

TS Eliot : Tradition and the Individual Talent

Thomas Stearns Eliot who was born in 1888 and died in 1965 is most influential English poet-critic of 20th century. His work as a critic is significant.

'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is about TS Eliot's view on poetry and value of tradition. He feels the word 'tradition' is used in pejorative sense. He questions about the praising of a poet. He thinks that the most individual part of the poet's work may be alive with the influence of his poetic ancestors. He stresses the objective and intellectual element.

Eliot emphasises on the Artist knowing "European mind - the mind of his own country more than his own private mind. This does not mean pedantic. It means consciousness of the past and historical awareness. Tradition for Eliot means an awareness of past history of Europe not as dead facts but ever-changing.

TS Eliot wants the poet to mingle his personality with tradition. He advises the analogy of the catalyst in a scientific laboratory for the process of depersonalization. The poet's mind is a resource of experience with new combination - when oxygen and sulphur dioxide are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphuric acid. The combination takes place in the presence of platinum. This is catalyst. But the sulphuric acid shows no platinum which remains unaffected. The catalyst facilitates the chemical change but not participate in it and remains unchanged. TS Eliot

Compares — the mind of the poet to the shred of platinum which will "digest and transmute the passions which are its material". That is, Eliot shifts his critical focus from the poet to the poetry and declares, "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation and directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry." He feels that the poet's mind is "a receptacle for storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present

together." For Eliot, intensity of the artistic process matters in poetry writing.

In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot refutes the idea of Wordsworth that poetry is the expression of personality of the poet or 'origins from emotion recollected in tranquillity.' For Eliot 'poetry is a new thing resulting from the concentration of a great number of experiences. He believes that poetry is an escape from personality. It is not from emotion.

In short, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is about poetry and importance of tradition. He concludes his essay with this critical thinking "criticism is as inevitable as breathing."