

Q. Impersonality of Poetry

Ans: According to Eliot, the artist must continually surrender himself to something which is more valuable than himself, i.e. the literary tradition. He must allow his poetic sensibility to be shaped and modified by the past. He must continue to acquire the sense of tradition throughout his career. In the beginning, his self, his individuality, may assert itself, but as his powers mature there must be greater and greater extinction of personality. He must acquire greater and greater objectivity. A good poem, he must realize, is a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. Hence a poet must be absorbed in acquiring a sense of tradition and expressing it in his poetry. As Eliot says, "the progress of the artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality". In other words, the poet's emotions and passions must be depersonalized; he must be as impersonal and objective as a scientist.

Eliot compares the mind of the poet to a catalyst and the process of poetic creation to the process of a chemical reaction. When a piece of platinum is introduced into a vapour chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide, the two combine to form sulphuric acid, but the platinum remains unchanged. The poet's mind is this platinum, the catalytic agent. The emotions and feelings are sulphur and oxygen. The poet's mind is necessary for new combinations of emotions and experiences to take place, but it itself does not undergo any change during the process of poetic combination. The personality of the poet does not find expression in his poetry. The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him "will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates." There should be an extinction of his personality. "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." This impersonality can be achieved only when the poet acquires a sense of tradition, the historic sense, which makes him conscious, not only of the present, but also of the past and its presence.