

Tradition and the Individual Talent Impersonality in Art

T. S. Eliot is a modern poet and critic at the same time. His criticism and poetry are inseparable. His criticism is thus, the by-product of his poetry workshop. His essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," is perhaps the most famous of all essays. In this essay, he gives us his views about the relation between tradition and writing of poetry by individual poets in different periods. He establishes a close connection between tradition and writing of successful poetry.

Eliot's views on impersonality in art are as follows: —

1. The process of Depersonalization —

Eliot explains this process in the term of chemical analogy. The poet's mind, according to Eliot, is like a catalyst. It is like the shred of platinum in the presence of which oxygen and sulphur dioxide combine to form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and platinum itself is unaffected. Thus, the more perfect the poet, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates. "The progress of a artist, Eliot says, is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extension of personality."

2. The business of the poet not to seek new emotions

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is anyway remarkable or interesting. The emotions in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or universal emotions in life.

In fact, one error of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search of novelty in the wrong place it discovers the presence.

3. The errors which make a poet personal:—

Here, Eliot rejects Wordsworth's view that poetry is the expression of emotion recollected in tranquillity. The experiences in poetry are not recollected, the writing of poetry there is good deal which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he should be conscious, or conscious where he should be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him personal.

4. A surrender of the poet to task undertaken:—

According to Eliot the greatest art is impersonal. And the poet cannot attain this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done.

5. The need for a poet's loyalty to his inheritance:—

The poet must develop a consciousness of the past; he must realize that the mind of Europe or the mind of his own country is much more important than his own private mind. It means that the poet should transcend his own personality and deal with life in an impersonal manner never forgetting the accumulate wisdom of the past and never at any stage becoming indifferent to the past poets, his ancestors.

6. The great poems which are also deeply personal:—

Giving the definition of romantic poetry, Eliot takes only one sided view of the matter. In his rejection of romantic art; his classicism goes to the farthest limit. The third stanza in Keats' 'Ode to A Nigtingale' which gains in its intensity and pathos if we know its

personal background, although extremely objective as it stands. This is an excellent example of deeply personal emotion going beyond self and acquiring a universal quality.

7. The proper approach to the idea of impersonality: —

According to Eliot, writing poetry meant a surrender of one's daily self in order to move to a deeper level. The desperate elements in the receptacle of the poet's mind will not be fused into a new unity without the intervention of some mysterious force not subject to consciousness or will. And, Eliot regarded poetic creation as inherently painful a sacrifice of the man to the work, a kind of death. It is, in this context, that Eliot's theory of personality should be understood.

8. The poet move a voice of the collective mind than of his own mind: —

According to Eliot, it is the operation in each poet's individuality of the collective mind that orientates correctly the desires of his personality puts them in a proper perspective, and tells the poet, how best they may be satisfied. As he progresses the poet will realize that his personal desires may be satisfied not by disordered experiment based on the expression of those things which emphasize his division from others, but by experiment based on methods recorded in tradition, adapted to his needs and the needs of his time. He will learn that the important thing is not any virtue that may be with him. It is the wisdom that he

“What has all ready been discovered, and from his attempts “to recover what has

been lost again and again:"

Thus, it seems that Eliot was
conscious of the fact. His theory of impersonality
found incomplete in this essay.