

## ‘HAMLET AND HIS PROBLEMS’ OF T.S. ELIOT- A CRITIQUE

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Throughout the ages Shakespeare’s Hamlet has remained a piece of work that is being analysed from different point of view by different critics. Some find interest in the way Shakespeare has handled the character, Hamlet. While some other questions the authority of the text including the character. It is only because of the versatility of the text so much analysis has been possible. Some like Nietzsche looked at the character from existential point of view while Freud from psychoanalytical point of view. Looking at different point of view continues like a contagious disease from hand to hand. However, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the premier of new critic T.S. Eliot proposed a different idea altogether saying about the failure of the play as whole with a special eye to the character of Hamlet. This paper is an attempt to look at the take of Eliot from a critical point of view.

Eliot was one of the premiers of new criticism who was of the view that a text is to be judged from the textual point of view itself. His objectification of emotion is one of them. The term ‘objective correlative’ according to Eliot is a way of expressing emotion in art. He says that

emotion is an internal working of human mind which cannot be expressed in art by the use of common language. So he suggests that the evocation of emotion in art can be done by means of 'complete, concrete objectification' of emotion. Again this objectification can be manipulated using 'a set of objects, 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, and the emotion are evoked'. And this will help in evoking the same emotion from the reader. The basic intention behind this technique is to externalize the emotion. This observation is not primarily for physical objects but to be applied to the states of mind and emotion. And this concept of 'objective correlative' is a continuation and application of his theory of impersonality which believes that the poetic quality is not determined by the greatness of components or the intensity of emotion but by the intensity of fusion and one of the ways in which the poet achieves the intensity through the embodiment of emotion in concrete objects.

Eliot's criticism of *Hamlet* is based on his contemporary critics like J.M. Robertson and Edgar Stoll. Both these two critics has paved to a new approach to critic the plays of Shakespeare especially *Hamlet*. They found problem with the play and the character of Hamlet as well. As Eliot says 'few critics have ever admitted that *Hamlet* the play is the primary problem and Hamlet the character only secondary'.

Eliot's mainly criticizes *Hamlet* mainly for the character, Hamlet and Shakespeare's failure in transmuting the play from the 'Spanish Tragedy' of Kyd. It has been often considered that in the Shakespearean plays there is a tragic flaw and the tragic flaw of *Hamlet* is his too much passion and excessive emotion. But according Eliot and other Shakespearean critics this is one of the flaws of *Hamlet* the play. According to them, Hamlet delays without having any valid reason. As Robertson points out that Hamlet fails because there is very less act of Hamlet when he arrived till his final act of vengeance or in his words 'We see nothing that Hamlet can be said to have shown any sensitive recoil from the act of vengeance'. Again the feelings Hamlet shows during the interval are hard to localize. Still he indulges more in feeling than action as in Eliot's words 'we find Shakespeare's Hamlet not in action not in any quotations that might select, so much as in an unmistakably not in the earlier play'. (Eliot, *Hamlet and His Problems*). Thus the prolong act less feeling of Hamlet makes the play a failure one.

Here being a new critic he is also judging the text from its historical context Eliot also alleging that Hamlet is a mere reworking of the earlier play of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. As the play of Kyd was published before Shakespeare's hence there is every probability of Shakespeare's watching the play. Here he alludes to the comment of Robertson,

All alike are inconclusive, because all ignore in effect, even when they make

mention it, the essential fact that Shakespeare's Hamlet is an adaptation of an older play, which laid down the main action embodying a counter sense which adaptation could not transmute'. (Robertson, *The problem of Hamlet*).

Eliot added that there are also similarities in verbal and in the character as well. However there is alteration which Eliot's says is not satisfactory as it fails to carry a sharp distinction rather what Shakespeare has done is that he feigned the emotion of Hamlet in order to escape the suspicion of the king. But despite having the same dealings in both the plays why Hamlet is a failure because the delay in Hamlet is baseless. Here Eliot refers to prof. Stoll's observation, 'the poet was obliged to delay his hero than he should have contrived some good reason for it'. (Stoll, *Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study*).

Apart from all this Eliot also has provided some other aspects to consider the play as an artistic failure. He said that 'the play is puzzling and disquieting, 'superfluous, 'inconsistent'. He said that these flaws are committed by Shakespeare in such a way that these would have been noticed even if a hasty revision had been given.

However the major flaw of the play as pointed by Eliot is Shakespeare's failing in using the objective correlative. Instead of using objective correlative Shakespeare used repetition of phrase and puns for emotional relief. But this is not the case as Hamlet is the buffoonery of an emotion which finds no expression in the play. In this case he (Shakespeare) could have used objective correlative to give an outlet to the emotion of Hamlet. Here he refers other plays by Shakespeare like Macbeth or Othello. In these plays Shakespeare successfully used the technique. The reasonless delay of Hamlet is also due to his failure in using this technique. The baffle Hamlet is overflows with his feeling but he could not identify it and had he found some equivalent objects to identify his feeling than the case with Hamlet would have been different and Shakespeare could have avoid the artistic failure.

This is just an overlook to how Eliot has criticized *Hamlet* for its artistic failure. However, it is not Eliot was cent percent correct. In the process of criticizing *Hamlet* he himself has committed some blunders which he failed to notice.

In the essay Eliot charges Shakespeare of ingenuity but in the process he himself has forgotten that the idea he is talking about is not his own. Nor does he mention the same anywhere in prose works as a whole. That is the term 'objective correlative' Eliot is talking about does not belong to him but it was Washington Alston. He used the term in his lecture 'Introductory Discourse' on art around 1840 where he simply stated that anything that is external will serve the purpose of objectification. He said that after the objectification of emotion it does not distort the emotion but it remains the same and its form merely changes.

Again Eliot's idea of 'objective correlative' itself is not the kind of mechanism to be applied all the time and this has come under scathing criticism in the hand of many critics like Viva Yvor, Winter, Ransome and so on. They find that 'complete objectification of emotion' cannot express the emotion in art perfectly and the emotional intensity will be distorted. Again Vivas said that with the objectification the poetic creation will turn into mechanism. They say that this technique of objectification is only applicable to Eliot's poetry alone and *Hamlet* only.

Furthermore charges against Hamlet can be defused if we look at the play from some other point of views. The play no doubt has been regarded as one of the greatest plays ever written in English by many critics. His bafflement also does have certain meaning as critic like Victor Hugo said that, 'his strange reality is our own reality... unhealthy as he is, Hamlet expresses the permanent condition of human life'. (As in, *Hamlet versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* by R. A. Foakes). Eliot takes the delay of Hamlet the character in taking revenge as a flaw. But Hamlet was not unaware of the fact rather whenever the character plays a role in the play then we come across the inner turmoil that is going on inside him. Once he got the chance to take vengeance but he did not because his hatred for his uncle was so much so that he wanted him ruin even in hell. Furthermore at first he did not have any definite reason to kill as for being a scholar he could not solely rely upon the ghost. Again he belonged to the Elizabethan era when people believed that devils have the powers to possess the form of a dead man. So he had to find some reliable source based upon which he could take the vengeance. Again in the words of Zamir:

Shakespeare brings out an entirely different range of philosophical meaning that relate to the very attempt to organize one's life through action. These cohere with a dramatic focus on inaction. (Tzachi Zamir, *Double Vision: Moral Philosophy and Shakespearean Drama*).

In other words the inaction of Hamlet in some way is the beauty of the text through which we can peek at the life with action.

These commentaries are no doubt a defense to the charges laid by Eliot and other Shakespearean critics regarding his delay and excessive emotion. And in fact the delay of Hamlet has also some other valid reasons. It is not something which can be done on the spur of the moment. His delay also helps us understanding the crime and risk of excessive emotion. Again Shakespeare too was not unaware of the fact that he is delaying the character in taking action. So he makes ghost to reappears and adds the Gonzago play to carry the play to its end.

If Hamlet the character was not appropriate then Hazlitt would not have said "They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet." Here one thing

can be added in the context of the device Eliot was talking about is that when readers can feel the emotions going on inside the mind of the character then what is the need to use 'objective correlative'?

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