

Literary
Essay

B.A-III

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The Poet's personality

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot says that the more perfect a poet is, the greater is the separation between the man who suffers and the mind that creates. when he says, not new, for in a letter Keats says that the poet has no identity and that he must have the negative capability to transmute his experience to poetry without introducing himself. As Eliot points out, the personality of the poet is a catalytic catalytic agent which fuses experiences into a compound and presents it in a poem. There should not be any trace of the personality in the final product. So Eliot remarks that poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from it. The perfect poet is completely impersonal. As Jones Joyce puts it, the perfect artist is like God, present in all his works, but visible nowhere.

The ideal of impersonality is an ideal which can be achieved by very few. Eliot recognises that when he says that the more perfect the poet is, the more impersonal he is. The degree of impersonality varies from poet to poet. The most impersonal poet is Shakespeare whose play, present his experiences but we never meet him anywhere. we cannot say that this character is Shakespeare's surrogate or this view is Shakespeare's own. In "King Lear" the Earl of Gloucester

can

"Like flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
They will kill us for their sport."

A contradictory view is presented by Cassius in "Julius Caesar" when he tells Brutus—

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves that we are underling."

In the plays of Shakespeare we find "God's plenty". We can not identify Shakespeare with Macbeth or Othello or Lear or Hamlet or Antony; he has no identity; he is their creator

like But very few poets can be completely impersonal. Shakespeare. The poetry of Milton cannot be fully appreciated unless we take his personality into account. When we read "Paradise Lost" or "Samson Agonistes," we can never forget the fact that Milton is a puritan and a great scholar. Milton has only one theme and that is temptation. This is a puritanic theme. His language is heavily latinized and he uses English with a latin grammar. This artificial style is an index of the man as the theme is an index of his mind. Many critics from Johnson to Eliot dislike Milton's poetry because it strongly savours of his personality which is not pleasant in any way. Beside the universal appreciation of Shakespeare Milton's appreciation is limited.

In the poetry of Keats we find an attempt of the poet to lose his identity. We find his success in "Ode to Autumn" where the sensuous experience of the poet is recorded in such a way that the poet's

personality is never obtrusive. In the first stanza Keats presents the melon fruitfulness of autumn. In the second stanza Autumn is personified and made to represent the workers in the cornfield. In the last stanza the sad music of autumn appears. It is a triumph of Keats's art. Shelley who is a contemporary of Keats is very different from him. As Matthew Arnold points out, both as a man and as a poet Shelley suffered from self-delusion. Eliot says that the poetry of Shelley reminds us continually of his personality which is despicable. The reader cannot forget that Shelley as a man is a blackguard. Even the best poems of Shelley present his ideas and himself and men like Arnold and Eliot find it difficult to appreciate his poetry. It is true that Shelley has his admirers, but the point is that as he lays impersonality, his appreciation is limited to a few.

In our time Eliot has achieved impersonality in his poetry by adopting a dramatic method while Keats who is intensely subjective is nevertheless impersonal in effect because he is conscious of the universal significance of his experience. In poems like "Gerontion" and "The Wasteland" Eliot presents his experience of the world through the protagonists of those poems. The old man of "Gerontion" is the typical European who stiffens in a scented house, whose owner is the Jew, whose business is dull, who finds modern

history to be uncertain and who notices heren-
 ity instead of love and ritual instead of
 religion. In "The Waste Land" what Tiresias
 sees is the substance of the poem London is seen
 as well, romance is found to be dead, sexual-
 ity is predominant, even the basic values of
 humanism are lost. Thus Eliot presents a
 pessimistic picture of the modern world.
 We succeed in the impersonal represent-
 ation of his experience so that we do not
 find him and his personality in his poems.
 Yeats' method is different; he is essentially a
 lyric poet and not dramatic like Eliot. But
 he is conscious of the wider significance of
 what he says. In "An Arch of Grass" he presents
 his realization thus:—

"My temptation is quiet;
 Here at life's end
 Neither loose imagination
 Nor the will of the mind
 Consuming its rag and bone
 Can make the truth known."

what Yeats says is his personal
 realization but this is the realization of
 every old man who has struggled to know the
 truth. In his early poetry Yeats is very personal
 and interested in things like magic. So his early
 poetry makes us conscious of his personality which
 embarrassing. But his mature poems present
 his own experience as the experience of
 mankind in general and in that sense the
 poet's identity is lost.

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we thus conclude that the poet must have a personality which will enable him to have vital experiences but he must be able to present those experiences with impersonality must never become ostentatious or intrusive. He must not try to express his personality but his experience. In this sense he must escape from his personality.