CHAPTER III
CRITICISM OF POETRY

Eliot furnishes certain principles, formulations and definitions of poetry at different places and on different occasions on the basis of which poetry might be criticised by the critic. The principles governing his poetry are found in his critical essays which are in the form of introductions, collections of reviews and lectures.

The aesthetic of verse occupies an important place among the critical principles of Eliot. He admits that when he talks of criticism it usually means the criticism of poetry. When most critics in the past generalised about literature, they had mainly poetry in their minds. The simple reason for their thinking chiefly of poetry as the most convenient object of criticism was that its formal qualities lend themselves most readily to generalization. It also seems that style has an important role to play in poetry. As Eliot remarks:

in poetry we come nearer to a purely aesthetic experience makes poetry the most convenient genre of literature to keep in mind when we are discussing literary criticism itself.¹

Eliot admits that the best of his literary criticism consists of essays on poets and poetic dramatists who had influenced him. These essays and formulations are, according to him, the by-product of his private poetry - workshop or the prolongation of the thinking that went into the formation of his own verse but Eliot's views about poetry do not lessen the interest of the readers in his poems. It may be mentioned that Eliot's critical principles and explanations of poetry prepare the critical faculty of other critics and readers.
In many of his works Eliot dwells upon poetry and brings to light the problems and the importance of poetry. According to him it is really very difficult to give a precise definition of poetry but as a poet and critic he provides some theoretical lights on the concept and practice of poetry. On the function of a critic he writes:

It is one function of the critic to assist the literary public of his day to recognize its affinity with one poet, or with one type of poetry, or one age of poetry, rather than with another.²

To suit the tastes of the modern mind Eliot himself has based his theory on the essential function of literary criticism, its function of "the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste" which can "promote the understanding and enjoyment of literature." He stresses that enjoyment and understanding are not distinct activities. Understanding a poem comes to the same thing as enjoying it for the right reasons. Eliot's task as a critic was a very difficult one at a time when romanticism had put poetry into oblivion and literary criticism was on the wane. He felt that the style of nineteenth century poetry cannot express the filth and squalor and the seediness of twentieth century urban life. Differing with Wordsworth's view of the function of poetry Eliot points out that sentimentalizing over a daffodil could no more be reckoned to be a style amidst the completely different urban experience.

Eliot throws a significant light on the nature of poetry in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in order to correct the uninformed, commonplace notions of what poetry is:
Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.  

In this definition of poetry we can find a new emphasis. Eliot is conscious of the unhealthy trend toward increasing sentimentalization in poetry and he wanted this trend to be checked. The unconscious and uncritical reader may have the wrong impression and may say that Eliot's poetry is in line with classical poetry and thus has no place for emotions and passions which will come as a contrast to his well-known definition of poetry. But we may assert that while analyzing his earlier essays and the definitions of poetry which we come across in different contexts and on different occasions, we get a clear idea of the background in which they were written. As Eliot admits:

I was in reaction, not only against Georgian poetry, but against Georgian criticism; I was writing in a context which the reader of today has either forgotten, or has never experienced.

Emotionalism, sentimentalism and vagueness had become the order in the writings of the day. In contrast to this Eliot tried to bring a new balance, order, and clarity in his poetry. When we discuss Eliot's criticism of poetry, his statement that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion ... but an escape from personality" is quite memorable. He was very much against the ideals of romanticism and the words "turning loose of emotion" indicates both explicitly and implicitly the unhealthy
features of the nineteenth century romanticism. Romanticism prevailed over the other qualities of poetry. As such, Eliot was determined to give an impetus to the Georgian sensibility. The expression "turning loose of emotion" is very much metaphorical. It indicates that excessive, disorderly, and indefinite mixture of emotions will not produce good poetry or good art. 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 into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. Besides, the phrase "escape from emotion"—seems to us an exaggeration. Perhaps hardly any good art or good poetry is possible if it is to be completely separated from emotions. Eliot has reacted against the poetry of the Georgian period for he tries to impress upon the readers the need for some values and qualities essential to poetry. These essential needs had been neglected for a long time. Arthur Symons' The Symbolist Movement in Literature showed Eliot the way to render the urban squalor, the dullness, madding crowd and industrialization of twentieth century life in a new style of poetry.

Eliot's definition of poetry may well be compared with Wordsworth's definition that "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility". To the unconscious reader it may sound as a contrast to Eliot's view. But that is not quite true. The difference is that Eliot only insists on curbing and restraining the "overflow" of those powerful emotions or feelings in poetry which would obstruct the
creation of a good work of art. However one ought not to forget that although they belonged to different periods and had different tastes, Eliot liked Wordsworth’s poetry to a great extent.

The difference between classicism and romanticism is very much evident in Eliot’s works as his main emphasis is on highlighting the neglected values in and taste for poetry and art. In a sharp reaction to the nineteenth century values and tastes which lay emphasis on emotion and sensation, Eliot comes out with a well-organised structure in poetry laying stress on wit, intelligence and common sense. Eliot writes in support of his view thus:

There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence.  

In Essays in Criticism, Matthew Arnold in his essay on Gray writes about the values of eighteenth century poetry. In order to substantiate his agreement with the literary taste of this age Eliot asserts that the qualities of the poetry of Dryden, Johnson or Pope are present in the poetry of any age. He says that clarity, simplicity and purity of language are some of the qualities in prose which cannot be overlooked but which are also the permanent and essential ingredients of poetry. As Arnold had observed:

The difference between genuine poetry and the poetry of Dryden, Pope and all their school, is
briefly this: their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits, genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul.\textsuperscript{6}

In the typical romantic vain Arnold identifies soul with the emotions, feelings or sensations. His definition seems to overlook some of the qualities like wit and reasoning. It seems that Arnold uses wit in this limited sense. It is worth mentioning that in his essay on Andrew Marvell, Eliot cautions readers against using the word 'wit' in a superficial sense. He observes: "We can say that wit is not erudition, it is sometimes stifled by erudition, as in much of Milton. It is not cynicism, though it has a kind of toughness which may be confused with cynicism by the tender-minded. It is confused with erudition because it belongs to an educated mind, rich in generations of experience; and it is confused with cynicism because it implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience. It evolves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of other kinds of experience which are possible, which we find as clearly in the greatest as in poet's like Marvell".\textsuperscript{7} And again, he observes, that "the quality which Marvell had - this modest and certainly impersonal virtue - whether we call it wit or reason, or even urbanity - we have patently failed to define. By whatever name we call it, and however we define that name, it is something precious and needed and apparently extinct; it is what should preserve the reputation of Marvell".\textsuperscript{8} Eliot considers 'wit' as an essential ingredient in poetry and vehemently opposes the absence of it in poetry. Arnold's statement that "genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul" is very important in the discussion
of the criticism of poetry for it virtually implies a direction
for the poet "to look into our hearts and write". 9

To substantiate his view Eliot convincingly says that a
poet should look into his soul a good deal more than his heart
but he adds an important note that a good poet "must look into
the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive
tracts". 10 According to Eliot, good poetry means not merely
sensation but also cerebration, not only passion but also
ratiocination for the modern civilization comprehends great
variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity,
playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and
complex results. Eliot is even prescriptive. He suggests that
"a poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive,
more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary,
language into his meaning". 11 Eliot praises metaphysical poetry
because the metaphysical poets possessed qualities of
sensibility which could comprehend and absorb any kind of
experience and yet produce harmonious results.

Eliot is very much against loose, indefinite, and
excessive sentimentalization of emotions or feelings. As is
very much evident from his definition of poetry
sentimentalization is bound to lead to a bad work of art. In
his opinion the business of the poet is "not to find new
emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up
into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual
emotions at all". 12 Shakespeare has shown his skill as a
greater artist by his apt handling in reducing and controlling
the excessive use of emotion in King Lear through the Fool's
laughter. The words like "A slumber did my spirit seal" present to the readers the same type of control over a powerful emotion; but underneath there is the surge of tragic experience while the surface is calm.

Eliot also goes on to differentiate between emotion in art and the crude or flat emotion of man. He says that emotion in good art or poetry is complex, richer and more definite than the complex or unusual emotion of human life. In general, the emotional experiences of people are usually indefinite, floating and superficial. The emotion of art is impersonal. It has force, relevance and concreteness. Eliot writes in this context:

His (a poet's) particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life.  

Eliot again writes in the same context:

The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art.

According to Eliot, emotion in good art is usually definite as it is fully objectified and is quite relevant to a particular object and situation. This is inseparable from the object which evokes it. Eliot's criticism of Swinburne helps to clarify the point:
... he (Swinburne) uses the most general word, because his emotion is never particular, never in direct line of vision, never focussed; it is emotion reinforced, ... It is, in fact, the word that gives him the thrill, not the object. When you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne, you find always that the object was not there — only the word. 15

It becomes quite clear from the above that an indefinite emotion which is devoid of the definite object is superficial and abstract. A poem or a good work of art will suffer in the absence of definite object and emotion. In analyzing Eliot's works it appears that at some point of time Ezra Pound's words might have influenced T.S. Eliot. In his essay on Pound, Eliot observes:

The only kind of emotion worthy of a poet is the inspirational emotion which energizes and strengthens, and which is very remote from the everyday emotion of sloppiness and sentiment ... Go in fear of abstractions ... consider the definiteness of Dante's presentation as compared with Milton's. 16

Reevaluating other poets Eliot again says that definite emotion will be behind the composition of good poetry. As he says:
Instead of slightly veiled and resonant abstractions like those of Swinburne, or the mossiness of Mallarmé, Pound's verse is always definite and concrete, because he has always a definite emotion behind it. 17

In his epochmaking essay Tradition and the Individual Talent, Eliot attempts to shift the emphasis from the Romantically model of poetry as an expression of the poet's personality to the awareness of a poem as an artificial verbal construction. He further tries to drop our attention to the dynamic process of creation. The poetic process is described as a process in which disparate materials combine together forming new wholes. The direct appeal of emotion to the reader has no scope in this process. The resultant poem thus became valuable in so far as it evoked a new art emotion which will be as genuine as a real life emotion. The internal coherence of its aesthetic structure which maintains an autonomous order is what matters most in the judgment of the poem. The poem presents a world which is independent of the world of personal joys and sufferings. Clearly, the dynamic and selective fusing of disparate materials would leave scope for induction of the poet's intentional elements into the final determination of the poem's aesthetic structure. In "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), Eliot makes the poet's mind the medium for synthesizing the disparate elements into a new order of coherence: In this context, Eliot observes:

The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings,
phrases, images, which remain there until all
the particles which unite to form a new compound
are present together. 18

In his Introduction to The Use of Poetry and the Use of
Criticism (1932) Eliot defines criticism as that department of
thought which seeks to find out what poetry is, what its use
is, what desires it satisfies, why it is written, why it is
read, or recited; or how, making some conscious or unconscious
assume that we do know these things, to assess actual poetry.
In order to substantiate his view he says:

Criticism, of course, never does find out what
poetry is, in the sense of arriving at an adequate
definition; but I do not know of what use such a
definition would be if it were found. Nor can cri-
ticism ever arrive at any final appraisal of
poetry. 19

Eliot thinks of his criticism largely as that of a poet
who always tries to defend the kind of poetry he writes. I.A.
Richards, a serious critic of Eliot writing on the equipment
the scientific critic needs, tells that "both a passionate
knowledge of poetry and a capacity for dispassionate
psychological analysis" are required. Eliot does not accept
Richards's ethics or theory of value which he thinks as being
based upon purely individual - psychological foundations. But
his psychology of the poetic experience is based upon his own
experience of poetry, as truly as his theory of value arises
out of his psychology. According to Eliot, the critic, in order
to analyse the enjoyment and appreciation of a good poem, must have experienced the enjoyment, and he must convince us of his taste. Moreover, he opines that the experience of enjoying a bad poem while thinking it is a good one is different from that of enjoying a good poem. On the experience of poetry Richards says, "it is never what a poem says that matters, but what it is". Eliot says that when we talk of poetry it is a part or extension of our experience of it because in the making of poetry a good deal of thinking is also necessary. The experience of poetry is not merely the sum of the experiences of good poems. To be aware of poetry requires an organisation of these experiences. Eliot says:

We may learn a good deal about criticism and about poetry by examining the history of criticism, not merely as a catalogue of successive notions about poetry, but as a process of readjustment between poetry and the world in and for which it is produced. We can learn something about poetry simply by studying what people have thought about it at one period after another.

Rene Wellek in his essay "The Criticism of T.S. Eliot" says that it is a genuine conviction that ultimate questions are beyond the reach of the intellect and that attempts to define poetry must fail. In a Review of A.E. Housman's The Name and Nature of Poetry (1933-34) Eliot points out that there are surprisingly few things that can be said about poetry which either turn out to be false or say nothing of significance.
Understandably, Eliot has been constantly working at a theory of poetry and, in fact from the very beginning of his writings, has had a theory in the back of his mind. There are, one must admit, certain tensions, and possibly even contradictions, in his major positions. That his point of view shifted on several problems after his "conversion" is undeniable. What I maintain is that still Eliot holds a theory which is quite definite, articulate and coherent. It is true that he has the habit of approaching his problems from different angles, of suddenly dropping the argument, of dealing with issues piecemeal, of concealing or not focussing on interconnections, of making obiter dicta without apparent support or proof, of producing quotations without drawing any consequences from them. But from his criticism, read as a whole and with regard to context in each instance, something very much like a system emerges which defines or describes most central issues of poetic theory. There are no doubt gaps in the exposition of his theoretical systems but it is so because he wrote for special occasions, for periodicals, for delivering lectures and writing introductions to books. His theory of criticism has undoubtedly suffered because of the exigencies of the occasions on which he presented his ideas.

Eliot's criticism is largely the criticism of a poet who is obsessed with the kind of poetry he is writing which he thinks he must strongly defend. According to him, poetry may be an accidental stimulus. The end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion have been removed. While reflecting on the relationship between scholarship and criticism, he forgets that there are other critics besides poet-critics.
Eliot distinguishes three types of criticism; so-called "creative" criticism, really "etiolated creation" of which Pater serves as an example; historical and moralistic criticism represented by Sainte-Beuve, and criticism proper, or poetic criticism. He dismisses the first by considering Arthur Symons and Walter Pater as "incomplete artists" because they sought illegitimate satisfaction of creative urges in criticism. Their criticism, he says, is "the satisfaction of a suppressed creative wish which in most other persons is apt to interfere fatally". 23 The second type, historical criticism, is really not literally criticism at all, although Eliot has frequently praised it. As he writes: "Scholarship, even in its humblest forms, has its rights; we assume that we know how to use it, and how to neglect it ... it may supply opinion instead of educating taste. But fact cannot corrupt taste". 24 But it is asserted that Eliot's compliments to scholars like Herbert Grierson or W.P. Ker should not disguise the fact that Eliot separates scholarship from criticism. Thus, the only genuine criticism is that of the poet-critic who is "criticising poetry in order to create poetry". 25 Eliot turns down the notion that criticism is for the sake of "creation" or creation for the sake of criticism. He also disregards any such assumption that there exist separately ages of criticism and ages of creativity. It would be wrong to argue that by plunging ourselves into intellectual darkness we had a better prospect of finding spiritual light. Instead, he postulates that the two directions of sensibility are complimentary; and as sensibility is rare, unpopular, and desirable, it is to be expected that the critic and the creative artist should frequently be the same person.
Somewhat disagreeing with Eliot's view of the need for a definite emotion in poetry Richards holds that such an emotion cannot be identified until its object is discernible. He observes:

The specific quality of any emotion is all but indefinable in pure emotive terms, and that seems to be because the distinctness that we think of as attaching to an emotion belongs really to the object towards which we have it ... I would think there is generally, and ideally, no emotion at all until an object has furnished the occasion for one, and that the critic is faking his discovery of the emotion when he cannot make out its object; and that if he should try to describe to us the emotion he would find himself describing it as whatever kind of emotion would be appropriate towards a certain object, and therefore presently, before he realised it, beginning to describe the very object which he had meant to avoid.  

Another critic, J.C. Ransom is of the view that Eliot's critical taste was fastidious. For Eliot it was "classicist" and his studies and interest were apparently in poems quite different from his own. The significance of this is that his own creative mode was not allowed to usurp his critical judgment. His religious convictions never dictated his critical obligation to poetry. One of the best things in his influence
has been his view that aesthetic effect is independent of religious or moral or political and social effect. It is an end that is beyond and not coordinate with these effects.

Eliot’s observations are not primarily of physical objects. His most sustained analysis relates to mental state and emotion. He none the less holds that permanent poetry is always a presentation of thought and feeling “by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world”. In his view the poet’s emotions are not important. As he remarks while elucidating Valery, “not our feelings, but the pattern which we make of our feelings is the centre of value”. The lasting poem is not the one in which the poet pours out his personal emotion, for “the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.” This passage may not be fully understood without a careful reading; but it is already a landmark in the theory of criticism. It furnishes, for example, an important clue to the triumph of 

Samson Agonistes. Milton had a great success in finding a dramatic situation by which he could externalise his own emotions and give them universal stature. But he also states that failure to find an adequate "chain of events", and a consequent confusion of purely personal feelings with those of the hero may be held responsible for the vagueness and vapourousness of Prometheus Unbound. The reason why "Gerontion"
is a much mature and balanced work of art among Eliot's earlier poems is that in this poem he hit upon a situation in the sombre brooding of the old man that enabled him to set down a particular statement of life in concrete, objectified form.

Another great critic of Eliot, F.O. Matthiessen, upholds the former's emphasis on condensation in poetry, but he suggests that this condensation could be obtained more easily by acquiring a concentrated form:

To convey in poetry the feeling of the actual passage of life, to bring to expression the varied range and volume of awareness which exists in a moment of consciousness, demanded, in Eliot's view the strictest condensation. Above all, the impression of fully packed content should not be weakened through the relaxed connectives of the usual narrative structure. Whatever may have been right at the time of the composition of The Ring and the Book, it was apparent to Eliot that to-day 'anything that can be said as well in prose can be said better in prose.' Poetry, alone, through its resources of rhythm and sound, can articulate the concentrated essence of experience, and thus comes closest to the universal and permanent; but it can do so only through the mastery of a concentrated form.

The problem of the critic is to capture some unified pattern in this variety; and yet, if he believes as Eliot does that poetry should embody a man's reaction to his whole
experience, then it should also present the full sense of its complexity. He can accomplish this double task of accurately recording what he has felt and perceived, and at the same time interpreting it, but only if he has grasped the similarity that often lies beneath contrasting appearances. Only then can he emphasize the essential equivalence of seemingly different experiences.

Eliot has himself taken pains on many occasions to point out that the concern of the poet is never so much with thought as with finding "the emotional equivalent of thought"; that the essential function of poetry is not intellectual but emotional; that the business of Dante or Shakespeare was "to express the greatest emotional intensity of his time, based on whatever his time happened to think". P.O. Matthiessen notes:

Purely in terms of the elements of tradition which Eliot has attempted to bring to fresh expression in his own poetry, it is by now apparent that his principal desire is not for intellectual density but for richness and subtlety of emotional impression.

Eliot has words of high praise for use of definite emotion and considers poetry good in the proportion as emotion is used. His attitude to poetry is similar to that of T.E. Hulme. David Daiches makes an interesting comment on Hulme:

For Hulme there is classicism (good) - and romanticism (bad); abstract or geometrical art (good) and naturalistic (bad); the religious attitude
(good) and humanism (bad); belief in original
sin (good) and confidence in man (bad); hard,
clear, precise images (good) and imagination
(bad); discipline (good) and self-expression
(bad); dictatorship or at least royalism (good)
and democracy (bad). 29

It is now widely recognised that Gautier and Hulme had
influenced both Pound and Eliot and provided them with a model
opposed to the romantic (Wordsworthian) sentimentality but one
tempered with neo-classical and Imagist "dry hardness" 30. Hulme
laid more emphasis on the medium than the content, or on the
sincerity of experience than the making and shaping of a poem.
Eliot's attitude is almost identical to that of Hulme's. Hulme
compares the composition of a poem with the making of a leg of
a table or jug or an engine. In his Speculations published in
1924 he comments on the geometrical character of the new art.
He says that this art exhibits no delight in nature and no
striving after vitality. It bears some characteristics of
distinctness free from messiness, confusion and the accidental
details of existing things. He observes:

As far as sensibility goes, you get a kind of
shrinking from anything that has the appearance
of being mechanical. 31

The term "objective correlative" becomes an integral
part of Eliot's criticism of poetry. Although Eliot has used
this term in his essay on Hamlet, it has now been accepted as
valid in respect of other forms of art as well. The purpose of
using it is to guarantee the definiteness, balance and relevance of the poem. The relevance is that the lack of it is likely to turn the emotion ineffectual and pell-mell. That good poetry does usually have an "objective correlative" means that the feelings and emotion in it are not without an object or beyond the context of facts and events - imagined or real. That is the universal formula which will hold good for good poetry of any age. In a poem emotion accompanied by an object and attached to a particular situation, has every particularity and force. F.O. Mathiessen's views are in conformity with that of Eliot's. He dwells on what the objective correlative meant for Eliot:

The necessity to concentrate on something definite is exactly what Eliot means by his repeated statement that the evocation of emotion by means of complete, concrete objectification is the only right way of expressing emotion in art. 32

And again,

Perhaps the most important thing that is revealed by applying Eliot's conception of the 'objective correlative' to his own work is the essentially dramatic nature of all his poetry.

The dramatic element in poetry lies in its power to communicate a sense of real life, a sense of the immediate present - that is, of the full quality of a moment as it is actually felt to consist. 33
Although Eliot admits that emotion and feeling are inseparable, he does not treat them in one sense. In his view emotion is the part of feeling as the scope of the latter is greater than that of the former. Emotion has distinctness and definiteness, while feeling is taken to be obscure and faint. The business of the artist or critic is to render the whole range of feelings into a clear, definite pattern. The inseparability of emotions and feelings is underlined by the fact that although there are vague thoughts there must be precise feelings. And ultimately precise feelings take the shape of a definite emotion. In his introduction to Paul Valery's *The Art of Poetry* Eliot writes that the importance of poetry is not on account of the feelings but the pattern of feelings that they form.

When we discuss Eliot's criticism of poetry, we find that he sometimes uses "feelings" as small but distinct units which he combines into a systematic emotional structure. At other times he equates feelings with experiences which express human emotions.

Although Eliot treats feeling and emotion as inseparable things, the distinction between them is not clearly made. But his views on the distinctions of these things are valuable contributions to the discussion of his criticism of poetry. According to Eliot the effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any other experience not of art. Eliot treats feelings as various indefinite experiences which are combined into a harmonious whole by the artist. To substantiate his view Eliot observes:
The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are formed together.\textsuperscript{34}

And again,

Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever; composed out of feelings solely.\textsuperscript{35}

In his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Eliot defines the poetic creative process negatively by saying that it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. While defining poetry Eliot wants to draw critical attention to another part of Wordsworth's statement that poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility" - only to refute this conception by observing that it is an "inexact formula". According to him, neither emotion, nor recollection, nor tranquility constitutes poetry. The poetry results from a particular kind of concentration in the mind of the poet. It is a new thing which results from the concentration of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or by deliberation. These experiences are not "recollected", and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is "tranquil" only in that it is a passive attending upon the event. It seems that Eliot
does not like to be drawn into any discussion of personality as it is implied that "personality" stands for narrow and selfish personal experiences and thus lacks the qualities which great poetry is supposed to escape from or transcend. The emotion of art is impersonal.

The poet cannot acquire this impersonality without surrendering his personal feelings, passions, prejudices, etc. What in short constitutes his personality wholly to the work to be done. To acquire it, a poet has therefore to detach himself from his personal experiences. If he cannot effect this detachment and neutrality, he would not be able to handle his personal experiences in art with balance and perfection. He must become neutral and a little indifferent to his experiences. Since these personal experiences constitute the material of poetry, they are to be transformed into a richer, impersonal and universal material. Thus, in Eliot's view, "personality" stands for narrow and obscure impulses and experiences.

On Eliot's view of the emotion of art being impersonal, Vincent Buckley observes that Eliot's concern for impersonality in poetry arises immediately out of his concern with order in its various manifestations. To him the order of art is impersonal. But " impersonality" is a word of uncertain meaning. We cannot settle any question of its literary value simply by invoking the word. Understandably Eliot leaves it to the readers to assign a full meaning to it. But it must be emphasised here that he does not see order as impersonal in the
sense of its being fixed and dead. It is not a patterned sterility set against life and "the natural". He is not interested (as Hulme was) in the kind of impersonality we see in abstract paintings; nor is he interested in the attempt to transmute reality into a structure of symbols. The order which he desires, and in which he sees the true virtue of impersonality, is an ordering of the facts of human life; it is, generally, an ordering of the emotions. To assert his viewpoint on this aspect Buckley writes:

It is part of Eliot's value (as of Arnold's) that he realises that his notion of impersonality leads to one of communion. Yet Arnold's view, though it scorns the 'personal estimate', does not really include a feeling for impersonality. For Eliot, it is the key to his whole view of the value of poetry. And his ambiguous way of affirming it, his use of mechanical or sterile images to define it, is the chief cause of the unease which I for one feel with that view.36

Vincent Buckley further says that a genuine impersonality will lead to an art that certainly is not divorced from life, but bears life within it in a form at once concentrated and impersonal. He quotes Eliot's words:

The end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed; thus we aim to see the object as it really is and find a meaning for the words of Arnold.37
For this very reason, because of his certainty that great art is impersonal, he reproves those who expect poetry to do too much, to be a vehicle of unacknowledged legislation, or to save us, or even to interpret life for us, to console and sustain us.

Eliot's well known definition of poetry as not the expression of but an escape from personality implies an attempt to escape from emotionalism and narrowness which are bound to be present in the poet's personal experiences. It is to be noted that in the year 1919 Eliot made a determined shift in his theory and practice of poetry by trying to divert the reader's interest from the content to the medium of art, the artistic process. As a critic of comprehensive taste he kept his options open and was not reluctant to modify or revise his critical opinions and attitude whenever required. When he sees the glimpse of a new experience, he shows his readiness to look at a work of art from different angles. It appears that Eliot's idea of impersonality is a modified form of the poet's need to minimise his personality in his work in order to reflect universality as held by Stephane Mallarme. For Mallarme a pure poet needs to transcend his finite personality and become "in his altered state ... as a mirror (the essence of man is consciousness) in which universal life can be reflected. This is the basis of Mallarme's theory of the impersonality of the poet". For Eliot, the poet's mind is a receptacle in which disparate experiences - personal or other - combine to form new wholes whereas for Mallarme the poet's mind is a mirror.
Eliot contemplates to attack the point of view which believes in the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul. For Eliot this theory does not say that the poet aims at the expression of his personality. He rather finds in it what was his chief concern, that poetry is a particular medium, a medium as such in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways and produce new experiences. Impressions and experiences which are important for the poet as man may take no place in his poetry, and such experiences as are important in his poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man’s personality. It will be very difficult to find here the whole truth in Eliot’s statement about poetry but the readers find it interesting in the context of its time. Eliot thought that it was extremely necessary to make such an assertion by insisting on art as art, as medium, as artistic process and as structure.

According to Eliot, the proper aim of the artist is to create an impersonal artefact. But his view stands opposite to the realist and personalist aesthetics of his immediate predecessors. Critics like Kandinsky, Appolinaire, Pound and others had earlier unfavourably reacted to the personalist aesthetics and, following the same line, Eliot pronounces that the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. As already stated, it is healthy for art sometimes to divert one’s attention from content to medium or from the sincerity of personal experience to the making and shaping of the poem. To substantiate his view Eliot writes:
For it is not the 'greatness', the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place.\textsuperscript{39}

F.R. Leavis, who was at one time an active admirer of Eliot, later became a bitter critic of his critical attitudes and ideas. In the review entitled "Eliot's Stature as Critic" in \textit{Commentary} Leavis writes:

Actually the trenchancy and vigour are illusory and the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is notable for its ambiguities, its logical inconsequences, its pseudo-precisions, its fallaciousness, and the aplomb of its equivocations and its specious cogency. Its offered compression and its technique in general for generating awed confusion help to explain why it should not have been found easy to deal with. Yet the falsity and gratuitousness of its doctrine of impersonality are surely plain enough.\textsuperscript{40}

Although Leavis's comment here is very forceful, it may be argued that his attack on Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is least convincing. It is also doubtful whether he had the background of Eliot's essay in his mind. We may say that in this and some other earlier essays Eliot writes with great power and vehemence and that he puts forth his arguments vigorously. When a critic has to prove a thesis
almost antithetical to the prevalent one he has to explain, assert, elucidate, explicate every thread of his argument and debate his opposed dictum to convince the reader. This precisely is what Eliot is engaged in doing in "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

Eliot's concept of an artist's need to shun his "personality" means that he ought to transmute his emotions by giving them a universal or impersonal form necessary to produce good art. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" first presents this idea in 1919, but later in 1924, in his introduction to Valery's Le Serpent, he states with full clarity how rigorously disciplined art should be: "One is prepared for art when one has ceased to be interested in one's own emotions and experiences except as material". He also gives his opinion that to make a work of art demands "surrender" of the appetitive self to the form being created.

Eliot holds that this requirement of good and great poetry is applicable in all art where personal emotions and experiences are extended to take universal form. In his opinion a work of art may take its origin in the personal feelings and emotions of the artist but this personal feeling or the so-called "personality" is transformed and transmuted by his imaginative process into something rich and valuable. As Eliot writes:
What every poet starts from is his own emotions...
Shakespeare, too was occupied with the struggle —
which alone constitutes life for a poet — to trans-
smute his personal and private agonies into some-
thing rich and strange, something universal and
impersonal. The rage of Dante against Florence, or
Pistoia, or what not, the deep surge of Shakes-
peare’s general cynicism and disillusionment are
merely gigantic attempts to metamorphose private
failures and disappointments.42

Eliot cites an interesting chemical process to
illustrate the poet’s mental state during the artistic process.
He finds the mind of the poet comparable to a shred of
platinum. His mind may partly or exclusively operate upon the
experience of the man himself, but, like platinum, remains
inert, neutral and unchanged. Only under such circum-
stances could we expect good art to be produced. To quote Eliot’s
memorable expression: “the more perfect the artist, the more
completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the
mind which creates”. Eliot’s view is that while working on his
personal material for creating a work of art an artist is
required to maintain a calm and serene mind however violent his
personal experiences. A clear line of distinction is drawn here
between the perfect artist and the suffering man in him in the
sense that the artist has to be neutral in order to master,
control and transmute his sufferings into art. The following
lines from Eliot’s dissertation on P.H. Bradley further explain
Eliot’s analogy of the poet’s mind with the role of platinum:
To say that one part of the mind suffers and another part reflects upon the suffering is perhaps to talk in fictions. But we know that those highly organised beings who are able to objectify their passions, and as passive spectators to contemplate their joys and torments, are also those who suffer and enjoy the most keenly. 43

Another important aspect of Eliot's notion of impersonality is the principle of depersonalization in art discussed in his "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Eliot gives a detailed analysis of the conception of impersonality in his essay on W.B. Yeats. What he means to say further on this subject is that "impersonality" as he practised in his earlier works was not quite achieved and was of an inferior kind. But the really great impersonal poetry is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth. The great and profound personality is outwardly cool like the tranquil surface of an ocean but beneath the surface it is raging, violent with the stir of its emotions. As for example, behind the force and power of Swift's work there is the feel of the constant vital transmission of his personality - Swift's disappointments and despair in life, either in political sphere or in love affair. In his essay on Yeats, Eliot rightly points out that there are two kinds of impersonality achieved by an artist in his art; the first is the one which is natural to the mere skilful craftsman, and the other is the impersonality which is formed out of intense personal feelings and passions. To substantiate this view Eliot observes thus:
There are two forms of impersonality: that which is natural to the mere skilful craftsman, and that which is more and more achieved by the maturing artist. The first is that of what I have called the 'anthology piece', of a lyric of Lovelace or Suckling, or of Campion, a finer poet than either. The second impersonality is that of the poet who, out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make of it a general symbol.\footnote{44}

Eliot's idea of poetry as "escape from emotion" and "escape from personality" appear to be closely related to his notion of the historical or the traditional 'sense'. Eliot postulates the way by which it may be possible to put a curb on one's personal experiences. The artist must develop a sense of tradition. Eliot's idea is that it enables the poet to see and interpret his experience in terms of the experiences of other writers and ages. In this connection F.O. Matthiessen observes:

Eliot's own verse bears everywhere evidence of how his reading has been carried alive into his mind, and thus of his conception of poetry 'as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. Holding such a conception of the integral relation of the present to an alive past, believing that it is necessary for the poet to be conscious, 'not of what is dead, but of what is already living', he naturally also believes that one of the marks of a mature poet is that he
should be 'one who not merely restores a
tradition which has been in abeyance, but
one who in his poetry retwines as many
straying strands of tradition as possible'. 45

J.C. Ransom presents a convincing argument about
Eliot's theoretical view behind his idea of tradition. He says :
"Eliot's argument about tradition is not a theory of poetry.
But he is not without a theory of poetry, as he does not write
specific criticism without conscientious references to his
theory." In the essay on "Tradition and Individual Talent", he
observes : "I think it is one of the most unmanageable theories
that a critic could profess, but it is not an unmodern kind of
tory; it is equivalent to some version of Richards's
psychologist's theory". 45

And again,

Though a traditionalist, Eliot is obliged to
concede that circumstances must alter cases,
and that each new poet must after all compose
a new poem which cannot be exactly what any
previous poem has been. His notion of dealing
with this insuperable fact is, in effect, though
the action seems incredible when put in terms,
to represent the tradition and looking over the
new circumstances and writing its own poem,
while the poet depersonalizes himself and
operates in the capacity of a private secretary
to the tradition. 47
Eliot admits that every time a new poem is written something new has happened. But what he tries to emphasise is that the new thing should come through an awareness of a long past or what he calls tradition. One may therefore argue that if a critic or a poet has to have a strong sense of tradition, then a critic or a poet has to be aware of theory.

Eliot has a clear conception of poetry. He felt that poetry should be as well written as prose. He himself has suggested that in one's prose reflections one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality. In his view poetry is the emotional equivalent of thought. Poetry is good and effective only when emotion and intellect both combine and cohere. Good poetry is the transmutation of thought. In Eliot's terms a good poet has the power of feeling as immediately as the odour of a rose. He gives emphasis on the emotional quality of a poem of a piece of work of art. Poetry, according to Eliot, is not "a substitute for philosophy or theology or religion. It has a function of its own, a function which is not intellectual but emotional, the nature of which can be apprehended only in terms of the effect produced by its combination of rhythmical movement with the sound and sense of words. Edmund Wilson is of the opinion that Eliot's criticism steadily illuminates the aims of his verse, while his verse illustrates many aspects of his critical theory. This is a clear admission of the fact that Eliot's theoretical aims are definitely stated in his criticism, and his poetry provides illustrations of these theoretical aims. Commenting on Eliot's criticism of poetry F.O. Matthiessen writes:
The final way of judging a poet is by the authentic value of what he has done; and to gauge this while remembering that, as Eliot himself knows, one of the greatest services of poetry lies in its power to make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world. 48

The "Dissociation of Sensibility" is yet another aspect of his critical theory which must be explained while discussing Eliot's criticism of poetry. Basically the term indirectly points to a basic feature of a good poem that there should not be the separation of feeling and thinking in the sensibility of the poet. The term "Dissociation of Sensibility" stands for the separation of feeling from thinking, intellect from passion. "Dissociation of Sensibility" takes place when one element in a poem is emphasized and refined at the cost of the other. It also describes the imbalance between the refinement of language and the degree of feeling. This term is very much evident in Eliot's essays on Milton, Marvell and the Metaphysical Poets.

In his essay on Marvell Eliot quotes Coleridge's views on imagination and fancy which may perhaps have been an early source of Eliot's term "Dissociation of Sensibility". Eliot's intention is that poetry should be composed not only in the soul but also in the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts. When there is dissociation of a poet's sensibility language naturally becomes crippled.
While discussing Eliot's sensibility it is to be noted that he also displays a major concern for language. In his view the language of poetry should be able to keep pace with the speech rhythms of its time. He is critical of Milton's language as it lacks vitality, muscular tension and the sensory rhythm of Shakespeare. A poet's function, according to Eliot, is to purify, develop and enrich the dialect of the tribe. Moreover, there is a close relationship between language and the object because in a healthy state language presents the object.

Eliot is thus seen trying to incorporate into his poetry some system of thought and point of view. He praises Dante for the economy of language and a system of thought discernible in his works. According to Eliot the greatest poetry can be written with the greatest economy of words, and with the greatest austerity in the use of metaphor, simile, verbal beauty and elegance. The language of each great English poet is his own language and the language of Dante is the perfection of a common language. Drawing a clear line of distinction between Dante and Shakespeare Eliot believes that most great English poets are inimitable in a way in which Dante was not inimitable. He substantiates this opinion by saying that if we try to imitate Shakespeare we will certainly produce a series of stilted, forced, and violent distortions of language. In Dante, Eliot finds the greatest attitude and greatest depth of human passion and also a system of thought. It is ultimately this underlying system of thought in a work that contributes to or makes for its greatness. But Eliot would prescribe only literary standards for judging this greatness of a literary work. As he observes:
The persons who enjoy the writings solely because of their literary merit are essentially parasites; and we know that parasites, when they become too numerous, are pests. I could fulminate against the men of letters who have gone into ecstasies over 'the Bible as literature' ...

Elliot does not entertain any religious principles or philosophical doctrines or systems to evaluate or measure the greatness of a literary work. Here one is reminded of his well known theoretical stand that poetry is poetry and religion is religion and that one could not be a substitute for the other. By thus turning down Arnold's dictum that poetry might be a substitute for religion, Elliot also turns down any critical standards that might interfere or adulterate the purely literary critical standards for judging literature, be it poetry, drama, or criticism itself.

Elliot, therefore, concentrates on poetic criticism from a purely literary angle. He takes neither the aesthetic nor the historical critical view but a purely literary critical view of poetic creation, poetic activity and poetic vision. He discusses a poem purely on the basis of classical ideals/principles such as impersonality, refinement, economy, wit, concentration, condensation, definite emotion, literary allusions, rhythm, etc. At no point does one feel that Elliot tries to emphasise the need for directing the attention of the critic to the poet's moods or biography, culture or society, religion or philosophy. Clearly, he takes a practical theoretical stand that the New Critics take—that of concentrating on the poem itself though he understands that no
fixed critical rules or methods will suffice for each poem will be different from every other poem according to the new circumstances in which it is produced. While his theoretical position finds illustrations in his own poetical compositions and vice versa, he takes a similar theoretical stand on novel and drama. We may now examine his critical stand on the drama in the next chapter and see how far he succeeds in maintaining his literary - critical theoretical position that the New Critics take on this form of literature.