

## DISCUSSION ON T S ELIOT'S POETIC THEORY: A REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*The present research work deals with "Discussion on T.S Eliot poetic theory "Eliot's poetic theory are included in "traditional and individual talent", "Impersonality theory of poetry", Objective Correlative", Dissociation of sensibility", This poetic theory discusses briefly Eliot's statement that A poet is not an individual separate from the rest of literary history. No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. The essay clearly described, how Eliot's theory of impersonality says, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality."*

**KEYWORDS:** *TS Eliot, Poetic Theory, Criticism*

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### INTRODUCTION

Poetic is the theory of literary form and literary discourse. It may refer specifically to the theory of poetry. Although some speaker uses the term, so broadly as to denote the concept of the theory itself. Perhaps the greatest contribution both to English poetry and criticism has been made by those poets who have been a critic as well. Dryden, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Arnold, and Eliot belong to this category. Their contribution to the theory of poetry and to the actual achievement in poetic outlook has been really significant. Eliot, the poet -critic, has not only added to the wealth of critical theories, but also made the sizable contribution to the twentieth -century poetry. (1)

T, S Eliot is one of the most important literary critics of the modern age. He was an essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and he is one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century major poets. His name has become synonymous with modernism and the general change that comes about in the realm of imaginative literature and criticism between the years 1900 and 1939. Though his poetry may be described as "romantic" because he was highly influenced by the French symbolist poets of the nineteenth century, he is an ardent champion of classicism, especially in criticism. In his famous preface to *Lancelot Andrewes* (1928) he declared himself "a classicist in literature, an Anglo -Catholic in religion, and a royalist in politics." He is like Dryden because most of his criticism is written in the form of the preface to his work with the purpose of justifying his own poetic creations. He believes that the true critic will strive to build his impression into laws and therefore he follows the example of Aristotle, who for Eliot is the classic instance of such critical power. (2)

## **T, S ELIOT'S MAJOR WORKS**

Eliot's most famous works were published near the beginning of his career. Eliot's works are incredibly complex and become both a study and a commentary on classical literature in and of themselves. As one of the most prominent members of the modernist movement in an answer to the preceding Victorian era of literature, Eliot sought to pay homage to the classics by Dante Alighieri, Shakespeare, and Homer, but Eliot also inserted reference to more contemporary work, such as the English cultural legend of Guy Fawkes, the work of Charles Dickens and even popular song lyrics of his time. Eliot's works were more production of quality over quantity with a handful of examples held up as his most iconic achievements. It's also interesting to track his writing style over time, as an American who becomes a British citizen later in life and converted to Anglicanism under the Church of England. T.S. Eliot's literary production spread over 45 years. He wrote poetry, plays, non-fiction, and essays during this long period. He worked as a journalist and editor. His writing may be divided under four heads i.e. poetry, plays, non-fiction, and essays.

### **Poetry**

Prufrock and other observations (1917), The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, Portrait of a Lady, Gerontion, The Wasteland (1922), The Hollow Men (1925), Journey of the Magi (1927), Ash Wednesday (1930), Coriolan (1931), Four Quartets (1945), Burnt Norton (1936), The Dry Salvages (1949), Little Gidding (1942).

### **Plays**

The Rocks, a pageant play (1934), Murder in the Cathedral (1935), The Family Reunion (1939), The Cocktail Party (1950), The Confidential Clerk (1954), The Elder Statesman (1959).

### **Non-Fiction**

Christianity and Culture (1939), The Second Order Mind (1920), Traditional and Individual Talent (1920), The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (1920), Homage to John Dryden (1924), Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca (1928), For Lancelot Andrews (1928), and Dante (1929).

### **Essays**

The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933), The Idea of the Christian Society (1939), Notes Towards a Definition of Culture (1948), Selected Essays, Third Edition (1951), Poetry and Drama (1951), The Three Voices of Poetry (1954), The Frontiers of Criticism (1956), On Poetry and Poets (1957). (1)

### **A Conscious Poet**

"First of all, his criticism tells that he is a conscious poet, who has speculated about the nature and function of poetry, particularly in our time. His poetry is the product of the one who believes that poetry is neither play nor the random experiment, nor something that is achieved without the fullest exertion of his powers. Nor is it, despite his vehement qualifications, something unrelated to experiment, both his own and that of the race. The ease with which his theory of tradition for the poet passes into a theory of culture suggests the serious function that he assigns, however diffidently, to the use of poetry. This is to be remarked because he was once greeted as the writer of light society verse, but that view may not be taken as a sign of the unconventional aspect of this poetry. Eliot is a poet of moral nature, or the history of man, not of physical nature or beauty or merely subjective life. The contemplation of the horrid or sordid or disgusting, by an artist, is the necessary and negative aspect of the impulse towards the pursuit of beauty.

For him, this scale is magnified by time, and he views the contemporary scene with a full consciousness of the past, though he finds their difference more in consciousness than in time. Indeed an acute awareness of the relations of present and past is central to his poetic sensitivity as well as his conception of human wisdom. This awareness, it needs hardly be said, does not take from as the pathos of the flight of time, other relations of past and present from the central problem of his poetry.(4)

Eliot's essay "tradition and individual talent" was first published in 1919 at the time, literary supplement as a critical article. The essay is considered the unofficial manifesto of T.S Eliot's critical creed, for it contains all those principles which are the basis of his subsequent criticism. The essay is divided into three parts, Eliot's concept of tradition in the first part, and in the second part is develops his theory of the impersonality, the third part being a summing up.

### **CONCEPT OF TRADITION**

The word "tradition" is a word that is disagreeable to the English who praise a poet for those aspects of his work which are individual and original. According to Eliot, this undue stress on individuality shows that the English have an uncritical mind. The best and the most individual part of a poet's work is that which shows the maximum influence of the writer of the past. To quote his own word; "Not only the best, but the most individual part of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. Tradition does not mean a blind adherence to or slavish imitation of the ways of the previous generation. For Eliot tradition is a matter of much wider significance. Tradition in the true sense of the term cannot be inherited; it can only be obtained by hard labor. This labor is the labor of knowing the past writers. It is the critical labor of sifting the good from the bad, and of knowing what is good and useful. Tradition can be obtained only by those who have the historical sense. (2)

### **HISTORICAL SENSE**

The historical sense involves a perception, "not only of the pastness of the past but also of its presence." The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer down to his own day, including the literature of his own country, forms one continuous literary tradition. He realizes that the past exists in the present and that the past and the present form one simultaneous order. This historical sense is the sense of the timeless and the temporal, as well as of the timeless and the temporal together. It is the historic sense which makes a writer traditional. A writer in the sense of tradition is fully conscious of his own generation, of his place in the present, but he is also acutely conscious of his relationship with the writer of the past.

Eliot further points out that no writer has his value and significance in isolation. The work of a poet in the present is to be compared and contrasted with the work of the past and judged by the standards of the past. Such comparison and contrast are essential for estimating the real worth and significance of a new writer and his work. Eliot's conception of tradition is a dynamic one. According to his view, tradition is not anything fixed and static; it is constantly changing, growing and becoming different from what it is. A writer in the present must seek guidance from the past; he must conform to the literary tradition. But just as the past direct and guides the present, so the present alters and modifies the past. The relationship between the past and the present is not one-sided; it is a reciprocal relationship. The past directs the present and is itself modified and altered by the present.

## IMPERSONALITY OF POETRY

The central point of T.S. Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry is that the poet, the man, and the poet, the artist are two different entities'. The poet has no personality of his own. He submerges his own personality, his own feeling, and experience into the personality and feelings of the subject of his poetry.

The experience or impressions which are obviously autobiographical may be of great interest to the writer himself, but not to his reader. The more perfect the poet, the more completely separate in him will be the man who experiences and creates.

The mind of the poet is like the shred of platinum without which a certain chemical reaction cannot take place, but the platinum remains unaffected. In the same way, the mind of the poet remains unaffected during his poetic composition. So Eliot says, "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality".

T.S. Eliot states, "The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done."

Impression and experience which are important for the man may take no place in his poetry, and those which are important in his poetry may play a very negligible role in his life and personality. The poet must suppress his personal feelings. "The progress of the artist is a continual self- sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality".(9)

## POETIC EMOTION

There is always a difference between the artistic emotion and the personal emotion of the poet. His personal emotion may be simple or crude, but the emotion of his poetry is complex and refined. He may express ordinary emotions, but he must impart to them a new significance and a new meaning. Even emotions which he has never personally experienced can serve the purpose of poetry.

Eliot's compares the poet's mind to a receptacle in which are stored feelings, emotion in an unorganized and chaotic form till, "all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together." Just as a chemical reaction takes place under pressure, so also intensity is needed for the fusion of emotions. The more intense the poetic process, the greater the poem. The poet is merely a medium in which impression and experience combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. In the poetic process, there is an only concentration of a number of experiences, and a new thing resulting from this concentration. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may find no place in his poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may have no significance for the man. Eliot thus rejects romantic subjectivism and word worth's theory of poetry as emotions recollected in tranquility. He concludes: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. "Eliot does not deny personality or emotion to the poet only he must depersonalize his emotion for; the emotion of art is impersonal". This can be done by the use of a set of conceptual symbols or correlative which endeavor to express the emotion of the poet.

## OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE

Eliot's doctrine of poetic impersonality finds its most classic formulation in the concept of the 'Objective Correlative' which he first used in his essay on "Hamlet and his problem" in his first book of criticism "The sacred wood".

According to Eliot, the poet cannot communicate his emotions directly to the readers; he must find some object or medium suggestive of it to evoke the same emotion in his readers. This 'Objective Correlative' is "a set of object, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" so that "when the external facts are given the emotion is at once evoked." It is through the objective correlative that the transaction between author and reader necessarily takes place. The reader responds to the object or medium and through that, to the work of art.

For example, in Macbeth, the dramatist has to convey the mental agony of Lady Macbeth and he does so in "the sleepwalking scene", not through direct description, but through an unconscious repetition of her past actions. Her mental agony has been made objectivity in the burning taper so that it can as well be seen by the eyes as felt by the heart. The external situation is adequate to convey the emotions, the agony of Lady Macbeth. Instead of communicating the emotions directly to the reader, the dramatist has embodied them in a situation or a chain of events, which suitably communicate the emotion to the reader.

Wimsatt and Brooks write that "the phrase 'Objective Correlative' has gained a currency probably far beyond anything that the author could have expected or intended." It is generally agreed that the term 'Objective Correlative' was probably borrowed from Washington Allston's lecturer on art. Cleanth Brooks interpret 'Objective Correlative' as "Organic metaphor", Allan Austin as 'the poetic content to be conveyed by the verbal expression'. Eliot's concept of the objective correlative is based on the notion that it is not the business of the poet to present his emotions directly but rather to present them indirectly through the 'Objective Correlative' which become the formula for the poet's original emotions. It is a kind of summation of what Eliot, along with Hume and the pound, derived from the theory and practice of the French symbolist and the writing of the French critic Remy de Gourmont.(10)

## **DISSOCIATION OF SENSIBILITY**

Eliot's idea of "Dissociation of sensibility" also occupies an important place in his theory of poetry. This phrase occurs in his critical essay *The Metaphysical poets*. He uses this phrase to describe the characteristic fault of the later seventeenth-century poetry. The opposite of this phrase which Eliot uses is "Unification of sensibility", which, according to Eliot, means "a direct sensuous apprehension of thought or a recreation of thought into feelings." Eliot's theory of "Dissociation of sensibility" may be said to be an attempt to find some kind of historical explanation to the dissolution of the traditions of unified sensibility which found its perfection in the writing of Dante and Shakespeare. By "Sensibility" Eliot does not merely mean feeling or the capacity to receive sense impressions. The great Elizabethans and Jacobson had developed a unified sensibility. So they were widely read, and their thinking and learning modified their mode of feeling. Such a remarkable fusion of thought and feeling is to be found in the poetry of Donne as well as in much modern poetry, but it is lacking in the poetry of Tennyson. The poets of the eighteenth century were intellectuals, they thought but did not feel the romantics of the nineteenth century felt but did not think. Tennyson and Browning could merely reflect or ruminate but could not express their experiences poetically. The metaphysical poets like the Elizabethans have a unified sensibility. (4)

## **DISCUSSIONS**

T.S Eliot's essay "Traditional and the individual talent," he proposes that he feels are the proper method's for a new artist to assimilate themselves into the literary tradition that has come before them. T.S Eliot is mainly concerned with what he describes as the tradition of poetry. In Eliot's opinion, a poet is not an individual separate from the rest of literary

history. A poet cannot in a sense make original art without being conscious of the entire past of literature, and how his art relates to the past. For Eliot, the past is still a dynamic entity that shapes the way poetry should be written and interpreted.

The essay, "Tradition and the individual talent" begins with Eliot alluding to the way "tradition" is commonly regarded in English literature as being somewhat absent. Eliot feels that English literature lacks a certain formalized aspect that is prevalent in French literature. Eliot says that we should not value poets who are different from their immediate predecessors. In Eliot's opinion, many of the best traits found in a poet are things that they have learned from the poetic ancestors, implicit things that are not easily distinguishable in poetic style.

Eliot emphasizes the importance of a historical view of tradition and expresses that this can only be obtained through rigorous work. It appears that Eliot would prefer that poets have a firm understanding every canonical piece of literature ever written prior to attempting to make poetry their own. A poet should additionally be aware of his place in the timeline of poetry because this will give him allow him to understand that literature is both timeless and temporal. Eliot then begins his theory on the idea of an individual talent as being seemingly impossible. All poets are interconnected, according to Eliot, and influence the past of poetry just as the past influence them. "No poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poet and artist" In this way, Eliot is almost denouncing the idea of the individual's importance in poetry. Just as new art must be compared to the art produced previous to it, art from the past is simultaneously affected by new art.

Eliot then expands upon his theory of how new art and past work of art relate to each other in this way. Art should not be judged by comparing it to the art that precedes it, and "certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics". Rather the test is if the new work fits into the history of art, and this is its test of value. It seems that a work of art must conform to certain regulations and convention in order to be valued as a true work of art. It appears that Eliot is calling for an abandonment of spontaneous originality; you can't be original without having a full concept of what has been done before you.

Influence is really just viewed as a form of emulating the authors that have come before you. Since one can only hope to emulate what has existed before them, Eliot feels that the best poet is one who leaves himself out of the poem. The poet's individual personality is not valued in the creation of a work of art; rather he is valued for, "being more finely perfected" in his medium. Eliot then uses an analogy to describe the importance of an artist leaving no personal trace in his work.

Poetry is likened to a craft in the scientific analogy proposed by Eliot. The science experiment described is the combination of two inert gasses that created acid when in the presence of platinum, yet the platinum is left unaltered. The poet's mind is the piece of platinum, it is used to trigger a reaction; combined things in a new way with the end result is an entirely new creation. In just the same way that the platinum is not affected, the poet's mind should not interpret details or information, and the purest art is one that has no trace of the artist. Similarly, Eliot does not think emotion is necessary for the creation of great poetry. Emotion would interject into poetry a remnant of the individual; it is possible to write about emotions without actually having said emotions. Dramatic scenes are quite possible in poetry, even if the emotion being expressed by the artist, have not been felt by the artist.(11)

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus T.S. Eliot has developed his own theory of poetry. He has to save English poetry from its silly nostalgic ways and has brought back its intellectual dignity. His poetry presents his efforts to harmonize the personal and impersonal poetry. In Eliot opinion, a poet is not an individual separate from the rest of literary history, No poet, no artist, of any art has his complete meaning alone. On the other hand, he insists on a highly developed sense of facts, an objective standard and a sense of tradition. Eliot concludes, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from personality." It must be noted that Eliot does not reject emotion in poetry. He simply emphasizes the fact that the artist must depersonalize the emotion. The impersonality can be achieved when the poet surrenders himself completely to the sense of tradition. Thus, Eliot advocates impersonality in poetry. He clearly rejected the Romantic subjectivity.

A.G. George comments, "Eliot's theory of the impersonality of poetry is the greatest theory on the nature of the poetic process afterwords worth's romantic conception of poetry." Eliot changed the entire course of critical theory and practice and his ideas have great significance. By going through all the work done by T.S. Eliot and discussing them seriously one can easily study other literature and find out the basic relationships between other literary works and those of Eliot's work. This will give a big impact on literary analysis and would definitely help other future researchers who wish to study literature, especially Eliot's way.

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