CHAPTER- III

ELIOT AS A VERSE CRITIC
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In this chapter, I have attempted an extended, critical consideration of the principles, formulations and definitions of poetry given by Eliot at different places and on different occasions. Eliot has not written his critical essays under any systematic plan; his books are collections of reviews, introductions and addresses; yet coherently progressing principles of poetry do emerge from them.

Among the aesthetic principles of Eliot, the aesthetic of verse is of paramount importance. Eliot writes that his essays and formulations about poetry are the by-product of his poetry-workshop or the prolongation of his thinking on the composition of his own poems, yet one feels that Eliot's writing or talking about poetry is in no way less absorbing than his poetry itself. In his respect, the case of Paul Valery is somewhat similar to that Eliot. It is probable that Eliot's poetry, through the passage of time, may go out of fashion, but his formulations and explanations of poetry will provide a permanent fund of critical stimulus to the reader.

It is part of the modesty of Eliot to say that he is no aesthetician. The fact is that whenever Eliot dwells upon poetry he brings adequate illumination on the problems and the essence of poetry. Regarding the definition or the critical appraisal of poetry, Eliot is a specialist. It is very difficult to
be wholly new poetry, Eliot is a specialist. It is very difficult
to be wholly new in defining poetry, because poetry is as
mysterious as the very soul of man. Eliot apparently seems to
us revolutionary; yet in fact, what he has done as poet and
critic is that he has given new emphases. It is proof of great
courage that Eliot introduced a new turn and new points of
emphasis regarding the precept and practice of poetry, when
poetry was almost famishing and literary criticism becoming
sickly through excessive romanticism. Eliot realized that the
traditional nineteenth century way of writing poetry was
incapable of registering the urban squalor, the seediness and
the dinginess of twentieth century-life. Sentimentalizing over
a daisy or a daffodil could no more be continued in a grim
urban environment?

In his essay "Tradition and the Individual
Talent" (1919), Eliot gave an important definition of poetry
which, though well-known, deserves to be quoted: "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". ¹

In this definition, a new emphasis is manifest. Eliot at
the most opportune moment demanded a check over the
increasing sentimentalization of poetry. The uncritical or the
hasty reader may get a wrong impression from this definition.
It is just possible that he may conclude that Eliot is in favour
of dry, dull or only classical poetry or such poetry as has no
room for emotion and passion. While reading the earlier essays and definitions of poetry, one must have in one’s mind the background and the context in which they were written. Eliot himself writes: “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”.

Vagueness, emotionalism and pseudo-Romanticism had become the order of the day. Eliot aimed to bring a health balance and order, a clarity and sanity in poetry. In the expression: “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion...but an escape from personality”, “Turning loose of emotion” denotes, indirectly or implicitly, the worse features of the nineteenth century Romanticism. In the eighteen-eighties, the typical reader of poetry was content to tolerate looseness, vagueness and emotionalism, at the cost of the other qualities of poetry. Eliot determined to give a jolt to the Georgian sensibility. “Turning loose of emotion” is an expression, metaphorical enough, which, adequately and sharply, suggests that excessive, haphazard, indefinite, messy, sloppy and misty jumbles of emotion will not make good poetry or good art. And “escape from emotion” appears to us extreme and somewhat exaggerated, as no real poetry is possible if it involves complete detachment from emotion. Specially in the earlier essays, Eliot takes an exaggeratedly opposite course from the usual one of the Georgian period, simply because he reacts against it and has to establish in the reader’s mind some
other values and traits of poetry which have been neglected for a long time. The study of Arthur Symons' The Symbolist Movement in Literature forced upon Eliot's mind a realization that a new kind of verse was needed in order to picture and render the city-life of skyscrapers, madding crowds, industrialization, the combustion engine, slums and jazzy machines. While introducing a dramatic poem (Savonarola) by his mother, Eliot made a point of much significance: "Perhaps the conditions of modern life (think how large a part is now played in our sensory life by the internal combustion engine) have altered our rhythms."

Eliot's definition of poetry as an escape from "emotion" and "personality" is not, as a partial reader may hastily conclude, exactly antithetical to Wordsworth's definition "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquility". Here the difference lies in the fact that Eliot insists, more outspokenly, on disciplining and calming the "overflow" of powerful feelings in good poetry. In a radio talk, Eliot expressed his unstinted liking for Wordsworth's poem, "Resolution and Independence".

The nineteenth century poets and critics harped mostly on emotion and sensation, and Eliot in reaction laid excessive stress on wit, intelligence, levity and commonsense, structure and organization in poetry. Eliot writes relevantly.

There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse and there is a small --
number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. 5

Matthew Arnold, in his essay on Gray, writes slightlyingly of eighteenth century poetry. Eliot tries to assert that the poetry of Pope or Dryden or Johnson is not necessarily inferior; rather, some of its qualities hold good for the poetry of any age. Literary finish, purity of language and clarity are prose virtues which should not be bypassed. Such prose virtues are the permanent ingredients of poetry. Arnold says:

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. 6

Apparently, "soul", for Arnold, symbolizes emotion, passion, sensation or feeling in the typical Romantic way. Arnold's definition, in fact, is not wholly incorrect, but it seems to overlook other qualities and faculties of man, like wit, reasoning and ratiocinative power. It is narrowness on Arnold's part to use wit in this limited sense. Eliot has rightly pointed out, in his essay on Marvell, that the Oxford Dictionary warrants us against using the word "wit" in the superficial sense. Unlike Arnold, Eliot takes "wit" in the larger sense, and deprecates in general its absence in poetry. His discussion of poetry and its problems is done with cool-headedness, commonsense, and a sense of proportion. Arnold's statement -- "genuine poetry is conceived and
composed in the soul"—means virtually a directive for the poet" to look into your heart and write". Eliot says convincingly and interestingly that a poet should look into a good deal more than the heart; the good poet must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts. Eliot means to say that good poetry is not merely sensation but also cerebration, not only passion but also ratiocination. Eliot is appreciative of the best of the seventeenth century metaphysical poetry because it makes varied recalcitrant qualities operate in harmony and union.

Regarding emotion in poetry, Eliot believes that it should not be loose, indefinite and excessive, for sentimentalization makes for bad art. Shakespeare is the greater artist by virtue of his power to scale down and control the mounting squads of emotion in King Lear through the Fool's laughter. "A slumber did not spirit seal" presents the same kind of control over a powerful emotion; underneath, there is the surge and swirl of the tragic experience, but the surface in calm.

Eliot differentiates between the art-emotion and the crude emotion of man outside art. He calls the art-emotion the aesthetic one, and explains further that emotion in good art is complex, richer and more definite than any emotion of human life. The emotional experiences of people in general are overflowing, defuses, indefinite, floating, opaque and abstract. Emotion in good poetry has force, particularly, relevance and concreteness, Eliot writes:
His [a poet’s] particular emotion may be simple or crude or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotion of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life.  

And at another place:

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.

But I.A. Richards in his essay “The Phantom Aesthetic State” is vehemently critical of the so-called, “aesthetic experience” and its differentiation from other kinds of experience of life. This kind of differentiation between art-emotion and non-art-emotion in Eliot’s manner arouses I.A. Richards’ remarks, “the phantom problem of the aesthetic mode or aesthetic state, a legacy from the days of abstract investigation…..” I.A. Richards says:

When we look at a picture, or read a poem or listen to music, we are not doing something quite unlike what we were doing on our way to the gallery or when we dressed in the morning. The fashion, in which the experience is caused in us, is different, and as a rule, the experience is more complex, and, if we are successful, more unified. But our activity is not of a fundamentally different kind.

That emotion in art, according to Eliot, is definite, means that it is fully objectified and is truly relevant to a
particular object and situation. Good art has usually definite emotion, and Eliot highly commends it anywhere he finds it. In his review, "The Silurist", Eliot shows the superiority of George Herbert’s poetry over the poetry of Henry Vaughan. "In short the emotion of Herbert is clear, definite, mature and sustained, whereas, the emotion of Vaughan is vague, adolescent, fitful and retrogressive.\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{About this point, Eliot writes in another place:}

\textit{....he [Swinburne] uses the most general word, because his emotion is never particular, never in direct line of vision, never focused; when you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne, yoit find always that the object was not there...only the word.}\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, the indefinite emotion in absence of the definite object is abstract and nebulous. Without the definite object and emotion a poem will be wanting in "relevant intensity". The following lines of Ezra Pound might have influenced T.S. Eliot:

\textit{...The only kind of emotion worthy of a poet is the inspirational emotion which energizes and strengthens, and which is remote from the everyday emotion of sloppiness and sentiment...Go in fear of abstraction.....consider the definiteness of Dante's presentation as compared with Milton's....}\textsuperscript{14}

Eliot showers high praise on definite emotion and takes it as a sign of good poetry. He writes:
Instead of slightly veiled and resonant abstractions, like [those] of Swinburne, or the mossiness of Mallarme, Pound's verse has always definite emotion behind it.  

Though Speculations was published in 1924, Eliot’s attitude to poetry is very similar to that of T.E. Hulme. David Daiches writes lucidly about 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).  

Hulme is inclined to shift the interest from the content to the medium, or from the sincerity of experience to the making and shaping of a poem.

Eliot’s attitude is no less extreme. The composition of a poem is to him almost like the making of a leg of a table, or a jug or an engine. Hulme in his Speculations writes that the new art is geometrical in character while the art we are accustomed to, is vital. The geometrical art, he continues, most obviously exhibits no delight in nature and no striving after vitality. Its forms are always what can be described as stiff and lifeless. The geometrical art is something absolutely distinct and free from the messiness, the confusion and the accidental details of existing things. Hulme says further: “As
far as sensibility goes, you get a kind of shrinking from anything that has the appearance of being mechanical”. 17

Eliot’s reaction against the nineteenth century attitude to poetry is similar to T.E. Hulme’s: “For it is not the greatness or the intensity of the emotion, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts”.

Though Eliot has used the term “objective correlative” concerning Hamlet, it is valid for almost every form of art. The “objective correlative” guarantees the definiteness, balance and relevance of the poem. The lack of it is likely to turn the emotion ineffectual and confused. That good poetry does usually have an “objective correlative” means that the feelings and emotions in it are not without an object or beyond the context of facts and events – imagined or real. That is the universal formula which is true for the best poetry of any age. In a poem, emotion accompanied by an object, and attached to a particular situation has tremendous particularity and force.

Eliot like Hulme leans on the side of classicism and has a general predisposition towards order and discipline. His chief concern is that feeling and emotion should not become unmanageable in art. He wants the artist to treat feelings and emotions – emotions bearing even upon his own person – as something objective. Eliot writes significantly, in this context, in a review, “Ulysses, Order and Myth”. 8 that in creation one is responsible for what one can do with the material, which one must simply accept. Eliot includes, in this material, the
emotions and feelings of the writer himself, which for the writer are simply material – which he must accept – and are not "virtues to be enlarged or vices to be diminished". Eliot in his book Knowledge and Experience attempts to present feelings as something objective. He writes:

"Our ordinary speech declares that two people may share the same feeling as well as regard the same object yet we persist in believing that about feelings there is something private, that we cannot know them from the outside; although we are compelled to admit that often an observer understands a feeling better than does the person who experiences it... Feelings exist on the same footing as other object: they are equally public..."  

It is obvious that we can no more explain passion to a person who has never experienced it than we can explain light to the blind. But it should be obvious also that we can explain the passion equally well: it is no more subjective because some persons have never experienced it, than light is subjective because the blind cannot see. We can explain it by its relations; by its effects upon the heart-beat, its toxic alterations of the system, by its effects in the conduct of social intercourse..."  

Eliot does not always treat emotion and feeling in one sense; he takes emotion to be part of feeling, as the canvas of the latter is greater than that of the former. Emotion is
generally taken to be distinct and definite, whereas feeling is regarded as a little obscure, more tangled, faint and less violent. The function of the artist is to make the configuration of feelings into a definite set or pattern. Eliot says that there may be vague thought but precise feeling. And precise feelings take the shape of definite emotions. Introducing The Art of Poetry by Paul Valery, Eliot writes that poetry is important not for the feelings but for the pattern of feelings that it makes.

Eliot sometimes uses "feeling" as shorter units which the artist or the poet coheres and systematizes into one definite emotional structure. And sometimes he uses feelings for experiences which are not usually regarded as fit subject-matter for poetry: "The business of the poet...is to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all". 21

Eliot's differentiation of feeling from emotion is not quite clear; yet it is a markedly valuable contribution to aesthetic principles. Feelings are considered by Eliot as various indefinite experiences which are compounded into a harmonious whole by the artist in art:

*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 present together.* 22

...Great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever: composed out of feelings solely. 23
In “Tradition and the Individual Talent” Eliot defines poetry negatively only to assert his viewpoint more positively. Eliot has dwelt upon the formulation and explanation of poetry in a debator’s style, with a new emphasis and powerful rhetoric – sharp-edged, hard-hitting, deliberately partial, almost dogmatic.

Poetry, Eliot say, is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. Eliot does not like to be drawn into any clear-cut discussion of personality, but by implication indicates that “personality” stands for narrow, selfish, private personal events and experiences which great poetry is supposed to escape and transcend. Unless a poet becomes neutral and is indifferent to his personal experiences, he will not be able to handle these in art with balance, beauty and perfection. Art may take its origin in one’s personal experience or event, but this experience but this experience or event needs to be transmuted or transformed into something richer and more complex, impersonal and universal. “Personality” in Eliot’s definition stands for the selfish, the private and obscure impulses and experiences. It is another term for what Bernard Shaw calls “the little selfish clod of ailments”. To be “Personal” is to be pseudo Romantic, to be oblique, muddle-headed, to be “moaning” or “whining”, to be sloppy, blurred and sentimental.

Hence, Eliot’s escape from personality is virtually a plea for an escape from emotionalism and narrowness. Eliot in 1919 had a determined aim to shift the centre of emphasis in
the theory and practice of poetry. He wanted to divert the reader's interest from the content to the medium and the artistic process.

The point of view, which Eliot struggles to attack in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", is related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul. Eliot's meaning is that the poet has "not a personality" to express but a particular medium which is only a medium and not a personality... In the context of its time, it was necessary to make such an assertion for resisting and countering "the post-Swinburnian arrest", and to insist on art as art, as medium, artistic process, structure and shapeliness.

Thomas Parkinson in his essay, "Intimate and Impersonal, an Aspect of Modern Poetics", throw much light on Eliot's opinion about the escape from personality in poetry. He points out that a major work on the motives of modern art is Ortega Gasset's The Dehumanization of Art. The major motive of the new writer is to purify art, to be willfully anti-popular, and to tend towards "dehumanization". The human content should thin to such a point that the artist's loyalty should be to the Inherent nature of the medium. In poetry and painting, according to the new trend, the mimetic or the non-creative part of an artist's work is the personal experience. From the viewpoint of the new art, the most that can be said for "personal experience" is that it may be the pretext of poetical composition. But the painting or poem is not to be tested by its fidelity to natural from (its realism) or to
personal experience (its sincerity), for the art-work is neither representational nor reminiscent. The proper aim of the artist is to create an impersonal artifact; and this extreme stand is opposite to the realistic and personalist aesthetics of his immediate predecessors. Kandinsky, Appolinaire; Ezra Pound and others had reacted against the personalist aesthetics and the same point of view led Eliot to say, with a certain pleasure in outraging an audience, that the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice. It is healthy for art sometimes to divert one’s attention from content to medium or from the sincerity of experience to the making and the shaping of the poem. Eliot writes: “For it is not the greatness or 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…”

Dr. Leavis in his younger days was an active admirer of Eliot. Late in his life, however, he wrote a sever criticism of Eliot in his review “Eliot’s Stature as Critic” in Commentary:

"Some of the ideas, attitudes and valuations put into currency by Eliot were arbitrary...The limitation, the disability...it is a case challenging a diagnostic approach- has its ominous document in a famous early essay: “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. It was on this preeminently that was based Eliot’s reputation as a thinker...

Actually Eliot’s trenchancy and vigour are illusory; the essay is notable for its ambiguities, its logical inconsequence
its pseudo-precisions, its fallaciousness, the aplomb of its equivocations, and its specious cogency. Its excellent 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...”It is not then a coherent conception of art that is figured in Eliot’s artist”  

Dr. Leavis here seems to write forcefully and brilliantly; yet his charge against Eliot, particularly his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, is not very substantial. Had Dr. Leavis kept the background of Eliot’s essay uppermost in his mind, he would not have swooped so heavily on Eliot. The “vigour” in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” is not, as F. R. Leavis says, “Illusory”. Eliot, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and some other earlier essays, writes with great power, energy and vehemence, as some of the attitudes and ideas moved Eliot the poet also. There may not be whole truth (and who has found the whole truth?) in the earlier essays of Eliot but in them he arranges his arguments and stand most vigorously. It will not be right on the part of a critic to be diffident when he has to prove to the reader a thesis almost antithetical to the prevalent one, He will have to assert, explain, elucidate, explicate thread by thread, even repeat vigorously and debate his diametrically opposed dictum to instill it in the mind of the reader.
It is surprising that Dr. Leavis in this review does not mention Eliot's developed notion of impersonality and personality which should have been fully agreeable to him.

To escape from "personality" means to check and control one's excessive overflowing emotion and to transmute it into universal, impersonal art that it may not seem to bear the trace of private experience. Eliot writes relevantly in a review, entitled "The Problem of the Shakespeare's Sonnets":

*Nowhere is the public in general more at fault than in its deciphering of the meaning of poems according to some experience*. *A fine poem which appears to be the record of a particular experience may be the work of a man who has never had that experience; a poem which is the record of a particular experience may bear no trace of that or of any experience.*

*About good poetry the public.....is usually quite wrong; the experience it sees behind the poem is its own, not the poet's. I do not say that poetry is not "autobiographical" but this autobiography is written by a foreign tongue, which can never be translated.... The greater the verse, the less it seems to belong to the individual man who wrote it.*

In good and great poetry there is always a curb on the emotions and the petty and the particular are extended to the universal. A piece of art may take its origin in the personal, private feelings and emotions of the artist but this personal
feeling or the “personality” is transformed into something rich and strange as if the bones are made coral. Eliot writes:

Shakespeare, too, was occupied with the struggle which alone constitutes life for a poet – to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal. The rage of Dante against Florence or what not, the deep surge of Shakespeare’s general, cynicism and disillusionment are merely gigantic attempts to metamorphose private failure and disappointments. 28

The mind of the poet, as Eliot says, is the shred of platinum. It may operate upon the experience of the man himself but it should remain neutral and unchanged, like the platinum, and then only is there the possibility of good art. Eliot has given a memorable and epoch making expression by saying, “the more perfect the artist the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates”. Eliot is right. While creating art a man is required to keep his mind serene, however, harrowing and violent the experience. A great artist is not the servant but the master of his material. The perfect artist is a great deal separate from the suffering man in him in the sense that the artist has to be neutral in order to master, control, organize and transmute his sufferings into art. Hence, we are reminded of the lines of Eliot’s dissertation which explain and cast further light on Eliot’s idea of the poet’s mind as 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 organized 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. 29

F.R. Leavis criticizes Eliot’s idea about the separation between the “man who suffers” and “the mind which creates”.

This, plausible or discussible as it might for a moment seem, is a wholly arbitrary dictum...The analogy of the catalyst gives it no support (all it does is to make the underlying intention plain). 30

There is, of course, a catalytic reaction involving platinum and one of the sulphur gases, but Eliot, being separated from the library, cannot quote the exact terms and conditions available in any book of inorganic chemistry.

Aristotle’s discussion of the nature of the soul (particularly De Anima 408b 3-32) seems to have clearly influenced the general scheme of the essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”. Eliot has quoted a tag from Aristotle as epigraph in Section III of this essay.

In the lines quoted by Eliot, Aristotle says “the mind is something more god-like, and is unaffected”, or, for the Greek word has several nuances, “indifferent”, or-without suffering”.

The notion of impersonality or the principle of depersonalization in art as shown in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” seems to us somewhat rigid and mechanical, like the geometrical line of T.E. Hulme’s Speculations. Eliot brings to us the most developed, extended
and profound conception of "impersonality in his essay on W.B. Yeats. He mains to say in this essay that impersonality", with which he was engaged some years earlier, was more or less of the mechanical or of the inferior kind. The really great impersonal poetry, of which Eliot became more clearly aware later on, can result only when there is enough of the personal or felt experience behind the poet. The great "impersonality is outwardly cool like the tranquil surface of an ocean but it is raging, turbulent beneath the surface. Behind the immense force and power of Swift's work, there is the feel of the constant vital transmission of the personality -- Swift's disappointments and despairs, either in the political sphere or in a love-affair. Thus Swift is in an adequate position to do ruthless, powerful, passionate condemnation of humanity and the world. The personal cynicism, the disgust, the contempt have been metamorphosed into an impersonal mask. Eliot points out that there are two kinds of impersonality achieved by the artist in his art; one is of the inferior kind -- the impersonality of a mere craftsman -- and the other is the impersonality of the first order, impersonality forged out of intense personal emotion and passion. While introducing Le Serpent of Paul Valery, Eliot expresses a similar thought:

Like all of Valery's poetry, it is impersonal in the sense that personal emotion, personal experience is extended and completed in something impersonal -- not in the sense of something divorced from personal experience and passion...
Eliot's development notion of impersonality deserves to be quoted in full:

"...but I think now at least that the truth of the matter [the problem of personality and impersonality] is as follow. 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 which I have called the anthology piece, of a lyric by Lovelace or Sucking 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." 32

Poetry is both the particularization of the universal and the universalisation of the particular.

Eliot's notion of the historical sense or the traditional sense is somehow linked up with the idea of poetry as "escape from emotion" and "escape from personality". The sense of tradition Eliot intends to express, is a means of control over one's excessive, "personalism". It enables the poet to see and interpret his experience in terms of the experiences of other writers and ages. Eliot praises the utmost honesty, truthfulness and the naked vision of Blake's poetry but deplores the lack of traditional or historical sense which might have countered with esoteric part of his thought and vision.
To be traditional in Eliot's sense, however, means also to have read and studied the significant works of the greater writers and to be aware of all past literature. To be traditional is equal to having mastered the other masters and to be allusive. It is to render, interpret and illumine the present in the light of the vision of the past masters.

"Unreal city...."

Here the words, as is well-known, are operating on different levels simultaneously, in terms of Dante's Limbo and Baudelaire's nightmare city. The insistence on the traditional is more important for a critic than for a poet.

Regarding the concept of tradition, he wants that one should not be guided by poetry of one age only, for example, the nineteenth century. Hence, Eliot adopts a corrective attitude to set right the reader's taste and make it comprehensive:

"...I have met but very few people in my life 'who really care for poetry and those few, when they have the knowledge (for they are sometimes quite illiterate people) know how to take from every poet what he has to give, and reject only those poets who whatever they give always pretend to give more than they do give; these discerning people appreciate the work of Pope and Dryden (indeed it might be said in our time that the man who cannot enjoy Pope as poetry probably understands no poetry)..."
Eliot has a coherent conception of poetry. He feels that poetry is good and effective only when emotion and intellect combine and cohere. In a good poem passion and reasoning, delicacy and logic should unite or go side by side or reinforce each other. Eliot is found of English Metaphysical poetry because he finds there both reasoning and passion in unison.

He says that a thought to Donne was an experience. Good poetry is the recreation of thought. A good poet in Eliot's sense feels his thoughts as immediately as the odour of a rose. His mode of feeling is directly and freshly altered by reading and thought. Whatever the subject-matter – the reading of Spinoza, the smell of the gutter, the noise of the typewriter, or the experience of loving a girl – if the poet has the basic passionate, sensitive, amalgamating faculty, his poetry will not go dry. Poetry, Eliot says, is the emotional equivalent of thought. Eliot is not a dry classicist who is in favour of discarding emotion. Often the emotional in a poem or a piece of art is the cause of Eliot's choice and commendation. In his essay "Poetry and Propaganda", he presents through thinking..." And in his essay "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" Eliot says that what every poet starts from, is his own emotion. At another place he writes that the keenest ideas have the quality of sense perception. While introducing Kipling's verse, Eliot opines, that the first condition of right thought is right sensation.

"Dissociation of sensibility" happens in poetry usually when only one aspect of sensibility is exercised to the
complete neglect of the other aspect. Eliot wants poetry to 'present the complete unit and the fullest reality that we encounter in the "Immediate Experience" of F.H. Bradley. In "Immediate Experience" reason and emotion are resolved.

While discussing Eliot’s aesthetic of verse it is essential to explain "dissociation of sensibility" at length. Eliot is himself surprised at the unexpected reputation that this phrase has earned. "Dissociation of sensibility" means much or almost nothing as it points to a quite general, common, basic feature of any good poem. It is not wholly a new term, though no previous critic had laid this much emphasis on this point and in such novel, memorable phrasing. This term stands generally for the separation of feeling from thinking, intellect from passion. But in fact at no stage and in no poem (good or bad) is there merely thinking or merely feeling. Eliot writes in his doctoral dissertation: "No stage can be so low as to be more feeling...." 34

Eliot’s "dissociation of sensibility" and unification of sensibility, are all implicit in Coleridge’s concept of Imagination and seem to have been fathered by it.

"Dissociation of sensibility" is not an evil that a poet must escape or avoid at his discretion. It is to be taken simply as the resulting feature of a bad poem. In poetry, a poet does not bring unification of sensibility by deliberation; rather he brings it into his poem most naturally. "Dissociation of sensibility" takes place especially when one feature or quality in a poem is emphasized and refined at the cost of the other. It
points also to the imbalance between the refinement of language and the degree of feeling; fancy and the matter-of-factness; the auditory and the visual. It suggests also the feeling not done through thinking, and vice versa. Dissociation of sensibility may also result from one’s vast learning of multifarious subjects without any passionate digestion and apprehension of these subjects.

The term “dissociation of sensibility” is directly dwelt upon in Eliot’s essays on Milton, Marvell, and in “The Metaphysical Poets”:

*It is interesting to speculate whether it is not a misfortune that two of the greatest masters of diction in our language, Milton and Dryden, triumph with dazzling disregard of the soul.*

*The two greatest master of diction [Recine and Baudelaire] also the greatest two psychologists, the most curious explorers of the soul.*

That Eliot quotes Coleridge on Imagination in his essay on Marvell should be regarded as a clue to Eliot’s term “dissociation of sensibility”. Eliot wants that poetry should be conceived and composed not only in the soul but also in the cerebral cortex, the nervous system and the digestive tracts. When a poet’s sensibility is dissociated, language inevitably becomes crippled and certain special properties are refined and cultivated while others are atrophied.

“Dissociation of sensibility” is derived, as F.W. Bateson points out, from a passage in Remy de Gourmont’s essay on
Laforgue. There, Remy de Gourmont argues that intelligence and sensibility in a man of original genius like Laforgue are "the flowering of one physiology".

For Eliot, poetry is neither pure cerebration nor simple sensation but the integration of both.

Eliot has added admirably to the fund of critical terminology by distinguishing poetry from verse. There are normally three terms—poetry, verse and prose—but while introducing Anabasis, a poem of St. John Perse, Eliot says there should be four. The opposite of poetry is not always verse. A good impersonal poem of some length cannot be written by a poet unless he is a master of verse and the prosaic also. Eliot does not agree with Poe that a long poem is a contradiction in terms. What Poe wants is "distilled poetry" of equal intensity from the first line to the last. Eliot, on the other hand, insists that there should be some transition or variation between the lines of higher pitch and those of the lower one. A poet should combine both verse and poetry in a poem. Eliot has dispelled the derogatory association with "minor poetry" and—"verse". He says that in poetry there are many casements which are not magic and poetry is not always liquid sentiment poured over in a ready made mould. Eliot writes while introducing St. John Perse's poem:

Poetry may occur within a definite limit on one side at any point along a line of which the formal limits are verse and prose; without offering any generalized theory about poetry, verse and prose I may suggest that
a writer by suing, as does Mr. Perse, certain exclusively poetic methods, is sometimes able to write poetry in what is called prose.... As a matter of fact, much bad poetic prose and a very small part of bad verse is bad because it is prosaic.

Eliot casts more light on the problem while introducing the poems of Pound:

One cannot write poetry all the time: and when one cannot write poetry, it is better to write what one knows is verse and make it good verse, than to write bad verse and persuade oneself that it is good poetry.

In his essay on Dryden, Eliot says that the prospect of delight above all justifies the perusal of poetry.

Language naturally is Eliot’s major concern. He realized that a new language or new diction needs to be forged after any alteration in sensibility. The language which is more important to us is that which is struggling to digest and express new objects, new feelings and new aspects. He insists that the language of poetry should keep abreast of the speech rhythm of its time. Milton’s language in general has not the vitality and verve of speech rhythm. It has not the muscular tension and the sensory rhythm of Shakespeare. Language in a healthy state presents the
object, it is so close to the object that the two are identified. And Eliot says that a poet’s function is to purify, develop and enrich the dialect of the tribe.

Ultimately, Eliot wants for poetry some system of thought, some coherent plausible thread of belief, some vision or point of view. That is why Eliot is fascinated by Dante in whose work he finds economy of language and a system of thought. Eliot insists on the study of the whole work of an author, as only in sequence and totality can we have an idea of the point of view forming or developing in a particular writer. One of the marks of the greatness of a writer is whether his works taken as a whole being to us point of view in a work of art is the reason that Eliot has been drawn to the conclusion that in appreciating art he cannot suspend or neutralize his personal belief. Dante for Eliot has everything in his poetry: simplicity; and lucidity of style, precision and economy of presentation, “the greatest altitude and greatest dept of human passion”, and a system of thought. Hence, to Eliot, Dante presents a saner attitude to life. In “Religion and Literature”, Eliot opines that the greatness of literature is to be judged not by literary standards alone.

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In art, Eliot, like Henry James, wants some figure in the carpet. He says that pure poetry is a phantom and that both in creation and enjoyment, much always enters which is, from the point of view of art, irrelevant. Eliot modestly calls it a personal prejudice of his that he takes the great test pleasure in poetry with a clear philosophical pattern. The great poet, he continues has something to say – something which is over and above the verbal beauty. In “Goethe as the Sage” Eliot writes: “...that the wisdom and the poetry are inseparable, in the poets of the highest rank, is something I have only come to perceive in becoming a little wiser myself”.39
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