



T.S. Eliot

❖ **Criticism is the product of my private poetry workshop.**

- T.S.Eliot

[The function of critics]

T.S.Eliot is the most towering & dominating man of letters of the 20th century. In the long span of his productive activity Eliot achieved distinction as a poet, play wright & critic. His critical works are inseparable from his creative works. He is also a precuroor to the new critics. Some of the features of new Criticism like close textual analysis & giving more importance to the work of art rather than the artist are found in the works of Eliot.

The value of Eliot's criticism arises from the fact that he speaks with prose style as memorable & precise as his poetry. His criticism offers both a reaction & reassessment. According to Eliot the aim of criticism is to bring a readjustment between the old & the new. His creative works reflect the world in which he lived & his critical works are a statement on his creative works his important works are:

- 1). The Sacred Wood
- 2). The use of Poetry & Poets
- 3). Use of Criticism
- 4). Elizabethan Essays
- 5). Selected Essays

Eliot's works that deal not only with literature & criticism but also with the survival of culture & civilization. His works are a statement of his own practice as a poet & a critic.

□ His Poetry & Criticism

In poetry & Criticism Eliot introduced a new kind of criticism. Eliot introduced new theories based on concepts like tradition individual, talent, dissociation of sensibility, objective, carrelative etc. The influence of writers like *Irving Babbit*, *Paul Elmer* more & *T.S Hulne* is found in the works of Eliot, Johnson & Dryden were concerned with the analysis of the particular works & did not examine. The process of creation or formulate

a theory of literature Eliot has his own theories of poetry & the Poetic process which can be gathered from his essays. “*Tradition and the individual talent, The function of Criticism & the fronties of Criticism*”, The sense of tradition the respect for order & authority are at the core of Eliot’s criticism.

Eliot was a highly learned artist & he expected his readers to be equally learned. He commex in the category of ‘*Avant Grade*’. As John Hayward says:

“I can not think of any critic who has been more widely read & discussed in his own life time & not only in English language but almost in all the languages except Russian, throughout the civilized world.”

□ **Eliot as a literary Critic:**

When Eliot began his career as a literary critic (2nd decade) the most prevalent schools in criticism were those of impressionism & abstract criticism. Eliot makes a case against these two modes of a criticism in the opening of his two essays in 'The sacred wood', '*The perfect Critic & The imperfect critic*'. According to Eliot, impressionism results not in criticism but a few opinions based on the critics aesthetic sensibility, Impressionistic criticism is all feelings & abstract criticism is all thought.

□ **His theory of Impersonality:**

Eliot's theory of impersonality is '*The Greatest theory*' (According to *H.G.George* after Wordsworth's romantic conception of poetry Eliot rejects subjectivism & According to

him poetry is not a letting loose of emotion not an expression of personality but an escape from personality. Eliot says that the function of criticism is he to turn attention from the poet to poetry.) Thus he changes the whole course of critical theory & Practice. His criticism is a corrective to biographical sociological & historical Schools & criticism.

□ **His views on the Metaphysical Poets:**

By Unification of sensibility Eliot means a fusion of thought into feeling. This function of thought & feeling is very essential to produce a great work of art. bad poetry results when there is a '*Dissociation of sensibility*'. i.e. when a poet is unable to feel his thought. His unification of sensibility is found in the works of Andrew Marvell & other Metaphysical Poets.

In his essays '*The function of criticism*' Eliot gives his views about criticism. According to him "*criticism is elucidation of works of art & correction of taste.*" It was also involves the common Pursuit of true judgement.

□ **His views on Tradition & Individual Talent**

In Tradition and Individual Talent, He says that every good artist should have a sense of paste & tradition which means one can not separate a sense of Past & Tradition can be obtained by only those who have a historical sense which involves Perceptions. He believes that the success of a Poet depends upon continual self sacrifice which means continual extinction of personality. He makes a clear distinction between good & bad artist. Good artist will sacrifice & surrender him self to his work in order to achieve success & impersonality but a bad artist will never surrender himself to any common action.

Eliot introduced the phrase adjective correlative in his essay, Hamlet, Eliot calls the play Hamlet as artistic failure & a '*Monalisa*' in literature. Hamlet, the play is the finest example of what may be called as Eliot's destructive or iconoclastic criticism.

□ His views on the frontiers of Criticism:

In a later essay entitled '*The frontiers of criticism*' Eliot defines the function of criticism as to establish a rapport between the artist & the people & to promote the understanding & enjoyment of literature.

As George Watson Says:

“Eliot has made English criticism look different though not in a simple sense.”

F. O. Matthieson has observed:

“Eliot is not merely a theorist but a practising writer, who talked of what he know at first hand.”

Because of Eliot, it was possible to revive many poets & dramatists. Thus Eliot’s contribution to English criticism is of wide significance.