

T. S. ELIOT'S CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE

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Clara K. Dyck

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Essays — Selected Essays

On Poetry — On Poetry and Poets

Use of Criticism — The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism

"Elizabethan Translation" — "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation"

"The Music" — "The Music of Poetry"

"Stoicism" — "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca"

"Tradition" — "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

"Verskunst" — "Shakespeares Verskunst"



## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to gain insight into T. S. Eliot's thinking concerning Shakespeare. By means of textual examination of Eliot's writings excerpts of criticism and appreciation have been compiled and annotated. Particular emphasis has been placed upon the aspect of development: Eliot describes a continuous development in the art of Shakespeare; and we note a continuous development in Eliot's appreciation for, and understanding of, Shakespeare until finally, in the writing of his own dramas, Eliot himself feels both the constricting and liberating power of the master upon his work while, at the same time, he becomes a student of the same.

The opening pages draw attention to Eliot's disapproval and re-assessment of the frequently seen three-fold division of Shakespeare's dramas. We depict Eliot's own two-part division of Shakespeare's development: firstly, in adapting the language to colloquial speech and, secondly, the experimentation with language to make it increasingly elaborate until, in the late plays t h e

musicality of language verges on pure music. Eliot also points out the relationship between levels of significance and audience appeal in a play of Shakespeare. The dramatic element is seen by Eliot to be basic to the development of Shakespeare's art.

It was found that, according to Eliot, Shakespeare did not lean on Seneca but that his characters share some attributes with those of Seneca. Any similarity that may be noted is due to Shakespeare's exploitation of these attributes, or character traits, for dramatic purposes, for his life was occupied with turning human actions into poetry. Eliot's comparison of Shakespeare and Dante results in an even draw: neither is superior to the other; each contributes a wealth of literature to our inheritance, according to his historical background and setting.

Eliot discovers the language of Shakespeare's plays to be based on his continuous development of mastery over blank verse. Characterization becomes increasingly diversified and individualized as this verse attains to a greater perfection; subtle undercurrents of meaning become increasingly significant. One cannot agree with Eliot who claims to find "unexplained scenes" in Shakespeare for, upon analytical investigation of the scenes named, it appears that everything in Shakespeare ultimately serves his intended purpose.

Shakespeare's dramatic achievement correlates with his achievement in the development of a vital and dramatic blank verse. Rhythm

is the undergirding beat of this verse. Eliot believes that Shakespeare and Milton have made blank verse obsolete for our time. But at the same time he found it difficult to escape Shakespeare's influence in the writing of his own dramas. And Eliot used Shakespeare's characters as models for his own, although with less success than his master.

Not only did we note Eliot's awareness of Shakespeare's gradual development, in this study, but also Eliot's increasing appreciation of Shakespeare and his art. There is a marked difference in tone and content of Eliot's criticism between his early and later appraisals of Shakespeare. Furthermore, Eliot admits to the relevance and influence of Shakespeare's writings upon his own.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot was very conscious of the effect of maturity upon the works of both writers and critics. In 1951, with this thought in mind, he wrote:

Reviewing my critical output for the last thirty years, I am surprised to find how constantly I have returned to the drama, whether by examining the work of the contemporaries of Shakespeare, or by reflecting on the possibilities of the future.... [M]y views have been continuously modified and renewed by experience; so that I am impelled to take stock of the situation afresh at every stage of my experimentation.<sup>1</sup>

In reading his essays and incidental comments concerned with William Shakespeare one becomes aware also of how Eliot's thinking about the great dramatist has changed over the years; how his appreciation of Shakespeare has been intensified; and even how the reading of Shakespeare has led Eliot to adopt motifs and themes from the master's works, in the writing of his own plays.

It is the aim of this thesis, by means of textual examination

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<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 72.

of T. S. Eliot's writings, to cull out statements of criticism and appreciation that he made concerning Shakespeare and his art, during the course of his writings. In this study particular attention will be paid to Eliot's changing impressions of Shakespeare, for it would appear that his early criticism fails to distinguish between the greatness of Shakespeare and that of his contemporaries; that by the late 'twenties his pronouncements were more positive; and that by 1937 (as we shall see) he gave Shakespeare the highest acclaim. And, although Eliot raises such questions as "Is it good to remain under the spell of Shakespeare?"<sup>2</sup> we recognize that when, finally, he was to venture into his own experiment of writing drama, Eliot felt that he was under the shadow of Shakespeare's mastery from which he had to free himself.

But Shakespeare's influence upon Eliot was only achieved gradually, over many years of reading and re-reading the master's works. That is why he mentions upon various occasions that Shakespeare will bear many readings and that one's understanding for, and appreciation of, his art increases with exposure to it. Thus Eliot tells us, too, that the only pleasure he derived from reading Shakespeare in his childhood literary studies was the commendation he received for doing so, and "had I been a child of more independent mind I should have refused to read him at all." This process of acquiring appreciation for a great writer is not unique in Eliot's experience with Shakespeare, for he states that "The perception of why Shakespeare, or

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<sup>2</sup>"Milton II," 1947, *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Dante, or Sophocles holds the place he has is something which comes only very slowly in the course of living."<sup>3</sup> The reader must mature towards the level of art which the artist has presented. Consequently, Eliot says, "I know that some of the poetry to which I am most devoted is poetry which I did not understand at first reading; some is poetry which I am not sure I understand yet: for instance, Shakespeare's."<sup>4</sup> And so, no doubt, Hilda M. Hulme expresses Eliot's thinking, from which she has borrowed in her closing statement here:

... we admire in Shakespeare's writing the different kinds of progression that he can simultaneously control; that this progression be always linear or forward-moving we do not stipulate. In the intricacy of his dramatic meaning we appreciate that there may be always a little more to understand. As T. S. Eliot said on his seventieth birthday, 'It takes a lifetime to grow up to Shakespeare'.<sup>5</sup>

And Eliot clearly states the necessity he finds in reading the works of the great masters in their entirety. In speaking of "Minor Poetry," he states "But there are certainly very few poets in English of whose work I can say that the whole ought to be read. Shakespeare, certainly, and Milton," and, pointing out specific works, he notes that "not only should each be read entire, for its own sake-- we need to read them all, just as we need to read all of the plays of Shakespeare, in order fully to understand any one of them: and

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<sup>3</sup>T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 33 & 35.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>5</sup>Hilda M. Hulme, Explorations in Shakespeare's Language (London: Longmans, 1962), p. 3.

unless we read Shakespeare's sonnets as well, and the minor poems of Milton, there is something lacking. . . . But the poets for whom I can make such a claim are very few."<sup>6</sup>

In the same year, in his essay "What is a Classic?" Eliot shows us why he feels that the works of writers like Shakespeare and Milton should be read in their entirety, while he does not find it necessary to make the same claim for other (minor), authors. According to Eliot, this indivisibility is one of the marks of the "classic" author, as distinct from the non-classic:

If there is one word on which we can fix, which will suggest the maximum of what I mean by the term 'a classic,' it is the word maturity. . . . No reader of Shakespeare, for instance, can fail to recognize, increasingly as he himself grows up, the gradual ripening of Shakespeare's mind: even a less developed reader can perceive the rapid development of Elizabethan literature and drama as a whole, from early Tudor crudity to the plays of Shakespeare, and perceive a decline in the work of Shakespeare's successors.<sup>7</sup>

But, Eliot continues, the maturity of a literature reflects the maturity of the society in which it is produced. An author can greatly influence the development of a language towards maturity, yet this is impossible unless his predecessors have already brought the language to a certain stage, requisite for development. After this essential preparation, then only can the great master, or innovator, give it "his final touch." "A mature literature, therefore, has a history behind it." It is based upon a "maturity of

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<sup>6</sup>"What is Minor Poetry?" 1944, On Poetry, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup>"What is a Classic?" Ibid., pp. 54-55.

mind and manners."<sup>8</sup>

In talking of literary innovators and literary developers, Eliot again refers to Shakespeare, of whom he states: "The poet who did most for the English language is Shakespeare: and he carried out, in one short lifetime, the task of two poets. I can only say here, briefly, that the development of Shakespeare's verse can be roughly divided into two periods."<sup>9</sup> Eliot's division into two periods distinguishes itself from the customary division of Shakespeare's dramas into three periods, which Eliot outlines as follows: in the first period, while reconstructing and making old plays stage-worthy, Shakespeare was involved in a mechanical craftsmanship. At this time the young man worked side by side with other writers of drama. It would seem that Eliot is suggesting that this was somewhat of an apprenticeship arrangement. During this time-span Shakespeare worked on approximately twelve plays. He may have written whole scenes or monologues in these plays, but the exact extent of his literary involvement here can never be accurately assessed.<sup>10</sup>

Progressing by way of some of Shakespeare's most notable

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 55 & 57.

<sup>9</sup> Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," 1942, On Poetry, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Shakespeares Verskunst," first presented on his 1937 Germany tour, then published in Der Monat, Mai 1950, No. 20, pp. 198-207.

comedies we reach the period of his full mastery in drama. This is the time-span in which he wrote his five greatest and best-known tragedies: Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and Antony and Cleopatra. The third period, according to popular belief, states Eliot, is that time-span during which Shakespeare wrote his last dramas. These are deemed to be less "dramatic" and are also performed less frequently. It is the general opinion, according to Eliot, that Shakespeare had either lost interest and was dallying while at the same time making literary experiments, or that his poetic powers had subsided. Eliot strongly refutes the latter, noting that this was hardly likely since Shakespeare was at the age of full maturity.<sup>11</sup>

Eliot's two-part division of Shakespeare's activity is explained by him as follows: during the first period

he was slowly adapting his form to colloquial speech: so that by the time he wrote Antony and Cleopatra he had devised a medium in which everything that any dramatic character might have to say, whether high or low, 'poetical' or 'prosaic', could be said with naturalness and beauty. The first period . . . is from artificiality to simplicity, from stiffness to suppleness. The later plays move from simplicity towards elaboration. The late Shakespeare is occupied with the other task of the poet--that of experimenting to see how elaborate, how complicated, the music could be made without his characters ceasing to be human beings. This is the poet of Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, Pericles, and The Tempest.<sup>12</sup>

This is part of the creative process, Eliot indicates: that an author will write from a different vantage-point at each stage

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>12</sup>"The Music," On Poetry, pp. 35-36.

of his development; that both his chronological age and his personal and dramatic development will determine the maturity of his art. Shakespeare's development, he states, was "very slow and very long."<sup>13</sup> This is where Eliot separates his ways of thinking from those of many other critics as noted in the preceding pages. It is, for example, because of the greater level of development attained at the time of writing that King Lear is a more emotionally disrupting and terrible tragedy than Romeo and Juliet, for it is the work of a mature man; of a man who has had experience and time to assimilate and clarify his experience. Still, it would hardly be fair to say that Romeo and Juliet, simply because it is the work of a young man, is not a great drama. Eliot does not agree with those who claim that lyrical poetry is best written by a young person, nor does he agree that a great drama can only be written at a mature age. An author has to present that picture which expresses his stage of development. Shakespeare's last dramas were those of a late man in his/forties, one who exploited all the facets of his long and varied experience. Consequently, Eliot assesses Shakespeare's work in its totality, rather than in individual plays which may be seen to be of varying quality.<sup>14</sup> And thus, too, Eliot does not distinguish between poet and dramatist but views these processes as

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<sup>13</sup>Eliot, "Cyril Tourneur," 1930, Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 189.

<sup>14</sup>"Verskunst," p. 199.

being one, as described by Inga-Stina Ewbank:

Eliot's view of the poet and dramatist as 'two distincts, division none' heralds, in time if not in fact the generation of scholars and critics to whom present-day students of Shakespeare owe so much . . . . At best it has meant seeing the poems—especially the sonnets—and the plays as products of the same imaginative process.<sup>15</sup>

Eliot refers, from time to time, to the "realness" of Shakespeare's characters. He does so also in the essay entitled "Cyril Tourneur." Here he declares that "Characters should be real in relation to our own life, certainly, as even a very minor character of Shakespeare may be real; but they must also be real in relation to each other."<sup>16</sup> This "realness" Eliot finds in Shakespeare's plays, including the oft-disputed late ones mentioned above. And "realness" is based on a "mastery of words." Consequently Eliot does not agree with the other critics, for he tells us that,

Even though some critics may still consider Cymbeline as evidence of 'declining powers', it has no less a mastery of words than Hamlet, and possibly more; and, like every one of Shakespeare's plays, it adds something or develops something not explicit in any previous play; it has its place in an orderly sequence.<sup>17</sup>

Not only does an author write from different points of development, but he also appeals to an audience with varying degrees of sensitivity and understanding. Eliot takes this into account in

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<sup>15</sup>Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Shakespeare's Poetry," A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies, eds. Kenneth Muir and S. Schoenbaum (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), p. 100.

<sup>16</sup>Essays, p. 185.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. pp. 188-89.

the following words:

In a play of Shakespeare you get several levels of significance. For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually. And I do not believe that the classification of audience is so clear-cut as this; but rather that the sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once, though in different degrees of consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

This thought correlates with the reasons for a varying popularity of dramas on the stage. It is the sensitivity and understanding of the audience, Eliot finds, which determine the comparative popularity of seemingly equally great plays. It has always been the case, Eliot asserts, both in England and abroad, that certain of Shakespeare's plays have a wider audience-appeal than others. Drama is written with audience-appeal in mind. We cannot fail to recognize the greatness of a drama like Hamlet, for example, for does not a more than three-hundred-year stage history denote the success of the play? Eliot states that a critic who would try to convince us that Hamlet is a poor play would find few followers.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, audience-support does not tell the whole story, for plays like Richard II and Richard III have been constantly more successful than Troilus and Cressida or Measure for Measure, although undoubtedly, according to Eliot, the latter are just as

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<sup>18</sup> Use of Criticism, p. 153.

<sup>19</sup> Note: But see page 43 of this thesis.

great as the former.<sup>20</sup>

In speaking of the comparative popularity of Shakespeare's plays in England and elsewhere Eliot lists them thus: the most popular tragedies have been Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Julius Caesar; the comedies are As you like it, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Much Ado about Nothing. We might also be able to add the historical plays Richard III and Richard II, as well as the tragedies Othello and Macbeth. Yet no one can claim that Romeo and Juliet is poetically or dramatically a greater work than Antony and Cleopatra, nor that Julius Caesar is greater than Coriolanus, for Antony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus are equally beautiful, poetically, as are Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar, but the dramatic construction of Antony and Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliet excels over that of Coriolanus and Julius Caesar.<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect which determines the popularity of a play is considered by Eliot in an article of 1932:

Now the desire for 'comic relief' on the part of an audience is, I believe, a permanent craving of human nature; but that does not mean that it is a craving that ought to be gratified. . . . The audience which can keep its attention fixed upon pure tragedy or pure comedy is much more highly developed.<sup>22</sup>

Eliot states that 'comic relief' was a practical necessity for any writer who wished to earn his keep by writing plays in the Elizabethan age. He adds: "What is really i n t e r e s t i n g is

<sup>20</sup>"Verskunst," p. 199.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 199-200.

<sup>22</sup>"Apology for the Countess of Pembroke," Use of Criticism, p. 41.

what Shakespeare made of this necessity." Even so, "the violence of contrast between the tragic and the comic, the sublime and the bathetic, in the plays of Shakespeare, disappears in his maturing work."<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the reason for a greater popularity of some of Shakespeare's dramas is based upon the fact that certain types of characterization and situations appeal more to the general audience than others. But this is not to say, necessarily, that dramas with more of a colloquial flavor are better or more dramatic. Eliot says that some plays are not performed as frequently because they are less worthy, but the more notable cause is that some plays were simply written for a smaller audience—we glean that Eliot means hereby a more sophisticated audience. Another reason for increased popularity of a play during a certain time-period is due to a particularly adept actor for a main role, such as Sir Henry Irving who played Shylock in the Merchant of Venice.<sup>24</sup>

In his article "Shakespeares Verskunst" Eliot states that the inner necessity which led to the development of Shakespeare's poetic art lies in the dramatic element; so, too, this development continued to the end, in the dramatic realm. Critics who state that only isolated passages of Shakespeare's early plays are of high lyrical or dramatic calibre, and who find the action mostly fantastic and

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>24</sup>"Verskunst," p. 199.

the characters unreal, will also be convinced that there was no further dramatic development after the famous tragedies. If this were true, Eliot's findings would be false.<sup>25</sup>

We perceive how Eliot anticipated the German article discussed above, for he summarized his thinking on the development of Shakespeare's art five years prior to his German tour:

The standard set by Shakespeare is that of a continuous development from first to last, a development to which the choice both of theme and of dramatic and verse technique in each play seems to be determined increasingly by Shakespeare's state of feeling, by the particular stage of his emotional maturity at the time. What is 'the whole man' is not simply his greatest or maturest achievement, but the whole pattern formed by the sequence of plays; so that we may say confidently that the full meaning of any one of his plays is not in itself alone, but in that play in the order in which it was written, in its relation to all of Shakespeare's other plays, earlier and later: we must know all of Shakespeare's work in order to know any of it. No other dramatist of the time approaches anywhere to this perfection of pattern, of pattern superficial and profound; but the measure in which dramatists and poets approximate to this unity in a lifetime's work, is one of the measures of major poetry and drama.<sup>26</sup>

All this was possible only because Shakespeare was endowed with a potential for spiritual and intellectual development and perfection which was far greater than other people can claim. And Shakespeare never repeated himself; every drama is a new attempt to produce something hitherto unaccomplished.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 200

<sup>26</sup> "John Ford," Essays, pp. 193-94.

<sup>27</sup> "Verskunst," p. 201.

## II. ELIOT'S VIEW OF THE INFLUENCES OF, AND UPON, SHAKESPEARE

There has been considerable discussion, over the past three centuries, concerning the influences which helped to shape Shakespeare's art as well as the influence which he, Shakespeare, exerted upon the English language and upon other writers of his day and up to our time. This chapter intends not only to reveal some of T. S. Eliot's views on the subject, but also to highlight several of the pertinent pronouncements which he has made. It will include Eliot's thinking concerning the influence of Seneca's stoicism upon Shakespeare and also a discussion comparing the influence of background upon the "philosophy" of Shakespeare and Dante. It will also deal with Shakespeare's influence in general upon the development of the English language.

Eliot does not believe that Shakespeare was "influenced" by the stoicism of Seneca. He merely wishes to forestall the suggestion of literary critics who may in the future try to show that this is so, as they have attempted to prove in the past that Shakespeare was influenced by Machiavelli and Montaigne. Eliot's statement of the purpose of his essay, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of

Seneca," (1927), reads as follows:

I propose a Shakespeare under the influence of the stoicism of Seneca. But I do not believe that Shakespeare was under the influence of Seneca. I propose it largely because I believe that after the Montaigne Shakespeare (not that Montaigne had any philosophy whatever) and after the Machiavelli Shakespeare, a stoical or Senecan Shakespeare is almost certain to be produced. I wish merely to disinfect the Senecan Shakespeare before he appears. My ambitions would be realized if I could prevent him, in so doing, from appearing at all.<sup>1</sup>

Eliot points out what had previously been said of Flaubert, namely that "The great poet, in writing himself, writes his time," and that Shakespeare, in fact, became representative "of a turning point in history."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Eliot suggests that present thinking and writing is based on past history. His concept of "tradition" includes the view that the past always influences the present, indeed, that the conglomerate past is the present from the point of view of knowledge.

But Eliot says that there seems to be no evidence whatever that Shakespeare deliberately took a "view of life" from Seneca.<sup>3</sup> He notes a distinctive attitude in some of the great tragedies of Shakespeare, however. "It is not the attitude of Seneca, but it is derived from Seneca . . . . It fosters 'theatrical utility'.

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<sup>1</sup>Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Essays, pp. 128-29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

It is the attitude of self-dramatization assumed by some of Shakespeare's heroes at moments of tragic intensity," particularly at the time of death.<sup>4</sup> This attitude is related to the bombast of Seneca. Shakespeare shows the basic elements of the emotion present in the hero at that time. Thus, in "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," Eliot states, "Certainly, Elizabethan bombast can be traced to Seneca. . . . Certainly it is all 'rhetorical'. . . . Without bombast we should not have had King Lear."<sup>5</sup> Eliot finds that Shakespeare sometimes carries the bombast to a greater extreme than does Seneca. The blinding of Seneca's Oedipus, for instance, "is far less offensive than that in Lear."<sup>6</sup>

Eliot is not concerned with the influence of Seneca on Shakespeare, but with Shakespeare's illustration of Senecan and stoical principles.<sup>7</sup> Senecan stoicism is of Roman origin. It is based on the "philosophy of slaves" and was absorbed by early Christianity. Eliot defines stoicism as "the refuge for the individual in an indifferent or hostile world too big for him; it is the permanent substratum of a number of versions of cheering oneself up." It is the reverse of Christian humility.<sup>8</sup> According to Hugh Kenner, Eliot

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<sup>4</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup>"Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," Essays, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>7</sup>"Stoicism," p. 131.

ascribes the "beliefs" of stoicism to scepticism; and Eliot believes that "the ethic of Seneca's plays is that of an age which supplied the lack of moral habits by a system of moral attitudes and poses."<sup>9</sup>

In the essay "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," Eliot distinguishes between Greek and Roman stoicism. The Greek had a "strong traditional morality which constituted, so to speak, a direct relation between him and the gods." This was based also on sceptical intelligence. The Romans, on the other hand, were much simpler and cruder and possessed only public virtues related to the state, rather than personal ones. Seneca's plays were based on this Roman background. His characters lacked subtlety and "private life." There was no true characterization.<sup>10</sup> "In the drama of Seneca there are no conflicts, except the conflict of passion, temper, or appetite with the external duties."<sup>11</sup> This gave the speeches of his characters the impress of "rhetoric" rather than life-likeness. So Seneca's stoicism was derived from the Romans who were naturally a sceptical people.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 131-32.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet: T. S. Eliot (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," Essays, pp. 70-72.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to follow Eliot's thinking on scepticism,

The plays of Seneca and of the Elizabethans abound in sententious aphorisms and in poses, and these aphorisms and poses were never more conspicuous than in death. Death gives a character the supreme opportunity to reveal the Senecan morality and stoicism.<sup>13</sup> Death gives the greatest expression to the self. It is, as it were, man's last fling, his final chance to exhibit what he really believes himself to be. Thus Elizabethan England was fit ground for the fusion of "the Senecan attitude of Pride, the Montaigne attitude of Scepticism, and the Machiavelli attitude of Cynicism."<sup>14</sup>

Eliot finds that "the Elizabethan hero is much more stoical and Senecan . . . than the Senecan hero."<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare's characters preserve the personality and characteristics, in death, that they had in life. But Eliot cannot see either "a deliberate scepticism, as of Montaigne, or a deliberate cynicism, as of Machiavelli, or a deliberate resignation, as of Seneca" in Shakespeare, only that Shakespeare used all of these conventional categories for dramatic purposes to make his characters more life-like.<sup>16</sup> In "The Music of Poetry" (1942) Eliot stated that "the task of the poet will differ,

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since he attributes this characteristic to both the Greeks and the Romans, and his distinction between the two kinds of scepticism is not clear.

<sup>13</sup> "Elizabethan Translation," Essays, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> "Stoicism," p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

not only according to his personal constitution, but according to the period in which he finds himself."<sup>17</sup> And so, he indicates here, Shakespeare is using these aspects of scepticism, cynicism and resignation for the greatest effect before the audience of his day. Shakespeare used the language of his times, "not of one person, but of a whole world of persons," and when we hear it now, three-hundred years later, if well rendered, we forget the distance of time.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, a writer such as Shakespeare is always aware of his responsibility. The most "direct duty" of the writer is to his language. "First to preserve and secondly to extend and improve. . . . [In doing so] he is making people more aware of what they feel already, and therefore teaching them something about themselves."<sup>19</sup> Thus, in 1932, Eliot compared the language of Shakespeare with that of his contemporaries, noting that "It is not merely that they fail where he succeeds; it is that they had no conception of what he was trying to do; they speak another and cruder language. In their poetry there is no symbolic value . . . it is poetry and drama of the surface."<sup>20</sup> So, too, Eliot wrote in 1936: "With Shakespeare, far more than with any other poet in English the combinations of

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<sup>17</sup>"The Music of Poetry," On Poetry, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>19</sup>"The Social Function of Poetry," 1943, On Poetry, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup>"John Ford," Essays, p. 195.

words offer perpetual novelty; they enlarge the meaning of the individual words joined. . . . Even in his most mature work, Milton does not infuse new life into the word as Shakespeare does."<sup>21</sup>

This tone of appreciation contrasts markedly with the 1919 pronouncement of Eliot where he, in an attempt to define the word "rhetoric," spoke of "the strained and mixed figures of speech in which Shakespeare indulged himself."<sup>22</sup> Though Eliot had always considered that Shakespeare used the inheritance of Senecan rhetoric for its own dramatic purposes, he realized in later <sup>23</sup> years that there was a marked difference in kind between the "rhetoric" of Seneca and Shakespeare. The rhetoric of Seneca was a literary convention of the first century A. D. By the time of Shakespeare this convention seemed artificial and out-moded. Whenever Shakespeare used rhetoric it was for a specific purpose; generally it characterized a stereotype, like Polonius, of whom Mahood states (contrasting him with Hamlet) that, "Whereas Hamlet's wordplay releases his deepest feelings, Polonius's is largely a rhetorical affectation of the court."<sup>24</sup> But, of course, by such rhetoric an individual is revealed who is essential to the idea of the play.

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<sup>21</sup>"Milton I," On Poetry, p. 140

<sup>22</sup>"'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama," Essays, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup>But see page 17.

<sup>24</sup>M. M. Mahood, Shakespeare's Wordplay (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 119.

Eliot challenges the statement of Wyndham Lewis, who declares that Shakespeare is the only thinker among Elizabethan dramatists, aside from Chapman. Eliot notes that there is a difference in quality of emotion, not in quality of thought. "The poet who 'thinks' is merely the poet who can express the emotional equivalent of thought."<sup>25</sup> He claims that we cannot know whether Shakespeare did any thinking at all, or how he did it. All we know is that "He was occupied with turning human actions into poetry."<sup>26</sup>

"All great poetry gives the illusion of a view of life,"<sup>27</sup> but we cannot, from this realistic illusion, gather that the view presented is necessarily that of the poet or dramatist, consequently we cannot point to instances in Shakespeare's plays and say that they express his view of life. Nor are the plays necessarily based on the writer's philosophy of life. They are "intellectual formulations" of a "precise emotion."<sup>28</sup>

In comparing the philosophy of Dante and Shakespeare, Eliot draws attention to the fact that Dante had behind him the system of St. Thomas Aquinas, and that Dante's Divine Comedy was based on this system "point for point," whereas Shakespeare had behind him only inferior men on whom to draw, men such as Seneca. But in

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<sup>25</sup>"Stoicism," p. 135.

<sup>26</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>27</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>28</sup>Loc. cit.

"Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot had said that "Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum."<sup>29</sup> Certainly Aquinas offers more unified enrichment towards the writings of a poet or dramatist than does Plutarch, but what Eliot appears to be ignoring is the fact that Plutarch was only one of the many sources which were at the disposal of Shakespeare. The latter had an additional 1600 years of literary, historical, political and philosophical material at hand and it is apparent in his plays that he drew extensively on this material. In fact, history lives on for us today because of the manner in which Shakespeare re-created it in many of his dramas.

There was more to be learned from Aquinas than from Seneca, according to Eliot. While the philosophy of Dante had a more resourceful background than did that of Shakespeare, both expressed "in perfect language, some permanent human impulse."<sup>30</sup> Thus Eliot states that "the deep surge of Shakespeare's general cynicism and disillusionment, are merely gigantic attempts to metamorphose private failures and disappointments. The great poet, in writing himself, writes his times." So Dante became the voice of the 13th century, and Shakespeare that of the end of the 16th. Everything

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<sup>29</sup>"Tradition and the Individual Talent," Essays, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup>"Stoicism," Ibid., p. 137.

Dante wrote can be matched out of Shakespeare.<sup>31</sup>

Still, the fact remains, to Eliot, that Dante had more to draw on than did Shakespeare during "the mixed and muddled scepticism of the Renaissance."<sup>32</sup> "If Shakespeare had written according to a better philosophy, he would have written worse poetry; it was his business to express the greatest emotional intensity of his time, based on whatever his time happened to think."<sup>33</sup> However, the "function of poetry is not intellectual but emotional" and "poetry is not a substitute for philosophy or theology or religion."<sup>34</sup> And, Eliot declares, "perhaps it is a part of his [Shakespeare's] special eminence to have expressed an inferior philosophy in the greatest poetry. It is certainly one cause of the terror and awe with which he inspires us."<sup>35</sup>

But in 1933, in an article about Shelley and Keats, Eliot referred back to his earlier comparison of Shakespeare and Dante:

Some years ago I tried to make the point, in a paper on Shakespeare, that Dante possessed a 'philosophy' in a sense in which Shakespeare held none, or none of any importance. . . . And although I was anxious not to give such an impression, I seem to have given some readers to think that I was thereby estimating the poetry of Shakespeare as of less value than Dante's.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>35</sup> "Elizabethan Translation," Essays, p. 96.

Eliot then draws attention to what he calls a "very clear, but not necessarily highly important" distinction; namely, that Dante expounded an explicit philosophy while Shakespeare did not.<sup>37</sup>

W. R. Elton introduces a new and distinct idea, concerning the difference between drama and epic, in that he draws our attention to the dialectical aspect of drama:

When T. S. Eliot, finally . . . questions Shakespeare's philosophical mind, denying that 'Shakespeare did any thinking on his own', it is apparent that the issues have been confused. Since drama operates dialectically, the main care must be not to decontextualize lines and interpret them apart from their fluid and dynamic ironies. The great thing is to grasp Shakespeare's unparalleled profundities within, as Dryden called it, 'the living labour of a play'.<sup>38</sup>

And, in trying to come to terms with the manner of death of Elizabethan heroes or villains, Eliot states, in 1927:

In a comparison of Shakespeare and Dante, for instance, it is assumed that Dante leant upon a system of philosophy which he accepted whole, whereas Shakespeare created his own; or that Shakespeare had acquired some extra-or ultra-intellectual knowledge superior to philosophy. This occult kind of information is sometimes called 'spiritual knowledge' or 'insight'.<sup>39</sup>

It is not so much a difference of philosophy that Eliot seems to stress, as the different background against which we read Shakespeare and Dante. He states specifically, "I prefer the culture which produced Dante to the culture which produced Shakespeare;

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<sup>36</sup> "Shelley and Keats," Use of Criticism, p. 98.

<sup>37</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>38</sup> W. R. Elton, "Shakespeare and the Thought of his Age," A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies, pp. 197-98.

<sup>39</sup> "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," Essays, p. 96.

but I would not say that Dante was the greater poet, or even that he had the profounder mind."<sup>40</sup> The important thing is that, in reading either Shakespeare or Dante, "There is no interruption between the surface that these poets present to you and the core."<sup>41</sup>

Philip L. Marcus, in an essay entitled "T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare," remarks that a clash between Shakespeare and Dante was inevitable in the thinking of the Eliot of 1927 because he had just recently turned to Anglo Catholicism and Dante was, after all, the greatest Roman Catholic writer of all time (along with Aquinas whom he emulated).<sup>42</sup> Two years later, in the "Dante" essay of 1929, Eliot states that there is greater variety and detail in Shakespeare than in Dante.<sup>43</sup> "Dante is no more 'universal than Shakespeare . . . ," although more seems to be lost in a translation of Shakespeare into other languages than in a translation of Dante.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, "Shakespeare gives the greatest width of human passion; Dante the greatest altitude and greatest depth. They complement each other."<sup>45</sup> "And take the Comedy as a whole, you can compare it

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<sup>40</sup>"Second Thoughts about Humanism," Essays, p. 488.

<sup>41</sup>"Milton I," Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>42</sup>Philip L. Marcus, "T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare," Criticism, Vol. 9, 1967, pp. 63-79.

<sup>43</sup>"Dante," Essays, pp. 238-39.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

to nothing but the entire dramatic work of Shakespeare. . . . Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them; there is no third."<sup>46</sup> Here Marcus, in the aforementioned article, draws attention to the fact that Eliot does not state how the division is made, the equality of the parts. We should remind this critic, however, that Eliot has also stated that "gradually we come to admit that Shakespeare understands a greater extent and variety of human life than Dante; but that Dante understands deeper degrees of degradation and higher degrees of exaltation. And a further wisdom is reached when we see clearly that this indicates the equality of the two men."<sup>47</sup>

Marcus tells us that Eliot's more positive view of Shakespeare dates back to 1930 when he was asked to write an introduction to G. Wilson Knight's book The Wheel of Fire. "Knight sees the entire body of Shakespeare's plays as forming a single harmonious work, unified by a definite organizational pattern (which he was soon to identify as an opposition between tempests and music)."<sup>48</sup> Here Eliot

does not go so far as to accept Knight's claims that Shakespeare's work is a profound statement of mystical truth about the Divine Power. But he does follow Knight on two crucial points: (1) the concept that Shakespeare's plays form a unified corpus, and (2) the importance of the 'romances' or 'late plays' in the evolution of that corpus.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 264-65.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>48</sup> Marcus, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> Loc. cit.

Marcus states that, as early as 1921, when Eliot wrote most of The Waste Land, he was trying to avoid echoing Shakespeare and also trying to avoid Shakespeare's technique in his plays. But Eliot did associate the technique of musical structure and subtlety in his Quartets with Shakespeare's musical patterns.<sup>50</sup> (Marcus bases this on remarks in "The Music of Poetry" which was published in the same year as the Four Quartets, in 1942). In this essay Eliot reveals Knight's influence on his reading of Shakespeare as follows:

In the plays of Shakespeare a musical design can be discovered in particular scenes, and in his more perfect plays as wholes. It is a music of imagery and dominant imagery, throughout one play, has to do with the total effect. A play of Shakespeare is a very complex musical structure.<sup>51</sup>

Also, as far back as 1936, Eliot had seen Shakespeare as a "touchstone" in the Milton essay. Milton was seen to be wanting, in comparison with Shakespeare.

The view of Marcus, namely, that Eliot's high esteem of Shakespeare only began in 1930 does not seem to be altogether consistent with facts mentioned earlier in this chapter. But there can be no doubt that Eliot's appreciation of Shakespeare increased through the years. Could this, perhaps, have been due not only to his more intense study of Shakespeare's plays, but also to his own experience with the intricacies of play-writing?

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-75.

<sup>51</sup> "The Music," On Poetry, p. 36.

## III. THE LANGUAGE OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

T. S. Eliot said upon various occasions that the work of Shakespeare constitutes one entire and complete unit. In an essay on John Ford (1932) he states that "The whole of Shakespeare's work is one poem."<sup>1</sup> However, he also singled out specific areas of Shakespeare's plays for illustrative purposes or for more detailed elucidation. Hamlet seems to be the only play to which Eliot devotes an entire article, a lecture in "The Development of Shakespeare's Verse" series, delivered first at Edinburgh University in 1919.<sup>2</sup> However, in 1956, when Eliot compiled the essays to be included in his volume On Poetry and Poets, he did not find the earlier essay on Hamlet and the shorter one on Romeo and Juliet "worthy of inclusion";<sup>3</sup> consequently he incorporated only parts of these two lectures into the essay on "Poetry and Drama."

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<sup>1</sup>"John Ford," Essays, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>"Hamlet and his Problems," The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1934), pp. 95-103.

<sup>3</sup>Preface to On Poetry, p. 11.

It is the aim of this chapter to explore Eliot's thinking concerning the language of Shakespeare's plays. Since this emerges as Eliot's main interest in the essays we are considering, his treatment of Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Antony and Cleopatra is seen in relation to this subject. Later in the chapter Eliot's remarks on other Shakespeare plays are thought to be relevant. We will, at the same time, seek to keep in mind Eliot's emphasis on the developmental aspect of Shakespeare's work.

One article by Eliot, "Shakespeares Verskunst," introduced in chapter I of this thesis, is invaluable to the present study for, in spelling out the development of Shakespeare's art, Eliot spells out his own increasing appreciation of this art. This chapter will include an examination of how the German article reveals Eliot's interpretation of Shakespeare's development. This lecture, delivered in 1937, falls at the approximate mid-point of Eliot's creative activity. It is evident in this lecture, however, that Eliot's appreciation of Shakespeare has greatly increased as compared to both his earlier incidental references to the art of the master, as well as to his detailed criticism such as is contained in the article on Hamlet and the extended comments concerning Othello in the article "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," written in 1927. We may, legitimately, pose the question whether Eliot's heightened appreciation for Shakespeare's art in the German lecture may have been due, in part, to his desire to show his compatriot in the

best favorable light in a foreign country, especially in a country where the bard of Avon had long been famous; where men like Wieland (who had translated twenty-two of Shakespeare's plays into German), Goethe and Lessing had eloquently and persuasively written about Shakespeare. The above, however, does not appear to be the case, as we shall see later in this chapter where we will have occasion to examine other statements of Eliot which fall into the later period of his creative activity.

In an article concerned with Ben Jonson (1919) Eliot states that "The characters of Shakespeare are such as might exist in different circumstances than those in which Shakespeare sets them."<sup>4</sup> And these characters, as well as those of Jonson, "and perhaps of all the greatest drama, are drawn in positive and simple outlines."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Eliot states here, that, "If we look at the work of Jonson's great contemporaries, Shakespeare, and also Donne and Webster and Tourneur (and sometimes Middleton), have a depth, a third dimension, as Mr. Gregory Smith rightly calls it, which Jonson's work has not."<sup>6</sup> In this early essay, as in others, Eliot recognizes aptitude in Shakespeare, but he does not yet realize the greatness of Shakespeare's characterization; nor does he distinguish between Shakespeare and his contemporaries. There are here

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<sup>4</sup>"Ben Jonson," Essays, p. 153.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

only minor indications of a singling out of Shakespeare above some other dramatists of the time. For example, Eliot notes that "Whereas in Shakespeare [emotional] effect is due to the way in which the characters act upon one another, in Jonson it is given by the way in which the characters fit in with each other."<sup>7</sup> To "act upon," one may say, is progress from "fitting in." Puppets may be made to "fit in" with each other, but they can in no wise "act upon" each other. To "act upon" includes the capacity of character development, of interaction between characters. In fact Eliot argues with Gregory Smith concerning Falstaff and other Shakespearean characters that have a 'third dimension' which Smith believes the characters of Jonson lack.<sup>8</sup> Here Eliot notes that the difference is not due to Shakespeare's characters springing from the feelings or imagination, while Jonson's spring from the intellect,

. . . but that Shakespeare's represent a more complex tissue of feelings and desires, as well as a more supple, a more susceptible temperament. . . . It is obvious that the spring of the difference is not the difference between feeling and thought, or superior insight, superior perception, on the part of Shakespeare, but his susceptibility to a greater range of emotion, and emotion deeper and more obscure. But his characters are no more 'alive' than are the characters of Jonson.<sup>8</sup>

By 1940, in an essay on Yeats, Eliot could say that "One form, a perfect form, of development is that of Shakespeare, one of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>9</sup> "Yeats," On Poetry, p. 254.

few poets whose work of maturity is just as exciting as that of their early manhood. . . . With Shakespeare, one sees a slow, continuous development of mastery of his craft of verse."<sup>9</sup> And, giving the reason why this is so, Eliot adds:

For a man who is capable of experience finds himself in a different world in every decade of his life; as he sees it with different eyes, the material of his art is continuously renewed. But in fact, very few poets have shown this capacity of adaptation to the years. It requires, indeed, an exceptional honesty and courage to face the change.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in the lecture "Shakespeares Verskunst," Eliot draws attention to the gradual development of Shakespeare's art. He depicts Shakespeare as one who gradually learned to write verse which embodies the natural everyday speech of man. It is this capacity to create natural speech which makes for great poetry and drama and which makes the characters live. Learning to do this was the first phase of Shakespeare's development in his art. It was progress from the writing of artificial language, to natural. Thus Eliot draws attention to the artificial inversions, repetitions, and wordplay in Shakespeare's early history play, The Life and Death of King John, where the king declares:

. . . in her eyes I find  
A wonder, or a wondrous miracle,  
The shadow of myself formed in her eyes:  
Which, being but the shadow of your son,  
Becomes a sun and makes your son a shadow.

Eliot asserts that no one would believe a character that speaks

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

this language. These may be dramatic figures but they are without life. He finds one figure in this play, however, whose language is so close to the natural speech of daily life as to become revolutionary in the context of this play. It is Richard Faulconbridge, the bastard. In comparison to this live character, the other characters of the play appear the less real. He is the forerunner of such true to life characters as Iago, Timon of Athens, Mark Antony and of King Lear. Thus, in 1937, Eliot discovers Faulconbridge to be far in advance of any character in Marlowe or other writers of that age.

According to Eliot's divisions, Shakespeare's second phase of development reaches its peak in Romeo and Juliet,<sup>11</sup> although the first two scenes of this play are not too promising. One must ask whether Shakespeare purposely gave Romeo an artificial language in these scenes in order to distinguish it from the language of true love, such as that in Love's Labour's Lost, for Eliot feels rightly that Romeo was not really in love, but rather that he only imagined himself so. It is not until Juliet's nurse appears that a life-like language is heard. Eliot finds that this strong, robust and vibrantly alive personality, too, is a descendent of Faulconbridge in her manner of speech. She, as well as Capulet, Juliet's father, is realistically presented. In this mastery Shakespeare excels over all English

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<sup>11</sup>It seems somewhat difficult to reconcile Eliot's description of Shakespeare's two periods as presented in the article "The

poets, who have written poetic drama, either before or after him.<sup>12</sup>

This view concurs with that of Clemen, who states:

On the whole it may be said, that the first scenes of Romeo and Juliet strike us as being more conventional in tone and diction than the later ones. The blank-verse, too, is handled more conventionally here than in the later parts of the play. It may very well be that this is intentional. For the nearer the play advances towards its tragic culmination, the less powerful and significant becomes the conventional world from which the two lovers have freed themselves by accepting their fate. This transition of style has not, of course, been worked out consistently.<sup>13</sup>

Eliot remarks that Romeo and Juliet is particularly to be studied for its variety in styles. Language is becoming individualized. This agrees with other Shakespearean critics as well, notably Kenneth Muir, who states that "By the time he wrote Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare was able to differentiate between the speech of Mercutio, Capulet and the Nurse, besides that of the lovers."<sup>14</sup> Eliot is unable to discover a reason for Mercutio's long "Queen Mab" speech which, he states, is dramaturgically superfluous. It intensifies

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(Cont.) Music of Poetry" (1942) with that of the article "Shakespeares Verskunst" (1937). One must assume that the classification in the former article refers to boundaries within the larger two-divisional dimensions of the latter, for it hardly appears consistent with Eliot's over-all observations to interpret him to mean that Romeo and Juliet (one of the earlier plays) should be grouped with the larger dramatic area which includes the master's last four plays which have been so widely disputed as to dramatic value and which Eliot believes excel over all Shakespeare's earlier plays.

<sup>12</sup>"Verskunst," p. 202.

<sup>13</sup>Wolfgang H. Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 64.

the puzzling quality of Mercutio's character, it retards action, yet it is a literary piece of great brilliance which we would hate to miss.<sup>15</sup> This speech also, Eliot explains, points forward to coming events in the play and in other plays, as for example, the words "Which is as thin of substance as the air" anticipates Horatio's line in Hamlet: "For it is, as the air, invulnerable." Furthermore, it seems important to remember the context of Mercutio's "Queen Mab" speech, for is not the play a presentation of the Petrarchan tradition? Thus by contrast Mercutio, with his down-to-earth prose, represents the principle of realism in the play. His language is liberated from that of the Petrarchan tradition. It is disciplined and straight-forward, just the opposite of the language of Romeo. In the "Queen Mab" speech, however, Mercutio suddenly and purposefully adopts blank verse and romantic subject-matter in order to parody the whole love-sick tradition which Romeo represents. He is telling Romeo, whose language abounds in stellar imagery, to come down to earth from his stars and to see life, women and love as it really is. And so we cannot agree with Eliot in his finding that this scene is "superfluous."

The "Queen Mab" speech also induces Eliot to compare the stagecraft of Shakespeare with that of Racine and other F r e n c h

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<sup>14</sup>Kenneth Muir, "Shakespeare the Professional," Shakespeare Survey 24, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup>"Verskunst," p. 202.

tragedians who, he feels, leave out all extraneous material, whereas Shakespeare tends to overload his plays, including everything that can possibly be made consistent with the dramatic activity.<sup>16</sup> This does not seem to be a realistic appraisal on the part of Eliot, for noted Shakespeare scholars (Granville-Barker, Bethell, Charney, Vickers, Clemen--to name only a few of the more recent ones) stress the profound insight that Shakespeare portrays, an insight which never lets any scene be merely incidental.

Romeo and Juliet is an early instance of Shakespeare appreciation on the part of Eliot, for as far back as 1919, in his essay "'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama," he compared this play with Rostand's Cyrano, finding that the latter has a life-giving dramatic sense, but that Rostand's characters are too conscious of having to play with "gusto." Eliot continues:

We recognize that in the love scenes of Cyrano in the garden, for in Romeo and Juliet the profounder dramatist shows his lovers melting into unconsciousness of their isolated selves, shows the human soul in the process of forgetting itself. Rostand could not do that.<sup>17</sup>

Eliot distinguishes between the two plays still more by stating that certain scenes of Cyrano satisfy the requirements of poetic drama, whereas Shakespeare's "form is determined in the unity of the whole, as well as single scenes."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>17</sup> "'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama," Essays, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Loc. cit.

A new style and perfection of verse which is characteristic of Romeo and Juliet is described by Eliot in both the lecture on "Shakespeares Verskunst" and in the Note appended to his 1951 essay, "Poetry and Drama." In both instances Eliot is concerned with the "artificiality" in the beginning of the speech in the balcony scene:

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
Having some business, do intreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.

Eliot doubts the likelihood of a man standing below in the garden, being able to see, even on a very bright moonlit night, "the eyes of the lady above flashing so brilliantly as to justify such a comparison."<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Clemen explains this discrepancy by noting that

When, in the first lines, the eyes of the beloved appear to Romeo as "two of the fairest stars in all the heaven," then this is no conventional phrase but is based on the reality of the moment, on the fact that he has raised his eyes to heaven and to Juliet at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, Eliot is keenly aware of a new virtuosity which has entered Shakespeare's play with this scene. It is a surprising musical pattern, comparable to the early works of Beethoven. There is a remarkable arrangement of voices, whereby Juliet's voice carries the "dominant phrase of the whole duet":<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"Poetry and Drama," On Poetry, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup>Clemen, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup>"Poetry and Drama," On Poetry, pp. 87-88.

My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
 My love as deep: the more I give to thee  
 The more I have, for both are infinite.

"Lightning," a key-word in the play, is also given to Juliet and it "is significant of the sudden and disastrous power of her passion, when she says

'Tis like the lightning, which doth cease to be  
 Ere one can say 'it lightens'.<sup>22</sup>

In this scene, Eliot declares that Shakespeare achieves an unexcelled perfection of verse "for this particular purpose":

The stiffness, the artificiality, the poetic decoration, of his early verse has finally given place to a simplification to the language of natural speech, and this language of conversation again raised to great poetry, and to great poetry which is essentially dramatic: for the scene has a structure of which each line is an essential part.<sup>23</sup>

So, too, Eliot chooses the opening scene of Hamlet which, he states in 1951, is "as well constructed an opening scene as that of any play ever written,"<sup>24</sup> to illustrate the unconscious effect of verse upon an audience. Here we see how far the diversification of language, which became evident in Romeo and Juliet can be intensified. In watching this scene in the theatre we are totally unaware of the

great variation of style. Nothing is superfluous, and there is no line of poetry which is not justified by its dramatic

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>23</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

value. . . . No poet has begun to master dramatic verse until he can write lines which, like these in Hamlet, are transparent.<sup>25</sup>

Hearing this kind of poetry on stage induces the audience to attend "consciously" to the meaning of the poetry, rather than to the medium of expression. We are only aware of the atmosphere of this night on stage, and of the foreboding of impending tragedy. Here we see how the rhythm of the verse changes with change of speaker and situation. From the guards' "short, brusque ejaculations at the beginning" the verse becomes slower when Horatio and Marcellus enter, and then the "solemn and sonorous words, 'What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,'" greet the ghost of the dead king. The rhythmical movement continues to change with the thought-content of the speakers. Eliot states that

This is great poetry, and it is dramatic; but besides being poetic and dramatic, it is something more. There emerges, when we analyze it, a kind of musical design also which reinforces and is one with the dramatic movement. It has checked and accelerated the pulse of our emotion without our knowing it.<sup>26</sup>

But Eliot was not always so appreciative of Hamlet. In his essay "Hamlet and his Problems" (1919) Eliot is disturbed because, as he states, in his essay "Hamlet is a stratification, that it represents the efforts of a series of men, each making what he could out of the work of his predecessors."<sup>27</sup> Therefore, Eliot tells us, we must perceive the Hamlet of Shakespeare as being "superposed

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<sup>25</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

upon much cruder material which persists in the final form."<sup>28</sup>

And Eliot objects to what he calls "unexplained scenes—the Polonius-Laertes and the Polonius-Reynaldo scenes—for which there is little excuse."<sup>29</sup> We should note, however, the character of Polonius's language, and his intense interest in linguistics. For example, in the scene where Polonius conveys to the King and Queen his conviction that Hamlet is in love with Ophelia, the Queen finally protests against Polonius's tediousness and circumlocution with the words: "More matter, with less art." (II.2.95). Ifor Evans tells us that this speech "is contrived to portray the character of Polonius, the aged courtier with a long-winded interest in the niceties of style. It adds also one of those many moods of comedy which give this tragedy such a varied interest."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the scene to which Eliot objects, that between Polonius and Laertes prior to the latter's return to France, serves to accentuate Polonius's involved style of language. In doing so it characterizes the man, especially since it occurs so early in the play (I.3.54ff). It adds a touch of comic relief from the preceding scene of the appearance of King Hamlet's ghost and from the tension-filled farewell between Laertes and his sister Ophelia. So, too, the Polonius-

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<sup>27</sup> "Hamlet," Essays, p.142.

<sup>28</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>30</sup> Ifor Evans, The Language of Shakespeare's Plays (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1959), p. 122.

Reynaldo scene (II.1) appears to serve a definite purpose, that of relief from tension. This scene follows Hamlet's suspenseful conversation with his father's ghost. His turbulent feelings are apparent in the words with which he closes the scene:

The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right! (I.5.189-90).

And immediately after the Polonius-Reynaldo interview the audience is confronted by the return of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with its ominous foreboding; consequently, it is difficult to agree with Eliot who finds this scene "unexplained."

Furthermore, both of these "unexplained" scenes point up the discrepancy between appearance and reality. Polonius poses as a highly moral person, but is really quite a corrupt man. The attributes that are generally associated with the station of a courtier are his only in name. He instructs Reynaldo to spy upon his (Polonius's) own son. He urges the King to post Ophelia as a decoy for Hamlet in order that they, Polonius and the King, may secretly spy upon Hamlet. He tells the King that he will hide behind the arras to spy upon Hamlet's interview with his mother; and he does so with fatal results. The distrust which is evident in all this spying is caused by the fact that he, himself, is not to be trusted.

The whole farewell speech which Polonius pours out upon his son, Laertes, is an ironic commentary on his own deceitful nature. This implication is summarized in his closing words:

This above all: to thine own self be true,

And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man. (I.3.79).

The whole aura of disguise and mystification which Polonius delights in is basic to his character.

Undoubtedly Hamlet has not been deceived by the outward courtliness of Polonius. His discourse with the latter is loaded with underlying meaning. Thus he says in mock-madness what courtesy to the aged courtier would forbid him to do sanely:

Pol. Do you know me, my lord?

Ham. Excellent well; you are a fishmonger.

Pol. Not I, my lord.

Ham. Then I would you were so honest a man. (II.2.171).

Hamlet is well aware of the fact that Polonius is trying to "fish" out the reasons for the prince's madness. His cynicism is deep and well-founded. Mahood aptly characterizes and contrasts Hamlet and Polonius when she points out what a vastly different outlook these two men have on corruption. The Polonius-Reynaldo scene again becomes significant here, as we are reminded that Reynaldo is to lay "slight sullies" on Polonius's son. The distinction between the pollution in the life of Laertes and that of the Danish court is emphasized:

The contrast of these two outlooks is suggested at the beginning of the second act when Polonius, whose business in life is to play the 'politician', tries to discover the misdeeds of Laertes by having Reynaldo lay slight sullies on his son. A sully is a mere surface tarnish to Polonius; but Hamlet, who has discovered misdeed in plenty in his own family, feels himself to be polluted by his discoveries.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Mahood, p. 120.

There is another aspect which Eliot has obviously overlooked when he refers to the Polonius-Laertes and Polonius-Reynaldo scenes as being "unexplained." That is the father-son relationship which Shakespeare appears to stress in this play. Hamlet's whole manner of mourning for his father, the murdered King of Denmark, conveys a deep sense of the loss of intimacy and fellowship which he had cherished. His great respect and veneration for his father is heard in the "closet scene" where, in comparing the usurper King with the dead one, Hamlet implores his mother to be conscious of the exchange she has made in her new marriage:

The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
 See, what a grace was seated on this brow;  
 Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;  
 An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;  
 A station like the herald Mercury  
 New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;  
 A combination and a form indeed,  
 Where every god did seem to set his seal,  
 To give the world assurance of a man:  
 This was your husband. (III.4.55ff).

But this tone of admiration and warmth is missing between Polonius and his son. What kind of a father will spy on his son and use his daughter as a decoy?

Three related assertions of Eliot, pertinent to this discussion are:

Shakespeare's Hamlet, so far as it is Shakespeare's, is a play dealing with the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son, and that Shakespeare was unable to impose this motive successfully upon the 'intractable' material of the old play.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>"Hamlet," Essays, p. 143.

Hamlet, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art.<sup>33</sup>

The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief. . . . a subject for pathologists. . . . We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, Eliot concludes, "the play is most certainly an artistic failure."<sup>35</sup>

This accusation of "artistic failure" has been widely disputed by literary critics. So, for example, a review in The Athenaeum, of Clutton Brock's book Shakespeare's Hamlet deals with the Eliot criticism, noting that "because 'Hamlet' is intellectually too much for Mr. Eliot, Hamlet was aesthetically too much for Shakespeare." The reviewer mentions how Mr. Brock

points out that Mr. Eliot's cardinal fallacy is a confusion between explanation and expression in drama. Shakespeare's intense aesthetic awareness of Hamlet, the drama of whose incomparably rich inner life is a means of stressing the dislocation of his normal consciousness, is our own unquestioning acceptance of Hamlet. Hamlet becomes as real to us as he was to Shakespeare, because we are aesthetically convinced by Hamlet. Hamlet acts or fails to act as he does because he is Hamlet, and what he says and does in the play is exactly what, being Hamlet, he would say and do. . . .<sup>36</sup> The disorder of Hamlet's mind is the coherence of the play.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> H. J. M., "The World of Books," The Athenaeum, Vol. XXXI (London: Loxley Brothers Ltd., 27 May 1922), p. 309.

Mr. David L. Stevenson, on the other hand, in an article entitled "An Objective Correlative for T. S. Eliot's Hamlet" would hate to miss Eliot's "extraordinarily cogent and exact observations on the dramatic structure of the play. . . . [H]e makes us aware of the unusual nature of Shakespeare's dramatic technique in Hamlet. And in tempting us to reply to his idea that the play is, artistically, a failure, he forces from us a fresh perception of the very real originality of Shakespeare's achievement in the first of his major tragedies."<sup>37</sup> The title of this article was based on a statement of Eliot, which occurs in the "Hamlet" article, as follows:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. If you examine any of Shakespeare's more successful tragedies, you will find this exact equivalence. . . . The artistic 'inevitability' lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in Hamlet.<sup>38</sup>

But can we not say that all the factors which Eliot requires for his "objective correlative" are set in motion in Act I, scene two: more particularly in Hamlet's soliloquy which occurs in this scene? Reverberations from this tack of Hamlet's inner turmoil and of the

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<sup>37</sup>David L. Stevenson, "An Objective Correlative for T. S. Eliot's Hamlet," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. XIII (Baltimore, Maryland: The American Society for Aesthetics, September 1954), pp. 69-79.

"weariness" of the protagonist in the "unweeded garden" of Elsinore "that grows to seed," echo throughout the entire play and fuse apparently disparate elements and scenes into a unified and logical sequential whole.

Stevenson appreciates Eliot's drawing attention to the necessity of realizing that Hamlet, the play, is of primary importance, and not Hamlet, the hero, and his motives.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, he notes Eliot's objection that

Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. . . . Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison and obstruct actions.<sup>40</sup>

This, Mr. Stevenson declares, is a shrewd and accurate diagnosis for "It is in fact precisely an imbalance between the character of Hamlet's expressed feelings and the events by which they seem to be evoked (his mother's re-marriage, his father's murder, etc.) which forms the essentially distinguishing nature or quality of the play qua play."<sup>41</sup> Also, "the crime on which the play is based has 'the primal eldest curse upon't, / A brother's murder'" (III.3.37-38).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>"Hamlet," Essays, p. 145.

<sup>39</sup>Stevenson, p. 70.

<sup>40</sup>"Hamlet," Essays, p. 145.

<sup>41</sup>Stevenson, p. 70.

We are advised to see Hamlet "in his complex situation as prince, son, and lover."<sup>43</sup> To this we must also add the fact that "Hamlet has lost a throne, and he has lost thereby a social, publicly-acceptable persona: a local habitation and a name."<sup>44</sup> Thus, too, Charney rightly makes a point when he declares: "I am actively convinced of the presence of evil in Hamlet, and that I feel no weakness, as Eliot did, in the 'objective correlative'."<sup>45</sup> It is for all of these reasons that Hamlet haunts the stage as he does, not only because of "the effect of a mother's guilt," as Eliot claims. We would agree with Stevenson who, like Charney, does not find the accusation of an "excess" in the play valid, for "Hamlet is a character whose emotions and reactions are dramatically legitimate and exist without need of unusual explanations in a wholly self-contained tragedy."<sup>46</sup> The avid interest of more than 350 years of Hamlet enthusiasts at the theatre alone should be ample verification of the artistic success, rather than "artistic failure" of Shakespeare's method in this unusual play. Time has

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<sup>42</sup> Maurice Charney, Style in Hamlet (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theater (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 100.

<sup>44</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, "Hamlet: The Analogy of Action," The Hudson Review, Vol. II (New York: The Hudson Review, Spring 1949), pp. 166-70.

<sup>45</sup> Charney, Style in Hamlet, p. 316.

<sup>46</sup> Stevenson, p. 72.

proven the measure of the play's success. And in Eliot's terms, too, one is conscious of the importance which he would place on such a long stage-history, particularly in view of his statements concerning our "inheritance" as discussed in his essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

And what is more Eliot admitted, in the essay on Hamlet that the protagonist "is the 'Mona Lisa' of literature,"<sup>47</sup> He attributes this one, "with that other profoundly interesting play of 'intractable' material and astonishing versification, Measure for Measure, to a period of crisis, after which follow the tragic successes which culminate in Coriolanus." Eliot states further that "Coriolanus may be not as 'interesting' as Hamlet, but it is, with Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare's most assured artistic success."<sup>48</sup> Eliot does not spell out the details which constitute, in his mind, this "artistic success," but Maurice Charney has aptly summarized the outstanding points of Coriolanus for us as follows:

If we consider the play from a dramatic point of view, it has surprising force and vitality. . . . The poetic speech is remarkably tight and sinewy. . . . There is also a brilliant use of short choric scenes which comment on the main action without making obtrusive analogies; for dramatic economy, I.3 and IV.3 are among the best scenes of this sort in all of Shakespeare. It is along these dramatic lines, I think, that we may understand the otherwise bewildering remark of Eliot that

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<sup>47</sup> "Hamlet," Essays, p. 144.

<sup>48</sup> Loc. cit.

Coriolanus is, 'with Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare's most assured artistic success'.<sup>49</sup>

In 1932 Eliot, recalling the criticism of his earlier words, attempted to correct former impressions of what he had said:

I was once under censure for suggesting that in Hamlet Shakespeare was dealing with 'intractable material': my words were even interpreted as maintaining that Coriolanus is a greater play than Hamlet. I am not very much interested in deciding which play of Shakespeare is greater than which other; because I am more interested, not in one play or another, but in Shakespeare's work as a whole. I do not think it any derogation to suggest that Shakespeare did not always succeed: such a suggestion would imply a very narrow view of success. His success must always be reckoned in understanding of what he attempted; and I believe that to admit his partial failures is to approach the recognition of his real greatness more closely than to hold that he was always granted plenary inspiration. . . . [B]ut if any one of Shakespeare's plays were omitted we should not be able to understand the rest as well as we do.<sup>50</sup>

The 1919 comparison of Hamlet with Antony and Cleopatra links with a comparison Eliot made in 1932 between the latter play and John Ford's Tis Pity. The characters in Ford's play, so Eliot believes, are not as convincingly presented as those of Shakespeare. Giovanni "is merely selfish and self-willed, of a temperament to want a thing more because it is forbidden; Annabella is pliant, vacillating and negative: the one almost a monster of egotism, the other virtually a moral defective."<sup>51</sup> Eliot is convinced, however,

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<sup>49</sup>Maurice Charney, Shakespeare's Roman Plays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 40.

<sup>50</sup>"Apology for the Countess of Pembroke," Use of Criticism, p. 44.

<sup>51</sup>"John Ford," Essays, p. 198.

that Antony and Cleopatra feel a genuinely "overpowering attraction towards each other" although they are defying conventional morality and acting against their own better interest. This is "an attraction as fatal as that indicated by the love-potion motif in Tristan and Isolde."<sup>52</sup> These two Shakespearean lovers have a close relationship to each other; their affinity for each other is made real; and their increasing interrelationship becomes evident in the intensification of their involvement with each other.

In Antony and Cleopatra Eliot finds the culmination of Shakespeare's development, both in dramatic technique and in versification. This was a development, as has been shown, of which the first phase reached its height in Richard Faulconbridge of King John and the second in Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet. This development shows an increasing adaptation of verse to colloquial speech, to natural everyday language, while simultaneously, the language increases in poetic quality. Eliot notes the vastly different atmosphere occasioned by a pair of aging lovers, in Antony and Cleopatra as compared to that of the young lovers in Romeo and Juliet. Both pairs are doomed, but for different reasons. Antony and Cleopatra spans all of world-history. Eliot believes that this makes it a play which is difficult for all but a small minority to grasp. The difficulty of staging, too, is increased beyond that of Romeo and

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 197-98.

Juliet because of the many quickly changing brief scenes. Antony and Cleopatra is infused with realism, says Eliot; this realism consists of a joining of the elevated and the vulgar aspects of real life; it results in a union which forms an entity of its own. Thus the aging lovers themselves "are two great heroic figures yet, at the same time, they are totally without dignity."<sup>53</sup>

The unity of their greatness, uncouthness and vulgarity is presented to us both in their own words and actions, and in the pronouncements which other characters in the play make about Antony and Cleopatra. In this play, according to Eliot, prose and poetry are often so sensitively fused and alternated as not to be distinguishable, as, for instance, in the short dialogue between Antony and Enobarbus, when the former relates the news of his wife's death:

Fulvia is dead.  
 Sir?  
 Fulvia is dead.  
 Fulvia?  
 Dead.

Eliot declares that only two passages in Antony and Cleopatra deviate from colloquial speech, and in both instances this is for a specific purpose. The one is Enobarbus' consciously splendid description of the first meeting between the lovers:

The barge she sat in, like a golden throne  
 Glowed on the waters (II.2.196ff).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>"Verskunst," p. 205.

<sup>54</sup>This is the quotation from Antony and Cleopatra as cited by Eliot in his article "Shakespeares Verskunst." A more familiar

Here the "rough warrior" becomes a different person, when he thinks of the magical beauty of the queen.<sup>55</sup> This, Eliot asserts, is an occasion when the "really fine rhetoric of Shakespeare occurs" in a situation "where a character in the play sees himself in a dramatic light." Here Enobarbus is "inspired to see Cleopatra in this dramatic light."<sup>56</sup> The second instance occurs in the scene on Pompey's gorgeous ship, at the meeting of the triumvirs (II.7). Now the triumvirs significantly speak in prose which tends to be more "colloquial" than verse. But, Eliot re-asserts, the most outstanding quality of the drama is that the heroic and the vulgar is found in the same persons and that these fuse into one and the same view of life. Only Shakespeare could have presented his characters on an elevated plane, yet endowed with all their human frailties; and without the human frailties this tragedy would lack in greatness. Shakespeare's superiority over other dramatists, such as Marlowe and Dryden, consists in his ability to say poetically what these others could not even say in prose. His colloquial language becomes elevated speech which excels over that of the others.<sup>57</sup>

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reading is that of Hardin Craig:

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,  
Burn'd on the water.

Eliot borrowed these two lines to introduce the anti-heroine of his "A Game of Chess" (Part II of The Waste Land) but he changed the word "water" to "marble." Perhaps we should say that he "stole" these lines, since Eliot's criterion of this is that "One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different." "Philip Massinger," Essays, p. 206.

Eliot does not, in the aforementioned article, draw attention to the manner of death taken by Antony and Cleopatra but he does so in another article, suggesting that, "If you compare the deaths of several of Shakespeare's heroes—. . . notably Othello, Coriolanus and Antony—with the deaths of heroes of dramatists such as Marston and Chapman, consciously under Senecan influence, you will find a strong similarity—except only that Shakespeare does it both more poetically and more lifelike."<sup>58</sup>

These heroes are, in death, as they were in life. They all maintain an individualistic character trait—the "vice of Pride."<sup>59</sup> This character trait was exploited, by Shakespeare, for its dramatic usefulness. The "vice of Pride" reveals itself in an "attitude of self-dramatization assumed by some of Shakespeare's heroes at moments of tragic intensity," particularly at the time of death.<sup>60</sup> The heroes of Chapman, Bussy, Clermont and Biron also die in this manner.

But Shakespeare, of course, does it so much better than any of the others, and makes it somehow more integral with the

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<sup>55</sup>"Verskunst," p. 205.

<sup>56</sup>"'Rhetoric' and Poetic Drama," Essays, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup>"Verskunst," pp. 205-206.

<sup>58</sup>"Stoicism," Essays, p. 131.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

human nature of his characters. It is less verbal, more real.<sup>61</sup>

M. C. Bradbrook observes that "The nineteenth century's view of Othello as entirely noble ('there is none we love like Othello', said Swinburne) produced its reaction." This reaction included both a negative as well as a positive response. "But it has been suggested more than once that Othello is damned for committing suicide, or that his lack of insight alienates. T. S. Eliot's influential words on the final speech set the tone for a whole generation of critics."<sup>62</sup> These words of Eliot are: "I have always felt that I have never read a more terrible exposure of human weakness-- of universal human weakness--than the last great speech of Othello. . . . It is usually taken on its face value, as expressing the greatness in defeat of a noble but erring nature."<sup>63</sup> The speech Eliot refers to is this:

Soft you; a word or two before you go.  
 I have done the state service, and they know't.  
 No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
 When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
 Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,  
 Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak  
 Of one that loved not wisely but too well;  
 Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,  
 Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,  
 Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away  
 Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,  
 Albeit unused to the melting mood,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 129-30.

<sup>62</sup> M. C. Bradbrook, "Shakespeare the Jacobean Dramatist," A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies, p. 148.

Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees  
 Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;  
 And say, besides, that in Aleppo once,  
 Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk  
 Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
 I took by the throat the circumcised dog,  
 And smote him, thus.<sup>64</sup>

This, so Eliot believes, is a case of the hero "cheering himself up."  
 It is an attempt to escape reality. Thoughts of Desdemona have fled.  
 He is thinking only of himself, dramatizing himself. A little later  
 in the same essay Eliot declares that "even Hamlet, who has made a  
 pretty considerable mess of things, and occasioned the death of at  
 least three innocent people, and two more insignificant ones, dies  
 fairly well pleased with himself--

Horatio, I am dead;  
 Thou liv'st; report me and my cause aright  
 To the unsatisfied. . . .  
 O good Horatio, what a wounded name,  
 Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!<sup>65</sup>

Thus Eliot comments that "Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself."<sup>66</sup> This self-dramatization, this adopting of "an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude" turns Othello and Hamlet into "pathetic" figures. And, Eliot concludes, "I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this bovarysme, the human will to see

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<sup>63</sup>"Stoicism," Essays, p. 130.

<sup>64</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare."<sup>67</sup>

Julian Markels, in showing how Shakespeare "needs to dramatize the conflict between public and private behavior as a central aspect of the problematic character," draws upon the above criticism of Eliot in regard to Othello's motives in his final speech:

Reality, Mr. Eliot implies, demands a moral rather than an aesthetic attitude, public rather than private; but if Othello were to adopt the moral attitude required, he could no longer think well of himself. Hence he abandons reality in order to appease his vanity.

I think Mr. Eliot is wrong about Othello but right about Shakespeare: the psychic process he describes is familiar even to readers of the plays who are not steeped in Freud. What needs to be emphasized is that in Mr. Eliot's formulation, the new 'self-consciousness and self-dramatization of the Shakespearean hero', which reflects 'not a very agreeable' stage of human history, is governed by a recognizable external reality; and this reality, because it demands moral attitudes is the source and standard of moral judgment.<sup>68</sup>

One must agree with Markels in that "'Reality', in this context, is a difficult word to understand." It would seem that a "set of ethical values" would be essential here, which could be used to explain instances of "escape." Markels notes that, in actual life, such a criterion is supplied by the "historical spirit of the age and the customs of the country; but in a play, where 'reality' must be given a more vivid shape, it is most readily compressed into the created image of a public world peculiar to the play."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 130-31.

<sup>68</sup> Julian Markels, The Pillar of the World (Ohio State University Press, 1968), pp. 56-57.

This is what we see in the death-scene of Othello. Shakespeare has placed his hero on the stage of his public life; there is no divorce between the manner of life and death in such a character. His motives are consistent through the end.

Enlarging on Eliot's view of Othello's manner of death, "Leavis thinks Othello's 'habit of self-dramatization' is often 'a disguise' for 'obtuse and brutal egoism'."<sup>70</sup>

Moreover this view, it has been remarked, is quite close to Iago's view of Othello; it is also quite close to that of Shakespeare's source. . . . The conflict and sympathy of this play depends in the first place on the character of the hero contradicting a stereotype, and secondly in the slow poisoning and quick final recovery, the change of speed in his development. Jacobean spectators were used to hearing speeches from the scaffold, in which a dying man put off his guilt.<sup>71</sup>

We become increasingly aware, as we compare Eliot's early and later statements, that he learned to appreciate Shakespeare and his art by a constant involvement with the same. The development that he sees in Shakespeare, though somewhat different from the usually accepted pattern, seems legitimate and noteworthy. Not everyone would concede with Eliot in the finding that Shakespeare's latest plays are his greatest ones; still, it must be acknowledged that they contain a new and different dramatic impact from any of his earlier plays. Eliot has, over the years, given a clear indication

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>70</sup>M. C. Bradbrook, A New Companion to Shakespeare Studies, p. 145.

<sup>71</sup>Loc. cit.

of the progress attained by Shakespeare, from the early King John  
to one of the latest plays, Coriolanus.

#### IV. THE VERSE OF SHAKESPEARE AND THAT OF T. S. ELIOT

In 1933 Eliot remarked: "Poetry begins I dare say, with a savage beating a drum in a jungle, and it retains that essential of percussive and rhythm."<sup>1</sup> He noted that the variety of poetry is

so great that all the kinds seem to have nothing in common except the rhythm of verse instead of the rhythm of prose. . . . [Poetry] may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed; may help to break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh, or some new part of it.<sup>2</sup>

Eliot was convinced that each generation and each civilization would find "a more plausible reason for beating a drum. Shakespeare and Racine--or rather the developments which led up to them--each found his own reason. The reasons may be divided into tragedy and comedy. We still have similar reasons, but we have lost the drum."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Conclusion," Use of Criticism, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Eliot, "The Beating of a Drum," The Nation and the

The drum-beat of Shakespeare's plays is, for the greatest part, that of blank verse. And when Shakespeare uses prose instead of verse, it "is a kind of spring-board from which verse attains greater power and resonance."<sup>4</sup> This chapter of the thesis seeks to highlight what Eliot says about Shakespeare's blank verse and also, if possible, to show the effect of this verse upon Eliot's own writing of dramatic verse.

Eliot states that every generation must re-appraise the poetry of the past, considering the performance of its contemporaries and immediate predecessors.<sup>5</sup> He notes that the outstanding achievement of Elizabethan versification is the development of blank verse.<sup>6</sup> And in 1927 he states further that:

Not only the evolution of the dramatic structure, but the evolution of the blank verse cadence, took place under the shadow of Seneca; it is hardly too much to say that Shakespeare could not have formed the verse instrument which he left to his successors . . . unless he had received an instrument already highly developed by the genius of Marlowe and the influence of Seneca. Blank verse before 1600, or thereabouts, is a crude form of music compared to blank verse after that date; but its progress in fifteen years had been astonishing.<sup>7</sup>

According to Eliot it was Marlowe who first showed what could be

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Athenaeum, XXXIV (6 October 1923), pp. 11-12.

<sup>4</sup>Brian Vickers, The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>"The Age of Dryden," Use of Criticism, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup>"Apology for the Countess of Pembroke," Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>7</sup>"Seneca in Elizabethan Translation," Essays, p. 85.

done with dramatic blank verse.<sup>8</sup> But it was Shakespeare who developed the art that we find in his great tragedies and history plays. Eliot notes that, even as early as 1597 when Shakespeare wrote Richard III and Richard II, a marked improvement is apparent; there is "less mere repetition, and a dexterity in retaining and developing the same rhythm with greater freedom and less obvious calculation. . . . When blank verse has reached this point, and passed into the hands of its greatest master, there is no need to look for fresh infusions of Seneca. He has done his work, and the one influence on later dramatic verse is the influence of Shakespeare."<sup>9</sup>

It is interesting, in view of Eliot's finding of a close relationship between verse form, rhythm, style and dramatic action, that he said, in 1919, "that Marlowe's rhetoric consists in a pretty simple huffe-snuffe bombast, while Shakespeare's is more exactly a vice of style, a tortured perverse ingenuity of images which dissipates instead of concentrating the imagination."<sup>10</sup> We shall soon see how Eliot's concept evolved into a radically different viewpoint.

But it is true also that "Eliot is aware that there are unexplored, probably not wholly explorable, connections between a poet's rhythm and what can loosely be called the rhythm of his age."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>"Countess of Pembroke," *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup>"Elizabethan Translation," *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup>"Christopher Marlowe," Essays, p. 119.

Each literary period has a predominant rhythm of its own. And this is what Eliot terms "the social function of Poetry," that it, affects the speech and the sensibility of the whole nation "in proportion to its excellence and vigour."<sup>12</sup> And the rhythm of each generation affects the dramatic beat of its works. Thus, too,

The history of blank verse illustrates two interesting and related points: the dependence upon speech and the striking difference, in what is prosodically the same form, between dramatic blank verse and blank verse employed for epic, philosophical, meditative and idyllic purposes. The dependence of verse upon speech is much more direct in dramatic poetry than in any other. . . . But in dramatic verse the poet is speaking in one character after another, through the medium of a company of actors trained by a producer. . . . [H]is idiom must be comprehensive of all the voices, but present at a deeper level than is necessary when the poet speaks only for himself. Some of Shakespeare's later verse is very elaborate and peculiar: but it remains the language, not of one person, but of a world of persons. It is based upon the speech of 300 years ago, yet when we hear it well rendered we can forget the distance of time—as is brought home to us most patently in one of those plays, of which Hamlet is the chief, which can be fittingly produced in modern dress.<sup>13</sup>

Eliot does not wish to suggest any one reason why prose now supercedes verse in the theatre. But he is sure "that one reason why blank verse cannot be employed now in the drama is that so much non-dramatic poetry, and great non-dramatic poetry, has been

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<sup>11</sup>F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 88.

<sup>12</sup>"Preface," On Poetry, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup>"The Music," Ibid., pp. 33-34.

written in it in the last three-hundred years. Our minds are saturated in these non-dramatic works."<sup>14</sup> Had Milton lived before Shakespeare, "Shakespeare would have had to discover quite a different medium from that which he used and perfected." Thus Eliot notes both that Milton's particular handling of blank verse made a continuing use of this kind of verse impossible, and also that "dramatic blank verse had exhausted its resources" by this time.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore the task of the poet depends upon two things: namely, his own personal set of mind, and the period in which he happens to live. It becomes apparent then that each poet and each period will have its own recurring themes. And the "use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music."<sup>16</sup> Verse structure, dramatic action and characterization were all equally coarse in the writings of his contemporaries when Shakespeare began to write. It was Christopher Marlowe who developed dramatic verse to the point from which Shakespeare continued and perfected it.<sup>17</sup> And each writer produces his own particular tonal quality in his works; consequently Eliot states:

Every writer who has written any blank verse worth saving has produced particular tones which his verse and no other's is capable of rendering; and we should keep this in mind when

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.35.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>17</sup>"Verskunst," p.200.

we talk about 'influences' and 'indebtedness'. Shakespeare is 'universal' because he has more of these tones than anyone else . . . [but] to say that Shakespeare expressed nearly all human emotions, implying that he left very little for anyone else, is a radical misunderstanding of art and the artist.<sup>18</sup>

One might say that the poet, or the period, that does not find a particular dominant tone is impoverished indeed.

Eliot is firm in his belief that blank verse is obsolete.

Shakespeare and Milton made it so. He tells us:

Now, blank verse has been a dead metre for a long time. It would be outside of my frame to go into all the reasons for that now: but it is obvious that a form which was handled so supremely well by Shakespeare has its disadvantages. If you are writing a play of the same type as Shakespeare's, the reminiscence is oppressive; if you are writing a play of a different type, it is distracting. Furthermore, as Shakespeare is so much greater than any dramatist who has followed him, blank verse can hardly be dissociated from the life of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: it can hardly catch the rhythms with which English is spoken nowadays. I think that if anything like regular blank verse is ever to be re-established, it can be after a long departure from it, during the course of which it will have liberated itself from period associations.<sup>19</sup>

It is apparent that this is the voice of experience. Eliot clearly found the influence of Shakespeare restricting in the writing of his own plays. Added to this restriction, perhaps the most painful part of the labour of the modern poet who tries to write a play in verse, so Eliot tells us, is as follows:

The course of improvement is towards a greater and greater starkness. The beautiful line for its own sake is a luxury

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<sup>18</sup>"Christopher Marlowe," Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>19</sup>"Yeats," On Poetry, p. 259.

dangerous even for the poet who has made himself a virtuoso of the technique of the theatre. What is necessary is a beauty which shall not be in the line or the isolable passage, but woven into the dramatic texture itself; so that you can hardly say whether the lines give grandeur to the drama, or whether it is the drama which turns the words into poetry. (One of the most thrilling lines in King Lear is the simple

Never, never, never, never, never

But apart from a knowledge of the context, how can you say that it is poetry, or even competent verse?).<sup>20</sup>

This is the kind of critical note that Eliot was able to apply only after agonizing over his own first dramas had given him personal insight into the web of what constitutes great dramatic writing.

So, too, Carol H. Smith reminds us that Eliot was constantly seeking models in Shakespeare's works for his own development of dramatic verse. Thus Miss Smith notes the aim expressed by Eliot in writing The Cocktail Party: "I laid down for myself the ascetic rule to avoid poetry which could not stand the test of strict dramatic utility: with such success, indeed, that it is perhaps an open question whether there is any poetry in the play at all."<sup>21</sup> This might well be compared to Kenneth Muir's findings in Hamlet where, he states:

There are nearly 3,000 lines of verse in the play and over 1,000 lines of prose. But unless one's attention is called to it, one is unlikely to notice which medium is being used at any particular moment. Eliot expressed the hope that the audience would not be aware during a performance of one of his later plays that it was written in verse, and he avoided

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>21</sup> Carol H. Smith, T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 181-82.

the alternation of verse and prose because he thought the audience would thereby become more conscious of the verse. Shakespeare, being himself without this kind of embarrassment, does not embarrass us. We forget we are listening to poetry: we seem rather to be listening to men and women talking. The different levels of reality provided by the Dido play and 'The Mouse-trap' make Hamlet's intervening soliloquies seem perfectly natural speech.<sup>22</sup>

But this kind of natural speech did not come as readily to Eliot as to Shakespeare. Eliot's characters are often without life; their conversation is frequently stilted and unrealistic. Sir Claude Mulhammer, for example, in The Confidential Clerk, never really seems to come to life, nor do Colby Simpkins, B. Kaghan and Lucasta Angel who should perhaps be more free and easy, or colloquial, in their conversation than Sir Claude. One has the feeling that they are all talking past each other, rather than participating in an exchange of ideas. Their dialogue does not have the ring of genuine person to person conversation.

We have already drawn attention to Eliot's admiration of Shakespeare's union of dramatic elements and musical order.<sup>23</sup> "This was an ideal which Eliot found worthy of modern emulation and one which he himself described as the ultimate goal of poetic drama, 'a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order'. It was also the ideal behind the complex plan of The Cocktail Party."<sup>24</sup> But it is

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<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare Survey 24, pp. 40-41.

<sup>23</sup> See page 38 of this thesis.

doubtful that Eliot can have been entirely satisfied that he fully accomplished his purpose.

Shakespeare started early towards acquiring his superb mastery of dramatic writing. Eliot, on the other hand, came to the professional theatre late in life—at about the age when Shakespeare retired to Stratford—and he never acquired the surety of touch in the dramatic realm that was Shakespeare's, nor indeed, the surety of touch that he, Eliot, displayed as a poet. "He did not know instinctively what lines would be effective in the theatre; he found it difficult to vary his style to suit different characters; and too many of his characters are either caricatures or mouth-pieces for himself."<sup>25</sup>

The Elder Statesman, for example, had to undergo drastic revisions between the performances at the Edinburgh festival and its opening in London some weeks later. The final scene between the young lovers had gone particularly badly, and so, significantly, Eliot "Transferred words spoken by the man to the woman. This is surely an indication that the characters had never come alive."<sup>26</sup> Eliot lacked Shakespeare's power to imbue his characters with life. There are a few exceptions, however, notably Celia Copplestone. But the Chamberlaynes, also in The Cocktail Party, are not created as successfully.

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<sup>24</sup>Carol H. Smith, pp. 182-83.

<sup>25</sup>Muir, Shakespeare Survey 24, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup>Loc. cit.

Even in his first play, Murder in the Cathedral, Eliot was conscious of working under the shadow of Shakespeare. And he had the additional problem to deal with, that of distance between the actual time of staging and historical time of the twelfth century, which he was dealing with. Thus we are told:

Since he had to take his audience back to an historical event, he felt that 'the vocabulary and style could not be exactly those of modern conversation. . . .' On the other hand, he wished to avoid archaic vocabulary and style because he 'wanted to bring home to the audience the contemporary relevance of the situation. The style therefore had to be neutral, committed neither to the present nor to the past'. He was aware that it was essential to avoid the Shakespearean echo of blank verse 'which, after extensive use for nondramatic poetry, had lost the flexibility which blank verse must have if it is to give the effect of conversation'. Because he felt that the rhythm of blank verse had become too remote from the movement of modern speech, he chose as his model the versification of Everyman.<sup>27</sup>

And in speaking of his efforts with Murder in the Cathedral Eliot remarks:

I observed that when Shakespeare, in one of his mature plays, introduces what might seem a purely poetic line or passage, it never interrupts the action, or is out of character, but on the contrary, in some mysterious way supports both action and character. When Macbeth speaks his so often quoted words beginning

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow,

or when Othello, confronted at night with his angry father-in-law and friends, utters the beautiful line

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,

we do not feel that Shakespeare has thought of lines which are beautiful poetry and wishes to fit them in somehow, or that he has for the moment come to the end of his dramatic

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<sup>27</sup> Carol H. Smith, p. 103.

inspiration and has turned to poetry to fill up with. The lines are surprising, and yet they fit in with the character.<sup>28</sup>

Eliot recalls other scenes, such as the knocking at the gate in Macbeth, "that can never become old-fashioned."<sup>29</sup> We sense, in these quotations, Eliot's admiration of Shakespeare as a dramatist. But Eliot, too, was a very dramatic writer, and this is apparent in the undercurrent of his plays.

The dramatic element is evident also in Eliot's poetry. The presence of this element may be seen in three ways: firstly, in the "speaking" verse of many of his characters. Thus "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" begins with the conversational lines:

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table;  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets.

Secondly, we note the entry of the dramatic element in the conflict which generally enters into Eliot's poetry; the salon world of Prufrock, for instance, becomes the veritable battleground of a tea-cup society where the characters assume dramatic roles. The minor quandary of Prufrock, as to whether he should make love or not, takes on major proportions. Consequently he agonizes: "Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?" and "I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat." And he ponders the inconsequential problem as though it were of great moment, far beyond that of his unheroic private life:

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<sup>28</sup>"Poetry and Drama," On Poetry, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

And thirdly, Shakespeare's influence upon the dramatic quality of Eliot's poetry is apparent in the references which Eliot makes to Shakespearean characters, particularly to his favorite, Hamlet. Such references add an expressive dramatic dimension which is relevant to this subject. Thus Eliot's Prufrock cries out dramatically: "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be." The Waste Land also contains references to Shakespeare's Hamlet and to The Tempest. Furthermore, it is here that we find two lines of poetry which appear to summarize Eliot's viewpoint of twentieth century society:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? (19-20).

This arid expression of hopelessness differs greatly from the zest of life that is portrayed by most of Shakespeare's characters--not only in life, but in death as well.

Eliot's poem "Song for Simeon" also shows echoes of Shakespeare in a peculiar or indirect way. Hugh Kenner states that this poem "is at once Eliot's most sophisticated contribution to the art of poetry, and the fulfilment of a method of systematic parody to which his instinct led him."<sup>30</sup> Here we have a "Falstaff who resembles the gross knight only in being a butt and growing old, a Hamlet who is all soliloquies and no heroism, fustily annihilated like Polonius:

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<sup>30</sup>Kenner, p. 254.

in every way a caricature of his exemplars, who were 'absolute for death'."<sup>31</sup>

And Eliot's poem, "Marina," is obviously based on Shakespeare's Pericles. In an unpublished address on "Shakespeare as Poet and Dramatist" (given at Edinburgh University in 1937), Eliot wrote: "To my mind the finest of all the 'recognition scenes' is Act V:i of that very great play Pericles. It is a perfect example for the 'ultra-dramatic', a dramatic action of beings who are more than human. . . . It is the speech of creatures who are more than human, or rather, seen in a light more than that of day."<sup>32</sup> Marina seems to be the incarnation of a vision to Pericles who, finding her alive, had thought her dead. In comparing Shakespeare's play with Eliot's poem Elizabeth Drew comments: "Eliot's poem has the same lighting, and his Marina is more than human. She is the dream-symbol of something newly born, and the scene is a recognition, a discovery of this magical creative regeneration, begotten in some mysterious way by the speaker himself."<sup>33</sup> And in a similar comparison Brockbank notes that:

In its 'sense of life' the poem's allusion to Pericles acknowledges a profound debt and that to Seneca measures a profound distance. For 'Marina' is an intense but muted response to the play--the woodthrush sings 'through the fog', the protagonist's

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<sup>31</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>32</sup>Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 127.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 127-28.

expectations are held this side of ecstasy:

let me  
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,  
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

Pericles is vital in comparison, for it creates deaths that in the theatre can be 'lived through' to a gay and imaginatively satisfying outcome. It smiles extremity out of act.<sup>34</sup>

In his article, "Shakespeares Verskunst," Eliot not only calls Pericles Act V, scene one the "finest of all recognition scenes," but he states that there is no scene anywhere, in any of Shakespeare's dramas that is as beautiful as this one. The duet of the King and his daughter, Eliot states, is as accomplished and perfect as the one mentioned earlier, that between Romeo and Juliet. Eliot compares the relationship between the dialogue in Romeo and Juliet and that of Pericles to Beethoven's early and late string quartets. To verify his findings he quotes the following excerpts from the recognition scene between Pericles and Marina:

I am a maid,  
My lord, that ne'er before invited eyes  
But have been gazed on like a comet: she speaks  
My lord, that, may be, have endured a grief  
Might equal yours, if both were justly weighed.

And Pericles' reply to his daughter:

Now, blessing on thee! rise: thou art my child:  
Give me fresh garments. Mine own, Helicanus:  
She is not dead at Tarsus, as she should have been,  
By savage Cleon.

Eliot reserves his especial and concluding attention, in the German article, for Shakespeare's latest dramas: Cymbeline, The

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<sup>34</sup>Brockbank, Shakespeare Survey 24, p. 116.

Winter's Tale, Pericles and The Tempest. In these, he states, Shakespeare has abandoned the realism of everyday life in order to lend reality to the world of feeling upon which the plays are based. Consequently, Shakespeare tends to convert the action of these dramas into a kind of faery-tale or fantastic novel and to simplify his characters to the extent where they become the bearers of an emotional reality, an emotional reality of which the characters themselves are oblivious. The tangible world becomes a dream world in these late dramas, and the role which dreams and visions play in them is highly significant. To substantiate this Eliot quotes the words:

'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen  
Tongue, and brain not: either both, or nothing:  
Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such  
As sense cannot untie.

Shakespeare's early play of language is still evident in these late dramas, according to Eliot, but there is now a more refined tone, a greater depth of symbolism and a richer musicality, such as we perceive in the following lines:

Nobly he yokes  
A smiling with a sigh, as if the sigh  
Was that it was, for not being such a smile:  
The smile mocking the sigh, that it would fly  
From so divine a temple, to commix  
With winds that sailors rail at.

Dramatically, this is a world into which few can follow Shakespeare. But Eliot finds the characters of the late dramas just as real and true to life as those of Shakespeare's early dramas, although they

originate in a world from which certain emotions have been distilled in order to make room for others which are generally unobserved.<sup>35</sup> These characters are in a world in which language is sheer music, as they say. What this seems to mean, in Eliot's terms, is that this language expresses feelings and emotions which are ordinarily only accessible to people who are sensitive to musical rhythms.

Thus Eliot sees a return to Shakespeare's early beginnings in the late dramas: the drama becomes a kind of religious cult-action with other-world symbolism. Hence we have the masques or dream-visions of the goddess, which represent the cult-action in these dramas and which have troubled dispassionately objective critics of Shakespeare so very much. Shakespeare arrived at this point of affairs out of a sense of logical necessity after he had done everything humanly possible in the realm of dramatic writing. Eliot concludes his article on "Shakespeares Verskunst" by re-stating his objective in this presentation. This objective was two-fold: firstly, to show that Shakespeare developed his verse to the highest possible perfection for the purpose of dramatic presentation. It is for this reason, because he wrote for the stage, that he became a great writer of verse. Secondly, the dramatic aspect always remained the goal of Shakespeare's writings, although, in the end, he arrived at a form of drama out of reach of most audiences. Shakespeare's powers did not decline; he strove to the very end to realize his goal. Eliot

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<sup>35</sup>"Verskunst," pp. 206-207.

closes his article with the often repeated admonition in his writings about Shakespeare, namely, that Shakespeare's work comprises a unified whole; we can really only understand any one drama if we read or watch it in the context of this wholeness.<sup>36</sup>

It has become apparent in these pages that the <sup>dramatic</sup>verse of T. S. Eliot differs quite markedly from that of Shakespeare. Eliot lacks the seemingly instinctive surety of touch in characterization which brings life to Shakespeare's characters; his dramas lack the free and easy natural speech which is the gift of even the most dramatic characters of Shakespeare; and his characters lack the individualization which is the unique mark of Shakespeare's characters. The dramatic anti-heroic qualities of the characters in Eliot's early "non-dramatic" poetry give these characters life in an arid twentieth century sort of way, but in his dramas, where characterization is largely dependent upon verbal intercourse, the dramatic situations often appear to be strained. And one must admit that Eliot was unable to infuse completely into his writings the kind of musical organization and eloquence which he so admired in the works of Shakespeare. However, having successfully avoided the blank verse beat of Shakespeare, Eliot could consider himself fortunate in not avoiding the master's influence in the areas of characterization, style, imagery and dramatic action.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

## V. CONCLUSION

At this point, if not before, it is clear that T. S. Eliot is no "ordinary" critic of Shakespeare. One poet's criticism of another—or one dramatist of another—is bound to have a personal aspect. (What does his work mean to me, or to my own development?) So, whereas much of the early criticism of Shakespeare by Eliot takes the usual form of technical notes and arguments, the feeling we later and finally get is that Eliot has moved from the position of critic to that of disciple. Shakespeare is an important part of his personal inheritance.

We have seen how Eliot's outlook towards the master and his art changed over the years because of his study of Shakespeare's works and because of his own increasing maturity and literary insight. Worthy of particular mention is the lecture which Eliot presented on his tour in Germany in 1937. I have drawn extensively upon this lecture, for it appears to afford a fresh insight into Eliot's thinking on Shakespeare, and also because Eliot here spells out many of his mature impressions which are only hinted at

elsewhere. It is noteworthy, too, for the appreciative insights which it conveys, on the part of Eliot, into the frequently neglected late plays of Shakespeare.

We have drawn attention to Eliot's statement that the inner necessity which led to the development of Shakespeare's poetic art had its roots in the dramatic element.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare was, according to Eliot, first and foremost a dramatist. It was due to the dramatic quality of his blank verse that he was able to develop his verse and his plays to such a high degree of perfection. It was due to this also that Shakespeare could achieve the innumerable and profound subtleties which enrich his plays. Eliot believed that atmosphere, rhythm, diction, imagery and characterization in Shakespeare's drama were all closely linked with this dramatic element which forms the undercurrent of his works. This element, so it seems, is inseparable from blank verse. And in 1927 Eliot expressed the opinion that "the Elizabethan mind, far more than the contemporary mind in any other country, grew and matured through its verse rather than through its prose."<sup>2</sup>

Reference has been made to the analogy of the development of Beethoven's quartets to the development of Shakespeare's plays—particularly in regard to the attitude to the medium (music in one

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<sup>1</sup>See page 11 of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup>"Elizabethan Translation," Essays, p. 101.

case, verse in the other). It is pertinent also, in this context, to look more closely at Eliot's aim as he expressed it in an unpublished lecture:

. . . that at which I have long aimed, in writing poetry; to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it; poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry as transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem points at, and not on the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get beyond poetry as Beethoven in his later works, strove to get beyond music.<sup>3</sup>

And in 1951 Eliot summarized his views in this respect as follows:

We can never emulate music, because to arrive at the condition of music would be the annihilation of poetry, and especially of dramatic poetry. Nevertheless, I have before my eyes a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama, which would be a design of human action and of words, such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and of musical order. It seems to me that Shakespeare achieved this at least in certain scenes--even rather early, for there is the balcony scene of Romeo and Juliet--and that this was what he was striving towards in his late plays.<sup>4</sup>

In another instance Eliot speaks of the inclusiveness of Shakespeare's metaphors, of the "fusion" into a single phrase, of two or more diverse impressions. Thus, for example, when Shakespeare says "in her strong toil of grace". . . the metaphor identifies itself with what suggests it; the resultant is one and is unique."<sup>5</sup> And Eliot compares Massinger's figures of speech (he who "squeezed his

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<sup>3</sup>Eliot, an unpublished lecture.

<sup>4</sup>"Poetry and Drama," On Poetry, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>"Philip Massinger," Essays, p. 209.

simile to death") with those of Shakespeare, admiring the "swift-ness" of the latter as may be exemplified by the lines:

'Tis in my memory locked,  
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.<sup>6</sup>

This evidence of development in language was an important factor in the influence which Shakespeare exerted, both upon his contemporaries and upon future generations.

It is important to remember also that the English language of the sixteenth century was undergoing drastic changes from within as well as adopting numerous foreign words into its vocabulary. Eliot notes that "It seemed as if, at that time, the world was filled with broken fragments of systems,"<sup>7</sup> and he appears to hold the view that Shakespeare had a stabilizing influence in this world of fragments. Explaining this, he states: "It has been said that Shakespeare lacks unity; it might, I think, be said equally well that it is Shakespeare chiefly that is the unity, that unifies as far as they could be unified all the tendencies of a time that certainly lacked unity."<sup>8</sup> The reason for this, according to Eliot, is that "Shakespeare was a much finer instrument for transformations than any of his contemporaries."<sup>9</sup> Another reason might be that

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> "Stoicism," Essays, p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

which Eliot cites in speaking of Thomas Heywood, in 1931, where he refers to the "prodigious capacity of development" in Shakespeare.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore it is almost unavoidable that Eliot should sooner or later touch upon the religious sensibility which is so pronounced in his own writings, for

Though Eliot's theatrical methods have undergone many changes, his original intention to portray the impact of the spiritual principle on the lives of men in a form which would be artistically ordered without losing contact with actual experience has remained the basic dramatic goal of all his plays.<sup>11</sup>

It was in working towards this goal that Shakespeare's dramatic achievements became relevant for Eliot. Thus he finds that Shakespeare possessed the "firm grasp of human experience" which was the formidable achievement of the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets. Thus, too, "This wisdom, cynical perhaps but untired (in Shakespeare a terrifying clairvoyance), leads toward, and is only completed by, the religious comprehension."<sup>12</sup>

Related to the thought of Shakespeare's literary development is also that of the development of other Elizabethan dramatists. This "is only intelligible as leading up to, or deriving from, that of Shakespeare."<sup>13</sup> Therefore Eliot tells us that "we might

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<sup>9</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>"Thomas Heywood," Essays, p. 180.

<sup>11</sup>Carol H. Smith, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup>"Andrew Marvell," Essays, p. 297.

<sup>13</sup>Loc. cit.

divide the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists into those who would have been great even had Shakespeare never lived, those who are positive enough to have brought some positive contribution after Shakespeare, and those whose merit consists merely in having exploited successfully a few Shakespearean devices or echoed here and there the Shakespearean verse."<sup>14</sup> So, too,

It is only after the language—its cadence, still more than vocabulary and syntax—has, with time and social change, sufficiently altered, that another dramatic poet as great as Shakespeare, . . . can become possible. Not only every great poet, but every genuine, though lesser poet, fulfils once for all some possibility of the language, and so leaves one possibility less for his successors.<sup>15</sup>

And the fact that Shakespeare was able to transcend all other poets and dramatists of the time imposes a Shakespearean standard. All literary achievements of that age are measured by this standard. We praise or condemn plays of the Elizabethan period "according to the usual Elizabethan criteria," the sum of which is Shakespeare.<sup>16</sup> This is so because "the work of a great dramatist, like Shakespeare, constitutes a world. Each character speaks for himself, but no other poet could have found those words for him to speak."<sup>17</sup> So, too, Shakespeare can be found nowhere, except in

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<sup>14</sup>"John Ford," Essays, p. 193.

<sup>15</sup>"What is a Classic?" Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>16</sup>"John Marston," 1934, Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>17</sup>"The three Voices of Poetry," 1953, On Poetry, p. 102.

the characters which he created, "for the one thing in common between the characters is that no one but Shakespeare could have created them. The world of a great poetic dramatist is a world in which the creator is everywhere present, and everywhere hidden."<sup>18</sup>

And the pleasure which a dramatist of Shakespeare's stature derives "for the pains of turning blood into ink" is, hopefully, the knowledge of the fulfillment which he brings to others.<sup>19</sup> For it is not essentially an advantage for a poet to have a beautiful world to deal with; but it is an advantage "to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory."<sup>20</sup> This, so Eliot believes, Shakespeare was able to do.

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<sup>18</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>19</sup> "Conclusion," Use of Criticism, p. 154.

<sup>20</sup> "Matthew Arnold," Ibid., p. 105.

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