T. S. Eliot's Concept of Impersonality in the Literary Work

المدرس
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Introduction:

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) is a key figure in the English modernist poetic tradition. His innovative style and influential critical essays helped to establish new attitudes to literature. They drew attention to tradition, the importance of continuity, and the role of objectivity. In rejecting the poetic values of the previous century, Eliot, along with Yeats and Pound, was to set new poetic standards (Thorne, 2006, p. 278).

Eliot's contribution to the English poetic tradition is significant. Along with Pound and other experimental writers, he challenged the literary conventions of the nineteenth century, changing the subject matter and the language of poetry. Eliot was no longer a man speaking to men as Wordsworth was, but a manipulator and creator of words and patterns. He was prominent in the development of artistic symbols as representations of the sensibility of the time, and consciously moved away from the sentimentality of much Victorian verse, replacing emotional outpourings with detachment (Thorne, 2006, p. 294).

Tennyson and Browning only ruminated. It is said that ratiocination gave way to reflection and rumination. For Eliot, the high watermark of English poetry was the seventeenth century after which there was a steady decline which, he felt, had to be arrested by Eliot himself. The metaphysical poets possessed the power to amalgamate disparate experiences, and the lapse of this power to amalgamate results in the separation of
thought and feeling. Eliot calls this the "dissociation of sensibility". The fusion of the emotion with the intellect is best poetry for him. Poets until the seventeenth century thought and felt, and knew that these two exist together; but in the seventeenth century, a split occurred with the onset of scientific rationalism. Poets only thought, and after the romantic revolution, they only felt. Again in the nineteenth century, there was a return only to thinking which he calls "rumination". Eliot pleads for a reintegration of these two—thought and feeling. (Nagarjan, 1987, p. 109-110).

In his well-known preface to "For Lancelot Andrews" (1928), Eliot openly described himself as classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion. In other words, he always believed in the need of an outside authority as norm or standard to curb the inner voice within man, or what he calls, "doing as one likes" (Nagarjan, 1987, p. 105).

Eliot, then, objects to highly emotional outpourings and personal confidences because they tend to focus our attention on the poet rather than the poetry. He therefore opposed Romanticism, stood against its implicit individual freedom, which he believed was unlikely to make criticism scientific or rule based (Bertens, 2001, p. 12).

**Concept of Impersonality:**

Objective (impersonal) and subjective (personal) were imported into English criticism from the post-Kantian German critics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A subjective (personal) work is one in which the author incorporates personal experiences, or projects into the narrative his or her personal disposition, judgment, values, and feelings. An objective (impersonal) work is one in which the author presents the invented situation or the fictional characters and their thoughts, feelings, and actions and undertakes to remain detached and noncommittal. Thus a subjective lyric is one in which we are invited to associate the "I", or lyric speaker, with the poet (e.g. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey") (Abrams, 2005, pp.204-5).
Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! And again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-spring
With a soft inland murmur.-Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard tufts


The one poem that stands out from the rest and indicates the ways in which Wordsworth was to move beyond his bold statement of poetic principles is "Tintern Abbey". It presents Wordsworth as a nature poet who finds a common bond between the natural world and the inner self. It stands apart from the rest of the ballads and lyrics in the collection because of its elevated language, complex syntax and its link to Wordsworth's personal life (Thorne, 2006, p. 196).

In an objective lyric the speaker is obviously an invented character or else is simply a lyric voice without specific characteristics (T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock") (Abrams, 2005, pp.204-5).

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spreadout against the sky
Like apatient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted street,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question…
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.


In 'Prufrock', the ironic tone of the title immediately establishes the context for failure. The love song is never sung and Prufrock fails to live up to the grandeur of his title. The imagery is used as a means of representing the triviality of Prufrock's life and his lack of self-esteem- both are symbolic not just of Prufrock and his society, however, but of twentieth century society and its inhabitants. Through these techniques and through the allusions that indirectly comment on the present by reference to the past, Eliot is able to present his personal views without directly engaging in a personal expression of them (Thorne, 2006, p. 288).

T.S. Eliot remarks about poetry being "not the expression of a personality, but an escape from personality." He propounds that a theory of poetry which views poetic process not as an externalization of a personal feelings, but as a complete surrender of personality (Jefferson and Robey, 1982, p. 32). Eliot declares that "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality". By appealing to "self-sacrifice ", Eliot is being religious (Bennett and Royle, 2004, p. 161).

He sought to make poetry more subtle, more suggestive, and at the same time more precise. He had learned from the Imagists the necessity of clear and precise images, and he learned, too, from the philosopher-poet T. E. Hulme and from his early supporter and adviser Ezra Pound to fear romantic softness and
to regard the poetic medium rather than the poet's personality as the important factor (Abrams, 1987, p. 2501).

**The Artistic Process:**

In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot states the new critical position on the relationship between the author and his or her work. The basis of Eliot argument is on analogy. He says that, the certain chemical reactions occur in the presence of a catalyst, an element that causes, but is not affected by, the reaction (Bressler, 1994, p. 59). The artistic process, according to Eliot, is a process of depersonalization. In order to make the relationship between the process of depersonalization and tradition clearer, Eliot gives us the example of a chemical reaction, a catalyst (Nagarajan, 2006, p. 107).

The creation of art is like the action which takes place when a bit of finely affiliated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide. The latter form sulphurous acid, in which there is no trace of platinum; nor is the platinum affected. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum (Calder, 1987, p. 90). The mind of the poet is this platinum. The emotions and feelings are oxygen and sulphur dioxide. The more perfect he is as a poet, the less involved is his own personality. The artist's mind keeps forming new compounds, but he remains separate in the whole process of creation. The man that suffers is different from the mind that creates (Nagarajan, 2006, p. 107).

"The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum," (Abrams, 1987, p. 2539).

During the creative process, the poet's mind, serving as a catalyst, brings the together the experiences of the author's personality into an external object and a new creation; the poem.
It is not the personality traits of the author that coalesce to form the poem, but the experiences of the author's personality. Eliot asserts that the created entity, the poem, is about the experiences of the author that are similar to all of our experiences. But structuring these experiences, the poem allows us to examine them objectively (Bresseler, 1994, p. 61).

Eliot avoids self-pity and sentimentality through impersonality. He believed that the poet should not reveal his personality in his writing. For him, the process should be one of continual self-sacrifice, continual extinction of the personality (Thorne, 2006, p. 282).

"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." (Abrams, 1987, p. 2539).

His approach was a reaction against the nineteenth-century Romantic Movement which emphasized the importance of the individual and emotion. For Eliot, the poet must aim to appeal to the mind rather than to the emotions since the intellectual rather than the reflective poet produced the best verse (Thorne, 2006, p. 282).

Eliot dismisses the romantic expressive theory of self-expression. The experiences, which are important to the poet as man, do not have much of a place in his poetry, and those that are quite important in his poetry have practically nothing to do with the poet's personality. That is why he is dismissive of Wordsworth's theory of "emotions recollected in tranquility" (e.g. Wordsworth's "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known") (Nagarajan, 2006, p. 107).

Strange fits of passion have I known;
And I will dare to tell,
But in the lover's ear alone,
What once to me befell.
When she I loved looked every day
Fresh as a rose in June,
I to her cottage bent my way,
Beneath an evening moon.


 Tradition and Objective Correlative:

Eliot's concepts of tradition and the objective correlative are important aspects of his impersonal theory of poetry, which in itself is an important aspect of his classicism. The theme of tradition is central both to his criticism and to his creative work. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which has since been widely anthologized, stand as an emblematic critical work of high modernism. Eliot saw the literary tradition as an evolving and transforming canon. He believed that the past, in the form of a literary tradition, informed and enlivened the present and that individual writers of talent became a part of and transformed that tradition if they could create "the new work of art" (Castle, 2007, p. 23).

In the sphere of literature, according to Eliot, the impersonal order is the tradition. A literary work can be valid only by existing in the tradition. Tradition permits the writer to be authoritarian and self-obnecagly humble (Eagleton, 1983, p. 34). "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is about the relationship of the artist and the critic to Tradition. New literary work is written out of an engagement with the old. The artist contributes his work to the ideal order of literary works; the literary critic assesses its place in that order. This theory places tradition, artist and the critic, in equilibrium. It enlarges the notion of tradition (Julius, 1995, pp. 150-1). The term 'Tradition' is the key to the essay, does not mean 'a blind or timid adherence; but:

"it involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensible to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense
involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but 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, and within it, the whole of the literature of his own country. Has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

Talking of 'historical sense', Eliot says, this historical sense, which is the sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. He uses 'the historical sense' not in the usual sense. He wants the critic to see literature, not as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time; to see the best work of twenty five hundred years ago with the same eyes. It is the 'historical sense' which makes a writer traditional. This sense denies chronology and conceives the past as timeless and existing here and now. Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry (Nagarajan, 2006, p. 106).

The new critics borrow Eliot's belief that the reader of poetry must be instructed in literary technique. Eliot maintains that a good reader perceives the poem structurally, resulting in good criticism. Such a reader must be trained in reading good poetry (especially the poetry of the Elizabethans, John Donne, and other metaphysical poets) and be well acquainted with established poetic tradition. A poor reader, on the other hand, simply expresses his or her personal emotions and reactions to a text. A poor reader and poor criticism, for example, may argue that a poem can mean anything its reader or its author wishes it to mean. On the other hand, a good reader and good criticism will assert that only through a detail structured analysis of a poem can the correct interpretation arise (Bressler, 1994, p. 57-8).

Eliot's concept of "objective correlative" is closely associated with his idea of the impersonality of poetry. The phrase occurs in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems" in the sacred wood, and it has been used by him to explain how emotion can be best expressed in poetry. "Objective Correlative" is defined in Eliot essay "Hamlet and His Problems"(1919) has this meaning:
"The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (Matthiessen, 1947, p. 58).

The poet seeks to say exactly what he means, to find "the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling." Eliot's purpose in defining the Objective Correlative was to indicate what he considered to be a failing in Shakespeare's play:

"Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him" (Unger, 1966, p. 36).

The term 'Objective Correlative' has become a staple in poetic jargon as well. When the external facts are thus presented in the poem, they somehow coalesce (correlate), immediately evoking an emotion. The new critics readily adopted advanced this indirect or impersonal theory of the creation of emotions in poetry (Bessler, 1994, p. 58).

The view of the "Objective Correlative" places the emphasis squarely on the work as an artifact. The poet cannot transmit his emotions directly to the reader, and so takes recourse to some medium. This may be a situation, a set of objects or a chain of ideas. What the poet has to convey gets objectified through this medium, and hence, interaction between the poet and the reader takes place. The reader responds to the medium, and through that, to the work of art (Nagarajan, 2006, p. 112). Eliot uses the dramatic monologue to characterize individuals in his poems, like Prufrock and Geronetion. The form has a dual function; it allows him to give a direct insight into a character, but simultaneously act as a mask. He can thus externalize an aspect of himself and represent a particular way of looking at experience without becoming subjective (Thorne, 2006, p. 293).
Conclusion

Eliot's concept of impersonality is important in the literary process to reveal that the mind of the writer is like a receptacle in which are stored a number of varied feelings, emotions and experiences. Poetic process is the process of fusing these disparate experiences and emotions into new wholes. The emotional and the intellectual, the creative and the critical faculties must work in harmony to produce really great work of art.

Abstract

The present paper is concerned with Eliot's concept of impersonality of art. Eliot says that in art, the emotion of the artist is not essentially present. Art is not the expression of personality but an escape of personality. The artist must acquire greater objectivity like a scientist. The important thing is his sense of tradition. Thus the artist's personality is merely a medium, having the same significance as a catalytic agent, or receptacle in which chemical reactions take place. Thus we see that the value of Eliot's view is great. He doesn't mean that the personal life is to be depersonalized, but that it should be given a universal force.
Bibliography


Imperative Notes for Researchers

1. The journal is quarterly and is issued every (3) months.
2. The paper is sent to two academic experts to be evaluated.
3. The set period to notify the researcher of the evaluation result is (60) days as of the date of the reception of the paper by the journal.
4. The researcher should write his full name, the title of his paper, and the abstracts in Arabic and English mentioning also his full address (work place, mobile, and e-mail).
5. The order of the paper as it figures in the journal does not follow a particular rule.