



**T. S. ELIOT AS THE ACKNOWLEDGED UNIVERSAL
POETIC VISIONARY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
THROUGH RICH USE OF OBJECTIVE CORELATIVE
THEORY IN HIS POETRY: AN APPRAISAL**

Dr. S. Chelliab, Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages & School of Indian Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai (T.N). India

Received: 27/06/2017

Edited: 04/07/2017

Accepted: 10/07/2017

Abstract: *This paper projects T. S. Eliot as a stern realist, who is acutely conscious of modern civilization with its manifold problems and also as a visionary who looks at life beyond the limits of time and space. He is classified as a classicist, innovator and philosopher who has a spiritual approach to life which is rare in the twentieth century dominated by threatening science and maddening materialism. The article also throws light upon his religious impulses and feelings in an unobtrusive manner and it concludes with the statement that, "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of the personality, but an escape from personality."*

Key words: *T. S. Eliot, objective correlative theory.*

What is universally accepted and understood is that literature exists not only in expressing a thing but it equally exists in the receiving of the thing expressed of a writer says something he has experienced, his words on his side, express his experiences but on the side of reads, his words represent his experiences. Whenever any person in his speech or writing is making an attempt not merely to say something, but to say it in a beautiful and pleasing manner, he is engaged in a healthy literary enterprise. A writer does not always succeed in making such a memorable utterance that the readers begin to cherish and would not willingly let it die, but when he has actually achieved it, no doubt, it can be said that he has produce literature. Literature, as Matthew Arnold defined it in his *Essays on Criticism*, is nothing but the record of the "best that is known and thought in the world". Every writer is expected to make a serious and deliberate effort to produce literature. Literature may be considered an instrument of self-discovery or a mode of self-fulfillment making an artist or writer take pleasure in expressing his ideas and emotions, and describing certain situations, real or imaginary and recalling

things that occurred in their lives and molded their personalities.

Born in America in St.Louis, Missouri on 16th sep 1888 to Henry wave Eliot and charlotte Chauncey Stearns, the English poet play Wright, journalist and critics, T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) has an important place amongst the modern literary men. Truly hailed as the greatest among the modern English poets, Eliot is said to have influence modern poetry more than any other poet of the twentieth century. One can find him combining in himself some characteristic both strange and opposing. He is good at playing the double role of both 'a great poet and a great critic'. No doubt, he is a traditionalist rooted in classicism as well as an innovator of a new style of poetry. He has proved himself stern realist who is acutely conscious of modern civilization with its manifold problems as well as a visionary who looks at life beyond the limits of time and space. What is surprising about Eliot is that though a professed and classicist and uncompromising upholder of tradition, he is the one who led the attack on the writing of "traditional poetry" and came out as the foremost innovator of modern times. No doubt, he is the leader of his age and he

has to his credit composition of such immortal works has 1. *The Sacred Wood* (1920), 2. *Selected Essays* (1932). 3. *For Lancelot Andrews* (1928), 4. *Homage to John Dryden* (1924), 5. *The use of Poetry and the use of Criticism* (1933), 6. *Elizabethan Essays* (1934), 7. *Essays Ancient and Modern* (1936). Besides these, he also wrote a number of other essays on poet, dramatists and other writers. He also edited famous magazines- *The Egoist* and *The Criterion*. The specialty of English literature lies in that it has produced such great critics as well as creative writers as Sir Philip Sidney, Ben Johnson, Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot.

T.S. Eliot believed rather strongly that creative writer can equally be a good critic. In fact, his poems enact his beliefs and theories. What has to be kept in mind is that for about one hundred and fifty years before Eliot began to write, romanticism and humanism had captivated literature. In the beginning of the 20th century, there was a revolt against romantic and humanistic tendencies. With the advent of T. S. Eliot, this opposition got strengthened in all respects. Irving Babbit, was the chief exponent of this opposition, who questioned and rather vehemently romanticism in his work *Rousseau and Romanticism*. Deeply influenced by Babbit, Eliot was found getting ready to bid good bye to Romanticism and join hands with such neo-classical writers as Dr. Johnson, Ben Johnson and John Dryden. He is said to have excelled those neo-classical writers in critical theories and concepts by offering fresh, innovative and fresh insights and perspectives. Eliot's opinion regarding literature and criticism are useful. Illuminating and varied. He has thrown light on varied aspects of the literary problems. He writes in *The Use of Poetry* (Moore VIII) that it is reasonable to be an guard. Against views which claim too much for poetry as well as to protest against those which claim too little to recognize a number of uses for poetry without admitting that poetry must, always and everywhere, subservient to any of them. In the essay 'The Perfect critic', Eliot is against is dogmatic and the purely 'technical critic' as

he takes criticism to be the disinterested exercise of intelligence' (P 63).

T. S. Eliot is a stern realist acutely conscious of modern civilization with its manifold problems and also a visionary who looks at life beyond the limits of time and space. Being himself a great classical scholar, and finding around him petty poets of the Georgian group, he set himself to establish a principle of a sound classicism stands for order. He conceives of literature as a continuous process in which the present contains the past. The modern poet, according to Eliot, should carry on the process, follow the permanent spirit of their tradition and thus create fresh literature by expressing the present in a new and modified manner.

In 1928, Eliot declared himself to be "a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and an Anglo-catholic in religion". He was a strong supporter of order and discipline; his classicism arose out of his reaction to the romantic theory which regarded poetry as the expression of the personality of the poet. In his anti-romantic attitude, Eliot was deeply influenced by Ezra Pound, Irving Babbit, Paul Elmer, more and T. E. Hulme. Eliot's idea of tradition is directly linked up with his impersonal view of art, as he insists on the poet's duty to transcend the private self by loyalty to the tradition of European literature as a whole. He has expressed his views on the impersonality of poetry and the poetic process in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. Eliot elucidates his impersonal theory by examining, first the relation of the poem to its author. The past, as Eliot says, is never dead; it lives in the present. "No poet, no artist of any sort, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to dead poets and artists". In the words of Mohammed Hanif, "Eliot has a singular style of his own in the sense that he has no style, still he has unique force, clarity and absorption. His style is lucid or translucent though the ideas and experiences may be complex." (P12). T.E. Hulme's attempt on the liberal humanist tradition and his plea for a dry, hard classical verse had an important effect on him and

the writings of the French royalist Charles Maurras worked in a similar direction.

From the futilities of post-war Europe, Eliot is said to have drawn arid hopelessness and wrote about it in dry and bare language. In *The Waste Land*, he contrasted the desert of England with the cultures of other ages and countries. The poem is full of irony overburdened by scholarship explained in pages of notes, heavily marked by the denial of faith in anything human or divine. Everything is parched, sterile, harsh, lyrical, amazingly, vivid in its natural rhythms bewilderingly symbolical. *The Hollow Men* neatly attracted readers who wanted to follow his line of thinking. As a poet, Eliot came under three marked literary influences-the English metaphysical poets and the Jacobean dramatists, the French symbolists Dante who all left a distinctive impression on his poetical works. Being the most universal poet in the modern language, he dwells chiefly on the power of Dante's precision of diction, and of his clear visual image. It would be glib to say that in *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men* Eliot wrote his inferno and that since then, his poem started representing various stages of passing through 'a purgatorio', says F. O. Matthiessen. His *The Waste Land* is nothing but "the fullest record in our literature of the disintegrating collision in a sensitive mind of the old tradition and new learning" (P 39). His probing analytic mind was keenly aware of the complexity of his feelings, their rapid alteration and sharp antithesis. His poetic achievement lies in his ability to convey 'his genuine whole of tangled feelings' as projected in *The Extasie*, the extraordinary range of feeling from the highest to the most serious, from the most spiritual to the most sensual.

A rare fusion of thought and feeling seemed to Eliot 'the richest and most varied in terms of expressions of English'. This was described by him as development of sensibility, "a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling". Such interweaving of thought and feeling is found to be richly existing in Chapman and Webster and in the dense, master full irregularity of the later plays of Shakespeare. In the opinion of T. S.

Eliot, "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it amalgamates disparate experiences, both chaotic and fragmentary-these experiences always forming new wholes" (*The Metaphysical Poets*) and goes to the extent of calling this rare fusion of thought and feeling 'as immediately as the odour of a rose'. Such was and even possessed by such later men of the seventeenth century as Crashaw, Vaughan and Andrew Marvell. The principal quality which drew Eliot to the symbolists possessing in common with the metaphysical is the same essential quality of transmuting ideas into sensation, of transforming an observation into a state of mind. The condensation of form that demanded both by Donne and the symbolists logically builds its effect upon sharp contrasts making fullest use of element of surprise which is considered by Eliot as the most essential means of poetic effect.

Breaking through on conventional perceptions and startling one into a new awareness of reality is one of the prime functions of poetry according to Eliot. Being loyal to poetry or creation or any work of art is 'being loyal to society or community. Eliot criticized contemporary society through his poetical creations for the quantitative life adulterated with more impressionism. Eliot is the acknowledged poet cum critic who dwells repeatedly on the integral relation of any poet's work to the society of which he is a part, to the climate of thought and feeling which truly give rise to his expressions. Truly speaking, an acute awareness of the relations of present and past is central to his poetic sensitivity as well as his conceptions of human wisdom. His "Tradition and the Individual Talent" do richly show the importance of the problem of time for Eliot and essentially the same paradoxes reappear in *Four Quarters*, where they point the relations of temporal and spiritual things rather than the relations of contemporary talent to enduring tradition as a poetically religious persons, his relation to the past, to time, has been the critical problem and his basic paradox has remained his dual relation to history his sense of its pastness and its present or of the changing and the permanent,

toward the resolution of which his effects have been constantly directed. When he seeks the permanent in the temporary, the timeless in time, he ultimately finds it on the religious level. He is no doubt, in a deeper sense, the poet of the historical consciousness and universal vision. T. S. Eliot himself said:

“I hold religious conceptions of ultimate values to be right...in speaking of religion; it is to this level of abstraction that I wish to offer. I have none of the feeling of nostalgia...which seems to animate most modern defenders of religion. All seems to me to be bosh. What is important is what nobody seems to realize—the dogmas like that of original sin, which are the closest expressions of the categories of the religious attitude that man is in no sense perfect but a wretched creature, who can yet apprehend perfection” (P491).

The emotional and the intellectual, the creative and the critical faculties must work in harmony to produce a really great work of art. A great poet both instructs and delights. However, for Eliot the greatness of a poem is tested not by the pleasure it gives or the moral elevation it leads to, but by the order and unity it imposes on the chaotic and disparate experiences of the poet. Both Wimsatt and Brooks are right in saying,

“Hardly since the 17th century had a critical writing in English so resolutely transposed poetic theory from the axis of pleasure versus pain to that of unity versus multiplicity”

In this way, Eliot’s theory of poetry marks a break from tradition and gives a new direction to literary criticism. Eliot has formulated a number of such new critical concepts as ‘objective co-relative’, ‘Dissociation of sensibility’ and ‘Unification of sensibility’ which have gained wide currency and exercised a far-reaching influence on criticism. The phrase “objective co-relative” was first used by Eliot in his essay on Hamlet. The phrase gained such wide popularity Wimsatt and Brooks wrote thus;

“The phrase objective co-relative has gained a currency probably far beyond anything that the author could have expected or intended”

In the opinion of T. S. Eliot, emotion can best be expressed in poetry through the use of some suitable objective co-relative. He himself defined ‘objective co-relative’ as;

“a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula for the poet’s emotion so that, “when the external facts are given the emotion is at once evoked”

In the opinion of Cleanth Brooks, the phrase ‘objective co-relative’ means ‘organic metaphor’ while Elises Vevas considers as “a vehicle of expression for the poet’s emotion” and for Austin, it is the poetic content to be conveyed by verbal expressions”. It can be said that it is a way of conveying emotion without direct verbal expressions, by presenting certain situation and events which arouse a similar emotion in the readers it is the way through which a poet, like Eliot depersonalizes his feelings and emotions.

As the most universal leader of the ‘modernist poetry’ and the acknowledged poet of the modern experience, began writing at a time when the first world war had just come to end and the atmosphere of the time was charged with disillusion and disintegration when steel men and factories sang in place of birds. Hence he illustrated in himself and his poetry the progress of poetic mind through the wasteland of the modern consciousness into an attempted reinvigoration by a rediscovery of the natural world, Eliot’s poetic carrier has two classifications; 1) the early period when he wrote poetry of disillusion, irony, disgust, the contemplation of trivial, sordid empty world and 2) the later period when he became a philosopher, moralist and theologian. In the first period the poet dominates, whereas the later period the thinker and Christian dominate the early poetry is a dissection of the modern city civilization, rootless and fossilized, in which the poet is clearly concerned with the social predicament but in his later poetry, his interest is increasingly engaged by the problem of individual or

personal ordering of life or the process of spiritual regeneration.

Being a traditionalist and classicist in poetry, the English metaphysical tradition, the French symbolist movement, the poetry of Dante Existential philosophy, the philosophies of the Orient, Hindu, Buddhist and others Christian tradition and theology, ancient myths and legends are some of the major influences that have gone into the making of his poetry is nothing but a poetry of revolt against the decadent and exhausted, almost dead, poetry of his times. What Joyce, Dorothy and Virginia Woolf did in the field of fiction, Eliot did in the field of poetry. He is said to have evolved a new poetic method for expressing the inner self of the individual and developed new technique of communication through the use of conversational rhythms and imagery drawn from urban life, the use of implication, the use of myths as objective co-relative, the use of the mythical method (the juxtaposition of the past and present). No doubt, most of the 'modernist' trends of poetry-the new psychology, anthropology, symbolism and metaphysics-meet in the literary word of T. S. Eliot.

Eliot the poet, Eliot the thinker is "shaped by the Divine commedia and the Gita" says viswanathan (P54) "The Four Quarters" is Eliot's philosophical perennial. One of the finest things in the poem is the note of humility, hesitancy, tentativeness that Eliot strikes; spiritual exploration replaces intellectual fascism:

"I do not know much about gods...

I often wonder if that is what Krishna meant...

Are both perhaps present in time future...

But there is no competition"

The Four Quarters is a 20th century rephrasing of Spenser's "concord", Chapman's "ceremony" and Shakespeare's "Hierarchy". Human knowledge being limited, his visions is controlled and conditioned by considerations of space and time. Visual appearances of phenomena are the only things that matter to him because he knows that

'... time is always time

And place is always and only place

And what is actual is actual only for one time

And only for one place". (P 93)

The imagery is unconventional, bare and naked, drawn from most naked, often even filthy regions which stand in no comparison with the beautiful aspects, sights and sounds of nature they illustrate. His idea is that "poetry is something to be looked through not at" (P 10) and he wants it to be so transparent. Hence his imagery is quite bare and common though quite poignant too. Never trying to provide arresting imagery or references to sensual experience, the similes, metaphors and symbols are wedded to the idea of his poems thereby producing a most beautifully integrated whole (Rajan 17).

Eliot is not only a poet of intellect like Yeats and Auden but also a symbolist from the beginning to the end of his career. He uses his poetry as a tool for linking up the present with the past and for expressing his own varied and conflicting thoughts and emotions with a focus on the emptiness, 'the spiritual and emotional sterility of the modern world', which is the main theme of his *The Waste Land*. In the words of Cleanth Brooks, the theme of *The Waste Land* is nothing but life-in-death, of the modern wastelanders. According to Eliot, man has lost his passion i.e., his faith in god and religion and this decay of faith resulted in the loss of vitality, both spiritual and emotional. Consequently, the life in the modern world is a life-in-death, a living death. In the modern desolate land, the people are dead; they merely exist like dead things living a life of inactivity, listlessness and apathy. That is why winter is welcome to them and April is the cruelest of months, for it reminds them of stirrings of life.

While the poem *The Waste Land* delineates the spiritual drought and emotional sterility of the denizens of the wasteland of the twentieth century, and "Sweeney among the nightingales" describes man's dehumanized physical appearance and his spiritual sterility almost as an implicit criticism of the modern world, a nostalgic rebuke to drab materialism, the poet instead of gloomily watching

the desolation and emptiness. Turns away from the outer world of men to ponder certain innate personal experience in "Ash Wednesday" with a stress on the theme of penitence and aspiration towards holiness and purgation. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" is simply the recreation of the journey undertaken by three wise men from the east to Christ's birth place in the Bethlehem as it is narrated in the Gospel According to Matthew 2:1-12. This poem is not a sheer repetition of the past. It does neatly emphasize the presentness of the past event and establishes its unbreakable connection to the present. As Eliot says, every great poet ought to possess "the historical sense" which helps him receive a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (ITT 15). Eliot's "A Song for Simon" is a monologue like the "Journey of the Magi". Simeon is an aged man awaiting death:

My life is light, waiting for the death wind like a feather on the back of my land" (P 4-5) The last phase of Simeon's life is contrasted with the imminent spring and blooming of hyacinths, both together highlight Eliot's usual birth-death and death-birth enigma. One can see a spiritual crisis projected in the psyche of Simeon. As commonly seen in the human psyche of modern men in the present day world. The inspiration for writing "Animula" came from Dante's exposition of the nature of the soul and surface level, Eliot's "Animula" bears resemblance to Vaughan's "The Retreat" and also to Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimation of Immortality from the Recollections of Early childhood". But "Animula" distinguishes itself with the stamp of Eliotean complexity and originality. "Animula" spins round his characteristic death-birth riddle and the soul's lack of spiritual volition. Here Eliot depicts the failure of the soul in its spiritual evolution towards its deification. The soul moves from primeval purity to corruption due to lack of will and discipline. The soul that issues from the hands of god has fallen into the hands of time and is bewitched by its evanescent charm. It fears to face the challenges of the reality of human existence. By nature, the soul is joyful in the pursuit of god.

Unfortunately the soul is deflected by evils making it fail in its mission. As in "The Journey of the Magi" and "A Song for Simeon", in "Animula" too, T. S. Eliot pivots on his symptomatic leit motif to show how the attempt of the soul to complete its spiritual paralysis and volitional impotence.

Truly speaking, Eliot has propounded the theory of "objective co-relative" as a means so as to evoke emotions by means of concrete objectification of feelings or emotion in objects, images etc., He has adroitly used his objective correlative device to express his emotion in *The Ariel Poems*. In almost all these poems, the primordial is employed and used as an objective correlative image for exploring new ways, gaining new experiences to improve modern life styles and situations. In Eliot's *Ariel Poems*, the journey is mostly the interior expedition of the soul. The chequered experiences of the journey of the different personal of *Ariel Poems* are objectified in appropriate correlative images for evoking deep emotions rather unerringly. "The summer places" and "Three trees on the low-sky" for the luxurious life led by the magic, "Three trees on the low-sky" for the crucifixion of Christ and "Birth or Death" which confounded the magic in the "Journey of the Magic" are extremely evocative images. Equally powerful objective correlative images like "the goat's path" and "the fox's home" for the homeless progeny of Simeon are employed. The "viaticum" as an objective correlative to resurrect the soul from its 'death in life' stupor in "Animula" and the scent of pine and the song of wood-thrush as numinous objective correlative images to connote the proximity of Heaven in "Marina" are highly evocative. Eliot has very skillfully used the objective images in the structure of his "Ariel Poems" to convey his religious emotion and feelings in an unobtrusive manner.

To conclude, in Eliot's words, "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates. The test of the maturity of an artist is the completeness with which his mind digests and transmutes the passions which from the substance of

his poetry. The personality of the poet does not find expression in his poetry; it acts like catalytic agent in the process of poetic composition. Eliot's concluding statement is that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of the personality, but an escape from personality. "Thus, poetry is organization rather than inspiration.

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