, to cultivate it and make it bear. We are set to rape lands abroad, loot and root out what is in them, and having ruined them to pass on to others.

Moreover, Mairret goes on to blame the economic basis of society: 'Ecological crime at home and abroad are interdependent, produced by the same financial-industrial style of living on the one side and on the other'.⁷⁸

Similarly, in *The idea of a Christian society*, Eliot bemoaned the state of modern agriculture and illustrated how dreadful the situation was with reference to soil erosion: 'I need only mention, as an instance now very much before the public eye, the results of "soil erosion" – the exploitation of the earth, on a vast scale for two generations, for commercial profit: immediate benefits leading to dearth and desert'.⁷⁹ In addition, Eliot deplored society's foundation on 'the principle of private profit' and the drastic effects of 'material progress':

We are being made aware that the organisation of society on the principle of private profit, as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated

⁷⁶ Conford, 'A forum for organic husbandry', p. 207. See also Jorian Jenks, 'The great humus controversy', *NEW*, 25 Feb. 1943, pp. 161–62.

⁷⁷ Lymington, Review of *The land: now and tomorrow*

by R. G. Stapledon, *The Criterion*, 15 (1936), p. 700.

⁷⁸ Mairret, Review of *The hill lands of Britain*, pp. 342, 342–43.

⁷⁹ Eliot, *Idea*, p. 61.

industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly.⁸⁰

This questioning of 'material progress' was also frequently expressed throughout the pages of the *Criterion*. For instance, it was vividly depicted in W. G. Peck's article 'Divine democracy', where Peck acknowledges man's tendency to 'plunge into a greedy exploitation of the earth's resources and engage in an orgy of materialistic pride'.⁸¹

The issue of mechanization was another key feature of the organic movement's concern with modern agricultural methods.⁸² A greater use of machines was deemed perfectly reasonable by those in the orthodox school, as they felt it would enable greater efficacy in production and ultimately increase wages. Viscount Astor and B. Seeböhm Rowntree, in *British agriculture: the principles of future policy*, were of the opinion that 'Science and the machine will gradually conquer the peasant ... greatly to the advantage of the common man'.⁸³ Yet many in favour of organic husbandry felt the movement towards more machines was a recipe for disaster, and that it would 'accelerate rural decline'.⁸⁴

The topical debate concerning machinery emerged at various points in the lifespan of Eliot's literary review. For instance, in January 1935, *Money and morals* by Eric Gill was reviewed in the *Criterion*, which raised this contentious issue of machinery in farming. In a similar manner to A. J. Penty, Eric Gill was fiercely against a society built largely on mechanized industry and longed instead for a community based on 'art, agriculture, craftsmanship and worship'.⁸⁵ Interestingly, Gill's book was reviewed by W. G. Peck, who himself is notable for his support of the Social Credit movement and for his prominence in the Christendom group.⁸⁶ Peck begins his review in praise of Gill's *Money and morals*, which, he asserts, is 'of great interest, rich in gnomic wisdom and fraught with provocative assertions'.⁸⁷

In *Money and morals*, Gill's viewpoint contrasts starkly with the views of Frank McEachran, which were put forward in a book review of October 1935. McEachran, in his review of *The growth and distribution of population* by S. V. Pearson, acknowledged the importance of having rural labourers working on the land, but reiterated his opinion that mankind should be able to maintain an appropriate balance between mechanization and ruralisation:

On the one hand population needs land and needs it for use, while on the other, land itself, under modern methods, has grown infinitely rich. The machine in industry (urban land values) and intensive cultivation (rural land values) have rendered man's labour applied to land immensely productive.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸¹ W. G. Peck, 'Divine democracy', in *The Criterion* 16 (1937), p. 265.

⁸² For more on mechanization see E. H. Whetham, 'The mechanization of British farming 1910-1945', *J. Agricultural Economics* 21 (1970), pp. 317-31; Jonathan Brown, *Agriculture in England: a survey of farming, 1870-1947* (1987), pp. 139-41.

⁸³ Viscount Astor and B. Seeböhm Rowntree, *British agriculture: the principles of future policy* (1939), p. 253.

⁸⁴ Conford, *Organic movement*, p. 30.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 225. Eric Gill was an eminent sculptor and designer. He occasionally wrote for the *NEW* and Philip Mairet spent some time as an agricultural labourer at his community in Ditchling, Sussex.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 233.

⁸⁷ W. G. Peck, Review of *Money and morals* by Eric Gill, in *The Criterion* 15 (1935), p. 324.

⁸⁸ Frank McEachran, Review of *The growth and distribution of population* by S. V. Pearson, in *The Criterion* 15 (1935), p. 123.

However, as Peck makes clear, Gill is of a completely different disposition:

This gentleman clearly hates machines. The machine, he says, and the human person, can reach no ultimate agreement. The machine is not a tool to aid a man's work: it is a device to eliminate a man's work. Therefore, in the end, humanity will conquer the machine by abolishing it.⁸⁹

Gill then, according to Peck, has 'not yet come to terms with the machine, either economically or theologically' and mistakenly refers to it as if it were the product of 'capitalistic black magic'. Ultimately, Peck suggests that Gill is caught between two sides of his nature: Mr Eric Gill the artist and Mr Eric Gill the economist. These two sides of Gill's thinking produce divergent opinions, and thus Peck concludes that 'after an excellent beginning, Mr. Gill plunges into some very muddled thinking' which leads him to 'a wild renunciation' of machines.⁹⁰

In *The idea of a Christian society* Eliot seemed to convey disdain towards industrialism: 'In an industrialized society like that of England, I am surprised that the people retains as much Christianity as it does'. Yet whilst Eliot undoubtedly felt an industrialized society detrimentally affected man's capacity for a truly spiritual existence, he did not feel it necessary to rid ourselves of machines altogether. He made this explicit in his Appendix to *The idea of a Christian society*:

Any machinery, however beautiful to look at and however wonderful a product of brains and skill, can be used for bad purposes as well as good: and this is as true of social machinery as of constructions of steel. I think that, more important than the invention of a new machine, is the creation of a temper of mind in people such that they can learn to use a new machine rightly.⁹¹

Here, Eliot makes it apparent that in his opinion it was not machines in themselves that were inherently bad, but rather our attitude towards them.

In his review of *Money and morals*, Peck appears to sit firmly on the side of Eliot himself with regard to the controversial matter of machines: 'It is not the acceptance of the machine that is the source of our trouble, but rather the fact that we have not yet learned to accept it for valid ends'.⁹² Likewise, in *Famine in England*, Lymington held the view that it was mankind's outlook on machinery that needed to be amended, and that thus far our approach had been misguided: 'So far machinery has been designed to exploit rather than to help the land'.⁹³ With regard to machinery, Eliot felt the most important issue was to learn to use the machine for ends which were not destructive. Ultimately, Eliot felt that if we could learn to adopt a new 'temper of mind' we would not only change our attitude towards nature's resources, but become closer to a spiritual relationship with God. It is in this sense, then, that for Eliot, 'religion ... implies a life in conformity with nature'.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Peck, Review of *Money and morals*, p. 324.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 325.

⁹¹ Eliot, *Idea*, pp. 30, 98.

⁹² Peck, Review of *Money and morals*, p. 325.

⁹³ Lymington, *Famine in England*, p. 100.

⁹⁴ Eliot, *Idea*, pp. 98, 61.

III

This discussion has endeavoured to illustrate that the *Criterion* should be studied not only for the insights it lends to Eliot's literary career and development, but also for the rural and agricultural topics which are present within its pages. Eliot declared in the 'Idea of a literary review' that:

A review should be an organ of documentation. That is to say, the bound volumes of a decade should represent the development of the keenest sensibility and the clearest thought of ten years. Even a single number should attempt to illustrate, within its limits, the time and the tendencies of the time.⁹⁵

Certainly, the disputation surrounding agricultural and rural issues that occurred at regular intervals in the *Criterion* should be seen as 'an organ of documentation' in and of itself. Indeed, Eliot's literary review presents us with an array of thoughts on several of the key organic issues of the 1920s and '30s, including the preservation of the countryside, agricultural decline, mechanization, soil fertility, humus, and the use of artificials.

There were a number of important journals that supported the organic philosophy in the 1930s, including the *New English Weekly*, *Christendom*, *Purpose* and *The Adelphi*. It is my contention that the *Criterion* should be considered another notable journal which helped develop the organic cause. In the final issue of the *Criterion* Eliot used his Commentary as an opportunity to reflect upon his editorship. Here, in an often-quoted section entitled 'Last Words', Eliot claimed that one of the most beneficial outcomes of the review was that it brought him into contact with a variety of individuals:

The *Criterion* has brought me associations, friendships and acquaintanceships of inestimable value; I like also to think that it may have served contributors, by initiating friendships and acquaintances between those who might not otherwise have met, or known each other's work.⁹⁶

Though many critics have quoted from Eliot's 'Last words', none have explicated in sufficient detail the 'inestimable value' of the 'associations, friendships and acquaintanceships' that Eliot formed during his time as editor of the *Criterion*. I have attempted, however, to demonstrate that Eliot's editorship of the *Criterion* brought together an impressive array of agricultural specialists and rural revivalists. In particular, in thoroughly investigating the neglected pages of the *Criterion*, we are presented with an extensive who's who of the organic husbandry movement. Indeed, amongst the many contributors to the *Criterion* were Viscount Lynton, Rolf Gardiner, Henry Williamson, H. J. Massingham, Kenneth Barlow, Montague Fordham, Eric Gill, Antony M. Ludovici, Philip Mairet, John Middleton Murry, William G. Peck, Arthur J. Pentty, R. G. Stapledon and Edmund Blunden.

Most significantly, I have offered evidence that Eliot played an important role in the evolution of the organic husbandry movement. As editor of the *Criterion*, Eliot's regular inclusion of

⁹⁵ Eliot, 'The idea of a literary review', *The Criterion* 4 (1926), p. 2.

⁹⁶ Eliot, 'Last words', *The Criterion* 18 (1939), p. 275.

agricultural and rural issues in the articles, Commentaries and book reviews featured within the literary review is highly significant. Certainly, Margolis is right to suggest that the *Criterion* documents Eliot's interests and attitudes:

the *Criterion* had served an immensely valuable and intensely personal function for its editor. During the period when Eliot's attitudes and interests were developing most rapidly, its regular appearance gave him an opportunity to explore and articulate the implications of that development. Both in his own contributions and in those he solicited from others, the *Criterion* provided a chronicle of Eliot's interests and attitudes.⁹⁷

Hence, the fact that agrarian issues were repeatedly dealt with in the *Criterion* throughout the 1930s serves as a clear sign that Eliot was becoming increasingly preoccupied with the deteriorating state of agriculture and the implications this had for society as a whole. Whether ruminating upon the relationship between the town and country, mankind's standard of life, the position of the Church, or the current state of politics, Eliot's thoughts were frequently drawn to agriculture. Indeed, Eliot asserted in a Commentary of October 1938, that 'to understand thoroughly what is wrong with agriculture is to understand what is wrong with nearly everything else: with the domination of Finance, with our ideals and system of Education, indeed with our whole philosophy of life'.⁹⁸

At frequent intervals in his *Criterion* Commentaries, Eliot was actively encouraging the preservation of rural Britain and pointing out the need to prevent further agricultural and rural decline. Thus, it is impossible to agree with Jeremy Burchardt's claim that 'it is clear that rurality and the countryside were very far from being at the centre of Eliot's preoccupations'.⁹⁹ One of the most vital functions of the *Criterion*, therefore, is that it establishes beyond doubt Eliot's sustained interest in agricultural issues.

Critics have often considered the closure of the *Criterion* as representing an end point in Eliot's professional life. Margolis provides one such example of this critical tendency, stating that: 'In a very real sense, the end of the *Criterion* represented the end of a chapter in Eliot's career'.¹⁰⁰ Yet, from an agricultural perspective, this critical commonplace can be challenged and a new way of thinking posited about the termination of the *Criterion*. That is, rather than interpreting the closure of the *Criterion* in terms of an 'ending', we should see it as a 'beginning'. In this sense, the final years of the *Criterion* represented the beginning of Eliot's preoccupation with agricultural issues, which was to continue throughout his role as a director of Faber and Faber and a member of the editorial board of the *New English Weekly*.

⁹⁷ Margolis, *T. S. Eliot's intellectual development*, p. 205.

⁹⁹ Burchardt, *Paradise lost*, pp. 75–6.

⁹⁸ Eliot, 'A Commentary', *The Criterion* 18 (1938), pp. 59–60.

¹⁰⁰ Margolis, *T. S. Eliot's intellectual development*, p. 205.