

For the post of Written Recruitment Test for the post of Postgraduate Assistants in Tamil Nadu Higher Secondary Educational Service.

Syllabus: English (Subject Code: P02)

Unit-IV - MODERN LITERATURE (1832 to the present day)

### TRADITIONS AND INDIVIDUAL TALENTS

Title	<b>TRADITIONS AND INDIVIDUAL TALENTS</b>
Author	<b>Thomas Stern Eliot</b>
Birth	1888
Death	1965
Post	He worked as a Director of Faber and Faber publication.
Award	He got Nobel Prize in 1948.
Other works	<b>Poems</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Prufrock and Other Observations - 1917</li><li>2. Poems - 1920</li><li>3. The Waste Land - 1922:</li><li>4. Poems - 1909-1925</li><li>5. Ash Wednesday - 1930</li><li>6. Burnt Norton - 1936</li><li>7. East Coker - 1940</li><li>8. The Dry Salvages - 1941</li><li>9. Little Gidding - 1942</li><li>10. Four Quartets - 1949: The book contains non dramatic poetry.</li></ol> <b>Plays</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Sweeney Agonistes - 1926-27</li><li>2. The Rock - 1934: The play deals with religious matter.</li><li>3. Munder in the Cathedral - 1935: The play contains the moving speeches of chorus of the women of Canterbury. It deals with the death of Saint Thomas Becket.</li><li>4. The Family Reunion - 1939</li><li>5. The Cockalil Party - 1949</li><li>6. The Confidential Clerk - 1953</li></ol> <b>Prose</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. For Lancelot Andrewes - 1928</li><li>2. Selected Essays - 1917-1932</li></ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism - 1933</li><li>4. Elizabethan Essays - 1934</li><li>5. After Strange Gods - 1934</li><li>6. Points of View - 1941</li><li>7. What is a Classic - 1945</li><li>8. Sweeney among the Nightingales.</li></ol>
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T.S. Eliot was awarded The British order of merit in 1948 and Nobel Prize in 1948.

He was particularly interested in comparative literature.

The twentieth century in English Literature is known as Age of T.S. Eliot.

He had acknowledged his debt to French symbolists Hulme and Ezra Pound influenced.

Eliot is a poet-critic, comparable to [Sir Philip Sidney](#) and [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#).

Eliot disclaimed his association as a critic in his essay entitled 'The Frontiers of Criticism' in 1956. The relationship between the past and the present in the realm of poetry is marked by reciprocal influence.

This essay formulates Eliot's influential conception of the relationship between the poet and the literary tradition which precedes him. According to Eliot, tradition and individual talent go together. It is the relationship of the poet to the past. Eliot points out a significant difference between "the present and the past"

### **About the work**

Published in 1919 in the Egoist and later included in Eliot's first book of criticism, "[The Sacred Wood](#)" in 1920

This essay is divided into three parts:

1. The concept of tradition
2. The theory of impersonal poetry
3. The conclusion with a gist that "the poet's sense of tradition and the impersonality of poetry are complimentary things."

Eliot opens the essay by revivifying the word "tradition". T.S. Eliot says that the sense of tradition is lacking in English literature. Criticism is a piece of 'archaeological reconstruction' dealing with outdated matters, as archaeology does. The French were then noted more than the English for criticism.

The English are proud that they are far more creative than the French.

He states that criticism, in his view "is as inevitable as breathing." According to Eliot, there is nothing wrong in a reader expressing his opinion of the book that he reads. Criticism is a healthy act because it cleanses the critic's mind of prejudices and enables him to view a work of objectively.

The best part of a poet's work is that which bears the impression of the ancient writers. Not only adolescent poet but the mature poet also have succumb to the influence of the ancients.

A poet must have a historical sense. He must absorb the literature of his own country and also whole Europe. He must know not only the pastness of the past and also of its presence. A poet must embody "the whole of the literature of Europe from [Homer](#)," while, simultaneously, expressing their contemporary environment. He states that "the most individual parts of the poet's work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Eliot claims that this "historical sense" is not only a resemblance to traditional works but an awareness and understanding of their relation to his poetry.

The private mind is subsumed by this more massive one. This leads to Eliot's "Impersonal Theory" of poetry. Great works do not express the personal emotion of the poet.

The relationship between the past and the present is one mutual influence. A piece of art, however novel, does not overthrow the existing order but merely modifies it slightly.

Eliot points out that every new poet is judged by 'the standards of the past' and at the same time one is not to be judged by 'the canons of dead critics'.

The poet should accept the past neither wholly nor partially. He should not concentrate on a few favorite authors or periods to the exclusion of the rest. The poet should enter into the mind of Europe and the mind of his own country which treasures old classics such as Shakespeare, Homer and the Magdalenian paintings. The present is more conscious of the past than the past was of itself.

It is enough if the poet is conscious of the literature of the past.

The poet's mind acts merely as a catalyst, remaining unaffected in the process of fusing disparate material. He refers to the role of platinum in causing the fusion of oxygen and Sulphur dioxide. The poetry of the de-personalized poet is similar to science. Sulphur dioxide (Feeling) + oxygen (Emotion) + platinum (Mind of Poet) = Sulphurous Acid (Poem) (No trace of Poet's Personality)

As the platinum itself remains unaffected, the mind of the poet remains unaffected also. Poet's personality is just an agent or medium to active the relation between emotion and feelings. So, the poet is never a creator, but like catalyst.

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion. Eliot point is more like Keats term 'negative capability'.

Critics should pay attention to the poetry rather than to the poet.

Eliot says:

"Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry."

Emotions and feelings are the two elements. Emotions are subdivided into emotions that are of art and those that are 'not of art'. Feelings are described by him as 'various' and inheriting in particular 'words or phrases or images'. Some poets make use of emotions 'evident' in a situation. Dante exploits the emotion.

According to Eliot the poet's mind is like a jar or utensil in which numerous feelings, phrases & images can be stored or seized. When a poet wants them he utilizes them and unites them. It doesn't mean that the poem created by the poet shows his personality or nature.

Eliot explains very basic thing of his point that, what is expressed by the poet is merely a medium, not a personality. He says:

"...the poet has not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality..."

The poet's mind is a storehouse of 'feelings, phrases, and images'. They get absorbed into a poem when a suitable situation arises.

The greatness of a poem lies in the pressure under which the fusion of emotions and feelings takes place.

He refused Shakespeare's Othello as good play.

The poet's mind is only a medium combines in 'peculiar and unexpected ways'. What is important to the poet may not have any importance in the poem and what is important in the poem may not have any importance in the poet's personal life. "The progress of an artist is a continual sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality".

He talks about Tourneur's play The Revenger's Tragedy, a beauty by ugly objects.

The conflict between beauty and ugliness is the basic emotion which arises out of the situation in the drama.

Eliot attacks the Wordsworth's definition of poetry as 'emotion recollected in tranquility'. Eliot says that it is neither 'emotion' nor is it 'recollected' nor does the poetic composition take place in a 'tranquil' atmosphere. Eliot defines that poetry is a 'concentration of the very great number of experiences. The concentration is neither conscious nor deliberate. Personal touches should be avoided in poetry.

Eliot says that "Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum."

Eliot says that this essay stops at the starting of mysticism and it can be applied by the responsible person, who really interested in poetry. It is very hard thing to take interest in poetry and to keep a poet aside. We usually read poem with the name and fame of the poet. We cannot separate them from each other. Eliot says:

"There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is expression of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet."





