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Q. Eliot as a critic. (1888-1965)

Eliot is the most important critic of twentieth century. He occupies a unique position among the modern critics of literature. As a literary critic he speaks with authority and ~~and~~ firm faith. He is regarded as the only remarkable critic after Arnold. He is one of the greatest literary critics in English literature from the point of view of <sup>both</sup> the bulk of ~~or~~ quality of critical writings. He has written about five hundred essays which have brought revolutionary change in the history of English literary criticism. These essays published as reviews and articles from time to time which has a far-reaching influence on the course of English literary criticism. He has corrected and educated the taste of his readers. As a modern critic, he is a classicist whose model critic is Aristotle. In the field of literary criticism his intelligence and sharpness finds its finest expression. His position in it is comparable to the Ben Jonson, Dryden, Pope, Dr. Johnson, and Coleridge. As a critic, he represents the afore-said direction of modern criticism. He stated the reaction against subjectivism and individualistic tradition. According to him, the qualification of a critic is, he

must possess sensitiveness and should have the sense of history and of the facts. And a critic also needs generalizing power.

Eliot's "impersonal" conception of art is essentially anti-romantic. His particular objection is to the Romantic conception, because at that time he was thirsty to find an ultimate value in human personality. And the Romantic's present, in exaggerated proportion the need to express the personal and the emotional in the art. Following Hume's doctrine of the original sin and man's imperfection, he opposed the romantic concept by advancing his theory of the impersonality in art. In "Tradition and Individual Talent" he asserts that honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon poetry. In the same essay, elaborating his theory of impersonality in art, he observes: "the poet has not a personality to express but a particular medium which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. According to him, 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. He emphasises the same theory of impersonality. This impersonality can be attained only when the poet surrenders himself totally to the creative work. The poet can't reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work.

Closely associated with Eliot's theory of "impersonality" is his theory of objective correlative. This theory is formulated in his "Hamlet and His Problems". A poet can't transfer his emotions and ideas directly to his readers. He objectifies them in a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events. It acts as a mediator between the poet and the readers. And the critics are mainly concerned with this mediator. According to him, the only way of expressing emotions in the form of art is objective correlative. In his essay on Metaphysical poets, he attempts to judge them by this theory and concludes that they were at best engaged for the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feelings. Here, the poem, in which this theory is expressed, does not emphasise the total break between the poet and the work. But his

theory of objective co-relative and the concept of "Impersonality" of art form the most significant aspect of his classicism.

He called himself a classicist in literature. His classicism is revealed by the great importance he attaches to form in literature; both as a critic and a creative artist. He emphasised on the significance of "form". His emphasis is clearly seen when he remarks in the preface to "The Sacred Wood" "In criticizing poetry we are right if we begin with poetry as excellent words for excellent arrangement and excellent metres". He is influenced by Ben Jonson, Dryden and the new classicists, by the Hutme's theories and Boileau. Hutme attributed the romantic neglect of the form, in the perfectibility of man, while the classical were aware of human limitations and devoted careful care to form. In his "Essays on Style and Order", his concern with the technical requirements of poetry is shown in judging, on the basis of the merits of their styles. Poets and writers as different as Bradley and Rabbitt. Eliot's comparison of Arnold and Bradley. Arnold suffers for his vagueness in style.

While Bradley gets higher place in the "Selected Essays" he assigns to Ben Johnson the literary critic. He has amply proved the truth of his own remark that the present illuminates the past and the past is illuminated by it.

As a critic, Eliot makes constructive contribution to criticism. He displays a remarkable capacity for subtle analysis. His best critical works deal with essentials, not with accidentals. His expression on avoiding all generalizations and abstractions and to look solely at the object. His effort to substitute the impressionistic methods for criticism by a strict critical method. All these made valuable contributions to literary criticism. His consistency of Eliot's critical method and his balanced generalizations about the literary process, are also remarkable. His equipment as a critic is identical with his equipment as a poet. As Matthessen has observed in "The Achievement of T. S. Eliot." "His criticism steadily illuminates the vision of his verse, while his verse illustrates many aspects of his critical theory. The ground work of his criticism is provided ~~only~~ by his thorough training in philosophy. His readers heard at once in his criticism, the voice of a man who

thought his way through his problem and was gaining from the mature results of that thinking.

Having all these qualities as a critic, Eliot has also some limitations, and some of them are quite glaring. He assumes a nagging judge attitude and instead of sympathetic understanding his pronounced savour of a verdict. His condemnation of Milton and the romantics, can hardly be called sound criticism. When he called Arnold an undergraduate and utters a joke on the inspectors of schools becoming a professor of poetry, his remarks seem to drift from real criticism. Another defect is that he does not apply the same standards of criticism to all the undertakes to evaluate. In his appreciation to Dante, he observes that the ideas and philosophy of a poet are not essential for or for the appreciation of his poetry. But judging Shelley, he condemns him for what he calls his "repellent ideas". Similarly, an antipathy towards Milton. His criticism is often marred by the personal and religious prejudices. Critics have also found fault with his style and too full of doubts reservation and qualification.

Thus, we come to the point that such faults do not detract from Eliot's greatness as a critic. His criticism is more a declaration of taste than a statement of argument, a verdict rather than an analysis. His contribution to criticism can never be overlooked and a critic can't neglect him. His criticism is a corrective of the eccentricity and waywardness.

The End

By Courtesy of

Dr. Firoz Alam  
Ph. D. IN ENGLISH  
Dept. of English  
Magadh Mahavidyalaya  
Patna

~~9835046447~~  
~~8809069835~~