

Theory of Impersonality

T.S. Eliot's impersonal conception of art and the fullest expression of his classicist attitude towards art and poetry are essentially given by him in his essay Tradition and the Individual Talent.

Eliot explains his theory of impersonality by examining first, the relation of the poet to the past and secondly, the relation of the poem to its author. According to his view the past is never dead, it lives in the present. "No poet or no artist has his complete meaning alone.

His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists." Above all, the artist or the poet has to work in the long established tradition of the literature to which he belongs. We cannot value the poet alone; we must set him for comparison and contrast among the dead poets of his language.

In the next part of the theory he examines the relation of the poet to the poem. According to him, the poem has no relation to the poet. The difference between the mind of a mature poet and an immature one is that, a mature poet has more finely perfected medium. Eliot thinks that the poet and the poem are two separate things. The feeling or emotion or vision resulting from the poem is something different from feeling, emotion, and vision in the mind of the poet. The art emotion is different from personal emotion. In other words the poet should be passive and impersonal.

To explain the theory, Eliot has brought the analogy of chemical reaction. When oxygen and sulphur-di-oxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphuric acid. This combination takes place only when platinum is present. Platinum is the catalyst that helps to process of chemical reaction, but it itself is apparently unaffected. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. Its presence may be necessary for partly or exclusively to operate for the combination of the experience in order to give birth to a piece of poetry.

Eliot says that, the business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and in working them up in poetry, to express feelings which are not actual emotions at all. The emotion of art is impersonal. It has its life in the poem and not in the history of poets. So, honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. The biography of the poet is not to be studied; the structure of the poem and its evocation powers are important.

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