

## **T.S. ELIOT'S THEORY OF IMPERSONALITY: THE PERSONAL BEHIND THE IMPERSONAL**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an endeavour to see if there is any link between T.S. Eliot's much propagated Theory of Impersonality and his personal life. My attempt would be to show a certain personal compulsion behind his avowed credo. Though such a biographical approach has recently lost its validation, an attempt can be made to show how in the case of a writer like Eliot it is the persona that invites a comparison with the person behind it. Not that such an approach is adopted here to rehabilitate the romantic concept of art as an inevitable expression of personality. In fact, no such theoretical reconstruction is intended here. Eliot's case is seen as a unique example of how a theorist's position is shaped in spite of himself by certain private experiences. This kind of critical enterprise inevitably involves a psycho-analytical approach which does not pretend to explain the theory itself but exposes the linkage between Eliot's theory and his struggle to overcome certain personal problems, the problems which perhaps hardened his stand as a theorist.

**Keywords:** - Theory of Impersonality, psycho-analytical, reconstruction.

In the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot formulated his Theory of Impersonality which states that 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality' (Eliot, T.S. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Essays* 17). He observes that 'the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates' (Eliot, T.S. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Essays* 18). He further asserts: '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' (Eliot, T.S. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Essays* 21). It is significant that Eliot always stresses on impersonality. He affirms 'the feeling or emotion or vision resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling, or emotion, or vision in the mind of the poet' (Eliot, T.S. *The Sacred Wood* x) and again states 'that which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and

only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it' (Eliot, T.S. *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism* 30). In his essay 'The Perfect Critic' Eliot explains that in a true artist the personal impressions aroused by a work of art 'become fused... and result in the production of a new object which is no longer purely personal' (Eliot, T.S. 'The Perfect Critic', *The Sacred Wood* 7).

Eliot's continuous insistence on impersonality as the essential prerequisite of any creative work leaves one wondering if there was any personal impulse behind his avowed credo. This paper would like to trace any linkage between his much propagated Theory of Impersonality and his personal life. It is definitely not an attempt of any theoretical reconstruction of the romantic concept of art as an inevitable expression of personality. Rather Eliot's case is seen as a unique example of how a theorist's critical position is shaped in spite of himself by certain private experiences. For such an investigation biographical studies are indispensable and the approach becomes psycho-analytical.

Born on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1888, Eliot was brought up under the over-protective shadow of his mother Charlotte and his elder sisters. This over-protectiveness was largely due to his ill-health. From his tenth year he had to visit a dentist twice a week for two years. He suffered from a congenital double hernia and his mother, always afraid that it could rupture, forbade football and all other strenuous sports. When he was given sailing lessons, he was always accompanied by his mother and sisters who were apprehensive that he would get too wet or too hot or too exhausted (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 7-8). He could never play around like any other normal child. He had only a few friends and mostly spent his time reading. It was an essentially lonely childhood that Eliot spent.

In 1898 when Eliot moved on to Smith Academy, Charlotte used to send her darling son in a sailor-suit and this made the boys laugh. Eliot described another 'terrible' humiliation: 'I sat between two girls at a party. I was very hot. And one of the little girls leaned across ... to the other and whispered loudly: 'Look at his ears!'. So one night I tied some rope round them when I went to bed, but my mother came and took it off and told me they would fold themselves back. So I needn't worry' (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 7). Generally Eliot tried to avoid children's party: 'I walked round and round the streets until it was time to go home' (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 7). However trivial these childhood events were, they perhaps had a negative impact on Eliot's psyche.

Moreover, there was always a strict code of conduct which he had to follow at his home. 'The standard of conduct was that which my grandfather had set: our normal judgements, our decisions between duty and self-indulgence, were taken as if, like Moses, he had brought down the tables of the Law, any deviation from which would be sinful' (Eliot, T.S. *To Criticise the Critic and Other Writings* 44). The observance of the laws of self-denial (Levy and Scherle 53-54) since childhood made it difficult for Eliot to enjoy simple, innocent pleasures.

The sense of self-denial and self-control was deeply rooted in Eliot which perhaps resulted in his extreme shyness with girls. In his boyhood days he looked upon girls only as beings of the Mary Institute which was separated from his parents' house by a wall. He went to play on the school's playground only when he had gone back home. Once when he arrived early he saw the girls staring blankly at him and fled immediately.

One possible explanation of Eliot's prejudice with girls and the related inhibition was his father's opinion about sex as 'nastiness'. Henry Eliot, Sr. thought public instruction equivalent to introducing children to the Devil. He considered syphilis to be God's punishment and he fervently wished that a cure would never be discovered. Otherwise, he said, it might be necessary

‘to emasculate our children to keep them clean’ (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 39). How far Eliot was affected by such an attitude is not easy to assess, but later in life Eliot also called the sex act evil (Eliot, T.S. ‘Baudelaire’, *Selected Essays* 429). All these factors had definite and concrete impact upon his future life.

To add to this, there was his dislike for Boston Unitarianism. Brought up in a family which revered it, Eliot’s ardent nature could not find any nourishment there, and by the time he took admission at Harvard he had developed an indifference towards the church. He found the religion taught by his grandfather stricter than spiritual. He once mentioned that his parents never talked of good or evil but of what was ‘done’ and ‘not done’ (Levy and Scherle 121).

In renouncing Unitarianism, Eliot revolted against those tepid, unemotional distinctions. ‘So far as we are human’, he wrote, ‘what we do must be either evil or good’ (Eliot, T.S. ‘Baudelaire’, *Selected Essays* 429).

Moreover, there was the sense of suffocation in the American environment. During Eliot’s youth the Boston society was essentially degenerated. Unable to find the pulse of life within his own social class, Eliot went to the slums. But life was as horrific there as in the sophisticated Boston squares. The most formative years of Eliot were spent in a city where life itself had become defective.

As a result Eliot wanted to get away from the set scenes of youth, flirtation with women, his family’s continuous query about his future career, his siblings and cousins – all those responsible grandchildren of William Greenleaf Eliot who were getting settled into practical careers. Eliot’s decision to go to Paris was largely the consequence of all these factors combined together.

Later Eliot confessed his ‘nervous sexual attacks’ which he ‘suffered’ in Paris: ‘One walks about the street with one’s desires, and one’s refinement rises like a wall whenever opportunity approaches’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 75). He admitted that these desires were for women. His desire for women was gradually becoming irresistible. In London, during the Christmas vacation in 1914, Eliot’s urge to fall in love with women seemed to be uncontrollable as he walked the streets. ‘How much more self-conscious one is in a big city!’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 74-75), he wrote to Aiken. It was one of his ‘nervous and sexual attacks ... This is the worst since Paris. I never have them in the country ... I am very dependent upon women (I mean female society); and feel the deprivation at Oxford – one reason why I should not care to remain there – but there ... the deprivation takes the form of numbness only; while in the city it is more lively and acute’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 74-75). He was too refined to seek any possible relief. ‘I should be better off, I sometimes think, if I had disposed of my virginity and shyness several years ago: and indeed I still think sometimes that it would be well to do so before marriage’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 74-75).

In this context it should be noted that after his return from Paris, Eliot met a girl called Emily Hale. In his sixties he declared in a private paper that before leaving for Europe in 1914 he expressed his love for Emily, but he knew, from the way in which his declaration was received, that his feelings would not be reciprocated ‘in any degree whatever’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* xvii).

After being rejected by Emily, Eliot met an English girl, Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Her vivacious nature made Eliot think that she might offer the experience he craved for. Soon they got married without even intimating their respective parents. After his marriage Eliot wrote of the charm of passion after an emotionally starved childhood. Six days after marriage, Eliot told

his brother that he was less ‘supressed’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 104). It seemed that, for a short span, Vivienne liberated Eliot in some way, but soon after that the liberation was transformed into a burden.

Perhaps Eliot’s disillusionment with his marriage was related with sexual failures and his discovery of Vivienne’s chronic illness. Continuously suffering from ill-health, she was surrounded by the smell of medicines. After a year, Eliot said that he had been through ‘the most awful nightmare of anxiety that the mind of man could conceive’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 151).

The crisis of Vivienne in the first year of marriage remained the unchanged pattern for the rest of her life: a pattern of illness, cure and relapse. In April 1919, when Virginia Woolf met her, she saw a prematurely (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 129) old and exhausted woman. To make things worse, she always took advantage of her ill-health and had no scruples. On one occasion she boldly admitted to Eliot’s brother that she had opened a letter addressed to her husband: ‘... I opened and read it. I read the postscript which you did not intend me to see’ (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 131-132). Another effective weapon for Vivienne was pathos. She could turn ordinary actions into severe disputes. However, she always defended her husband’s right to pursue a career as a poet: ‘... Tom (Eliot) knows perfectly well that I share his feeling over the poetry – in fact, he knows that of the two of us perhaps I worry the most...’ (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 132). But the interesting point was that Vivienne did not exert her force only to support her husband. She enjoyed his fight with his family on the issue of his poetic career and exulted as she won. To describe the horror of their marriage Eliot’s own words can be referred to: ‘It is terrible to be alone with another person’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Wasteland: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Draft* 104).

It seems that from Vivienne’s perspective too, the marriage must have been unhappy. She reported to Charlotte Eliot how ‘very very trying’ it was to keep him at home – his ‘black silent moods, and the irritability’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 173) at the beginning of 1917. In 1919 she wrote to a friend: ‘Tom is Impossible – full of nerves ...’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 320).

Gradually marital conflict reached its climax. Financial stringency, Eliot’s tiring work for prolonged span at Lloyd’s Bank, huge bills from doctors for Vivienne’s treatment and the latter’s unpredictable behaviour transformed Eliot’s life into hell – the Wasteland. Unable to bear the tension he turned to the whisky bottle (Seymour-Jones 519). Virginia Woolf was confused by Eliot’s sudden withdrawal from friendship. Apparently he was always modest and courteous, but this was actually a ‘wooden armour’ (Seymour-Jones 258) inside which he concealed himself. Virginia found him ‘more like marble than flesh’ (Sencourt 68). He always needed the protection of a series of masks – a ‘crowskin’ or ‘rat’s coat’ (Eliot, T.S. ‘The Hollow Men’, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 84): ‘Let me also wear/ such deliberate disguises’ (Eliot, T.S. ‘The Hollow Men’, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 84). Eliot’s outward life was only the shell of a character who was almost opposite to what he appeared to be. Apparently he was composed and serene but inwardly afflicted and agitated.

Even after getting separated from his wife, there was no escape for him. She could be seen waiting for her hubby at Faber and Faber. As soon as she arrived, Eliot, being terrified, escaped from the building. This continued for months. She came to his lectures wearing on her back a placard in which was written ‘I am the wife he abandoned’ (Sencourt 137). Then a desperate pursuit began when Vivienne made an advertisement in the personal column of ‘The Times’:



Will T.S. Eliot please return to his home 68, Clarence Gate Gardens which he abandoned Sept. 17, 1932 (Gordon, *An Imperfect Life* 299).

These are only a few glimpses of the nightmarish existence of Eliot which provide us with reasons enough to guess why he tried to follow impersonality in his work. Because if such a sufferer began to vent his feelings then perhaps he could not have been able to control himself and would have written about every agonising aspect of his private life.

To add to his trauma there was the constant awareness of isolation and identity crisis. Eliot knew that he was accepted nowhere – neither in America nor in Britain. ‘I have got used to being a foreigner everywhere’, he admitted to Maxwell Bodenheim, an American poet, ‘and it would fatigue me to be expected to be anything else’ (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot Vol I* 431). ‘The young immigrant poet thought the rejection of his poem disappointingly puritanical’ (<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/10/from-tom-to-ts-eliot-world-poet>). The continuous strain of maintaining disguise, of severe marital problems and of adjusting himself with a post-war culture widely different from the familiar certainties of Unitarianism, was pointed out by Henry Eliot to their mother: ‘the strain of going out among people who after all are foreigners to him ... has, I think, been pretty heavy’. Tom had confessed, his brother said, to ‘always having to be alert to appearances, always wearing a mask among people’ (Seymour-Jones 257). ‘... part of him always sought an escape hatch, a way to elude his official self’ (<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/10/from-tom-to-ts-eliot-world-poet>).

Another extremely significant aspect to be noted is Eliot’s homosexual instinct that is brought to light by modern biographers. In fact his relationship with Jean Verdenal is brought into question now. In this ‘instant friendship’ (Seymour-Jones 49) with the medical student Eliot ‘felt, for the first time, accepted and understood by another human being, which led to a mental crisis after his return to America’ (Seymour-Jones 359). Again in 1923 Eliot invited a ‘foreign young gentleman’ (Seymour-Jones 359) called Jack to stay at his own home. Seymour-Jones explicitly states: ‘There is little doubt that he (Jack) was, in fact, romantically and sexually involved with Tom’ (Seymour-Jones 359). In the context of the orthodox American society of Eliot’s age, homosexuality was a hush-hush affair and hence Eliot’s desperate urge of concealment of personal details.

Moreover, his Puritanical upbringing should be taken into consideration. His Puritanical culture forbade him from relishing the idea of other people knowing about his personal life. Hence he chose to be silent about his personal problems. All these make us inquisitive about Eliot’s insistence upon impersonality as a theory. We tend to question- was it merely a theorisation of a literary critic or a desperate effort of an essentially wretched person to divert readers’ attention away from his personal life?

Though himself the propagator of the Theory of Impersonality, it was not possible for Eliot to maintain the impersonal facade throughout his career as a writer. When Monica, talking about her father, says to Charles: ‘... the man that people see when they meet you/ Is not the private man, but the public personage’ (Eliot, T. S. ‘The Elder Statesman’, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* 528) it seems as if she is describing Eliot. Prufrock longs for romance, but at the same time, mocks his own desires because he is imprisoned in a society which derides such desires. To a large extent Eliot is perhaps releasing his own psychic troubles through Prufrock’s dilemma. The disintegrated personality of Prufrock perhaps suggests the conflict within Eliot himself. The most celebrated creation of Eliot, *The Wasteland* is an expression of the poet’s own mental state resulting from the horrors of his marriage with Vivienne. In this

poem the poet 'is expressing only his private experience; his lines may be for him only a means of talking about himself without giving himself away' (Eliot, T.S. 'Virgil and the Christian World', *On Poetry and Poets* 122). It is quite interesting that Eliot preferred to describe the poem as an expression of his state of mind rather than as a social criticism: 'Various critics have done me the honour to interpret the poem in terms of criticism of the contemporary world, have considered it, indeed, as an important bit of social criticism. To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life' (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Wasteland: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Draft* 1). *The Hollow Men* is also an enactment of a state of spiritual barrenness and emotional sterility in a physical and psychological landscape quite similar to that of *The Wasteland*. 'Eliot's early poetry depicts the sordid and seedy' (<https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-268650709/the-impulse-toward-beauty-in-prufrock-the-waste>).

In fact, 'Prufrock', 'Gerontion', *The Wasteland* and *The Hollow Men*, all are permeated by feelings of guilt, compunction and anguish, and by intensely personal experience which could neither be expressed nor resolved properly. Again, Eliot's religious journey can be traced in his various poems. In each successive poem Eliot dealt with his conversion story from different angles: hesitating in *The Hollow Men*; perplexing after his conversion in 'Journey of the Magi'; waiting in *Ash-Wednesday*. Here Eliot displays remnants of his old life: the dry bones which have to be revitalised. The tormented old self has now taken the direction which the hollow men were petrified to think of, and this has been possible only by the consoling presence of the 'Lady of Silences'. This lady is the woman who played significant role in the poet's personal life and is unmistakably found in his various works. In 'La Figlia Che Piange' Eliot describes separation with a girl whose arms are 'full of flowers'. The speaker wonders 'how they should have been together' (Eliot, T.S. 'La Figlia Che Piange', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 34) but prefers to possess her in memory as the material of art. This girl is none but Eliot's first love Emily Hale to whom Eliot declared his love 'before he left for Europe' (Eliot, Valerie, ed. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot* Vol I xvii) and was rejected. She reappears, through 'memory and desire' (Eliot, T.S. 'The Wasteland', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 61), as a source for the hyacinth girl in *The Wasteland*, who promises a non-wasteland moment, 'looking into the heart of light, the silence' (Eliot, T.S. 'The Wasteland', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 62). In 1927, at the time of Eliot's conversion, with the renewal of his contact with Emily, he transformed her in his imagination as a Beatrice figure, an exulting 'Lady of Silences' (Eliot, T.S. 'Ash Wednesday', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 91).

Again, while concentrating on his plays we find out striking personal references. In Emily, Eliot identified the source for the rejected woman, the martyred Celia of *The Cocktail Party*. Emily found, rereading the play years later, 'many a passage which could have hidden meaning for me and for him' (Gordon, Lyndall. *Eliot's New Life* 153). Martin Browne has suggested that the reference to the Tempters in *Murder in the Cathedral* was not to be found in Eliot's preliminary notes. But on the back of the fourth of the eighteen pages of notes, he listed the names of a few contemporary writers, numbering them one to four. These could be the 'germ' (Gordon, Lyndall. *Eliot's New Life* 30) for the four Tempters. The description of the wife in *The Family Reunion* is an exact picture of Vivienne as people saw her after 1925: an agitated woman who always clutched at the sleeve of her husband. During this period she was 'shivering, shuddering' (Killorin 162) just like the wife in *The Family Reunion*: 'A restless shivering painted shadow' (Eliot, T.S. 'The Family Reunion', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 290). Again, like Harry who is 'living on several planes at once' (Eliot, T.S. 'The Family Reunion',

*The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 324) Eliot is leading a double life – a smiling figure in front of his admirers and simultaneously a solitary, tormented person always conscious to preserve his privacy. In Eliot's final work, *The Elder Statesman*, Eliot presents a woman who evokes, for the first time, at the very end of his career, ordinary human love. Lord Claverton discovers not only the love which Monica, his daughter, has for him but also the love she has for her fiancé Charles. In this play Eliot for the first time depicts with zeal and joy real and normal relations between a man and a woman. This coincides, definitely, with Eliot's own discovery of human love through a happy second marriage to his secretary, Valerie Fletcher, in the last eight years of his life.

These are only a chosen few among the abundant examples of the reflection of Eliot's personal life on his writing, despite his desperate effort to keep the two separate. Now the obvious questions are: why did Eliot stress so much on the need of impersonality and why was he so conscious not to let his personal life intrude into his creative works? If Eliot is not frank in his works it is because he disliked his public exposure of private suffering. The more is known of Eliot's life, the clearer it becomes that the impersonal facade of his poetry- the multiple faces and voices- masks seem to be literal reworking of some intimate personal experience.

Perhaps the insecurity of his private life compelled him to surrender to the certainty of religion as an escape from the unhappy memories of his dreaded past. The society to which Eliot belonged was very unlikely to surrender to religiosity. Vivienne had no sympathy for Eliot's situation; in fact she hated the influence of Anglo-Catholic priests on her husband. Bloomsbury was shocked at Eliot's conversion. Virginia Woolf was horrified: 'He (Eliot) has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church ... A corpse would seem to me more credible than this. I mean, there's something obscure in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God' (Nicolson and Trautmann, ed. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* vol 3 457-8). From the reaction of the people it can be well comprehended that religiosity was something unthinkable among the people of Eliot's circle, but Eliot sought for it. This is because religion was soothing balm for his wretched soul. When Bloomsbury asked Eliot mockingly: 'What are your feelings when you pray?', Eliot answered, 'to concentrate to forget self, to attain union with God' (Spender 130). He badly needed this union with God to attain mental solace. Hence his surrender to religiosity in plays like *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* is largely driven by his personal urgency. In each play Eliot has strengthened his belief that realisation or attainment of Divine reality must be the first goal of mankind on earth. In *Murder in the Cathedral* sainthood is in the forefront while in later plays, he attempted to portray the contemporary world and draw the relationship of sainthood and martyrdom with the lives of ordinary people.

Eliot's characters in his plays are elevated from the physical world to the divine. Thomas in *Murder in the Cathedral* in his Christian attitude to lose his 'will in the will of God' (Eliot, T.S. 'Murder in the Cathedral', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 261); Harry, in *The Family Reunion*, in his attempt to 'unknot the knot' (Eliot, T.S. 'The Family Reunion', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 316) of the mystery of 'sin and expiation' (Eliot, T.S. 'The Family Reunion', *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 333); Celia, in *The Cocktail Party*, choosing peace through 'Negative Way' (Smith, Carol H. *T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice* 172-3); Colby, in *The Confidential Clerk*, seeking 'musical order' (Smith 194) to make his life meaningful, an order which can be attained only by his union with God, and Claverton, in *The Elder Statesman*, in his claim for salvation, through 'illumination' (Eliot, T.S.

‘The Elder Statesman’, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* 581) represent their search for the Divine.

Eliot’s persistent insistence on religiosity in all his plays can be easily related to his alienation, frustration and horror of personal life which prompted him to search for this peaceful shelter in religiosity. In ‘The Music of Poetry’ Eliot asserts: ‘I believe that the critical writings of poets ... owe a great deal of their interest to the fact that at the back of the poet’s mind, if not as his ostensible purpose, he is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write’ (Kermode 107). Further, he declares in his introduction to *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*: ‘When the critics are themselves poets, it will be suspected that they have formed their critical statements with a view to justifying their poetic practice’ (Eliot, T.S. *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* 29). From these two observations of Eliot it can be guessed that he deliberately tried to prove that his poetry was impersonal, completely shorn of personal references. One may well ask, why did Eliot always stress on the Theory of absolute Impersonality? Was it only a commitment to his professed classicism or an urgency for concealing something deeply personal?

It is interesting to note that Eliot being the preacher of Impersonality often contradicted himself in his critical essays and emphasised on the personality of a writer. Isn’t it queer that the propagator of Impersonality himself often turns to personal references in his criticism? In ‘Blake’ Eliot says that in order to understand Blake’s poetry, Blake the man should be understood. In ‘Milton’ he considered Milton’s blindness and personality as most relevant in a discussion of his poetry and his historical role as a poet.

But Eliot did all he could to prevent us from knowing Eliot the man. This is not the reserve of a man who shuns publicity, but the secretiveness of one who is perpetually afraid of an invasion of his privacy. So for the lonely, introvert, maladjusted personality of Eliot, the cult of impersonality seems to be a defence mechanism, and not a very effective one.

In evolving his Theory of Impersonality Eliot responded largely to his private need for self-defence. His letter to John Hayward stating his order: ‘Your job will be to suppress everything suppressible’ (Seymour-Jones xvii), his unwillingness for the manuscript paper of *The Wasteland* to be published in any form whatsoever and his arrangement for more than one thousand of his letters to be sequestered until 2019 – all hint at the fact that this impersonality was desperately needed by Eliot. Moreover, the destruction of most of his correspondence with his mother and Vivienne and his instruction to his fellow director at Faber, Peter du Sautoy to burn all his letters which were exchanged between him and his first love Emily make things even more explicit. His desperation to maintain a distance from public has been nicely observed by Robert M. Adams: ‘There hardly seems to have been a period when he (Tom) was not playing possum – cultivating a mask, a facade, a polished and perceptibly alien surface’ (Adams 3).

However, the aim of this paper is definitely not to undermine Eliot’s importance as a literary figure. Despite his personal urgency for the Theory of Impersonality, his theory has served a greater purpose than a mere personal cause. Through this theory Eliot anticipates many of the later theories like those of Ransom, Barthes and Kristeva. Eliot’s importance as a theorist increases with every discourse that is generated today about the author-text-critic-reader network. Eliot’s critical thinking ‘helped to inaugurate the New Criticism, an approach to literature and culture that once seemed- and perhaps still is- the most supple, serious, and responsive of any formulated in the twentieth century’ (<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/eliot-kimballr-2798>).



Being absolutely conscious of Eliot's tremendous influence upon critical theories, this paper is the product of a curious mind which locates an anxiety of the poet-critic-dramatist in his continuous insistence not to link his creative works with his personal life. This anxiety seems to have hardened his stand as a theorist and makes his critical position shaped in spite of himself by certain private experiences.

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